

# A troublemaker in feminist performance

An exploration of the potential of a more relational approach in contemporary feminist performance through an analysis of the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* by Samira Elagoz



Universiteit Utrecht

Arianne Perez-Koeleman | Student nr. 6240879  
MA Thesis | Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy  
Supervisor: Sigrid Merx | Second reader: Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink  
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Women and men – it’s an impossible subject, because there can be no answers. We can find only bits and pieces of clues. And this small portfolio is just the crudest sketches of what it’s all about. Maybe, today, we’re planting the seeds of more honest relationships between women and men.

— Duane Michals, as cited by Susan Sontag in *On Photography* (1977)

The real relation is one of reciprocity.

— Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949)

This book is about the effort of turning, with the logic of the twister. But the ultimate aim of such turning is not to arrive, as T.S. Eliot hoped, to “know [ourselves] for the first time,” but to keep on turning and turning and turning again, to take, always, a second look.

— Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997)

## Abstract

“A troublemaker in feminist thought” is an MA thesis in which I examine how the performance *Cock, Cock... Who’s there?* by Samira Elagoz helps to rethink and reconceptualize cisgender interaction in a relational way. I started this research from the desire of investigating the potential of staging cisgender interactions in contemporary feminist performance, and how this can help to think about gender at large in a relational way, in contrast to a more dualistic approach in traditional feminist performance. Inspired by a series of articles published in the theatre journals *EtCetera* and *Theatermaker*, I build further upon theatre critic Fransien van der Putt’s analysis in her article “Camera op de man – over de kritiek op het werk van Samira Elagoz” with regard to the differences between the performance by Elagoz and Florentina Holzinger’s *Apollon Musagète*. I ground this analysis in theories of Rebecca Schneider (regarding the explicit body in performance) and Donna Haraway’s relational philosophy, along with an interpretation of Haraway’s work in a gender theory context by Kathrin Thiele. My main research question is: how does the performance *Cock, Cock... Who’s there?* by Samira Elagoz help to rethink and reconceptualize cisgender interaction in a relational way? In the first chapter I elaborate on Haraway’s relational philosophy, specifically her theories on *staying with the trouble*. Following Thiele, I argue why *staying with the trouble* can be productive in a gender theory context to reconceptualize gender difference. In the second chapter I go into feminist performance as a genre and tradition. I pay specific attention to Schneider’s theories regarding the *explicit body*, using *Apollon Musagète* as an exemplifier of these theories. In chapter three I dramaturgically analyze how cisgender interactions are staged in the performance *Cock, Cock... Who’s there?* and interpret this staging by operationalizing Haraway’s concepts *staying with the trouble*, becoming-with and making kin. In chapter four I compare the critical reception of *Cock, Cock... Who’s there?* to the reception of *Apollon Musagète*, arguing that *Cock, Cock... Who’s there?* can be regarded as a troublemaker, in a Harawayan sense, in feminist performance and feminist thought. In the conclusion I bring these various strings of thought together, arguing why *Cock, Cock... Who’s there?* can help to rethink cisgender interaction in a broader sense, both in the academic discourse as well as in (feminist) performance, and possibly even society as a whole.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis has largely been written in the year 2020, a year I have experienced as a (mostly terrible) rollercoaster. Not only on a global level, but also on a personal level difficulties kept piling up. The corona pandemic, the tragic loss of a man I considered family, the separation from my partner for many months due to travel bans and finally the struggle with my mental and physical health all made it challenging to focus and work on my MA thesis. There were, however, also bright spots amid the gloom, mostly brought to me by the wonderful people I am lucky enough to be surrounded by.

First and foremost I want to thank my amazing supervisor Sigrid Merx. Thank you for your guidance, your sharp intuition, your kindness and understanding, your ability to bring structure to the most chaotic thoughts. Thank you for pointing me towards Donna Haraway and specifically her work on staying with the trouble, which provided me with the building blocks on which I could build my argument. I often felt defeated in this wreck of a year, but a conversation with you always left me feeling replenished and encouraged, ready to continue my work. I'm looking forward to working together as colleagues!

A massive thank you to my wonderful fellow students of the MA Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy. What smart, interesting and wholesome people you all are. I feel lucky to have been a part of this group. Special shout-out to the Saturday Nightzzz girls – Kareth, Naomi, Polina, Mai and Kim. Thank you for all being so inspiring, intelligent, hilarious and kind.

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## A note on pronouns

When I was almost at the end of my writing process, Samira Elagoz came out as trans via their Instagram account. Elagoz has not yet publicly stated via social media or other channels what their pronouns are. To acknowledge their transition process, I decided to refer to them in my introduction with the more gender-neutral pronouns they/them. Since Elagoz emphasizes that their performance was made with cisgender interactions in mind, in a time when they still identified as a cis woman, I have decided to keep the she/her pronouns in place in the rest of this thesis when referring to them.

## Introduction

“I was curious what the weird choreography of this stereotypical set up of ‘cis man meets cis woman’ is, and what the grey area is before crossing the boundaries. When does attraction transform into a desire and lust that could lead to domination, possession, or violence?”<sup>1</sup>

This is a quote by artist and filmmaker Samira Elagoz about the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* (2016), the performance that is the main inspiration for this thesis. For many years now I have had a fascination with feminism in general and specifically with feminist theatre and performance. This fascination is probably influenced by the upheaval of feminist thought and activism in current times. My reasons to write about feminist theatre and performance are not solely limited to a personal interest or a wish to align with the zeitgeist. While looking for literature on the subject I couldn't help but notice that the bulk of the literature focused on an Anglophone context, of which the most publications often dated from the nineties of the last century, apart from a few exceptions.<sup>2</sup> In comparison there seems to be relatively little recent research which focusses on European (especially Dutch) performances, even though the Netherlands and Flanders have a thriving experimental theatre and performance scene.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, I noticed that many texts on feminist performance focus either solely on performance art or on more traditional dramatic theatre. Forms of postdramatic theatre, mime and dance that find themselves on the borders of disciplines seem to be less frequently discussed.<sup>4</sup> One thing that specifically stuck out to me while watching feminist performances is a lack of focus on men and their behaviors and relationships towards women. Most feminist performances I have seen typically have a strong focus on the (naked, explicit) female body and hardly feature any men, an observation that is supported by literature.<sup>5</sup> This absence of men is not necessarily surprising. Elaine Aston describes in her book *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* that one of the original motivations for feminists to make performance was to recover a female performative tradition, since women's culture had so long been 'hidden' or silenced in a male-dominated culture.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, women sought spaces to explore a theatrical tradition without men.<sup>7</sup> But we have come a long way since the early days of feminism and feminist performance. The absence of men in contemporary feminist performance makes me wonder: what would be the potential of staging cisgender interactions in feminist performance?<sup>8</sup> The lack of men in

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<sup>1</sup> “Cock Cock... Who's There? Q&A with creator Samira Elagoz,” CityMag, published on February 18, 2020, <https://citymag.indaily.com.au/culture/cock-cock-whos-there-qa-with-creator-samira-elagoz/#:~:text=Samira%20Elagoz's%20'Cock%20Cock...',reactions%20it%20elicits%20from%20audiences.>

<sup>2</sup> I'm thinking here for example of *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (1995) by Elaine Aston, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1991) by Jill Dolan, *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* by Lizbeth Goodman and Jane De Gay (1998) and *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997) by Rebecca Schneider.

<sup>3</sup> “Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy: Why in Utrecht,” Utrecht University, accessed January 16, 2021, <https://www.uu.nl/masters/en/contemporary-theatre-dance-and-dramaturgy/why-utrecht>

<sup>4</sup> An example with reference to my previous examples: in Dolan and Aston's work there is a strong focus on a (dramatic) theatre context, whereas Schneider's book solely focuses on performance art. *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* addresses both forms, but also still largely upholds this categorical way of thinking about the disciplines.

<sup>5</sup> Schneider's book is practically based on this very observation. Most case studies that are discussed in comprehensive guides on feminist performance (such as *Theatre & Feminism* by Kim Solga or *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* by Elaine Aston) only feature women, except when repertoire plays (like for example *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen) are discussed.

<sup>6</sup> Elaine Aston, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Aston, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre*, 15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Elagoz refers in interviews to *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* as a performance that explores cisgender interactions. I have decided to continue to use this formulation throughout this thesis, because I find it a more precise and adequate than 'male/female' interaction or a variation on that. I want to focus specifically on cis

contemporary feminist performance feels a bit like a missed chance to me. However strong and subversive visceral images of the explicit female body might (still) be, why don't we shift focus to men's behavior towards women? If women still suffer oppression at the hands of men, then why don't we focus more on how this oppression comes to the fore in the relationship between men and women? Where is the relationality and cisgender interaction in contemporary feminist performance? These questions have been holding me in their grip since I started researching the work of Samira Elagoz.

In my thesis I want to research the potential of a more relational approach, by the staging<sup>9</sup> of cisgender interactions, in contemporary feminist performance. I want to explore how this helps to think about gender at large, in contrast to a more dualistic approach in more traditional feminist performance. My main case study is the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* by Samira Elagoz, since this seems to be one of the few contemporary feminist performances that incorporates men and men's behavior towards women. As a way of dealing with the trauma of a rape experience, Elagoz started a project: via Craigslist Elagoz requested to meet strangers at their houses and film those meetings.<sup>10</sup> As was to be expected, only men replied to the ad. Elagoz travelled all over the world to meet men in their homes and the documentary film *Craigslist Allstars* is a montage of the resulting film material. After this, Elagoz continued to make the installation *The Young And The Willing*, a film-montage of meetings via the dating app Tinder with men from 18-25 years old to only exchange a kiss.<sup>11</sup> In the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* Elagoz uses selections of film-material from these projects and other photos and videos: selfies, videos of relatives and friends and psychedelic colorful images of their dancing body. Elagoz is present on stage and comments on the videos and images they show, interweaving their own story surrounding the rape with the videos of the strangers they met. *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is often described by theatre critics as a lecture performance, in which Elagoz explores power-dynamics between men and women.

Additionally, I discuss another feminist performance to point out how *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* differs from more traditional feminist performances, which typically seem to have a strong focus on the explicit (often naked) female body and hardly feature any men. The performance that I use to examine this difference is *Apollon Musagète* by Florentina Holzinger. This performance is a feminist parody of the original ballet *Apollon Musagète*, which was a cooperation between Balanchine and Stravinsky in 1928 and centers around the Greek god Apollo.<sup>12</sup> In this ballet three of the nine muses 'audition' for Apollo, before he ascends the mountain Parnassus where he will take up his role as god of the arts.<sup>13</sup> Towards the end of the ballet, he rejects the muses of poetry and mime and chooses the muse of dance to accompany him. As theatre critic Marijn Lems aptly puts it: a rather patriarchal premise, in which the female characters are fully subservient to the male lead.<sup>14</sup> In Holzinger's version, six naked female performers perform a light-hearted but highly masochistic and

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dynamics and interactions without erasing the existence of queer culture and interactions, and as a result find this the most fitting language to use.

<sup>9</sup> The verb 'to stage' might for some connote the idea of scriptedness. I want to emphasize that in this thesis I continuously use the verb 'staging' to describe the performative conditions within which Elagoz' encounters take place. I use staging to address the concrete reality of what is shown on stage without insinuating that these encounters were scripted or dramatized beforehand.

<sup>10</sup> Craigslist is an American advertisements website with different sections devoted to different goods. There are sections that for example advertise furniture, housing, jobs, items wanted, et cetera.

<sup>11</sup> Samira Elagoz, "The Young And The Willing", *Samira Elagoz*, accessed on January 16, 2020, <http://www.samiraelagoz.com/the-young-and-the-willing>.

<sup>12</sup> Fransien van der Putt, "Feministisch exorcisme anno 2017," *Theaterkrant*, published on December 14, 2017, <https://www.theaterkrant.nl/recensie/apollon-musagete/campo-florentina-holzinger/>.

Freely translated, the title *Apollon Musagète* means: Apollo, leader of the Muses.

<sup>13</sup> Marijn Lems, "De poëzie van provocatie: Apollon Musagète van Florentina Holzinger," *Theaterkrant*, March 30, 2018, <https://www.theaterkrant.nl/tm-artikel/poezie-provocatie-apollon-musagete-florentina-holzinger/>.

<sup>14</sup> Lems, "De poëzie van provocatie."



explicit series of tricks and shows. Bodily fluids such as blood, urine and feces flow freely. The god Apollo himself is absent, although there is a large, sparkly rodeo bull placed prominently center stage, which can be interpreted as a symbolization of the Greek god. It is important to note that when I refer to this performance as more traditional, I do not mean this in a dismissive sense – I do not want to diminish its transgressive quality. However, I am of the opinion that this performance fits more in a tradition of feminist performance, whereas *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* seems to be breaking new ground. I detect a more relational approach in Elagoz' work compared to other feminist works, and I want to explore this further. *Apollon Musagète* functions for me as a kind of sounding board, to illuminate how *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* deviates from a feminist performance tradition.

One might wonder what brought me to include *Apollon Musagète* in this analysis; there are several examples to choose from, so why this particular performance? To answer this question I have to refer to the article that forms the starting point of this thesis: the article "Camera op de man – over de kritiek op het werk van Samira Elagoz" by theatre critic Fransien van der Putt, which was published in the Dutch theatre journal *Theatermaker* in 2018. Van der Putt's article was a response to a series of articles published in the Flemish theatre journal *EtCetera*. In the article Van der Putt explores the critical discourse surrounding the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?*<sup>15</sup> While the work was generally well received, it received a strong critique in a special issue of *EtCetera* on sexism in 2018. Reviewer Ilse Ghekiere stated that Elagoz' performance reproduces sexist ideas.<sup>16</sup> The editors of the special put Elagoz' work under the same umbrella as that of established (and, in Fabre's case, controversial) directors Jan Fabre and Ivo van Hove.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, Florentina Holzinger's *Apollon Musagète* was used as an example of "good practice."<sup>18</sup>

Van der Putt argues that *EtCetera's* criticism of *Cock, Cock... Who's There?* is unfair. In her article she analyzes *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* and unravels similarities and differences between Elagoz' and Holzinger's performances. Without wanting to discredit Holzinger's work, she questions why – seventy years since the start of the second wave of feminism – these subversions are apparently still needed. She posits that the fact that Elagoz points her camera towards men and examines their behavior lends *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* its renewing and interesting quality. I agree with Van der Putt's analysis; in my opinion it is a serious misinterpretation to state that *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is a sexist performance. However, it speaks to its quality as a 'troublemaker' that this performance incited such a strong reaction in self-proclaimed feminist reviewers. I chose to stay with this initial comparison between these performances, so that I also might be able to give a more in-depth answer at the end of this thesis to the question why *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is apparently controversial, when *Apollon Musagète* is generally palatable for a feminist audience. This thesis can therefore also be read as an extensive response to the abovementioned debate, or as a detailed elaboration on Van der Putt's arguments. However, I ground my analysis in academic theory, thereby transcending the reviewers' debate.

Feminist sociologist and ecological thinker Donna Haraway's relational philosophy forms another important inspiration for this thesis. Her theories concerning the concept *staying with the trouble* form the basis of my argument. In her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*

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<sup>15</sup> Fransien van der Putt, "Camera op de man – over de kritiek op het werk van Samira Elagoz," *Theatermaker* 139, no. 4 (September 2018): 20-23.

<sup>16</sup> Ilse Ghekiere, "Geen kritische blik," *EtCetera* no. 152 (March, 2018), 24, [https://e-tcetera.be/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/etcetera\\_152\\_DEF\\_web.pdf](https://e-tcetera.be/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/etcetera_152_DEF_web.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> In September 2018, on the waves of the #metoo movement, twenty (former) performers of Jan Fabre's company Troubleyn accused Fabre of sexist and intimidating behaviors, ranging from verbal abuse to sexual assault, in an open letter in the Flemish magazine *rekto:verso*. See <https://www.rektoverso.be/artikel/open-brief-metoo-en-troubleynjan-fabre>.

<sup>18</sup> Charlotte de Somviele, Elke Huybrechts, Michiel Vandeveldel, Kristof van Baarle, Sébastien Hendrickx, Ciska Hoet en Natalie Gielen, "De grenzen van de kunst," *EtCetera* no. 152 (March, 2018), 20, [https://e-tcetera.be/wpcontent/uploads/2018/03/etcetera\\_152\\_DEF\\_web.pdf](https://e-tcetera.be/wpcontent/uploads/2018/03/etcetera_152_DEF_web.pdf).

she proposes ways of thinking and doing that reconfigure human's relationship with the earth. The phrase *staying with the trouble* refers to her proposed way of dealing with our troubled world; it centers around questions rather than answers. It is an acknowledgement of difference and difficulty without accepting those as a status quo.<sup>19</sup> I am aware that Donna Haraway's theories might seem out of place here, especially since this particular book is so focused on shaping coexistence within a world on the brink of ecological disaster - that topic does not really align with mine. However, Haraway's relational way of thinking does. I think Haraway's concept of *staying with the trouble* can be helpful when discussing societal systems and relations. Would it be productive to try and focus on *staying with the trouble* of cisgender relations and interactions, instead of trying to wipe out differences on the one hand or trying to reinforce artificial binary categories on the other? Cultural theorist and critic Mieke Bal argues in her book *Travelling concepts in the Humanities* (2002) that concepts are dynamic and can travel from one discourse to another, thereby crossing the borders of disciplines.<sup>20</sup> The underlying thesis of Bal's book is that concepts, in an increasingly interdisciplinary academic field, can now do "the methodological work that disciplinary traditions used to do."<sup>21</sup> The confrontation between a concept and a cultural object can produce a fruitful interaction, in which the object studied, the subject studying and the concept engage in an interactive, meaning-making practice. Bal also emphasizes the importance of assessing how the concept has changed in meaning, reach and operationality after travelling from one discipline to another. I include a reflection in the first chapter on how Haraway's theory can become especially meaningful in the context of gender theory, and reflect on the use of this theory in the context of gender theory and dramaturgical analysis in my conclusion. Haraway herself is known for the multi-interpretability of her thinking and writing and the multitude of research areas that she interweaves with each other, like biology, literary science fiction, technology, feminism and postcolonialism.<sup>22</sup> I could imagine that she would not be averse to her concepts and theories being used in the context of social reality, considering what she wrote in her famous essay "A Cyborg Manifesto": "Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction."<sup>23</sup> This introduction brings me to the formulation of my main research question and my sub-questions:

### Central Thesis Question

How does the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* by Samira Elagoz help to rethink and reconceptualize cisgender interaction in a relational way?

### Sub-questions

1. How can Donna Haraway's relational philosophy be used as a lens to think about cisgender interaction?
2. How does Apollon Musagète fit into a tradition of feminist explicit body art?
3. How does cisgender interaction take shape in *Apollon Musagète*?
4. How does cisgender interaction take shape in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?*
5. How does *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* expand dualistic ideas of a female/male dichotomy?
6. How does *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* help to rethink Schneider's concept of the explicit body?

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<sup>19</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, ed. Sherry Marx-Macdonald, (Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 24.

<sup>21</sup> Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, 24.

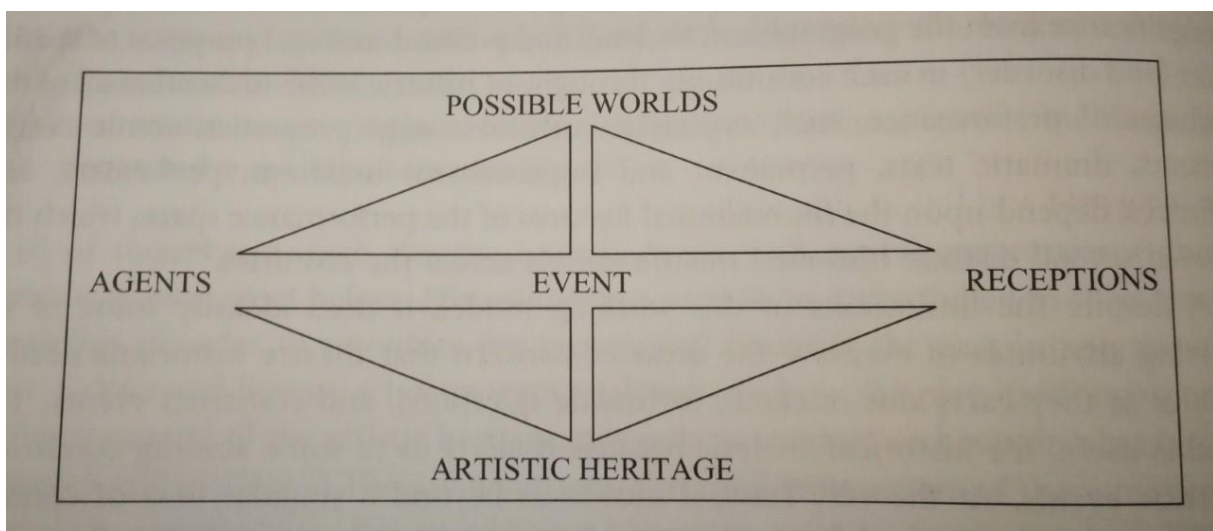
<sup>22</sup> Baukje Prins, "The Ethics of Hybrid Subjects: Feminist Constructivism According to Donna Haraway Science, Technology, & Human Values", Vol. 20, No. 3, Special Issue: *Feminist and Constructivist Perspectives on New Technology* (Summer, 1995), 352.

<sup>23</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto – Science, technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149.

## Methodology and theoretical framework

This research will take the shape of a contextual analysis in which I will explore how cisgender interactions are (not) staged in *Cock, Cock... Who's There?* and *Apollon Musagète*, thinking with these performances about what their different approaches (relational versus dualistic) might mean, both in a performance context, a societal context and within the academic discourse. When stating that I want to *think with* these performances, it is important to mention that I regard them in this thesis, following Maaïke Bleeker's approach in her book *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking*, as theoretical objects. In her own words: "I demonstrate how they [theatrical performances, APK] can be read as theoretically meaningful statements embodied in the artistic discourse of theatre."<sup>24</sup> She adds to this statement that "thought 'moves' in different ways" in the artistic discourse, compared to the strictly theoretical discourse. I interpret this statement, in the context of my thesis, as a testament to how theatre performances can open up (new) ways of seeing and thinking *through* the specificity of the theatrical medium. I therefore discuss the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* in particular as a thinking tool that can help to rethink and reconceptualize cisgender interaction, because of the way Elagoz stages these interaction in the performance.

Overall, to analyze these performances contextually and in comparison to each other, I draw on a model posed by Thomas Postlewait in his book *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*. Postlewait approaches performances as *events*, that are determined by four factors: (possible) worlds, agents, receptions and artistic heritage.<sup>25</sup>



When using the word (possible) worlds, Postlewait points towards the collection of factors that make up "...everything in the global environment that human beings participate in and that art is capable of representing [...]".<sup>26</sup> The relation between world(s) and event can be summarized to how "theatrical events provide a perspective *on* and *of* the world."<sup>27</sup> For my research, this notion is helpful to analyze what (underlying) worldviews come to the fore in the performances, specifically views regarding the status of gender equality, and vice versa. Furthermore, Postlewait's notion of 'possible worlds' helps me to think with the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* about a possible future for the feminist performance genre, as well as a possible future world in which we relate to each other differently. With agents, Postlewait refers to everyone involved in the creation process surrounding the theatrical event, such as the director, performers or the author. Receptions has to

<sup>24</sup> Maaïke Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 8.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-24.

<sup>26</sup> Postlewait, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem. Italics by the author.

do with “the conditions of perception and evaluation, the processes of comprehension by various people – their horizon of expectations and their methods of interpreting (and misinterpreting) the event at the time.”<sup>28</sup> Postlewait regards the reception as part of the theatrical event since it influences how the event is perceived and remembered. With regards to my research, this factor allows me to take into account the (different) ways in which my two case studies were received critically, and to reflect on *why* their respective receptions by feminist reviewers were so different. Lastly, artistic heritage refers to the relation of the theatrical event to the tradition or heritage “in which it operates, to which it refers, and out of which it shapes its own separate identity – sometimes in homage, sometimes in revolt.”<sup>29</sup> With regards to my analysis, this factor allows me to discuss both performances in relation to a tradition of feminist performance, arguing why *Apollon Musagète* fits neatly into this performative tradition while *Cock, Cock... Who’s there?* is part of it and not part of it at the same time (the same and different), since it has a strong feminist thematic but explores cisgender interaction.

Overall, Postlewait states that “each of these four factors – world, agents, receptions and artistic heritage – *need to be understood as part of the event as well as part of the context.*”<sup>30</sup> The triads in the model, signifying mutual exchange, emphasize how neither of these aspects of the theatrical event stands on its own. Postlewait therefore describes his model as a relational approach to the (historical) analysis of theatrical events, an approach which aligns with my overarching quest for a more relational approach in thought and practice. Postlewait emphasizes that this model does not provide a fixed systematic method for analysis, but that it offers a framework, pointing towards the questions any historian should consider. Therefore I do not analyze the performances strictly following these four factors step by step, nor do I regularly fall back on his triangular model. Postlewait himself argues: “...few research projects call for a comprehensive analysis of every conceivable factor.”<sup>31</sup> I analyze the (interrelations between) the factors that are relevant with respect to the argument I wish to build, in relation to the concepts and theories that I introduce in my theoretical framework. While my objective in this thesis is not historiography, I think Postlewait’s approach can be valuable when analyzing contemporary performances in the here and now – I frame my analysis as a *contextual* analysis instead of a *historical* analysis to emphasize this difference. Postlewait’s approach helps me to consider my case studies in a broader context; it allows me to reflect on the mutual exchange between the performances and their receptions, their agents, their artistic heritage and the world as a whole. Postlewait’s underlying understanding of these four factors and their interrelations as determinative in how the theatrical events produce and acquire meaning, forms the basis of my thesis.

The first two chapters of this thesis serve as my theoretical framework, the last two chapters are analytical chapters in which I operationalize said theoretical framework. In the first chapter I go into Donna Haraway’s relational philosophy, focusing primarily on the concept *staying with the trouble*. I discuss how *staying with the trouble* as a concept can in my opinion be helpful to “think anew across differences” in feminist theory, specifically with regard to cisgender interaction, following Kathrin Thiele’s interpretation of Haraway’s work in the context of gender theory.<sup>32</sup> In the second chapter I discuss feminist performance as a genre and tradition. I pay specific attention to Rebecca Schneider’s theories regarding the *explicit body*, since there I see the clearest connection with my contemporary case studies. The performance *Apollon Musagète* serves in this chapter as an exemplifier, to reflect on the discussed theories with practical contemporary examples on the one hand and to underline how it is a part of the feminist performance genre on the other. Then, I move on to problematize (the academic discourse on) feminist performance by arguing that the lack of representation of men and specifically cisgender interaction in feminist performance threatens to

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<sup>28</sup> Postlewait, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Postlewait, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Postlewait, 15. Italics by the author.

<sup>31</sup> Postlewait, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 7.

uphold the binary way of thinking that the genre tries to undermine. *Apollon Musagète* serves again as an exemplifier for this argument. I conclude the chapter by arguing that a relational approach, specifically in the form of *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction, holds a lot of potential for feminist performance and might even help to think about gender difference at large.

In the third and fourth chapter I analyze *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* on two different layers. The first layer, which comes to the fore in chapter three, concerns the performance itself. In this chapter, I dramaturgically analyze the performance. For my understanding of dramaturgical analysis, I follow a model proposed by Sigrid Merx and Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink in their (unpublished) article "Dramaturgical Analysis: A Relational Approach."<sup>33</sup> They distinguish three components of importance when conducting a dramaturgical analysis, namely: "...principles of composition, modes of addressing the spectator, and, ways in which a performance may relate to a wider social and artistic context."<sup>34</sup> This model is relational since it is based on the understanding that one cannot discuss one of these components without involving the other two. Composition refers to "the arrangement of space, time, and action and the employment of all theatrical means available."<sup>35</sup> In other words, it refers to how the performance is structured in time and space. The composition of a performance creates a certain viewing experience. In other words, it addresses and positions the spectator in a certain way. Through this spectatorial address, certain meanings, feelings and/or thoughts are invited in the spectators. The component context refers to how social and artistic contexts reverberate within performances. Examining the context helps "to understand and interpret what performances communicate to their audiences and how they do so."<sup>36</sup> In my analysis of *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* I will analyze parts of the composition, spectatorial address and context of the performance to analyze how Elagoz stages interactions between themselves and the men they meet. However, I do so through the lens of Haraway's theories, operationalizing her concepts *staying with the trouble*, *becoming-with* and *making kin* as analytical tools. These concepts help me analyze how *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* stages cisgender interactions in a relational way, what kind of viewing experience this invites in spectators and what kind of meaning this produces in the context of gender theory. As I mentioned before, *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is a lecture performance, meaning in this case that Elagoz' project leading up to the performance (her artistic process) is the subject of the performance itself: the performance details how they came up with the idea for the project, and how they executed it over the course of a few years. Their artistic process can therefore in my opinion be considered as part of the performance as a whole. I therefore also analyze the artistic process to point out how Elagoz' approach and attitude in the project, and their underlying dramaturgical strategies and artistic principles, can be regarded as a form of *staying with the trouble*.

The second layer comes to the fore in the fourth chapter and this concerns the critical reception of *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* in comparison to that of *Apollon Musagète*. By discussing *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* in relation to *Apollon Musagète* I interweave these two, previously separate, strings of thought. While I briefly touch upon the broader critical response to both performances, I mainly focus on the previously mentioned articles published in *Theatermaker* and *EtCetera* in 2017. I find these the most relevant for my analysis, since they are written by self-proclaimed feminist critics and they feature very extensive discussion of the performances in comparison to each other. On the basis of my dramaturgical analysis of *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* in chapter three and my elaboration on *Apollon Musagète* and its relation to the feminist performative tradition in chapter two, I offer an explanation to why *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is controversial, while *Apollon Musagète* is generally appreciated by feminist reviewers. These two final chapters together serve to demonstrate how *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* functions as a *troublemaker*, in a Harawayan sense, to help think anew about feminist performance and feminism itself (specifically

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<sup>34</sup> Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink and Sigrid Merx, "Dramaturgical Analysis: A Relational Approach," [not yet published], 3.

<sup>35</sup> Groot Nibbelink and Merx, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Groot Nibbelink and Merx, 11-12.

the trouble of cisgender dynamics). In the conclusion, I answer my central thesis question and additionally discuss how *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* can help to think about ways of *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction in the broader academic discourse on gender theory. For my analysis of the performances, I will make use of video registrations of the performances.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Sadly, I wasn't able to attend either of these performances live. However, in this thesis I focus on elements of the performances which can in my opinion be analyzed adequately via video registrations. I focus on what happens on stage in each of these performances, and in some instances how this affects me personally as a spectator. I for example do not analyze a collective audience response or the performers' interaction with spectators, for which live attendance would have been vital.

## 1 Staying with the Trouble of cisgender interaction

“The need is stark to think anew across differences of historical position and of kinds of knowledge and expertise.”<sup>38</sup>

This opening chapter can be read as an introductory chapter. It is both an exploration of the theories that inform this thesis, as well as the starting point of an argument I build in the subsequent chapters. The central question in this chapter is: **how can Donna Haraway’s relational philosophy be used as a lens to think about cisgender interaction?** To be able to answer this question, a few matters need to be addressed first. Firstly, I briefly go into the status of present-day feminism and feminist theory. Then, I elaborate on Donna Haraway’s relational philosophy and, specifically, her concept *staying with the trouble* as introduced in her eponymous book. I shortly go into the themes and some of the key concepts of *Staying with the Trouble*. Subsequently I argue why in my view it is productive to use this relational philosophy as a lens when discussing cisgender interaction. I do this following a line of reasoning set out in the article “Pushing Dualisms and Differences: From ‘Equality versus Difference’ to ‘Nonmimetic Sharing’ and ‘Staying with the Trouble’” by Associate Professor in Gender Studies Kathrin Thiele. I put this hypothesis to the test in my analytical chapters, in which I will use the theories discussed here to analyze how Samira Elagoz’ staging of cisgender interaction in *Cock, Cock... Who’s there?* can be understood as a form of *staying with the trouble*, and what this approach has to offer to the feminist performative tradition as well as the academic discourse.

### 1.1 Feminism: a fourth wave

In recent years, there has been an upsurge of feminist activism and thought. Some academics even speak of a fourth wave of feminism since approximately 2012.<sup>39</sup> Ealasaid Munro states in the article “Feminism: A Fourth Wave?” (2013) that, whether or not one wants to define the second decennium of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the starting point of a fourth wave of feminism, “...it is clear that women’s understanding of their position in the world and their political struggles is changing.”<sup>40</sup> One could argue that we should rather speak about feminisms, plural, because of the great variety of opinions and theories that exists within the feminist discourse. However, Munro states that most present-day feminism has a strong focus on intersectionality and that a lot of feminist thought and activism originates and thrives on the internet. Intersectionality is a term coined by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. It refers to the idea that inequality is determined by an interaction or co-construction of different axes of ‘difference’, such as gender, class, sexuality, age, religion, race, (dis)ability and ethnicity. Intersectional analysis aims to include these different axes of difference when studying gender.<sup>41</sup> Cultural historian and gender theorist Nancy Jouwe describes in *Het F-boek* how these categories of difference are not cumulative; they construct personal experiences of inequality in interaction with each other.<sup>42</sup> She adds to this that the concept of intersectionality on a more symbolic level also deconstructs the category of ‘woman’; it contests the idea that all women face the same struggles or that there is one way to be ‘woman’. Intersectionality can therefore also be regarded as a relational approach to inequality. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge distinguish relationality as a key concept within intersectional theory, and define it as follows:

Relational thinking rejects either/or binary thinking, for example, opposing theory to practice, scholarship to activism, or blacks to whites. Instead, relationality embraces a

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<sup>38</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Ealasaid Munro, “Feminism: A fourth wave?,” *Political insight* 4.2 (2013), 22-25.

<sup>40</sup> Munro, “Feminism: A fourth wave?,” 25.

<sup>41</sup> Rosemarie Buikema and Liedeke Plate ed., *Handboek Genderstudies in media, kunst en cultuur* (Bussum: Uitgeverij Coutinho, 2015), 396.

<sup>42</sup> Anja Meulenbelt and Renée Römken, *Het F-boek* (Houten and Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Unieboek | Het Spectrum bv, 2015), 113.

both/and frame. The focus of relationality shifts from analyzing what distinguishes entities, for example, the differences between race and gender, to examining their interconnections. This shift in perspective opens up intellectual and political possibilities. [...] Relationality takes various forms within intersectionality and is found in terms such as “coalition,” “dialog,” “conversation,” “interaction,” and “transaction.”<sup>43</sup>

Relationality is a central concept in both intersectional feminist theory as well as in Donna Haraway’s philosophy. My thinking and writing on this subject is informed by the abovementioned understanding of intersectional feminism and relationality; I subscribe to the idea that different combinations of and interactions between axes of difference can create different experiences of inequality, and that relational thinking opens up new ways of thinking about forms of inequality. In this thesis I mainly focus on sexual difference, thinking beyond an ontological understanding of the male/female binary as distinguished entities to explain how, in my opinion, gender inequality and oppression are formed in the way men and women relate to one another. I elaborate on this argument in the following paragraphs, with the help of Donna Haraway’s philosophy and Kathrin Thiele’s interpretation of said philosophy.

## 1.2 The relational philosophy of Donna Haraway

Multispecies feminist theorist Donna Haraway was trained as a scientist, specifically a biologist, before turning to the philosophy of science “in order to investigate how beliefs about gender shaped the production of knowledge about nature,” as journalist Moira Weigel puts it in a 2019 interview with Haraway in *The Guardian*.<sup>44</sup> In short, this citation refers to the belief that knowledge and truth are never neutral, although they are often presented that way. Stereotypical ideas surrounding gender can find their way into scientific research, get projected onto scientific findings and be presented as truths. One of Haraway’s most influential texts regarding this subject deals with what she calls ‘situated knowledges,’ in which she argues how knowledge and truth are not static forces that simply exist, but that they are always created and constructed by people and can therefore privilege certain groups over others.<sup>45</sup>

Haraway has been a prolific writer for most of her life and her work has been highly influential, reaching a global audience. Professor of Sociology Sarah Franklin summarizes the current significance of Haraway’s work as follows:

Her unique voice has become ever more urgent and necessary during a period when the intersections between social inequality, environmental decline, mass extinction events and increasing economic stratification have required boldly creative responses.<sup>46</sup>

Haraway is known for the multi-interpretability of her writing and the multitude of research areas that she interweaves with each other, like biology, literary science fiction, technology, feminism and postcolonialism.<sup>47</sup> Her most well-known and possibly most influential work to date is *A Cyborg*

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<sup>43</sup> Hill Collins, Patricia and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 28, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>44</sup> Weigel, Moira, “Feminist cyborg scholar Donna Haraway: ‘The disorder of our era isn’t necessary,’” *The Guardian*, June 20, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/20/donna-haraway-interview-cyborg-manifesto-post-truth>.

<sup>45</sup> Haraway, Donna, “Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective,” *Feminist studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599.

<sup>46</sup> Franklin, Sarah, “Staying with the Manifesto: An Interview with Donna Haraway,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 34, no. 4 (July 2017): 49.

<sup>47</sup> Prins, Baukje, “The Ethics of Hybrid Subjects: Feminist Constructivism According to Donna Haraway Science, Technology, & Human Values”, Vol. 20, No. 3, Special Issue: *Feminist and Constructivist Perspectives on New Technology* (Summer, 1995), 352.



*Manifesto*, which was published in 1985.<sup>48</sup> Weigel summarizes the work as "...an oracular meditation on how cybernetics and digitization had changed what it meant to be male or female – or, really, any kind of person."<sup>49</sup> Haraway argues in this text that, by the late twentieth century, we have all become cyborgs. Haraway's notion of the cyborg does not refer to a machine or a robot, but rather to "a cybernetic organism" formed by specific historical developments, such as the developments in the communication sciences and technologies of the twentieth century.<sup>50</sup> Haraway's concept of the cyborg rejects boundaries separating human from animal and machine, but also the boundaries separating genders.<sup>51</sup> Her cyborg philosophy foregrounds the belief that no person is whole and that essential unities do not exist. Instead, our selves are in a continuous state of becoming, through different kinds of relationships on micro- and macrolevels.<sup>52</sup> Weigel states that one of the things that rendered the *Cyborg Manifesto* its revolutionary quality was its outlook on gender: "The cyborg vision of gender as changing and changeable was radically new."<sup>53</sup> The *Manifesto* has later been interpreted as an advocacy for a post-gender world. However, in later years Haraway has stated that this was not her intention, since after publication the term post-gender turned into an 'ism' that is often used in "a utopian, beyond-masculine-and-feminine sense."<sup>54</sup> In a 1999 interview, Haraway clarifies how she would like to see her usage of the term post-gender interpreted:

Things need not be this way, and in this particular sense that puts focus on a critical relationship to gender along the lines of critical theory's "things need not be this way" – in this sense of blasting gender I approve of the term "postgender." (...) It is the blasting of necessity, the non-necessity of this way of doing the world.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, Haraway approves of the term post-gender in the sense of dismantling the necessity of a gendered categorization and the oppression that comes with that categorization. *A Cyborg Manifesto* afforded Haraway with a cult-like following that is alive to this day. Haraway herself asserts in the introduction of *The Haraway Reader*, a collection of many of her papers, that many of her writing focusses on undoing reductive dualisms:

All of these papers take up one or another aspect of inherited dualisms that run deep in Western cultures. [...] All of my writing is committed to swerving and tripping over these bipartite, dualist traps rather than trying to reverse them or resolve them into supposedly larger wholes.<sup>56</sup>

Haraway deems this 'tripping over' dualist traps essential since, in her own words, "to make sense we must always be ready to trip."<sup>57</sup> In the context of this thesis, the reductive dualism or dualist trap I trip over, following Haraway's relational philosophy, is the male/female dichotomy. A concept that Haraway has developed in this spirit of tripping over dualist traps is *staying with the trouble*.

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<sup>48</sup> Weigel, "Feminist cyborg scholar Donna Haraway: 'The disorder of our era isn't necessary.'"

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>50</sup> Franklin, "Staying with the Manifesto: An Interview with Donna Haraway," 53.

<sup>51</sup> Haraway, Donna, "A Cyborg Manifesto – Science, technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century," 2.

<sup>52</sup> Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto – Science, technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century," 5.

<sup>53</sup> Weigel, "Feminist cyborg scholar Donna Haraway: 'The disorder of our era isn't necessary.'"

<sup>54</sup> Lykke, Nine, Randi Markussen, and Finn Olesen, "Cyborgs, Coyotes And Dogs: A Kinship Of Feminist Figurations", in *The Haraway Reader*, ed. Donna J. Haraway (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 328-329.

<sup>55</sup> Lykke et al., "Cyborgs, Coyotes And Dogs: A Kinship Of Feminist Figurations", 329.

<sup>56</sup> Haraway, Donna J., *The Haraway Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

<sup>57</sup> Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 2.

### 1.2.1 *Staying with the Trouble*

In her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* Haraway proposes ways of thinking and doing that reconfigure human's relationship with the earth. She critiques the human-centered, destructive Anthropocene and Capitalocene and explores ways to meaningfully live and die together in a multi-species world, which she refers to as the Chthulucene: a contraction composed of the Greek roots *khtôn* (earth) and *kainos* (new) that, in Haraway's words, "together name a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth."<sup>58</sup> In this era, humans do not occupy a privileged place over other beings but they are endlessly becoming-with other critters – Haraway's preferred collective name for humans, non-humans, microbes, plants, animals and often even machines.<sup>59</sup> Together, in their continuous relays of becoming-with, these critters form what Haraway calls "hot compost piles."<sup>60</sup> In other words, Haraway foregrounds an ecological vision in which togetherness and interconnectedness precede individualism. This search for new ways of living and dying together of species is a recurring theme in Haraway's work, especially in more recent work under the influence of the current climate crisis.

The book *Staying with the Trouble* is a collection of eight essays. A common thread in all of these essays is Haraway's pliable concept SF, which refers to: "...science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism, science fact, so far."<sup>61</sup> Haraway goes on to describe SF as both practice and process: "...it is becoming-with each other in surprising relays, it is a figure for ongoingness in the Chthulucene."<sup>62</sup> Through its manifold meanings, SF manifests itself in different ways throughout the book. For example, it emerges in the form of speculative fabulation (and science fiction, if you will) by Haraway's imagining of *Terrapolis*; a multidimensional space in which multispecies becoming-with flourishes. In this world lives not the human as *Homo*, but the *guman*, a being of soil, humus and compost.<sup>63</sup> In this interconnected, muddy world, *guman* is "full of indeterminate genders and genres, full of kinds-in-the-making, full of significant otherness."<sup>64</sup> A vision that is reminiscent of Haraway's earlier work, like the abovementioned Cyborg Manifesto. SF also manifests itself in Haraway's style of writing, that she herself refers to as playing a game of string figures or cat's cradle: thinking in the form of a passing of patterns and relays, back and forth, which according to her is vital to *staying with the trouble*.<sup>65</sup> String figures or cat's cradle can be seen as a metaphor for a strongly relational, process-based approach to thinking.<sup>66</sup>

Another important recurring concept in Haraway's work, which I already briefly mentioned before, is the concept becoming-with. Becoming-with refers to the understanding that "to be one is always to become with many."<sup>67</sup> Haraway uses the concept to refer to the interrelatedness of all

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<sup>58</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 169.

<sup>60</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 12.

<sup>65</sup> Haraway describes this thinking practice in detail in her 1994 article "A Game of Cat's Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies": "Cat's cradle is about patterns and knots; the game takes great skill and can result in some serious surprises. One person can build up a large repertoire of string figures on a single pair of hands; but the cat's cradle figures can be passed back and forth on the hands of several players, who add new moves in the building of complex patterns. Cat's cradle invites a sense of collective work, of one person not being able to make all the patterns alone. One does not "win" at cat's cradle; the goal is more interesting and more open-ended than that."

Haraway, Donna J., "A Game of Cat's Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies," *Configurations* 2, no. 1 (1994): 69-70.

<sup>66</sup> It is therefore closely related to for example actor-network theory and the Deleuzian rhizome.

Martin, Emily, "Anthropology and the Cultural Study of Science", *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 23, No. 1 (Winter, 1998), 36.

<sup>67</sup> Haraway, Donna J., *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4.

species on earth, stating that “the partners do not precede their relating; all that is, is the fruit of becoming with [...].”<sup>68</sup> According to Haraway, becoming-with is an essential worlding practice:

Ontologically heterogeneous partners become who and what they are in relational material-semiotic worlding. Natures, cultures, subjects and objects do not preexist their intertwined worldings.<sup>69</sup>

According to this view, it is the entanglements of and encounters between species, or *intra-actions*, that shape the world and create meaning. Haraway often makes use of the term *intra-actions*, which she derives from feminist theorist Karen Barad. Barad introduces the notion of *intra-actions* as a key element of her theories on agential realism in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.<sup>70</sup> This concept refers to the idea that different agencies do not exist individually, but are formed through interactions and relationships. As Barad herself puts it: “[...] in contrast to the usual ‘interaction,’ which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of *intra-action* recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their *intra-action*.”<sup>71</sup> This understanding of reality generally informs Haraway’s philosophy.

Finally, the concept of *staying with the trouble* refers to Haraway’s proposed way of dealing with our troubled world.<sup>72</sup> She synonymizes the word *trouble*, following its etymology, with “to stir up”, “to make cloudy” and “to disturb”: “We – all of us on Terra – live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times. The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response.”<sup>73</sup> In the introduction of the eponymous book, Haraway states that many people address trouble in the world by trying to make a future safe and manageable, out of fear of what the future might bring. Her concept of *staying with the trouble* does not focus on such a relationship to a future. Instead, it focusses on being truly present in coexistence, “entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.”<sup>74</sup> An important way of *staying with the trouble* according to Haraway is ‘making kin’, or ‘making oddkin’: a striving among all creatures to get on together in many different ways. She describes how she is not so much interested in reconciliation or restoration, but “...deeply committed to the modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together. Call that staying with the trouble.”<sup>75</sup> Haraway deems unexpected and unusual collaborations and combinations amongst humans and non-humans necessary to make the world habitable, hence the prefix ‘odd’ in making oddkin. As she puts it: “We become-with each other or not at all.”<sup>76</sup> As an example of this, Haraway describes the project *PigeonBlog*; a collaboration between artists, environmental activists, pigeon-fanciers and homing pigeons, which explored new ways of gathering data on urban air pollution by equipping the homing

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<sup>68</sup> Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 17.

<sup>69</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 13.

<sup>70</sup> Barad, Karen Michelle, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 33.

Barad herself defines agential realism as follows: “...an epistemological-ontological-ethical framework that provides an understanding of the role of human *and* nonhuman, material *and* discursive, and natural *and* cultural factors in scientific and other social-material practices, thereby moving such considerations beyond the well-worn debates that pit constructivism against realism, agency against structure, and idealism against materialism. Indeed, the new philosophical framework that I propose entails a rethinking of fundamental concepts that support such binary thinking, including the notions of matter, discourse, causality, agency, power, identity, embodiment, objectivity, space, and time.” Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 26. Italics by the author.

<sup>71</sup> Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 33.

<sup>72</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>75</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 10.

<sup>76</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 4.

pigeons with lightweight technological ‘backpacks’ that collected air quality information. Subsequently, the gathered information was posted on the blog for the general public. Haraway describes how, despite the innovational character of the project, in the end *PigeonBlog* was not so much about air pollution science, but more about sparking new collaborations which would create “recuperation across consequential differences.”<sup>77</sup> In this case, the most significant differences that were breached were between pigeons, humans and technology. Haraway also uses the example of *PigeonBlog* to demonstrate how these collaborations and combinations can provoke response-ability; how new ways of relating can help in becoming response-able. She details how the project taught city children to see pigeons as living, sociable birds instead of as “rats with wings”. This led to a change in their behavior, making them response-able: “The kids transmute from bird hecklers and sometimes physical abusers to astute observers and advocates for beings whom they had not known how to see or respect.” Haraway also demonstrates that such response-ability does not automatically lead to blissful ignorance and acceptance of the overpopulation of pigeons. They do, however, help us think of new ways of getting on together. Instead of treating the pigeons like pests, we can assume response-ability, knowing that their overpopulation is due to our urbanization. As a result we can come up with inventive ways of dealing with this. Haraway uses the example of the Batman Park pigeon loft in Australia, which encourages pigeons to stay away from city buildings and streets and allows for ‘birth control’ by making it possible to replace the pigeons’ eggs for artificial ones. As Haraway puts it: “Response-ability is about both absence and presence, killing and nurturing, living and dying – and remembering who lives and who dies and how in the string figures of natural/cultural history.”<sup>78</sup>

Thus, Haraway’s characteristic relational philosophy is illustrated by the abovementioned concepts like becoming-with, making kin, response-ability, *staying with the trouble* and SF. It also comes to the fore in Haraway’s inspirations, like Karen Barad’s theories on agential realism. Since Haraway’s way of thinking is so broad and layered, and can at times seem enigmatic or confusing, I have included this rather extensive elaboration on Haraway’s philosophy, including detailed examples. Her general understanding of reality, in which everything exists and *comes to be* in interaction with each other, informs my thinking in this thesis. In my analytical chapters I operationalize Haraway’s concepts, specifically *staying with the trouble*, becoming-with and making kin, to think with the performance *Cock, Cock... Who’s there?* about the potential and importance of a relational approach in both feminist performance and the academic discourse.

### 1.3 *Staying with the trouble* in gender theory

Although Haraway’s ecological focus does not immediately align with my topic, Haraway’s relational way of thinking does. In this thesis, I discuss Haraway’s concept of *staying with the trouble* in the context of societal systems and relations, specifically to rethink cisgender interaction. As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, I hypothesize that Haraway’s philosophy can be productive in this context. I see value in an attempt to *stay with the trouble* of cisgender interactions, instead of trying to wipe out differences on the one hand or trying to reinforce a rigid binary on the other.

Haraway strives for a new way of thinking, of finding new ways of living and dying together and making (odd)kin for humans and non-humans on a planet that is on the brink of ecological disaster. My focus in this thesis is different: I focus on meaningfully living together and making kin between humans, from a gender theory perspective. I regard it as taking a step back from Haraway’s overarching consideration of all critters, humans and non-humans combined, without denying its incredible value. I view my practice not as a moving away of this overarching perspective, but as a zooming in by considering making kin on the micro-level of gendered relations between humans.

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<sup>77</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 21.

<sup>78</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 28.

*Staying with the trouble* as a concept can in my opinion be helpful to “think anew across differences” in feminist theory, more specifically with regard to cisgender interaction.<sup>79</sup> To add depth to my discussion of how the concept might be useful in this context, I first want to devote attention to an important and controversial paradox in feminist theory and activism, namely the paradox of equality vs. difference.<sup>80</sup> Gender theorist Kathrin Thiele addresses this paradox in her article “Pushing Dualisms and Differences: From ‘Equality versus Difference’ to ‘Nonmimetic Sharing’ and ‘Staying with the Trouble’” as follows:

In its most basic outline, the paradox here is that feminism’s major claim for (sexual) difference(s) is, on the one hand, a rejection of determinist and essentialist understandings of sex/gender and a demand for equality and equal access, yet this demand can, on the other hand, only ever be brought about by emphasizing the specificity of (sexual) difference(s).<sup>81</sup>

Thus, equality and difference cannot live with or without each other. An insistence on ‘difference’ is necessary as an analytical tool to point out how women are disadvantaged compared to men and to argue why there is a need for equality. However, this insistence on ‘difference’ at the same time upholds precisely those determinist and essentialist ideas about gender identity and sexual difference that feminism tries to undermine. Thankfully, as Thiele emphasizes, this paradox has not halted feminist thought; rather it has inspired creative thinking beyond dichotomous structures.<sup>82</sup>

Thiele argues that a new materialist/posthuman(ist) perspective in the equality vs. difference debate offers new insights, that can be helpful “...for both theorizing differentiability as ethico-onto-epistemological ‘becomingwith’ and for practicing this world of/as difference(s) in a more ‘response-able’ manner.”<sup>83</sup> Through a new materialist/posthuman(ist) lens, Thiele offers a new way of approaching the equality vs. difference debate, that moves beyond the old paradox and aims at pushing feminist thought into a “different difference” type of thinking, which according to her can be positioned “...*diesseits* of the divide between equality and difference.”<sup>84</sup> In this thinking, she works towards finding new answers to questions of how to share and coexist with each other on this earth.

In developing her argument, Thiele visits various feminist thinkers. She starts with a re-reading of Luce Irigaray’s sexual difference philosophy, accompanied by feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz’s reading of Irigaray’s work. One of Irigaray’s central claims is her view of sexual difference as a universal given. Thiele concludes, following Grosz, that this should not be interpreted as an essentialist notion but as a rethinking of the ontology of sexual difference. As Thiele puts it:

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<sup>79</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 7.

<sup>80</sup> Thiele, Kathrin, “Pushing Dualisms and Differences: From ‘Equality versus Difference’ to ‘Nonmimetic Sharing’ and ‘Staying with the Trouble’”, *Women: a cultural review* 25, No.1 (2014), 10.

<sup>81</sup> Thiele, 10.

<sup>82</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>83</sup> Thiele, 9.

Thiele uses the double formula ‘new materialist/posthuman(ist)’ throughout the article, to emphasize the difficulty of correctly ‘labelling’ schools of thought. She uses the adjective ethico-onto-epistemological throughout this article to underline the inseparability of ethics, ontology and epistemology, following Karen Barad’s agential realist understanding that ontology and epistemology can no longer be assumed as separated entities, but that they entail one another.

<sup>84</sup> Thiele, 11. Italics by the author.

Thiele uses the German *diesseits*, which she describes as the immanent version of *jenseits* (‘beyond’), signifying both ‘on this side of’ and ‘before’. This wording is of conceptual importance in her argument, since she builds her argument on the understanding of an ever-present and underlying, inherent differentiability that precedes the divide between equality and difference.

Sexual difference with Irigaray suggests a different ontology, one in which differentiability – the more than o/One – is primary and, by being primary, is prior precisely to the divisiveness of separate entities (for example man/woman).<sup>85</sup>

In other words, if we assume difference as a starting point, the essentialist idea of ontology as referring to ‘what is’ becomes unhinged. If we do not assume an essential, primary ‘one’, the division between female and male as separate entities also no longer holds. Thiele cites Grosz, who connects Irigaray’s sexual difference philosophy with Gilles Deleuze’s ontology of becoming, which also assumes a primordial difference before all else. Following these theories, Thiele therefore reconceptualizes ‘what is’ as a continuous ‘becoming-different’. Returning to the equality vs. difference debate, Thiele argues that this stressing of (an inherent or primary) difference does not automatically oppose equalization. She asserts that it is exactly the perspective of primary differentiability that provides a complex grounding for all claims of needing further equalization:

It is the acknowledgement of differentiability first and foremost, without giving up the demand for ‘a possible place’ for everybody, that, instead of opposing, combines the claims of equality and difference.<sup>86</sup>

In her book *Sharing the World* (2008) Irigaray philosophizes how we can organize living together on this planet in such a way that there is a possible place for everybody, from said perspective of ontological differentiability. She envisions new modes of relating to the other, “...from the acknowledgement that there are ‘at least’ two (if not more) possibilities for everything.”<sup>87</sup> Thiele refers to this thought practice as Irigaray’s “cosmo(po)logical project”.<sup>88</sup> Thiele emphasizes Irigaray’s use of the word ‘sharing’, contending that this word avoids the assumed divisiveness of difference and that it therefore ‘spaces’ the discussion differently.<sup>89</sup>

However, Thiele problematizes the anthropocentric focus on transcendence and human exceptionalism of most Western philosophical engagements with difference, including Irigaray’s work.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, she sees value in adding a new materialist/posthuman(ist) perspective to this thought practice of primary difference. It is here that she turns to the philosophy of Donna Haraway, for Thiele deems Haraway’s philosophies fruitful in developing “...a thought practice of worlding-with-others, which starts from immanent relatedness and thus is able to undo the humanism of the transcendental self/other (inasmuch as nature/culture) relation.”<sup>91</sup> Thiele describes how, following Barad’s and Haraway’s philosophies which foreground a primary entanglement and relationality, sharing “becomes *all there is*”.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Thiele, 13.

<sup>86</sup> Thiele, 14.

<sup>87</sup> Thiele, 15. Italics by the author.

<sup>88</sup> Thiele, 14.

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>90</sup> Thiele, 11.

Thiele’s argumentation for this is (briefly) as follows: “Both the demand of the absolute otherness of the other (transcendental difference) and the focus on purely intersubjective relations between self and other (anthropocentric differences) are yet to be deconstructed as the seemingly unquestioned ethico-political telos of a conceptual engagement with difference(s).” Thiele describes how Irigaray works from “...a phenomenologically structured field of at least two subjective entities, which are utterly different and, therefore, demand both an end to monosubjective culture and an ethico-political vision for coexistence in difference with the other in a cosmopolitical dimension.” In contrast, new materialist and posthuman(ist) approaches consider worlding forces not necessarily as subjective, nor necessarily human. Furthermore, they do not consider worlding forces as “...placed within the world, but [...] as performances of this world in its dis/continuous becoming – which enables an engagement with differentiability ‘on this side of’ dichotomies.”

<sup>91</sup> Thiele, 20.

<sup>92</sup> Thiele, 21.

According to Thiele, Haraway's concept *staying with the trouble* forms "the most practical formula via which recognition and responsibility for the other become *a mattering response-ability for and with others* (human and non-human)."<sup>93</sup> Thiele leaves it to the reader to determine how *staying with the trouble* can be used practically and does not elaborate much further on this. However, she does contend that Haraway's concepts are not intended to produce an answer in the equality vs. difference debate, but that they are about "...learning the insisting practice of respect and politeness that does not avoid 'the complexities for all of the actors (Haraway 2008: 83) and *stay with the trouble* of continuously asymmetrical power relations."<sup>94</sup>

#### 1.4 *Staying with the trouble of cisgender interaction*

I include this extensive discussion of Thiele's text because I believe it is valuable to demonstrate the far-reaching implications of using the concept of *staying with the trouble* in a gender theory context, instead of in the mostly ecological context in which Haraway proposes and discusses the concept. Thiele's argumentation for the usefulness of *staying with the trouble* when discussing gender difference aligns with my thinking. In Thiele's discussion, it becomes apparent that *staying with the trouble* can offer a new way of looking at sexual difference, *diesseits* of the male/female binary. The idea of difference here is not reduced to an essentialist idea of two divided unities, rather it refers to a prior difference in all things. Following this line of thinking, one could state that difference does not arise from inherent characteristics of women and men, but from different types of worlding and worlding-with-others. I regard this as a new way of approaching the male/female binary and consequently cisgender interactions. This offers a way of regarding cisgender interactions as intra-actions and instances of becoming-with, instead of 'predetermined' exchanges on the basis of fixed gender roles – and this view, in my opinion, offers more room for change and growth. In *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* I see, in the encounters between Elagoz and the men she meets, a concrete materialization of what a different type of relating might look like when we approach them as intra-actions and instances of becoming-with. Whereas Thiele's discussion focusses mostly on the philosophical implications of primary differential thinking, I intend to put these theories to the test by operationalizing them in relation to the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* I explore in chapter 3 how *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* can serve as a concretization and materialization of these concepts in a performance setting, and how it helps to think about what *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction might look like.

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<sup>93</sup> Thiele, 22. Italics by the author.

<sup>94</sup> Thiele, 23. Italics by the author.

## 2 A tradition of feminist performance

It should be noted from the outset that when I write about women I am not writing about some essentialized category transcendent of history, transcendent of representation. Rather, I am writing about women as born of and entangled in history, entangled in representation.<sup>95</sup>

In this chapter I argue why a relational approach, through *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction, is an important next step in feminist performance. To substantiate this point, I first have to discuss feminist performance as a genre and tradition. I briefly go into the history of the performative tradition as well as the academic discourse on said tradition. I devote the most attention to the feminist performance art genre, specifically on Rebecca Schneider's theories regarding the *explicit body*, since I see the clearest connection there with my contemporary case studies. The aim here is not to offer a complete summary of feminist performance history, but to paint a brief but clear picture of the genre. I discuss how the genre has focused mainly on the recovery and exploration of a female performative tradition on the one hand, and on the cultural deconstruction of the sign 'Woman' through a variety of artistic strategies on the other. The performance *Apollon Musagète* by Florentina Holzinger accompanies me throughout my elaboration as an exemplifier to reflect on the discussed theories with practical contemporary examples of those theories on the one hand and to underline how this performance is a part of the feminist performance genre on the other. By doing so, I answer my second sub-question: how does *Apollon Musagète* fit into a tradition of feminist explicit body art? As mentioned before, *Apollon Musagète* is a feminist remake of the original ballet by Balanchine, featuring six naked female performers who perform a series of masochistic and provocative tricks in a very light-hearted atmosphere. Apollo himself is absent from Holzinger's version, although there is a large rodeo bull center stage which can be interpreted as a personification of the god. After discussing the feminist performance genre and *Apollon Musagète's* place in it, I problematize (the academic discourse on) feminist performance by arguing that the lack of representation of men and specifically cisgender interaction in feminist performance threatens to uphold the binary way of thinking that the genre tries to undermine. *Apollon Musagète* serves again as an exemplifier for this argument, which helps me answer my third sub-question: how does cisgender interaction take shape in *Apollon Musagète*?

I then posit that a relational approach, through the staging of cisgender interaction, should be the next step for feminist performance. I support this argument by demonstrating that Rebecca Schneider, in the epilogue of her 1997 book, already implied that the next step for feminist performers might be to take up the role of subject and peer in relation to men. I connect her discussion of Simone de Beauvoir's concept reciprocity in this context to Haraway's relational philosophy. Through this I arrive at my contention that *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction in theatre holds a lot of potential and might even help to think about gender difference at large. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on this thought with the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* as my companion.

### 2.1 On theories and terminology

In this chapter I draw from both traditional theatre studies as well as performance art theories. It should be noted that many of the key texts written on feminist performance date back to the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century; a time in which one could arguably still more assuredly speak of bordered disciplines within the (performing) arts. Since then, disciplines have blended into one another more and more. The contemporary case studies I wish to analyze cannot so easily be pinned down in one discipline. Both my case studies are created by makers schooled as contemporary choreographers. However, since both Elagoz and Holzinger make interdisciplinary

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<sup>95</sup> Schneider, 10.



work, it would be unfit to refer to their works as dance pieces.<sup>96</sup> When discussing contemporary examples I therefore speak only of feminist performance, which I deem a suitable umbrella term for all types of feminist live performance. When citing academic texts, I will for clarity mention the discipline or context in which the text was written.

So, what is a 'feminist' performance? When can a performance be called feminist? There is no straightforward definition. Some writers in the early years of the women's movement asserted that all women's performances are in some way feminist, since women taking up space in a world dominated by men according to them is inherently a feminist act. However, I align myself with Elaine Aston, who deems this stance an oversimplification and reductive to the field.<sup>97</sup> I regard feminism, following theatre scholar Kim Solga, as "...the best and most accurate term to use when thinking about gendered experience from a human rights perspective."<sup>98</sup> Feminist performances, then, are in my view performances that in some way critically address gendered experience, by for example demonstrating, analyzing, critiquing or subverting the dominant, exclusionary discourse, which is typically upheld by a patriarchal (white, straight, cis-gendered, male) order. From an intersectional perspective, it is worth noting that feminist performances can of course exist on different planes and intersections and engage with different themes. Therefore a lot of contemporary works with a feminist thematic do not necessarily present as (exclusively) feminist.<sup>99</sup> Performances that take up issues like race, (dis)ability or class difference can for example also be feminist, although this might present itself in a less obvious manner or as a secondary theme.

My descriptions of feminist performance and feminist performance studies are of course not exhaustive. Both 'performance' and 'feminism' are words that contain multitudes, and I do not wish to imply that my discussion of feminist performance is in any way complete. Just like it is nowadays more fitting to speak of feminisms, plural, we should probably rather speak of feminist performances to fully appreciate the multitude of forms and styles that exist under its flag.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, many academics have gone before me to distinguish certain characteristic traits in feminist performances that keep recurring in the approximately sixty years that feminist performance has existed as a genre. Before I go into these, it should be noted that most of the available writings on feminist performance are written from an Anglo-American context and perspective. The reader can therefore assume that when I speak of feminist theatre and performance studies in the following pages this concerns Anglo-American studies, unless otherwise specified. In those texts, discussions of feminist performance (theory) in a European context are often limited to a discussion of the famous feminist French theorists.<sup>101</sup> A European feminist performance practice – if we can even speak of it as such – is hardly ever addressed. There seem to be few studies available in either the Dutch or the English language concerning feminist theatre and performance in a European context and specifically the Dutch language area. Nevertheless, I assume that observations made by North-American and British theatre and performance scholars will still to a large extent be useful when discussing European

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<sup>96</sup> Samira Elagoz and Florentina Holzinger both attended the SNDO in Amsterdam; the School for New Dance Development. Elagoz has made documentary films, visual art and performances. Holzinger mostly creates performances that critics have referred to as a 'total theatre' because they draw from a myriad of disciplines, such as performance art, ballet, contemporary dance, body art and variety show.

<http://www.samiraelagoz.com/about>, accessed April 6, 2020.

<https://www.theaterkrant.nl/recensie/tanz/florentina-holzinger/>, accessed April 6, 2020.

<sup>97</sup> Aston, 64.

<sup>98</sup> Kim Solga, *Theatre and Feminism* (London: Macmillan International Higher Education, 2015), 1.

<sup>99</sup> Solga, 78.

<sup>100</sup> Aston, 9.

<sup>101</sup> In Elaine Aston's *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (1995), the chapter which focuses on feminist performance studies in a European context is solely devoted to the theories of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Kim Solga's *Theatre & Feminism* (2016) focuses virtually only on the feminist performance studies and practices in the UK, USA and Canada, although in her last chapter "Further reading" she suggests English texts by writers from other parts of the globe.

feminist performance, and in turn by writing this thesis I hope to add to the European discourse on feminist performance.

## 2.2 Historical context

Feminist performance studies and feminist performance practices both developed as more or less demarcated disciplines around the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century, under the influence of the second wave of feminism. It is important to note that these phenomena were not completely new, although they are often presented as such in historical texts. The 1960s are often assumed as the time of birth of all feminist performance. However, Aston argues that this assumption risks "...perpetuating the historical invisibility of women's work in theatre."<sup>102</sup> Women have throughout history repeatedly attempted to claim their own space in opposition to a male-dominated theatre. However, since feminist theatre and performance art as genres in and of itself emerged on the currents of the second wave of feminism and has been documented as such, it makes sense to take that period as a general starting point when discussing the history of feminist performance practices.

### 2.2.1 Feminist theatre studies

Feminist theatre studies developed relatively late compared to related disciplines. According to Aston this can largely be explained by the late emergence of theatre studies itself as a discipline – the first drama departments in Britain opened only halfway through the twentieth century.<sup>103</sup> Due to its late development, feminist theatre studies were heavily influenced by feminist work in related disciplines. The discipline therefore mostly started by 'borrowing' from feminist theory in English studies and film and media studies.<sup>104</sup> According to Solga, feminist performance theory has largely drawn ideologically from cultural materialism, feminist film theory and psychoanalytic theory.<sup>105</sup> Solga gives a brief overview of the three critical debates, running roughly from the 1980s until the early 2000s, which according to her have been especially influential for feminist theatre studies in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada.

The first debate that Solga distinguishes concerns spectatorship and the development of "a feminist theory of *looking* at the theatre", which was inspired by (feminist) film theory's focus on the spectator's gaze.<sup>106</sup> This debate mainly concerns itself with theorizing how the spectator's gaze is gendered. Feminist theories about the spectator's gaze in theatre are highly influenced by film theorist Laura Mulvey and her theories surrounding the 'male gaze' in Hollywood cinema. Many of the theories developed within this debate focus, in one way or another, on "...resisting the male gaze and subjecting it to analysis and critique."<sup>107</sup> The second debate is highly indebted to theories by both Bertolt Brecht and Judith Butler, and centers around (a resistance to) stage realism. Judith Butler's theories on gender performativity argue that gender is not an innate, biological quality of people, but rather a rigid cultural construct that manifests itself as a (subconscious) continuous performance throughout people's lives (for example: I was assigned female at birth and raised as a woman, and therefore I, partly subconsciously, adhere to a large number of social and cultural codes that align with the idea of what and how a woman 'is'). Brecht's theories on politically activating epic theatre were combined with Judith Butler's theories on gender performativity to form "a model for an engaged and ethical theatre practice in which sex and gender codes could be actively and openly contested (and even reimagined) on stage."<sup>108</sup> Solga argues that in principle any dramatic genre

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<sup>102</sup> Aston, 58.

<sup>103</sup> Aston, 1.

<sup>104</sup> Aston, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Solga, 18.

<sup>106</sup> Solga, 14.

<sup>107</sup> Solga, 24.

<sup>108</sup> Solga, 38.

Judith Butler is a cultural philosopher, not a performance theorist. Her work however has always been strongly connected to (the development of) feminist performance theory.

could potentially achieve a kind of political activism through resistance of gender norms on stage. In practice however, these theories led feminist performance scholarship to practically unanimously turn away from stage realism. The Brechtian self-reflexive acting style was deemed more fitting for staging gender as a performance on stage.<sup>109</sup> The third important debate started to develop in the late nineties and the early 2000s and is largely informed by the previous two debates. Solga states that feminist scholars in this time focused on (political) feelings of either hope or loss. Some feminist scholars focused on reimagining a brighter, hopeful future in which inequality no longer exists. Others analyzed how the theatre and performance world responded to the feeling that feminism was 'done' and/or no longer relevant, which was a common sentiment during the 1990s and early 2000s.

### 2.2.2 Feminist performance art

The 1960s and 70s also saw the emergence of feminist performance art. Theatre scholar Jeanie Forte states that women's performance art since the 1960s is distinguishable as a subgenre within the performance art field due to its overtly political, feminist nature. According to Forte, in the late 1960s and early 1970s feminist artists deployed performance art as a deconstructive strategy to demonstrate how women are objectified in a patriarchal culture.<sup>110</sup> Under the influence of semiotic theory, there was a strong focus on (the deconstruction of) 'Woman' as a culturally constructed category. Forte phrases this dominant cultural representation of 'Woman' as follows:

Woman constitutes the position of object, a position of other in relation to a socially-dominant male subject; it is that 'otherness' which makes representation possible (the personification of male desire).<sup>111</sup>

Feminist performers took offense at these dominant representations of Woman as Other and as the object of male desire, especially since the real lives and experiences of actual women were largely invisible in cultural representations. Forte argues that, to be able to speak, women "...must either take on a mask (masculinity, falsity, simulation, seduction), or take on the unmasking of the very



*Still from the performance Apollon Musagète (credits Radovan Dranga)*

opposition in which they are the opposed, the Other."<sup>112</sup> It is exactly this type of unmasking of the sign 'Woman' that performance artists took upon themselves in their works. Through continuously

<sup>109</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>110</sup> Forte, Jeanie K., "Women's performance art: feminism and postmodernism." In *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, ed. Lizbeth Goodman and Jane De Gay (London: Routledge, 1998), 218.

<sup>111</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>112</sup> Forte, 209.

challenging the status quo via cultural deconstruction, women performance artists provided “a feminist frame of reference for the re-articulation of difference.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, feminist performance art subverted dominant ideas concerning gender difference and thereby also implicitly or explicitly articulated alternative representations of women.

Often, these deconstructions and subversions of the dominant representation of Woman materialized *through* the bodies of women performance artists. Theatre scholar Rebecca Schneider coined the phrase *explicit body* to refer to this phenomenon. In her book *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997) Schneider uses the concept of the *explicit body* to refer to practices in feminist performance art in which the visceral body of the (typically female) performer is used to collide against “Symbolic Orders of meaning” and thereby questions concepts of appropriateness.<sup>114</sup> *Apollon Musagète* serves as a clear contemporary example of this praxis: for one, the female performers in this performance are naked through-out the entire performance, drawing attention to their bodies. However, they don’t behave as naked women typically do in cultural representation; while they are able-bodied, slim and conventionally attractive, they do not seem to want to conform to a societal idea of feminine sexiness or beauty through their behavior. Instead, they perform tricks on their bodies that trigger feelings of shock or disgust. Many of the grotesque, shocking bodily acts in the performance seem to be a response to cultural ideas of the infinitely desirable female body on the one hand and ideas of appropriateness on the other. Schneider notes that feminist artists often deliberately play with shock and provocation, thereby questioning whose transgressions are deemed artful and ‘high art’ and why, and whose transgressions are deemed inappropriate or too much. A good example of this occurs halfway through the performance, when one of the performers drinks a cup of coffee and smokes a cigarette center-stage, after which she turns her back on the audience, lowers down into a squatting position and pulls her buttocks apart with both hands. While breathing loudly, she puts one finger in her anus and fingers it roughly for a while. She then proceeds to sit down on a small jar and pees in it. After this, she sits in a squatting position over a bigger jar and poops in it, while grunting loudly. By showing a young, attractive, naked woman unapologetically defecating in jars on stage, the performance challenges assumptions about what (good, attractive) women ‘should’ and ‘shouldn’t’ do and triggers questions of appropriateness. Additionally, through the demonstrative display of the body’s natural function, the female body is demystified; the performer rejects her role as a source of insatiable desire for the audience’s gaze.

According to Schneider the *explicit body* in performance serves as “a site of social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality – all of which bear ghosts of historical meaning, markings delineating social hierarchies of privilege and disprivilege.”<sup>115</sup> Explicit is derived from the Latin *explicare*, which means ‘to unfold’. Schneider argues that many female performance artists in their work unfold the layers of signification that surround their bodies: “Peeling at signification, bringing ghosts to visibility, they are interested to expose not an originary, true, or redemptive body, but the sedimented layers of signification themselves.”<sup>116</sup> In other words, this unfolding of signification does not aim to reveal a hidden truth, rather it points towards the signification process itself. Schneider describes how explicit body performance typically “replays, across the body of the artist as stage, the historical drama of gender or race (and sometimes, brilliantly, gender and race).”<sup>117</sup> This replay can be explained as a kind of double take; when a naked woman artist (who is, through her woman-ness and her naked body automatically sexualized)

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<sup>113</sup> Forte, 234.

<sup>114</sup> Schneider, 3.

<sup>115</sup> Schneider, 2.

<sup>116</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>117</sup> Schneider, 3.

In relation to the case studies in this thesis, it should be noted that they do not deal with race, in the sense that they, in Schneider’s words, “leave whiteness in the realm of the implicit.” The women performers in my case studies are all white, and whiteness remains unremarked in these performances. According to Schneider, implicit whiteness is regrettably common, since white feminists often have trouble combining the themes of gender dis-privilege and racial privilege in their work.

comments on this sexualization by demonstrating, affirming or critiquing it across her body, she invites the audience to look (and think) twice about this sexualization. Furthermore, feminist artists play with, challenge and subvert ways of seeing, such as the inscribed perspectivalism in which women are always the object of vision but never seers themselves, and in which the (male) viewer remains invisible. An example of such a subversion is how the performers in *Apollon Musagète* continuously 'look back' (at the audience) and address the audience. Throughout the entire performance they exhibit a strong awareness that they are seen, thereby claiming a kind of agency and challenging the audience's gaze.



Performer Evelyn Frantti in the performance *Apollon Musagète* (credits Radovan Dranga)

All of the abovementioned themes can be recognized in the opening scene of *Apollon Musagète*, when performer Evelyn Frantti addresses the audience as follows: "Ladies and Gentlemen, and everything in between, welcome. What you are going to witness are some of the most fantastic, monstrous and dangerous acts known to mankind. [...] I will prick, squeeze, maim and mangle my body for your twisted longings. Real blood, real pain, real sweat, real entertainment." Her tone is light yet formal, comparable to a stewardess explaining the safety procedures on an aircraft. She then proceeds to light-heartedly do a series of extreme tricks, like slowly hammering an eight centimeter long nail in her nose, swallowing a meter-long modelling balloon in its entirety and eating the glass shards of a light bulb. Through her opening lines, Frantti directly addresses the presumed insatiable desire of the spectators, by declaring that she will mutilate her body for the pleasure of the viewer's twisted longings – this can be read as an explicit reference to how women are always primarily meant to be looked at. It also refers to women's ongoing attempts to satisfy a (male) gaze, even if that means that they have to harm themselves in the process. Frantti's light tone emphasizes how self-evident this behavior is; of course she will prick, squeeze, maim and mangle her body for the viewer's entertainment. This self-evidence also comes to the fore in the general light-hearted attitude of the performers when they perform their numbers. It seems to be a matter of course for them, enjoyable even, to demonstrate their suffering to the audience. However, the performers are not innocent or powerless victims of the system they are ridiculing; the unapologetic scene when the woman nonchalantly but resolutely poops in a jar shows a kind of playful defiance of cultural expectations. Given the beforementioned examples, it is not remarkable that explicit body works receive(d) a lot of criticism; they are often considered exhibitionist and/or too provocative. Schneider disarms this critique as follows: "Nudity [is] not the problem. Sexual display [is] not the problem. *The agency of the body displayed, the author-ity of the agent* – that [is] the problem with women's work."<sup>118</sup> In other words, Schneider argues that the outrage at explicit body art is mostly due to uneasiness about women deciding for themselves when and how they made their bodies explicit.

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<sup>118</sup> Schneider, 35.



## 2.4 The ghost of Man in feminist performance

There is one thing that is conspicuously absent in feminist performance studies and in feminist performances. Men are hardly ever mentioned in feminist performance studies, nor do they feature in feminist performances. Most case studies that are discussed in comprehensive guides on feminist performance like *Theatre & Feminism* by Kim Solga only feature women, except for when Solga discusses repertoire plays such as *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen. The reason for the absence of men, and thereby cisgender interactions, might be deemed obvious; Aston argues that it was originally one of the main focusses of feminist performance to recover women's performance, "which, like so much of women's culture, had been 'hidden' and silenced by a body of conservative, male criticism."<sup>119</sup> Therefore, male exclusion seemed oftentimes necessary to give women the space to find and explore a theatrical tradition that was not influenced and/or suppressed by men.<sup>120</sup>



*The bull in Apollon Musagète (credits Radovan Dranga)*

The physical absence of men does not mean that feminist performances aren't about men in any way. Many feminist performances bear in some way the ghost of Man: there is no physical man present, but the performance implicitly or explicitly echoes (and critiques) toxic masculinity and/or an oppressive male order. Schneider uses the word ghosts repetitively throughout her book to refer to how pervasive ideas about historical, cultural categories (like gender, race and class) 'haunt' feminist performances. Schneider defines ghosts as "explicitly disembodied signifiers" and sees them in this context as particular postmodern entities, because the invalidation of modernism's claim of originality led to "every act, public and private, [being] ghosted by precedence."<sup>121</sup> These ghosts of historical ideas, situations and bodies come to the fore on the stages of feminist performers.

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<sup>119</sup> Aston, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Aston, 15-16.

<sup>121</sup> Schneider, 21.

Schneider calls it the challenge for feminist performers “to wrestle with those ghosts in a way that brings the dynamics of such ghosting to light.”<sup>122</sup> The goal is not to eliminate these ghosts to find “some true woman that exists without quotation marks,” but to demonstrate how these ghosts play a role in (re)presentation.<sup>123</sup> Schneider discusses such ghosting mostly in relation to ideas and images concerning women. In my opinion, it is also interesting to analyze the pervasive images of men which ghost feminist performances. The cultural idea of Man in these performances is often reduced or elevated – depending on the viewer’s interpretation – to a kind of omnipresent entity, a stereotype of traditional masculinity which is mocked, parodied, subversively affirmed or critiqued by women performers. These ghosts of men become visible in a myriad of ways, for example as personifications in the form of objects or puppets, or through the bodies of the female performers by means of gender bending. These ghosts also come to the fore through the behavior of feminist performers, which often can be described as a subversive response to patriarchal expectations or a male gaze.

Holzinger’s *Apollon Musagète* is a good example of a performance ghosted by men. In *Apollon Musagète* there are no physical men present, but there *is* a clear manifestation of Man on stage; the sparkling rodeo bull. Symbolically, a bull is the epitome of traditional masculinity. On top of that, in this performance the bull seems to represent Apollo, the male lead of the original ballet. This personification of Apollo, as well as the fact that the performance carries the name of the original ballet by Balanchine and that there are some parts of the original choreography included, makes that the performance is also clearly ghosted by the precedence of the original *Apollon Musagète*, which was made entirely by men. It is thereby an obvious, rather humorous response to the silly, slavish roles of the muses in the original rendition. The male figure, represented by the gigantic bull, is sublimated and trivialized at the same time: the bull, placed pontifically center-stage, symbolizes a kind of higher being, but at the same time it is just a prop; the bull looks remarkably defenseless and silly when the muses collectively remove it from its pedestal at the end of the performance, after which one of the performers rides the stump in slow-motion for her own erotic pleasure.

As mentioned before, the ghost of Man also comes to the fore in feminist performances through gender bending of women performers. Gender-bending is also present in *Apollon Musagète*, for example in what I’d like to refer to as the ‘Western-sequence’: a scene halfway through the performance in which an otherwise naked performer enters the stage dressed as a cowboy, wearing a large cowboy hat, a fake moustache and cowboy boots, while Western-like music plays in the background. S/he runs around the stage with a rifle, shouting in an affected American accent. At a certain point, s/he climbs through the audience as if on a hunt. Towards the end of the sequence, the character keeps getting hurt in grotesque ways, by accident (by walking into a bear trap) or by their own doing (by trying to saw their own arm off when they’ve touched something yucky). This sequence can be interpreted as a mockery of the stereotypical hypermasculine values like strength, aggression, immunity to pain and invincibility, which come together in the macho image of the cowboy that ghosts this sequence. On top of these concrete examples of ghosts of men in *Apollon Musagète*, the performance overall deals with the ghosts of ideas about how women should behave to earn the approval of men. These ghosts appear through the general subversion of the sexist narrative of the original ballet, as well as through the extremity of the acts displayed and their effects on the performers’ bodies. It begs the question if these extreme acts are so very different from what female ballet dancers typically have to go through: female (ballet) dancers’ bodies already notoriously have a lot to endure, in terms of outside criticism as well as the sometimes torturous physical exertion that comes with the profession.

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<sup>122</sup> Schneider, 23.

<sup>123</sup> Ibidem.



Still from the *Western-sequence* (credits Radovan Dranga)

## 2.5 A lack of relationality

The abovementioned ghosting of men in feminist performance is interesting and relevant in its own right. However, I believe that including men in feminist performance is an interesting new avenue to explore for feminist performance. As I have argued before, it feels like a missed chance to me not to: it is in my opinion through cisgender interaction that the complexity and nuances of gender inequality become the most visible. The absence of men in feminist performance begs the question: why don't we look more often at men, and their behavior in relation to women? Instead of arguing against the patriarchal roles we've been assigned, why don't we counteract by observing and critiquing the dynamics of cisgender interaction?

I am predisposed to believe that by rendering men 'invisible' and keeping them and their behavior towards women out of sight while focusing mainly on the woman and the female body, a certain power is still upheld and allocated to men and an unequal victim/oppressor dichotomy is kept in place. Depicting men as face-less oppressors or eliminating them from the stage completely seems simplistic in a world where men are part of a system of oppression in which they are both victim and oppressor at the same time. Men experience oppression from the constrictions of traditional masculinity and at the same time participate in behaviors of so-called toxic masculinity. As social scientist Linda Duits puts it bluntly: "The patriarchy fucks us all."<sup>124</sup> I want to stress here that I do not wish to imply that traditional feminist performance wrongfully portrays men as one-sided beings. My argument should in no way be equated with the exhausted "not all men"-trope.<sup>125</sup> However, I do think that we should not shy away from this subject out of a fear of finding ourselves 'defending the oppressor'. I think the patriarchal order is not a black and white system of oppressor versus victim, but more an entangled equation which upholds stereotypes and inequality through behaviors and dynamics exhibited by both men and women. To try and define oppression and inequality in a fixed,

<sup>124</sup> Duits, Linda, *Dolle Mythes* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 106.

<sup>125</sup> "Not all men" has for a long time been used as a common response to feminist claims about male oppression. As a result, online feminism appropriated the term and turned it into hashtags and memes to mock men's dismissive responses to feminist arguments.



dichotomous way is therefore in my opinion problematic. It seems essentializing to regard women and men as two completely separate groups and it doesn't do justice to the fluidity of gender-experience. What about feminist men, what about sexist women? What about people who don't identify with any of these fixed identities? To explore systems of oppression I think a more relational approach, which takes into account these complexities, is called for.

Additionally, I think examining cisgender interaction opens up new possibilities for deconstructing the sign of Woman, since then its defining connection to the sign of Man comes into focus. Woman attains its meaning as a sign because it is considered *different from* the neutral, unmarked category of Man. Can one talk about women without talking about men? Can one talk about men without talking about women? The two categories assume form in relation to each other; they are not pre-existing unities in themselves. Here I look to Donna Haraway's relational philosophy: "...the partners do not precede their relating; all that is, is the fruit of becoming with [...]"<sup>126</sup> Man and woman become-with each other; they do not stand on their own. When one wants to critique and undermine the rigid gender binary, isn't it more productive to try and deconstruct cisgender interaction, instead of only focusing on the deconstruction of Woman? She is after all only one side of the equation. I am of the opinion that in this day and age one runs the risk of painting a one-dimensional picture when one wants to thematize gender but chooses to represent *only* women or *only* men for that purpose. The representation of both men and women risks oversimplification when they are not represented in relation to each other. Therefore, I think *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction is an important next step for feminist performance.

All of this is not to say that similar questions have not been posed before by feminist performance theorists, with regards to the progression of the genre. It can be argued that Schneider foresaw, in some way, a development towards a more relational approach within feminist performance. In the epilogue of her book Schneider in fact poses the following question: "But once apprehension is apprehended – its terms made literal, embodied – what then?"<sup>127</sup> Once the bodies are made explicit and the historical staging/representation of those bodies is interrogated, what else is there to do? Schneider philosophizes about what the next step could be and suggests, following Simone de Beauvoir, "an alarmingly simple answer to this question": reciprocity. Reciprocity refers, in Schneider's words, to a "mutual exchange between subject and object (which would become subject and subject, or object and object)."<sup>128</sup> Professor of Philosophy Julie K. Ward argues that reciprocity is a recurring theme in a lot of Simone de Beauvoir's work; she describes it as an important goal in Beauvoir's lifelong search for mutual equality.<sup>129</sup> In her famous feminist work *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir repeatedly comes to the following conclusion with regards to reciprocity:

Insofar as woman is considered the absolute Other, that is — whatever magic powers she has — as the inessential, it is precisely impossible to regard her as another subject. Women have thus never constituted a separate group that posited itself for-itself before a male group; they have never had a direct or autonomous relationship with men.<sup>130</sup>

In other words, Beauvoir concludes that reciprocity is lacking between men and women, as long as woman is considered as Other and by that not as an equal subject in relation to man. She deems reciprocity the sine qua non for truly equal relationships between men and women:

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<sup>126</sup> Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 17.

<sup>127</sup> Schneider, 176.

<sup>128</sup> Schneider, 177.

<sup>129</sup> Ward, Julie K., "Reciprocity and friendship in Beauvoir's thought", in *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Margaret A. Simons (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 149.

<sup>130</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 105.

...the real relation is one of reciprocity; as such, it gives rise to authentic dramas: through eroticism, love, friendship, and their alternatives of disappointment, hatred, and rivalry, the relation is a struggle of consciousnesses, each of which wants to be essential, it is the recognition of freedoms that confirm each other, it is the undefined passage from enmity to complicity. To posit the Woman is to posit the absolute Other, without reciprocity, refusing, against experience, that she could be a subject, a peer.<sup>131</sup>

This quote emphasizes the importance of reciprocity in cisgender relations. Additionally, I want to point out that reciprocity according to Beauvoir *does not exclude* trouble. In fact, she posits that it is reciprocity which allows for *authentic dramas* to take place. She elaborates on how authentic, albeit sometimes troubled relationships can take place between peers, through her descriptions of relationships between women amongst themselves.

It would be reductive to suggest that the concept of reciprocity seamlessly fits into my analysis; I cannot devote proper attention to its philosophical baggage in this chapter. However, I mention it to point out that Schneider, already in the late 1990s, seemed to suggest a kind of relationality as a next step in feminist performance. Schneider uses Beauvoir's concept of reciprocity in this context to refer to a kind of equalizing relationality between individuals through interactions. Schneider emphasizes in the notes of her book that reciprocity is often suggested in feminist works, even when the word itself is not used. I find it telling that Schneider suggests that the next step for feminist performance would be to actively look for exchanges between subjects. Furthermore, I see a possible connection between Beauvoir's reciprocity on the one hand, and Haraway's *staying with the trouble* (as a means of getting on together) on the other. Both concern themselves with the question of how we can get on together in a better way. But where Beauvoir mainly posits reciprocity as an aim to work towards, Haraway also offers a means of getting there. Her approach is arguably more process-based to begin with. I think *staying with the trouble* might be a fitting present-day answer to what reciprocity should look like, and/or how it can be achieved. Even though there is no room in this thesis to elaborate extensively on this possible connection and its implications, I want to point it out to hopefully inspire further research into the matter.

Above I have discussed how feminist performers in the past and in the present deconstruct the sign Woman as Other. Schneider, in her epilogue, implicitly suggests that the next step in performance might be to take up the role of subject and peer in relation to men:

It is arguably the current project of postcolonial and cultural critical studies to ask: What can reciprocity look like? How can we *do* it? How do we access this reciprocity in our approach to alterity, our approach to "objects" of study as well as our approach to our "selves"? Reciprocity suggests a two-way street, but it does not necessarily reconstitute the delimiting binaries which feminists and postcolonial theorists have been fighting to undermine.<sup>132</sup>

In the final pages of her book, Schneider refers to the equality vs. difference debate, albeit in a veiled way. She describes how many philosophers, following Hegel, assume that the ontological "number two" (instead of underlying unity) inherently foregrounds difference and antagonism. She suggests, however, that there can be other, more productive ways of approaching difference: "[...] is antagonism the *only* mode of conceiving of difference between one and one? Or is there something imaginable as satiable in a mutual gaze, double vision, a hybrid pass, a two-way street, or even a trivialis?"<sup>133</sup> Speaking from the present, I suggest it would be interesting to explore *staying with the*

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<sup>131</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 315.

<sup>132</sup> Schneider, 177.

<sup>133</sup> Schneider, 178.

With "trivialis", she refers back to her opening citation of the Epilogue by Roland Barthes: "A writer – by which I mean [...] the subject of a praxis – must have the persistence of the watcher who stands at the crossroads of all

*trouble* as a means of navigating the complexities of difference, and concepts like ‘intra-actions’ and ‘becoming-with’ in the place of reciprocity, to move away from concepts that are rooted in psychoanalysis and to put an emphasis on relationality, rather than the binarism that is still in some way implied in the concept of reciprocity. In the following chapters I think with the performance *Cock, Cock... Who’s there?* about the potential of *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction, and what that might look like, on and off stage.

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other discourses, in a position that is *trivial in respect to purity* of doctrine (trivialis is the etymological attribute of the prostitute who waits at the intersection of three roads).”

### 3 Staying with the trouble: *Cock, Cock... Who's there?*

Tell these stories; show up; stay with the trouble! Risk being wrong in order to become a vital 'we'. Asked for or not, the pattern is now in 'our' hands.<sup>134</sup>

In these last two chapters I examine *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* on two different layers. The first layer, which comes to the fore in this chapter, concerns the performance itself, focusing mainly on how the artistic process and the performance in itself help to think about ways of *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction. I focus on answering my fourth and fifth sub-question, namely: 'how does cisgender interaction take shape in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?*' and: 'how does *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* expand dualistic ideas of a female/male dichotomy?' I analyze ways in which Elagoz includes cisgender interaction in her process and performance, to first argue how Elagoz' artistic practice as a whole can be considered as a form of *staying with the trouble*. I pay particular attention to how this artistic practice *troubles* dualistic ideas of a female/male dichotomy, specifically cultural ideas of the woman as victim and the man as oppressor. Then, I mobilize Haraway's concepts of 'becoming-with' and 'making kin' to discuss how specific instances of cisgender interaction are staged in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* and how this staging *stays with the trouble*. When discussing elements of the performance, I sometimes use a first-person narrative describing my personal experience as a spectator viewing the work, to exemplify how the performance can evoke certain responses in spectators. The second layer, which I go into in the next and final chapter, concerns the reception of *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* and the discourse surrounding the work. I compare the reception of *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* to the reception of *Apollon Musagète*, thereby interweaving these two strings of thought. These two final chapters together serve to demonstrate how *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* functions as a troublemaker, in a Harawayan sense, to help think anew about feminist performance and feminism itself (specifically the trouble of cisgender dynamics).

#### 3.1 Performance summary

As was mentioned in the introduction, *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is a lecture performance in which Samira Elagoz describes the actions she took after her ex-boyfriend raped her five years ago. One of the main actions she took was posting a Craigslist ad, requesting to meet strangers at their houses and film those meetings. As was probably to be expected, only men replied to her ad. She travelled all over the world to meet these men in their homes and filmed their encounters. The documentary film *Craigslist Allstars* is a montage of the resulting film material. After this she continued to make the installation *The Young And The Willing*, a film-montage of meetings Elagoz had via the dating app Tinder with men from 18-25 years old to only exchange a kiss.<sup>135</sup> The performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is a collage in which she shares photographs and film footage of these projects and others. She comments on the videos and images she shows, interweaving her own experiences before and after the rape with observations about (her interactions with) the strangers she met. During the years that she was working on this project, she got raped a second time in Tokyo – not by a stranger, but by someone she considered a friend. She has woven parts of this experience and its aftermath into her performance as well. As I argued in the introduction, the fact that this is a lecture performance makes it relevant for me to regard the artistic process as part of the performance, which is why I analyze it as such.

In the performance Elagoz stages, and through this staging analyzes, cisgender interactions. There are no physical men present on stage.<sup>136</sup> However, a lot of men feature in this performance. In

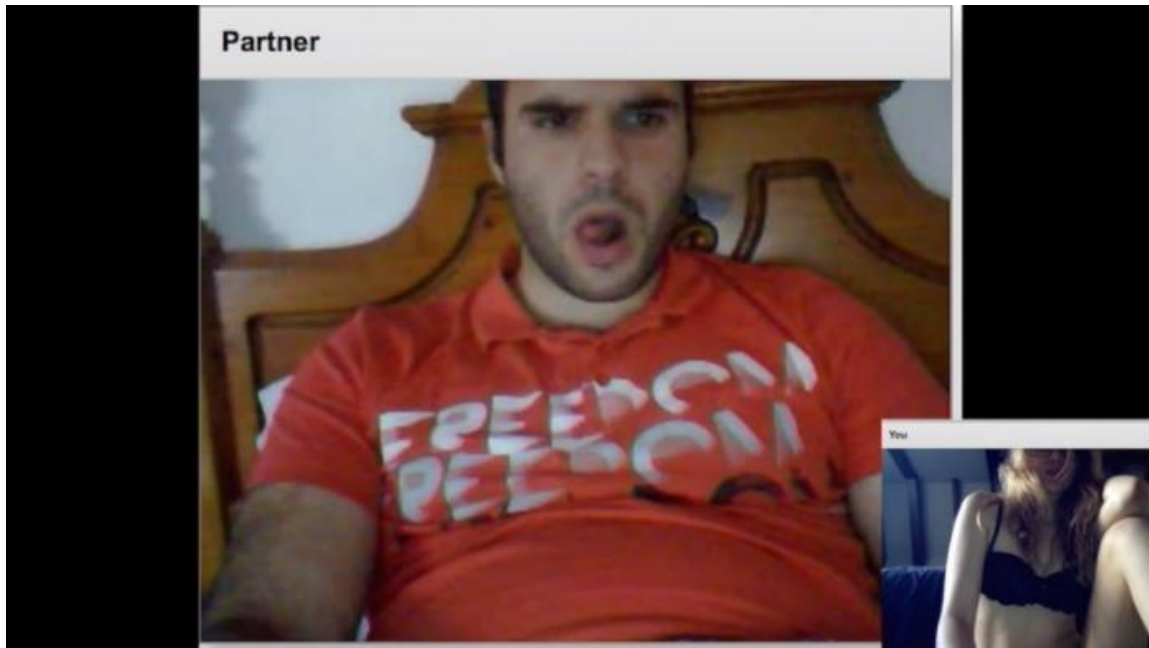
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<sup>134</sup> Donna Haraway, "Staying with the Trouble for Multispecies Environmental Justice," *Dialogues in Human Geography* 8, no. 1 (March 2018): 102–5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820617739208>.

<sup>135</sup> Samira Elagoz, "The Young And The Willing," *Samira Elagoz*, accessed on January 16, 2020, <http://www.samiraelagoz.com/the-young-and-the-willing>.

<sup>136</sup> Except for a scene in which two actors, a man and a woman, assist Elagoz in a stoically choreographed reenactment of her experience at the Tokyo police station after her second rape.

the photos of her *Chatroulette* project, in which she displayed herself half-nude to strangers on the website *Chatroulette* to capture their faces upon seeing her for the first time, we see a wide range of webcam-stills of men. In the film footage of her documentary project *Craigslist Allstars* a variety of men is shown talking about themselves, interacting with Elagoz and showing her their skills. In the footage from *The Young and The Willing* we see Elagoz with a range of young men together in the frame in a variety of locations, looking into each other's eyes and kissing each other. In the film footage, Elagoz herself is always present or her presence is implied, if only through the bobbing of the hand-held camera or her audible voice. The main focus however is on the men she films. We see them responding to her presence, looking straight at her or shily away from her, they are flirting with her, bragging to her or simply having a conversation with her.



Still from the *Chatroulette Project in Cock, Cock... Who's there?* (credits Samira Elagoz)

### 3.2 The artistic process

In my opinion, Elagoz' artistic practice and the eventual performance can be considered as a form of *staying with the trouble*, even *seeking the trouble*. Virtually everything Elagoz does to acquire her photo and film material are things that all women are typically advised against from a very young age. She does not examine cisgender interaction in an arguably 'safe' manner, by for example approaching men she knows to discuss how they relate to each other. Instead, she posts an open-ended ad on Craigslist and meets up with strange men in their homes all around the world. Another clear example of this 'unsafe', seeking the trouble approach, is the *Chatroulette* project where she displayed herself half-nude to strangers online. A woman who voluntarily shows herself (semi)nude on anonymous chat websites is typically seen as slutty and shameful, but Elagoz turns the tables by using the medium to observe the men who are looking at her. While Elagoz' behavior is not deemed appropriate for any woman, the fact that she is a victim of sexual violence makes the situation extra sensitive: female victims of sexual violence are generally expected to have 'learnt their lesson'. However, Elagoz deliberately starts *seeking the trouble* of encounters with strangers after her sexual assault, to investigate this cisgender power dynamic. In the next paragraph, I go further into how this artistic practice troubles the cultural script of the victim and the oppressor, implied in the traditional male/female dichotomy.

### 3.2.1 Troubling a dualistic male/female dichotomy

Elagoz' artistic practice *stays with the trouble* in the way it deals with (female) victimhood and (the aftermath of) sexual trauma. The performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is, in essence, not a story about trauma or victimhood; at least not a typical one. It does not deal in depth with Elagoz' personal struggle in overcoming the trauma of being raped. Nor is the performance very much about Elagoz herself in general. As I mentioned before, for most of the performance she shifts the perspective away from herself and towards men, and zooms in on their behaviors and their interactions with her. Her rape experience is of course still important for this performance, but mostly because it functions as a catalyst for her actions. It is an underlying motivation that makes her encounters with men even more loaded. Because the audience knows her history and inevitably sees her as a rape victim, her attitude and actions are even harder to stomach, since they clash with cultural ideas about the 'typical' rape victim.

The fact that Elagoz takes action after the assault to begin with already *troubles* the traditional, dualistic male/female dichotomy in which the man is the aggressor/oppressor and the woman the passive victim. This binary supposition that, when relating to each other, woman is victim and man is oppressor and that they relate to each other as such by following a cultural script in a predictable way, is understandable to an extent. Gender based violence, which typically is inflicted on women by men, is still "one of the most notable human rights violations in all societies."<sup>137</sup> A rigid victim/oppressor dichotomy of gender roles, which is entangled in our broader cultural ideas about gender difference, is fixed into our collective cultural consciousness. As I pointed out when discussing the equality vs. difference debate as explained by Kathrin Thiele in chapter one, such ideas on gender difference can be productive for feminist theory in some ways. In this case for example, they can help to point out how women are still structurally (sexually) victimized by men all over the world. However, as I argued in chapter one, when insisting on (a form of) gender difference, one always runs the risk of upholding precisely those determinist and essentialist ideas about gender identity and sexual difference that feminism tries to undermine. In the case of sexual violence, when discussing sexual violence by men towards women there is a risk of falling back onto essentializing categorical thinking; a victim/oppressor dichotomy in which both the victim and the oppressor have to fit certain criteria to be considered as such. In the typical cultural narrative, men are naturally assumed to be savage aggressors who cannot control their sexual urges, and women need to protect themselves from this in all kinds of ways, first and foremost by not being (openly) sexual. While this culturally inscribed victim/oppressor relation between men and women is also a form of relationality, it is obviously not the kind of relationality that I foreground in this thesis: it is a fixed relation based in an essentialist, dualist understanding of gender difference – a dualist trap, as Haraway would put it. This type of thinking easily ignores and/or denies the grey areas, the *trouble*. In practice the relation between men and women is not black and white, and therefore sexual violence cannot be categorized so neatly either. Approaching it as if that were possible ultimately disadvantages the victim, resulting in a 'rape culture'<sup>138</sup> in which victims are blamed for having been victimized, since sexual assault victims almost never fit the narrow cultural image of the 'perfect victim'.<sup>139</sup> However, denying that these violent patterns are in some way rooted in gender difference, is also not the

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<sup>137</sup> "What is gender-based violence?", European Institute for Gender Equality, accessed December 19, 2020, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence>.

<sup>138</sup> "Rape Culture, Victim Blaming, And The Facts," Sexual Misconduct, Inside Southern, accessed December 19, 2020, <https://inside.southernct.edu/sexual-misconduct/facts>.

<sup>139</sup> The perfect victim is a common cultural trope which feminist theorists have attacked since the second wave of feminism. In the Huffington Post article "Hunting for the Perfect Victim" the perfect rape victim is defined as "...a cisgender woman; young, and sexually inexperienced — even a virgin. Perhaps she is religious; perhaps she doesn't drink. She is probably white. Probably middle or upper class. Perhaps she was just out with her friends, or walking home, or attending a party when she was approached, attacked or drugged by a man she didn't know. She said no, she tried to escape, but he was stronger than her and overpowered her, probably violently." [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hunting-for-the-perfect-v\\_b\\_8626034](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hunting-for-the-perfect-v_b_8626034), accessed January 5, 2021.

solution; that would deny the very real (sexual) oppression women face by the hands of men every day.

In my opinion, *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* stays with the trouble of this paradox by demonstrating the ambiguity of (the power dynamics in) cisgender interactions. Elagoz' story and attitude don't fit into the standard cultural narrative of the perfect rape victim who is destroyed by her experience. As she herself pointed out in an interview:

Many rape stories I saw were about victimhood and how women are destroyed, never with the victim having any sort of real agency. I was lacking any stories about the aftermath I could actually identify with, so I decided to share my own. It was important and intriguing for me to expose the actions one might take after being raped, [a topic] which still seems to be a bit taboo.<sup>140</sup>

As Elagoz points out, the typical cultural idea of victimhood implies passivity and a general lack of agency. Elagoz clearly demonstrates agency in every aspect of her project, thereby destabilizing the idea of the victim as ontologically passive. She problematizes the victim/oppressor dichotomy which contains, as said, a very narrow definition of a victim of sexual violence (the so-called 'perfect victim') and limits many victimized people, especially women, in their actions and expressions during and following sexual trauma.

A concrete example of Elagoz' subversion of traditional victimhood in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is when Elagoz gets raped for the second time in Tokyo, and decides to document the aftermath of this experience and include it in the performance, in the form of videos the days after the rape. She shows a video she filmed 24 hours after the rape, after she just got back from the police station. In the clip she looks incredibly tired and shaken, but mostly laughs at the strangeness and the irony of the situation. In the video she made three days after the rape, she starts by lightly singing 'White Christmas' while walking through the city. After that she laughs a little, saying it's her last day in Tokyo and her rapist has been arrested. She ends the video with the words "I guess I feel OK". This response is a contrast with the panicked and devastated response that is typically expected from rape victims.

Overall, it is important to note that the actions that Elagoz takes are not violent. As said, the typical cultural narrative displays female victims of sexual violence as passive and traumatized for life. However, in the exceptional cases that these victims do defy their victim role, they typically do so by taking violence, for example by violently revenging themselves on the perpetrator or on the male species as a whole.<sup>141</sup> Elagoz however approaches all the men in her projects with an amicable, open curiosity. It is this amicable curiosity which allows for the encounters to take place and the relationships to form. In each encounter, Elagoz and the man she's with seem to sniff each other out, with different effects and consequences. I expand upon this strategy of openness and its consequences in the following subparagraphs.

### 3.3 Staging the trouble of cisgender interaction

I now want to devote attention to how *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* and Haraway's relational philosophy might help to think about each other, by operationalizing Haraway's concepts to analyze Elagoz' staging of cisgender interaction. I see a specific connection between Haraway's concepts of becoming-with and making kin as a means of *staying with the trouble*, and the way Elagoz shapes her

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<sup>140</sup> Daniela Frangos, "Cock, Cock... Who's There: A Bold, Intimate and Powerful "Subversion of Victimhood" Coming to Adelaide Festival," *Broadsheet*, February 26, 2020, <https://www.broadsheet.com.au/adelaide/entertainment/article/cock-cock-whos-there-bold-intimate-and-powerful-subversion-victimhood-coming-adelaide-festival>.

<sup>141</sup> The 'rape-revenge-movie' is for example a popular though controversial genre. See <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/may/11/how-the-rape-revenge-movie-became-a-feminist-weapon-for-the-metoo-generation>.



encounters with strangers in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* I explain how these concepts can be understood as underlying dramaturgical strategies which can be recognized in the artistic process and the eventual performance. In this part of the analysis I focus primarily on the film footage shown in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?*, since that is *where* the cisgender interactions are staged in the performance.

### 3.3.1 *Becoming-with*

As I discussed in chapter one, becoming-with refers to the understanding that all species are interrelated and that “the partners do not precede their relating; all that is, is the fruit of becoming with [...]”<sup>142</sup> According to Haraway, it is the entanglements of and encounters between species, or intra-actions, that shape the world and create meaning. Here, I want to dive into this connection and elaborate on how Elagoz’ open attitude towards the strangers can be regarded as a dramaturgical strategy, which helps to think about what becoming-with cisgender interaction might look like, and how this might problematize a male/female dichotomy. To this end I want to zoom in on the three men that feature in the montage called “The Dominants” which Elagoz shows in her performance. Elagoz introduces this montage from her position on the stage as follows: “There was a group of men that I was particularly fascinated by, and these were the dominant ones. Men who practice and understand rules, consent and stipulation. Men who exhibit some form of sexual intelligence.” In the montage we see a variety of middle-aged to older men interacting with Elagoz.

The first dominant is referred to by Elagoz as the Director. He is first seen in front of the door of what assumedly is his apartment. He leans down towards her and says, smiling: “Are you sure that you want to come in?” He then takes the camera from her and aims it at her. Smiling, but with a look that I interpreted as slight apprehension, she says: “Yeah, I can trust you. Or whatever that means...” Then she enters behind him into a dimly lit, messy apartment. Later in the montage, they are in the shot together, sitting across from each other on an unmade bed, surrounded by clutter. The director has his own camera set up to film them from the other side. In the interactions with him, he seems to constantly take the lead: he keeps filming her, either with her camera or his. He asks her rather personal or direct questions (“What is the sadness in your eyes?” or “What do you think of me, secretly?”). When she tries to answer he takes his camera and moves it very close to her face. Later, he films Elagoz’ face with her own camera and says from behind the camera: “It’s too bad you’re not a little bit more afraid. It would be an interesting...” Elagoz smiles apprehensively, and briefly averts her eyes, asking: “Have you tried to make me afraid?” to which he replies: “Should I?” He turns the camera to himself and says: “I can do that easily.” In the last shot of him he lies on his back on the bed, and says to her: “You should be my type actually but for some reason I find this in myself... Not a strong...” Elagoz: “Attraction?” Director: “Yes, it is strange... I don’t know why. (...) I always try to look where it is.” (Loud laughter) “It is as if we have a kind of relaxedness as if we would live together in an apartment or so. Which is kind of sad. I would like to get so horny and you... don’t... you know... It could be interesting.”

Another dominant is an older white man in a kimono, who in the first shot is seen comfortably sitting while his fingernails are painted by a much younger, rather timid woman. Later in the performance, we see footage of him sitting next to the same young woman while she lies on the floor in only a top and her underwear, tied up in ropes. He tells Elagoz, in strongly accented English: “The way I see the situation here, I can do with her what I want. But if I do that, it would be... I know better what she needs and what she wants. Therefore I try to be good to her. And not take advantage of her. [...] If I give her option: suck my dick or shall I fuck your ass? Then she would say: up to you. I’m trying to be nice and give her some options. But no, ‘up to you’. That’s what I mean, that’s the type she is. Look once, touch once, understand, basically.” While his English is rather limited, he implies that he doesn’t want to take advantage of her total submission to her and that he sees it as his responsibility to be good to her. Later in the montage, he says: “I would say the girls come to me because I give them a good... I can touch them, touch their soul in a way that is not easy to be... appreciated as a person, I would say. Don’t you think? They don’t come here to touch the

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<sup>142</sup> Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 17.



pussy or something. That is just part of the tools.” A little later we see him gesture the girl, who is freed from the ropes, and allowing her to hug him. She seems to ask for his permission to cuddle up against him and rather awkwardly but happily does so.

The last dominant in this montage is a middle-aged, conventionally attractive British man. He sits on a sofa, rather smartly dressed, and mainly speaks about his preference of being sadistic in a sexual context: “I’m quite sadistic at times, I go through quite sadistic periods. And I like the excitement I see in women’s eyes when I’m into that forceful powerful ‘I will take you and I will eat you and I will consume you...’” Later in the montage, Elagoz asks him: “How does it feel to have power over someone?” After a short silence he answers: “Sweet.” With a faint smile: “Things taste better. Because you’re in a position of control and even if it’s only for a few hours, everything is certain and everything is sure, and you’re not forcing anything on anybody. I want that, and you want that. We have the roles that we both want. And you are satisfied and I am satisfied. Now let’s play.”

These men and their interactions with Elagoz personify, each in their own way, the ‘grey area’ or the *trouble* of cisgender interaction – as much as you want to categorize, understand or characterize these men and these interactions as a spectator, you cannot judge if they are ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The men seem at times dirty or perverted (by traditional, cultural standards) but at the same time friendly and forthcoming. Most importantly, their behavior does not stand on its own. It is their interaction with Elagoz that creates the ambiguity to begin with – on their own they are just men, but their connection to Elagoz taints how the spectator interprets these interactions. This is why it is dramaturgically so important that Elagoz is not, for example, just a fly on the wall in her film footage, but that she actively participates and interacts with these men. Because I, as a spectator, know that these men are relating to Elagoz – a young, attractive woman – I suddenly see them as either a charmer, a predator, a pervert or a teacher. The scene between the kimono-wearing man and the younger girl is arguably the most erotically explicit film footage in the Dominants montage, because the man is filmed while engaging in a kind of erotic power exchange with a younger woman. Furthermore, both the kimono-wearing man and the sadistic man both explicitly talk about sexual acts and what either they themselves or the women they’re with enjoy about them. The director circles around the same topic but is less explicit. Interestingly, as a spectator, I find the director more threatening and ‘creepy’ than the other two. The director seems to actively try to make Elagoz uncomfortable, under the guise of it being ‘interesting’ for her film, but he seems to enjoy it too much to make this motivation completely believable. Elagoz’ own behavior towards him underlines this observation: she looks younger, more vulnerable and on edge when interacting with the latter – she seems more hesitant and apprehensive. While we only hear her voice in when she interacts with the man in the kimono or the sadistic man, she sounds more relaxed and grounded than when she is interacting with the director. In other words, the way I see or hear Elagoz respond to these men also influences how I as a spectator view both her and the men she interacts with.

Regarding this from a Harawayan perspective, one could see these interactions as intra-actions, as a demonstration of becoming-with: the men and Elagoz *become-with* each other in the staged interactions. It is through their relationality that they assume certain (stereotypical or cliché, or more ambiguous) gender roles. I as a spectator form my opinion on both Elagoz and the men she deals with through the interactions they engage in. Or rather, the interactions not so much form my opinion but rather evoke questions and leave me with a feeling of ambiguity – in other words, they invite me as a spectator to *stay with the trouble* of these interactions. From her position on stage, Elagoz doesn’t offer an answer or a solution, she does not suggest that these men are dirty old men or aggressive predators, nor does she comfort the audience by suggesting that they are completely harmless or innocent. She leaves it up to me, as a spectator, to sit with the ambiguity of the film footage. When I first saw the kimono-wearing man, I assumed him to be strange or perverse before I had ever heard him speak – not in the least because the director before him had already left an impression, but also because I almost automatically assumed him to be perverted because he seemed to have an erotic connection of some sort with the much younger woman next to him. However, as the scene unfolded I grew more and more confused. The young woman seemed to be voluntarily submissive to him, painting his finger nails with a respectfully bowed head? She would let

him do anything to her if he wanted to, but *he* didn't want to take advantage of *her*? Because he displayed such an awareness of the power dynamic existing between them, I could not really settle in this feeling of inappropriateness. Was there really anything strange or inappropriate about this scene, or was it my personal association with these situations – in which an older man interacts with a young, attractive woman – which tainted these fragments for me? Why does the interaction between Elagoz and the director, though way less explicit in language and in image, feel more charged and unheimlich to me than any of the other interactions? Elagoz encourages this ambiguity to arise through the form she has chosen to interact with these men; because they are strangers to each other, because of the age difference, because the relationships aren't clear and because all possibilities are open. Elagoz creates a performative situation by planning these encounters, her camera evokes a performative attitude in everyone involved, but the encounters themselves are unscripted. By doing so, she seems to welcome the trouble, rather than trying to resolve it. While becoming-with mainly comes to the fore in the interactions in the film footage, Elagoz supports or supplements this by the way she introduces and analyzes the film footage from her position as commentator on stage. She does not tell the spectator what to think or how to feel about these men and these encounters – she leaves it up to them to decide. Thus, these interactions can be regarded as instances of becoming-with because of the open attitude that Elagoz displays in both her artistic process (in the open unscripted encounters with the men) as well as in the performance (by not offering concrete answers or explanations with regards to these encounters). This openness and open attitude can therefore in my opinion be seen as a leading artistic principle in the artistic process, as well as a dramaturgical strategy in the performance.

This openness also comes to the fore in the ending of the performance. At the end, Elagoz states: "I don't really have any pretty conclusion to my story, or any universally applicable advise to take. It happened, it might happen again, and this is how I dealt with it. I haven't let rape define my view of men, it has only given it more depth." This approach, of welcoming and *staying with the trouble* instead of trying to resolve it, aligns with Haraway's elaboration on *staying with the trouble*. As Haraway states: "My book [Staying with the Trouble, APK] contorts itself into knots to propose practices for thinking-with, for not-knowing, for becoming-with each other a 'we' capable of responding, rather than knowing in advance [...]"<sup>143</sup> It is an embrace of the ongoingness, of continuously searching and thinking-with these experiences and encounters. Elagoz is not trying to solve or explain the problems of cisgender interactions that she might encounter, not trying to knit her observations into a satisfactory whole. Instead, she foregrounds the messy ambiguity of the encounters, the *trouble* which in some way always looms in cisgender interactions, whether implicitly or explicitly. By doing so, one could argue that she, as Thiele calls it, engages difference differently: she does not try to explain difference by accepting essentialist categories, nor does she try to solve difference by denying its existence. Instead, she arrives what Thiele would call *diesseits* of the debate; the idea of difference in this performance is not reduced to an essentialist idea of two divided unities, rather it points to a suggestion that difference does not arise from inherent characteristics of women and men, but from different types of worlding and worlding-with-others, and a prior difference in all things.<sup>144</sup>

### 3.3.2 Making kin

Following the previous discussion, there is another connection between *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* and Haraway's relational philosophy that I deem worthy of exploring, namely how Elagoz' way of engaging with men in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* can be regarded as a concretization of the concept making kin. As mentioned in chapter one, Haraway sees *making kin* (or *making oddkin*, using the

<sup>143</sup> Haraway, "Staying with the Trouble for Multispecies Environmental Justice," 103.

<sup>144</sup> Thiele, 11. Italics by the author.

Thiele uses the German *diesseits*, which she describes as the immanent version of *jenseits* ('beyond'), signifying both 'on this side of' and 'before'. This wording is of conceptual importance in her argument, since she builds her argument on the understanding of an ever-present and underlying, inherent differentiability that precedes the divide between equality and difference.

prefix to emphasize unusual collaborations) as an important aspect of *staying with the trouble*. She explains it as a striving among all creatures to get on together better in many different ways. Haraway emphasizes that she is not so much interested in reconciliation or restoration, but “...deeply committed to the modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together. Call that staying with the trouble.”<sup>145</sup> Haraway deems unexpected and unusual collaborations and combinations amongst humans and non-humans necessary to make the world habitable: “We become-with each other or not at all.” In my opinion, Elagoz encounters with strange men after her rape can be seen as an ultimate form of making (odd)kin: while she has suffered at the hands of men, she decides to explore the dynamics that seem to cause the violence towards her and other women, in a relational way – with openness and curiosity.

A concrete example of how Elagoz makes kin, or oddkin, in this performance, becomes visible after she gets raped for the second time in Tokio. After this experience, she comes up with the idea of *The Young and The Willing*, which centers around arranged moments of intimacy between her and strange men she meets on Tinder. In the performance, she introduces this montage as follows:

I noticed that the same thing happened after this rape, as with the first one. Suddenly I was craving for intimacy: not sex, but just to be close to someone. I thought: how can I mix this with my project? And suddenly I came up with the idea of a first kiss, which is kind of innocent, but also very intimate. I chose Tinder as my medium this time, and I worded it like this: how would you give a healing experience to a girl that has just had a bad one? This request would instill a performative attitude in my subjects; they would have to judge what would constitute a good intimate experience. So I swiped right, picked boys I liked, and decided to meet them, just for a kiss.

Then, the montage of *The Young and The Willing* starts, with three frames next to each other. In each frame, Elagoz is visible with a different young, handsome guy – slowly, sensually kissing against the backdrop of an evening sky, giggling and slowly moving towards each other in a brightly-lit room, passionately making out on a bridge.

What is particularly interesting here is that Elagoz seeks solace for her pain *in relating* to men. As she herself emphasizes, she stages the meetings in such a way to instill a performative attitude in the men, who will therefore try to provide her with a positive intimate experience. Where the typical victim from the rape-revenge trope might respond by violently avenging herself on the perpetrator (and possibly other men along the way, depending on the narrative), Elagoz searches for new ways of getting on together. Even at a pivotal point, she keeps making (odd)kin by still relating, still seeking the relationality. As a result there is, despite the darkness in the narrative, as Elagoz puts it: “...an ultimate sense that consensual intimacy is still a beautiful thing.”<sup>146</sup>

In a broader sense, one could argue that Elagoz’ entire project is a concrete form of making kin. By investigating men’s behavior towards her and her behavior towards them, it ultimately poses the question ‘how to get on together (better)?’ over and over again. This question also lingers with me as a spectator. Seeing Elagoz, a woman of about my age, relating to men with this curious, open attitude – despite their unconventional desires or tendencies – made me curious to explore such interactions as well. It would be a rash and sweeping statement to declare that Elagoz encourages her audience to make kin, but the performance definitely raises questions about how to get on together better as men and women.

### 3.4 Navigating the trouble of including men

Elagoz consciously included men in her performance, in such a way as to invite men to consider their own role in the power dynamics of cisgender interaction. As Elagoz herself states in an interview:

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<sup>145</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 10.

<sup>146</sup> Frangos, “Cock, Cock... Who’s There.”

Work I had seen about rape was always some moralizing quest or an attack on men. And I very much wanted to make a performance about rape that would be accessible to men too. I thought not vilifying them would allow those who recognize something of themselves to analyze rather than reject.<sup>147</sup>

This approach is of course not without risk. As discussed in chapter two, the reluctance of including men (and making kin) in feminist performance dates back to the twentieth century – performers were reluctant to include men in feminist performances out of fear of falling back onto sexist role patterns. It is therefore rather understandable that feminist performers might be afraid that, bluntly put, allowing men in would equate to shutting women out. However, in my opinion this fear no longer holds – as Haraway asserts, when discussing how fear can lead to an avoidance of important issues: “That fear is not good enough.”<sup>148</sup> That fear might hold back frank conversations on how both men and women participate in shaping the power dynamics that in the end are oppressive to both sides. That fear is not good enough to justify avoiding relationality and making kin, when that is arguably what is required to get on together better. Elagoz herself signals that the automatic victimization that comes with talking about her rape experience makes it difficult to have an open conversation about cisgender dynamics: “One of my main questions [...] was how to unburden the audience of the discomfort of seeing me as a victim, in favor of promoting a frank discussion about the actual topic.”<sup>149</sup> In my opinion, Elagoz has found a performative, intermedial way of dealing with this risk of including men by mixing her own live presence with the mediated presence of the men. Through this approach she is sure to maintain agency and control the narrative in this performance, while still representing men.

As mentioned, Elagoz herself is practically continuously present on stage, commenting on the photographs and film footage she shows throughout the performance. The fact that Elagoz is the only one who is actually present gives her a certain advantage in terms of agency compared to the men in her photographs and film footage. She has the power to look back at and address the audience, while the men remain passive objects to be looked at.



Samira Elagoz in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* (credits Adam Forte)

<sup>147</sup> Frangos, “Cock, Cock... Who’s There.”

<sup>148</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 6.

<sup>149</sup> Frangos, “Cock, Cock... Who’s There.”

How the men are perceived is not only based on their own behaviors in the interaction with Elagoz, but also, in large part, on Elagoz' montage of her film footage, as well as her on-stage commentary on this footage. Elagoz literally frames the men in a certain way to fit the narrative of her performance, by for example arranging them or their behaviors in groups. The skills montage as well as the dominants compilation are clear examples of this. When I see a young man twirling a fire baton in the skills montage I might have been more focused on his actual skill and showmanship, if Elagoz through her framing had not directed my attention to the bigger picture; in this case how all of the men wanted to present a skill to her. As a result, I look at the man in a different light; he becomes not only a subject but also an object of examination – I connect his behavior to Elagoz' presence, and wonder why he feels the need to 'show off'. This effect is a demonstration of Elagoz' agency as the artist; she filmed and edited the footage, she controls the narrative and she displays the men to the audience. While this might sound like Elagoz 'uses' these men, I would say she is quite generous in the way she portrays them. By showing these men in their own environments and giving them space to express themselves, Elagoz destabilizes the idea of the strange man as the unpredictable, violent and faceless aggressor. She features actual men in her performance who participate voluntarily, and allows them to present themselves however they choose. The men behave in – as far as we know – authentic, unscripted ways. They are subjects with insecurities, vanities, intelligence and ignorance. As a result they are not reduced to stereotypes; while we don't get to know each individual intimately, the collage of film footage does offer a relatively in-depth view of what it means to be a man in relation to a woman. Because the men aren't present only as ghosts, but as active subjects and in relation to Elagoz, they become more than the symbolic role of faceless oppressor.

All of this is not to state that, when men are included in feminist performance, women should always be in complete control of the narrative. I am not interested in making rules or presenting 'one way' as the right way of staging cisgender interactions – that would be completely contrary to Haraway's call to *stay with the trouble*. The point I want to make here is that *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* in my opinion demonstrates that there are creative ways of navigating – and even playing with – the trouble and risk of falling into sexist role patterns when representing cisgender interactions, and that these strategies are worth exploring more.

### 3.5 The performative medium / *Staying with the trouble of the self*

Where I mostly focussed on the content of the performance in the previous paragraphs and how this relates to a broader context and affects a certain spectatorial address, I now want to pay focus more on the composition of the performance – particularly to how the interplay of film, photography and theatre *stays with the trouble*. In my opinion, the combination of media in the performance therefore mostly *stays with the trouble* of Elagoz *herself*, due to this double presence. In the introduction of the performance, Elagoz describes the overarching project as a social experiment, stating: "Instead of just being the scientist creating the situation, I was also the test rat I threw in. I didn't go make a film, I went to live it." Her assertion about being both scientist and test rat is cleverly made visible in the performance itself, due to her featuring in the film footage while being present on stage at the same time. The combination of film and theatre allows for her to demonstrate the combination of roles: on the one hand we see Elagoz in the film footage, caught up in the interactions with the strangers. The film footage demonstrates to the spectator how much she truly 'lives' this project and is open to any kind scenario, for example when she shows the footage of her meeting a new partner through the project – in the montage 'The Magician' she shows a fast-forwarded compilation of the week she spends with this initial stranger. We see them talking, dressing up, smoking, doing karaoke, kissing, taking a bath, making love – in other words, in rapid succession we see them become more and more intimate. On the other hand we see her present on stage, relaxed and well-spoken, sharing her project with the audience. It is not for nothing that the performance is often referred to as a lecture performance; her attitude on stage resembles that of a neutral, slightly detached professor sharing research results. This double presence emphasizes the



complexity (the trouble) of her own role in this process. As Van der Putt observes: “Sometimes the detachment with which she recounts her experiences seems to signify PTSD. But then again it becomes clear how she uses humor, understatement and reasonableness to convert the pathos of victimhood to the pathos of the perpetrator.”<sup>150</sup> This combination of roles demonstrates how she is both in and out of control; she can’t really control how the interactions unfold, but she can control how she stages them for the audience. Through her physical presence on stage, Elagoz demonstrates how she is the one framing the narrative.

A different example of how Elagoz *stays with the trouble* of herself and her own role in cisgender interactions can be found at the beginning of the performance. Elagoz reflects on how she, as a young girl, became aware of how she could style herself in such a way to be attractive to men: “And looking back at myself, there clearly was a moment in my life when I realized that with a few facial twitches I look like I can take it hard. (...) I was confronted with my apparent intention to be sexualized by men. So I would like to introduce you to SAM, the smart-ass masochist, SAM, who’s asking for it and can take anything.” The text “Looking like I can take it hard since 2005” appears on the screen, followed by a series of selfies, taken between 2005 and 2016 – in the first few Elagoz is clearly still a teenage girl, in the last ones a grown woman. In most of the photos, Elagoz looks seductively at the camera. She pouts or sticks out her tongue, arches her back and makes sultry faces. The more recent photos contain some nudity and are more explicitly erotic; in some of them Elagoz is topless. The photo series in itself might evoke prejudices or judgments from the spectators, because they are so sexualized and tailored to a male gaze; Elagoz presents herself as a rather one-dimensional, lustful creature, a ‘bimbo’ or a slut, if you will. Because of the neutral, self-aware but rather professional attitude she displays while presenting the photos, and the way she positions herself live next to the images on the screen, she literally and figuratively demonstrates her own multidimensionality. Elagoz not so much contradicts but rather supplements the photo series through her live presence on stage. I choose the verb supplementing here to emphasize that, despite there being a contrast between the selfies and Elagoz live presence, these two presences don’t exclude each other. Rather, by bringing them together they demonstrate Elagoz as a multi-layered person; she isn’t either/or but both/and. She hereby *troubles* black and white ideas about what women can and can’t do: she is both the intelligent, neutral lecturer and the sexualized bimbo, and probably much more than that.



Samira Elagoz in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* (photographer unknown)

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<sup>150</sup> Van der Putt, “Camera op de man.”

## 4 Troublemaker

Our task is to make trouble.<sup>151</sup>

In this last chapter I examine the critical discourse on the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?*, specifically its reception in comparison to the reception of *Apollon Musagète*. I mobilize Schneider's theories once more to discuss how both *Apollon Musagète* and *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* can be considered *explicit body* works, although in different ways. In so-doing, I also answer my sixth sub-question, namely: how does *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* help to rethink Schneider's concept of the explicit body? Furthermore, I answer the question why, in my opinion, *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* relates to and deviates from a feminist performance tradition as described in the second chapter (thereby 'shaking up' the tradition itself) and suggest why *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* elicits such a strong, mixed response in feminist viewers compared to *Apollon Musagète*, arguing finally that the troubling quality of *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* actually lends it its renewing potential. This helps me unpack how *Cock, Cock... Who's there?*, as a cultural object, functions as a *troublemaker* within the feminist performance genre, and can in a broader sense help to think about ways of *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction. I end with the recommendation that it would be productive for the genre to pay more attention to where the trouble is, since that is often where we find innovation.

### 4.1 The reception

While *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* was typically well received (it even won several prizes<sup>152</sup>), this positive reception of the work was not unanimous. According to Elagoz, the performance always provokes strong feelings.<sup>153</sup> Quite often, people blame her for her rape after seeing the show: "...I've heard so often, from journalists, strangers, acquaintances, peers from the scene and from different gender identities, that my rapes were my fault in a variety of misguided ways. That it's just down to how I look or behave. That old tautological song sang to women of 'Be modest and you won't attract trouble.'" <sup>154</sup> Via social media, Elagoz often reflects on such critical comments. In an Instagram post of March 2020 she lists quotes, taken from press responses to *Cock, Cock... Who's there?*:

"Finnish woman ends up fucking and using drugs"  
"Elagoz sacrifices her entire body for the art of filmmaking"  
"A victim of her own sensationalism?"  
"No critical rebellion, no sign of solidarity for all women"  
"In bed with the cast"<sup>155</sup>

Through the critical reception of the work, and Elagoz own comments and responses on this reception, the performance has become part of a broader debate about sexism, rape culture and women's behavior.

I want to pay specific attention to articles that were published in 2018 in The Netherlands and Flanders, by the theatre journals *EtCetera* and *Theatermaker*. *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* was strongly criticized in Flemish theatre journal *EtCetera* in a special issue on sexism in 2018. In this issue reviewer Ilse Ghekiere (also known as a #weto campaigner for the theatre and dance sector in

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<sup>151</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1.

<sup>152</sup> Samira Elagoz, "Cock, Cock... Who's there?", *Samira Elagoz*, accessed on December 2, 2019, <http://www.samiraelagoz.com/cock-cock-whos-there>.

<sup>153</sup> Frangos, "Cock, Cock... Who's There."

<sup>154</sup> "Cock Cock... Who's There? Q&A with creator Samira Elagoz," *CityMag*, published on February 18, 2020, <https://citymag.indaily.com.au/culture/cock-cock-whos-there-qa-with-creator-samira-elagoz/#:~:text=Samira%20Elagoz's%20'Cock%20Cock...%20it%20elicits%20from%20audiences>.

<sup>155</sup> Samira Elagoz (@suck\_my\_disc), "Are you a female movie character?," Instagram post, March 2, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9PBCLBb-K/?igshid=9xqzgy7mgmcq>.



Belgium) essentially stated that Elagoz' performance reproduces sexist ideas.<sup>156</sup> She reproaches Elagoz' use of her own, sexualized image, stating that she objectifies herself to please the audience. The judgement "No critical rebellion, no sign of solidarity for all women" that Elagoz featured in her Instagram post, came in fact from Ghekiere's piece. Furthermore, Ghekiere criticizes Elagoz for 'stereotyping' and 'using' her strangers for her artwork, specifically the dominant men. Furthermore, the editors of the issue equate Elagoz' performance with the work of established directors Jan Fabre and Ivo van Hove. Additionally, *Apollon Musagète* was used as an example of "good practice" in comparison.<sup>157</sup>

In the article "Camera op de man – over de kritiek op het werk van Samira Elagoz," Fransien van der Putt analyzes and critiques *Etcetera's* criticism of *Cock, Cock... Who's There?* She acknowledges the quality of Holzinger's performance, while at the same time emphasizing that its artistic premise – to respond to oppression with shamelessness – is not necessarily original or innovative: "The raised middle finger apparently cannot be repeated often enough."<sup>158</sup> Moreover, Van der Putt observes that *Etcetera's* reviewers seem to want Elagoz to take a strong, political stance in her performance. As a counter-argument, Van der Putt argues that the ambiguity of *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* actually makes the performance interesting, stating:

Elagoz permits herself a more risky, personal search, through clichés and platitudes, wondering why the feminism she grew up with changed so little in the sexual behavior of men and the western (media-)culture as a whole.<sup>159</sup>

With this discussion in mind, I now turn again to Rebecca Schneider's concept of the *explicit body* to contextualize the reception of these two performances in that light.

## 4.2 Rethinking the explicit body

As I described in chapter two, Rebecca Schneider coined the concept of the *explicit body* to refer to practices in feminist performance art in which the visceral body of the (typically female) performer is used to collide against "Symbolic Orders of meaning" and thereby questions concepts of appropriateness.<sup>160</sup> Through explicit body works, feminist performers unfold the signification processes which underlie these concepts of appropriateness. Schneider points out how explicit body work in the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century was often highly criticized as too provocative, inappropriate, narcissist and exhibitionist.<sup>161</sup> The underlying reason for this disapproval, according to Schneider, was mostly due to the fact that women performance artists displayed agency over their own bodies in these works – the criticism demonstrated the cultural dogma that women weren't supposed to use their bodies in such a way. In chapter two, I argued why *Apollon Musagète* can be considered a contemporary example that fits into this tradition of explicit body work.

Today's (critical) reception of *Apollon Musagète* appears by comparison to be a lot milder compared to the reception of the explicit body works that Schneider discusses – even incredibly positive in some cases.<sup>162</sup> Theatre critic Marijn Lems goes so far as to call the performance the

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<sup>156</sup> Ghekiere, "Geen kritische blik," 24.

<sup>157</sup> De Somviele et al., "De grenzen van de kunst," 20.

<sup>158</sup> Van der Putt, "Feministisch exorcisme anno 2017," my translation.

<sup>159</sup> Van der Putt, "Camera op de man," my translation.

<sup>160</sup> Schneider, 3.

<sup>161</sup> Schneider, 34-36.

<sup>162</sup> *Volkskrant* reviewer Annette Embrechts described the performance as "bold", "daring", "a sublime commentary on masculine power" and the performers as "liberated women." *Parool* reviewer Fritz de Jong called the performance "a feminist statement."

<https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/nieuwe-versie-van-ballet-apollon-musagete-real-pain-real-blood-en-real-sweat~b36ae085/>, accessed on January 16, 2021.

current highlight in Holzinger's oeuvre. Whereas women unapologetically incorporating nudity, blood, urine and feces on stage can still serve to shock or provoke an audience, it seems like it's not necessarily deemed inappropriate, exhibitionist or controversial to do so anymore. This literal, strongly visual form of explicitness appears to be more or less accepted, sometimes even embraced, by the professional field and by feminist critics.

For the sake of my argument, I want to consider *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* here as an explicit body work in its own way, although it requires a rethinking of Schneider's original concept. The explicit body in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is not so much a visceral body, which Schneider names as one of the key characteristics for the performances she discusses. Still, I think *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* can be considered an *explicit body* work in a more abstract, figurative sense. If we take the abovementioned description of *explicit body* works and forget the presence of a visceral body, other important characteristics remain: a collision against "Symbolic Orders of meaning" and a provocation that raises questions about concepts of appropriateness.<sup>163</sup> As discussed in chapter three, *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* and Elagoz artistic process leading up to the performance troubles the black and white victim/oppressor dichotomy between men and women, by examining both her own participation in cisgender interaction as well as the male part. Her relational approach troubles fixed ideas about how men and women (should) relate to each other. Elagoz' explicit display of the troubles of cisgender interaction collides against symbolic orders of meaning (by destabilizing seemingly fixed roles in cisgender interaction). Furthermore, she clearly provokes questions about concepts of appropriateness by examining her own role in cisgender interactions. Through her rigorous though unapologetic self-examination combined with the focus on men's behavior, she touches upon questions about blame and innocence, investigating the grey areas around the crossing of boundaries. To put it without nuance, Elagoz work is explicit not so much in form but in content – Elagoz explicates the *trouble* of (the power dynamics implied in) cisgender interaction.

In the context of *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* I therefore think it productive to consider both the *body of the work as a whole* and the *relational body* (made visible through staging cisgender interactions) as *explicit bodies* in this performance. The *explicit body of the work as a whole* refers in this case to the artistic process and performance combined, in which Elagoz' demonstration of taking action after her rape destabilizes gender roles and provokes concepts of appropriateness. When I say *relational body*, I refer to how Elagoz and the men relate to each other in the encounters – not so much (or not solely) in terms of their physical bodies in space, but more how they take shape in relation to each other, in terms of behavior and general presence. The explicitness of this *relational body* lies in the way Elagoz displays the power dynamics and the *trouble* in cisgender interaction that often remains hidden; because we see how Elagoz relates to these men in the privacy of their own homes, with only a camera as their witness, we get a realistic and explicit view of how cisgender interaction can unfold behind closed doors. As a result of this different explicitness, *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* deviates from and stays with this feminist performative tradition at the same time.

If we turn back to the reception of the work in this light, it is not strange that the reception of *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is rather controversial. Schneider sees a form of shock and provocation pretty much as a given for explicit body work. But where we might be relatively used to the explicit visceral body by now, we might not yet be used to the explication of the *trouble* of cisgender interaction. It is especially interesting, and rather ironic, that self-proclaimed feminists are among those who deem Elagoz' work inappropriate for that reason. The reception by feminist reviewers in *EtCetera* expose the writers' assumptions about what a 'good' (feminist) woman should and shouldn't do, a response which is alarmingly similar to the (male) critical response towards feminist work in the seventies and eighties. I think this response lays bare how fixed ideas about gender difference are engrained even within feminism. I agree with the observations that Van der Putt made in her analysis of the critique

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<https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/geweldig-gewaagde-avond-vol-vrijgevochten-vrouwen~bd154be1/>, accessed on January 12, 2021.

<sup>163</sup> Schneider, 3.

of Elagoz' work: without denying that women's transgressions and subversions, as seen in *Apollon Musagète*, can still serve as tools to dismantle patriarchal oppression, Elagoz takes a next step which is both appealing and troubling for the feminist performance genre as a whole. The mixed response from feminist spectators underlines my observation that the performance is a *troublemaker* within the genre, stirring up questions about the what, how, why and, specifically, *what next* of feminist performance. I want to emphasize that the troubled response to *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is in my opinion precisely *why* we should pay close attention to this performance. When reading Schneider's book, it shows that it is precisely the feminist works that stirred up controversy and in some way clashed with the zeitgeist that turned out to be the ones that wrote history and defined the genre.

As I pointed out in chapter two, Schneider already suggested a relational approach, based on Simone de Beauvoir's thoughts on reciprocity, as a next step for feminist performance, which I then connected to Haraway's relational philosophy and the importance of *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction. In this thesis I suggest that *staying with the trouble* can provide a framework for what a relational approach in contemporary feminist performance might look like. *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* makes a beginning in exploring this relationality and can therefore function as both an example and a thinking tool to open up new ways of practicing *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction (in feminist performance).

## Conclusion

In this thesis I examined how the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* by Samira Elagoz helps to rethink and reconceptualize cisgender interaction in a relational way. I wanted to research the potential of staging cisgender interactions and how this can help to think about gender at large in a relational way, in contrast to a more dualistic approach in traditional feminist performance. My main research question was informed both by my own observation of a lack of men and cisgender interactions in feminist performance, as well as by Donna Haraway's relational philosophy, specifically her theories on *staying with the trouble*. Haraway's work foregrounds the idea of interrelatedness of all beings on earth – stating that we *become-with* each other through relating. *Staying with the trouble* centers around questions rather than answers: it is an acknowledgement of difference and difficulty without accepting those as a status quo. It refers to a 'both/and' mentality and practice, which is characterized by a continuous effort to get on together better despite our differences. Haraway discusses this theory mostly in a broader ecological context, but I saw potential in considering what it might mean to *stay with the trouble* of cisgender interactions. My goal wasn't to move away from Haraway overarching perspective, but to zoom in by considering the micro-level of gendered relations between humans.

This thesis can be described as a contextual analysis, based on Thomas Postlewait's model for historical analyses of performance, using theories by Rebecca Schneider and Donna Haraway, along with an interpretation of Haraway's work in a gender theory context by Kathrin Thiele. In this thesis the performances, especially *Cock, Cock... Who's there?*, functioned first and foremost as theoretical objects that helped me formulate my argument about the importance of a relational approach in feminist performance and gender theory at large. As discussed in the introduction, Postlewait approaches performances as events, that are determined by four factors: (possible) worlds, agents, receptions and artistic heritage.<sup>164</sup> Different (combinations of) factors are emphasized in each chapter of my thesis.

My first chapter, from the perspective of the factor world(s), can be regarded as an elaboration of the worldview I wished to build upon in the rest of my thesis. It centered around the question: how can Donna Haraway's relational philosophy be used as a lens to think about cisgender interaction? In this chapter, I discussed how *staying with the trouble* as a concept can in my opinion be helpful to "think anew across differences" in feminist theory in a broader sense and more specifically with regard to cisgender interaction.<sup>165</sup> To this end, I used Kathrin Thiele's article "Pushing Dualisms and Differences: From 'Equality versus Difference' to 'Nonmimetic Sharing' and 'Staying with the Trouble'", in which she elaborates on how *staying with the trouble* can help to think about gender difference differently. I conclude the chapter by stating that *staying with the trouble* can offer a new way of looking at gender difference, *diesseits* of the male/female binary. The idea of difference here is not reduced to an essentialist idea of two divided unities, rather it refers to a prior difference in all things. Following this line of thinking, one could state that difference does not arise from inherent characteristics of women and men, but from different types of worlding and worlding-with-others. I regard this as a new relational way of approaching the male/female binary and consequently cisgender interactions. This offers a way of regarding cisgender interactions as intra-actions and instances of becoming-with, instead of 'predetermined' exchanges on the basis of fixed gender roles – and this view, in my opinion, offers more room for change and growth. This understanding provides the grounding for my arguments in this thesis.

In the second chapter the factor artistic heritage takes center stage. I discussed feminist performance as a genre and tradition. I paid specific attention to Rebecca Schneider's theories regarding the *explicit body*, since there I saw the clearest connection with my contemporary case studies. The performance *Apollon Musagète* served in this chapter as an exemplifier, to reflect on the

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<sup>164</sup> Thomas Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-24.

<sup>165</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 7.

discussed theories with practical contemporary examples on the one hand and to underline how it is a part of the feminist performance genre on the other. By doing so, I answered my second sub-question: how does *Apollon Musagète* fit into a tradition of feminist explicit body art? I argued on the basis of my analysis that *Apollon Musagète* can be regarded as a contemporary example of an explicit body performance. Then, I moved on to problematize (the academic discourse on) feminist performance by arguing that the lack of representation of men and specifically cisgender interaction in feminist performance threatens to uphold the binary way of thinking that the genre tries to undermine. *Apollon Musagète* served again as an exemplifier for this argument, which helped me answer my third sub-question: how does cisgender interaction take shape in *Apollon Musagète*? I described how there is no cisgender interaction in *Apollon Musagète*, but that the performance is ghosted by a men in a variety of ways; through the presence of the bull center-stage and the artistic heritage of the original ballet (which centers around the god Apollo), as well as through gender-bending of the female performers. On top of these concrete examples of ghosts of men in *Apollon Musagète*, the performance is ghosted by ideas about how women should behave to earn the approval of men. Through these ghosts, a rather one-dimensional symbolic idea of Man as patriarchal oppressor is symbolized. I concluded the chapter by arguing that a relational approach, specifically in the form of *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction, holds a lot of potential for feminist performance and might even help to think about gender difference at large. I supported this argument by demonstrating that Rebecca Schneider already suggested a relational approach as the next step for feminist performance, on the basis of Simone de Beauvoir's concept *reciprocity*.

In the third chapter, I shifted focus to the performance event itself. I operationalized Haraway's concepts becoming-with, making kin and *staying with the trouble* to dramaturgically analyze *Cock, Cock... Who's there?*, focusing mainly on how the performance helps to think about ways of *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction. Since *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is a lecture performance in which Elagoz details and shows her artistic process, I consider this process as part of the performance and analyzed it as such. I answered my fourth and fifth sub-question, namely: how does cisgender interaction take shape in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* And: how does *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* expand dualistic ideas of a female/male dichotomy? I described how cisgender interactions in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* are staged in such a way that they can be understood as instances of becoming-with. This is mainly due to the openness with which Elagoz approaches the men and the encounters – an openness which I therefore regard as a dramaturgical strategy and underlying artistic principle. Because the encounters are unscripted and anything can happen, they demonstrate how both Elagoz and the men assume certain (stereotypical or cliché, or more ambiguous) gender roles *through* their interaction with each other. Furthermore, I analyzed how Elagoz' way of engaging with men in *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* can be regarded as a concretization of the concept making kin, since despite having suffered at the hands of men she explores the dynamics that seem to cause the violence towards her and other women, in a relational way, with openness and curiosity. Because of Elagoz artistic premise of exploring men's behavior towards her and her behavior towards them in an open way, Elagoz encounters can be considered as a concretization of making kin. The performance thereby poses the question 'how to get on together (better)?' over and over again. Overall, I argued that Elagoz' work as a whole (artistic process and performance combined) can be seen as a form of *staying with the trouble*, since it destabilizes the traditional, dualistic male/female dichotomy in which the man is seen as the aggressor/oppressor and the woman as the passive victim and because it demonstrates the ambiguity and messiness of (the power dynamics in) cisgender interactions.

In the fourth chapter, I focus on the factor receptions and discuss this factor specifically in relation to the artistic heritage of the performances. I compare the critical reception of *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* to the reception of *Apollon Musagète*, focusing mostly on articles published in the theatre journals *EtCetera* and *Theatermaker*, thereby interweaving these two strings of thought. *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* received mixed reviews by feminist critics, while *Apollon Musagète* is generally appreciated and celebrated. I explain this difference in reception by operationalizing Rebecca Schneider's theories on the explicit body once more, arguing that while *Apollon Musagète*

can be considered a traditional explicit body performance, *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* is an explicit body performance in a figurative sense. Because of its explicit display of the troubles of cisgender interaction I argue why *the body of the work as a whole* as well as the *relational body* can be considered as *explicit bodies* in this performance. I conclude that Elagoz work is explicit not so much in form but in content because she explicates the *trouble* of (the power dynamics implied in) cisgender interaction. Thereby I also answer my sixth sub-question: How does *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* help to rethink Schneider's concept of the explicit body? I use this analysis to explain why, in my opinion, certain feminist reviewers respond negatively to *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* Where we might be relatively used to the explicit visceral body by now, we might not yet be used to the explication of the *trouble* of cisgender interaction. I conclude that this critical reception exposes the assumptions of certain feminist viewers of what a 'good' (feminist) woman can and can't do, thereby demonstrating how some feminists also still uphold binary ideas surrounding gender. Because *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* explicates the *trouble* of cisgender interaction, it clearly stirs up *trouble*. These two final chapters together therefore also served to demonstrate how *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* functions as a *troublemaker*, in a Harawayan sense, to help think anew about feminist performance and feminism itself (specifically the trouble of cisgender dynamics).

### How does the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* by Samira Elagoz help to rethink and reconceptualize cisgender interaction in a relational way?

In this conclusion, I want to discuss how *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* can help to think about ways of *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction in a broader sense, both in the academic discourse as well as in (feminist) performance, and possibly even society as a whole. To answer my main question, I analyzed the performance *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* in chapter three in the light of Donna Haraway's relational philosophy, focusing specifically on her concepts of *staying with the trouble*. Overall, *staying with the trouble* comes to the fore in this performance as an underlying dramaturgical strategy and artistic principle, which can be summarized as a form of openness and ongoingness, of continuously searching and thinking-with experiences and encounters with strange men, without offering clear-cut solutions or answers. Elagoz is not trying to solve or explain the problems of cisgender interactions that she might encounter, not is she trying to knit her observations into a satisfactory whole. Instead, she foregrounds the messy ambiguity of the encounters, the *trouble* which in some way always looms in cisgender interactions, whether implicitly or explicitly. By doing so, one could argue that she, as Thiele calls it, engages difference differently: she does not try to explain difference by accepting essentialist categories, nor does she try to 'solve' difference by denying its existence. Instead, she arrives, as Thiele would put it, *diesseits* of the equality vs. difference debate; the idea of difference in this performance is not reduced to an essentialist idea of two divided unities that behave according to pre-determined gender roles. Rather, it points to the suggestion that difference does not arise from inherent characteristics of women and men, but from how we (choose to) engage with each other.

### A troublemaker in feminist thought

Haraway's theories have in my opinion, despite her obvious affinity with soil and hummus, a tendency to float – she often discusses *staying with the trouble* on a meta level. While suggesting this (thinking) practice as a strategy to get on together better, a more grounded *how* often remains rather implicit. It is for this reason that I included Haraway's extensive discussion of the Pigeon Blog project in chapter one; while the project itself is not necessarily related to my research, I saw it as one of the few more tangible discussions of what *staying with the trouble* in practice might look like. This performance too might serve as a concretization and materialization of Haraway's theories in the context of gender theory, which I tried to accomplish to an extent with my analysis in chapter three.

I think these examples are important. If we want to make *staying with the trouble* into an actual way of being and living together better on this planet, we need to ground it into actual

practices. It is also here, in my opinion, that the value of performance (in a broad sense) becomes extra apparent: it can form the stage of explorations of new ways of getting on together. Schneider provides a useful argument for the relevance of performance in the exploration of cisgender interaction. She argues that performance, “a medium of mimesis and exchange”, is a suitable medium to explore this terrain, since it “acknowledges the present moment of exchange between embodied participants, embedded in cultural codes.”<sup>166</sup> Thus, Schneider concludes that performance is a medium in which difference can be explored in a myriad of ways – beyond the Hegelian premise that difference inescapably leads to antagonism – because performance is the medium of the present moment and of exchanges between embodied participants. Following this line of reasoning, I would argue that staging cisgender interactions in performance – and their troubles – can help to rethink gender differences and at the same time open up new ways of getting on together. As Haraway states herself: “Staying with the trouble is rooted in telling the stories and joining and inventing practices for making kin non-biogenetically.”<sup>167</sup> She emphasizes how stories can help us remember or introduce us to new knowledges. In the case of *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* this is Elagoz' personal story (or at least an account of her actions), which is brought in the form of a mixed media performance, for which she invented a practice of making (odd)kin with men after a sexual assault.<sup>168</sup>

Haraway often states that making oddkin is required to learn how to get on together better, although it is not necessarily obvious how to do that.<sup>169</sup> I see *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* in this context as an interesting starting point to this discussion when it comes to getting on together better as humans. Reading *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* through the theories of Donna Haraway provides, in my opinion, an invitation to think about what becoming-with and making kin between men and women might look like, and how this might transform how we relate to each other. As I previously stated, one could argue that Elagoz' entire project is a concrete form of making kin. It can be regarded as a materialization of the question ‘how to get on together (better)?’ The performance poses that same question to the spectator, by not offering any definitive answers.

Thinking with *Cock, Cock... Who's there?*, I start to believe that by exploring how to continuously relate to each other and invite the *trouble* that comes with this relating, we will cultivate more response-ability for each other. As I discussed in chapter one, Kathrin Thiele argues how Haraway's relational philosophy can offer new insights to theorize differentiability in a different way and for practicing this world of difference in a more response-able manner.<sup>170</sup> Thiele described Haraway's theories surrounding *staying with the trouble* as “...a thought practice of worlding-with-others, which starts from immanent relatedness [...]”.<sup>171</sup> This worlding-with-others is in my opinion precisely what happens in the unscripted, continuously relational meetings between Elagoz and her strangers. The performance and its openness and open-endedness to all participants do not avoid the complexities, but show what it might look like to “...*stay with the trouble* of continuously asymmetrical power relations.”<sup>172</sup> The performance does not fabricate forced answers to difficult questions, but explicates the questions and their complexities. In Haraway's words: “Call that *staying with the trouble*.”<sup>173</sup>

## A final note

This thesis was a rather ambitious project and while I tried to bring together all of the strings of thought, this was not always possible to the extent that I would have liked. Some thoughts could not be fully developed, some connections couldn't be fully explored. Even though I did touch upon it, one

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<sup>166</sup> Schneider, 178.

<sup>167</sup> Haraway, “Staying with the Trouble for Multispecies Environmental Justice,” 103.

<sup>168</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 29.

<sup>169</sup> Haraway, “Staying with the Trouble for Multispecies Environmental Justice,” 103.

<sup>170</sup> Thiele, 9.

<sup>171</sup> Thiele, 20.

<sup>172</sup> Haraway, cited by Thiele, “Pushing Dualisms and Differences”, 23. Italics by the author.

<sup>173</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 10.



could add depth to the argument why performance as a medium might be especially suitable for investigating cisgender relations, for example by exploring further, on the basis of case studies and performance theories, how the specificity of the medium allows for such investigations. My rethinking of Schneider's *explicit body* could be explored in more depth; now I only devote a small paragraph to this in relation to *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* A contemporary rethinking of the (potential and implications of) the *explicit body* in performance might be relevant and interesting in its own right, especially since the rise of the internet which brought, among other things, a selfie culture and an ubiquity of pornography in its wake – these developments have arguably changed our perception of when and how bodies are perceived as explicit. The connection between De Beauvoir's concept of reciprocity and Haraway's relational philosophy, and how these might enrich each other, could be the subject of an entire new thesis. Rather than seeing these and other loose ends as a loss, I would like to reframe it as an opportunity, with Haraway's string figures thinking style in mind:

One person can build up a large repertoire of string figures on a single pair of hands; but the cat's cradle figures can be passed back and forth on the hands of several players, who add new moves in the building of complex patterns. Cat's cradle invites a sense of collective work, of one person not being able to make all the patterns alone. One does not "win" at cat's cradle; the goal is more interesting and more open-ended than that.<sup>174</sup>

There are stills strings and string figures here that can be passed on to other pairs of hands – or I can continue with them in a different time and a different place.

It was especially interesting to discover while writing this thesis that the idea of a relational approach in feminist performance was already proposed by Rebecca Schneider in 1997. This begs the question *why* the same plea has to be made again, more than twenty years later. I suspect this has to do with the fact that broadly speaking between the 1980s and 2010s, with the exception of an upheaval of feminist scholarship in the 1990s, there was a general consensus that feminism was 'done'.<sup>175</sup> The word feminism itself for a long time had a negative connotation. As a result, feminist performance was, alongside all things 'feminist', put on the back burner. This might also explain the hiatus in literature on feminist performance. It is interesting that when feminist performances started to return, along with the feminist movement as a whole, these feminist artists seem to have picked up mostly where their predecessors left off all those years before – by deconstructing the sign of Woman yet again. Apparently this, too, is still necessary – but it is not an excuse to not explore a more relational approach as well.

In general, writing this thesis has opened up more avenues to explore – I would like to encounter more examples of feminist performances in which cisgender interactions are staged, so as to explore more ways in which feminist performance can become more relational. Furthermore, as I was writing, I became more and more convinced that *staying with the trouble* can be a productive thinking tool in the context of gendered relations between humans. The theory helps to critically ask questions like: what are the troubles of cisgender interaction? Who is seen as responsible (or response-able) for this trouble? How can we do better? And, from a performance studies perspective, what might *staying with the trouble* of cisgender interaction look like on stage? Elagoz already stated in an interview that the critique she received while touring with *Cock, Cock... Who's there?* was often based on the same preconceived idea: "Be modest and you won't attract trouble."<sup>176</sup> This statement suggests that the trouble of cisgender interaction is universally acknowledged and avoided, and the responsibility for it is mainly put on women. While I offered a starting point in this thesis for how to consider *staying with the trouble* in the context of gendered

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<sup>174</sup> Haraway, "A Game of Cat's Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies," 69-70.

<sup>175</sup> This idea of feminism as 'done' is often referred to as postfeminism.

Duits, 20-25.

<sup>176</sup> CityMag, "Cock Cock... Who's There? Q&A with creator Samira Elagoz."

relations between humans, I am sure there is much more to unpack here – more connections to be made, more questions to ask, more trouble to make.

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