

From an edition of 500 Cds produced for the Solo show 7 Acts of Love, curated by Wibke Behrens,
project coordinator NGBK Gallery, 2001

ALONE AND TOGETHER: A letter to
ELI who died before Marcus

Dear ELI

I have been hearing about you from your brother in London. I hope you do not take offence and I do not mean to exoticise you, but I have been thinking about what 'you do' in relation to someone who lives in London, called Oreet Ashery.

Oreet has an alter ego called Marcus Fisher. And like you, Marcus flaneures the city streets as a man, transgressing cultural and gender categories. He spends time 'passing' in various contexts, orthodox Jerusalem, trendy districts of London and Turkish men's cafes in Berlin. However there are some differences between your claimed or reclaimed identities. Oreet was born in Jerusalem and raised in a secular home, although her mother is of Orthodox Jewish heritage. Marcus was developed and formed in relation to these cultural references, and informed with contemporary ideas of sexuality.

However, Marcus primarily operates under the category of art. Ostensibly one can, if need be, validate and contextualise Marcus - discuss him as a practice or praxis and refer to the associated institutions. On the other-hand, I gather that you grew up in a secular Catholic French household. From what I can ascertain, what you 'do' is not part of a group practice and therefore not sub-cultural or framed by Culture.

I initially thought that you elected to become Hassidic but then your brother told me that you were certain that you were born Jewish before your adoption. The yellow skin helps your cause but this does seem to be an incredible leap of faith. Your insistence that there was no need for any conversion ceremony frustrated the Rabbi in the small Alpine French town, a town famous for its large Jewish population. The fact that you managed to masquerade your way into the male quarters of the Hassidim is incredible. The events that occurred when they found out about this deception are even more dramatic.

Marcus can be turned on and off; in this sense it is separate from everyday life. In contrast, you have taken on your new (old)* name and character day and night. If Marcus is framed by Culture what you 'do' appears to be an aberration of culture - one that is outside the world of categories and words. The assumed closeness between Marcus and you must feel like cavernous distance. Yet there is something important connecting both practices, actions and identities. Your brother told me of the degenerative illness that you developed from the age of five, he also said that you were a tomboy from the very start - forcing your voice to go lower and starting to dress as a man in your teens. Uneasy in your body and alienated from your cultural surroundings, your decision to become Jewish and Hassidic in particular, provide you with a cultural narrative for a personal story. Marcus is closer than you think.

Michael Gillespie

December 2001

(Oreet Ashery's alter ego, Marcus Fisher and ELI never actually met but they heard of each other and had brief mediated contact through friends and family. ELI died in the summer of 2001)

* ELI - A male name in Hebrew. EL means God, and ELI translates to 'my God'.