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Baking *Cake Daddy*: transforming fat-phobia to fat-positivity with a slice of fat-queer subversive fun to fatten the stage

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Abstract

This article examines the genesis, making processes and performance choices of *Cake Daddy*, a queer and fat-positive live performance work (Belfast, Melbourne, Sydney, 2018-19). The show was made in response to performer-creator Ross Anderson-Doherty's experience of shock and fatphobia in the audience's reaction to his naked fat body in a previous production. This experience—and the unpacking of it—proved a catalyst for Anderson-Doherty to respond in the best way he knows: through performance and his own form of queer performance pedagogy.

Through a Practice as Research methodology we, who are also members of the *Cake Daddy* creative team, trace the queer and “fat” dramaturgical choices within the creation and staging of this fat-positive and celebratory production. This includes the hybrid cabaret-theater form of the production, its (at times) conversational/dialogic mode, the visibility and participation of audiences, the virtuosity of Anderson-Doherty's singing and hosting, the sharing of deeply personal material, the flaunting of fat/ness and fat sexuality onstage and the shared act of committing to a fat-positive community pledge: all of these, we assert, lead to a fat-queer utopian performative moment. Borrowing from queer theory's move to see queer as a verb, rather than a noun, Anderson-Doherty's co-option of fat as a *verb* has brought this forth: Anderson-Doherty “fattens” the space—and in the performance's final moments he teaches audiences to conjugate that verb together as a temporary community.

Key words: fat dramaturgy, emotional dramaturgy, fat and queer performance pedagogy

Introduction

This article examines a pair of performance moments that are key to the making of *Cake Daddy*, a queer and fat-positive live performance work (Belfast, Melbourne, Sydney, 2018-19). The first moment: performer Ross Anderson-Doherty emerges onstage in a jockstrap and apron in a production about HIV and AIDS, titled *Tea (Cell) Dance* (dir. Campbell, Outburst, 2016). He senses shock and fatphobia in the audience's response to his naked fat body. This moment—and the unpacking of it—proved a catalyst for Anderson-Doherty to respond in the best way he knows: through performance and his own form of queer performance pedagogy.

The second moment: it is the final part of *Cake Daddy* and Anderson-Doherty is back in jockstrap and apron singing “Cake Daddy’s Recipe (Fat is a Verb)” —a striking, powerful, stage-owning reimagining of the first image. He is essentially wearing the same costume (though now pink and gold and spectacular), but the impact, the environment and the audience response is completely transformed. This time the audience is primed for celebration of the fat body.

In examining our fat dramaturgy in *Cake Daddy*, several elements emerge as key: the hybrid cabaret-theater form of the production, its (at times) conversational/dialogic mode, the visibility and participation of audiences, the virtuosity of Anderson-Doherty’s singing and hosting, the sharing of deeply personal material, the flaunting of fat/ness and fat sexuality onstage, and the shared act of committing to a fat-positive community pledge—all of which contribute to a fat-queer performance pedagogy.

Combined and composed—in other words, dramaturgically arranged—these elements lead to what we are asserting as a fat-queer “utopian performative” (Dolan 2005) with the showstopper anthem “Cake Daddy’s Recipe: Fat is a Verb.” Theater scholar Jill Dolan proposes “utopian performatives” function as lifting audiences above an oppressive present moment by offering an alternative vision of the world: how it might be better (2005, 6). On one level, dramaturgy is concerned with the selection and ordering of materials within an artistic work but, crucially, it focuses on the relationship of this aesthetic composition with the socio-political and cultural environment it sits within: what impact can this work have? In the case of *Cake Daddy*’s climax (sic), fat, as a *verb*, allows Anderson-Doherty to “fatten” the space: in the performance’s final moments he teaches audiences to conjugate that verb together as a temporary community, via song. Through a fat-queer performance-making and pedagogical approach the audience is invited to experience this moment of celebration with each other and to imagine other ways we might each contribute to bringing forth a better world.

There is very little writing from “within” the making process of fat theater/performance work. Author-editor Jennifer-Scott Mobley’s *Fat Studies* special issue (2019), dedicated to theater and performance, highlights glaring gaps that remain in the field and does vital work to address these. Performer-academic Vikki Chalklin (2016) offers important alignments between fat identity and queer performance by examining her experiences as a participant-competitor in U.K. artist Scottee’s *Hamburger Queen* (2014-2017). In her writing, Chalklin forges theoretical

ties to queer-world making projects (via Muñoz 1999; 2009) and suggests performance that revels in its transgressiveness can be a community-binding experience for fat people. Charlotte Cooper's "Tantalising Glimpses: A LADA Study Room Guide on Fat" (2020) offers an overview of how fat/ness has been addressed through live art and provides a compilation of key fat activist-artists and their works. Lastly, while film documentaries like *Nothing to Lose* (Drinkwater 2018) and *SWAGGA* (Perlak 2016), as well as Scottee's published book *I Made It* (2018), record and respond to live performance work, there are seemingly scant examples of fat activist-artists analyzing their own work through academic writing or Practice as Research. This article can be seen, then, as a response to this gap and to Mobley's call for the further articulation of "Fat Dramaturgy"; that is, for "a collection of writing that seeks to develop a theoretical framework through which to create and understand fat in performance..." (2019, 214)

In this article, as artists, we take a Practice as Research approach (Nelson 2013) combined with (queer) autoethnography (Holman Jones and Harris 2019), or "autotheory" (Nelson 2015). We are writing collaboratively: Belfast-based Ross Anderson-Doherty (writer/performer) and Melbourne-based Alyson Campbell (director/maker) and Jonno Graffam (dramaturg/researcher), jumping queerly, at times, between first and surnames. Mostly this can be read as coming from us all, but at times we quote Ross directly when it is quite clearly his perspective as the performer, and whose lived experience is the basis for the show. In tracing the dramaturgical strategies used to create the performance, particularly those used to frame the final moment of the work, we are also (auto)ethnographically tracing the emotional dramaturgy of Ross's embodied experience in creating and performing the role, and how his pedagogical urges moved and shifted through the encounter with audiences.¹

A catalyzing moment

As a production *Cake Daddy* has a somewhat unusual genesis, in that its eponymous character was created for an earlier collaboration, *GL RY*, a trio of works Anderson-Doherty and Campbell were making with writer Lachlan Philpott in Belfast around the experience of living with HIV (2016).² When gathering input from a group of local People Living with HIV, Campbell and Philpott³ were struck by the recurrent recounting of the desire to sit and have a cup of tea and a "wee bun" – cake – with family and friends, and how often this simple act was a source of anxiety fueled by fear of (and the experience of) rejection. In response to this, tea and cake became the central motifs of *GL RY*.

Cake Daddy the character emerged out of the complex devising period for these works, with Anderson-Doherty and Philpott getting playful in the rehearsal room. Their naughty foolery led to Philpott writing a monologue and a duologue for this newly-formed figure Cake Daddy, and his young lover Pig Boy.

One of the three works, *Tea (Cell) Dance*, was conceived as a "tea-dance": it took place in a church hall, with afternoon tea and cabaret seating. The main impetus was to find a

performance mode that could open up ways for Matthew Cavan, an actor (and drag and cabaret performer) that Anderson-Doherty and Campbell had worked with for some time, to convey his experiences of stigma and anti-HIV prejudice—but also of the support of family and kinship. Anderson-Doherty was the co-host with Cavan in this afternoon event, and it marks a key moment in our collaboration to find a queer form that is not quite cabaret, not theater, not musical theater, not burlesque, not drag, not talk show or panel, not baking show, not game show—but could contain elements of all these in some tricky hybrid.

This eclectic and “short-form” dramaturgy seemed to hold together and “do” something in terms of conveying the impact of stigma in living with HIV, but what caught our attention was the audience response to Anderson-Doherty’s arrival onstage as Cake Daddy. At this point, it is important to note that this was a one-off event and the audience was very clearly the “home crowd”: they were empathetic and there to support a local artist and others sharing his experience. They would also have been drawn by Anderson-Doherty’s central involvement and performance, as a very well-known figure in the Belfast cabaret, panto, theater and queer performance scene (see Campbell and McTighe 2021).⁴

Leading into this particular moment of *Tea (Cell) Dance*, Cavan was singing solo onstage while Ross left the space briefly to change and re-enter as Cake Daddy. As he recalls:

My memories of working with Philpott and Campbell to create the figure Cake Daddy in the *Tea Cell Dance*, 2016, are overwhelmingly positive. The piece that Philpott wrote felt like a beautiful poetics of sexual ethics and the resulting decisions to have me appear naked, apart from a small server’s apron, felt safe and even exciting. In the performance I walked out in nothing but the little apron, holding a rolling pin, fully expecting there to be some laughter at this somewhat ridiculous image. I was met with a mixture of shock and revulsion with a few supportive whoops. The laughter was nervous; straining to be polite. The audience was fully lit and in a reasonably intimate space so their recoil was both visible and audible. My body remembers a fleeting few seconds of intense sensation: my larynx closed and I stopped breathing; the shuddering surge of adrenaline pulling me towards dissociation; the very real sense of being frozen in a moment with no escape. By the time my conscious mind had caught up with the rest of my body I realized the familiarity of the situation: being humiliated in a fat-queer body and exploiting the close physiological connection between stress response and “performance mode” to carry on as required. Immediately after the performance, Campbell confirmed that she had also noted the unexpected strangeness.

The processing of this moment proved a catalyst for Anderson-Doherty and Campbell to initiate a work about fatness and queerness, using Ross’s own lived experience as material, with Philpott as a co-writer and Siobhan Barbour as Stage/Production Manager. They then brought

in Marty Byrne as composer/sound designer, Uruguay-based visual artist Leho De Sosa for costume and set design, and Graffam as dramaturg/researcher. As a team we agreed to keep exploring a form that would build on what we'd been experimenting with dramaturgically in *Tea (Cell) Dance*, and which would embrace Anderson-Doherty's skills as a singer, cabaret host and actor. Something Alyson and Ross particularly love about this form is that it appeals to our pedagogical urges: how could we "teach" fat positivity (or HIV awareness) through performance? What we wrangled with as we progressed through the devising, writing, rehearsing and performing, however, was how to do this teaching in fat-queer ways that would avoid didacticism and instead draw on dramaturgical strategies such as: humor—particularly camp parody; the affective qualities of song; and the mix of Anderson-Doherty's lively wit alongside Philpott's lyricism. We learnt much from our (two-show) premiere at Outburst Queer Arts Festival (Belfast, 2018), but it was having the chance to get a two-week run (at Midsumma Festival, Melbourne, and Sydney Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras, 2019) that allowed us to implement changes in response and then, crucially, for the show to "settle in," and for Ross to find pedagogical solutions *through the felt experience* of performance and the interrelationship with the audience.

Through various performance modes—including song, silly games, group singalong and exercises, extended parody, stand up, conversation, high camp and satire—the production set out to create a space where encountering fat/ness could be a collectively reflective and celebratory experience. This eclectic dramaturgy sits awkwardly—but queerly productively—alongside Philpott's urge, as a highly accomplished playwright, for a form that would bring a coherence (of some kind) to the work. The following section focuses on the resulting process of seeking dramaturgical strategies to queer and "fat" form.

Summoning Cake Daddy

Upon entering the space for *Cake Daddy*, audience members are greeted by team members and handed a "Cake Watchers" workbook (which doubles as a production program). The seating is arranged cabaret-style; that is, four to five chairs fan around tables, atop which sit blue-green Cake Watchers placemats. Large Cake Watchers banners hang either side of the stage, emblazoned by a logo featuring a hand emphatically grasping a cucumber—a symbol of "healthy eating." While the design of this is purposefully reminiscent of existing mainstream diet group branding, in this case the clenching of the cucumber also inserts a wry phallic and sexual spin. Cake Daddy is "daddy," after all.

Anderson-Doherty enters the performance to the sound of rhythmic bells and a deep, thunderous beat rippling through the space. He "belts," riffing hyperbolically through high notes and key changes. He welcomes the audience to Cake Watchers, a new "diet group," and introduces himself as Cake Watchers group leader "Ross," immediately placing his audience in role as diet group members. Warm yellow-white lighting remains onstage and across the entire

audience seating area throughout the opening sequence of the show, intentionally capturing a community hall feeling.

Leading a collective “cake watching” exercise, Anderson-Doherty playfully posits cake as the ultimate enemy of this assembled group of dieters and demonstrates for them how cake can (and definitely needs to) be “watched”: he stares fixedly and unblinkingly at a bright pink, beautifully decorated cake onstage (and continues to hold his gaze while the audience erupt in laughter). This setup—the parodic representation of a diet group—allows Anderson-Doherty to move freely through the audience area and engage directly with different audience members. He relates outrageous “personal” stories, conducts a singalong, poses questions, engages in audience banter, hosts games and activities, performs numerous songs and has various onstage costume changes. Key to this is the highly visible and active role of the audience within the performance.



Figure 1: Composite image of performer Ross Anderson-Doherty as Cake Watchers diet group leader in *Cake Daddy* (dir. Alyson Campbell). Photos by Bernie McAllister of Argyll Images. Courtesy of Outburst Arts.

In establishing the interactive dynamic, the Cake Watchers sequence does not have Anderson-Doherty in a fixed “character” or within a narrative structure that intends to deliver one particular “message.” Rather, the hybrid cabaret-theater-musical-comedy form relies on the visibility and contribution of audiences to function in a way that intentionally fosters

feelings of community-connectedness and sharing. A key way it does this is through what Campbell calls a “dramaturgy of conversation” (2018). Disrupting the performer-spectator binary that exists in most traditional, narrative-driven theater (Fischer-Lichte 2008), these choices, aligned with queer, feminist and HIV and AIDS activist performance histories (Campbell and Farrier 2016), created an environment where Anderson-Doherty could host a conversation about fat/ness.

According to Mobley, “Staring, seeing, or viewing can be a way to bring communities together and put them in conversation, to demystify ‘the other,’ and to help individuals and communities gain knowledge about themselves” (2019, 216). The capacity for theater to bring people together, to engage in conversation and to forge meaningful connections with others is supported by its live nature and potential for spontaneity. Importantly, in *Cake Daddy*, the conversational dynamic sits alongside an urge to create moments between the performer and audience that are lively, whimsical and entertaining—with the knowledge that these moments can also be “dangerous.” By this, we mean that, although the content of the performance parodies diet group structures, it draws on real-world groups and experiences to do so, many, if not all, of which are innately fat-phobic and a cause of real distress and pain for some audience members. Given this, Ross establishes a highly complex space within which both his skills as host-performer and his lived experience as an attender of diet groups are vital in negotiating provocative and potentially triggering discussions onstage and in among his audience.

A pivotal turn in the performance occurs at the end of the *Cake Watchers* sequence, where the diet world falls away (conveyed through lighting and sound) and Anderson-Doherty stands center stage. In stillness he delivers a monologue. At this point the performance shifts into an entirely different mode. Aspects of cabaret and those other interactive forms are temporarily discarded in place of a narrative-driven “acting” mode with Anderson-Doherty establishing a new tone of performance that is tightly-scripted and moves into more serious territory and mood.



Figure 2: Image from *Cake Daddy* (dir. Alyson Campbell) featuring performer Ross Anderson-Doherty in cucumber tracksuit designed by Leho De Sosa. Photo by Bernie McAllister of Argyll Images. Courtesy of Outburst Arts.

Through the monologue, Anderson-Doherty relays an experience of heart failure at the gym, brought on by excessive exercise and extreme food restriction, and resulting in a weeks-long hospital recovery. A song titled “Life on the Wing” sits at the heart of it and details a series of painful rejections experienced as a fat-queer child. This song is perhaps the emotional heart of the whole piece, with Anderson-Doherty drawing on specific vocal devices to produce a very different effect from the rest of his singing. As Ross explains it:

Life on the Wing describes my experience of a moment from childhood where my illusion that my fat-femme ways could continue in perpetuity was broken. My challenge was to find a mode of performance which allowed for me to perform a sincere form of the vulnerability the lyrics and melody of the song engendered in me, without leaning so

far into it that I relive the trauma in a way that ceases to be safe for me and the audience. To that end, I spent time sitting with the song as I learned the tune and lyrics. My early voice training (which informs much of my instinct still, especially when learning a song for the first time) led me to sing the song with the soft, sweet sounds of a “legit” musical theater singer. The resultant sound was accomplished and appropriate and allowed for clarity and for the broad range of the song’s pitch to be smoothly achieved. However, I experienced it as muscularly very easy, with little, to no, sense of connecting “Baby Ross” with the “Ross” who was present in the moment of singing. In a moment of my body working more quickly than my brain, I began to sing it through in my own accent, eschewing the general American that is the standard in pop music. I added more abdominal pressure and less connectivity in the larynx which created a lighter tone where one can hear the turbulence of the airflow against the vocal folds. It occurred to me that this is the condition the vocal mechanism finds to be most aerodynamically efficient at the pitches this song uses most. This means that, physically, it is a much easier sound to make than the sounds I would usually engage. However, I experienced it like a thousand times more effort in that moment to navigate using less control. Perhaps body as metaphor for my navigating the sharing of my own vulnerability. The breathy folk sounds in my northern Irish accent helped create a space for “Baby Ross” in the singing of the song. As I performed the song more it became clearer that that space was situated both boldly and loosely in the cultural and class heritage that were so at odds with my fatness and queerness.

Ross’ rare capacity to convey (and enact) how technique and emotion intertwine demonstrates what Alyson identified as an “emotional dramaturgy” at work. This dramaturgy is a vital part of a fat-queer performance-making methodology, in which aesthetic choices are driven by lived experience and the dramaturgical process demands a careful negotiation between art, personal feeling, the affective capacity of the work in contact with its audience, and the impact on the performer. Much of this balancing took place between Ross and Lachlan in a collaborative writing process in which Lachlan extracted personal memories through conversation, and then crafted them into lyrics for Ross, in turn, to perform.

In the moment following the monologue, as the realization that this story may indeed belong to Anderson-Doherty sinks in, he steps forward—framed by stillness and silence—and cuts a slice from the bright, pink cake. He begins to eat. This action signifies a clear act of breaking free and turning away from those painful, repressive diet group behaviors and structures portrayed through *Cake Watchers*. It initiates a “turn” in the performance—away from the ridiculous, yet very familiar, diet group, and away from playing a “version” of Ross to something much closer to “being” himself. At this point team members assist Anderson-Doherty in delivering slices of cake to individual tables. Simultaneously, in a major aesthetic

shift, the Cake Watchers imagery is quite literally “flipped”: placemats, stage banners and workbook/programs are turned around to reveal a celebratory image of Cake Daddy (De Sosa’s animated rendering of Anderson-Doherty’s face) in pink and gold. In this moment audiences typically rejoice, with the drastic shift in mood (and color) immediately prompting delight and conversation. In this communal afternoon tea-like moment, Anderson-Doherty holds a conversation directly with his audience, dropping all pretense of being in “character”. He shares real-life dieting anecdotes, invites recommendations for local cake spots and explains how Cake Daddy (first as a figure and then as a production) has been a powerful motivator in the ongoing process of removing himself from diet culture.

As the show heads towards its final section, Anderson-Doherty invites everyone in the space to “grab your favorite fat bit; your own or someone else’s—with consent!” and read out the “Cake Daddy Pledge” with him:

- I pledge to be a good egg and challenge fat stigma, fat shame and anti-fat bias whenever I can;
- I will shove a huge cucumber deep into my gob before I compliment anyone on their weight-loss;
- I will shove it down further and swallow it whole before I speak ill of my body;
- I will plug myself with the cucumber and let it rot inside before I conflate health with thinness;
- I will listen to fat people about fat things and use fat as a descriptor of bodies that should be celebrated, included, enjoyed, had sexy time with and shamed no longer.

(Text by Anderson-Doherty and Philpott)

Again, the ridiculous nature of drawing the cucumber imagery through, accompanied by a kitschy little trumpet salute on each line of the pledge, means that, as well as continuing the production’s camp-queer sexual aesthetic, Anderson-Doherty can address key ideas while avoiding a mode that might veer into didacticism.



Figure 3: Image from *Cake Daddy* (dir. Alyson Campbell) featuring Ross Anderson-Doherty with Cake Daddy visual design by Leho DeSosa. Photo by Bernie McAllister of Argyll Images. Courtesy of Outburst Arts.

Fatting the stage

As the Pledge concludes, Anderson-Doherty leads his audience and (now) co-disruptors, in a collective cheer, congratulating them on having given enough energy to the Pledge to summon Cake Daddy. Under this cheer the opening tones of the final track “Cake Daddy’s Recipe” start to be felt and heard. This coincides with the lighting transitioning from “meeting in a community hall” to “pop-concert,” with Ross-Cake Daddy as the star. Anderson-Doherty changes, in full view of the audience, from green cucumber tracksuit and pink tank top to just his pink and gold jockstrap before being adorned with a pink and gold apron fixed around his natural waist, a large cherry headpiece and gold laborer’s boots.

The song is a way of doing this job of queer performance pedagogy, or doing pedagogy queerly. Describing the opening section of the “Cake Daddy’s Recipe” music track, composer Byrne says:

I gathered many samples of heavy objects being banged or hit, things like windows being smashed, metal being bashed. This was about establishing a dramatic, “heavy,” fat(/phat) sound. I combined these samples with many layers of sub bass. The sub bass sounds were

so low in frequency [50hz - 80hz] that they were there to be felt, rather than heard.
(Byrne, March 4, 2021, voice recordings to Anderson-Doherty)

Over this, a recording of Anderson-Doherty's speaking voice growls the names of well-known cakes: "Battenburg, Velvet, Victoria..." In this he emulates the voice of the large, sexually assertive "daddy" often portrayed in gay culture, harking back to the initial version of Cake Daddy portrayed in *Tea (Cell) Dance*.⁵

A heavy, confrontational guitar riff tears across the musical track as Anderson-Doherty, in spotlight, walks to the front of the stage. Bare-chested, he spreads his arms and sings:

Cake Daddy don't diet, no no
Cake Daddy don't diminish for no one
Cake Daddy gonna surprise with you with his size
Come on fatties, make Cake Daddy's cake riiiiiiise

Cake Daddy takes up all the space
Cake Daddy loves his big fat painted face
Cake Daddy always wears what he wants 'ta
Cake Daddy ain't no Cake Watcher

I (fat) You (fat) We (fat)

(Lyrics by Anderson-Doherty)

Anderson-Doherty sings each "I," "You" and "We" in falsetto, shifting back to spoken word for "fat." In the break between chorus and verse, he tells his audience: "we can all fat because, like queer, fat is now a verb—so let's fatten the fuck out of this place." The next time this is sung, he invites all to sing along: "let's conjugate together"—a small but profound moment of literalizing the fattening of the sonic and visual realms of the space that he and the audience are making together and a reminder for his audience they are vital contributors to this moment.



Figure 4: Ross Anderson-Doherty performing “Cake Daddy’s Recipe (Fat is a Verb)” in *Cake Daddy* (dir. Alyson Campbell). Photo by Bernie McAllister of Argyll Images. Courtesy of Outburst Arts.

The music drifts into an extended pop and electro-club mix and a thumping techno kick enters, bringing the familiarity of a club anthem. As the tempo accelerates and the bass broadens, the lighting shifts from that of a “pop concert” where Anderson-Doherty is the main attraction to that of a “hazy club” where everyone is included in the same throbbing visuals, with Anderson-Doherty employing a piercing mixture of twang and falsetto. While showcasing his huge vocal range, Ross’ physical presence, particularly his fat/ness, is accentuated or “flaunted” by costume and high physical energy. He uses wide, sweeping arm gestures, mock “diva” expressions and, at times, rubs his belly and shimmies across the stage. As Abigail Saguy and Anna Ward (2011) put it, “flaunting fatness” is a queer way of celebrating deviance and transgression: a refusal to assimilate or pass within normative culture. It is embraced here as a fat dramaturgical strategy—at once aesthetic, personal and political.

We suggest the performance of “Cake Daddy’s Recipe,” within the experience of the wider *Cake Daddy* production, may offer audiences what queer performance scholar Jill Dolan has conceived as “utopian performatives”:

small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world

might be like if every moment of our lives were emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense. (2005, 5)

Building on this, we'd argue that "Cake Daddy's Recipe" produces a fat-queer utopian performative. Important to this assertion is that it is staged immediately following the Pledge. While individuals may have differing experiences and reactions to the communal Pledge, we suggest it offers the possibility for forging temporary, yet meaningful, communities of its audience members through vocalizing a commitment to this set of everyday, fat-positive acts *together*, as a collective.⁶ In theorizing utopian performatives, Dolan describes moments in performance when individuals "become part of the whole in an organic, nearly spiritual way; spectators' individuality becomes finely attuned to those around them, and a cohesive if fleeting feeling of belonging to the group bathes the audience." (2005, 11)

Significant to this is that there is no claim from Dolan that utopian performatives function by pointing to a clear, locatable future. Instead, Dolan describes the notion of "utopia" as always in process, "an index to the possible, to the 'what if,' rather than a more restrictive, finite image of 'what should be'" (2005, 13); it allows performance to experiment with the possibilities and potentialities of queer futurity that then reflect back on and inform the present moment, which itself is continuously processual.

The excessiveness of the sonic and visual aesthetic, its thick weave of soulful vocals with disco melody and club bass synth contribute to creating an affective experience for audiences. By this we mean the stage elements fuse together to convey what Campbell refers to as an "affective climax" (2011). In the thrust of "Cake Daddy's Recipe" – with Anderson-Doherty's complex vocal riffing, the thumping music, smoky haze, flashing lights and the residual feelings of connectedness that hang in the air from the Pledge – the lyrics, music, vocals, movement, physicality, costume and lighting operate together to convey a specific message of uplift and celebration, building to a potential, indescribable, *feeling* that soars above the present moment. As a fat-queer utopian performative it gestures toward a brighter, fat-positive future—another, better way of being in the world. Importantly, the terms we have used to describe the sequence, "expansive," "thick," "dense," "excessive," are all descriptors that connote fatness. This is inherently bound to the message of the song's lyrics, as well as Anderson-Doherty's call to "fatten" the space and "conjugate" fat/ness *together*. In this, fat (like queer) becomes a methodological approach to crafting striking, potentially transformative moments of performance.

Conclusion

Diet culture and fat-phobia is first parodied in *Cake Daddy*, but then stripped away so that the brightness and fullness of a fat utopic future can emerge, offering a space, even momentarily, to feel connected and, possibly, to find hope, courage, validation and relief

through such connection. Singing “Cake Daddy’s Recipe”—indeed, belting and soaring vocally—Ross/Anderson-Doherty can create his own response to the intensity of that moment of felt fat-phobia in *Tea (Cell) Dance* through performance. His internal experience requires an emotional dramaturgy in the process of making and, ultimately, it gives rise—like a good cake—to feeling and emotion in the spectator. Through fat/ness, specifically by exploring fat performance strategies, we can envision and bring forth fat-positive and celebratory worlds in which to gather, where the pain of the current moment is temporarily displaced.

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Interview

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² *Tea Cell Dance (GL RY)* was produced by wreckedallprods and Theatreofpluck, directed by Alyson Campbell, and featured in the Outburst Queer Arts Festival (Belfast, 2016). For more on the trio of *GL RY* works staged in Belfast, see Campbell 2018.

³ Campbell (director) and Philpott (writer) share a twenty-year collaborative relationship, working together with an "assemblage" of queer-identifying performance-makers under the banner of wreckedAllprods: <https://wreckedallprods.com>.

⁴ Anderson-Doherty and Campbell have worked together for over ten years, always seeking to develop queer methods and processes and contribute to the queer community. Anderson-Doherty's work has been crucial in

queering panto and cabaret in Belfast/Ireland, bringing his political and fat-femme sensibility to mainstream modes as well as LGBTQIA+ events and venues.

⁵ Audio recording of “Cake Daddy’s Recipe” available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvlj3hOtjXA>.

⁶ It is notoriously difficult to claim “impact” on audiences. A normatively-sized reviewer may not share the experience of fat audience members. Fat-identifying reviewer Shirley-Anne McMillan in Belfast writes, “For an audience to move from laughter to tears and back to laughter again is a pretty intense journey in the space of just over an hour. But it’s a wonderful intensity, and there is cake, which there always should be when emotions are high.” (2018) Additionally, audience questionnaire responses point to the resonance of the work on fat community. Possibly what was most notable, however, were the nightly conversations Ross would have with audience members, keen to share with him their experiences of fatphobia and what the work had meant for them. These were often emotional sharings, which speaks to the emotional labor that Ross was undertaking through this public performance, particularly over the two-week run in Australia.