

Performing Fighting Cocks

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Fighting Cocks is live performance that was created specifically for *Commitment Issues*, a night of performances curated by artist Jess Dobkins for the FADO Performance Art Network in Toronto Canada in November 2011

Oasis Aqualounge, 'Toronto's preeminent swinger's club' would be used as the site of the performances. On Oasis's website it is stated that going there is "a great opportunity for ladies to wear slinky dresses, their favorite lingerie, tiny bikinis". They have rooms themed like dungeons or the back of 70's vans and of course they had locker rooms for changing, and this is where I found the location for my performance.

Considering the theme of commitment I drew on my own and other's experiences and expectations of the locker room as a site of both mental and physical trials, and that resulted in a 3 hour towel fight between another person and myself. What became interesting through this process was to focus on aspects of play, violence and queer/queering masculinity. I wanted to push beyond the normative 'masculine' act of snapping towels by inserting two bodies into the space that queered masculinity itself.

I needed to find a person who would be my partner in this performance. The idea of working with an 'unknown' partner was exciting but it was a risk to trust the commitment that this person could give to me and to the piece. I typically do not involve others in my performances for practical and conceptual purposes however his time working with another person was crucial.

This is where Eli D Campanaro comes in. Eli was on a list of potential performance partners that I gathered from contacts in Toronto and when I saw a picture of Eli I knew that was who I wanted to undertake the performance with me. Eli was standing on top of an old tractor wearing a sleeveless white t-shirt, rolled up shorts, brown boots and a cap. Eli recently wrote on Facebook: "...I'm so tired of the bullshit binary boxes that others seem determined to slot me into. Fuck the binary. So what if I have a beard and tits?!? So the fuck what?!?!" This way of thinking can help frame why, after talking with Eli, I understood that both Eli and I represented, each in our own way, how queer masculinities have the potential to take shape.

The performance was an extremely physical and emotional affair. Eli and I alternated between taking turns and simultaneously snapping each other with wet towels that we pulled out from the lockers and then threw onto the floor in a pile. We quickly became extremely bruised, exhausted and exhilarated while hearing opposing shouts from people that moved in and out of the locker room: shouts of support to "hit that guy harder" and admonishments of "stop, you can't go on".

I grew wary of continuing for my sake but more pressing was an anxiety I felt for Eli as I did not think either of us was aware of how brutal this performance could become. Our bodies were obviously suffering.

While there were no moments of rest during the performance there were times when the action slowed down. It was then that I could reflect on the fact that we had set up a 'safe word' system that could ultimately stop this

performance. As the towel snapping continued I considered that fact that neither Eli or I had not used these words and came to the conclusion we had to trust each other to know our own bodies and minds.

This mimicry of a cockfight where birds are conditioned for strength, stamina and trauma ended after three hours as Eli and I gingerly put back on our jeans and shirts and left the locker room.