Voice Euphoria Hour

New Media Caucus Version

Performance Transcript

Edited for non-performance reading

Last summer, I met my opposite sex. **[pause, stunned]**

Well, I should say gender, because we’ll eventually be the same(?) “sex(?)”

**[deadpan, just updating a friend]**She’s growing boobs now, and my dick will arrive in 20-30 business days.

**[then, giddy:]**It’s this sweeeeeet newish model: it can even fucking *come*when you squeeze the tip! I am psyyyyched.

**[glow with it for a sec]**

Now, we do this long-distance thing and we found this way to have sex that’s just as kinky and kooky as what we do in person. The solution is: animated gifs.

It’s the perfect millennial role-play: She can be Jessica Rabbit, tied up on train tracks, back arching, chest heaving. I can be Frodo, eyes rolling back, ready for the darkness of Mordor to take me over.

But honestly, it’s best when we can get outside of the human body all together

The sexiest gif she ever sent me was actually of one of those inflated “tube guys” or “air dancers” you usually see waving over car dealerships. This one was bent over, head resting gently against a telephone pole, arms limp, and the “butt” up in the air, bouncing for attention. **[bites lip]**

The sexiest I’ve ever felt was when I was a lizard, all four paws on the ground, my long tongue going in and out of the hole of a Cheerio. **[stick tongue out 3 times]**

The thing is this: a waterfall surging forward over and over and over again, has no notion of shame.

My name is sair goetz, I am an artist, writer, filmmaker, performer, and educator. That was sair **[slide: name]** — **[slide: name+ pronouns]** rhythms with their, and I use they/them pronouns.

**[slide: I’m Very Into You, cropped]**

I first told this story last November within the context of a play adaptation of *I’m Very Into You*

– a genderqueer email-love-affair between Kathy Acker and McKenzie Wark in the early days of email. **[drink water, slide: I’m Very Into You, uncropped]**

My story is mostly true, though sadly, I was never this lizard. **[slide: lizard gif]**

And, I identify as nonbinary, so I don’t even believe in a gender or sex “opposite.” **[slide: blank]**

I repeat this story to you now because it is a window into the three topics I will touch on today: smartphone communication as sites of gender-(mis)recognition, consensual self-silencing, and the not-so-new-anymore silent cinema of the smartphone. So I will return to this as I move along.

First, I’d like summarize the sites of gender-recognition I’ve been contemplating **[sites of gender-recognition]** – theobservable elements of someone’s presentation through which we assume gender.Here are some common border-lands that I and many of my trans fam try to control regularly.

**[slide: Sites of Gender- (mis)Recognition**

Size

Body Mannerisms

Communication Training

vocal patterns such as up-speech

textual patterns such as exclamations points

rhetorical patterns such as passive voice

Body Image

Voice pitch

Skin texture

Smell

**]**

Animated gifs **[slide: butt bump gif]** are a perfect workaround for this, because it illustrates an escape from nearly all sites of gender-recognition. IRL is more complicated: I personally find a great deal of gender euphoria in packing with citrus **[slide: image of packing with a lemon]** (snacks for later), in the wearing of facial hair **[action: put on cotton candy]** (also snacks for later), but the part of my physical presentation that is most constantly gendered can never leave me IRL.

**[slide:**

****

**]**

**[in “male” pitch]** I wonder about this often: is there something about this tone - that puts you at ease? Does a “deep” voice signal authority, adulthood? to you more? [**live action: eat cotton candy from face] ­­­**

In turn, as I am, larynx un-stretched by testosterone, does my voice take on untrustworthiness? Absurdity when lowered, bitchy when higher? A spring of ready emotional labor? More apologetic? **[slide: stop apologizing, take T]**

My voice can’t leave me, except on posts, gifs, or in post-production. But so much else is highly mailable.

Those who are experienced in the ways of the selfie, just from lighting, make-up, and angles, can easily fool anyone as to their height, rib-cage size, and hair thickness. **[Contrapoints:]** honestly she’s better at this now, this is a joke from the early days of Contra points, a you tuber most well know for this gem : **[feel like shit gif]**

But it’s even easier now,. to *look* like a “not-woman” all I have to do is download this snapchat filter that makes me look like a frat boy or police officer.

**[video clip: “this is my voice zero days on t” – “Male” snapchat filter, sound off, with subtitles]**

This level of fake was recently kicked up a notch with the viral Chinese deep-fake app “*Zao”* which maps the user’s uploaded selfie onto pre-selected videos, mimicking face movement

**[slide: “zao”]**

There are, of course, many elements of how we read someone’s gender that are totally resistant to digital transmission **[Slide: sites of gender recognition resistant to digital transmission]** – coincidentally these are also the things most changed by gender-affirming hormone treatment or HRT.

Though the voice is extremely easily manipulated and transmitted, there do not seem to be many algorithm junkies out there working hard on an app that bends identity through sound for anything but prank calls. On this front, Instagram & Snapchat are running over 20 years behind the $20 toy Yak-Bak series **[live: record & play something],** which allowed users to change their pitch in seconds (which of course slows the voice), **[play pre-recorded pitch-altered voice]** and at least 7 years behind DAWs like Adobe Audition (where one can actually change the pitch without altering the duration). It seems there is not a large enough market?

So I’ll continue to choose “sound-off” while this is the alternative:

**[clip: “this is my voice zero days on t” – “Male” snapchat filter, sound on ]**

For Terri Rogers, whose multiple voices made her carrier, “sound-off” destroys the magic that it preserves for my image.

**[slide: Terri Rogers on silent]**

Terri Rogers, a trans woman born in 1930, died in 1990, was a master of voice control. **[clip: Terri Rogers (dead cat)]** Her silence as her dummy speaks reinforces not just the male dummy’s autonomy, but her own, refined, feminine voice. It’s a gender affirming performance. We watch her lips, hoping to see a sign that this is really *her* male voice, but we are frankly forced to suspend our disbelief. I can’t know that ventriloquism helped Terri Rogers come to her transness, but her work helped me come to mine.

The dummy & ventriloquist are also a perfect example of the self-silencing that I mentioned earlier. **[consensual self-silencing]**

– the experience of silencing one element of self-expresssion, your voice, your face, your story, to foreground some else’s.

In this case it is literal. The appropriated “other voice” has a bodily form on stage– the ventriloquist goes “silent.” But the silence is a freeing silence. The dummy acts a counter-point, usually to say what the respectable ventriloquist cannot. At best they act much like an anger translator, **[slide: obama]** there to allow both silence and expression simultaneously.

**[slide: blank]**

Drag, karaoke, lip-syncing, ventriloquism and gifs are also strategic self-silencing. These all replace your daily self, to temporarily embody a self you don’t feel to be truthful, safe, or just is not accessible to your life.

And unlike Zao – instead of adding yourself to pop culture, you add some element of pop-culture to yourself.

To do drag is to willfully silence the prescriptions of your gendered body to temporarily adopt the appearance of a differently-gendered body.

To lip-sync with your drag is to exchange your voice as well as your body.

I’ve done many “studio tests” of drag/lip-sync performances of this next clip. In this version, I gave up on finding appropriateness between this voice and my body, and tried to silence myself entirely **[slide: Grease video from ACRE]**

Talk to me after about Grease but, in short, next time you watch it, picture Danny and Sandy as highly cis-passing binary trans people who are just trying to go stealth for their own safety – suddenly the whole movie makes sense.

**[slide: blank]**

To do karaoke is to willingly silence one’s own words and persona for the cathartic release of expressing someone else’s

It is to “force the appropriateness of” your body and voice upon that complex social and historical object that is a song in the world.

This is often problematic (ie kungfoo fighting?) but at best empathetic. There is one song that I think of as the ultimate karaoke song: It’s a song about deeply identifying with another song. To me, though, ittells the story of someone assigned-female-at-birth **[slide: afab]** identifying with the song of a cis man. I’ll play this song now, I’ll sing the verse, but I’d appreciate it if y’all would join me in singing the chorus.

**[play killing me softly on zylophone (and sing it)]**

E   F       G     A      G    D      G

I felt all flushed with fever

A    G      F    E     F   C

Embarrassed by the crowd

E       F   G    A     G   A     B

I felt he found my letters

G       C^ -  B     A   G    A

and read each one out loud

C^   A     F   ED      D      E     F

I prayed that he would finish

E    G - G     G   G#   G#-A-B

but he just kept right on

**sing with me yall**

Strumming my pain with his fingers

Singing my life with his words

Killing me softly with his song

Killing me softly with his song

Telling my whole life with his words

Killing me softly with his song

The history of *killing me softly* is an interesting question of appropriation, silencing, and disconnection. The authorship of the lyrics to the song were disputed by a white lady **[slide: Lori Leiberman]** and two white guys, but in the end their version is buried in the dust (for good reason).

As most people understand it, the song is actually appropriate to –**[slide: ]** two black women: Roberta Flack, and Lauren Hill.

So when I claim it as a trans-masc\* anthem, am I doing violence to its black R&B history?

**[slide:blank ]**

I’m not looking for an answer from you on this: I can’t accept permission because it is no one’s to give. What I do want to know, is if you have a better question for me to ask myself than these two: Who is silenced when *I* sing this song? Who is silenced if *I* don’t?

And are the ethics of it any different if I simply overlay the song on my Instagram story? **[IG Music]**

But would anyone even hear the lyrics I put it there? But maybe *seeing* lyrics is more effective in this case? Just as reading a subtitled animated gif is more effective than watching a small clip of a movie.

**[gif, always]**

**blank**

As I close, I want to return for a moment to this new silent cinema. The gifs speak *for* me in silence, relieving me of gender identity, but I came to these questions thru the original silent film- this is my remake of a dialog device from 1916. **[slide: dialog device]**

I sought to think through the dislocation and relocation of the motive power behind a read (but never heard) voice. **[video clip: swipe through instagram story type ]**

We read to ourselves, in our internal projection of that voice from what few signals of “self-hood” we read in the typeface, the word choice, the frills, or not.

I sit with silent film in the studio because of the way*this* **[wave phone around]** this sits in my life and my hand.

It’s genderlessness is a liberating silence. But the erasure of vocals from the space of the social media has also erased other traces of my vocal history. The me that speaks naturally in my southern accent is separated from the me that found a community of trans folks across the country. That fact carries fear for me whenever I go back to the south. When this accent comes out of my mouth, my sense of my own complex gender is further erased, and all that’s left is the voice of a southern white woman.

Will y’all try one more thing with me?

I typically only hear the word “non-binary” in a sorta newscaster generic accent – in fact, until a few years ago, I had only *read* the word on Instagram. and I wonder if there’s a way to force the appropriateness of my own gender-complexity onto my own accent. So I’d really like to teach y’all how to say this word in my southern accent, in hopes that maybe it’ll force the appropriateness of gender multitudes into y’alls conception of the south, and eventually, the south’s conception of itself. So, **[clap hands]** if y’all’d repeat after me:

Non — biiii

nar

re

Y’all don’t even know how heart warmin’ that was.

Thank you.