

# eating glass

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curated by  
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## WOULD IT BE QUEER TO WRITE THIS ESSAY ABOUT WRITING THIS ESSAY?

Okay. Since it's a queer show let me open with some Radical Vulnerability (Transparency?)<sup>1</sup> by making A Disclosure that is probably obnoxious to make at the beginning of an essay about glass: I don't really know anything about glass. I got interested in it the same way I got interested in a lot of things (astrology, oat milk ice cream, affect theory) i.e. I had a crush on a woman. She arrived at our first date in a furious mood: the manager of the gallery she worked for was preventing a queer glass artist from selling some exceptionally beautiful butt plugs in their store. *It's ridiculous*, she told me, *because glass is extremely gay*.

Avoiding my work the next day, I google "glass" and "gay," hoping to find a good essay to send her (i.e. the main way I know how to flirt). It turns out that Queer Glass is a subject in its academic infancy (meaning that a lot of much-better-than-academic content is being created for the Instagram stories of the artists who are actually part of the Queer Glass Community,<sup>2</sup> but the Wikipedia entry for "Queer Glass" keeps getting deleted because it doesn't have enough Official Citations). Anyway, the first thing that comes up is that glassblowers call the entrances of their furnaces "glory holes," which, sure. There's also a contestant on a Netflix-produced glassblowing reality TV show, *Blown Away*, who talks about glass being fundamentally nonbinary, i.e. fluid, changeable, both a solid and a liquid at once, and therefore a good medium for exploring queer experience.<sup>3</sup> *An amorphous solid*.

1. I'M SORRY i will resort to this kind of wink-and-nod only twice in this essay.
2. For e.g. just look at the Instagram entries from any of the brilliant artists in this show, who are far better at talking about this than I am: @broni.sargeson / @louisgrantcreative / @wlucyw
3. Check out Grace Whiteside – their project 'Homosilica: Glass is Gay' opened at the Museum of Art & Design in NYC in 2021, combining performance art with hot glass to investigate these ideas.

In conversations about queerness, amorphousness is unavoidable. Not only does every queer person experience their queerness differently, it's also necessarily a self-reflexive concept – because *Queering As A Process* involves defining things against or beyond the norms that already exist, it becomes something ever-expanding. There's a lot to talk about, When We Talk About Queerness, because we're always queering it. <sup>4</sup>

And here in the essay is where I start getting stuck, because there is so much to talk about, and like a lot of overthinksy, autotheory-adjacent queer ladies (i.e. any woman who has sent an essay to another woman as a form of flirting), I can be guilty of really getting into, shall we say, Queer Theory Buzzwords. <sup>5</sup> You know what I mean: for glass, you can definitely talk a lot about fluidity and amorphousness, but you could also go for transparency or opacity or reflectiveness instead, <sup>6</sup> or you can talk about the idea of perfection/imperfection and *The Queer Art of Failure*. <sup>7</sup> *Liminality* is also a good one – glass in windows, or objects shaped like portals – queerness is about *in-betweenness*? <sup>8</sup> You can reference Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, but then you might have to dodge defining

4. Queering as a process of constant deconstruction, “something we do, rather than something we are” (Julia Scheele), or, always about “unbecoming, unmaking and undoing,” (Louis Grant).

5. It isn't really my fault, I have a Virgo moon.

6. If this sounds interesting, a nice read is ‘Afterthoughts on Queer Opacity’ by Nicholas de Villiers, published in *Invisible Culture Journal* in 2022.

7. “I believe in low theory in popular places, in the small, the inconsequential, the antimonumental, the micro, the irrelevant; I believe in making a difference by thinking little thoughts and sharing them widely. I seek to provoke, annoy, bother, irritate, and amuse; I am chasing small projects, micropolitics, hunches, whims, fancies...The desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production around which I would like to map a few detours.” Jack Halberstam, ‘The Queer Art of Failure’ (2011, Duke University Press).

8. For more on in-betweenness, I recommend ‘Making the invisible, visible: Exploring liminality of mind and body through glass’, written by Naomi Hunter, Edith Cowan University, in 2009.

affect theory.<sup>9</sup> A better way to go might be to talk about sexuality by way of orientation – like, how can objects be oriented towards or away from each other, and how does this context transform them?<sup>10</sup> And if work in the show is designed to be arranged and rearranged, how is that a metaphor for queerness as a political orientation – a way of stretching the imagination towards different possibilities?<sup>11</sup>

All of this works very well as cute foyer chat, i.e. a great preface to asking a woman at an art opening on a date.<sup>12</sup> But what if, hypothetically, you pull this trick enough times that you end up being asked to write an essay for a glass show? And that once you start writing it all down, it starts feeling kind of... wrong? Somehow inauthentic, like, too academic, like, that these references might catch the light nicely, but that ultimately your work is, you know... composed of hot air?<sup>13</sup> You talk to a friend who writes art essays for a living. *Have you tried using the Hamburger Method? She asks you. It's like, the introduction and the conclusion are the buns, and each idea is a different*

9. Although, as it is, my favourite relevant Eve K-S is this: “Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, troublant, relational and strange...an open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning.” (from *Tendencies*, 1993, Duke University Press).

10. In ‘Queer Phenomenology’ (2006, Duke University Press) Sara Ahmad uses the analogy of objects arranged on a table to talk about sexual orientation. It makes me think about the way that the pieces in the show communicate, the ways that they will reflect each other, cast shadows, magnify or distort, the way that one colour might foreground and transform another etc.

11. In his essay ‘Queer Glass: A Personal History’, available online via Washington Glass School, artist Tim Tate both gives a history of the queer glass movement, and asserts that art must be political in order to constitute queer work – an interesting read and an interesting debate.

12. I recommend you try it? Is there someone cute at the show?

13. Sorry.

*ingredient on the burger: Amorphousness is the meat, Liminality is the cheese, etc.* Listening to her talk, you begin to feel total despair. Like, that the Hamburger Method might be a framework that you (and gay glass) might be ill-suited to fit. Hypothetically.

*Using all these queer theory buzzwords is feeling gross for some reason, I tell Tegan, and I just absolutely cannot bring myself to do the Hamburger Method.* We are workshoping the first essay that I wrote for her glass show, i.e. not this essay, because this essay is actually the second essay that I wrote, after discovering that the first essay felt wrong. *Remember that I asked you because I wanted someone who isn't from a glass OR art writing background?* Tegan tells me. *If it's feeling inauthentic, why not just write about your own queerness?*

So, okay, a second disclosure: I don't even know that much about my own queerness. Which is to say that it is definitely something liquid, amorphous, something that transforms in different lights. It is also something that can feel very fragile. When Tegan suggests that I write about my personal experience of being queer, my first thought is I would literally rather eat glass. I am desperate enough to avoid Writing About My Own Queerness that I actually spend a whole day watching the Oscars broadcast, and then right afterwards I end up rewatching *Everything Everywhere All At Once*<sup>14</sup> (a movie which, notably, does not censor its butt plugs.) But without meaning to, i.e. in the gentle way that you find ideas unfolding every time you interact with good art, I find myself wondering about whether there are multiverses in which my family are able to find my queerness acceptable.

Growing up in a small, fundamentalist religious community, my experience of

my queerness was similar to one that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “the glass closet,” i.e. it was something that everyone around me could see, but that nobody would name. Instead, there was a hovering sense of my general wrongness - a community-wide acknowledgement that many of my personality traits (those that I now see as connected to being queer) were deeply undesirable in some way – defects to be solved, melted down, polished away. It’s knowledge that crunches between the teeth, leaves shards in the gums. It’s knowledge that can’t be metabolized. It is not very fun to talk about. It is actually a lot more fun to float around using queer theory buzzwords.

This is the thing, right — *defining yourself against or beyond norms* often comes, first of all, from the discovery that there are norms that you fundamentally don’t fit. There’s pain there. But looking at queer art is a reminder that this pain is only the first step – that queerness is a process with transformation at its heart, that it contains the intent to expand, to reshape, to always keep reshaping. That instead of grinding yourself down, you choose to find something beautiful, something funny, to move towards something that you desire. That queerness is a celebration of non-normative processes, deviance, and imperfection, of failing the assignment as a choice towards authenticity.

*I am not interested in mastery*, Louis tells me. He tells me about making work from scraps of leftover glass, reclaiming and transforming things that have been discarded, and hearing him talk makes a bubble of joy inflate inside my chest. *I am interested in enhancing imperfect details, constructing imperfection with intention*, Broni writes. Studying their work, all the ideas that feel obnoxious and inauthentic when described using words find articulation with delicious, vivid clarity. It’s also a reminder that it takes careful labor and careful attention to

create something that you really love – viewing something from all its possible angles so that each part can be prized, noticing all of those details that exist to be celebrated.<sup>15</sup> This, to me, is pure nourishment.

I get notes from a different friend about the second essay. *I worry that I'm not actually saying anything*, I tell them. *Look, I think it's very queer to say, "this is queer and I won't be taking questions,"* they say, aka, it feels gay to me, which, like, true, but also: not a very good essay.

Hannah de Feyter

2023

15. I think about the movie 'Lady Bird', 2017 directed by Greta Gerwig, where Sister Sarah Joan says, "Don't you think that maybe they're the same thing – love and paying attention?" but also Sara Ahmad (again) who reminds us that "if a world can be what we learn not to notice, noticing becomes a form of political labor."

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