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ACT LIKE A LICHEN: A QUEER FASHION WORKSHOP

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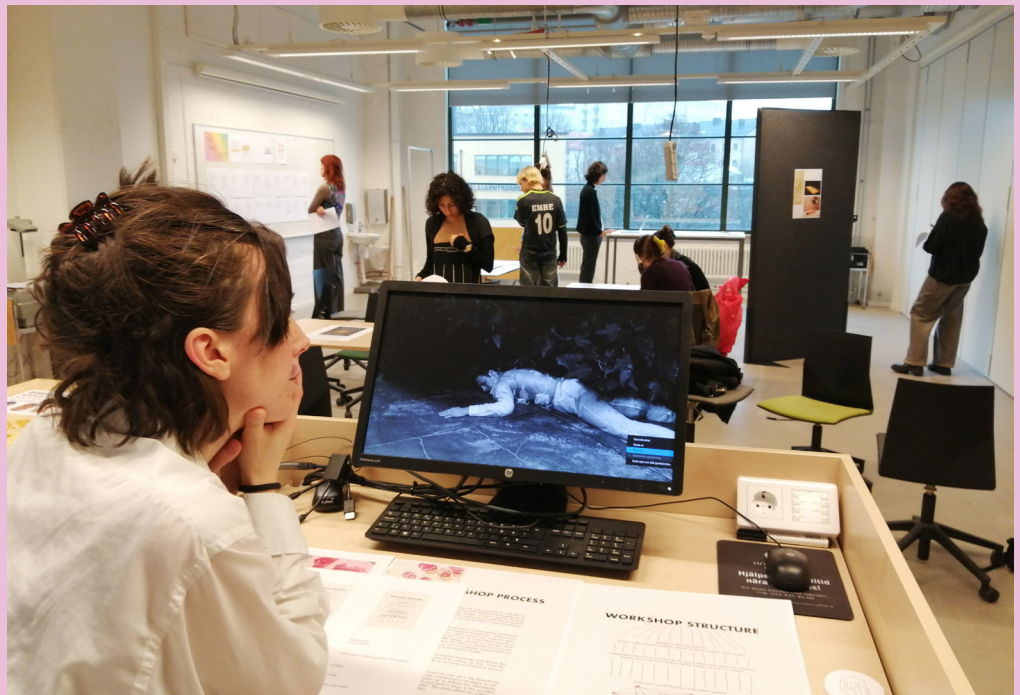
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One of the workshop outcomes: a 45" symbiotic moulage exercise by students Siri Bratt and Josephine Järnhem (left image). Poster of the workshop (right image).

Act like a lichen: A queer fashion workshop is the title of the activity that we held at The Swedish School of Textile – University of Borås (2–5/04/2024), with a group of BA fashion students. An unedited collaboration to cross-fertilize our on-going PhD investigations. This contribution critically discusses such experience. Lichens are a symbiosis of algae or cyanobacteria and fungi, therefore they are emblems of intimate collaboration. In contrast to top-down educational hierarchies, the aim was to test commoning and bio-inspiration as a potential for future design practices, where each participant plays an important part in a network of knowledge, and where the collective discussion, creative conception and research phases are emphasized over the final outcome. Accordingly, using lichens as inspiration to structure the methodology of the workshop has allowed us to develop a collaborative exploration, without providing premeditated briefing or outcome restrictions. The

theoretical framework is informed by the expansion of sensitivity and multi-disciplinary literature inspired by fungi. It is linked with queer methodologies and studies, specifically unfolding Griffiths' "queer theory for lichens" (2015). In this context, queering the fashion design process does not only refer to gender issues but rather appears as a possible strategy to cooperate with complexity, collectivity and undefinition (Brown and Nash, 2010). The contribution aspires also to recover the empirical and spiritual value of making fashion, by guiding towards a design process that sets sensorial and material provocations at the center of attention – here a reference point is to Abramovich "Rhythm 0" performance in 1974. The theory behind the workshop was not made explicit on-site of the activity, yet it was framed according to the provocative design method proposed by Woodward (2020), by setting up in the working space a selection of inputs defined as "materials provocations" (audio, video, images, objects, material samples, texts): an immersive environment that triggers spontaneous learning methods and partnerships. Participants were encouraged to present their project outcomes in a similar format, fostering reflection on their understanding of queer fashion design. As a result, queering the fashion design methodology translates into: creating a shared space of individual experience through physical interaction animated by "material provocations"; inspiring a collective non-premeditated fashion design practice; expecting design-related outcomes that enhance the research process over the final product. In conclusion, the bio-inspired methodology experimented in the workshop aimed to address key questions: how can lichens inspire a queer design attitude? How do they challenge the physical and material boundaries of fashion? Does promoting non-intellectual modes of knowing affect the perception and emotional engagement with a design project?



Workshop initial stage: exploring the "material provocations".

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