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Queer Achilles vs. masculine mimicry
A movement-centered critique of masculinity

Abstract: The essay is interested in masculine movement and its contribution to fostering toxic masculinity. To exemplify the analysis, the author draws on the film version of the dance piece *Enter Achilles*. Masculinity is conceived of a mimicry-like dynamics that forces individuals to set respective acts. The dynamics thereby only allow a small range of movements and immediately punishes deviation. It causes uniformness instead of individuation. Queerness, on the contrary, seen as an allowing dynamics helps to reconnect to playfulness and vividness. A dynamics that is able to establish caring bonds, as queerness allows difference and thereby reappropriates otherness as something that connects.

Keywords: cultural studies; masculinity; dance; movement; mimicry; queering; intussusception; body schema.

An introductory personal move

A personal story introduces the issue of this essay. Being a passionate Argentine Tango dancer, I have to cope with the lack of a queer tango community in my city. Luckily, Vienna is an accepting place, and I frequently go out to dance at the local conventional *milongas* (dance events). In the meantime, everybody knows I am a queer[1] dancer. Slowly, more and more heterosexual men are daring to dance with me. The most blatant repudiation I get is being cold-shouldered. In many cases I am not able to tell if this behavior is homophobic, or if it is just the same thing I do, since I also disregard some people for whatever reason. Sometimes, a bunch of women and men and I gather at the bar and talk. The next *tanda* (set of dances) starts and the women leave for the tango. Thus, it happens that I end up alone with some of the men at the bar and that is when it occurs: the

[1] I use the term "queer" throughout the essay for individuals not falling short of, not wanting to follow, never fitting into the hegemonic paradigm – be it the heterosexual nerd, be it the non-binary person, be it the trans*person. The term designates all those confronted with the menace of hegemonic masculinity.

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communication stops, the perception of being part of the group is over, and every attempt to connect just slips off an invisible wall. I know for sure, these men are not homophobic; otherwise, I would leave the situation. But there is something that inhibits the contact between us.

Over time, I have learned that this behavior does not concern me. I just do not understand what is going on in the situation. Of course, I follow the talk and understand the sense of the conversation; of course, I participate with my own opinion. But my ignorance of how masculinity negotiates itself unconsciously and how these dynamics involve the bodies present, pushes me outside. Suddenly, there is no place for me within the group. From one moment to the next I am of no significance. To make it clear, the scene does not picture hypermasculinity (Ruxton 2019: 88). It is rather comparable with what Miriam J. Abelson (2019) has called "Goldilocks masculinity", an "in-between-masculinity" that "incorporates aspects of nonhegemonic masculinities to sustain the existing gender order amid challenges to its legitimacy" (6). In this scene (and especially regarding masculinity in the Argentine Tango community, see Tobin 2009), we find a form of masculinity that is already transformed through feminist policy, a certain acceptance of queer life, and a kind of progressive life style. After all, in Argentine tango, many men contribute themselves to a certain bending of traditional representations of masculinity by attaching great importance to being well but sometimes quite unusually groomed, by fanning themselves to cool down, etc. Nonetheless, they are still motivated by the desire to stabilize the masculine agenda. It really took some time to realize what exactly was going on. It is not about being kicked out actively or being despised. I learned that it is a process of negotiating their masculine status within the group, their *need* to be recognized as masculine – individually, mutually, and collectively.

Meanwhile, I am able to smile at these situations, and I now observe what happens with curiosity. What I find is masculine mimicry: a series of micro-movements that go beyond the obvious gestures that are commonly perceived as masculine. It is my ignorance of these micro-movements that puts me outside the circle. I have come to understand these micro-movements through Marcel Jousse (1969), who conceives them as complex motors in the individual, which also order inner life (53). In his concept of intussusception, we learn that the mimetic process does not follow a conventional appropriative logic, like seeing, imitating, failing, seeing

again, imitating, succeeding. It is a different mode of becoming aware of something (122). Intussusception describes the incorporation of structures that do not need to be consciously trained in order to replay them. The mimeticism introduces the relevant structures to be followed in a certain realm (Harrasser 2018: 161). It is thereby thrilling that, within masculine mimicry, the mimetic mode of intussusception seems to follow a strict and narrow path. It thus leads to recognition (*Ibid.*) – to the recognition of belonging to the masculine realm which results in being possessed by the masculine dynamics. Intussusception is negotiated corporeally through interaction, "all constituent parts ‚act on' each other and are simultaneously ‚acted upon'" (Nixon 2019: 99). To describe this concept, Jousse uses the term *anthropos*, a "unified body-mind-soul entity" (*Ibid.* 100). In spite of a theoretical difference, this concept is similar to the body schema (see further down). Both describe the simultaneous appropriation of meaning and structures through movement.[2] Intussusception is thus part of a twofold mimetic process: First, one takes notice of something, and through intussusception, the individual incorporates it. Second, in what is called *rejeu*, what is embodied "tends to be reproduced, voiced, and re-played" (Scheffler 2016: 182). Intussusception as such is neither positive nor negative; it is instead intrinsically world-making (Sienaert 2016: 18) and transformation is always possible (this is, e.g., what performance practitioners use in their training sessions – Nixon 2019, Scheffler 2016). However, the *rejeu* stays bound to the structures that intussusception has provided (Harrasser 2018: 162), and therefore reproduces them. In the intussusceptive structures of masculinity, we find no layer of playfulness and human difference. Queerness, consequently, could represent a different mode of intussusception since it works in the permanent becoming of individuals; a becoming that opposes the necrotic reproduction of stereotypes (Comité des Études Marcel Jousse in Jousse 1969: 67). Queerness, in other words, unveils itself in "aesthetic enactments that gesture towards innovative ways of imagining, subjectivity and relationality" (Walsh 2016: 2). We can "sense [queerness] among emotions, moods and sensations that tingle

[2] To outline the difference very briefly: Marcel Jousse is more concerned with orality (and therefore language that not only consists of spoken language but mainly of bodily gestures) as a backdrop for the sociocultural construction (Jousse in Sienaert 2016: 25). The phenomenological concept of the body schema, on the other hand, takes physical movement as a starting point for appropriating and thereby constructing a world (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 100ff).

with the hope or need for brighter days to come" (*Ibid.*). A queer intussusceptive mode allows other forms of interactions, as these structures draw on a different repertoire, as Eve Gianoncelli, for example, has shown in her study of Claude Cahun (2017: 183). To further clarify my position: As I know of many (non-)queers who perfectly represent the macho-type without engaging in the dynamics of masculine mimicry, it is important to understand that masculinity in this article is not about masculine-labeled body postures, or about different forms of masculine expression (like those written and thought about in Abelson 2019, Di Martino 2018, Halberstam 1998); it is about going along with what Thomas Page McBee (2018) expressed with "[b]eing a man unwilling to face the worst parts of masculinity guaranteed that I was passively part of the problem" (52). It is about the interactive movements that arrange the space to act and provide the attraction towards masculine mimicry.

This essay intends to identify different layers of masculine mimicry by drawing on the film *Enter Achilles* – a dance piece featuring DV8 Physical Theatre under the direction of Lloyd Newson. The piece was choreographed for Wiener Festwochen in 1995, adapted for film in collaboration with Clara Van Gool, and revived for the stage in 2020. Since many queers in the Global North find themselves in a situation of broad acceptance, hetero/homonormativity and especially masculine normativity flip over to what could be called a queer world. With the elaboration of my argument, I also want to write against any form of masculinity instead of arguing for queer masculinities, still recognizing the strategic value this train of thought clearly demonstrates in social politics and activism. To avoid antagonizing readers from the beginning who argue in favor of queer masculinities, I might console them for the time being with the thought that the concept of masculinity I refer to in this essay does not assume masculinity as something residing in a person or something that might be put on like a coat or even embodied. It is not about identities or masculine-labeled forms of expression. Here, masculinity is understood as the homogenous, uniforming *dynamics* one follows by performing the right micro-movements, gestures, and actions in order to create the impression of being masculine. The appropriation of these dynamics is something that happens "through some cultural osmosis" (McBee 2018: 41). These dynamics are involved in a never-ending process of tying masculinity to maleness and to specific ideas through the implicit consequence of repudiating anything

that might shatter the masculine illusion (Clatterbough 2004: 201-202). Therein resides no concept of possible difference; on the contrary, it only activates a particular, quite stereotypical range of behaviors as the concept of intussusception/rejeu suggests.

For the purpose of my argument – and thereby highlighting its inter-individual dynamics, expressed through (micro-)movements – I have decided to skip the customary overview concerning the literature on masculinity at this point. Nevertheless, the relevant literature is inserted throughout the text in order to underline my point, using different aspects found within the field of critical studies on men and masculinities as well as queer, trans* and female masculinities, all of them addressing the topic in order to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity. My argumentation, though, starts from a different angle: instead of foregrounding power structures or forms of expression, its core thought sets out from the *sediment* that operates in all of us, which David Buchbinder, for example, quoting Raymond Williams (2013), calls the *residual*, a past that is still "active in the cultural process" (158); in phenomenological thought, the sediment is what we as individuals always already find as intrinsic cultural meaning when arriving in this world. Thereby, we inevitably appropriate the sediment (e.g., Waldenfels 2000: 183; Joas 1996: 270-271). The sediment realizes itself through bodily expressions in the many ways we *move* and thus act in this world. I therefore draw on phenomenological thought, combining it with positions from the wide field of performance studies. Even though this move might seem eclectic to some, it is not. Both phenomenology and performance studies come from an intrinsic (therefore not always explicitly expressed) bodily positioning (even though performance studies' argumentations might be based on different body theories). Phenomenology with its concept of the lived body (and the body schema as its concrete expression) delivers a counterposition to dualistic thought. We learn to transgress the body-mind split, thus allowing us to think about the *naturalness*[3] of human actions (cf.

3 I had several conversations about the use of the word *natural*, as it immediately draws on the discourse of nature/culture. In this context, *natural* describes self-evidence, matter-of-factness, a kind of behavior that is invariably accustomed to something, so s*he, of course, acts this way without questioning what and how something is done. Still, I stick to natural as it terminologically marks the phenomenological background and the connection to the body schema; expressions like self-evidence and alike would suggest too much consciousness of what one does. Thanks to Ray Batchelor and Mark Miscovich for helping me to find a way through this tricky problem on how different languages work.

Jousse's *anthropos* above). In performance studies, it is evident that our bodies are the instruments that express what is found on a cultural layer. They show that there is no difference and no distance between the individual bodies and the cultural layer.

The film *Enter Achilles* serves as a movement-based reference opus for my argumentation, and this essay therefore leaves out the definitely important genesis of the piece and its contextualization. It presents a wonderful depiction of masculine mimicry, or as Justin Wyatt would label it, a "male buddy film" (2001: 53) that celebrates masculinity through "open homophobia" (*Ibid.*). As this essay does not intend to discuss the art of dance in this production, the storyline will only be told in a run-through. The essay will instead focus on specific scenes to show certain mimetic structures. Nevertheless, I recommend the reader watch the piece because it is a great work of dance art. To differentiate between the nameless protagonists, the dancers will first be referred to by their official full names and then afterwards by their first names. Only Achilles, who is performed by Juan Kruz Díaz de Garaio Esnaola, will keep his dramatic name. After all, the hero Achilles himself serves as a very suitable reference point since his love for Patroklos has been the source of controversial debate for centuries, as Marta González-González (2018) has shown. The hero, the protagonist of an epic about a man who loves another man, was obviously *normal* to Homer, but already scandalous to Plato (*Ibid.* 69). The figure in *Enter Achilles* is a superhero, which is emphasized in a scene where he takes off his shirt and trousers to reveal a superhero costume underneath, just when he is attacked for the very first time for being different. The use of the term superhero seems to place my argumentation within the narrative of good vs bad subjects (Muñoz 1999: 11). However, I want to position Achilles as the representation of an intussusceptive queer mode that disidentifies (*Ibid.*) and points to a utopian openness which is yet to come (Muñoz 2019); a superhero of not-yet-lived difference who constantly interferes, breaks, and changes what stereotypically persists; a superhero who disidentifies as he knows he cannot escape, but is able to deal with what is there.

The story we are presented with in *Enter Achilles* may be summarized very briefly by highlighting a queer Achilles who maintains his place in a toxic environment. The superhero and demigod is not, as we might remember him from the epos, the ideal(ized) male – his superpowers and, at the same time, weak point, the so-called Achilles' heel, is precisely his

queerness. *Enter Achilles* tells the story of a night in the pub, "The Plough". Throughout the feature we witness a bunch of men entertaining themselves, and it seems that these entertainments are very common. Throughout the film we stay immersed in a homosocial setting, an ambience which serves to prove masculinity (Kimmel 2004: 186). With aesthetic precision, we are led to understand that the homosocial milieu constantly depends on its separation from the homosexual (Wyatt 2001: 62), and consequently from queerness. Some scenes take us outside the pub: in the courtyard, under a bridge, and in an apartment where one of the protagonists lives. The story told is one of masculine friendship, which consists of adapting to certain behaviors like violence (Kimmel 2004: 189), self-destruction (Buchbinder 2013: 2), bullying (Dyer 2004: 22), competition (Hoch 2004: 104f), alignment (Ruxton *et al.* 2019: 88), sexualization (Stoltenberg 2000: 3), and avoidance of weakness and difference (Miller 2001). The depicted scenes are quite well known in the Global North, even though they might differ in expression in different countries with their respective cultural touch. Concerning the latter, Miriam J. Abelson (2019) informs us accurately about how coercive influences are determined by geographical spaces (e.g., in the film, a not further named industrial city in the UK) and sociocultural places (e.g., "The Plough") (Abelson 2019: 11, 18). However, there are intussusceptive similarities to be found in the different expressions; it is masculine mimicry at work. We learn that one must carefully understand the do's and don'ts that seem to follow quite random but in fact quite serious rules to become and to stay a member of the group. We learn that masculinity is a power game that applies rules for either acceptance or humiliation. Although persistent, we find out that masculinity is a friable concept that is upset by queer easiness which is attractive and seductive – masculinity is a concept that is only maintained through the coercive dynamics of masculine mimicry.

Masculine mimicry. An orientation towards death

Masculinity is persistent. Its persistence is affected by mimicry, the imitation of the same, the extinguishment of difference. Still, almost 30 years after the ground-breaking publication of Raewyn Connell's book *Masculinities* (1995), we find ourselves amid of a world that may be defined as masculine. Women and queers have to fear masculine aggression – both physical and emotional. Masculinity still seems to remain attractive – even gay men

foster masculinity and benefit from the so-called "patriarchal dividend" (Connell 2009: 142). These persons – whether queer or not – thereby contribute to reinforcing cis-masculinity and solidifying homonormativity. It is an inconspicuous, internalized homosocial coercion that operates from within as an exclusionary force (Wyatt 2001: 57). This force is sensed in the individual, it there arouses the "fear of disconnection" (Brené Brown quoted in McBee 2018: 181).

Human evolution can be described as mimetic (Wulf 1989). *Doing as-if* is a dynamic perceivable in all sorts of groups. To belong to a group, individuals have to show that they have understood what it is that holds the group together. Instead of signing a declaration of mindset or first principles (like we find in organizations and states), sociocultural groups unconsciously negotiate the decision of whether a human being is *in* or *out* through body movements. However, it is not that black and white since we find groups that, even though considering somebody an outsider at first, stay open towards these individuals, allowing them to approach and even reaching out towards them. This is a sociocultural move transferred by means of the body.

Acting mimetically may be categorized as either following mimesis or following mimicry. Even though in the literature the reader might find various definitions and synonyms, I would like to distinguish between the terms for the purpose of the current analysis. In this essay, mimicry is based on the understanding of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2002). In the *Elements of Antisemitism* chapter in their book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we find the very often cited quote:

> Where the human seeks to resemble nature, at the same time it hardens itself against it. Protection as petrified terror in form of camouflage. These numb human reactions are archaic patterns of self-preservation: the tribute life pays for its continuous existence is adaptation to death. (148)

What is called *camouflage* in the English version is labelled *Mimikry* in the German original. In this text, Adorno and Horkheimer reflect the dynamics of antisemitism. These dynamics intrinsically operate by constantly detecting the particular/different. When localized, classified, and isolated, the different is forced to adapt. When it does not adapt, disgust comes naturally: "Uncontrolled mimesis is proscribed" (*Ibid.*). Uncontrolled, here, is an important word as it points to coercion. The authors do not neglect a

mimetic process in societies but rather consider it as something that happens anyways. The problem of adaptation in their thought is that, over the time of human history, the confusion of natural adaptation with adaptation to certain concepts has been absorbed by the cultural sediment. What they discuss is the rational, hence embodied, dynamics of appropriating sociocultural concepts (which nowadays would also cover the known markers of gender, race/ethnicity, class, etc.) and realizing them in a form of world-making that depends on sticking to these concepts by applying them constantly. Its means is terror, as terror guarantees sameness – terror that subordinates differences to the same, searching for repetition, regularity, and stereotypes (*Ibid.* 148-149). In their view, antisemitism "is based on a false projection" (*Ibid.* 154). It is a paranoid dynamics that switches its mimetism, and thereby "brand[s] the intimate friend as foe" (*Ibid.*). In this article, I transpose their concept to masculinity, i.e., mimicry here is a mimetic interaction that protects the individual by killing life and its vivid expression through adaptation to the masculinity game. In my view, masculine mimicry threatens individuation and inhibits a good life for all.

Right from the beginning, the possible threat is revealed: one of the dancers, Ross Hounslow, has a nightmare. Being one of the two tops (the other one is Robert Tannion) in the hierarchy, Ross fears his tender relation to a sex doll will be discovered. He dreams of men approaching, even creeping in archaic movements. This threat comes closer and closer, shaking him awake. He quickly forgets the awful dream as the sex doll lies beside him. Ross starts touching the sex doll, and we can see his tenderness, his love projected onto the doll. The scene's suggestions are ambivalent, as it also displays misogyny and female objectivation (especially as his girlfriend is calling, and he does not pick up the phone, preferring contact to a plastic phantasy to human reality). It is his emotions, his sensibility, and his naive playfulness that he fears being discovered. And his premonitions come true in the end when his secret becomes a true source of amusement to the others. Liam Steel has by chance witnessed Ross' particular liking through the window. He presents the doll, distracting the others from bullying Achilles in the pub's courtyard. Immediately, the presence of the doll takes the masculine dynamics to a higher level. Ross tries to rescue his beloved item. Defending the doll escalates the humiliating game; the others make fun of him by harassing and forcing Achilles to have sex with Ross' love object, the atmosphere suggests this will end in a gang bang. But Robert kills the

Figure 1 – A scene depicting masculine mimicry in the recreation 2020 of *Enter Achilles*, a work by Lloyd Newson (DV8 Physical Theatre, from the 2020 production by Rambert/Sadler's Wells; photo by Hugo Glendinning).

doll, which seems part of the game and may serve to confirm the rules to Ross. Both the emotional bound with the doll and the revelation of a tender, instead of rude porn, relation leaves the loving Ross alone, banished from the masculine bond and suffering an emotional breakdown. Masculinity does not allow tender bonds; masculinity has to prove a violent attitude towards sex. Having tender sex with a fetish, a sex doll, is too queer.

Enter Achilles presents us with the insight that masculinity does not reside within the individual; it is an interdependent attitude that confirms the masculinity of each other (and oneself). There are coercive dynamics that force individuals to participate in a shared ritual. Mimicry's dynamics is nourished by reproduction and symbiosis (Wulf 1989: 103), where reproduction necessitates a certain competence and skill. This competence is grounded on an "external intention" (Adorno *et al.* 2002: 159) that easily objectifies the other; in this way, it already inflicts violence on this other (*Ibid.*). The reproduction of masculinity, however, needs a dedication and an awareness of what must be done. Therefore, masculinity can be conceived as a belief system that, in fostering "short-winded" (*Ibid.* 163) thoughts, gets "socialized" (*Ibid.* 162). Within, masculinity works as an "intoxication

of the communal ecstasy" (*Ibid.*). Symbiosis is the reward, it is masculinity's nourishment – nourishing the dynamics as well as the individual who gets incorporated into the group. Having proven a successful mastership of masculine movement, belonging to the group is secured for a while; however, the belonging does not exhibit a caring quality, but a quality of obedience to the rules.

Of course, it is not just about appropriating and perfecting masculine movement. In *Enter Achilles*, we witness this right from the beginning. Liam, who, again and again, succeeds in incorporating himself into the group before falling out again as the piece unfolds, prepares himself in the pub's toilet for the evening. He exemplifies the ever-present hierarchical order within a homosocial group (Baker *et al.* 2018: 5). Liam is nervous: he concentrates on his appearance while checking his face in the mirror. On the window ledge there is a pint. Liam moves very consciously in a specific manner to take hold of the glass. This is a rehearsal of masculine movement, believing mistakenly that mastering the moves and poses guarantees belonging to the group. Nevertheless, it may serve the purpose of deception for a while (to deceive oneself and others). Liam takes a few sips, helping himself to some liquid courage. Obviously, he is preparing for what awaits him outside, the struggle of belonging, the fear of being bullied – a dynamics that treats others with contempt by means of laughter, making jokes about their actions (Adorno *et al.* 2002: 151f). The next shot shows him leaving the toilet from a perspective taken from the pub's bar. There is a mirror where some of the other dancers are enjoying themselves in superficially adjusting and thereby demonstrating their appearances. In this scene, we know they belong to the group. The adjustment of their clothes, the controlling touch of their shaved cheeks and chins, and the masculine posing are nothing more than a demonstration, not a rehearsal as in Liam's case. Not being disturbed, being left alone in front of the mirror, *and* just being side by side with the others, proves the privilege of belonging.

Masculine belonging boasts a feature of uniformity. Its movements are a characteristic mark and must be recognizable. But it has to occur in the right form at the right moment. Even though the dancers exhibit different movements, they make use of a specific repertoire that frames different movements as angular and block-like, rather big and sweeping – with an aura of seeming self-confidence. In the movie, this is not too obvious at the beginning, even though the gestures are directly comprehended as

masculine movement. This form of movement gets challenged to a certain extent with the appearance of Achilles, as we see that his movements contrast not only physically but also meaningfully with masculinity. First, as he slides in, entering the bar with a respectful distance towards the others and with an expression of curiosity, avoiding bodily contact with the rambling men, the others do not take note of him. His soft and small movements are not perceived, especially as the others are focused entirely on the masculine dynamics, which shows the interdependent character of masculine relations. From Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2012), we learn that their movements follow a shared motor space, which describes the immediate realization of bodily knowledge through the body in space of what it perceived as essential in a situation (101). But suddenly, he is seen, as his material body is right there in the pub. As a stranger, he becomes the target of the other‘s curiosity; one can see that he is attractive to the others. He has and does something that the others sense and restrict in themselves (Adorno *et al.* 2002: 149). Their attempts to establish contact with him stem from the desire to classify him, to find out if he adapts to the masculine dynamics. Since Achilles does not follow their suggestions, the men intensify their efforts to get him under their control. It seems to become their mission to subject and subordinate him by breaking his type. This scene shows that masculinity constitutes itself by establishing an atmosphere of latent threat; an ambience of menacing physical violence is created in order to find out whether or not the intruder adapts, becomes intimidated, or possibly claims (a new) leadership. Making use of a submissive repertoire within the masculine, which is part of the intussusceptive mode of masculinity, would secure a place, but with his queerness, Achilles keeps on bending the norms.

The movement logic of masculinity seems to follow a paranoid uniformity, with the result that all-male associations find a fertile ground to persist (Adorno *et al.* 2002: 163). Considering the paranoid notion of masculinity, we can describe it as a vicious cycle of self-referentiality: everything is done to nourish itself in order to maintain the association. In *Enter Achilles*, we find some very delicate scenes that showcase that the slightest suspicion menaces the sense of belonging. Jordi Cortés Molina, the first person to become aware of Achilles‘ presence, finds himself seduced twice by Achilles‘ playfulness. While the other dancers follow dance movements that encapsulate them as a group which behaves masculinely, Achilles offers an individual interpretation of the music, hopping, moving smoothly. Jordi‘s

awareness seems to turn towards Achilles quite sympathetically, which is highlighted by the fact that he does not join in the bullying of Achilles. His expression shows that he questions the behavior of both misogynist and homophobic actions. His withdrawal from the group's bullying of Achilles is punished by Robert, who readjusts Jordi's legs. Since he is apparently not sitting in a masculine way, he must be disciplined. Subordination might then be the way back into the group; otherwise there will be expulsion. As Achilles escapes the pub and the others pursue him, Jordi stays behind. The following scene is paradigmatic as it shows the ritual notion of mimicry in group dynamics (Wulf 1989: 109). Even though he is alone, Jordi tries to remasculinize himself by instrumentalizing the binding marker, the beer. He pours out his pint, wets the floor, and rolls around in the liquid – a liquid that is used to mark bodies with masculinity. As one of modern civilization's way of marking a territory – as the film portrays other items, like a soccer ball – it seems to offer the protagonists the possibility to reterritorialize themselves within masculinity by making use of the ritual item. Jordi wants to use this procedure to erase his misbehavior in terms of masculinity and to protect his rank within the crowd. Jordi likes to believe that a ritual marker promises that belonging is just that easy; that bathing in the masculine liquid washes off the suspicion.

The second scene causes fewer problems for Jordi, since he is not associated with Achilles, but shows the intussusceptive character of mimetic actions, thus the new possibility of discovering different ways of moving (Nixon 2019: 110). As Achilles' escape goes on, he reappears for a short time in the pub before leaving again through the window. Jordi follows him and finds him outside. A soccer ball comes from somewhere. This can be seen as a metaphor for the seduction, the invitation to deviate through and to transpose the meaning of a typically masculine item (there is a significant amount of literature about the gendered territorialization of concepts and objects that are in themselves neutral, e.g., gender expression (Halberstam 1998), sexual identity (Stoltenberg 2000), trauma (Walsh 2010), fashion (Moore 2018)). Achilles entices Jordi to play with the soccer ball, but not like one *should* play with a soccer ball. Achilles plays with the ball with his hands, arms, and the parts of his upper body. The movement is a fluid one, impeding the broken movements we know from soccer players when they try to trick their opponents. In this way, Achilles snatches the soccer ball away from the competitive battle setting. After getting the soccer ball,

Jordi enjoys playing with it differently. He learns to use the soccer ball in "a form of extended engagement of the self", which "encourages receptivity to new ways of doing" (Nixon 2019: 111). Obviously, it is fun and causes pleasure. This insight remains with him, and he wants to pass it on to Jeremy James, but Jeremy does not even notice the offer, instead grabbing the ball and playing with it in a soccer-like fashion. The masculine intussusceptive mode only activates a rejeu of respective soccer movements. The soccer ball, a thing that might serve multiple uses, that might open various worlds, falls back into the realm of masculinity.

The lack of openness is in fact the paranoid structure of masculinity. This structure is established in the body schemas that make respective action available within the masculine dynamics. The exclusive notion of hegemonic body schemas manifests itself through the way in which movement and its meaning are performed. The phenomenological concept of the body schema (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012: 100f; Gallagher 2013: 26f; Gallagher *et al.* 2012: 164ff) explains human actions by what an individual has found and finds when moving or learning to move in this world. It not only encompasses motor movements but also the cultural layer of movement, i.e., its meaning. It thereby creates an experiential field that a specific situation activates in the individual in order to find an appropriate act. The body schema is not fixed; it constantly constitutes itself by being in the world and repeatedly (re-)appropriating the world. In this way, it designs the horizon of actions and is thus decisive for inclusion or exclusion. The body schema may be understood as a person's repertoire for acting in a situation. To avoid possible misunderstandings, the repertoire is not comparable to having different acts available like a book on a shelf. It is the synthetized experiential history of the individual in interaction. In this synthetizing process, each situation is a new one, as the context and the present people and things are always different. Thereby, each individual encounters new experiences, which again synthesize with what is already available in the body schema. As Waldenfels (2000) suggests with the term *virtuality* for acting, the function of the body schema is constituted in such a way that it projects possible ways to act into the future. It thereby realizes the actual act which supposedly fits the situation best (199-200). To the person, all acts feel normal or *natural*. Sara Ahmed, here, stresses the notion of orientation (2006: 25-27) to describe spatially that a certain orientation evidently causes us to lose sight of the overall context.

We are facing forwards and do not perceive what resides out of sight. Put this way, some bodies and objects appear, and others do not. Orientation is understood both towards where the body is oriented and what kind of possible individual expressions (in her book she focusses on sexualized, gendered, and racialized identities) are within one's naturalness. We here find a similarity between intussusception and the body schema, as in both concepts there is a situational and corporeal mode of action that responds to an underlying freedom or restriction of the concrete acts available to the individual.

When the others do not notice Achilles at the beginning – interpreting this now through the lens of the body schema – he does not appear to the others in the first move because he does not participate in masculine mimicry. Only the lack of a certain masculine-labeled naturalness, therefore marking him as an alien element, causes the others to take notice of him. The paradox he presents to masculinity – being different and staying in the pub – does not help to classify Achilles; consequently, he is subjected to the masculine dynamics that seeks to force him to participate in the mimicry. Here, the paranoid process of masculinity comes to the fore. The coercion that is implied in paranoid thinking and acting creates a certain kind of attitude; these men "can only endlessly repeat their own self, which has been alienated from them as an abstract mania" (Adorno *et al.* 2002: 157). Taking this quote literally, one could say that masculinity cuts the connections of individuals to themselves, installing a remote-controlled behavior that is fueled by masculine dynamics. Within their repertoire, there is nothing to be found that might serve for acting differently. A pause in order to think, an interest in the other, etc. does not work within the paranoid set because the coercion to act masculinely inhibits one from breaking the rules. The coercion to act masculinely occasions immediate, fearful acts within the body schema that establishes masculine dynamics as the main determining factor of a situation. Seen from a moment's glance, the situation would also allow for different acts, too. Masculinity "seizes whatever comes its way and, wholly disregarding its peculiarity, incorporates it in its mythic web" (*Ibid.*). Since queerness threatens masculinity, it cannot be recognized as a peculiarity, which is being different and acting differently. It is a threat that has to be incorporated again and again. As "[t]he closed circle of perceptual sameness becomes a surrogate for omnipotence" (*Ibid.*), queerness has to be extinguished. Omnipotent masculinity has no means to escape its

closed circle. Yet "[i]n the abyss of uncertainty, which every objectifying act must bridge, paranoia installs itself" (159). As an internalized homosocial dynamics, masculinity is "fraught with danger, the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition (Kimmel 2004: 187). Thus, queerness always unsettles as it does not act coherently and stereotypically.

Apart from being coercive dynamics, masculinity is very well sedimented within human history. Adorno's and Horkheimer's notion of mimicry as adaptation towards death is a double-layered argument. On the one hand, mimicry produces puppets, dead figures which are animated by masculine dynamics but are never individuated. On the other hand, mimicry as natural behavior resides in the sediment (Wulf 1989: 104) in so far as the danger of being expelled, harassed, or even killed is averted by this kind of intussusceptive mode. Christoph Wulf speaks of the contagious character of mimicry, that addresses the intrinsic violence. Although masculine mimicry compels one to adapt and conform, there is also a need to distinguish oneself, which presupposes competition and rivalry (*Ibid.* 107-108). Adaption and differentiation are related paradoxically, i.e., adaptation does not allow differentiation (and individuation); thus, the differentiating tendency to set oneself apart from the others is an invitation to acting violently towards others. This intrinsic violence installs a hierarchy. Nevertheless, competitive violence in masculine actions, even though it might mean dropping a certain rank when one loses the game, is what is the masculine marker. Refusing to compete or participate in the rivalry expels one from the masculine universe.

In *Enter Achilles,* this position is primarily held by Robert. Throughout the film, he is the leader, if not the commander of the bunch. His behavior is a constant invitation to compete: we witness in several scenes that he incites the others to harassment and violence (e.g., when Achilles' movements at the beginning of the film are used to feminize him and to threaten him sexually); he incites the other men to competition (e.g., the push-up-scene that is designed to re-establish the bond among the group by doing masculine body work); he embodies judgment and correction (e.g., when Jordi gets disciplined after being found to be suspicious); and he embodies the authority of speaking and executing a verdict (e.g., when he kills the sex doll after expelling Ross, the number two in the hierarchy, for his unconventional love).

Masculine mimicry, seen this way, is a blunt but complex set of dynamics aimed at violently extinguishing the non-masculine. The non-masculine

threatens male individuals because it is feared as a disintegrative force (Pechriggl 2018: 183-184). It is not an individuating power, but it is connected with severe, negative affectivity towards oneself, which leads to the fact that all the non-masculine tendencies within the individual must be extinguished. As this ambiguity of life and death cannot be borne, the affects are vented on everybody considered non-masculine. Putting on a performance of one's own masculinity is a reproduction of what the sediment and the masculine actions have done to the individual, a reproduction of what this individual has had to bear in his life. This disciplining tendency constantly cuts off the move towards individuation in the individual (*Ibid.* 186).

Queer Achilles. A symbol of life

Even though Achilles' queerness is what endangers him, at the same time, it represents life expressed through vividness, interest in others, and a playful enjoyment in being and connecting with others. Throughout the whole piece, Achilles transposes meaning, putting on a masterpiece of being in contact with others, relating to what they are doing, but doing it differently, and even performing parodies of what is done within the group or of the kind of bullying action with which he is threatened. Even though depicted as a superhero, Achilles shows us that it is not about escaping masculinity's dynamics but about finding a way of dealing with it. In Muñozian terms, Achilles disidentifies, as he "manag[es] and negotiat[es] historical trauma and systemic violence" (1999: 161).

In my view, Achilles' main power is seduction. Here, seduction is not only understood as something that concerns sexual aspirations, but rather as Eros, which always, on any (psycho)individual layer, castrates the "believing itself almighty Ego, which is the price to pay for the gain in knowledge and the desire for truth"[4] (my translation, Pechriggl 2018: 49-50). Throughout the piece, Achilles demonstrates *what else* may be available in a situation, which, at the same time, can be viewed as a tactical misrecognition (Muñoz 1999: 168-169) of masculinity. He thereby creates meaning, creates movement, and creates different modes of connecting. But, at the same time, almost logically as part of the misrecognition, Achilles castrates masculinity. The most obvious point here is that

4 „Der Eros hat immer auch mit einer ‚Kastration' des sich allmächtig wähnenden Ego zu tun, die der für den Erkenntnisgewinn und die Lust an der Wahrheit zu begleichende Preis ist."

he creates room for self-expression. Achilles does this mimetically by taking up what the others do but altering the way of doing it. This example clearly shows that one cannot simply escape from masculinity's dynamics, but it may still be possible to bend its rigidity, decipher its coercive force, and transpose it to a different mode of connecting. Achilles breathes life into the connections and thus into the individuals, as he makes the others following his invitation to dance to the Bee Gees' *Staying Alive* – squealing, shaking their hips, gesticulating wildly and taking off their clothes. What happens there is the opposite of mimicry's faking death; it is mimesis: "Mimesis aims at transformation, not the reproduction of the ever same. It is not a means for putting experience in order, but the competence that enables alienated subjects to experience the other/the world"[5] (my translation, Fuchs 2011: 61). Sabine Fuchs' understanding (as we also find in many other reflections on mimesis) does not suggest that mimesis as active mover is a fully conscious process. Her concept draws on Elin Diamond (1997), who considers psychoanalysis and the unconscious. The mimetic force interweaves the psychoanalytical forces of acting out and action (as also conceived in Pechriggl 2018).

In the context of unconscious acting out and conscious action, we find a thought that Diamond refers to as Berthold "Brecht's alienation-effect" (1997: xiv), which is a different and more strategic understanding of alienation than the one offered by Adorno and Horkheimer. In my view, queerness alienates masculinity with every move; it cannot do other than "'ruin' and 'destroy' [...] conventional mimetic practice" (*Ibid.*). The conventionality here is masculine mimicry. The queer use of one's body alienates the supposedly essential masculine; an invitation to those who invigorate masculinity "to move through and beyond imaginary identifications, rethink their own differences and contradictions" (*Ibid.*). Fundamental to the V-effect (alienation-effect) is the work on the *gestus*, i.e., gesture, which bridges intussusception and the body schema as it combines the movement and oral foundations of common expression. Gestus points at society's history as well as the interpersonally readable expressions of social class in the bodily acts of any individual. It describes the full repertoire of bodily communication that is made available for a specific

5 „Mimesis zielt auf einen Wandel ab, nicht auf die Reproduktion des Selben [...]. Sie ist kein Mittel zur Ordnung von Erfahrung, sondern eine Fähigkeit, die es entfremdeten Subjekten ermöglicht, das Andere/die Welt zu erfahren."

situation, which is why Brecht (2018 [1964]) "places […] the traditional understanding of gestures, facial expressions and speech intonation [into an intersubjective relationship]" (35).

In *Enter Achilles*, both Jordi and Liam – at least in some scenes – are led there by Achilles' seduction. Jordi obviously questions the behavior of the other men. Liam completely forgets about the masculine game when he accepts Achilles' invitation to swing on a rope and to climb acrobatically. In both protagonists, we can see the ambivalence of belonging. On the one hand, Jordi apparently comprehends what occurs in these dynamics; there is expression of sadness (he has to leave something behind that he has appreciated so far); there is bad conscience (he believes himself part of a group that obviously acts against his moral values and his newly established affective bonds); but the joy of newly acquainted playfulness interrupts the expression of withdrawal. Liam, on the other hand, cannot step back from his seemingly naive and childish attitude, which he wants to use to connect with the bunch, e.g., when he invites the others to play the roles of Olivia Newton John and John Travolta while singing to the *Grease* hit *Summer Nights*. He does not realize that this openness to impersonating different genders puts him in conflict with masculine coercion; fun within the masculine provides a very narrow range of activities.

Achilles' actions, which are permeated by his seductive powers, may stand for what Elin Diamond expects from mimetic transformation (1997: XV). Again it is Berthold Brecht's concept which serves as a model, explaining that a "gestus traces how humans relate to one another» (Brecht 2018 [1964]: 707), and that "the *gestus* is the stage sign (verbal and/or gestural) that reveals historical relations – the personal/social contradictions implied in the play's fable. To read the sign or image against bourgeois myths of historical continuity is to see, as a transformative act of cognition, the possibilities emerging of another reality, what is not there, but could be" (Diamond 1997: 145). I would like to substitute the word masculine for what Brecht and Diamond refer to here as bourgeois. Queering the (behavioral) sign or image against masculine myths of historical continuity – which can stand for the persistent notion of masculinity – is to see, as a transformative act of moving, the possibilities emerging of another (queer) reality, what is not there, but could be. Achilles symbolizes queer futurity or, coined differently also in Muñozian terms, queer virtuosity: as it "offers the potential for a certain escape […] virtuosity offers a certain

defection of our current system" (Muñoz 2019: 178).

But Achilles, and thus as other queer people, is not a stranger to masculine movement; he knows all too well how these dynamics work. The difference in his way of using these dynamics is to alienate them, to "estrange the social gestus underlying every incident." (Brecht 2018 [1964]: 494). In *Enter Achilles,* we experience a very nice, though ambivalent, parody of masculine violence. Jeremy is stopped by Achilles, who wants him to give back the soccer ball. When Jeremy refuses to do so, Achilles intussusceptively falls back on the masculine, but estranges and queers it. He still takes advantage of its power, since Jeremy is not able to realize that there is no concrete danger apart from the symbolic danger which is foregrounded in this scene. Achilles menaces Jeremy with a can of shaving foam and a razor. Jeremy is scared and lets Achilles rip off his clothes. The latter quickly applies the foam, threatening Jeremy with turning him into a woman by shaving off the little hair he has anyway on his chest and legs – a suggestive castration. Achilles leaves him on the floor like a victim of rape, with his buttocks naked and some foam in his posterior rugae. What makes this violent scene parodic, strange, and serious at the same time is that queer nonsense takes place. First, the parodic, the real danger to men of losing their masculinity through a queer menace, an assault with shaving foam; second, the weird, the threat of having one's masculinity shaved off through effemination; third, the serious, because the scene is an instantiation of violence as masculine power.

Effemination here points towards several aspects that endanger masculinity (Dyer 2004: 22; Halberstam 1998: 1). It shows the hierarchy in the binary world. Losing one's anatomical sex, the penis, is not only an injury and loss on the mere physical level, but it also means the severe loss of an entire world, that presupposes a penis to belong, no matter if it is covered or displayed. Effeminated beings, whether anatomically female or not, constitute what many feminist thinkers have referred to as *the other*. Within this hierarchical disbalance, all the movements, behaviors, and expressions that do not correspond or reconfirm the masculine are relegated to a secondary, already excluded position. The razor scene remains ambivalent because of the violence depicted and the shaving action that uses effemination as an instrument. However, I would like to offer an alternative reading of this scene, one in which the depicted process of effemination offers a possible way out of masculine mimicry. In my view,

effemination does not mean a devaluation of the other, as the word suggests in a conventional understanding. Instead, I see the other as an individual that comes into being by deviating from masculine mimicry. This way one is automatically subjected to effemination – everybody who does not participate in this deadly mimetic process self-evidently becomes the other. The other could be a valuable position, as in the end, it is an *other person* that is seen. This means a re-appropriation of otherness that makes available different forms of connections, caring forms of belonging and social dynamics beyond anatomical designation, sexual relations or identities – and additionally a possible way for solidarities to arise between different groups.

Achilles is a queer, effeminate superhero, one who uses an otherness reminiscent of Brecht's *gestus* throughout the piece. Otherness here operates as a gestural form that points to how seemingly natural masculinity objectifies, as the other never fits into a supposedly natural norm, something Brecht (2005) called commodification (243). Achilles' superpowers seem to lie in othering everything he encounters. Here *othering* is used in different sense than that usually applied in queer-feminist thought; it is read against the grain. It relates to what Erving Goffmann called stigmaphile response (1963: 31). Knowing and having grasped the impossibility of corresponding a certain standard may turn out to be a possible way of doing, acting, moving differently, since it is clear that one can never succeed. Instead, it suggests a fundamental understanding of otherness that values being different; another person is *an other than I am*. Therein also lies one possible way of dealing with and finally accepting differences.

On the level of movement, doing differently is to allow smooth movements, to allow contact with one's own skin, to shorten the vocal cords, to circle the hips, to connect to others – to establish a connection with one's full range of expressions. On the level of meaning, doing differently demands casting aside the frames of gendered categorization and being open to other expressions of belonging instead of following a mimicry-like adaptation to the ever same – ultimately opening towards mimetic thinking and acting that builds connections and acknowledges the difference of the other.

The masculine sediment. A conclusion

Elin Diamond offers a striking quote: "To seem womanish in behavior is to become womanish." (1997: vi). Masculinity as a self-centered force

persists in a mode of self-affirmation. Masculinity cannot reside in a single individual; it follows an idea, or more precisely, a stereotype. Individuals cannot mobilize this stereotype by and in themselves, for it is not to be found within them: masculinity is in need of the "womanish". The expulsion of *mis*behaving individuals, the suppression of one's own "womanish" tendencies, and the inevitable constitution of those as targets of violence or affective unloading (Pechriggl 2018: 186), makes masculinity itself come to life and be installed, at least seemingly for a moment, *in* the individual. It is a permanent process of appropriation, that is slippery in so far as once it seems achieved, it is already gone. It therefore needs constant repetition. The otherness is defined by what does not match – be it a part of the body, or behavior, or style, and so forth. Devaluing women in general and effeminating those who do not conform is part of masculine mimicry. We discover masculinity as a practice which draws on and thereby actualizes its sedimented meaningful actions (*Ibid.* 177). Masculinity still plays a major role in societies. Socio-anatomical males are drilled a certain way that results in them only finding their places in this world by falling back on these masculine dynamics. Otherwise, they become the first targets of the intrinsic violence. But we have to be alert and *care*-ful. Masculine mimicry does not only take place in social contexts like those depicted in *Enter Achilles*; it can wear many sophisticated disguises. Masculinity persists even though looks and scenes change and different apparently egalitarian, activities become possible – the tendency to mimicry reveals it.

The particular type of pub in *Enter Achilles* might have changed its features here and there, as in the meantime a quarter of a century has passed. But it might serve as an example that sedimentation also creates sociocultural places, or "culturally communicating containers, in which psyches arrange themselves newly, transfigure themselves in their bodies and situate themselves – also in time" (my translation, Pechriggl 2018: 181)[6]. However, the film ends at dawn. A *new* day begins. Achilles, the queer superhero, walks on the roof of "The Plough". The pub's name now suggests that masculinity is both ploughed into bodies and ploughs social settings – all the time. Nonetheless, there is Achilles on the rooftop, a queer demigod

6 „… sie sind kulturell kommunizierende Gefäße, in denen die Psychen sich immer neu arrangieren, sich über ihre Körper transfigurieren und neu – auch in der Zeit – verorten."

moving freely and being moved by a morning breeze. A Muñozian utopia that suggests that queerness is able to defeat the masculine, just by using one's fingers to symbolize the beat of an eyelash.

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