

# SAIR GOETZ

843 19<sup>th</sup> st • Oakland, CA 94607 • 704-819-7106  
sairgoetz@gmail.com • sairgoetz.com • they/them pronouns

2019

## Statement of Research

I write instructions that shift problematic realities into speculative fictions. My work seeks to leverage the weightlessness of language to complicate, manipulate, and annotate the weighty matters it circumscribes. This speculative language is inscribed back into reality through bodily performance, video, installation, and signage. Each work spawns lines of inquiry that move propositions about pertinent topics (sexual violation, illusions of safety, gender non-binaries, the future of literacy, and the stability of self) into the specificities of embodiment (the elasticity of my tongue, an industrial scissor-lift, buttons on the left side of a shirt, meme gif ventriloquizing, and 300lbs of ice).

One primary element of my research agenda is an experimental practice of voice/silence aimed at unpacking my early gender training and dismantling the structures that continue to reinforce them. For *IVE CHANGED*, I began the performance by reading aloud to twenty volunteers a poetic text from which I had redacted all gendered pronouns. Ten of the volunteers carried 10 1'x2'x2' ice letters reading, "*IVE CHANGED*" to the cold, unglamorous muddy banks of the Olentangy River, recalling both funerary rituals and illegal waste dumps. A swarm of ten camera-people moved in circles around them, clicking at their shutters in bursts to try to make permanent that ephemeral act. While I held the ice *IVE CHANGED* against the current of the river, I traded "she/her" for "they/them," but the melting ice sign, like all utterances, could not be frozen in time. The disruptive sound of the photographers highlighted the need for constant reaffirmation of any philosophical or linguistic distinction, especially one as alien as a gender non-binary, in our era of the constant refresh.

Another focal point for my work is an inquiry into the dynamics of safety and power in binary gender presentations and experiences. Taking literally an instruction to "talk *around*" an experience of sexual violation involving a former teacher, the character of *bold yr tongue* speaks around a variety of objects held in their mouth. A 26-channel video, the work moves between unified chorus, distinct dialog, and multi-vocal cacophony - evading linguistic intelligibility and achieving emotional resonance. Appropriating media such as Jackson 5's *ABC* and Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*, the work ties the story's specificities to a larger sexualization of teacher-student narratives and the re-learning of fundamentals that follows such violation. Characterized by a complex blend of humor, accusation, resolve, and sorrow, the channels work with and against each other to complicate mentorship dynamics and reflect upon the use of the alphabet to provide order for the unorderable. Like *me and my army* (explored in my letter of application), *bold yr tongue* locates itself in the infinitely malleable territory of the green screen. This green non-space, along with frontal framing and exaggerated costuming, pull their spectacle, placelessness, and surreality from vaudeville, burlesque, and drag stages.

My works are frequently in dialogs surrounding technologically dis- and re-embodied futurism, often see those conversations as a refuge for trans\* bodies. *Take Requests*, a collaboration with Wanbli Hamilton-Gamache, was a telepresence performance that took place simultaneously in Oakland, CA and Chicago, IL. My character, a trans-masculine compare, appeared in Chicago on two 45" monitors on either side of a trans-feminine person (Wanbli), who appeared in Oakland, also on two monitors. Over 20 minutes, in which she performed various actions of vulnerability, my character

acted as her back up, with an Oakland audience as my back-up, breaking silence with tone-deaf speeches and from *The Sound of Music*. This character, in cotton-candy beard and coat tails, took on both an impressiveness and an absurdity that I could not accomplish through bodily presence. After forcing the media stereotype of trans-masculine inefficacy into farce, the trans-feminine character leaves the stage, allowing the usually silenced trans-masculine character to have the last word: instructional texts of solidarity held up to the camera like a TV News channel ticker tape.

While sound was the first technological frontier for telepresence, it remains the last technological frontier for individualization of technology. Sound is still something we still share with our neighbors. In the upcoming years, my main research focus will be the cinematics of unspoken sound: and the analogy between the silent screens of the 1910s and the silent screens of the 2010s, and their implications for how we think of embodiment and gender performance. The silenced smartphone reverts the dynamism of sound-cinema back into silent cinema's combination of text and image. Just as language is placed on top of video social media "stories" like silent film titles, the body is placed into "text" messages through zoetrope-like animated gifs, selfies, and shaky, hand-held videos. The very silence of the body-image, however, works to create a trans\*-futuristic social space, removed from of the constraint of vocal-pitch gendering. Through a practice of embodiment and dis-embodiment exercises taking cues from silence cinema and meme culture, I hope to map the topologies — liberating and oppressive — of digital and physical social silence. As video ubiquity in all areas of life ushers in a new era of silent cinema, as new policies towards gender emerge, I will write instructions for them.