Keynote for Queer B-cademy
by Dean Hutton, Hamburg, 2018.

Slide 1.
(Gently disturb the space. Ring Bell. Breathe.)

((RINGBELL))

Slide 2:
Hello, I am Dean, I name myself. #Luckydeal. I stand here as Goldendean, an avatar, a divine being, a teacher come to earth. I am white. I am Genderqueer, a non-binary trans identity with a fat body, a lisp and an inability to stay quiet in the face of the fuckery that is a world built on white, cis-het-imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist patriarchy.

I choose They, Them, Their as my pronouns not just as a signifier on my non-binary trans Genderqueer identity but because I am more than me. They/Them connects me to the communal I was denied by my birth into a structure that demands I corrupt my humanly in the practice of violence as power. It is a strategy of resistance that connects all queer beings. I am a member of a community of creators, artists, writers, performers, healers and cultural workers dedicated to people-centred public art practice, who value process, collaboration, and critical engagement.

What I understand of my place, how I got here, is through the intellectual and emotional labour of Black, Queer, and Trans people under everyday threat by white supremacy. The Black Radical Tradition, writings of bell hooks, Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, Steve Biko, W.E.B Du Bois, Franz Fanon, Lewis Gordon, Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, and many other scholars contribute the language for a conceptual framework to locate, analyse, and articulate my work. Everyday I am led and supported by friends, collaborators, and colleagues to do better. I am humbled.

(I completed my Masters the day before I traveled here, this keynote will sometimes refer directly to parts of my thesis, and my performance lecture)
Slide 3:
I ask you to breathe with me so we remain aware that we are sharing this space. To hold this space, to remember we are here.
When we breathe deliberately we are fully present in our bodies. We take space. We matter. If you do this 3 times a day you build muscle memory that helps reduce anxiety.

((BREATHE)) In to the count of six. Out for six. Slow. Through your nose. Open your chest fully. Do 3 times.

Slide 4:
The future is here. Just out of reach.
We catch glimpses, feel it at the tips of our fingers. There, not here yet.
Beyond binaries.

Slide 5:
Queer time is future present. Language does not adapt fast enough to truly articulate our reality. I choose the word queer as a placeholder for a word expressing all the me's that do not yet exist. For me Queer is so much less about sexuality, and beyond gender - a potential. It's history is complicated, re-appropriated. Queer is different.

We are who we are, for now. We can be born this way. But we are here, visible, taking space, making work, because we have made clear choices to live as queer, openly, choosing love; who we love, how we love, at great cost.

Queer is political.

Slide 6:
To queer is an action, a verb; like love, its a doing word. Sure love and loving feels good, we live our lives in a soup of chemicals that make us feel good or not so good. If love was just feelings we would move on once the dopamine ran out. One cannot live on oxytocin alone.

As artists we are expected to cleverly bend material, manifest concept as aesthetic object. But what if making work is making love? I am a labour of love. Love is my medium, the material proof of that love. Love is power and threatens power. Love that works for equality is Justice. Love connects us, inspires unlimited potential for transformation. Lock us away, deny us love, and we will resist or we die inside. Love is dangerous. Those who choose to love when the expression of their love calls violence to them, love that is criminalized, pathologised, erased, are dangerous too.
We live in a world where we compromise our practice of love. We treat it as a safety net, a commodity, and an escape from the isolation we feel from our families, our communities broken by the demands of surviving capitalism. Pinkwashed, whitewashed. Loveless. Captured. To undo the pain, isolation, fear, hurt, haters — we must learn languages of love that honour our humanity. Ethical practices of love demand that we be conscious, self-conscious, to the affects and the consequences of our actions. Love is a right and a responsibility.

Slide 7: To understand how I as a citizen, as a human, as an artist, can contribute to social justice I went back to school after 20 years of professional practice as a photojournalist. On Monday I handed in my Masters thesis and performed my exam, a performance lecture. Entitled Plan B, A Gathering of Strangers (or) This is Not Working, my research began as a proposition to a friend that artists could intervene in public and private spaces to shift the performance of violence in meaningful ways. Its value, beyond my own catharsis, is its research potential into how site-specific performance art makes boundaries fluid, breaking the fourth wall, where both artist and audience collaborate in a dialogue aimed at shifting ideas of power and so-called public space. I wondered if artists, entertainers and performers could develop relationships in volatile situations where they could support vulnerable audiences in ways that could divert violence from them, and in so doing help make spaces safer. Part of making these spaces safer is making clear the different ways race, gender and sexuality code bodies under surveillance. Implicit to this are the invisibility of hegemonic whiteness and the “criminalizing” of black and queer bodies under surveillance.

Slide 8: I engage in this practice with my body, through the performance of an avatar. Goldendean existed in potentia on the mine-dumps of eGoli, in the dust I breathed for most of my life.

My relationship with nude public interventions began with collaborator Alberta Whittle when we disrobed and photographed each other on quiet national roads on a road-trip to Cape Town. Goldendean was born in Braamfontein as I performed naked, painted gold in a street facing window.

Slide 9: video

"Goldendean gleams and glamours us, inciting a frenzy of gold lust, gold fever and golden showers. Much like gold itself the spectacle of Goldendean, challenges the arbitrary values we place in the normative body. Our gaze cannot help but devour Goldendean. They are simultaneously seductive and silly, rejecting the Gold Standard, revealing the embedded heteronormative positioning of queerness as unnatural and undesired.

Keynote for Queer B-cademy ©Dean Hutton
My thesis asserts the “right to look” at whiteness and white body not only as an act of live performance but also as an object of surveillance. Mirzoeff insists that “the right to look is strongly interfaced with the right to be seen.” Mitchell proposes that we see race as a medium... something we see through, like a frame, a window, a screen, ... rather than something we look at.” The “racial medium” is both fantasy, as a “social construction” and a reality that shapes our everyday experience.

The Queer body is a living archive. It holds every emotion, every experience, in which we have been present. It is marked by every violence, every desire, every love acted upon and with it. It is not just a receptacle of likes and lusts, it is a system of knowledge – a technology with which queer people can adapt, translation and embody revolution.

My performances are improvised, instinctual, practice as research. Through reading, in writing, and in conversation, I have learned to articulate how my tool, my material – my Fat Queer White Trans body is read before I make a gesture, a sound or an action. We embody history, intentions shift, contexts change and what was appropriate at one time, will not always be. We are work in progress, creation as force of error.

((BREATHE!)) Breathing is an act of love.
Slide 13:
We hack the body, hack the systems to which our bodies are tied—hacking identity, forming ourselves in our own image. This body is just one of the weapons I carry in my struggle against Normal. To have any future outside of what has been predetermined for us, without us, we must continue to radically shift our present. We exist there now. Queer Time.

Slide 14:
We are. We are becoming queer (Múnoz) – committing to the development, and radical sharing of creative strategies for resistance, direct action, ethical, compassionate and healing work. We must trust in the power of poetics. Camp aesthetics. Ethical. Compassionate. My friend, artist Thenjiwe Nkosi calls this Radical Sharing, “practices that privilege the power of human interaction, of creating community, of deep listening, of sharing ownership, of really seeing one another”

(RINGBELL)

Slide 15:
It’s not an easy thing for me to come to Europe. There is a discomfort deep in me as soon as I leave the airspace of the continent I call home. I will never be African. Not because I have the phenotypic characteristics of those who are understood to be white, but because bodies like mine have and continue to enact direct, and profit from systemic violence in the place I was born and every place we’ve ever colonized. Sure, it’s great to get to walk around at night like I own the place, I can’t do that at home because people have been made desperate by generations of poverty and I’m just another settler living on stolen land. These streets feel haunted by the ghosts of all that paid the price for your development. We are walking on bones. Your centers of culture are impressive and overwhelming. Your museums are monuments to conquest, archives of appropriated, stolen, destroyed knowledge systems. Every African, every colonized subject, is owed profit shares in what you take for granted everyday.

I am unsettled because I have my own beef with this place. My body has inherited, remembers the violence that shapes modern capitalism. I am a descendant of one of your unwanted peasants shipped off to wield your whips, to capture your slaves, to settle stolen land and to oversee the theft of minerals. A product of 500 years of enforcing colonialism and the trade of human bodies. I’m as mutt as a poor white can be in South Africa but I figure I’m at least half Dutch descent. My mother was a Van Wyk. My father’s parents were at least half Irish and half Italian apparently but it really doesn’t matter because sometime around three or four generations ago they became white.
Slide 16:
Rage drives me but I cannot rage impotently when there is work to be done. Bitterness is no solution. It’s poison. Three years ago I decided to shift from my practice as a photojournalist to focus more on performance art. My manifesto read: “This is my Plan B: a community of strangers willing to meet in the streets to prove that love will always be a greater force than hate. A gathering of collaborators to make our public spaces safer by using the tools of art-making. A declaration that change starts with action.” Plan B continues a series of projects where I intimately document, examine and share my own life and experiences as an episteme for self-knowledge, and as a social practice to queer power by performing of a transgressive queer body.

Slide 17:
My masters thesis consider how The Queer Art of Failure (Halberstam) suggests that the “art of unbecoming” of “refusing legibility”, can compliment anti-colonial struggle. If Queer is a “rejection of the here and now” (Muñoz), then queer failure is a strategy to destabilise structures which remain violent and violating. The performance of Queer actions as Queer Love and Queer Disobedience subvert traditional systems of identity, knowledge and being and contribute to decolonization, new knowledge’s and strategies for protest. Two years ago I made a suit to fuck white people, inspired by a black student at Wits. Zama Mthunzi who made a t-shirt with the words on the back. The front of the shirt was ignored.

((RINGBELL))

Slide 18:
((Breathe with me)) When we remember to breathe, we are reminded of the times we have been left breathless.

Slide 19:
My performance strategy of simple and often improvised actions try to invoke those tender feelings through deliberate acts of Queer Failure, by remaining silly and playful, a clown, a warrior, always vulnerable... a tenderqueer sharing moments of soft courage that invest trust in an audience to respond in kind, to let our bodies be safe together, to queer space no matter the way we fail each other.
Slide 20:
Talks like these are a significant part of the practice of Plan B, not just to avoid appropriation, but conversations that engage ethical praxis through dialogical action.

Slide 21:
Last year the Equality Court dismissed charges of hate speech against Iziko National Gallery’s display of Goldendean’s #FUCKWHITEPEOPLE installation laid by the separatist Cape Party. The judgment becomes an extended piece of art criticism, where Chief Magistrate DM Thulare remarks “If there is one thing that the work has achieved, through this ...is to draw South Africans to a moment of self-reflection...”

Slide 22:
Responses to Goldendean reveal the defensive stance of white invisibility, where the performance of whiteness by white people affirms collective expectations of white fragility in what could be seen as a global participatory public performance.

Slide 23:
Plan B presents, a data archive of hundreds of pages of social media conversations, and screenshots, of public discussion about Goldendean and #FUCKWHITEPEOPLE. A public online folder named White People Made Visible can be found at http://bit.ly/whitepeoplemadevisible. Thousands of comments, shares, articles and conversations about the words, whether the words printed on paper can be considered art, words about my body, words about thoughts and feelings, how people are responding to the provocation. Inside every conversation, there is evidence of how the work functions as a catalyst for important conversations around race, gender and violence.

Slide 24:
Since my Fat Queer White Trans body was made hypervisible by fragile whites, white privilege doesn’t necessarily keep me safe. By speaking out, my body is made a trans-frankensteinn monster, hounded by outraged expressions of cisgender horror.

Slide 25:
Plan B is not polite. Plan B is Divine kneeling down to eat a hot fresh dog shit straight out the oven. Our power is not in compliance, it’s subversion. Queer is not cutesy unicorns, it’s glitter shit. From the Gutter. It’s Queer Bile, tired of hiding in polite company.

Keynote for Queer B-cademy ©Dean Hutton
Slide 26:
There can be no ethical queerness without an appreciation of difference. We cannot combat oppression without acknowledging and decoding the intersectional struggles we face with regard to the various identities ascribed to and by us via race, sexuality, gender, ability, class and ethnicity. This is particularly important when checking our various privileges. We need to see cultural representations of ourselves, because so much our humanity relies on the expression of authentic human interaction and self-reflection. Queer exists not only in the individual as a politic of identity but as a means for collective action. We are using these same queering notions to create “safer spaces” for self-care and expression. Support each other across intersections of race, class and means, to survive, to be resilient – making “chosen” family.

Slide 27:
To be queer and to love, openly, is an act of civil disobedience, a protest at the ways in which we are erased, rendered silent in violent and mundane ways.

Audre Lorde writes:
“I am deliberate and afraid of nothing.”

Deliberate, like an act of creation.

Slide 28:
For the first time in human history a majority of us exist not just as consumers of information, fed a diet of received images but have the ability to make and disseminate our own – to queer the production of knowledge. How do we use the power we have in service to those who are oppressed? There are no coincidences; Plan B and Queer B-cademy were meant to be here together. Like B-cademy, Plan B calls for alternatives to the academic spaces that continue to fail us.

Thank you Danny, Nuray, the B-cademy team, and Kampnagel for bringing us together. I am honoured to be invited.

This Dean declares B-cademy open for learning.

((RINGBELL))