

# Pink Labor on Golden Streets Queer Art Practices

Christiane Erharter

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Hans Scheirl (Eds.)

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Publication Series of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna  
Eva Blimlinger, Andrea B. Braidt, Karin Riegler (Series Eds.)  
Volume 17

*SternbergPress* 

## On the Publication Series

We are pleased to present this new volume in the publication series of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. The series, published in cooperation with our highly committed partner Sternberg Press, is devoted to central themes of contemporary thought about art practices and art theories. The volumes in the series are composed of collected contributions on subjects that form the focus of discourse in terms of art theory, cultural studies, art history, and research at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, and represent the quintessence of international study and discussion taking place in the respective fields. Each volume is published in the form of an anthology, edited by staff members of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Authors of high international repute are invited to write contributions dealing with the respective areas of emphasis. Research activities, such as international conferences, lecture series, institute-specific research projects, or research projects serve as points of departure for the individual volumes.

With *Pink Labor on Golden Streets: Queer Art Practices* we are launching volume seventeen of the series. The book forms a culmination point of many scholarly and artistic efforts undertaken at the Academy during the past few years. Initiated by the "Contextual Painting" studio, headed by University Professor Hans Scheirl, an international conference on queer theory and queer art practices took place in 2012. Keynotes, workshops, club events, and artist talks formed the program that drew a broad audience to the Academy. Hans Scheirl and Ruby Sircar—assistant in the studio—invited the two curators Christiane Erharter and Dietmar Schwärzler to conceive of an exhibition with a focus on the idea of queer abstraction—an issue raised by theorists like Jack Halberstam and a somewhat conceptual provocation: queer art and figurative representation (of queer bodies, of queer sexuality, of queer symbolism) seemed inextricably linked and the hypothesis of a possible deconstruction of this realistic relationship between signifier and signified into the abstract sounded—and maybe still sounds—daring. The exhibition was realized in xhibit—the exhibition space for contemporary art at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. The publication brings together selected papers from the conference as well as writings on selected artworks from the exhibition. In addition, the editors have made an enormous effort to find contributors who were prepared to produce original work on the topic and stimulate the discussion of the queer abstract within the discourse on art practices. Also, they have collected testimonials by queer performers on the central topic of "drag," shedding light on the many different conceptions and partly contradictory standpoints, also in a historical perspective.

We would like to sincerely thank the editors of this volume for their long, laborious effort to put this book together. Again, the challenge of this publication series to bring forward scholarly contributions together with highly acclaimed artistic interventions has been, in our opinion, met beautifully.

The Rectorate of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna  
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Editors: Christiane Erharter, Dietmar Schwärzler, Ruby Sircar, Hans Scheirl  
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Design: Maximiliane Schling, Surface, Frankfurt am Main/Berlin  
Cover images: Katrina Daschner, *Silber Glitter*, 2012. Embroidery on canvas, 44 × 44 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Krobath, Vienna.  
Photo: Jens Ziehe.  
Tejal Shah, *Between the Waves (Outer)*, 2012. Mixed media collage on paper, 182.88 × 127 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Project 88 Gallery, Bombay.  
Printing and binding: Holzhausen Druck GmbH, Wolkersdorf

ISBN 978-3-95679-182-6

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Sternberg Press  
Caroline Schneider  
Karl-Marx-Allee 78  
D-10243 Berlin  
www.sternberg-press.com

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# QQ<sup>1</sup>

# Queer and Questioning

Dietmar Schwärzler

In 2011, when Hans Scheirl and Ruby Sircar invited Christiane Erharter and me to curate an exhibition on the theme of “queerness,” we were initially unsure what its substantive focus, placed fully at our discretion, should look like. By then we did know what the symposium, a centerpiece of the event series, would be titled: “Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction.” I was impressed and captivated by the title’s directness, but at the same time perplexed; for me it interposed two divergent, even contradictory concepts or approaches. I had trouble reconciling the first discourse—which draws on the post-porn debates of such pioneering theorists as Beatriz Preciado, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and Teresa de Lauretis—with the (formalist) aesthetic concept that follows it, not to mention that I then lacked, and am still honing, a clear grasp on the term “queer abstraction.” The term was coined by Judith Jack Halberstam, who illustrates it in a book chapter on “Technotopias: Representing Transgender Bodies in Contemporary Art” by way of the work of Eva Hesse, Linda Besemer, and J. A. Nicholls, defining it very expansively with broad room for interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Halberstam situates queer abstraction as a fluid nomenclature that he ties to the materiality of images, objects, and sculptures—one that defies the dichotomy of abstract versus Conceptual art. In this conception, queer abstraction is grounded in the choice of material (which in Hesse’s case is fragile and not intended for posterity), the choice of saturated colors, plasticity, and non-narrative structure; these artistic expressions exhibit techniques of repetition, seriality, absurdity, and abnormality.

Referencing the Scottish artist and author David Batchelor, Halberstam writes: “If straightness (masculinity in particular) is associated with minimalism, then excess (of form, color, or content) becomes the signification of the feminine, the queer, and the monstrous.”<sup>3</sup> This is followed by a quote from Linda Besemer: “I was always taken by Meyer Schapiro’s idea of the non-narrative. Unlike Greenberg, Schapiro did not see abstraction as a transcendent, apolitical or ‘purely formalist’ art form. Rather he viewed ‘Abstract Expressionism’ as a salient critique of a burgeoning postwar industrial culture.”<sup>4</sup>

1 Recently, the abbreviation LGBT has been extended in various contexts to include several more categories for the sake of thorough differentiation. One version is LGBTQQ, the final two letters of which stand for queer and questioning. Queer has been utilized here as “an umbrella term used to encompass all those of the LGBTQQ community.” “Questioning: this term is used for someone who isn’t sure of their sexual orientation or how to label themselves.” See <http://www.onyourmind.net/qanda/lgbtqq/whatislgbtqq.htm>.

2 Judith Jack Halberstam, “Technotopias: Representing Transgender Bodies in Contemporary Art,” in *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 97–124.

3 Ibid., 121.

4 Linda Besemer, “Lecture Notes,” shared with the author by Besemer, in *ibid.*

From a curatorial perspective, the phrase queer abstraction proved to be a stroke of good fortune that we sought (and seek) to investigate further through the exhibition as well as this book. The pair of terms open up another, still largely unexplored, landscape of research for a field that I often perceive in conventional exhibition practice and discourse as a mixture of political issues (such as civil partnership and gay marriage laws; adoption rights; [historical] tactics of stigmatization, persecution, and oppression; pride parades; and AIDS, etc.), theoretical discourses, political activism, and artistic approaches. Although this interdisciplinary collective thought process is assuredly a productive one, its various specialized conceptions of issues often remain disparate, presenting both advantages and drawbacks in the inherent logic, for ultimately each of the fields mentioned has its own divergent strategies and concerns.

One common thread running through many of these debates is the (naked) body, which functions simultaneously as an affective battlefield and as a surface for inscribing different explicit identities and forms of sexual representation. Our intention was not to exclude this angle, or to distance ourselves from it, but to make a bold attempt to narrow down the broad field of “queer” in the exhibition, and by extension this volume, to artistic practices and to create a dialogue between figurative representations of bodies and abstract, abstracted, or even completely absent ones. One of our objectives to that end was to define queer, *cuir* (in Spanish),<sup>5</sup> *kirik* (in Turkish),<sup>6</sup> *kvar* (in Serbian-Croatian),<sup>7</sup> as not just a question of sexual orientation and sexual preference, but as a work in progress, even a utopia à la José Esteban Muñoz: “Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not queer yet.”<sup>8</sup>

In that vein, the title “Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction” can also be read as a temporal progression line that tells the tale of an explicit bodily politics and reaches a kind of queer formalism increasingly common in Western art circles—one that can but does not necessarily include political forms. According to that reading the various fields of discourse invoked by the conference’s title, via their respective negotiations, are both self-contained and in dialogue.

From our standpoint, queer should also be interrogated critically, as the term has long expanded beyond a movement or a theory, let alone a subculture. Now ubiquitous, it has become part of the lifestyle (at clubs, on fashion blogs, in TV series, etc.). Martin Büsser, whose notion of queer that Christiane and I also wanted to invoke in the exhibition, explains the term as follows:

Queer is not just another word for “gay” [or “lesbian”]. It is neither a terminological update of “gay” nor a mere expansion to encompass both gay men and lesbians, it is an uncertainty tactic that calls into question any personal or external assignment of identity. As such, “queer” contains gay,

lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and ultimately even heterosexual strategies provided their treatment of sexuality is oppositional to heteronormativity [and homonormativity]. Nothing but intellectual laziness or misguided hipness has led to the word queer establishing itself in our speech as a synonym for “gay/lesbian”: for example, what was once called “gay cinema” is now known as “queer cinema” although it generally means “gay cinema” and nothing else. By contrast, as Andreas Kraß explains in his introduction to the reader *Queer denken* [Think queer], queer thinking aims to denaturalize normative concepts of masculinity and femininity, to decouple the categories of gender and sexuality, to destabilize the binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and to acknowledge sexual pluralism.<sup>9</sup>

As we envisioned both the exhibition and the book, we were particularly concerned with combining, juxtaposing, or playing off various artistic enactment strategies. The spatial settings of the works at the exhibition “Pink Labor on Golden Streets” could be characterized by the phrase “form meets politics,” an approach we also adapted in compiling this volume. Form meets politics should rightly be read in multiple ways: in one sense, it describes two artistic attitudes often perceived as divergent; in another, the choice of form or the form itself can often be attributed to political issues and vice versa.

Of course, when dealing with this subject matter especially, forms of artistic expression must be read in relation to actual geopolitical circumstances as well the realities of urban or rural life. While queer artistic practices have increasingly entered the art market in such Western metropolises as New York, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, San Francisco, and London—albeit with relatively limited demand from collectors and correspondingly few purchases—political factors have precipitated a wildly different situation in cities like Moscow, Bombay, Lagos, Cairo, Cape Town, Shanghai, Tokyo, Belgrade, Tehran, Dakar,

5 In this volume, see Katia Sepúlveda in Conversation with Nina Hoehchl, “To Think with the Whole Body,” 68–81.

6 In this volume, see Cana Bilir-Meier and Madeleine Bernstorff, *Off-White-Tulips (Kirik Beyaz Laleler)*: A Short Film by Aykan Safoğlu, 2013,” 196–207.

7 In this volume, see Christiane Erharter “A Collection of Key Queer Moments of the Last Decade 2006–2015,” 18–27.

8 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 9.

9 Martin Büsser, “For Your Pleasure: Fragmente Einer Porno-Komparatistik,” in *Testcard #13: Sex*, ed. Roger Behrens et al. (Mainz: Ventil-Verlag, 2008), 83. Transl. JS.



Fig. 1  
 Johannes Schweiger, *Offijism Chairs – Missoni/Pitpull Polished Leather* (foreground), 2015  
 and *Partitions/Cabin Walls/Glory Slits* (background), 2015



Hong Kong, Nairobi, Mexico City, Santiago de Chile, or Jerusalem. In the queer context from a Western perspective, each of the above-mentioned cities is primarily associated to varying degrees with repressive policies; when these places appear in art at all it is only from this perspective. Much more frequently, queer artistic practices from these geopolitical contexts remain invisible or are avoided entirely—to some extent, the same holds for this book.<sup>10</sup>

The exhibition's title, which we have also adopted for this book project, is a both referential and reverential nod to the almost identically named 1969 film by Rosa von Praunheim, *Rosa Arbeiter auf Goldener Straße, Teil II* (Pink laborer on golden streets, Part II), which was also presented at the exhibition. In this early short film, von Praunheim's protagonist (played by Carla Aulaulu) escapes from political imprisonment in then—East Germany and finds a hideout in the bourgeois/bohemian West Berlin art scene. After her arrival, she marries an actor who eventually joins the gay revolution and dies. The film, which runs only eleven minutes, is a prime example of the ambivalent correlation of gender roles and sexualities and can be read today as queer. Incidentally, in a biographical twist, von Praunheim actually did marry Aulaulu in order to get the wedding subsidy that was paid by the city of Berlin at the time.

The four keywords in the title of the exhibition and book signify our intellectual roots and strategies, which combine approaches from feminist theory with those from cultural, postcolonial, African American, and queer studies.

PINK – The color of the gay and lesbian movement.

LABOR – The efforts that everyone involved in the project constantly exert in order to bring about a geopolitical change or a shift in perspective.

GOLD – The color we associate with feminism and the women's movement.

STREETS – The location where political groundwork and the struggle for equal rights takes place in the past and present.

<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, two papers were withdrawn on short notice. One would have explored methodological and aesthetic implications of bodily representations in queer art from southeast Europe. The other would

have dealt with queer artistic practices in Latin America generally and Brazil in particular, focusing on performance art and poetry.

This book is intended as a follow-up project to the exhibition "Pink Labor on Golden Streets" and the conference "Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction,"<sup>11</sup> which supplied the foundation for this examination, although one that we deliberately wanted to expand on by strategically broadening our strategy for inviting contributors and collaborators. This is even evident from the story of this book's development. In a role reversal of sorts, Christiane Erharter and I invited Ruby Sircar and Hans Scheirl as coeditors to deepen our already strong collaboration. The point was to reconsider questions that we had raised in the exhibition and the conference from other, broadened perspectives in a book-appropriate format, and to grapple more intensively with the vague field of queer artistic practices. With that in mind, we invited individual artists who had participated in the exhibition, but also others, to have more in-depth conversations and expound on their work (whether displayed or not) at greater length. These were supplemented by more distilled papers by scholars. Two edited lectures from the conference by Judith Jack Halberstam and Eliza Steinbock were adapted for this book. The volume is rounded out with individual, entirely subjective predilections, interests, and artistic practices that we find exciting and thought provoking.

Dear queers, cheers.

#### Literature

Büsser, Martin. "For Your Pleasure: Fragmente einer Porno-Komparistik." In *Testcard #17: Sex*, edited by Roger Behrens, Martin Büsser, Jonas Engelmann, and John Ullmaier. Mainz: Ventil-Verlag, 2008.

Halberstam, Judith Jack. "Technotopias: Representing Transgender Bodies in Contemporary Art." In *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

# A Collection of Key Queer Moments 2006–2015

Christiane Erharter

To curate an exhibition about queerness at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna: that sounded intriguing—and complicated. To be sure, in 2012, it was no longer necessary to depict the body in order to say something about (sexual) identity. One idea was to translate conventional representational images of LGBTQI people into an abstract queer imagery. But Dietmar Schwärzler and I did not merely avoid displaying bodies, portraits, or self-portraits. For us it was key to go beyond our local community and arrange an international exhibition. The following textual collage compiles some of the artistic and scholarly sources that fed into the research conducted for the exhibition “Pink Labor on Golden Streets.” Of course, some of these subjectively chosen examples contradict and even dispute the notion of “queer abstraction.”

## Go West

1

In August 2006 I traveled to Cologne for the opening of the exhibition “The Eighth Square: Gender, Life and Desire in the Arts since 1960” at the Museum Ludwig.<sup>1</sup> At the exhibition’s press conference, the curators Julia Friedrich and Frank Wagner emphasized its historic nature as the first queer art exhibit. The curators further claimed to give a comprehensive overview of sexual desire and sexual liberation in the arts since 1960. They acknowledged the groundbreaking achievements of (radical) feminist art of the 1960s and 1970s but were only able to include some of its canonized highlights, such as works by VALIE EXPORT, Annette Messager, Adrian Piper, and Cindy Sherman. However, since the exhibition aimed to cover a much broader scope, lesbian feminist contributions could not be exhibited extensively. At least there were works by Catherine Opie and Nicole Eisenman. Martin Büsser criticized the exhibition as insufficiently activist and political.<sup>2</sup> The exhibition not only lacked a guiding title, it did not even have a clear theme that could have become a scandal, as Büsser put it.

1 “The Eighth Square: Gender, Life and Desire in the Arts since 1960,” Museum Ludwig, Cologne, August 19–November 12, 2006. Catalogue available: Frank Wagner et al. ed., *The Eighth Square: Gender, Life and Desire in the Arts since 1960* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006).

2 Martin Büsser, “Das Achte Feld,” *Intro*, September 18, 2006, <http://www.intro.de/kultur/das-achte-feld>.

## 1a

From my research into and thinking about queer art, the works that were influential over the past decade were by Kaucyila Brooke, Henrik Olesen, and Piotr Nathan. All three artists produced work that left the depiction of the body behind and introduced sociopolitical determinants of identity politics. Brooke was invited to extend her ongoing artistic research about lesbian bars and include their history in Cologne for the exhibition cited above. Since 1996, Brooke's series *The Boy Mechanic* documents the history of lesbian bars across the United States and Europe, in cities and towns such as San Diego, Los Angeles, Cologne, and San Francisco. She writes:

Focusing on the lesbian bar reveals how sexuality and sexual identity inform larger narratives about public identity and social space. It is my hope that the photographs, video, and maps of *The Boy Mechanic* will document and give authority to narrations of lesbian bar life, so often anonymous or mute, and now waning.<sup>3</sup>

For *The Boy Mechanic/Cologne* (2006) she documented the sites of former and current lesbian bars through photography. For the exhibition, a map on a blackboard included descriptions of her encounters with the owners of those places.

## 1b

A gay male counterpart of Brooke's *The Boy Mechanic* could be Nathan's installation *Neue-Romantik-Schriften zu den Leidenschaften des 20. Jahrhunderts: die Jungs* (New romantic writings on the passions of the 20th century: The boys; 1993), which I saw for the second time at the aforementioned exhibition. Nathan's work is an homage to gay cruising—probably the embodiment of gay sex. He removed the doors and partitions of cubicles in public men's rooms in Berlin, which featured graffiti, advertisements, scribbles, and glory holes, and transferred them to the exhibition space.

## 1c

Olesen's research piece *Lack of Information* (2001) was presented in Cologne in a closed room. This compilation of international "sodomy laws" provides evidence of the criminalization of homosexual activity. In around forty countries, same-sex relationships are illegal; in another forty countries, sexual relationships between men are illegal. In seven countries, homosexuality carries the death penalty. Olesen listed the countries in alphabetical order and combined the texts with images—each one a cliché of the nation depicted.

## 1d

In 2008 Olesen not only updated but challenged Magnus Hirschfeld's archive of an early sexual typology of "intermediate" sexualities. Olesen's classification system combines the historical presentation charts with new queer images. *Der Körper unter der Haut ist eine überhitzte Fabrik* (2007) is the title of the artwork he created for the exhibition "Sex brennt" at the Berlin Museum of Medical History at the Charité.<sup>4</sup>

## 2

At documenta 12 in 2007, Lukas Duwenhögger presented *The Celestial Teapot* (2006–07), an oversized teapot placed on scaffolding. The sculpture was initially conceived by the artist as a memorial for homosexuals persecuted during the Nazi era and afterward. In this context, the teapot represents a cliché about gay men as well as a pose: one hand is placed on the hip while the other hand is held at shoulder height with a floppy wrist. With this piece of china, Duwenhögger pays homage to the repertoire of camp posing and drag.

## 3

In spring 2009 Schwärzler curated an exhibition at Vienna's Kunsthalle Exnergasse on the topic of friendship.<sup>5</sup> An interview with Foucault, published in *Gai Pied*, served as a source of inspiration.<sup>6</sup> In this interview, he conceives friendship as a model of living and loving beyond normative heterosexuality, a practice that gives rise to new networks and (political) activities. Dietmar included rarely seen works by artists from post-socialist countries, such as Dasen Štambuk, Karol Radziszewski, Jaan Toomik, Marina Gržinić, and Aina Šmid. He stressed that in the art world, friendships are often a significant aspect of production—whether for structural or economic reasons or due to shared thematic interests.

3 Kaucyila Brooke, "The Boy Mechanic," 1996–ongoing. See <http://www.kaucyilabrooke.com/index.php/projects/archive-the-boy-mechanic/>.

4 "Sex brennt: Magnus Hirschfelds Institut für Sexualwissenschaft und die Bücherverbrennung," curated by Rainer Herrn, was an exhibition of art and historical documents at the Berlin Museum of Medical History at the Charité from May 6–September 14, 2008.

5 "Smell It! Freundschaft als Lebens-,

Produktions- und Aktionsform," Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna, May 28–June 27, 2009. See <http://www.smell-it.org/catalogue/available>.

6 Michel Foucault, interview by R. de Ceccatty, J. Danet, and J. Le Bitoux, "Friendship as a Way of Life," *Caring Labor: An Archive*, trans. John Johnston, November 18, 2010, <https://caringlabor.wordpress.com/2010/11/18/michel-foucault-friendship-as-a-way-of-life/>. Originally published in *Gai Pied* (April 1981).

## 4

In April 2011, I spent a week in New York City. I met the artist Emily Roysdon—a member of LTR who had a solo show at Art in General titled “Positions.”<sup>7</sup> Roysdon is a contributing member of the band MEN, of which Ginger Brooks Takahashi had been a member, too, before leaving the band in the beginning of 2011. It so happened that during my stay, MEN was playing a concert at some venue in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. MEN is a Brooklyn-based band and art/performance collective led by JD Samson, also a member of the feminist electro-punk collective Le Tigre. It was a “home game” and a release party for their debut album *Talk about Body*. Roysdon joined them on stage. The performance was high-energy, the crowd enthusiastic—and familiar, like “my community” in Vienna. Not abstract at all.

## 5

In 2003 Beatriz Preciado’s *Kontrasexuelles Manifest (Contra-Sexual Manifesto)* introduced the anus as the center of universal lust.<sup>8</sup> According to the manifesto, a contract needs to be signed before having sex—preferably anal sex with a dildo—and sexuality needs to be completely separated from its reproductive aspects. In her pamphlet she further demanded the abolishment of the terms “masculine” and “feminine” as well as gay marriage. In 2013, Preciado published a text about her personal experiences with testosterone.<sup>9</sup> She now lives and works as Paul B. Preciado.

## 6

In May 2012, I visited the “Animism” exhibition at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin.<sup>10</sup> It was the last week of the show, which was on tour from Vienna where I had missed it. I was drawn into Roe Rosen’s *Maxim Komar-Myshkin: Vladimir’s Night* (2011–14). Following a children’s book aesthetic, Rosen presents the story *Vladimir’s Night* by the young poet Maxim Komar-Myshkin. Komar-Myshkin was the pseudonym of the fictional Russian poet Efim Poplavsky (1978–2011), who committed suicide in a closet. I was thinking that we needed to include a piece like that in our “Pink Labor” show, which we were already planning by then. At that time Dietmar was at the short film festival in Oberhausen, where Rosen’s films were shown. Back in Vienna we reported to each other enthusiastically about Rosen and his projects. And we agreed to include him. We had a similar experience with Tejal Shah’s *Between the Waves*,<sup>11</sup> which I saw at DOCUMENTA 13 in June 2012.

## Queer East

## 7

In her 2009 novel *Atemschaudel (The Hunger Angel)*, Nobel prizewinner Herta Müller tells the story of a young man who is deported to a labor camp by Soviet soldiers because he belongs to the German-speaking minority in Romania.<sup>12</sup> He is imprisoned for five years because of his ethnic identity, not his sexual one, suffering privations and experiencing incredible hunger. Müller only vaguely mentions his homosexuality when he is caught cruising at a park. By not making an issue out of the sexual orientation is Müller differentiating between discrimination because of ethnicity and sexuality? In the character’s case, his ethnicity weighs far more heavily than his homosexuality.

## 8

I heard about the concept of *kvar* for the first time at a presentation about queer politics and migration by Ana Hoffner and Ivana Marjanović.<sup>13</sup> According to Marjanović, the term, a Serbo-Croatian word for “malfunction,” was introduced by the performance collective Queer Beograd.<sup>14</sup> *Kvar* originally referred to a machine’s malfunction, but Queer Beograd uses the term to signify queer politics as a connection between diverse struggles against oppression, such as anticapitalist, antiracist, and antifascist activism. *Kvar* means the feminist/post-feminist/queer fight against patriarchy and hetero-normativity. *Kvar* means celebrating and exposing the malfunctioning of the capitalist, racist, fascist, and homophobic society-machine.

7 LTR is a queer-feminist collective of visual artists with a flexible, project-oriented practice. LTR produced five issues of an annual independent art journal, performance series, events, screenings, and collaborations. The group was founded in 2001 by Ginger Brooks Takahashi, K8 Hardy, and Emily Roysdon. Ulrike Müller joined LTR in 2005 and Lanka Tattersal became a member in 2005.

8 Beatriz Preciado, *Kontrasexuelles Manifest* (Berlin: b\_books, 2003). *Contra-Sexual Manifesto* originally written in English and Spanish, and first published in France in 2000.

9 Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2013).

10 “Animism: Modernity through the Looking Glass,” Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin,

March 15–May 6, 2012; and Generali Foundation, Vienna, September 16, 2011–January 29, 2012. Curated by Anselm Franke. “Animism” was a collaboration between Extra City Kunsthall, Antwerp, Museum of Contemporary Art (M HKA), Antwerp, Kunsthalle Bern, Generali Foundation, Vienna, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, and Freie Universität Berlin.

11 In this volume, see Nanna Heidenreich’s text, 56–67.

12 Herta Müller, *Atemschaudel* (Munich: Hanser, 2009).

13 “Queer(in)Beograd – Kvarenje Queer-a,” a talk between Ana Hoffner and Ivana Marjanović about queer politics and migration, took place at Ve.Sch, Vienna, on May 3, 2012.

14 Ibid.

Hoffner and Marjanović have also used the concept of “homonationalism”—the association of queer people and/or gay rights with a nationalist ideology—as a critique of LGBTQI, for example “pinkwashing” in Israel. By promoting gay-friendliness, the state attempts to pinkwash—as in downplay or soften— aspects of its politics that are considered negative.<sup>15</sup> I find this stance useless. Not every queer person identifies with nationality. And at the end of the day, being a lesbian in Belgrade’s public space is different from being lesbian in, say, Graz—or Ljubljana.

## 9

*Being Afraid and Being Yourself* (2007) is a work by the Romanian artist group h.arta, claiming that gay rights, such as gay marriage, are civil rights.<sup>16</sup> A photograph of two red balloons rising into a light blue sky references the riots against the 2007 Bucharest gay pride parade. A gay march took place in Bucharest on June 9, 2007. The 250 participants were protected by 600 policemen, and 105 people were arrested for acts of violence against the marchers. Even if the focus of “GayFest” itself was to demand and promote same-sex marriage and partnership, h.arta’s work is very subtle. Without depicting bodies or individuals, they address queer issues by taking the struggle to a symbolic level instead at the same time paying credits to its activist aspect.

## 10

At the 11th Istanbul Biennial in 2009, I saw Igor Grubić’s *East Side Story* (2006–08) for the first time. In a two-channel video installation, he juxtaposes news footage with reenactments of it through the medium of dance. The documentary film combines television footage taken from two separate gay pride events that took place in Belgrade in 2001 and in Zagreb in 2002. The images surpass expectations as well as prejudices when it comes to social acceptance of homosexuality. The participants in both parades were subjected to verbal and physical abuse as well as organized violence coordinated by groups of nationalists, hooligans, and neo-Nazis.

## 11

In June 2010 I saw Katarzyna Kozyra’s *Il castrato* (2006) for the first time during a visit to the Muzeum Sztuki, the contemporary art museum in Lodz, Poland. The video was presented in a black box as part of an exhibition of the museum’s collection. It is a drag performance in the setting of a Baroque opera. Kozyra is taught “femininity” and thus plays a drag queen. In the opera’s finale she is

castrated by the maestro while singing Schubert’s “Ave Maria.” As in her earlier work *Men’s Bathhouse*, Kozyra once again investigates and deconstructs gender roles. Her gender once again proves to be a costume. I am surprised that such a radical work of art is in the collection of a public museum, and presented prominently no less, disproving the stereotype of Poland as a homophobic society.

## 12

In late June 2012, Dietmar and I presented our initial concept for our exhibition at a conference in Bremen. The conference organizers suggested a host/guest structure following the idea of a community connecting the spirits of activism, art, and theory.<sup>17</sup> The hosts were invited by the organizers and could themselves suggest guests with whom to do the presentation. Andrea B. Braidt was our host. Braidt’s lecture was a reckoning with the usage of queer as an adjective: “It has become a label for commodities; think of all the queer film festivals, queer cookbooks, etc. Nobody thinks of its history as a shaming term anymore. But is it still a powerful weapon of political activism? I am not sure at all. It has become too arbitrary, too nondescript. No emancipatory power there anymore.”<sup>18</sup>

Braidt reminded us:

Queer has become such an overused adjective. Who remembers that it used to be most powerful when spoken as a verb: to queer a piece of art, to queer the language, to queer political action?<sup>19</sup>

As a productive solution she suggested prohibiting the adjective “queer” and saying *kvar* instead in order to extend the term by contradiction:

Finally, let’s only use “queer” in connection to “abstraction.” As a term, “queer abstraction” ensures the non-identitary dimension. The abstract, i.e., the nonrepresentational, the nonfigurative, does not, cannot

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> See the “Land of Human Rights” project, which started in 2007; <http://www.landofhumanrights.eu/eng/project/index.html>. (last visited May 15, 2015)

<sup>17</sup> “Quite Queer Lab,” June 29–July 1, 2012, Spedition Kunst- und Kulturverein e.V., Am Güterbahnhof, Bremen, Germany. Organized by thealit Frauen.Kultur.Labor.

<sup>18</sup> Andrea B. Braidt, “Queer Art: Prohibit the Adjective: A Manifesto on the Occasion of a 20th Anniversary,” in *Quite Queer*, ed. Claudia Reiche (Bremen: thealit, 2014), 17–23, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

(by definition) have the power to affirm something that could be “performed.” The abstract remains a signifier without a signified. It defies commodification because it does not show who it possibly addresses. The abstract promises to stay temporal. Queer abstraction represents the contradiction-in-terms. It performs an interpellatory act (“I declare this abstraction queer”) that has the potential to be both ironic and provocative.

HOW ABSTRACT CAN A COCKSUCKING FAGGOT BE?<sup>20</sup>

## Epilogue

“Drag is political,” reads a banner in the Spanish Pavilion at this year’s Venice Biennale.<sup>21</sup> It belongs to an installation by the artists Cabello/Carceller. The curatorial project *Los sujetos* (The subjects) revisits and reinterprets the figure of Salvador Dalí through the eyes of contemporary artists, among them the duo Cabello/Carceller.<sup>22</sup> They filmed a performative situation in the empty Spanish Pavilion prior to the opening, aiming to “address the issues of imposed social obligations, the will to modify, personal struggle as a form of change, the revival of myths and the need for a revolution based on a lack of definition.”<sup>23</sup> As in 2011, with artists Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz,<sup>24</sup> Cabello/Carceller refer to drag as a political concept of agency in 2015.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> The Spanish Pavilion, part of the 56th Venice Biennale, was curated Martí Manen, May 9–November 22, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Manen’s curatorial project, entitled *Los sujetos* (The subjects), revisits and reinterprets the figure of Salvador Dalí through the eyes of three contemporary artists: Francesc Ruiz, Cabello/Carceller, and Pepo Salazar.

<sup>23</sup> Statement from the press release of the Spanish Pavilion.

<sup>24</sup> In 2011 Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz represented Switzerland at the Venice Biennale. They exhibited their film project *Chewing the Scenery* and presented their new catalogue *Temporal Drag*, ed. Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz 2011).

# Queer in Trans-Formation

A Conversation between Jakob Lena Knebl, Hans Scheirl,  
and Ruby Sircar

In 2012 the studio for Contextual Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna organized the conference “Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction,”<sup>1</sup> an interdisciplinary artistic and scholarly project unfolding in diverse formats and held in tandem with the exhibition “Pink Labor on Golden Streets.” The weekend consisted of a three-day conference that took place at the Academy, a performance program at brut Theater, and a film program shown at top kino.<sup>2</sup>

“Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction” was conceived and initiated by Hans Scheirl, Jakob Lena Knebl, Tim Stüttgen, and Ruby Sircar as a follow-up on two events that had taken place at the Academy: Judith Jack Halberstam’s presentation on “Queer Abstraction” in 2007, and Tim Stüttgen’s seminar “Post Porn Politics” in 2012. The idea was to discuss, spread, and share queer and especially post-pornographic positions, ideas, visions, and methods at the Academy and in public settings. In recent years, a large number of the Academy’s staff members has centered their artistic scholarship and teaching around queer, feminist, gender-related, and decolonial themes. The aim was to present and discuss internal and external academic tendencies and movements, contemporary post-porn theories and practices, and the question as to whether abstract art can be called queer.

**Hans Scheirl:** Let’s start by talking a bit about our work at the Academy, especially regarding queer and trans issues. How do we approach this subject matter, and how did it develop for us? All of us have been involved here and teaching now for quite some time.

**Jakob Lena Knebl:** I find it interesting how the studio transformed and became a place where queer and trans topics were applied and discussed. More and more people from different parts of the world have been applying to study here.

**HS:** From the outset there was a strong feminist angle, as Elke Krystufek was my predecessor. Working with her was Katrina Daschner, who stayed on and built a performative discourse as well as staging performance events outside the Academy. Later Jakob Lena joined in, bringing in topics around body and identity politics along with the meshing of art and design, emphasizing the importance of working with and within the mainstream. Also, you brought in a sensitivity toward classification. Ruby, you have been on the team for the longest now. You expanded the department’s scope into wider interdisciplinary fields and the decolonial

<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.akbild.ac.at/portal\\_en/organisation/activities/lectures\\_events/2012/conference?set\\_language=en&cl=en](https://www.akbild.ac.at/portal_en/organisation/activities/lectures_events/2012/conference?set_language=en&cl=en).

<sup>2</sup> For detailed information, see the appendix, 260–67.



discourse. Since the beginning of the year, I am happy to say, we have Roberta Lima on board, who is not only a radical queer body artist but also a theorist and architect. In her most recent works, such as *Setting Foot: deconstructing the sapatão*, she focuses on the question of performativity and gender in Latin America. She demonstrates how an apparently “simple” word (*sapatão* means both “shoe” and “lesbian”) carries various meanings that can be interpreted in different ways and inserted into different contexts and lines of thinking, such as postcolonial, queer, and feminist theory, as well as South American diaspora epistemologies.

**Ruby Sircar:** I think we should clarify in the beginning whether or not we should divide “queer” and “trans” in our discussion. As you, Hans, have been pointing out, for example, in your manifesto the issue and content of trans precedes your teaching.<sup>3</sup> Does trans as a term take queer issues a step further or broaden queer understanding in any way?



Fig. 2  
Roberta Lima, *Setting Foot: deconstructing the sapatão (Self-portrait 01)*, 2013

**HS:** These two concepts can both work side by side, as these words have different resonances. For me, queer includes life, the experiments we conduct in our lives, the effect those have on our artistic practices, and how those in turn shape our lives. It also includes the notion of a community.

**JLK:** For me, queer is trans. Language is always limited. I could speak in quotation marks all the time. Transformation is something that all of us practice and carry out all our lives. Queer makes this transformation conscious and works with it.

**RS:** Maybe we should not divide the two issues.

**HS:** Well, there are differences. Trans for me, includes transgender, but also trans-media, trans-genre, trans-capitalist, transcultural, trans-feminist<sup>4</sup>—this could be continued. Just like queer it is an adjective, not a noun.<sup>5</sup> It puts a mark on a dominant signifier and thus trans-forms the sign or queers it: just as in queer abstraction.

- 3 In 2007 Hans Scheirl defined a teaching manifesto-in-progress for his work at the Academy. The following is an excerpt of what Scheirl’s work here is about:
2. To encourage trans-themes and working methods: trans-media, trans-genre, transgender, trans-culture, trans-class, etc., and introduce the students to the concept of queer and especially cyber-queer.
  3. To develop a contextual, in this sense ethical, consciousness and an individual as well as team-based agency: to become aware of the art-work’s bigger (cultural\_ social\_ political\_ scientific) framework and to locate it somewhere in the exploding media-sphere of “public space.”
  5. To bring “the body” back into the discourse. But “where does my ‘body’ start and end?” we ask ourselves in these time\_ spaces of global interchange, where technologically enhanced prosthetic and chemical/physical interventions are transforming our everyday exchange with the world. And in this sense to consider whether the word “body” needs to include the materials, technologies, and techniques of our art making, as well as the social,

political, and financial context of its production, the embodied subjectivities of the recipients, and last but not least the “bodies” of the exhibition—or event—spaces: “cyborg body-art”!

6. To reflect on sexuality in the context of the all-persuasive media that charge it with meaning in an obsessively repetitive beat and to realize that our sexuality with its practices and fantasies is just as much being shaped by biopolitical power systems as it is predisposed for our own shaping.

7. To create a dynamic between the performativity of art, art making, and being-an-artist and the performativity of gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and other identity construction sites where “life-art” and “the art of life” meet.

- 4 In this volume, see Katia Sepúlveda in conversation with Nina Hoehchl, “To Think with the Whole Body,” 68–81.
- 5 In this volume, see David Getsy in conversation with Simon Williams, “Appearing Differently: Abstraction’s Transgender and Queer Capacities,” 38–55.

**RS:** The project started out when Jakob suggested that it would be interesting to cooperate and exchange thoughts with Tim, as he had been invited to teach as guest lecturer at the Academy. And now, if you, Hans, point out the importance of trans but clearly chose “queer abstraction” as the title of the project?

**HS:** Yes, I was referring to Jack Halberstam who introduced the notion of queer abstraction as an artistic practice when visiting the Academy in 2007 after an invitation from Katrina Daschner and me.

**RS:** Tim was a trigger to stage the project at the Academy. We all know that queer teaching has been paramount at the Academy during the last few years. And as far as I can see it has taken a pioneering role here within the German-speaking academia. The current and ongoing discussion is how to formulate queerness. Let us leave aside the motivation of why it all began, whether it is analyzed through scientific scholarship, lived in daily experience every day, or explored through artistic work ...

**HS:** A sense of community has grown around the Contextual Painting class with constant exchange to and from the other departments. Students are self-organized and set up group projects in diverse places. Also, outside the Academy there is a vital vibrant performance, music, and club scene; for example, Burlesque Brutale, FMQueer, Klub Mutti, and Gender Crash, to mention only a few. Even in the art world, queer and trans-gender have become topics. And in some points it crosses over into the mainstream (Conchita Wurst is a current example). The format of the club-night hosting performances allows people to experiment with dragging up as different personalities. It is a scene where you are safe from discrimination. We are dealing with a dynamic here in-between theory, everyday life, the club and performance scenes, the university, and art.

**JLK:** Even though queer is meant to deconstruct norms and stereotypes and makes us think about alternatives, it is not free concerning when it comes to its own “dos and don’ts.” One must not think of oneself as being ahead of others. That is a mistake—marking the beginning of stagnation, or producing new kinds of norms.

**HS:** At this point it would be interesting to hear about the experiences you are currently having on this Internet platform ...

**JLK:** I started to find out about this by creating a profile for myself at a swinger platform in order to transform, yet again, my desire, identity, and scope. That is not just an observation, but I am in it. Within our academic community, this

is not self-evident. These different spaces do exist side by side without connections. Online you can find so many self-defined straight men who are highly queer. You would not easily find anything comparable in a queer surrounding. This cyber-community functions according to a very old libertine idea without even knowing or using the term queer. And yet it is extremely widespread. I think it is important to discuss alliances. Queer is much bigger than we can imagine—it is often already there but merely hidden.

**RS:** Do you really think it is that hidden? Let’s us go back to Jack Halberstam who refers to a mainstream culture (Jay Z and Kanye West), on the one hand, and artistic practices, on the other.<sup>6</sup> Showing imagery used in popular music videos depicting the male body in what seems to be an assumed positive queer aesthetic and attitude.

**JLK:** Yes, there is a lot happening in different contexts in our societies, like what happened already in the 1970s with glam rock and in the 1980s with pop cultures turning very queer. Today this tendency has returned to the mainstream, which means there is a lot of potential to discover and tease out.

**HS:** I am currently reading Eva Illouz, who made me aware what a huge number of people are searching for sexual experiences through similar platforms.<sup>7</sup> But that book is from 2004!

**JLK:** Entering one of these online platforms, you have to fill out a questionnaire and reflect on yourself. You fix an identity for this specific exchange. Illouz further writes that a private self is trans-formed into a public self and vice versa. Thus you are confronted with a mixture of private and public identities. On top of that, you have to find out and question your search parameters very specifically. The first questionnaires were designed and patented by psychologists. I was excited that one of the questions was: “How do you deal with emotions and anger?” A “normalization” has taken place. What used to be associated with a sleazy atmosphere became common sense and a mass market.

**RS:** Talking some more about emotions, let me refer to Johnny Golding here who said in her lecture during the conference that a shared and common trauma of the community made the concept of queer possible. The common grief in the 1980s and 1990s, following the losses from AIDS, united the gay and lesbian movement as queer. We are standing on an emotional minefield when discussing queerness.

<sup>6</sup> In this volume, see “‘No Church in the Wild’: Anarchy Now,” 208–18.

<sup>7</sup> Eva Illouz, *Gefühle in Zeiten des Kapitalismus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2006).

You, Jakob, said that creating phrases and language as such is unable to pinpoint—

**HS:** —but you don't need a label when you fill out a form point by point, describing your sexual desires. It would be immediately limiting if I had to write that I am a transvestite or a such-and-such. There are numerous, varied things to get aroused by and often they mix.

**JLK:** The term queer was necessary for me to conduct and reflect consciously on my own transformations! I like the idea that there is no fixed self.

**HS:** What I also find interesting is why people are more relaxed in front of the computer—this idea of escaping from the body into cyberspace. On the one hand, they have this very intimate and active exchange of private details and, on the other, most users are not interested in a physical meeting. Nevertheless, your body is part of the game: sitting in front of the computer, masturbating, satisfying yourself. The body is always there. Only the communication with the other person happens through the computer, not through the bodies.

**JLK:** I think the issue is a different one: it is about how we want to be seen. I have noted that many people are very adept, beautiful writers. With their ideas and fantasies, they get very close to the other person very quickly. More quickly than in "real life." They open themselves up without the fear of the constraints of body-norms.

**HS:** But there are photos ...

**JLK:** Photos can be fake and often it takes a long time before they are exchanged. Illouz talks about an authentic self, without fear, a safe space. It is possible to expose everything or give myself away.

**RS:** I would not agree that the body is left aside. You, Hans, quite often talk about a cyborg state as a self-assigned form of everyday experience. The computer or cyberspace has become an extension of the body.

**JLK:** I think it is also about abolishing fear, as your physical body is not there. In a way that is a kind of abstraction. In lived everyday experience, people do not get so close so quickly. Will the person acknowledge me, find me attractive? Self-manifestation can happen extremely quickly in cyberspace.

**HS:** But also loss happens much more quickly. Couldn't it be a special quality of queer art that it withstands being appropriated by power and

surplus value, as it deals with emotions? Difficult emotions. Looking at Jennifer Doyle's work,<sup>8</sup> or remembering John Golding recounting vividly how she lived through the trauma of AIDS in the 1980s in Toronto, where so many of her friends died. A queer community bonded over the overwhelming grief and horror over the sick and dying. And some of this has survived. When one meets a queer person a warm embrace reminds us, "Hey, we are still alive!" The other emotion I find interesting within these topics is disgust, as it is often related to sexual practices that are outside the expected parameters.

**JLK:** My perspective is that of another generation. My environment contains as much grief as any other. And here as well as elsewhere, it's a taboo. I wasn't there in the 1980s. Warmth and sincerity are maybe just part of such a small scene. We all know each other. We have common discriminatory experiences of discrimination. That creates a cohesion. Our finite nature is ignored by us, which is mankind's greatest catastrophe. It is our big chance to live. Life is not a rehearsal. Tim Stüttgen has died. This was a moment of disruption. Afterward we all lived more consciously for some time. And then it is gone again. Only some of us are able to carry it further. It is really tragic that we are not more conscious of our finite being.

**HS:** Art offers the possibility to mourn, to be furious, or to be disgusted. How do you deal with it?

**JLK:** How is it possible to make queer more productive? How do you enlarge your own radius? How to transform yourself? This is why I am interested in queer. What does queer mean for community building and for people who define themselves as straight? What are the chances queer offers?

**RS:** I think that both of you answered some of these questions already. On the one hand, it is difficult for an economic/market realm to access queer space, and, on the other hand, queer provides you with a safe/liberated space to live in. The concept is broad enough to not allow a capitalist/liberal free-market system to take hold. Hierarchies are more difficult to define—the aforementioned embrace is a safe haven. Queer is a social format that offers new possibilities that are denied in other social communities or everyday lives. I think there is implicitly a beautiful utopia included that one must accept.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

**JLK:** To build social alliances is our big task and chance. Perspectives and parameters must be questioned, and yes, queer allows for that—alternatives might be exercised that are of importance for all of us. Queer often faces allegations of being neoliberal—as transformation and change are key notions to the idea. But the context is a different one. We are facing an important and productive paradox here. Like many others, I am always searching for an easy way out. That would be very practical. But it is not possible. The political subject acts from within a political formation. On the one hand, this is necessary, but on the other, I'm not happy about it. And this is a paradox. But we need the paradox, for otherwise the entrenched battles will continue. It is not so easy. It is not easy at all. There are so many nuances of gray and such a variety of shades, and yet we are hoping for simplicity. Logic. But also a boomerang.

**HS:** It is about movement—the movement necessary between creating notions we can more or less agree upon. We need fixed notions in everyday life as we need pictograms, and we need to break them up again when they start to limit necessary development. I have this picture in my head of different entities hovering in the air, which actually seem to contradict each other, but all have an effect as part of the dynamic. But sometimes it becomes urgent to pull it all together and say: “This is what I mean.” How can one be mobile and then do the fixing when it is necessary?

**JLK:** Transformation that embodies itself within specific situations as a statement and construct, but then continues to transform.

**HS:** A lovely last word. Let me just add one thing we all did not touch upon in our conversation, because we take it for granted: the humor that we are employing in our works. Parody, exaggeration, camp, and a celebration of the now are certainly defining moments of queer-sensitive art.

#### Literature

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# Appearing Differently Abstraction's Transgender and Queer Capacities

David J. Getsy in Conversation  
with William J. Simmons

**William J. Simmons:** Queer art has often been predicated on the literal nature of LGBTQ themes and bodies, following the idea that representation is a form of liberation. How does the representation of politics differ from the politics of representation?

**David Getsy:** The history of queer practices in art has been wrapped up with a desire to testify to the existence of those who love and live differently. This means that both art and its histories have tended to be preoccupied with the production of evidence.

This compulsion to make evident has its roots in the late nineteenth-century construction of sexuality as a means to categorize people based on their erotic or romantic gravitations. In this history, regulations of sexual acts gave way to a wider monitoring of individuals' ways of living. The agents both of oppression and of resistance positioned what we have come to call "sexuality" as being more than carnal. Rather, it came to delimit an interrelated set of nonnormative attitudes toward desire, family, and one's relation to the social. One way this played out historically was in the emergence of medical and legal formulations of homosexual (and later LGB) identity that could be posited, defined, and identified—whether that be to attack or to defend them. No less than those who would be prejudiced against them, pro-LGB activists and cultural workers, that is, tended to pursue a model of identity that privileged shared experience, coherence, and visibility. It was this model that they came to argue was equivalent (but still different) to the norm to which they aspired. In this they demanded evidence of existence as a foundation for arguing for sympathy and compassion. This is the "equal" rights strategy in which restrictive identity categories are constructed and, consequently, defended in order to talk back to the unequal distribution of power. Ultimately, however, this strategy demands that difference be made visible, countable, and open to surveillance as a precondition for arguing that such identifiable divergence be treated like the norm. Not only does this strategy insidiously reinforce a hierarchical relationship between normalcy and difference, it also serves to engender attitudes of assimilationism and of subordination to normativity among those who are fighting prejudice. Difference (and oppression) is still experienced, but it is denied as a foundation for opposition. Michel Foucault was right to warn of all that was lost when sexuality became a taxonomic category of identity and, consequently, became an axis of regulation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Beyond the analysis in Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume 1, an Introduction*, trans. Robert J. Hurley (1976; New York: Vintage Books, 1990); see also

the 1978 interview published as "The Gay Science," *Critical Inquiry* 37 (Spring 2011): 385–403; the 1982 interview published as "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,"



Fig. 3  
Gordon Hall,  
*SET (V)*, 2014

In the 1980s in the United States, a recognizably queer politics (and art) emerged publically out of the fight against the genocidal effects of governmental inaction to the AIDS crisis, and activists and cultural workers demanded visibility and accountability. (Foucault was a key source for many as they thought about the redistribution of cultural power).<sup>2</sup> Such political movements targeted assimilationist politics for their compulsory self-abnegation and argued that their self-erasure from discourse had facilitated the ability of the government to passively overlook the mounting deaths caused by AIDS.

Paradoxically, clear evidence of the existence of nonnormative desires was (again) demanded. Anti-assimilationism—the refusal to erase the difference of nonnormative sexual lives—became a cardinal principle, and it manifested itself as highly visible incursions of nonnormative sexualities into politics and culture. In activism and its attendant cultural manifestations like visual art and theater, evidence of existence was confrontationally produced. The United States is not the only place this happened during this era, of course, and we can see different kinds of AIDS-related artist activism in Europe and in Latin America (as with, for example, Roberto Jacoby in Argentina or *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis* in Chile). I'm calling forth this history here because it's important to remember how queer practices were formulated boldly and bravely in public discourse for the first time on a large scale. Across this history, however, it has been evidence of visibility and the ability to identify that have been given the most currency. That is, from the invention of the modern category of sexuality to the eruption of antiassimilationist queer practices that departed from it, an organizing question has been how to bring into representation visible positions of difference.

**WS:** So, are there alternatives to the politics of representational visibility?

**DG:** Running within and against this history has been the ongoing desire to evade the protocols of identification and surveillance that come with the figuration of queer positions. This arises from a skepticism about the limitations of overarching taxonomies of identity and, more specifically, about the ways in which sexuality has been made available to representation—that is, about how visualizations of sexuality have tended to focus

in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1974–84, Vol. 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1998), 163–73; and the 1983 interview published as “Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: Foucault and Homosexuality,” *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews*

and *Other Writings of Michel Foucault, 1977–1984*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 286–303.

<sup>2</sup> See David Halperin, *Saint Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).



Fig. 4  
Jonah Groeneboer,  
*bent hip*, 2014

almost exclusively on bodies and their couplings as recognizable signs of queer sensibilities. Such a privileging of images of erotic objects has the effect of caricaturing sexuality as sexual activity (even as something to be defended and celebrated) while replaying the regulatory compulsion to produce evidence of existence—to *appear* as lesbian, gay, bisexual, homosexual, or queer. That is, even though the history of modern sexuality has been caught up with arguing for a category of identity, the allowable and verifiable representations of nonheterosexual sexual identities have tended to privilege bodies and acts. In turn, this has prompted some artists to pursue ways to resist the reproduction of the regulatory power that makes the queer subject identifiable and distinguishable.

What I'm trying to say is that while the history of LGB activism and art have tended to focus on the politics of representation and visibility, there has also been, from the start, a recognition of how easy legibility comes with a cost. After all, how *does* one make sexuality visible to others? More to the point, how does one make it visible in a sophisticated way that speaks to the complexities of desire, of self-created familial bonds, and of the accumulated experience of living outside tacit norms? Queer experience can incorporate attitudes toward the world, family, sociality, and futurity—attitudes of resistance to compulsory heterosexuality that depart from its normative and procreative logics. How, today, do artists address this richer understanding of what sexual perspectives of difference can produce? Think about the problems faced, for example, by an artist who identifies as lesbian or gay or queer and asserts the centrality of that part of their existence to their work but who *refuses* to paint, sculpt, or write about erotic objects, same-sex couplings, or naked bodies—or, we shouldn't forget, who might be *barred from* doing so. How do they prove to skeptical viewers or readers that their sexual sensibility matters? Possibilities for speaking from experiences of difference are limited when one can only testify to existence through a recourse to the depiction of sexual acts, same-sex couplings, or erotically available bodies. This becomes a political as well as a formal question.

These concerns are not new, and they can be discerned throughout the history of art and, especially, twentieth-century art.<sup>3</sup> But what I've been fascinated to see is that many twenty-first-century artists have been finding one answer to these questions—and by no means the only one—in abstraction. This is, for them, not a turning away from politics but rather a mode in which to enact politics. Abstraction has been embraced for its oppositional, utopian, and critical possibilities, for it is in abstraction that the dynamic potential of queer stances can be manifested without recourse to the representation of bodies. The human figure in representation is inescapably culturally marked. Abstraction is one tactic for

refusing the power of this marking and for resisting the visual taxonomies through which people are recognized and regulated.

**WS:** So, what is the relationship between this history of the representation of sexuality and renewed interest in the term “queer”?

**DG:** In my view, abstraction makes sense as a vehicle for queer stances and politics because it is unforecasted in its visualizations and open in the ways in which it posits relations. On a conceptual level, queer is an adjective and not a noun. The usage of the term always implies at least two other things—a noun to which it is applied (a queer *what?*) and a norm or convention against which the term queer is posed. So, the term is always historically and contextually contingent. It infects and overtakes the nouns and things to which it is attached. One way of saying this is to say that it is performative in the strict sense, and its effects are to highlight and bracket the operations of implicit normativity. The connotations of queer in English center on a suspicion about unnaturalness, and it is the assumptions about what is and is not “natural” that queer practices critique.

I’m setting all this up to remind us that queer is no one thing—nor is it easily recognized. It is an operation in which norms are called into question, “common” sense is challenged, unnaturalness is upheld, and castigation is rebuffed through its embrace. It is frustrating for some to deal with the fact that queer has no one simple definition nor a readily available iconography, but it’s important to keep it mobile, tactical, and immoderate. This is why it continues to be urgent today—and why its mobility cannot be limited to the politics of representation. For this reason, abstraction has proved to be a useful mode for many artists in thinking through queer perspectives and their tactical richness.

**WS:** I noticed that in all you just said, you didn’t include transgender. You even left the “T” of the acronym. But much of your recent work has foregrounded the perspective of transgender studies. How have the important challenges brought about by recent interventions from transgender theory complicated our understanding of the word queer?

**DG:** This is crucial for both historical and conceptual reasons. While they are interwoven, transgender and queer histories should not be simply equated. Historically, gay and lesbian politics (as well as its outgrowth in academia as queer theory and queer studies) have tended to subsume, ignore, or misrepresent the role of gender nonconforming people.<sup>4</sup> More broadly, the distinctions between what we in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries define as gender and sexuality are historically contingent and not clear cut.<sup>5</sup> Gender variance was often seen—by both medical



Fig. 5  
Prem Sahib, *You & Me Both II*, 2013

establishments and by otherwise well-meaning gay and lesbian activists—as merely a manifestation of nonnormative sexual desire and identity. Such appropriations effectively made the contributions of trans and gender-variant people invisible. Even more problematically, transfolk were also subject to prejudice not just from the general public but also from gay and lesbian politics and culture. They were seen to be distracting from the message and problematic to gay and lesbian assimilationism.

- 3 See also “Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation,” *Art Journal* 72, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 58–71.
- 4 See, for instance, the critiques in Susan Stryker, “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin,” *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (2004): 212–15; *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2007); and see notes 6 and 7 below; Viviane K. Namaste, “Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory’s Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity,” in *Queer Studies; A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology*, ed. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 183–203; Viviane K.

- Namaste, “The Use and Abuse of Queer Tropes: Metaphor and Catachresis in Queer Theory and Politics,” *Social Semiotics* 9, no. 2 (1999): 213–34; and Viviane K. Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- 5 See the discussion in David Valentine, “The Categories Themselves,” *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (2003): 215–20; and David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).



Susan Stryker has talked about how the uncontextualized addition of the T to LGBT in mainstream activism had the pernicious effect of *normalizing gender* for the L, the G, and the B in that acronym, thus desexualizing the T and keeping all visibly nonconforming genders into that last letter.<sup>6</sup> This doesn't mean that there should not be coalitional politics among queer and transfolk, and Stryker has also argued how much queer politics and LGB rights movements *have always been* tied up with gender nonconformity and the fight against gender oppression.<sup>7</sup> The relation of queer to transgender should always be interrogated for the many ways in which they differ and interweave. I slipped the T out of the above because I was specifically talking about queer history. The politics of representation and the problems of visibility are different in trans history—as are the demands that one *appear* in order to be a political subject.

All in all, it's important to remember that there are allegiances and overlaps between queer and transgender priorities and experience, but they are not equivalent. Many individuals adopt both terms as ways in which they affiliate and understand themselves, but one needs to be careful not to equate gender nonconformity with sexual nonconformity. Further, one must understand how queer practices are always also fundamentally about gender. Because of this, the critique of gender regulation must be prioritized and the history of appropriation of trans experience by queer politics and theory must be attended to and revised.

**WS:** In another piece, you argued: “While transgender subjects and experience must remain central and defining, the lessons of transgender critique demand to be applied expansively.”<sup>8</sup> How can transgender theory be best incorporated into art historical scholarship?

**DG:** Transgender studies, as an intellectual formation and as an academic manifestation of real world politics, demands a substantial reconfiguration of our conceptions of personhood, relationality, and the social. Quite simply, the world looks different once we attend to the historical reality that gender is multiple, bodies are mutable, personhood is successive, and variability rather than (binary or dimorphic) consistency is ubiquitous. Our accounts of the human, of sexuality, and of the interpersonal must all be rethought through a valuation of mutability and of particularity. For instance, recognition of gender's pluralities fundamentally undermines the ways in which mainstream definitions of sexuality are predicated on binaries, however aligned or shuffled. What is needed is a broad recasting of politics, biopolitics, and necropolitics to understand the ways in which persons have been taxonomically regulated through the assumption of dimorphism and through the repeated positing of gender as static and unworkable.

With regard to artistic practice and its histories, I think art history can offer a major resource in this endeavor in its long-standing critique of representational strategies and of the use of the human figure as privileged image and allegorical device. In other words, art history has been concerned, for a long time, with the adequate rendering of the human form and the debates that have surrounded it. These arbitrations are ethical and not just aesthetic.

To take on the indisputable reality of transgender history and its complexity demands that additional work be done. Beyond its foundational focus on trans subjects speaking to and from trans experience and history, transgender studies is also a position from which to launch expansive critiques of gender regulation, of binarisms and dimorphisms, and of the ways in which persons are recognized. For me, this meant that I had to look differently at the ways in which art's histories have tended to reinforce models of the human that disallowed particularity and transformation. So I track episodes in which gender mutability or plurality incited reactions of anxiety and repression, or I examine ways in which artistic practices formulated non-dimorphic or nonbinary accounts of genders and bodies. In my new book *Abstract Bodies*, it is sculpture's struggle with extreme abstraction or objecthood in the 1960s that proved to be a particularly rich site for asking questions demanded by transgender studies.<sup>9</sup> It allowed me to see differently the work of non-trans artists such as David Smith or Dan Flavin. They are artists who would never themselves espouse a critical attitude toward a binary model of gender—let alone a more open understanding of gender's complexity. So, I use the questions from transgender studies to re-view their work itself, showing how the artists' desires to refuse the human figure inadvertently produced unforeclosed possibilities for thinking differently about how the human could be nominated. This is what I mean when I talk about “transgender capacity,” and I think it's essential for scholars and artists to take on board the wider critique of gender and biopolitics on which transgender studies insists. Such work supplements the important research being done by trans scholars on history, theory, and politics as well as contributes to a wider revision of the ways in which we analyze the “human” as a category of analysis and politics. My historical research on 1960s abstraction seeks

6 Susan Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” *Radical History Review* 100 (Winter 2008): 145–57.

7 Susan Stryker, “Why the T in LGBT Is Here to Stay,” *Salon*, October 11, 2007. [http://www.salon.com/2007/10/11/transgender\\_2/](http://www.salon.com/2007/10/11/transgender_2/).

8 David Getsy, “Capacity,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (2014): 48.

9 David Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

to understand how nonrepresentational art objects problematized binary gender assignments, how accounts of gender were reformulated in this decade, and, more broadly, how this history can inform current engagements with abstraction by trans and queer artists.

**WS: Following this line and thinking about this new book on nonrepresentational sculpture, how do these critiques relate to abstraction as a practice that gives voice to nonnormative sexualities or atypical or transformable genders?**

**DG:** Abstraction has afforded many artists a way of thinking about the varieties of identification that operate for individuals. With regard to gender, abstraction's avoidance of the figure offers the possibility to at least partially circumvent the tendency to read bodies as if they signify simply the gender of the person with that body. In other words, one shouldn't assume that one can discern gender from a quick glance at a person or a body. Figural representation brings with it the cultural marking of bodies in relation to ideologies and power, so one means of resistance is to refuse to render the human form and to demand an open range of potential identifications.

Abstraction is not a panacea for the cultural oppression of otherwise genders and sexualities, but it is a generative and increasingly attractive mode in which to prompt new visualizations. Because it refuses representation and figuration, abstraction relies on relations, be they between internal forms or externally with the viewer or with the space. One can examine those relations for what they propose and how they foster variability and particularity.

**WS: Can the lessons we derive from the queer and transgender advancements be applied to different veins of artistic practice beyond abstraction?**

**DG:** There is no denying that abstraction is a rarefied mode, but it is nevertheless a capacious one that engenders openness and potential. It's not, however, the only way to think about temporalized personhoods and plural genders. Any rendering of the human form (and any evocation of it as a standard) necessarily engages with the arbitration of persons and bodies, and transgender studies argues that we misrecognize the world by assuming that bodies and genders are simply and easily divided into two static camps. Instead, it demands that we attend to the temporal nature of bodies and persons and that we not assume that gender is readable as an expression of bodily configurations. Similarly, queer studies problematizes how we think about how bodies relate to one another, how desire operates, and how the social is formulated. These questions

are both bracing and enabling for the study of image making, and they offer ways to show how artistic practice is an arena in which accounts of personhood have, for centuries, been at issue. Abstraction distills these concerns and provides an exemplary theoretical object for them, but the questions are mobile and infectious.

**WS: Is there, then, a transgender iconography? A queer iconography? Surely this runs the risk of some kind of essentialism, though it sounds as promising as it does problematic. These issues have been on the mind of straight artists for some time as well. Lisa Phillips said of David Salle in 1986: "Salle has largely displaced the eroticism of his subject matter into the act of painting itself, demanding an erotics of art as a way of encountering the world."<sup>10</sup>**

**DG:** Well, the big difference is that Salle's subject position is in line with compulsory heterosexuality and normative accounts of gender as binary, so there is not the same political weight given to (or expected of) his *appearing as* heterosexual or male. Displacement or eroticism can be a political for an artist like Salle in a way it isn't for an artist working from a trans or queer perspective. For trans and queer artists, to choose to be visible is a political act. But from those same positions, to argue that one's difference still matters while refusing to become an object of surveillance or voyeurism is no less political. This is the difficulty. How does one do justice to the complexity and daily political content of trans or queer existence without simply requiring self-disclosure and self-representation as avatar of an identity category?

Back to your first question. Yes, there are iconographic signs that have been used by queer and trans artists—everything from Oscar Wilde's green carnation to the omnipresent rainbow to the proud display of the chest scar. These are reductive and by no means universally accepted. But I think the bigger question is how to refuse the requirement of an iconography. That's where we started this conversation, after all. It is often assumed that in order to be recognized as such, queer work has to *figure* queerness in the form of the iconography of sex and desire and that trans work has to make *visible* a process of transition. Such iconographic presumptions fall prey to the same evidentiary protocols that characterize the politics of visibility. We have to leave room to be able to speak from experiences that deny being so figured, and we have to reject the presumption that one needs to self-disclose and make oneself *easily recognizable* in order to have one's differences matter.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Phillips, "His Equivocal Touch in the Vicinity of History," in *David Salle*,

J. Kardon, ed. (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986), 31.



Fig. 6  
Heather Cassils,  
*The Resilience  
of the 20%*, 2013

It's precisely because of its own refusals of representation that abstraction seems newly political to many artists. Abstraction has become a position from which to prompt new visualizations and to propose new relations. Again, it resists the cultural marking of the body by refusing the figure. Some might see this as utopian and apolitical, but there are many artists who put forth abstraction as a way to make space for a critique of relationality and for *worlding* differently. Again, it's not the only strategy, but it is one that has been increasingly important in recent years as a means to think beyond the limitations of an exclusive focus on the politics of representation.

**WS:** So, what about other practices? My own work has thus far focused on the Pictures Generation, especially the late Jimmy DeSana, whose lush, abstracted bodies of the early 1980s became complex photomontages after he was diagnosed with AIDS. How might photography factor into these discussions?

**DG:** Because photography often starts with image capture, it differs from the ways in which images in painting and sculpture are largely built up through their material mediums. It's a cliché—but not all that wrong—to say that photography has a more intimate relationship with the world. It captures it, receptively, and relies on it. Montage and digital tools, however, afford many possibilities for the captured image(s) to be manipulated, allowing for new combinatory forms and previously unvisualized potentials. Because of this, degrees of abstraction are surely possible in photography (in addition to DeSana, one obvious example is Wolfgang Tillmans), but it's still relatively rare. I guess my question for abstract photography would be medium specific: What were the events during which the form of the photograph occurred?

For DeSana, however, could you say a bit more? Are those works actually abstract? I think collage and montage have some specific meanings (and are related to a long history of visualizing hybridity and the ways in which the given or the found can be used as raw material for transformation and recombination).

**WS:** It is precisely this oscillation between raw material (or the body) and the capacity for its manipulation that allows DeSana to enter this discussion. Before being diagnosed with AIDS, DeSana used his camera to dissolve bodies, to create a world wherein corporeality is both present and diffused—a combination of queer politics and the medium—something that could equally be said of the work of Amy Sillman or Nicole Eisenman as well. His works of the early 1980s are indeed representational, but through complex staging, lighting, and precise darkroom production, they speak to the possibility of a photography that is able to approximate the abstract possibilities of raw canvas or sculptural material.

His collage work, done in the darkroom, often uses materials we can recognize, like mustard, ravioli, flour, and letters of the alphabet. In many cases, DeSana would layer these materials atop photographs using glass, a method also used by his friend Marilyn Minter. This distancing effect refuses easy assimilation or consumption, causing us to pause and consider the layers of representation inherent in the photograph—the essence, perhaps, of abstraction. In this way, DeSana peels back the “laminated” image, to use Barthes’s terminology, and the crevices in between these sediments take on their own life. This suggests possibilities for new forms of queer erotics.

**Getting back to the present moment, what artists do you see as working within the queer and trans frameworks that we have been discussing?**

**DG:** My historical work on the 1960s has really been developed in dialogue with current practices. This comes, in part, from the fact that I teach in an art school and am deeply engaged with thinking about how art’s histories inform contemporary art and its making. It was seeing more and more trans and queer artists working with abstraction in the studios and in the galleries that made me realize the need for a historical assessment of a moment when abstraction became a place from which new accounts of gender could be articulated. This is what drove the writing of *Abstract Bodies*. That said, I am beginning to write much more often about artists working today, since I think all of the questions we’ve been discussing about abstraction have become increasingly widespread.

I’ve been approaching this in some writings about artists like Heather Cassils, who works between performance, sculpture, installation, and sound. Cassils’s performances often have a sculptural element as well as being aimed at the political history of figuration in art, and I am interested in the ways in which they critique that history and deploy abstraction.

There are also a number of artists who have used more or less reductive and geometric abstraction to address trans experience and queer perspectives. I’m thinking here of artists like Gordon Hall, Jonah Groeneboer, and Math Bass. Hall, like Cassils, also activates abstract objects through performance, and they create site-responsive sculptures that speak to issues of transformation, remaking, care of the self, and the refusal of visual taxonomies of personhood. For instance, their *Set* sculptures appear simple at first. However, the sculptures reveal themselves slowly as intricately worked objects that repay attention to particularities. Only by committing to spend time with one of these objects will one begin to see the ways in which it occupies the space and the ways in which it is unique. All of the *Set* sculptures also produce color effects (through reflection) on the wall that they are placed in intimate relation to. However striking



Fig. 7  
Jimmy DeSana, *Instant Camera*, 1980

this reflected color, the viewer sees only the effects of the vibrancy of the side that it refuses to show us directly—that is, visibly unavailable to us. The visual disclosures made by the sculptures in response to the viewer’s commitment to get to know them are, in this way, nevertheless restrained and intentionally partial. Not all is available to looking. Similarly, Groeneboer’s practice uses both sculpture and painting to create works that frustrate visual discernment. He makes art that is deliberately hard to see, singly. For instance, his sculptures made from barely visible strings in tension are visually inextricable from the space in which we encounter them. They activate an engaged process of looking in which viewers struggle to see the drawing made by the slight, taut strings in three dimensions. As they attempt to engage with these barely visible lines in space, they become just as much aware of what they have had to choose to not see in order to focus on one aspect of the complex polygons and quadrilateral outlines hovering in their proximity. I also think of Bass’s sculptures that appear, only from some angles, as if they are bodies underneath brightly striped tarps but from other angles appear illegible as such.

All three artists have explored the ways in which transformation can be visualized in works that evoke problems of figuration but that refuse to offer a representation of the body. Such work can be understood as standing in opposition to the long history of the voyeurism and exploitation to which trans and queer people have been subjected. At the same time, it's much more than that, and the work uses abstraction to address larger questions of the politics and poetics of how we view each other, what demands we make on recognition, and how transformation and particularity can be valued.

There are many more artists who similarly work from trans, queer, or both perspectives in making abstractions of varying degrees. One could look to Sadie Benning's paintings of video-editing transitions, Prem Sahib's abstract wall works, or Ulrike Müller's carefully composed and tightly cropped forms made from vitreous enamel on steel. For instance, Müller's coupled geometric forms have boundaries and interfaces that blur slightly due to the material. Visual differences of color and line are all made inextricable from (and intimately related to) each other once the powdered glass becomes fused through heat into one solid matrix. Divisions become continuities. Such work reminds us how materials and processes can also be used to evoke the complexities of personhood and its accruals, transformations, and exchanges.

Ultimately, there is no one way to recognize queer or trans content in abstraction. That's the point. Trans and queer stances appear differently each time. I think it's crucial to cultivate those acts of appearance and the openness they propose.

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# Eyelips

## On Tejal Shah's *Between the Waves*

Nanna Heidenreich<sup>1</sup>

All work entails relation, correspondence, reference (and reverence), connections, proximities, and fabulation. Tejal Shah's five-channel video installation *Between the Waves* consists of five chapters, each corresponding to a poem by Minal Hajratwala, who is also one of the performers: Dreamtime, Catastrophe, Regeneration, Hedonism, *Ache*.<sup>2</sup> In what follows I will repeat this five-channel/chapter structure, building on it or, to use a phrase by Trinh T. Minh-ha, whose work Shah admires and often quotes, speaking nearby.

This entails gossip, of course, and gossip is where fabulation meets the fabulous, as queer theory and film scholar/curator Marc Siegel has elaborated,<sup>3</sup> but gossip is not just about content but about context. I am not just writing about a work. I am also writing from my own personal connection, which also begins with an anecdote. It was a chance encounter that took place fifteen years ago, at the Filmhaus at Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, where I was then involved in the Lesbenfilmfestival at the Arsenal Cinema, an institution that later became very significant for me.<sup>4</sup> They\* were traveling through Europe with a friend, Natasha Mendonca (who did the camera in the "*Ache*" chapter).<sup>5</sup> Natasha, like Tejal, has since become an acclaimed artist and filmmaker.<sup>6</sup> Our encounter that day literally stopped us in our tracks. I took the two of them home that night (no, not like *that*). I remember it as one of those intense encounters where you're not entirely sure what the intensity, the magic consists of. And little did we know then that chance would bring all our paths together time and again. A few years later Natasha and Tejal conceived of *Larzish: Tremors of a Revolution* together, a film festival on sexuality and gender plurality that took place in Bombay for two consecutive years in 2003 and 2004. I recall discussions about our experiences programming queer cinema. There have been several connections since, such as two events addressing the pogroms against Muslims in Gujarat, organized in Berlin in 2003 at b\_books and the Heinrich Böll Foundation, with Tejal, Anissa Hélie, Britta Ohm, and Nicole Wolf. Oh, and Tejal's first solo show was in Berlin too, the city in which I still live, at Gallery Alexander Ochs: "The Tomb of Democracy," also in 2003. Other encounters in various places followed.

But let's begin. Five channels, five chapters.

- 1 I would like to thank Daniel Hendrickson for helping with "my English." Any odd formulations and language wrongdoings are entirely my responsibility though.
- 2 Commissioned by and first presented at DOCUMENTA 13 in Kassel (Germany) in 2012.
- 3 "Neither true nor false but fabulous." Marc Siegel, "Vaginal Davis's Gospel Truths," *Camera Obscura* 23, no. 1 (2008): 151-59.
- 4 In 2005 I began working at the Arsenal - Institute for Film and Video Art, which runs

- the Arsenal Cinema, holds an expansive film and video collection and distribution, as well as running the Berlinale Forum. In the past decade I have been continuously connected to the Arsenal, at present as cocurator of Forum Expanded at the Berlinale (<http://www.arsenal-berlin.de>).
- 5 The choice of pronouns is Shah's. See <http://www.tejalshah.in/info/>.
- 6 See <http://natashamendonca.com/>.

## Quotations (Are Also a Kind of Gossip)

In 2011 Tejal is interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist.<sup>7</sup> Like her talk “Queer, Eco-Sexual Ancestors and Dreaming Unicorns in India” in November 2012 at the conference of the project “Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction,” their\* trajectory is biography. They\* recount, for example: 1992 the move to the big city; 1998 leaving India to study in Australia, then the United States, significant encounters; art becomes a possibility. Also the radicalization of sex and gender. There are continuous trajectories in their\* work, such as performance, the blurring of fact and fiction, the archive, certain media. There are changes too, of course, the transformation of existing subjects. Shah describes *Between the Waves* as marking a shift—toward a queer ecology. I’ll get back to that.



Fig. 8  
Tejal Shah, *Between the Waves*, 2012

During the Q&A after the presentation in Vienna, Shah stated: “I guess for me, I need a book ... And a personal thing.” So there are quotations, and references, recognitions. Most obviously, of course, Rebecca Horn’s *Einhorn* (“unicorn”) performance, presented at documenta V in 1972, which in turn quotes Frida Kahlo’s *The Broken Column* painting. And Unica Zürn’s flesh and bondage sculptures, Minh-ha’s *inappropriate/d other*, and Donna Haraway’s interspecies relations. But there is also what maybe only I see: a medley of Luis Buñuel’s *Un chien andalou* and Luce Irigaray’s *This Sex Which Is Not One* (in the last chapter, with pomegranates, nozzles, the unicorn-dildos, on a balcony in an urban sprawl, with close-ups of labia opening like eyelids, shots of fingers rubbing eyelids, then a pussy, cutting from fucking with the unicorn-horn-dildo to a tongue licking an eye as if it is going to suck it open), and Afrofuturism’s queer futurities. And then some. And then there is, of course, the impressive list of people who have worked with Shah on the five videos, such as the performers, the dancers, the camera people, the sound designers, whose collaborative presence is beautifully tangible. These include, as already mentioned, Natasha Mendonca and Minal Hajratwala, then Ma Faiza (the amazing DJ), Anuj Vaidya, Kush Badhwar (who belongs to the New Delhi-based collective Word Sound Power), Katell Gélébart (the designer who created the upcycling costumes), Suman Sridhar (singer, songwriter, actress), Floy Krouchi (musician, composer, sound artist), Amber Bemak,<sup>8</sup> Dhanya Pilo (VJ, filmmaker, editor), Hari Dwarak Warrior (sound designer), the Hrishikesh Pawar Contemporary Dance Company in Poona, and many others.<sup>9</sup>

7 Public interview between Hans Ulrich Obrist and Tejal Shah; see <http://tejalshah.in/2012/07/02/hans-ulrich-obrists-interview-with-tejal-shah-now-available-on-dvd/>.

8 Whose own work *Airplane Dance* appears to have been based on this collaboration. Amber Bemak calls it a transformation from failure into treasure (<http://amberbemak.com/filter/Experimental/Airplane-Dance-1>) without making direct reference to whom the collaborators mentioned in the description were. I saw *Airplane Dance* installed in an exhibition in Berlin titled “what is queer today is not queer tomorrow,” nGbK, Berlin, June 14–August 10, 2014, and immediately recognized the resonance in the imagery. See [http://ngbk.de/development/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=375&lang=en](http://ngbk.de/development/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=375&lang=en). I mention this resonance not only to

acknowledge what we all cherish, and what we assume queerness as “nonnormative organization of community” (J. J. Halberstam) is based on: beginnings, collectivity, encounters (collaborations, love, sex, work), but also failures, hurt feelings, breakups (and in particular the breakups of collectives!), the clashes between academic and artistic authorship and the careers that are based on this structure, and political ideas that are meant to spread, infect, be shared and not owned. Let’s begin to think about endings not just as failures but to theorize them and think about them with the same endeavor as we do about beginnings and programmatic proposals (such as manifestos).

9 For the full credits, see [http://tejalshah.in/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/CREDIT-LIST-BTW-3\\_8\\_2012.pdf](http://tejalshah.in/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/CREDIT-LIST-BTW-3_8_2012.pdf).



Figs. 9–10  
Tejal Shah, *Between the Waves*, 2012

“Some kind of artist working on some kind of nature.”<sup>10</sup>

Unicorn-dildoed creatures crawling over glistening salt fields, rolling in the breaking waves of the shore, plastic pieces and electronic artifacts dangling from their bodies like seaweed, dipping their fingers and other extensions in white glob with which mangroves are then groomed, floating through a turquoise pool filled with plastic fish and other shiny glamour, dancing over landfills, sucking pomegranate juice from lips, hands, eyelids, performing dramatic entrances, receiving signals emanating from the sky and reflecting the sun’s all-consuming blinding bliss with crescent silver moons. Shah calls these creatures “humanimals.” They are artificial creatures, imaginary beings in a future that is here and now, steeped in history as they are steeped in the landscapes.

The first chapter is reminiscent of a Harappan excavation site, the remains of one of the cities of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. Some of those known sites are located in Haryana, Maharashtra, but mostly in Gujarat and in Pakistan. The visual reference to these places points to urgent and on-going geopolitical fault lines also evoked by the appearance of the crescent moon in *Between the Waves*.<sup>11</sup> The Indus Valley Civilization was one of the three early civilizations of the Old World, the “Ancient East,” and was known for its sophisticated urban planning, which entailed intricate water supply and elaborate sewage and drainage systems. The cities also featured no monumental structures, no architecture of authority; no evidence of palaces or temples has been found, and speculations about the extent of the egalitarian structures (only architecturally? or also socially?) abound. Aside from such speculations about lost origins,<sup>12</sup> which might help to envision a different future, the “discovery” of these excavation sites is also steeped deep in colonial history.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See <http://tejalshah.in/info/>.

<sup>11</sup> The crescent moon has become a symbol for Islamic nations and institutions. But it is also connected to the ancient civilizations—such as the moon god Nanna (*sic*) in Sumer.

<sup>12</sup> The artist statement claims: “In popular imagination, Unicorns are associated with Western mythology, but through this performative video installation, the artist brings them back to their supposed original home, a region to which Shah also traces her family lineage.” I find such tracings of roots highly dubious (but legitimate as speculative fictions). See <http://tejalshah.in/project/between-the-waves/>.

<sup>13</sup> When I first saw *Between the Waves* I was imagining that it had actually been shot in Mohenjo-daro. In reading about it I was coming across writings about a bronze statuette called *The Dancing Girl*, which had been found at the site. I am still puzzled, caught off guard, by the beautiful descriptions of the figure by various British archeologists: “A girl perfectly, for the moment, perfectly confident of herself and the world. There’s nothing like her, I think, in the world” (Mortimer Wheeler); and “We may not be certain that she was a dancer, but she was good at what she did and she knew it” (Gregory Possehl).





Fig. 11  
Tejal Shah, *Between the Waves*, 2012

On many of the seals found at these sites the unicorn is depicted, making them the first known images of these creatures. In recent years the unicorn has become a queer icon, a trans-animal, crossing the boundaries between nature and fabulation, a magical creature often accompanied in popular imagination with rainbows and sparkly glitter explosions. But also depicted mostly as white. *Between the Waves* reminds us that the unicorn once inhabited a different imaginary space and that in this contemporary queer fabulation only the artifices are white, the mounds of flesh bound by the unicorn-dildo-backbone-rib-constraint-support structures, the breasts and lips and hair are all shades of brown and black.

But *Between the Waves* isn't about nature versus artificiality, about affirming authenticity, roots, belonging. The plastic pieces decorating the humanimal creatures in the installation are cherished as just as beautiful as the natural props. The landfill sequence is just as much a natural habitat as the gleaming hot dry excavation site and the shady mangrove swamp or the heavy monsoon sky over the urban sprawl. To quote Minh-ha again:

But since I work with resonances in displacement, I would ask, for example, what is artificiality in the context of spirituality? When you mentioned positioning as an artificial process, I immediately say yes, not because "artifice" connotes something not true or not real, but because the world caught in its life and death processes can be seen entirely in terms of artifice and artificiality. In other words, the world is a "radical illusion," to use a term that artificially links Baudrillard to Buddhist thought. When one says man-made is all artificial, one is not necessarily implying that nature is truer. For ultimately, it is in producing the artificial that one manifests "truth" and gives shapes to one's situation.<sup>14</sup>

## Explicit

Porn is usually described as "explicit." With post-porn this explicitness is no longer (just) about nudity, sexual organs, fluids, penetrations, cum shots, and the like. As a critique of modern Western pornographic reason post-porn includes the explication of an idea, of the critical subversion of given norms about gender and sexuality.<sup>15</sup> Explicit then also refers to politics, to thought, to criticality.

## Aiming Big

Nudity in itself isn't really much of a reason for scandal. It has to be a specific kind of nudity. Or rather, the naked body is specific. It is not any body, or all bodies. Today it is, first and foremost, a thin body: a racialized, gendered, thin body. Seeing abundant flesh always seems to get remarked on. Seeing a big body naked is not another naked body enlarging the continuum of explicitness (big already insinuates a normality against which this body is measured—is not an adjective, it's not a quality, it is a quantification within the regime of normalcy). It is a different body. It is the body that dares to differ. It is seen as different, and I believe its perception reveals a difference that is not about

<sup>14</sup> From an interview with Marina Gržinić conducted in 1998, see <http://trinhminh-ha.squarespace.com/inappropriated-artificiality/>. Another coincidence/connection: Gržinić was among the participants at the "Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction" conference.

<sup>15</sup> And here is a small tribute to Tim Stüttgen (1977–2013), who co-conceived the "Queer

Abstraction" conference in Vienna and whose book *Post/Porn/Politics: Queer-Feminist Perspective on the Politics of Porn Performance and Sex-Work as Culture Production* (Berlin: b\_books, 2009) was among the influences for Tejal's work. See <http://www.b-books.de/verlag/ppp/>.



Figs. 12–13  
Tejal Shah, *Between the Waves*, 2012

the naked body as such. Post-porn reveals not naked flesh but how it is charged. Seeing a big woman on screen creates probably more gender disturbance than seeing lesbian sex.<sup>16</sup>

Is the possible scandal of *Between the Waves* seeing prosthetic penetration?<sup>17</sup> Is it the close-ups of eyelids and pussy lips? Or is it seeing big brown bodies, hairy bodies, folds of flesh, large breasts that have better things to do than point at the viewer?<sup>17</sup>

## Being Seen

In the Q&A after Shah's presentation at the conference, Antke Engel remarked on not just watching the piece but also watching the audience watching it, an audience she called "established." In this context, she concludes, a work like *Between the Waves* makes a strong argument. It would be easy for me to dismiss this as the externalization of internalized projections (after all, she was that very audience too—so on what grounds is such differentiation being made?). But the truth is: I too remember watching the installation in Kassel by looking at the people I was sharing the space with. Which in my case for the most part were two older, well made-up women speaking Russian. And what was I doing? I was projecting the evil straight audience onto them. They weren't very generous in providing food for my speculations though. They sat there fairly unagitated, concentrated, for a significant period of time (they did not, like I did, sit through the whole piece, but then again, most people don't do

16 I recall here the intense responses to Antonia Baehr's striptease leading up to the Martelli's Cat (*Felis lunensis*) episode in her *Abecedarium Bestiarium*. The movements are all familiar, but the removal of items of male drag, including a prosthesis for extra belly fat, defamiliarizes the genre and its iconography with apparently disturbing effects. The striptease culminates when the performer places her large breasts on a table, under a spotlight, turning them into independent creatures that are at the same time part of the crazy feline creature Baehr turns into. For impressions, see the still photography by Anja Weber on the make up productions website: [http://www.make-up-productions.net/pages/gallery/m-is-for-martelli/squo-catfelis-lunensis-by-valerie-castan\\_2302.php](http://www.make-up-productions.net/pages/gallery/m-is-for-martelli/squo-catfelis-lunensis-by-valerie-castan_2302.php).

17 In addition to the main commissioning body, dOCUMENTA (13), *Between the Waves* was coproduced and cofunded by Barbara Gross Galerie in Munich and Bildmuseet in Umeå, but also by India Foundation of the Arts in Bangalore and Project 88 in Mumbai. In their\* talk in Vienna, Shah mentions that a museum in Sweden told them\* they couldn't show the work because the museum is a "family place." In conjunction with this Shah also expressed doubts about the work's future in India. It has since been shown in Mumbai, at Project 88 in 2013, albeit under the restrictive circumstances that apply to much critical contemporary art within the current political climate in India.

that in exhibitions). So what was happening there? I discarded the differences, which I refused to be seeing myself seeing, into a differentiation in the viewing space. THEY, not me. By in my assumption that this is a space not prepared for nor expecting transgressive and feminist corporeal richness, is it not me that is insisting on the very norm I am guessing is being undone in front of my very eyes? There are no indications that the contemporary art world is not willing to incorporate and digest gender queer art. What if my viewing (and its theoretization) is based on an assumption that misses the point? The point not being that the art world—and its audiences—has become so queer, but that the question of difference (in representation, exhibition, and reception) needs to be reconfigured. But let me return to the work.

The viewing space of *Between the Waves* is also a very pronounced soundscape. It contains (almost) no dialogue and is satiated with intricate compositions. Rich, smacking sounds of touch, complex harmonies of birds and other tropical creatures, the various fluid sounds of water, ocean, rain, the spherical sounds of birds, the sun, the space were not recorded on location but imagined and created, joined to the visual material as deep sonic layers.

No dialogue, and also almost no faces. Only fleeting moments, but mostly partial views. To withhold the face means avoiding frontality, refusing mirroring recognition: "The face-opposite takes the place of the head, which belongs to the physical spatial being as one of its body parts. The face-opposite is accentuated in its surface quality. For this reason it seems to be coupled to the imperative of immediately reading and identifying it, resolving its ambiguities."<sup>18</sup>

*Between the Waves* is indeed not a frontal but a visceral viewing experience. It is sticky, it asks for your complicity. It's utopian and dystopian at the same time. It denaturalizes nature and it turns wastelands into hospitable environments. Creatures mingle in it, and we mingle with them in this installation. Sometimes wondering about the space we share with it, and others, sometimes just getting lost in it, in the blazing heat at the excavation site, the heavy humid air at the shores of the sea and the city, in the gray and blue salt and the bright turquoise chlorinated water, in the forests of mangroves and the floating plastic flowers, in the blinding reflections of the silver discs of the digital optical disc data storage devices, and of crescent moons scattered across the various channels of the work, in the artificial sounds of nature and the natural sounds of artifice, in the orifices, extensions, prostheses, between eyelids and pussy lips.

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18 "Das Gesicht-gegenüber setzt sich an die Stelle des Kopfes, der als Körperteil zum leiblichen Raumwesen gehört. Das Gesicht-gegenüber ist in seiner Flächigkeit akzentuiert. Aus diesem Grund scheint es von Anfang an mit dem Imperativ, es zu lesen

und zu vereindeutigen, verschwistert zu sein." Ulrike Haß, *Das Drama des Sehens: Auge, Blick und Bühnenform* (Munich: Wilhem Fink Verlag, 2005), 158 (my translation).

# To Think with the Whole Body

Katia Sepúlveda in Conversation with Nina Hoechtl

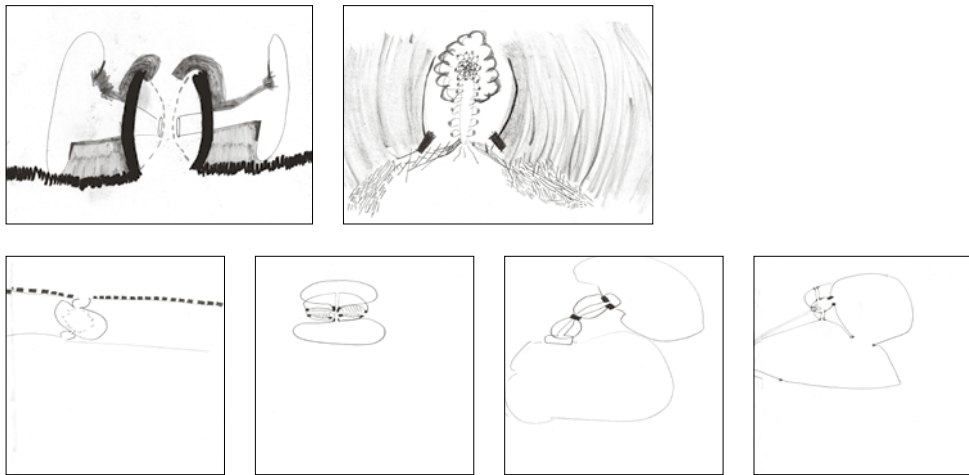
The video *Wish* (2010/11) is projected on two screens and the song “Black Wish” by The Last Poets fills the small seminar room of the program of gender studies at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). All of us, participants of the seminar “Del queer al cuir: desplazamiento geopolítico sur y desde las periferias” (From queer to cuir: Geopolitical displacement from the south and the peripheries), organized by the poet, essayist, and performer Sayak Valencia, rock our bodies to the song’s rhythm and at the end of the video we start a heated debate about gloves, white, brown, black, feminine, masculine, trans-hands, fisting, and post-porn. I am sitting—by chance and unknowingly—close to Katia Sepúlveda, the Chilean artist whose video has just been presented. She has been living in Germany over the last nine years. Soon enough we get to talk, I thank her for the presentation, and three years later I write her an e-mail, asking if she would be interested in a conversation for a publication in Europe. A few hours later I find her consent in the inbox. The following exchange came about through several e-mails in a hybrid of German and Spanish, revisions and translations, over a period of one month from the middle of February to the middle of March 2015.

**Nina Hoechtl:** Antes que todo quisiera agradecerte por aceptar hacer la conversación también en tu segunda lengua, en alemán, mi primer lengua. **VIELEN LIEBEN DANK, KATIA!** So let me start off our conversation by asking right away about the possibility of translation and the borders of language(s). What relation do you have with Spanish, German, and English? Do they enable a different agency and/or do you pay greater attention to cultural borderlands, crossings, and in-between spaces?

**Katia Sepúlveda:** Indeed, translatability. I think that everything is a misinterpretation. Eurocentrism has always, from times immemorial to the present day, attempted to dominate through its culture. Through visual language, which I consider a world language, I’m in motion. That is its advantage, and I rely on the image wherever I am.

Spanish is my mother tongue. I am always thinking in Spanish. German is my second language, and English is simply an internationalism. These three languages grant me more space in my mind.

I am always on the move, and my life is configured by this mobility. During the last three years I’ve lived in three different countries and I’ve been traveling a lot. You can see it in the following three works of mine: *Wahrheit* (2014) in Germany; *Pancoreograficx* (2014), a collaboration with Sayak Valencia in Tijuana (Mexico); and *¿Feminismo Mapuche?* (2013–14) in Temuco (Chile). I always feel at home in the transdisciplinary, the transnational, and the transfeminist. I don’t believe in resistance, I believe in transformation.



Figs. 14–19  
Katia Sepúlveda, *Untitled*, 2005

**NH:** You position yourself as a transfeminist *mestiza sudaka*, who, through your works, seeks to address concepts that come from transfeminism, decolonization, and/or white, black or *mestiza* feminism. Could you elaborate on the meanings of transfeminism, *mestiza*, and *sudaka*, since these terms, while crucial for an adequate understanding of your work, are not so common in the European context?

**KS:** For transfeminism I always use the definition of Sayak Valencia, as it is the most precise one we have: “Transfeminism [...] integrates the element of mobility between genders, corporealities, sexualities, and geopolitics through the creation of strategies applicable in situ. These strategies are identified with the Deleuzean idea of minorities, multiplicities, and singularities that make up a reticular organization capable of a critical reappropriation of gender, race, class, and sexuality with a decolonial perspective.”<sup>1</sup>

I clearly remember the following experience: In 2012 I gave a talk about transfeminism at an event in Cologne. To my surprise, there were no bio-females in the audience and the bio-females felt that in Germany there was no need for transfeminism, which was rather just something for peripheral countries such as Spain, South America, etc.<sup>2</sup> I think that the periphery is better backed by the state, is better organized, there’s more money, and I think there is a better distribution of wealth than in Germany.

In Germany I spoke with bio-females from Australia, Finland, Spain, Austria, and also with Latinas. I had a German girlfriend and it was very difficult in Germany, as the women mainly came from a background of white feminism. So I began to read bell hooks, and my language became more radical, as I did not want to act like a white person any longer. Colonization traverses the body, and if you question the various colonial perspectives of your own subjectivity, then a transformation can take place, a transformation from what you once were into what you really want to be. For me this takes place, in principle, in everyday life, in the small things. I had to move to an “epistemological south” of Europe and so I started to travel more often to Spain. In 2011 I participated in the activist post-porn festival *Muestra Marrana* in Barcelona with my video *Wish*. This festival constituted for me a very effective way to promote decolonization and transfeminism through images.

I don’t believe in purity, I believe that we are all *mestizo/a/xs*, and that this is the place where our singularity appears. I use singularity as an antonym to individuality. We are all singular people, unique, and we can work in a collective from our own singularity.

I do not believe in the concept of race. Race does not exist; it is a colonial invention, hence identities can never be decided by the individual, they are established by white society, and the notion of *mestizo*, even though it is colonial, can be shifted, from insult into queer, as a claim. I think we are all *mestizo/a/xs*, in the sense that we are all a mix, and it is this mix that makes us singular. Singular, not individual, because there’s a difference, and the difference lies within that uniqueness that entails new perspectives and different kinds of knowledge, combined with an awareness that collective work and constant exchange are important.

1 Translated from the Spanish: “El transfeminismo [...] integra el elemento de la movilidad entre géneros, corporalidades, sexualidades y geopolíticas para la creación de estrategias que sean aplicables in situ y se identifiquen con la idea deleuziana de minorías, multiplicidades y singularidades que conformen una organización reticular capaz de una reapropiación crítica del género, la raza, la clase y la sexualidad con perspectiva decolonial.” Sayak Valencia, “Interferencias transfeministas y pospornográficas a la colonialidad del ver,” in “Gesto decolonial,” ed. Jill Lane, Marcial Godoy-Anatívia, and Macarena

Gómez-Barris, special issue, *e-misférica* 11, no. 1 (2014);

<http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/es/e-misférica-111-gesto-decolonial/valencia>.

2 I have taken the terms *biomujer/biohombre* (bio-female/bio-male) from B. Preciado’s *Testo Yonqui* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, S.A., 2008), an English translation of which was published under the title *Testo Junkie* (2013). The categories thus named are the ones society uses to categorize a person as a man or a woman. I use them because I’m talking about the conceptualizations of the body and the performativity of gender.



Figs. 20–22  
Katia Sepúlveda, *Lx jotx nostrx*, 2014

Sudaka is the claim that knowledge is not centred on the hegemony of Europe and the United States. It is also about the appropriation of a racial slur, similar to the word “queer,” which was originally an insult, but was changed through its appropriation. For example, in Chile queer is written as it is pronounced in Spanish: *cuir*. To me, sudaka is related to the global south, to all the various souths, to all dissident and non-hegemonic knowledge. Australians are also a sudaka insofar as they do not belong to the hegemony. They tend to be discriminated because of the kind of English they speak, and are often regarded as savages by the British. A Mexican is also a sudaka, even though geographically speaking they live in the northern hemisphere. The south begins in Tijuana. This also means to acknowledge the wisdom of people that have been exploited, looted by global capitalism.

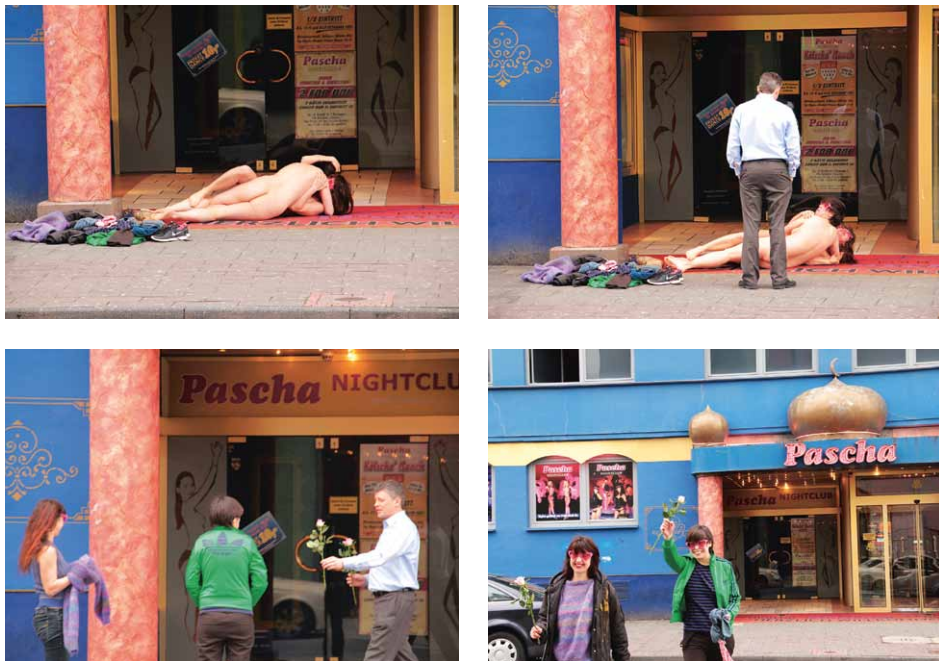
NH: In your practice you often combine political and artistic issues through the use of words. I am thinking, for instance, of *Lx jotx nostrx* (2014), a graffiti that was collectively celebrated at different sites in Tijuana. The multilayered figure of the jotx—a homosexual—is united with a *nosotrx*, a we.<sup>3</sup> In English the graffiti would read, “We homosexual.” In Spanish, however, an alternate spelling for mixed genders and/or for identities that are not covered by the feminine or masculine gender, and/or go beyond them, was applied through the x. Another example that comes to mind is your poster work *Hey you! you are a political fiction ... / Ey, tú! Tú eres una ficción política ...* (2012–13), that you mounted in English in various public spaces of Cologne (Germany) and in Spanish in Villa Alegre (Chile).

KS: I’m interested in getting the discourse out of the classroom so that it doesn’t just remain in books or in our minds. I’m interested in “thinking bodies.” Rationalism wants to make us believe that we can only think with our minds—but, what good is a mind without a body? The art of thinking consists in thinking with all our senses, with our whole body. As an artist I work with the technification of the body. We cannot talk about a capitalist body in the same way that we talk about a dissident body—to which decolonial and transaesthetics may be applied—as we cannot think about a dissident body outside the capitalist assemblage.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the body becomes a critical tool of our times. It is for this reason that in some of my works I only use text, yet I think that everything is text—images too.

3 In Mexico *joto* or *jota* is a slang word used as an insult for a homosexual. *Jota* is mainly used for a visibly effeminate *homosexual*. There are countless folk etymologies that seek to explain the word’s origin. The historian Rob Buffington believes that the word comes from the cell block “J” (pronounced jota in Spanish) of the Federal Penitentiary in Mexico City, where formerly the overtly homosexual inmates were isolated. Rob Buffington, “Los Jotas: Contested Visions of Homosexuality in Modern Mexico,” in *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, ed. Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 118–32.

4 In Spanish, Katia used the notion “agenciamiento” by Deleuze and Guattari,

which is used to describe the French concept of *agencement* and was translated into English as *assemblage*. Deleuze and Guattari (2004) describe *agencement* as follows: “We think the material or machinic aspect of an assemblage relates not to the production of goods but rather to a precise state of intermingling of bodies in a society, including all the attractions and repulsions, sympathies and antipathies, alterations, amalgamations, penetrations, and expansions that affect bodies of all kinds in their relations to one another.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2004), 99.



Figs. 23–26  
Katia Sepúlveda, *Pascha Revolution!*, 2012

**NH:** This performativity of texts and bodies is explicitly employed in your works *Showroom* (2009) and *Pascha Revolution!* (2012). To my mind, these works make the power of language and bodies come alive by triggering shifts and creating new realities.

**KS:** What I'm after with my performances is to get people to stop thinking only with their minds, and instead start thinking with their whole body. This is also intended as a form of depatriarchalization. The process of depatriarchalizing comes about in one way or another in all my works. The work *Showroom* enters into a direct dialogue with power. This power has a patriarchal structure, and, when it comes to government, it does not matter whether a bio-male or a bio-female makes the decisions. In 2009, a hospital was opened in Chile; with rented hospital beds and patients who were actors—everything was fake. That was an insult to the poor and outperformed any art exhibition or performance. President Michelle Bachelet was the lead performer of that show. As a performative gesture, I renamed the Palacio de la Moneda *Showroom*, and thereby intervened in the patriarchal architecture of the presidential palace.

The performance *Pascha Revolution!* raises the idea of a patriarchal architecture too. The megabrothel Pascha in Cologne is a space that is only made for bio-males and that makes me think about the privileged position of bio-males in this society. During the performance, the Australian artist Amy Rush and I undressed in front of Pascha's main entrance; we began to caress each other and had sex. Shortly thereafter we were sent packing by security.

**NH:** And that way, as you describe it on your website, you intervened in the “power architecture and the hyper-heteronormativity” that the Pascha performs. Another work of yours that intervenes in public space as much as it has a direct correlation with your autobiography is the video *La Marienstr. 21* (2008). Your performative intervention in the history of a squatted building in Cologne transverses your relation to the “vicious white feminism,” as you call it, coming from your own experience.

**KS:** I've lived on Marienstraße for over nine years. At first, this was a very hard experience for me. I arrived in 2005, and moved into a lesbian WG (German for shared apartment), which was run by Trude Menrath. There, I suffered maltreatment—such as exoticizing and colonial handling—at the hands of the white feminist rulers, who had no tolerance whatsoever for any deviation from the intellectual line everybody had to toe. One had to follow Frau Menrath's whims. A compañera from the WG,<sup>5</sup> Enssie (from Iran) and I (from Chile) rallied for an uprising within the WG. We could not stand the oppression, and alongside other compañeras—Cecilia Grey (from Argentina), Kelly Cavalcanti (from Brazil), and Moni Becker (from Germany)—we fought the injustice that we were put through. Frau Menrath never gave up her queen-like power and kicked us all out into the street. She would manipulate all of her Latin-American migrant network into trying to convince me that what she was doing was the right thing. It was during this time that Moni introduced us to the work of bell hooks. As we went on reading bell hooks we further understood the situation we were living at home. I realized, through this experience, that multiculturalism does not exist, and that many times it is more comfortable to remain within the white feminist way of thinking rather than listen to other ways. I was lucky though, and I got another place to live in the house next door, also a squatted place, where I still live now.

5 According to the feminist decolonial theorist María Lugones, among Latinos the term *compañera* is used for the sort of relation that consists of joining forces and efforts and imagination in common political struggles. María Lugones with

Pat Alake Rosezelle, “Sisterhood and Friendship as Feminist Models,” in *Feminism and Community*, ed. Penny A. Weiss and Marilyn Freedman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 135–45.



Figs. 27–29  
Katia Sepúlveda, *Postsexual*, 2007

**NH:** This work was documented on video and Super 8 film. In my opinion, the performative actions of your works enter in different relations with their documentation—photography, video, or drawing—which are created by you, and thereby also have an impact on the actions themselves. In *Becoming Woman of Salvador Allende* (2013–14) you drew/wrote together with your mother. Another example is the, as you call it, video sculpture *Postsexual* (2007), where the performative act transforms itself into a sculpture on the stove. What do these different approaches mean for your practice?

**KS:** They mean that any new work I come up with creates a new language through the subject matter that I work with. It's also about surprising myself; it's a constant game. My conceptual framework, however, is always transfeminism, from which I cannot deviate; it is part of my daily life practice and my way of working.

For the commemoration of forty years of military coup in Chile (1973–2013), I proposed to do a work called *Becoming Women of Salvador Allende*. I was asked by the two curators, Stella Salineros and Monica Salineros, to select a quote by Salvador Allende. I researched and found the following phrase: “Yo soy cada día más partidario de las mujeres” (Each day I’m more in favor of women). I love this phrase. It feminizes the image of Allende, who is sacred to the Chilean bio-males of the left. So I invited my mother to write this sentence, as she had experienced the period of the Unidad Popular (Popular Unity, an electoral coalition of left parties and groups that supported the presidential candidacy of Allende). This drawing is a recovery of my mother, who went through this whole process, and me, the product of an after-time. In the presence of the drawing, the two eras, my mother’s and my own, come together.

*Postsexual* is a piece in which the patriarchy is represented by a “dildo,” and its stage is represented by a frying pan in the kitchen. I wanted to make a video-sculpture; the goal was to produce a trace—the “sculpture,” of the time taken to shoot the video. The idea was to invoke the downfall of the patriarchy. The double sudaka patriarchy. With this gesture I kill my father and I actually deconstruct the patriarchy. Aesthetically speaking, it was pure delight to see how that thing was being melted down and peacefully transformed, which is the whole idea behind transfeminism: a radically peaceful revolution. It’s a piece dedicated to all the women who do reproductive work.

**NH:** The performative acts of framing your anus and fisting at the center of the videos *Ano* (2010) and *Wish* respectively, evade to various degrees a fixed identity—they relate to other media, comments about them, documentation, representations, and interact with each other. How do you develop your video language and the visual composition in the interplay with sound and the performative act itself?

**KS:** Well, these are two very different videos. In *Ano* I quote Peter Fleischmann’s emblematic film from Bavaria *Jagdscenen aus Niederbayern* (Hunting scenes from Bavaria, 1969), and therefore the video fits into the “found footage” genre. The film’s subject is homophobia and its biggest problem, i.e., the “anal terror.” When the video is played, my ass comes to the fore in order to destroy the myth. By doing so, I invoke the text “Terror Anal” (2009) by Paul B. Preciado. “Terror Anal” constitutes a radical dialogue with Guy Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire* (1972). It implies a revision of some thirty-plus years of struggle and the early positioning of the visionaries, as well as a defence of their outrage, if possible more angrily. That’s the anal challenge: a coup in working order, carved out of the very guts of heteronormativity. Yet, that is also its most terrifying promise ...





Fig. 30  
Katia Sepúlveda, *Wish*, 2010/11

In the video *Wish*, the music is rather at the center. “Black Wish” of The Last Poets is a quote from a Black Panther song, which inspired the title of my video. The music determines the rhythm of the situation in the video, a constant “work in progress” of decolonial processes. Particularly after the experience in Marienstraße, I realized that I myself had used a white mask (Frantz Fanon). I tried to get rid of it, so I came up with the following: white gloves are caressing and fisting a white ass (from a German) and when the gloves are removed black skin remains to be “discovered” by fisting. I did this in order to exorcise myself.

**NH:** You refer in your works to theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Paul B. Preciado, but also to Beatriz Colomina, bell hooks, Julieta Paredes, Deleuze and Guattari. What form do your processes of fusion or crossover of theory back into practice take? How do you deal with the tension between theory and practice? A tension that, in my view, makes itself particularly felt when you’re dealing with subjects that are controversially discussed within a society. I am thinking, for example, of your installation *Feminism Mapuche? Technologies of Disobedience* (2013–14), which takes off from the question, “Does the feminism Mapuche exist?”

**KS:** Philosophy and art are technologies; theory comes from the Greek word meaning “looking at,” “to view” ... I like concepts. I wanted to create a work to figure out if the feminism Mapuche exists. That was weighing on my mind after I had read the Aymara feminist activist writer Julieta Paredes, who claims that we inherited a double-junction patriarchy, the one of the Spaniards, and the one of the indigenous groups.<sup>6</sup> I wanted to know what was going on with the Mapuche bio-females in the south of Chile, because it is right there that the heightened conflict takes place.

The Mapuche conflict is a delicate one. It all began with the colonization of Chile, when the Mapuche people had reached certain agreements with the Spaniards over land ownership. The problem was the creole or mestizo population—an offspring of both Mapuche and Spaniards, who were for a long time ostracized by these two. As time went by the new state took over more and more of the Mapuche land, the most valuable of all things for the Mapuche. Then the Chilean state decided to classify the Mapuche struggle as a terrorist one, and many have been unjustly incarcerated for defending their land. In recent years the conflict has escalated and the level of state violence has become progressively worse. The south of Chile is almost a site of war these days, but a war that remains largely invisible. What I’m telling you here is just a brief recap. I think most Chileans do not identify with the Mapuche struggle—it is only a very small minority that cares about this issue, and most of those who offer help have little to no political power.

There are some stories that claim before colonial times the Mapuche (which, by the way, means “people of the land”) was a matriarchal society, but there is no evidence for this. That is why I wondered if there was such a thing as a Mapuche feminism. So I went to Temuco (the town where the Mapuche border begins) with this question in mind. I interviewed various women: artists, activists, scholars, and my questions were always about the role of bio-females within the Mapuche struggle. I often got similar answers: I was told that the women had given up the fight for their own interests and against sexism in favor of the bigger cause. For them, feminism is too much of a white word, but they are trying to find an adequate term in their Mapudungun language. However, since they haven’t succeeded yet, at the moment they say there is no such thing as Mapuche feminism. Since the land is the main issue at stake, some women did not want to talk openly about feminism, thinking it’d be a betrayal of the Mapuche struggle. Men were entitled to the land during colonial times; they were the right holders and so they became the leaders of the struggle. The Mapuche struggle’s objective is to reclaim the land and declare its independence as a nation. I think this is a dangerous thought because as a transfeminist I believe the best thing to do is to abolish the idea of a nation all at once. The clearest example of how bad an idea it can be is Hitler. I find it a very masculine idea anyway. Within the Mapuche movement there are exceptions: some bio-females—mothers who have had their sons or husbands murdered—have raised their voices, but they are still a minority. These women have retreated to their households, taking care

<sup>6</sup> Julieta Paredes, *Hilando Fino. Desde el feminismo comunitario* (La Paz: DED, Comunidad Mujeres Creando Comunidad, 2010), 24.

of the children and their culture. There has been a marked increase in femicides, and homophobia is widespread. Very few bio-females have access to higher education, but there are some, which is why I made the connection between Julieta Paredes's text, in which she addresses a double-junction patriarchal heritage, both from colonial and indigenous pasts, because I recognize this nowadays in the Mapuche conflict, where masculine issues seem more important than those of bio-females. The fundamental problem is the patriarchal structure, and that is precisely what I tried to highlight through a sound choreography in my piece *Feminismo Mapuche?* in which the affected women spoke in the first person, without mediators.

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# Own Goal In Time of Dire Need

Stefan Hayn

The relationships (distance and connection) that exist between speaking and writing are complicated; between artistic work and life questions; a way of loving a person that continues to be regarded here as “other,” compared to a seemingly “dominant,” “authoritarian,” “more power-related” way. When long locked floodgates open and waters held back can finally be unleashed, these questions and their apparent complexities are as if washed away. Life becomes livable, permitted in all its abundance and tenderness, and its full force. Another person is allowed to enter, and I am allowed to be with the other person; to get to know and touch the other person; to feel affection for the other person.

Asked my opinion in regard to “Notes on the Category of ‘Gay Film’” from the point of view of my situation today, I can say that this lecture, published in 1995, was the only form I could use at the time to express the pain of losing a loved one, the consequent loss of close friends, as well as my disappointment that the artwork through which I articulated and processed my grief did not find the reception I had desired back then. It is only partly true when I claim the tone of the text has grown foreign to me. I would differently express though still acknowledge substantive points articulated behind the rage that is channeled by the strenuous conceptual precision of my writing back then. It is thanks to a friend, who withstood many months working with me on the text, that I can consider language, speech, and writing a way to approach problems and possibilities throughout the artistic work and life—it is likely that a more direct way of being oriented toward another person or persons might be more “healthy” in the long run. But the way I create images, which I practice professionally through the release provided by painting and film, also rightfully demands this form of attempting to speak to a person unknown to me—to maybe transmit an impulse to this other person to desist from closing the floodgates without cause.

From my point of view, it is unnecessary to say something new about homo- or bisexuality here. The perspicacity and far-reaching openness of the Wikipedia entry astounds me. And yesterday evening’s radio feature about homophobia included much truth, also much that is entirely untrue—though perhaps not entirely false. Rather, too narrow, thereby becoming false. It was similar to how it felt at a pub around the corner two hours later, when a bartender I’d known since student days announced a “packed homo day.” As of ten in the evening you aren’t allowed to stand outside the door with a beer, in consideration of the neighbors. The summer heat, humidity, and sweat—it wasn’t terrible—felt reminiscent of years past. I want something different. I drank up and left.

On Father’s Day, over two months ago, when I woke the younger of my two daughters, she looked exhausted. In response to my insistent questioning, she told me of her dream: “You were transformed into a squirrel. In order to be changed back, you had to do something bad.” “Please tell me what I had to

do." "It's too terrible, please let me ..." She later told me on the way to the kitchen, or to the bath. A few days afterward I told her I'd twice bicycled past a squirrel hit by a car. I asked her again about her dream. "You ate it." "Was I changed back into a person?" "Yes. Please leave me alone now."

Every person (I notice I prefer to speak from the position of a man)—each of us at some point has perhaps unwittingly sensed a longing, as I did after having repressed the loss of and love for my father, despite years of difficulty. There is a vehement, burning desire to be close to the people we had come to know in the beginning—two or perhaps more people who were physically different, who smelled and felt different, who allowed us and themselves to be touched or who didn't, who thought differently: Why this desire? Is it due to physical difference? Do they not also think differently? But they do speak differently. Does this agree with what is said about "otherness"? Why does one person speak in one particular way, cry, laugh, and move in this manner that corresponds to the way the other person talks, laughs, and cries?

In May a poster in the city made me get off my bike to examine it more closely. "When did you decide to be hetero?" I felt like I had been caught. I thought about the sentence I repeat three times in *Painting Now* (1998–2005), a film I made together with my girlfriend, the mother of our two children: "Homosexuality is not a disposition, not a sick." I hesitate here to repeat the sentence yet again. In heated debates after screenings of *Painting Now*—if somebody dared—the controversy boiled down to this sentence that states homosexuality is a decision. If I ever had to justify myself again during such a discussion, I would perhaps contend that the decision is about love and allowing for the desire to be intimate with a particular person. This distinction is a matter of tone, perhaps a softer tone—like that in the abovementioned lecture. Justifications. But, rightly so—the film narrates the opening of a floodgate.

How is it I can write this down here and now? A floodgate has opened, but the waters have not been unleashed—they could cause a deluge. But now, for the first time, the floodgate has closed back down a degree. Painting yesterday in my studio, writing this long postponed text today, it helps make waiting possible—till the point in time pent up waters are allowed to flow.

Translated from the German by Eve Heller



Figs. 31–139  
Stefan Hayn, *Pissen/Piss*, 1989/90



# Notes on the Category of “Gay Film” [1995]\*

Stefan Hayn

My short films are concerned to a varying degree with the meaning of sexual identity. This evening they will be confronted by a textual critique. Occasion for this critique as well as context within which the films were made is a no longer entirely new but nonetheless booming “genre.” Hundreds of so-called gay and lesbian films screening at festivals all over the world promote a model of sexual identity that, no matter how questionable, continues to attest an emancipatory character. Recent film theory extrapolated from a feminist critique of patriarchal structures has also focused on this category previously classified as “underground,” in order to emphasize media’s capacity to provide minorities with a sense of identity as a political alternative to what mainstream entertainment offers. At the same time, the entertainment value of drag queens has made them regular guests on contemporary television shows and TV series.

As I have restricted my discussion to male homosexuality, my line of questioning will proceed as follows: How did this category come to be? What does it imply in terms of content and aesthetics? And what about the subversive character repeatedly attributed to “gay film,” its potentially critical take on a society within which it continues to stand for otherness?

My lecture is divided into three sections, between which films will be screened. It will conclude with *Flaming Creatures* (1962) by Jack Smith, a film that explored the question of sexual identity over thirty years ago, and from today’s point of view answered it far more radically than most anything seen since.

1.

As a fundamental hypothesis I would like to assume a definition of sexuality that does not correspond to the ahistorical notion of a natural constant opposite to the capitalist sociality. How we define sexuality and sexual identity is instead the result of an ongoing historical process. This applies equally to “normal” sexuality beneficial to reproduction, as well as to its differentiated “perversions:” Hetero- just as homosexuality and all other variations are socially generated categories that confront the individual with their regionally differentiated and fully realized lifestyle norms.

This argumentation that sexual identity models are fabricated does not contradict the fact that today’s lifestyles based on different sexual preferences still meet with varying degrees of social acceptance. “Coming out”—or “professing” a homosexual desire at home, at school, in a workplace, etc.—may still be

\* The lecture has been published in German in *Rundbrief Film: Filme in lesbisch-schwulem Kontext* (August 1995), ed. Thomas Behm and Jens Schneiderheinze, 65–75.

a difficult and painful process for the individual. Not only do legal code and judicial practice pass down the exploitation of women. Moral double standards regarding incest taboos and the fact that every aspect of life is turned into pornography perpetuate a watered-down heterosexually conditioned compulsion.

However, the taboo-breaking wave of the so-called sexual revolution felt to this day has made it clear that the simple reversal strategy—revealing and labeling previously hidden sexual preferences in order to free a personal desire—only succeeds in displacing traditional power relations. In explicit criticism of Wilhelm Reich's hypothesis of repression, Michel Foucault pointed out that the public exposure of—or scientific discourse—in regard to previously hidden and sanctioned forms of sexual desire does not abolish social repression, but rather produces more complex power relations on a new level.<sup>1</sup> This means that Western society can be characterized as having undergone waves of liberalization and repression only in an external sense over the past thirty years. The "real" process aims for a modern form of social access to the individual via sexuality—paradoxically introduced by the "activists" of various "sexual revolutions."

This transmutation of emancipation efforts into their opposite is particularly visible in the gay liberation movement, or within the so-called gay subculture. While "professional" gays at the end of the 1960s launched emancipatory slogans, which in turn were profitably used by a branch of the leisure and entertainment industry that is booming to this day, thereby contributing to a framework within which sex became anonymous and detached from any (relationship) obligations in regard to the partner—a mere matter of bodily exchange between "free" agents. As discussed by contemporary sexologists, the product yielded by this rationalization of intimate desire is "gay identity"—what was foreign and entirely other has finally advanced to a modern, socially integrated norm of subjectivity constructed around sexual desire. "Free your ass and your mind will follow!" is not an activist's slogan championing anal sex as a subversive act in the AIDS era. Coupled with the additional phrase "Everyone is an original," it is the advertising slogan for Chesterfield cigarettes anno 1994.

This development rendered the call to emancipate the individual via sexuality more and more obsolete. There is no escape, no "coming out" anymore; on the contrary, there is a pressure of "coming in," an endlessly refined coercion to belong to the community of sexual beings. To the extent that everybody is "allowed" to participate, or must "be an original"; differences are increasingly flattened out. An external uniformity becomes increasingly perfected. And what remains can be called "the mannequin," as Wolfgang Hegener puts it: "It is genderless, and at the same time, a 'little man,' a 'little penis' and

perhaps also a 'little phallus'; it is sexually encoded, no part of it escapes being sexualized; furthermore this (fashion) body—entirely engaged in producing and consuming—becomes a venue for multifaceted narcissistic enactments. Ultimately it is a body full of sexual signs and demands that remains un-touchable, self-referential, nothing other than a blank form for miscellaneous wrappings."<sup>2</sup>

2.

Ever since there have been films, they have been classified for a wide variety of reasons according to special criteria. Classical film theory categorizes films primarily according to formal/aesthetic characteristics for purposes of analysis and critique, while the film industry is known to use genre classifications more often than not to elicit potential audiences. At the same time it is often the films themselves that establish and modify classification models, especially the stylistically pioneering films. In the case of "gay film," it is the interweaving of diverse political ambitions, artistic inventions, and economic interests that give rise to its differentiated contemporary form. When, in the following argumentation, I chose certain films as examples, it is due to their function as historical focal points in terms of representing a "productive collaboration" between public, film criticism, film industry, and filmmakers.

It could be said that initially the discussion regarding the category of "gay film" was concerned with the search for screen figures to identify with. Cinema served as a projection space for daily questions and desires. Ten years ago, when I started going to the cinema more regularly, I often chose films related to the topic of homosexuality. Later on, I encountered gay film as a "class in its own" when attending topical festivals and thematically focused series, where the most various narrative, documentary, and experimental films from the entire spectrum of film history were introduced as a "genre." Artistically advanced cinema, like *Michael* (1924) by Carl Theodor Dreyer, was supposed to constitute a standard of gay cinematic socialization as well as, for example, the pornographic film *Nights in Black Leather* (1973) by Peter Berlin.

With this type of film selection and the assumption of "gay film" as a festival motto, the function of identity construction became effective not only for the individual but also for a "minority audience" thereby generated. As a result, gay film festivals have become one of today's most important occasions for "community building." People look for a representation of themselves in the cinema—consequently cinema is supposed to mirror the sociopolitical situation of homosexuals.

1 Michel Foucault, *Der Wille zum Wissen – Sexualität und Wahrheit 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983).

2 Wolfgang Hegener, *Das Mannequin – Vom sexuellen Subjekt zum geschlechtslosen Selbst* (Tübingen: konkursbuch, 1992), 10.

The question of representation also became the starting point of a certain branch of cultural studies. Gay film becoming a "scientific category" meant that certain films were extracted from the historical context of their production and reception, and integrated into comparative systems in regard to gender and sexuality. "Queer studies," as this new branch of film, or rather cultural studies from the United States was called, mainly projected a special societal and historical model of identity—the Western "gay identity" of the 1960s—retrospectively onto cultural history, mostly in order to prove the repressive character of existing aesthetical and historical approaches. Derived from feminist theory, queer studies, in large part, use ahistorical categories, like "the male gaze," "female aesthetics," etc., to stress a positively pitched history of an "oppressed minority" as foundation for further social emancipation.

In short, by the time I started making films, a "gay film history" had been written, "gay aesthetics" had been established, and the category of gay film had already been formed with all its questionable theoretical implications. Under these premises, homosexuality as assertion of one's subjectivity on the screen seemed highly problematic to me. By using the title *Gay film = This Film Is by a Gay Man* (1989), I tried to provide a polemical quintessence of the combination derived from this kind of identity politics that compulsively linked the artist, his work, and the representation of a minority to the "outside" world. My impression was based on cinematic experiences at the time, as well as on Vito Russo's book *The Celluloid Closet* (1981),<sup>3</sup> a starting point of queer film studies. What Russo tried to praise as emancipation from Hollywood's "closetedness" riddled by intrigue is a direct transfer of the "coming out" slogan to the film world. The filmmaker openly acknowledging his homosexuality functions as a medial mouthpiece—he is obliged to publicly represent the current minority interest.

Incidentally, the archetype of this kind of coming out on a movie screen was introduced by Kenneth Anger in his film *Fireworks* (1947), long before gay liberation was proclaimed. What back then appeared as a strange, subjective alternative world captured on film, developed over the course of time into the perfect identity prison for the "gay filmmaker," as it was represented by Rosa von Praunheim.

In 1971 Praunheim used the politicization of cinema happening at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s in Germany to initiate a German gay rights movement modeled on the United States, with his film *It's Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, but the Situation in Which He Lives*. Praunheim developed a routine out of the provocative impact the film had on the "minority" it caricatured, as well as on the broad, heterosexual audience—using the self-ironic motto "Sex and career."<sup>4</sup> While Frieda Grafe describes "the entire,

aggressive, vulgar directness of content" in 1977 as "indigestible leftovers" of his films,<sup>5</sup> what was once indigestible and subversive takes on a compulsively maintained air of provocation. Praunheim performed his specially developed model of the gay filmmaker ad absurdum, condemned to break taboos acknowledged as no longer taboo and to defend his monopoly in the crossfire of a gay public that felt falsely represented.

While for Praunheim, gay characters were supposed to come down off the screen and heighten the awareness of homosexuality to bring social change, this educational impetus based on identity politics in cinema was superseded in the mid-1980s by an opposite model. More or less harmless narratives about relationships, like *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1986) by Stephen Frears, aimed for integration into the existing social order, saying: "Homosexuals are basically as normal as you and me."

But lifestyle politics in the 1980s had different faces. The British filmmaker Derek Jarman became the new "king" of a reanimated "gay underground," both for the "minority community" newly regrouping in response to AIDS, as well as for a majority of film critics. Certainly a reason for this was that Jarman initially left questionable aspects of identity politics behind in order to foreground questions of aesthetics. Gay film was declared to be innovative art house cinema, especially referencing certain American experimental filmmakers of the 1960s whose formal approach grew important for Jarman in two respects.

Reference number one is the problematization of the film material to be found in experimental cinema: people like Ken Jacobs conveyed a sense of the materiality of the medium, the grain of the film stock, using the newly available and relatively inexpensive 16 mm material either out of analytical interest or economic need. Jarman registered the aesthetic surface as an empty poetic form from these, in part extremely consequential experiments, starting with his early Super 8 films and proceeding all the way to the video and computer processed imagery of his 35 mm movies.

Reference number two is the aforementioned Anger. In 1963, with *Scorpio Rising*, Anger used ironic quotations from everyday life and youth culture as well as standard Hollywood fare to develop a visual vocabulary and create a "camp" aesthetic that influences prevalent, ironic aesthetic advertising styles to this day. Anger's trendsetting motorcycle cult mix finds an analog in

3 Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981). Published in German as *Die Schwule Traumfabrik: Homosexualität im Film* (Berlin: Bruno Gmünder Verlag, 1990).

4 Rosa von Praunheim, *Sex und Karriere* (Hamburg: Rohwolt, 1978).

5 Frieda Grafe, "Beschriebener Film – Rosa von Praunheim Bruder! Sex und Karriere," *Die Republik*, nos. 72–75 (1985): 222.



Jarman's reflection on lifestyle politics of punk and pop culture, further enhanced and modernized by Jarman's own contemporary artistic efforts. Here please recall the symbiosis of Jarman/Pet Shop Boys.

Jarman attempted to reinforce the politicization of his cinematic aestheticism—to sum up his artistic process—which he later introduced under the motto "Queer instead of gay," in the spirit of the newer "queer" movement. Jarman's HIV infection and illness became a central theme within this context. In the end, his film *Blue* was celebrated as having attained the height of an artistically cinematic radicalism.<sup>6</sup> Jarman was said to have found the most appropriate artistic expression for his HIV-related blindness in the film's use of a monochromatically blue screen.

And so we arrive at contemporary premises of (film) production and reception. The shiny blank surface of digital images is no longer capable of revealing the difference between itself and a phenomenal experience of the world. In other words, film or media artists behind the work are doomed to disappear in competition with the development of technology, and so there is an increasing need to enable the human being = the artist to be perceptible in ever-cruder forms. An answer to this situation is a drive for authenticity that ignores all taboos, as in the above quoted reception of Jarman's film—a reception which by now can only be characterized as cynical.

The loss of every distinction between the artistic intention and the compulsion to sell is affirmed in ever-new forms and constitutes the supposedly subversive accomplishment of the gay film genre today. Accordingly, to be "critical" in New Queer Cinema at the beginning of the 1990s implied the transmission of the latest aesthetic accomplishments along lines of Calvin Klein underwear ads, in combination with the currently most politically correct, prescribed quotas in regard to the number of women, black people, and people with AIDS. The complementary strategy—presenting mass murderers, Nazis, and other monsters in ironic opposition to the "correctness"—consisted in conceptually as well as the missionizing of the rest of the world with this model of emancipation, realized by queer film festivals from Wuppertal, to St. Petersburg, all the way to Tokyo.

To summarize, gay film as a genre mirrors different variations of gay identity, but more importantly, this genre in its function as a mass medium initially established and modernized the identity model. Alongside the question as to what degree this "branch of film" participates in an ultimately repressive discourse in regard to sexuality, the genre simultaneously takes on a pioneering role within a commodified aestheticization of life. Both fields—sexuality and aestheticization—are together transmitted by the gay filmmaker as a model of contemporary (artist-) subjectivity.

3.  
"The first article I ever published in the *Voice* was on *Flaming Creatures*, and I can truly say that no art has moved me more deeply than the midnight slide shows and glacially paced performances Jack used to stage at the Plaster Foundation of Atlantis on pre-Soho Green Street."<sup>7</sup> So wrote Jim Hoberman, chief film critic of New York's *Village Voice*, in the obituary honoring Jack Smith who died as a welfare case from an AIDS-related illness in 1989. Even if considered only as a marginal character in the official annals of art and film history, Smith is esteemed in certain circles as a legendary performance artist and filmmaker of the first generation in the American underground and independent film movement—registered by many as providing the initial artistic impetus for their own creative work. Secondhand anecdotes about his boundless creativity, on the one hand, and his eccentric if not paranoid, habitual contentiousness, on the other hand, proliferate the little that remains of almost thirty years of his artistic productivity: short prose and theater texts; some interviews and essays (i.e., about Maria Montez and Josef von Sternberg); Smith as an actor in films by Ken Jacobs, Bill Rice, and Andy Warhol; and as the single complete and preserved work, the forty-minute film *Flaming Creatures*, which he directed, shot, and edited in 1962.

"I started making a comedy about everything that I thought was funny. [...] The first audiences were laughing from the beginning all the way through. But then that writing started—and it became a sex thing. [...] When they got through licking their chops over the movie there was no more laughter. There was dead silence in the auditorium."<sup>8</sup> If one takes at face value what Smith told Sylvère Lotringer during an interview in 1978, it was the scandals staged by others that associated *Flaming Creatures* with a supposed provocative attitude. The transgression of sexual taboos—as in times of censorship of pornography the film was perceived—provided publicity for a new form of film production. The New American Cinema—this cinematically innovative movement centered in New York at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s—was mainly initiated by the filmmaker Jonas Mekas. Mekas had brought *Flaming Creatures* to the experimental film festival of Knokke in 1963—and due to the festival management's prohibition of the film, he projected it in his hotel room, instantly turning the film into a sensation and insider tip on the international film scene. According to Smith, given Mekas's newspaper article emphasizing the allegedly

6 Wolfram Schütte, "Nachruf zu Lebzeiten – Derek Jarman's neuer Film *Blue*," *Magnus*, no. 3/94 (March 1994)

7 Jim Hoberman, "Jack Smith, 1932–89," *Historical Treasures*, ed. Ira Cohen (New York: Hanuman, 1990), 10–11.

8 Sylvère Lotringer, "Jack Smith – Uncle Fishhook und die heilige Babykack – Kunst," in *New Yorker Gespräche* (Berlin: Merve-Verlag, 1983): 83. Jack Smith, interview by Sylvère Lotringer, "Uncle Fishhook and the Holy Baby Poo-Poo of Art," *Semiotext(e)* 3, no. 2 (1978).

pornographic nature of the film, the police confiscated a print of the film and further screenings in New York were forbidden. Smith consequently referred to Mekas as "Uncle Fishhook," personification of the culture industry in a new and alternative way, and as such, as a lifelong object of hatred.

Watching *Flaming Creatures* today, it becomes clear that its radical statement in regard to the question of the meaning of sexual identity lies beyond intentional identification and beyond affirmative provocation; in fact, Smith's film shows in an almost analytical presentation the problematic results of a "sexual revolution" that had just started at the time. The "mannequins" prowl around in diverse costumes, eventually to theatrically fall into one another's arms—they are not innocent as claimed by Susan Sontag in her essay on *Flaming Creatures*,<sup>9</sup> anything but. They realize they are being used to pull off a scam by the time the off-screen advertising dude praises the latest, heart-shaped lipstick that supposedly bestows everyone with a heart-shaped mouth that remains perfectly shaped even while giving a blow job. The product palette of sexual emancipation is already far too familiar to them to still allow the pursuit of target-oriented sexual acts motivated by a serious sexual attraction. Boredom and interchangeability becomes widespread with the endless wagging of breasts and penises. Nonetheless, people keep applying the lipstick, so that the age-old game and only pastime can keep starting up again.

In *Flaming Creatures* I made use of the mass dreams I find I have inherited. The deep soulfulness and beauty I feel from the popular culture of my formative years moved me and I sifted through the mould passed down by my parents' generation in order to discover for myself a cinematic form. Believing that style, the way in which an artist handles a theme, rises above all subject matter, I chose the most artificial and decadent scene structure—an earthquake, an orgy, a dance routine—as the outline for my own film. I filmed and edited these scenes in a more or less abstract manner so that a high pitch of delirium (again) would be felt and the poetic ambiguities inherent in the "pop culture" scenes would become manifest.<sup>10</sup>

In this fellowship application from 1964, adhering to the tradition of Sternberg, Smith pronounces the central significance of the visual in cinema against the story-oriented routine Hollywood had fallen into at the time. Unlike Sternberg's lavish studio settings, Smith's scenes are supplied by the giant and perpetually growing garbage dumps of industrial mass production. By recycling pieces from mass culture, Smith stresses his own bias as a starting point for his critique of the excessiveness of capitalist production. This form of critique distinguishes Smith's burlesque method from the "camp" lifestyle, described by Sontag in the mid-1960s, as a pioneering aesthetic worldview that "is neutral with respect to content [...] disengaged, depoliticized."<sup>11</sup> Taking her essay

"Notes on 'Camp'" (1964) as a mirror of the contemporary zeitgeist, it becomes understandable that Smith considered the scandalous success of his film's reception to be based on a misunderstanding. He grew increasingly skeptical of any interpretations of art as well as the strategies of the art market.

In 1963 he filmed *Normal Love*, a supposedly comprehensive, feature film-like project, but he never assembled a definitive version. He subsequently no longer produced films, instead staging performances—in part incorporating slides and film fragments creating Happenings, or unique events directly linked to his own person as opposed to tradable products.

In conclusion, it can be maintained that from the point of *Flaming Creatures* all the way through the time of his fragmentary late work, Smith attempted to "rescue" the autonomy of the artwork in the age of the culture industry from meeting the empty fate of "art for art's sake," on the one hand, and "Tendenzkunst," ideologically tendentious art, on the other.

To guarantee a subjectivity that defies alienation, Smith used his own person ever more recklessly in his work—and in this he might be counted as one of the "unsophisticated" people who took the call a little too seriously to "extend the concept of art," as the new demarcation between art and life was programmatically called in the 1960s. That he has not yet gone down in the annals of art or film history as an icon of exemplary suffering, is in large part due to his megalomania. "I mean I didn't want this, to create a race of prostitute drag queens. I'm ashamed of it," he stated from his sickbed in 1988.<sup>12</sup>

If praises are to be sung to the radicalism of a path such as that pursued by Smith to the bitter end, a dated form of art that perpetually exacts the sacrifice of the artist is promoted—even if only in the form of his or her "madness." Nowadays the universally offered escape from this bourgeois notion of art is to affirm art as design in the world of commodities, as was illustrated in the critique of the category of gay film. But as long as a critical relationship to society is maintained, this cannot be an option. In his investigation of European aestheticism, Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow describes this historical situation that

9 Susan Sontag, "Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*," in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), 229.

10 Jack Smith, "Notes for the Ford Foundation Application – Program in Humanities and the Arts," in *Film Culture*, no. 76 (1992): 25.

11 Susan Sontag, "Anmerkungen zu 'Camp,'" in *Kunst und Anti-Kunst: 24 literarische Analysen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1982), 324.

12 Jack Smith, "Remarks on Art and the Theater," in *Historical Treasures*, 126.

remains unresolved to this day in the following manner: "The artists have become suspicious of themselves. There are only two possible answers to this dilemma: A farewell to art, or, a new foundation that will also be of a social nature, in order to achieve some kind of liability."<sup>13</sup>

English translation of a lecture presented by Stefan Hayn on April 24, 1995, at Kino Arsenal, Berlin, under the title "What to Put on Top of Jack Smith's Memorial Christmas Tree?" Screening of films by Hayn *Schwulenfilm* (Gay film, 1989), *Tuntenfilm* (Queeny film, 1990), *Pissen* (Piss, 1989/90), *Fontvella's Box* (1991/92), *What to Put on Top of Jack Smith's Memorial Christmas Tree?* (1994), and Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1962).

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13 Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow, *Muse, Maske, Meduse: Europäischer Ästhetizismus*, Edition Suhrkamp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), 31.

# The Politics of Queer Archives

Karol Radziszewski

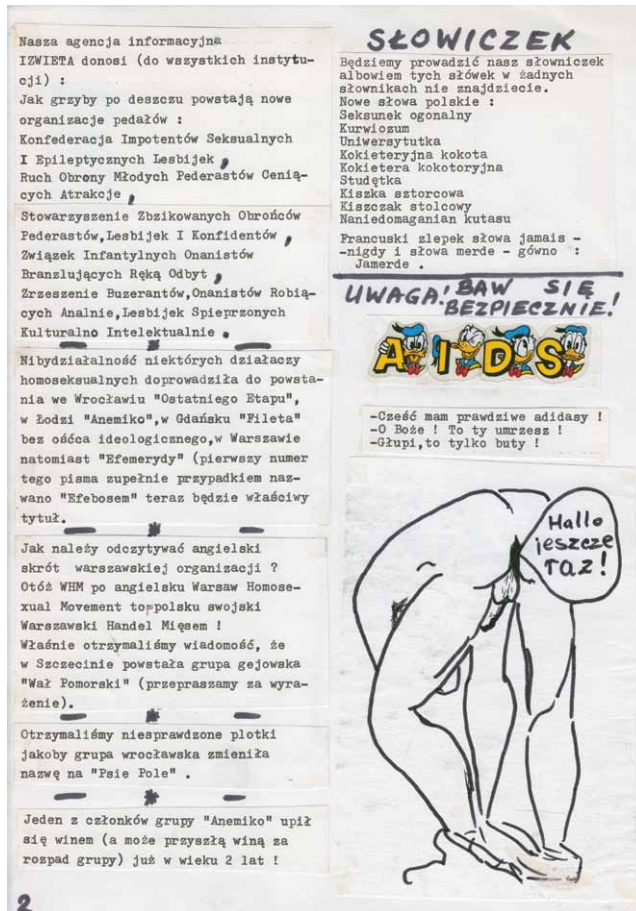


Fig. 140  
Ryszard Kisiel, *Filo*, 1989

*DIK Fagazine* is an irregularly issued magazine I founded in 2005, and continue to self-publish. It is the first and so far the only art magazine from Central Eastern Europe devoted entirely to the subject matter of masculinity and homosexuality in the broadly conceived context of culture and art, with particular focus on the context of this geography. Individual issues of the magazine are either monographic, as those devoted to Ukraine (number five), Romania (number seven), or Czechoslovakia (number nine), or multi-themed, concentrating on selected areas of interest. In 2008 I began to work on an almost three-year-long project—a special issue entirely focusing on the life of homosexuals in Central Eastern Europe before 1989, before the fall of communism. In the process of researching the topic and searching for sources and traveling I reached many people whom I interviewed. From the outset it was important to me to confront the Polish experience with that of Poland's neighbors, sketching a wider panorama of the whole region. Together with my collaborators, I decided to trace and compare cruising areas, gay nude beaches, groundbreaking publications as well as reactions to the beginning of the AIDS epidemic in several selected countries (Poland, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Serbia, Czech Republic, and Hungary). As it turned out, despite specific local circumstances and lack of an organized homosexual community, many of the described experiences were similar owing to the shared context of living behind the Iron Curtain.

Thanks to archival research and work on the *BEFORE '89* issue, I met Ryszard Kisiel and found out about the existence of *Filo*—the first magazine devoted to non-heteronormative issues in this part of Europe, founded by Kisiel and distributed semi-legally among his friends and acquaintances. Consequently, *DIK Fagazine* reprinted original mockups of *Filo*, our “newly discovered ancestor.” During consecutive meetings with Kisiel in his tiny flat in Gdańsk, I had an opportunity to explore his vast archives, and to learn about new facts and various aspects of his activity. On one occasion, Ryszard produced a plastic bag full of meticulously described little boxes containing a collection of nearly 300 coloured slides. As it turned out, it was a documentation of photoshoots Kisiel realized with his friends in one of their private apartments. The slides were made in late 1985 and in early 1986, as a direct response to the “Hyacinth” campaign (a comprehensive campaign carried out by the Civic Militia in the People’s Republic of Poland, which consisted in gathering data on Polish gay men and their community, as a result of which around eleven thousand personal files were registered). Kisiel said himself, “Since they started to expose us there was no point in hiding any more. We had nothing to lose, so we decided to keep going and stop worrying about it.” The discovered slides are not shocking, yet they do contradict a stereotypical way of thinking about life in the People’s Republic of Poland, providing specific visual evidence. They disabuse us of the image of a homosexual as a persecuted victim, revealing a large potential of positive energy, uninhibited



Fig. 141  
Karol Radziszewski, vitrine (*Filo*, 1986–90 and *DIK Fagazine*, 2005–14)



Fig. 142  
Karol Radziszewski,  
*Kisieland*, 2012

sexuality, invention, irony (also toward such taboo topics as AIDS), but above all self-irony, which today's LGBTQ activists often lack.

For the last few years, drawing on Kisiel's archive, I have been working on an art project titled *Kisieland*, which is a long-term undertaking and will range from records of conversations, through ordering and digitization of the slides, to realization of a documentary, publication of a book, and organization of various presentations in the form of exhibitions and lectures. In 2011 I invited Kisiel to my studio, where, after twenty-five years, he decided to return to the role of a creator. The film, which recorded this action, confronts memories with Kisiel's present image, as he confronts a young model face-to-face. Part of my *Kisieland* project is the *AIDS cycle* (wallpaper, paintings, graphics, and posters), echoing Kisiel's collage of Donald Duck stickers included in an issue of *Filo* in the late 1980s as well as the *Imagevirus* project by the General Idea collective, which travestied Robert Indiana's iconic work *LOVE*. In this way I clash Eastern European archival materials with visual codes that have become iconic for Western culture, thus creating new, hybrid forms. Locating Kisiel's archive in the context of art is an opportunity for restoring/revealing, but also recovering its critical potential. It is also a way of complementing Polish visual history by adding to it hitherto ignored elements.

I find working on history and archives interesting for many reasons. I think that particularly in post-communist states, where some historical threads were broken or could never emerge, there has been an attempt to construct national identities anew, to build new narratives. Recent history, including art history, is being largely constructed today, and sometimes manipulated. I am interested in this appendicizing, rewriting, revising, but from a very personal perspective. This allows a lot of room for interpretation. I am not a historian, thus, as an artist, even when referring to various concrete figures or events I essentially always talk about myself. What for me is vital and inspiring in working with archives is influencing the present and the future through working with the past. In this sense the work has also a political, or even activist potential. I am interested in searching for alternative versions of well-known stories, fantasizing about potential similarities, questioning canonical narratives. This is also connected with discovering the local, Eastern European identity being shaped in parallel to the global canon. What is happening now stems from what happened earlier, and therefore instead of grappling with the effect, I want to reach back to the cause.

Translated from the Polish by Ewa Kowal

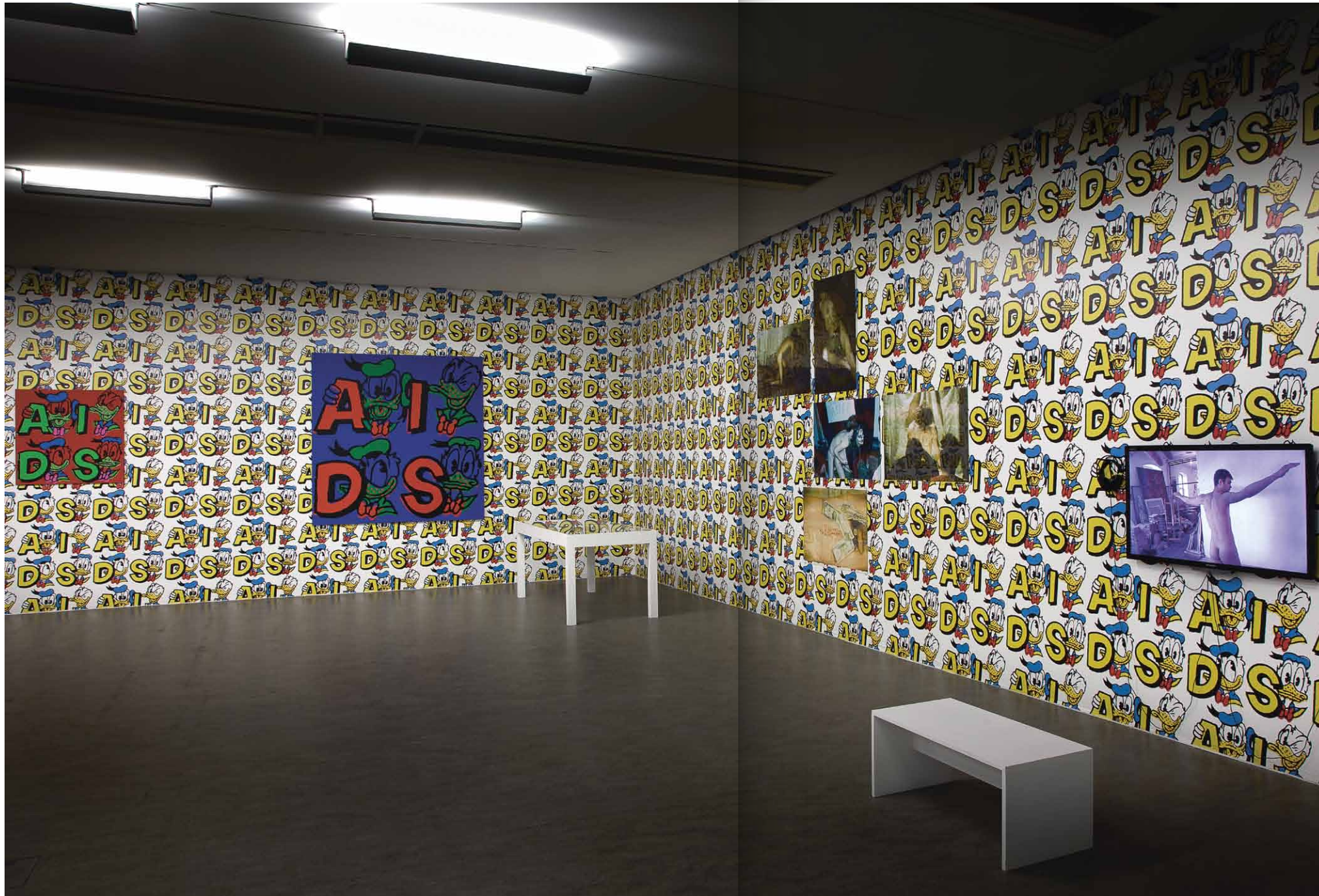


Fig. 143  
Karol Radziszewski,  
*Kisieland*, 2014

# “Conceptions” of Drag

# Fantasies and Fetishisms; or, A Composition in Steinese Drag

Werner Hirsch

Dedicated to all my drag heroes, and to name only a few of these extremely inspiring, troubling folks: the sublime geniuses, Vaginal Davis, Mélanie Enragée and Bonny Guitar, Jacob Katz, Jakob Lena Knebl, Hans Scheirl, Tony Transit, and last but not least my supreme genius wife Ida Wilde, who made me up.

## Part VII

Nobody knows what drag means because nobody knows where this word comes from, except that it once came from drag queen. But everybody knows what cross-dressing means. It is very simple. So I write cross-dressing and I write drag and this is not about a theory and this is not about a concept. This is about what people do and what people cultivate.

## Part VIII

There is nothing exciting about drag and there is nothing exciting about cross-dressing. Every normal human animal on the continent of Europe and the Northern Americas does it or likes it. The continent of Europe and the Northern Americas are the places I know best and have seen most and this is why I write that. There is cross-dressing in the normal theater there. There is cross-dressing in the normal dance there. There is cross-dressing in the normal club there. There is cross-dressing in the normal film there. There is cross-dressing in the normal art there. There is cross-dressing in the normal television and the normal face tube and the normal u-book. There is cross-dressing in the normal carnival and there is cross-dressing in the Sunday party and there is cross-dressing in many more places and it is very fashionable. Let me specify. Well for every second male dancer/choreographer there is a contemporary cross-dresser even though most tittie lady dancers there do stay tittie lady dancers there. I don't know why this is so, but it is so and this is, of course, very exciting to the male heterosexual choreographers and spectators who are titillated by the tittie dancers and the homosexual programmers who are inflamed by the fantastic dressed-up gay dancers and this is all very exciting to everybody and all are very pleased by it. The contemporary theater and art lovers love themselves for loving to be shocked and thrilled by the cross-dressers, and this is so in the normal dance theater, and this is so in the normal art museum and there is no escape to that.

## Chapter III

Oh well, oh very well. Let me tell you now what happened. This is what happened. When drag king Werner Hirsch was discovered by the Frenchmen as a talented classical "non-danseur" (nondancer) at the beginning of the millennium, he entered the European contemporary dance scene. In those days,



there was a lack of male dancers and a great demand for them, and the style of the non-danseur for the males was very much in vogue. So this is how he soon made a living for his extraordinary family, which is not a family and is produced by makeup. But in spite of the success, normal drag soon became boring to him and so he moved on to expanded drag. What is expanded drag? Expanded drag is pretty much like expanded cinema. This is so that you expand drag to anything and everything that may cross your head or cross your geyser of desire. Now then Hirsch and his accomplices from makeup productions produced drag kings and drag queens and drag chaps and drag cats and drag dogs and drag bears and drag extinct animals and drag old gays and drag choreographers and drag husbands and drag texts and so on and so forth. So in *termini technici* they did such things as anti-juvenation drag aka temporal drag aka animal drag aka freak drag aka profession drag aka dandy drag aka terrorist drag aka voice drag. Sometimes they would pass and sometimes they wouldn't. But the most important thing with all of it was, and remains, that there always has to be a special sensation that runs up the spine when it comes to it. *Ein Kribbeln*: an unmistakable tickle symptomizing perversity. This has to do with context. Let me explain. For example, just last week we were shooting a new film by the brilliant *grandes artistes* Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz in the treasured company of my genius compeer before the lens Ginger Brooks Takahashi. Well the traditional simple harvest of pubic hair to be glued with artistry on the upper lip, his habitual shaving of the widow's peaks, paired with the application of the famous *Werner Wurst* and sock didn't produce any of that typical tickle to Werner, if his voice would remain un-dragged. Let me explain some more. When Werner goes to buy the bread at the bakery in France, a much-gendered country, which he often wanders about with his hat and usual pre-loved dandyish attire on, the baker says, "Ce sera tout Monsieur?" and Werner answers simply, "Oui ce sera tout," and the baker blushes and replies in grand confusion, "Oh pardon Madame, je croyais que vous étiez un monsieur, je suis désolé\_e!" and Werner replies simply, "Ne vous inquiétez pas. C'est au choix: Madame, Monsieur. C'est comme vous voudrez." "Mais non enfin! Ce n'est pas possible!" and follows a gay conversation. The fact is that the gent's high-pitched voice nails his gender down and it is the voice that always wins over the fine bird's feathers and now this is why in the film Werner dragged his voice up. He asked Ginger to lend it to him, and Ginger did it generously. And this is why Werner likes voice drag and this is the end of this story and I wanted to tell you more about how Miss Antonia Baehr became a drag choreographer but that will be for another time. Well anyway. After all, under the makeup there is no truth but true makeup.

Werner Hirsch aka Henry Wilde, husband of Ida Wilde, August 2014, south of France, not far from Bilignin, Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein's country residence.

# My Drag Experience as Lady Reporter Damiana Garcia

Michael Lucid

My relationship with drag has been a constant throughout my life, and my drag has continued to evolve. From my earliest childhood days of proudly parading around the house in my mother's outfits from her closet (my parents were always very encouraging and supportive of my one-lady pageants), to my years during and after college performing as a whole ensemble of different comedic drag lady characters. I think my inherently androgynous nature and my comedic leanings just naturally led me to comedic drag. My lady characters cater to my more feminine sensibility, and I've always loved to comedically perform both in and out of drag. In recent years, my drag has taken the form of my most long-running drag persona—the intrepid lady reporter Damiana Garcia. Damiana is a plucky gal who chases hot leads and exclusive stories all over Los Angeles, often finding herself on the red carpets of film and TV premieres and award shows, or in the homes of her celebrity interviewees for lively sit-down chats. I post these interviews on YouTube,<sup>1</sup> and the videos are then featured on *The WOW Report*, the blog of film/TV production company World of Wonder, who've taken a major role in the promotion and distribution of drag culture. World of Wonder produces the internationally enjoyed reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and for many years they acted as RuPaul's manager from the very beginning of her career. It's been a thrill for me to be taken under World of Wonder's wing, or under their petticoat, so to speak, as they've given Damiana a home and a platform to feature her exclusive lady interviews.

Damiana has been an ideal character for me to take on, because in so many ways she's a heightened version of myself and my own personality. I'm naturally a very animated, lively, and chatty person, and like my lady reporter character, I love to hear other people's stories, and learn about how they've become the people they are today. For better or worse, I've always been fascinated by celebrity and glamour, also definitely because I grew up in Los Angeles myself, and I've been saturated in celebrity culture my whole life. For all these reasons, Damiana provides a wonderful vessel for me to express these facets of my personality and my enjoyment of indulging in the sparkle, glitz, and often paper-thin artifice of celebrity culture.

And because she's a lady reporter working with a respected production company like World of Wonder, Damiana gives me a point of access to celebs that I might not normally have. Now I get to meet so many performers whom I admire, and get up close and personal with them. And Damiana often even gets a little irreverent and cracks jokes with her interviewees, thus getting to peek behind the curtain of celebrity a bit, and loosen up the self-seriousness of the concept of celebrity to have a little fun. Like me, Damiana is very much

<sup>1</sup> See "Michael Lucid Presents," YouTube page, <http://www.youtube.com/michaellucidpresents>; and "Daily

Freakshow," YouTube page, <http://www.youtube.com/dailyfreakshow>.

a comedienne—as much as she enjoys getting the journalistic scoop from her interviewees, even more so she loves the playful repartee, improvising, and riffing back and forth. Significantly, Damiana’s name is also the name of an aphrodisiac herb, which can be ingested and enjoyed in tea form, so there’s a sense of delirious, amorous, and fun energy embedded in Damiana’s very name, which comes through in her personality and interviewing style.

In terms of her role as an actual lady reporter, Damiana’s role models and templates for her character are the iconic American lady reporter Barbara Walters and red carpet legend Joan Rivers. Walters has always been celebrated for her insightful, sensitive, and revelatory interviews, in which she gets her interviewees to open up to her and divulge very emotionally charged and personal information. Rivers is known for her fearless irreverence on the red carpet, sidling up to the world’s most famous entertainers and brazenly putting them on the spot, while she does comedy bits and busts their chops about their wardrobe choices. Damiana falls somewhere in between these two legendary ladies with her reporting style, while also offering her own personal flavor. Damiana is almost always unflappably positive, upbeat, encouraging, and compassionate. She wants to get juicy exclusives from her interviewees, but she has no desire to embarrass or antagonize them, or make them uncomfortable.

In this way, Damiana simultaneously acts as a drag homage to these great lady reporters, while also being an amplification of who I am as a person and comedian. Damiana is more upbeat, brave, irreverent, and adventurous than I often am out of drag. She also dresses more colorfully than I do (she’s very fond of bright, colorful lady reporter blazers, blouses, and beaded necklaces, and when she wants to make more of a fashion statement she loves to rock pashminas, ponchos, and kimono/muumuu hybrids—kimuumuus!). And perhaps because I don’t identify as a “drag queen” per se, but more as an androgynous comedic performer who happens to usually play female characters, I see Damiana as a “real lady,” and so she’s not so much campy as she is just a fun-loving, joke-telling, natural woman. By seeing her less as a campy drag queen and more as a female character whom I embody, I close the gap between Damiana and myself even more. The line between us can actually become very blurred, as we often speak and express ourselves very similarly. She just happens to do it a bit bigger and more colorfully! Damiana’s not high-glam either. Her makeup is understated and simple, and she can often even be quite homely and down-to-earth. Perhaps it’s just the sensible lady reporter in her and me, but Damiana and I often just want to be comfortable when we’re pounding the pavement to chase a hot story, and so most of the time, even on the red carpet, Damiana’s wearing fitted black slacks and sneakers (which is usually a drag cardinal sin!) with her colorful blazers and kimuumuus, for optimal comfort and mobility. And amusingly, no one watching her videos online can

usually tell the difference, since most of the time all that appears on camera is her outfit from the waist up. So her black slacks and sneakers usually remain her red carpet “secret”! That’s just Damiana, and that’s just me when I’m at my best—easygoing, fun-loving, inquisitive, always looking to crack a joke, a bit goofy, a bit frumpy, a bit absurd, but often also sharp as a tack, and all love and joy, all the time.

# What a Drag!

Ginger Brooks Takahashi

This summer I was on Fire Island for a month. It is a long skinny island off of Long Island in New York with two very gay beach towns—The Pines and Cherry Grove—separated by a cruising area known as “The Meat Rack.”

My comrades for the month were a group of mostly gender nonconforming queer artists. And the standard evening entertainment in Cherry Grove, where we were staying, is drag. This Cherry Grove drag scooped us into its world of stand-up comedy drag—into drag that hit us in the face nonconsensually; drag that is xenophobic drag, racist drag, and misogynist drag, in the form of mainstream American television drag. What a drag! From Bianca del Rio to Hedda Lettuce’s solo shows to Ginger Snap hosting Drag Bingo. What a confusing place to be queer, as in “other!” We wondered as a group: Was this fear and hate embodied as queer trauma and then excused as drag? And how have we, the consumers of this nightlife, said yes this is ok and to be expected from Cherry Grove’s mostly white gay male culture and its embedded casual sexism? This nightlife spoke of a drag to me that costumed and even made spaces for the very systemic violences that are in fact the creators of the very queer trauma being mourned.

The drag that I grew into my own queerness with emerged from queer subculture—queer that is imbued with anticapitalist guts and fumes, queer that means oppositional, queer that is strategy or methodology, not just a rainbow bumper sticker. (Though I do like rainbow paraphernalia.) I remember seeing self-organized drag shows in the Pacific Northwest in someone’s old barn, or maybe it was a roller rink, in the early 2000s—Freddie Fagula and Hellary Homosex’s scene. I remember being freaked out and turned on all at once.

And in New York around the same time, I was part of a scene that centered around two distinctly DIY and feminist spaces—Bluestockings bookstore and the queer group house and event space DUMBA. My favorite drag act from that time and those places was the Backdoor Boys, a group of dykes who choreographed, danced, and lip-synched, bringing out the homosexuality in boy band pop songs.

To me, drag has meant invention, disguise, and play. A place for flipping gender inside and out, for pushing and pulling, crushing, composing, and teasing our expectations with all this performance.

One night a few weeks ago, I was sitting on the front porch at the Fire Island Artist Residency and heard Tracy Chapman, Lauryn Hill, and Nina Simone being sung by one voice, an inspired set with a wild and wide range of vocal styles, beyond the usual caliber of karaoke. I think it was the Nina Simone that finally got me out of my seat and over to the Ice Palace where the singing was happening. And there was Porsche, the back of her dress drenched in sweat, singing her heart out. It was her voice and her commitment to performing that pulled me in and reminded me how much I do love drag.

# Girls against God A Poem Manifesto

Vaginal Davis

Vaginal Davis

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Centuries ago, on a night of a full wolf moon, the fairies of Burzee, under the protection of Lurlene, gathered to honor the Piss Goddess.

What defines the logic of a cultural moment? The efficacy of electoral results? Campaigns? Exhibitions? We urinate on insecurity, competition, alienation. Let's mark our territory à la Romula et Rema. Subcutaneous, subterranean reflections on power structures and alienation. We who are poor with sexy paint a-glowing; electric, distorted landscape for a face.

I am Vaginal Davis, a daughter of Bilitis, an Ozma of the Fairyland of Oz, a Xixi of Ix, a Freya, Femina, Lilith, Cybele demanding gonads to make a necklace of testicles.

I am one of the most celebrated women in the world, known and honored by queens, kings, presidents, chancellors, and prime ministers.

I honor Goddess 13 with the most beautiful robes and gowns made by leading fashion designers, worn in honor of thy beauty. I am one of the twelve best-dressed women in the world.

Take hold of the golden tree, the branch of life that is the greatest opportunity ever afforded the human race. Seven right fists, seven holy troughs, seven sparkling frosty freeze healing waterfalls. Transubstantiation. The key to eternity.

Drink, drink, drink from my breastage that can feed dying nations. Feast children—die Kinder—not only from the areola but the entire titty cavity.

Breath, breathing, respiration, expiration, inspiration/force in motion.

The fruitage of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, and self-control.

Gifts are offered not collected.  
 Gifts are offered not collected.  
 Gifts are offered not collected.  
 This offering is made by fire.  
 This offering is made by fire.  
 This offering is made by fire.

Feminist art raises consciousness, invites dialogue, and transforms.

Chant the mantra:

Women, world, whimsy, wonder.  
 Women, world, whimsy, wonder.  
 Women, world, whimsy, wonder.  
 Women, world, whimsy, wonder.

Welcome to the wolf pack  
 Welcome to the cozy coven  
 Welcome to the life/death/life cycles of love  
 Welcome to the funeral of patriarchy  
 Welcome to the celebration of the wild female soul  
 Welcome to the subterranean forest  
 Welcome to the underworld, the inner world  
 Welcome to the black womb

Under the waning wolf moon  
 let us howl together  
 in the dead of winter  
 dark smoke and hard times  
 the time of the wolf  
 The strong mother  
 Animal mothers  
 We are witches  
 Together let us face the life/death/life nature of love

We cast a circle calling the four directions:  
 north/wisdom; south/innocence; east/illumination; west/introspection  
 Our differences are united in this circle  
 The circle is the universe  
 The circle is change  
 The circle is a mirror  
 The circle is a flowering tree

We are life feeding death feeding life  
 Let us return to the earth  
 Let us listen to the plants  
 Let us unearth the lost stories of the goddess  
 Let us listen to our grandmother's stories  
 Let us celebrate in song and in dance  
 The skeleton woman dance  
 The siren song  
 The sacred feminine  
 The sacred earth song  
 The same song

We cast spells  
 Of protection  
 Of earth healing  
 Of personal objects of significance  
 Making the intangible tangible

We laugh  
 We fall  
 We are ridiculous  
 We are clowns and buffoons  
 We howl at the comedy of chaos  
 We laugh at ourselves

We are here in the moment  
 We feel our breath, blood, and bones  
 Our flows are the flows of nature  
 Our flows are the flows of life

Under the winter moon  
 Under the waning wolf moon  
 let us howl together.

# A Chart of Universal History

Kaucyila Brooke and Vaginal Davis in Conversation  
with Daniel Hendrickson

**Daniel Hendrickson:** Contrary to its worldwide reputation, Los Angeles is not a city where anything can happen. In fact, destiny rules over Los Angeles with an iron fist. It's just that destiny is not always predictable. For instance, Los Angeles is the locale that spawned Vaginal Davis, a miracle on its own terms, but also inconceivable anywhere else in the world. It's also the place where Marc Siegel and I first met Kaucyila Brooke. We had many mutual friends, so it was unpredictably bound to happen. And happen it did. (This, of course, was long before any of us had even heard of Susanne Sachsse.) I remember an evening when we all decided to go out to a club to see Vaginal Davis perform, probably at The Garage, but I can't really remember. Vaginal, however, declined to appear and sent the wheelchair-bound Lester Vartan in her stead. He was accompanied by his home health-care nurse, Rolanda, who, despite her long blonde cornrows, bore a striking resemblance to Ron Athey. But Ron was in the audience, so it couldn't have been him. Anyway, Vartan couldn't keep his eyes off of Kaucyila, and kept yelling out, "You fly, girl!" between songs. And he was right. She was fly.

Now, many years later, Vaginal and I are exiles in Berlin, and Kaucyila still lives in California, so we had to make use of some modern technology to have a long overdue chat. But the technology wasn't really working well, which really got the ladies going.

**Kaucyila Brooke:** As a lesbian Luddite, I value conversation. I find that I only have a few friends who enjoy this. I used to spend hours on the phone—my landline of course, which I still maintain because the audio is better and it doesn't heat up next to my head and it does not suddenly go skritch-y or blankety-blank or skeeeeshhhhh! My friends and lovers and I would discuss the finer points of politics, theory, art, lovers, and break-ups until the morning hours. Now I can hardly get a call returned. I leave a voice mail and what comes back is either a text message or an e-mail or nothing. My friend Susan Silton often remarks that she is grateful that she can count on me to return a call and usually in a twenty-four-hour period. Is it just that everyone is so connected with each other that they don't need to return my calls or are they hiding out on YouTube or e-mail or checked out in some Facebook phantasmagoria of what they call "community"? How can there be such a thing as a Facebook community when the FBI and Coca Cola want to be your "friend"? Does your friend take your data and store it to check up on you later to see if you are a terrorist or consumer or someone whose identity they would like to steal?

**Vaginal Davis:** Oh, my darling duchess, since we're both Luddite lesbians, I don't mind telling you that I faced quite the dilemma recently when

I was appearing in Glasgow. The curators put me up in a cute boutique hotel there called citizenM. It's a very nice place with a staff of major Ms. Gorgeous youth-quaking millennials, but to access the lights and TV in the room I was forced to use an iPad, which I'd never used before. I can only say, it aggravated me to no end.

I do have an iPhone, which was given to me as a birthday present by my boss, the Empress Stefanie Schulte Strathaus of the Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art, where I have been curating the monthly performative film program *Rising Stars, Falling Stars: We Must Have Music* for the last seven years. I am still trying to figure out how to work my so-called smart phone. I hate sending texts as my thick fingers just can't seem to handle typing on the tiny pad, but I realize that to stay in contact with my young students, I must. Most of them only do texting and don't really check e-mails, so I am at a disadvantage because of my lesbian Ludditeness.

**KB:** The term "smart" is an odd one because it makes me think about "stupid." Is the phone smart and therefore smarter than you or me? Are we stupid? Is the classroom "smart" because it has Wi-Fi and projectors and lights that switch on when we enter them? I thought that intelligence was something we were working on together in the classroom through reading, learning our shared histories, and looking at images and books. I don't believe that my ability to look everything up online is helping with my memory—although auto correct is making me look like a better speller.

**VD:** I've heard of technology being compared to a bad lesbian relationship, but I feel that there is no such thing as a bad lesbian relationship. What people call lesbian drama I find fascinating and full of merit. The same goes for lesbian processing and lesbian crib death, when lesbians stop having sex with each other. I find sex overrated anyway. I am becoming so, not just last century but the century before that. I am reverting to Victorian-era standards of sexuality and technology.

Particularly since letter writing has always been a big part of my art practice. I feel that it's necessary to make the time to write old-fashioned letters via post and to keep up with my correspondence with people all over the world, something I started doing as a child back in the 1970s. There is nothing I enjoy better than receiving a long letter in a creatively decorated envelope stuffed with photos, drawings, ephemera, and the like. As a member of the nobility, I am sure you receive lots of formal requests for an audience and the like. Do you have your own seal? Is this something that you engage in as well?

**KB:** I did for many years, on beautiful paper with fountain pens. Whatever was the current favorite became my most trusted companion—from pens that had rubber bladders to refill to cheap cartridges. Or for quite some time in the 1970s I would always write with a Rapi-dograph—0001 point—shaking the pen to release the ink flow. I must confess that the last letter I wrote was to Mother Flawless Sabrina—who does not use e-mail, is not on Facebook (me neither, I followed her example. She stated the obvious: "These people are not 'friends!'"), and does not make calls but will receive them. Anyway, when I thought about reviving my letter-writing practice she seemed the obvious recipient. I took my Lamy fountain pen to paper and wrote several long pages, carefully folded them into a collaged envelope, and sent the missive on its way.

And yes, of course I have a seal! Here it is!



Fig. 144  
Kaucyila Brooke with  
Gala Porras-Kim,  
*Unofficial Seal, 2012*

In any case, speaking of my lust for old technologies, I shoot on film and with numerous cameras, including the very basic large-format Toyo-View 4x5 Field Camera. The waterfalls that I exhibited in Vienna during the "Pink Labor on Golden Streets" exhibit were made with that camera. When I set up the camera on a tripod at the site of Multnomah Falls—I made such a spectacle of myself with a dark cloth over my head and cable release and 4 x 5 film holders—parents were bringing their children over to see the old-fashioned camera. What kind of camera is that? Are you using film??? The



confusion continued when I exhibited the prints. Because my exposures were thirty seconds to one minute long, the water from the fall is exposed to film over time and looks like a blur of white in the print. Those looking at the images wondered what sort of Photoshop filter or digital technique was used to make the effect. Funny, eh? The most basic relationship between time, the shutter, and light on film is still mysterious after 188 years. I love the trace of light on film and the magic box of the camera, and what emerges from the diabolical darkroom enchantments. The waterfall series is titled “The Last Time I Saw You,” which is referring to the last time I saw my father or spent time with him while he was conscious before he died—but it is also about the disappearance of the experience of things through time and space and the attempt to fix the shadows and traces of light with the alchemical materials of silver halides.

**DH:** By this time our technological aids were giving out, perhaps because they were being bad-mouthed so much, so the conversation had to move to a written form.

**Kaucyila wrote:**

*Your Majesty! or Yo Majesty!*

First I want to say, how honored I am to be having such a correspondence with one of such glamorous glitz and good sense as you. You inspire me. I am always at your feet looking up at you as resplendent clouds surround you in the lofty halls of Olympian glory. Or is it Hades where I find you? I may be looking up and down all at the same moment.

Do you remember where we first met? It was 1992 and I had just arrived in Los Angeles to take a faculty position at CalArts. I saw that there were several queers among the faculty—Millie Wilson, Matias Viegner, John DiStefano, to name a few—and we decided to make something of it. We organized a Drag Ball, CAL ARTS IN FLAMES!, and because it is a school, we made it academic by holding a panel discussion on drag in the afternoon before the ball. Maybe that is how we got the money to pay our guests a small fee. The panel was you—Vaginal Davis, Gender, Cathy Opie, and Pigpen—kind of a butch/femme spread. I was the moderator. Honestly, I wasn’t really good at it—I just thought I would introduce everyone and then it would self-manage. I had nothing to prepare myself for how you would enchant me and throw me off the task at hand. You began speaking

and the wit and wisdom dropped like so many gems from your perfect lips and the room faded around thy glory. Cathy tried to catch my eye and indicated her watch. Pigpen gave me a nudge and nodded her head in your direction and I understood that although time warped and enfolded me in your magic, others were waiting to speak. I stuttered and sputtered—breaking into your history lesson—trying to wedge open a few minutes for the rest of the panelists to do their bits.

We arrived to the event because we had a meeting and decided to do it. You know, in the same room—our fleshy bodies in one of those windowless offices at CalArts—where we recirculate our own hot air. Then we divided up tasks. Someone made a poster. Several of us made phone calls. Was there even e-mail in 1992? Certainly we weren’t using it to do e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g the way we do now. I really didn’t realize that I was such a lesbian Luddite until recently when I took on the job of codirecting the Photo and Media program last year and found myself confounded and inadequate to manage the number of daily tasks which formerly would have been handled by one or two phone calls—now become endless unwieldy e-mail chains—with multiple personalities writing volumes on small subjects. How did I end up sitting on my increasingly well-padded derriere for hours every morning and into the afternoon trying to catch up with all this frivolity masquerading as important business? I mean, it is not that I mind sitting, but it should be for something truly worthwhile—like reading de Sade, or Bataille, or Butler, or Acker, or looking at pictures or reading the *New York Times* style magazine—where you can learn so much about everything but the Internet.

**Vaginal responded:**

*My Darling Great Duchess,*

I don’t know if you know this, but I grew up in an all-lesbian separatist feminist household with my mother, a fierce barracuda-femme-top who ruled over a bevy of proper butches. So I came under the providential influence of my mother and her comrades-in-arms, who literally were women with weapons. They were fighting the patriarchal order, waging a war with their own stockpile of arms to create a feminist state somewhere in Palestine. The women in my mother’s group went by names like “Manimal” and “Spyder” and I called them Uncle So-and-So growing up. There were no men in our household EVER. I grew up with my mother, my four sisters, and my mother’s women’s group. They were part of the women

who helped renovate the building in the Westlake section of Los Angeles that became the first Women's Building. Talk about going around in a circle! That famous photo that Cathie Opie took of me with the green hair, socks, and pubes was taken at the previous Women's Building location on North Broadway in Lincoln Heights, which has now been converted to studios and art spaces.

I have basically co-opted all my mother's work. She never considered herself an artist, but she was the most creative person, making what we would call now assemblage work and installations by dumpster diving at fabric houses in the garment district in downtown Los Angeles. I loved going on these forays with my mother and recycling things that were just thrown away. My mother was also an excellent seamstress, and she could knit and crochet. She tried to teach me these important skills but for some reason they never took hold. My mother hated cooking but was a great cook. She tried to teach me that and I was a complete and utter failure. Thank goodness I get invited to formal dinner parties and events at embassies for artists or I would starve.



Fig. 145  
Vaginal Davis, *Denham Fouts – The Best Kept Boy in the World*, 2015

*Dear Princessa of Ho!Henzollern,  
or Queen of My Heart Land Body All the Space around Us,*

Let's come back to the topic of "bad lesbian relationships." I think that they are different than my relationship to technology, but I am having trouble making the connection between the two. Other than that they are all-pervasive—like a relationship—and that technology is in my life to stay whether or not I choose to participate. This seems different than lovers, who can certainly choose to move on or I can choose the same solution to opt out of the struggle. "Dyke drama" (that is what we call it, to take advantage of the alliteration) seems to come with the territory of being one. Lesbian bed death? It is such a disappointment, but I agree that sex is not the whole relationship. What is called sex is just one part of intimacy—and everyone doesn't always want it the same way and at the same time. But in the movies that I watch, they do! They are always fucking on the countertops or shoving each other against walls and wrapping their legs around and getting fucked. It seems that the Victorians were at it all the time—or certainly they talked about it a lot and wrote about it and categorized it and put all the different kinds of sex into hierarchies of normal and abnormal—good, better, and best!

*Lusciously longingly yours,  
Kaucyila*

*Darling Major Ms. Gorgeous Duchess de Edendale,*

Though you now live in Tujunga, you will always remain the grande Duchess of Edendale, as Edendale is so identified with your beauty and glamour, and you are one of Los Angeles' premiere ageless wonders and sterling talents.

Since we're on the topic of feminine delights, I think I forgot to give my mother's name earlier. I'm so excrement for brains sometimes. My mother's name is Mary Magdalene Duplantier. She hated her biblical name, but I think its divoon. When my mother married my sisters' father in 1937, his name was Sam Hall Williams. Williams is an awful surname. I have a different father from my sisters so my birth name is Clarence Dennis Ruff von Holtzendorf Sanders, which is such a hideous name, but my mother was trying to satisfy my oldest sister, who liked the named Clarence Dennis, and my father's relatives who are the Ruff von Holtzendorf.

Now moving on to the political understanding of humor in our work. I believe in utter whimsy and taking frivolous things seriously and serious things lightly. I was gagging on the lovely extravaganza of your *All about Eve* spoof.<sup>1</sup> I didn't know you did work like that and it's just brilliant and with great production values on a budget. I believe highly in working within a certain cheap aesthetics. That's why I recycle in my visual art, and art objects, and painting, using disused makeup brands or cheap nail polish and other kinds of makeup from ninety-nine-cent stores, or there is a thirty-cent store on Central Avenue and Adams Boulevard in Los Angeles that one of my former students sends me care packages from. I love this store.

So many well-meaning liberal types hated my work in the 1980s. For instance, there was this activist named Dave Lumian, who was the publisher of a magazine I used to write for called *Twist*, and he had a management company that handled Phranc, the Jewish lesbian folk singer, and the ska band The Untouchables and The Dream Syndicate. I used to get into such heated discussions with him as he didn't get where the politics came from in the humor and the way I used humor. Well, my mother always used to say she would rather suck the four-horned penis of the grand cyclops of the KKK or French kiss Adolph Hitler and his halitosis-riddled mouth than deal with a well-meaning white liberal.

*Dearest and Most Honored Majestic Being,*

Edendale—we are in the dale of Eden in our mind's eyes or is it the vale? Edenvale, where the flowing veils of deep velvet and chiffon fly through the air flowing off our shoulders, but hopefully unlike Isadora, they will not wrap themselves through the spokes of a wheel and cause the end of our breathing—of course not because here we are in Eden Veil—a paradise of feminine delights in the garden of our conversation.

Your mother sounds amazing! Like the opposite of mine. My mother was not a feminist and would not have described herself as one either. She was an educated woman who said that she was satisfied with her role as wife, mother, homemaker, etc. I gave her a very hard time about that when I was first developing my feminist ideas in the 1970s and even earlier when I was confronting her with my ideas about the Vietnam War, marriage, and my budding radical politics. She is the one who introduced me to art. She took me to the Portland Art Museum to see the collection and later to see the blockbuster Salvador Dali jewelry show, which included a beating

heart of rubies—that was the most fantastic object I had ever seen—talk about a *Wunderkammer*! That was the beginning of my fascination with *Kunst und Wunderkammern* before I even knew they existed. When she found out that I was a lesbian she said that she understood why I felt closer to women and liked the intimacy of those relationships but she didn't know why it had to be a sexual relationship too. Then later when she was reading a biography of Edith Wharton who had both male and female lovers she amended her ideas about me and said that she was not convinced that I was a lesbian but she did think that I was artistic and that that led me to unconventional relationships. She grew up in the Philippines for the first eighteen years. Her father moved there from Minnesota to teach in an American school and later—after he married my grandmother on a trip home to Le Roy, Minnesota—he exported tobacco. I guess that was a more lucrative business, because my mother grew up with a cook, a chauffeur, a nursemaid, and went to all the fancy parties at the American officers' clubs. She would sometimes pull tissue-wrapped beaded flapper dresses from her carved Chinese chest and show me that the armpits were all rotted out from the heat and humidity in that climate. Her aunt was a missionary in China, which is where the chest came from—so on that side of the family there is history with American imperialist and colonialist economies. My mother was very sensitive about racism and social differences in class, language, and culture, I guess because of growing up in Manila, and this was something that she impressed upon me going up. She was much more worldly than my father who had not traveled beyond Oregon until 1933, when he went to the World's Fair in Chicago as a delegate for the Chi Psi Fraternity's National Convention.

My mother's name was Ann and my father's name was George. She was an English literature major in college and gave all of her children English names: Ann, George, Jane, and Edith. I am the youngest and they had a family meeting to decide on my name. At twenty-two I decided to offload the markings of my patrilineal heritage by dropping my last name and so for a period of time I went by Edith Grace. My father was a little hurt but my mother surprised me by backing me up and stating that she agreed to my objection to the name of the father sequence and although they all thought my frequent name changes ridiculous, when I finally landed on Kaucyila Brooke, she did attempt to call me by that name. I have been Edith

<sup>1</sup> Kaucyila Brooke and Jane Cottis, *Dry Kisses Only*, 120 minute video, 1990.

Grace Hibbard, Edee Hibbard, E, Edith Grace, Grace, Shady Grove, Grove, Nail, Conchita Rivales, Kaucyila Brooke, Brooke, Sunshine Daisy, Smokey Blueberry, and Queen Kaucyila. My cats have been called Ceres, Falodal, Abayoyo, and Buwara. My dogs have been called Kiki Parker, Cricket Hoover, and Mingus Dragonfly.

*All my love,  
Kaucyila*

*O Goddess Freya,*

I didn't know about all your many names and persona changes. So very similar to me. I was coming up with new characters all the time and morphing into different identities since about the age of five, all of this under the guidance and encouragement of my mother and her lesbian kollektiv. I have gone by the name Vaginal Davis since about thirteen, and my mother, sisters, and entire extended family never blinked an eye. A normative friend from university was shocked when he was over at my Koreatown flat and heard me retrieving messages from my old answering machine. He couldn't believe that my mother called me "Ms. Davis." I think he was more shocked by her formality of tone than anything else.

*Dear Fantastico Fabuloso Fire of Life,*

This conversation has really got me thinking again! Thank you for getting it off the ground.

I was thinking about your mother the lesbian separatist and wondering about you navigating that world as Clarence Dennis Ruff von Holtzendorf Sanders. Your account of those days makes it sound like it was all okay in your household and that you were included in those early days at the Westlake Women's Building. My memory of the lesbian separatists in the Pacific Northwest was that they were hostile to male children and after the age of eight they were not welcome to attend all women events. Those women most certainly pushed the definition of radical lesbian feminism to exclude not only boy children, but straight women who they thought of as sleeping with the enemy, and obviously gay and straight men. I lived in a log cabin in a former logging camp on the Siuslaw River and the landlady, Bertha Fitch, only rented to "girls" and we never knew if she knew we were all dykes. Anyway, there were a couple of separatists living there but they were quite phobic toward those of us who did

not define ourselves the same way. A male friend from college days visited my cabin and that made my membership to the "sisterhood" teeter toward oblivion—after that they were convinced that I was just a tourist.

Although I quickly found out that my dream of living in a feminist utopia was an unrealizable fantasy filled with divisive politics, I was not dissuaded from pursuing my own path through the history of feminism and feminist theory. Mostly I realized this through starting a radio program where I could produce programs related to my research and true to anarchist feminist ideals. The program became a collective and more women were trained to take over the programming. That remained my primary creative outlet until I picked up photography. I started making pictures of my friends at the river cabins with my mother's No. 1 Pocket (Kodak) Camera from the 1920s. I still have the photos of us cutting up logs with our collectively owned chainsaw, who we called "Run Ten Ten" since to us everyone had to have a good name. We weren't reading Monique Wittig but we could have been. Documenting beautiful women in costumes and meadows and naked creek walking became my preoccupation and eventually led me to take photo classes at the local community college. I became an artist because I wanted to picture my feminist friends who were making up a new world at the edge of the forest. When I eventually made my way to graduate school in Tucson, Arizona, one of my male colleagues took me aside and advised me to drop the queer and feminist content out of my work if I wanted to be taken "seriously" in the art world. Another confessed to me that she envied me because I had something to say rather than what she felt was her own vague ambition to be an artist. It is not that I was not making art or had no ambition to have it seen, it is just that feminism was the foundational moment that propelled me into the field of the image.

Weirdly out of context and never part of some urban group of feminist artists like WAC or the Guerrilla Girls, I was surprised one day to wake up and find out that feminism had become a brand or a banner and some feminist artists had become pillars in the pantheon of art stars. I remember thinking, "Ain't I a feminist?" and later "Ain't I a dyke?" when *OUT* magazine started reifying its own brand of queer artists. The same power-dykes populate the art world and take a visible position sometimes at the risk of losing the nuances of ambivalent ambiguities or the contradictory complexities that make it so difficult to define the subject or inhabit the fiction of a stable or singular subjectivity. Certainly humor undermines the unified and

proliferates signs and signifiers until the multiplicity of associations can become dizzy and indirect. What exactly is her position anyway? Is there a story here? I think that humor is both a way into the play of the subject and her many invented meanings and a way to cut against the power hierarchies by turning my back on them, or turning aside ever so slightly to deflate the puffed-up daddies and bring the attention back to the dandy. Because who wants to be taken seriously anyway?

Humor and play both abstract the image out of its most expected relation to meaning. Turning it over and spanking its hiney means the possibility of another synthesis that allows me to slam and Post-it note dissimilar things together. If gender and the feminine are only associated with a certain kind of body, it becomes very difficult to see the other alliances that are drawn. For example, I took my waterfall photos while thinking about my father at the end of his life. The photos look like big wet cunts, or that is how the creamy watery slit in the green wall of ferns has often been anthropomorphized, and I admit this is a desirable association for me. But before I put it away into that corner of my mind and leave it as a representation of a female body, I have a strange sensation of something missing in the equation. For me, these pictures came out of my thinking about my dying father. Is the falling water then the stream of life? The cum that contained the semen that eventually became me? Is water falling to a pool and then in an undefinable whoosh of wind and sound moving on to join the great Columbia River and out to the sea of souls no longer individuated into the biographies of great historical subjects? What does any of this have to do with being queer? It is queer to think about, don't you think?

# Disfiguration On Violence and Negativity in Queer Art\*

Eliza Steinbock

One of this conference's main line of inquiry is into what "queer abstraction" might mean. I think the greater problem is what queer abstraction might do; that is, I want to examine its power. First, I want to investigate how artworks create an abstract, but nonetheless very real feeling of violence. Jack Halberstam's article on "imaginary violence" helps to put into perspective how even the abstractness of the imagination still elicits feelings experienced as fully real in the body, and causes certain effects.<sup>1</sup> For instance, seeing a gory revenge film might make you think twice about assaulting someone. His article focuses on the political space opened up by popular culture and subcultural representations of unsanctioned violence committed by subordinate groups on white men. In this "place of rage" the effects of imagined or real violence become blurred: the imagined experience threatens to erupt into real violence.

Like Halberstam, I'm less concerned with the ethics of committing violence, whether real or imagined; in other words, asking should you or should you not act violently. I am more interested in the political nature of art that is explicitly about bashing back. However, I want to extend the scope of imagined violence to artworks that are nonrepresentational and distance themselves from being figural representations of a violent story. Hence, what I focus my analysis on is how negativity becomes abstracted in the painting and performance of bodily violence. How does negativity become condensed into a nasty prick felt on a viewer's nervous system, or more strongly, a disfiguring affect?

Sianne Ngai's study of ugly feelings in the arts examines the "politically ambiguous work" conducted by the minor negative emotions.<sup>2</sup> Anxiety and disgust, for example, render us passive, thereby suspending agency, whereas fear and melancholia lead to action. Aesthetic theories tend to focus on these "major emotions" associated with correct action and morality, neglecting the "minor emotions" that have less clear political relevancy. Therefore, canonical artworks mainly are those that most properly and powerfully create the passions of fear, anger, sympathy, and shame. Following Ngai down this less-trodden, dark path of debilitated agency, I want to examine the politically dubious work of ugly feelings elicited by an ugly, or at least difficult aesthetic. Going a step further than Ngai's concerns, I argue that the suspension of agency by ugly aesthetics becomes experienced in the body of the viewer not just as a frustrating or temporary obstruction, but as a violent disfiguration.

\* Eliza Steinbock, "Disfiguration: On Violence and Negativity in Queer Art," (lecture, "Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction," Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, 2012).

1 Jack Halberstam, "Imagined Violence/ Queer Violence: Representation, Rage, and Resistance," *Social Text* 37 (Winter 1993): 187-201.

2 Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

The *disfiguring impulse* in various forms of queer art point to a pissy, bloody, politically ambiguous sub-subsection in the archive of queer feelings; in this corner are works from Francis Bacon, eddie gesso, Heather Cassils, Josephine Krieg, and Del LaGrace Volcano. While sharing a disfiguring impulse, these mainly contemporary artists inflict affective violence at different targets: to disfigure the viewer's body, to disfigure negative stereotypes of gender, and even deform expectations of queer art. In what follows, I address the disfiguring impulse and its politics in two sections divided by medium: first on painting and then on performance.

## I. Painting and the Body of Sensation

Francis Bacon's paintings are regularly invoked to discuss the existential themes of violence, loss, and fragmentation. However, in *the Logic of Sensation*, Gilles Deleuze's study of Bacon takes a different tack to addressing wherein the violence lies.<sup>3</sup> He is quick to dismiss, as Bacon himself did, that the violence simply lies in the depiction of a scene, such as in monsters and mutilations. Instead, Deleuze identifies the violence of sensation wrought by the paint, color, and line. In other words, looking with Deleuze at Bacon we might see that invisible forces model the flesh. Bacon paints to study movement's effect on an immobile body: "to make the spasm visible." The setup is key. Art and literature scholar Ernst van Alphen points out that many of the male figures are caught in the midst of some movement, a walk or wrestling for instance. The arrest of this sensation in the freeze-frame of the painting recomposes the movement in all its continuity, violence, and speed. Our eye grasps the movement deforming mass, the sensation of it swishing by, rather than the static body broken into hulking fragments.

Breaking with figuration and all its attendant problems of representation, narrative, and clichés is no easy task. As evidenced in an example from 1949 titled "Study from the Human Body," the body remains central, as it does in nearly all of Bacon's oeuvre: he rejects outright abstraction.<sup>4</sup> Deleuze argues that in its isolation the figure becomes elevated above the figurative, illustrative, and narrative traps. Stripped bare by strong vertical lines this figure has a misty, cadaver-like quality. Creating a field in which the figure moves, the translucent curtains part and blend with the paper-thin body. There is no face, but a thickened neck with a bulbous head turned down. Indistinct color, the streaks of curtains shoot downward. Pooling colors follow gravity and flow away into the indistinct background, figure and field are stripped of any signifying traits. In Deleuze's terms, Bacon's technique of "local scrubbing" has tried to clear the canvas of clichés.

But loosely speaking, there is a body, and it is being studied in terms of being deformed by movement, tortured by sensation. Walking away, the body attempts to escape from itself, literally passing through the vanishing point, dissolving into the black. Van Alphen suggests that the "body-as-sense-organ" is not only a topic of his paintings, but an effect they achieve on the viewer.<sup>5</sup> They hit, so declares Bacon, the viewer's "nervous system," to distort the usual mode of perception. Michael Taussig's study of the nervous system characterizes it as "illusions of order congealed by fear."<sup>6</sup> However, what Bacon's viewers may feel hitting their nervous system is not fear in the first place but the orders of sensation piling up. As William James says, fear is what happens because you are running from a bear, not what makes you run. Color, taste, touch, smell, noise, weight pound the nerves of a body laid bare. No illusion about it: orders of sensation congeal into a twisting mass we sloppily call a body. The viewer becomes a semblance to the disfigured figure that resonates in the field. The second-order violence lies in the shaking of the viewer's bared body when confronted with the first-order violence of the figure confronting the field. Perhaps confrontation is too tame a term. Van Alphen discusses the "masculinity under siege" in Bacon, who in painting the terrifying white male disfigured by sensation shatters the conventions of figurative representation, which wholly favors aesthetically pleasing women and animals. As van Alphen phrases it, this is a "site of *genderization*." And here, enacted in painting's attack on the dominant form of masculine genderization, Bacon's disfiguring impulse comes closest to queer abstraction.

What would it look like to depart from the figure? An attempt at dealing with the abstract concept of gender through the genre of abstract art can be found in the work of eddie gesso. Abstract artworks are characterized by refusing any simple illustrative purpose, usually by appealing foremost to the cerebral. The title of gesso's painting installation is a bit of an understatement: "Attempt to Complicate" is a series of abstract paintings that methodically layer "baby pink with baby blue and baby yellow" in a demanding process (see figs. 146–147). The title of each panel lists which colors were used and what number attempt it was. The colors become the site of genderization attacked, not by stripping and scrubbing of cliché, but by suffocating. Overworking their powers of signification the multiple, layered application of gendered colors builds up a strange body from muffling the power of blue over pink over yellow and so on. Bacon's murderous process of overloading and then draining sensation from each figure is inversed: gesso's square panels of smothered clichés create

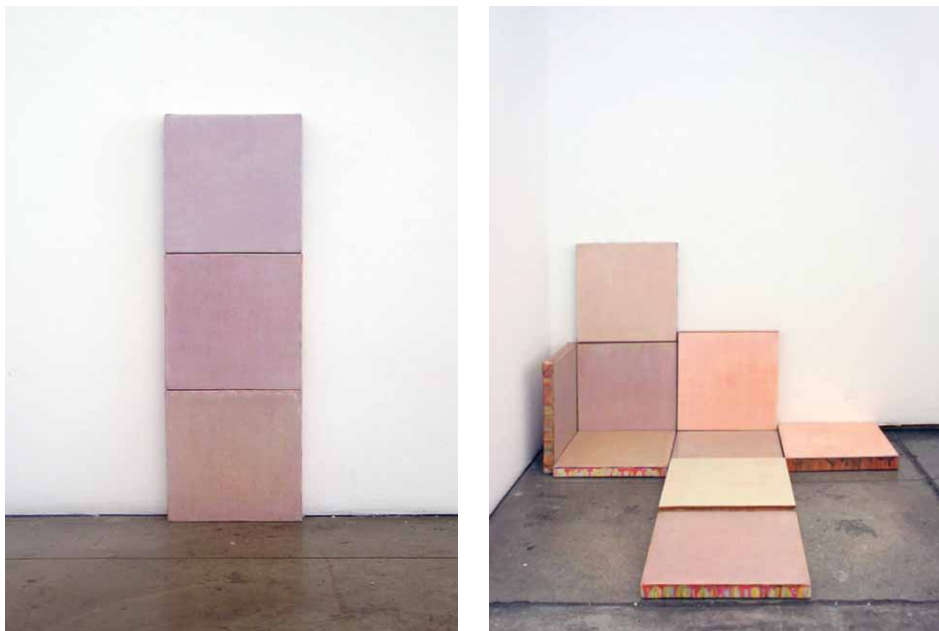
3 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation: Francis Bacon* (London: Continuum, 2005).

4 See the painting on the official website of the estate of Francis Bacon: <http://www.francisbacon.com/paintings/study-from-the-human-body-1949/?c=48-49>.

5 Ernst van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of the Self* (Chicago: Reaktion Books, 2004), 41.

6 Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (New York: Francis and Taylor, 1992), 2.

surprisingly lively creatures when arranged in a space, hung in a series. The uncanny flesh tones that surface from the dull mixtures range from caramel to bronze, from taupe to rose. Placed together, hung proximate to the viewer's own shape and size, the panels become animated, glowering figures without a referent.



Figs. 146–147  
eddie gesso, detail from “Attempt to Complicate” series, 2007

A quick glance to the side of the panels, though, reveals the drips from the process of layering color. The mono-color drips stand in stark contrast to the intricately worked surface. The streaking drips look like blood, spurting and hemorrhaging from the creation, from some internal wound. This detail indexes the violence wreaked by the achievement of the surface color. For the viewer it provides a disturbing remainder of the slow fight to overcome a genderized body.

Like Bacon's disfigured figure, gesso's panel installation of overwrought figures does not principally refer to traditional art-historical forms or motif. The works perform an abstract though highly material act with paint color, shape, and composition to engender the violence of sensation.

## II. Performance and the Fighting Body

Whereas painters Bacon and gesso wrestle with materials and then disappear into the traces of the brush, the performance art of Heather Cassils uses their body as a disfiguring force to fight their chosen material of modeling clay. Bringing Bacon into four dimensions, in the 2012 performance *Becoming an Image*, Cassils becomes the figure, a fighter stripped bare confronting the field shaped by the audience cloaked in blackness. First performed at ONE National Lesbian and Gay Archives in 2012, the “Transactivation” exhibit aimed to place transgender and people of color histories on the map of the art archives. An occasional photography flash punctuates the darkness during the twenty-seven-minute performance in which Cassils pummels a two-thousand-pound block of clay. Using professional boxing techniques of Mixed Martial Arts for the “all-out attack,” Cassils punches, kicks, and tears into the clay. In another sort of deforming process, rather than locally scrubbing, the artist disfigures the form of an immobile, impassive opponent with their bound fists, elbows, knees, shins, and feet.



Figs. 148–149  
Heather Cassils, *Becoming an Image*, 2012



Technically, Cassils also attempts to break with clichés by using a process similar to Bacon’s method: first, isolate the figure and strip signifiers bare, then create a field here in the shape of a ring, and finally, build up and empty out the sensation. These steps for achieving queer abstraction offer a working model that might be taken as a method more broadly for attacking the site of genderization. Despite the presence of a person who could become a figural representation of “transgenderism” or even of the story of trans violence, I want to suggest that Cassils’s abstraction of violence is more properly nonrepresentational, explicitly fighting to produce a different kind of image, a sensation image.



Fig. 150  
Heather Cassils, *Advertisement: Homage to Benglis*, from the series “Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture,” 2011

Cassils’s work as a whole explicitly addresses sculptural methods of adding and subtracting, and gender as a sculptural form. In addition to doing stunt scenes in films, they are personal trainers, and for this performance as well as for others they underwent extreme physical training. In three months Cassils’s body bulked up in muscle that required weight training, speed boxing, as well as the necessary endurance cardiovascular training. Cassils’s durational performance

brings into the world a new cut of the body, while also mining a body of gender codes. This transgender form of *musculinity*, to borrow a term from Yvonne Tasker that refers to female masculinity marked by musculature, gives us more than a hero form.<sup>7</sup> The fight between trans-masculinity and a hunk of clay is a fight to sculpturally define each other. This is an event of bashing back that narratively fails to produce a hero: all participants seem to win (or to lose). The clay makes Cassils stronger if exhausted. The event gives new life to the form of Cassils and the clay even if it implies loss or transformation.

For the audience, the rigged fight is failed spectacle. Crowding around the moment of composition, the audience is subject to flying sweat and debris from the clay, the panting sounds of a fight, the shuffling movement of the fighter, and the shock of the light flashing. In some sense, this event could become read as unsanctioned violence committed by a subordinate person upon the impassive form of “white men” if we take a narrative route to reading the bout. But in this a place of rage, what is lacking is pronounced or direct anger. Cassils exerts cold precise violence. Bashing back comes with no cathartic release as if it came from rage.

Without the easy figural reference (a burnt effigy for instance), the imagined violence here is nonrepresentational. As Cassils beats the clay, the photography flash hits the crowd. The performance creates a nervous system, literally making them nervous, on edge waiting for the next series of blows delivered with punches in the eye. Violence condenses into a burning flash, shocking the audience individually, but passing through them collectively. The audience passes through into the clay, becoming a living semblance of the sculpture, an only apparently impassive form that slowly, after a grueling process gives into Cassils’s force.

Overloading and draining the audience becomes the action of the performance: they become the vessel for the image, the form that Cassils works to sculpt. They become the image, burnt retinas, imprinted memory, and bruised bodies, shot through with sensation. The violence of the performance lodges under their skin, a prickling afterimage. Becoming an image, precisely not an object, a thing, or a person, the crowd carries an abstraction of violence. The photographs we are looking at are a poor documentary form not because they lack indexical power, but because they only served in the performance to disfigure the audience. Looking at them now, we only see the disfiguring of a clay figure, a tracing of the disfiguring impulse on the audience.

<sup>7</sup> Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993).

With no outright call to action, or clear threat, the work becomes politically ambiguous, but in a most productive way. The performance experience confuses witness with violator/violated; we all must confront our complicity in allowing senseless aggression against trans people to be perpetuated. Agency uncomfortably circulates from the materials, acting on the human bodies, creating a pulpy mass. In the crowd, agency can become found in becoming receptive to the disfiguring forces of sensation, to becoming a passive block for absorbing sensation.<sup>8</sup>

The political content in Josephine Krieg's mixed dance and martial arts performance titled *Gender Violence* also showcases physical violence, but resists a clear moral message. Since around 2004, the piece by has been performed multiple times with different choreography and lengths for crowds of over 600 in Krakow, to dozens during Club Wotever evenings in London, to a small panel during a school audition. Again, a figure confronts a field and has to clear the clichés. Training, duration, and setup are crucial methods employed for the violent queer abstraction of gender in and on the body. Wearing a simple black dress and dance shoes, Krieg's trans-feminine figure enters from the audience. Over three distinct acts the dancing figure increasingly and disturbingly mixes ballet and contemporary dance with martial-arts heroine moves and horrendous falls.



Fig. 151  
Josephine Krieg, *Gender Violence*,  
Stockholm Pride, 2004

A specter of violence haunts the piece: unlike Cassils hulking clay opponent, Krieg fights an imaginary, nonexistent attacker. It only at first appears to be a solo, but becomes a duet-duel as the violence of genderization means we are never alone. The 2013 report from the Transgender Murder Monitoring project found that in the last fourteen months there was a 20 percent increase in the reported murders of trans-people, a total of 265, in which a disproportionate number of victims were trans-women, of color, and sex workers.<sup>9</sup> Here, "femininity is under siege." In *Whipping Girl* Julia Serano explains the reworkings of misogyny into the sinister form of "trans-misogyny."<sup>10</sup> Misogyny is steeped in the assumption that femaleness and femininity are inferior to, and exist



Figs. 152–153  
Josephine Krieg, *Gender Violence*, Stockholm Pride, 2004

primarily for the benefit of maleness and masculinity. Serano charges that trans-misogyny is reflected in the sexualization and lurid treatment of people on the trans-feminine spectrum, resulting from the notion that trans-women would only transition socially and medically to appeal sexually to men, or to twist it further, to themselves as women in an autoerotic form of "gynophilia." Trans-misogyny's sexual charge is fully compatible with the violence committed against them when they are actually appealing and therefore threatening to male heterosexuality.

In Krieg's solo, the fight sequences transform into a duet with an imaginary attacker. In one turn she is fierce, focused, strong. In the next turn, lost, flailing, vulnerable. The narrative trajectory is toward a slow deterioration. However, we are kept on the edge of our seat precisely because Krieg's piece is carried out in staccato rhythms creating an eventual, but not inevitable resolution. Sweeping the air, the floor, and the field in repetitive combinations of movements, the audience is narratively left in a lurch: When will the next avalanche of punches and blocks, kicks, and falls spill? Which figure will appear, fighting which opponent? On edge, the anxious mood deepens as the movements become less regular, the figure stops and starts, crashing, hair pulling, moaning.

The endlessness and the pain could become numbing; we become dragged along by the work, sensorially involved but not given a place to stand. Neither as witness (to what crime?), nor as perpetrator (sitting "innocently" in our

8 This analysis has been further developed in the article by Eliza Steinbock, "Photographic Flashes: On Imaging Trans Violence in Heather Cassils' Durational Art," in "Queering Photography," special issue, *Photography & Culture* 7, no. 3 (2014): 253–68.

9 See the Trans Murder Monitoring (TMM) project report, published May 19, 2009: <http://www.tgeu.org/tmm/>.

10 Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2007).

seats); yet, the title tells us this is gender violence. This is “gender” doing violence. How can you bash back at gender, at structural violence? Gender in its normative form—that material force, an invisible, abstract movement—we can see painfully disfigures the figure. We in turn become emotionally ugly, uncomfortably figured as irrelevant, incapacitated in our seats. Anxiety permeates long after the piece is complete, and Krieg’s body stops spinning. We don’t get to witness a cathartic release, the non-cathartic ending is collapsed, a failure of the body to hold-up.

This is not feeling good; this is not the spectacle of camp, of blowing off steam with delicious frills, much less blowing off a head Thelma and Louise-style. This is diving into the wreck of feeling disfigured. This is what it feels like to be uncertain that it will get better.

These artworks literally run to the fight, not looking for a political payoff later, but want payback now. The fight is here, now, and in some cases even with you; and in this sense they are not utopian, they do not invest in the future. This is not a redemption narrative, but a suspension of the narrative-as-usual. The emotional negativity in which these works dwell and pull us into might be classified by Heather Love’s identification of a tradition in queer experience and representation she calls “feeling backward.”<sup>11</sup> To this archive of feeling these works help us to account for the corporeal and psychic costs of the violence carried out by the feelings of homophobia and transphobia.

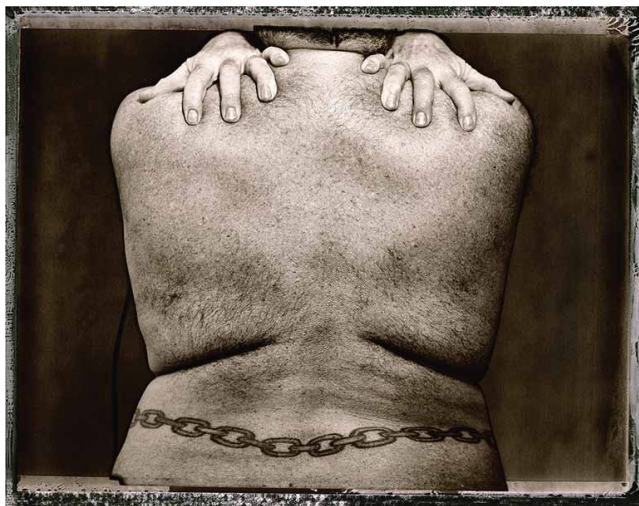


Fig. 154  
Del LaGrace Volcano,  
*Herm Back*, 2012

I want to close with an image from Del LaGrace Volcano’s latest series of self-portraits called “INTER\*me.” *Herm Back* was created in the cold basement of his home in Sweden. Highly processed use of Polaroid 665 film, including by solarization, this image series is incredibly fragile not only aesthetically, but also materially. They are literally as close to perishing as possible without fully dissolving.<sup>12</sup> Meditating on the strangeness of an aging masculinized body, Volcano for the first time in a self-portrait turns his back on us. He grips his own bulk, rather than as we know herm best facing the camera/spectator directly with open arms, making herm muscles pop. Looking “backward” does not have to be out of feelings of nostalgia per se. Looking backward, we can better examine the psychic and aesthetic cost of social stigma, of the empty shell of white masculinity that disfigures us all.

<sup>11</sup> Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> This analysis has been further developed in the article Eliza Steinbock, “Generative

Negatives: Del LaGrace Volcano’s Herm Body Photographs,” in “Trans\*Cultural Production,” special issue, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (November 2014): 539–58.

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# Editors and Fugitives

Ulrike Müller in Conversation with Harmony Hammond

This conversation started on a very cold day in February 2015, when Harmony Hammond visited Ulrike Müller's Brooklyn studio. It was formalized in several e-mail exchanges over the following weeks, when Hammond was back in New Mexico, where she lives and works.

**Ulrike Müller:** I've been thinking about how to approach this conversation about "queer abstraction," and I would like to keep it close to home: I am most interested in questions regarding the work that we make as painters and then, in extension, how the paintings exist in the world, how they are looked at and talked about. The studio part seems both simple and complicated, concerning ideas, processes, and decisions that are direct and others that are at odds with language. I'm proposing to have this conversation from an artist's perspective. What do you think?

**Harmony Hammond:** I like your idea of staying close to our work and visual practices. I think this current interest in what is being called "queer abstraction" is part of the renewed engagement with abstraction in general (because there isn't the political urgency that there was in the late 1980s and 1990s as we all struggled with AIDS and censorship issues), but must be read against the postmodern emphasis on representation and identity-based politics.



Fig. 155  
Harmony Hammond, *Rib*, 2013

Fig. 156  
Harmony Hammond, *Rib* (detail),  
2013



In the late 1980s and 1990s, it was widely assumed that content addressing issues of identity was based in representation, and that representation was about depiction/picturing/the gaze (the dynamics of who is looking at who and from where)—the focus was based on the “figure” as a “representation” of the queer body and therefore the narrative of marginalized bodies. While the postmodern lens of representation is surely a helpful lens, it did not address abstract work or even that work positioned along a continuum between representation and abstraction. Work conceptually presencing gendered and sexed bodies through materials and process was missed or dismissed.

As an artist who works out of an awareness that my chosen materials (including but not limited to oil on canvas, metal, fabric, latex rubber, straw, blood, hair) and the way I physically engage with them carries meaning (that is, they have agency), I find this position limited and “lacking.” In fact, the very heightened indeterminacy of abstract painting can be thought of as a queer space. I am interested in “the body” versus “the figure” that is defined by its contour. Abstraction allows me to engage the body as a sociopolitical site as well as the “painting body” (both the physical painting and the artist who makes the painting). To borrow from Foucault, abstraction like queerness offers a space of infinite and pleasurable possibilities.<sup>1</sup>

**UM:** I’m afraid I don’t share this positive outlook. I have become increasingly irritated by how an idea of “abstraction,” as soon as it is qualified as “queer,” seems to fuel back into iconography, and by the readings this produces in relation to my work. I would hate it if my work became “about” any one thing and that thing could be spelled out in language. For example, there are many round shapes in my paintings, and they are used in different, and I believe, specific ways. The circles have to do with familiarity—with the scale of things we handle in our everyday lives. I make decisions based on formal relationships, not with the intent to illustrate or depict. I work with and against symmetry, with and against such limitations as format, verticality, a central splitting, and the confines of the support. Somehow an idea of sexualized, round body parts has been projected onto these circles. I actually remember the first instance this happened; I cringed but told myself that it was fine as long as it was clear this was one reading of several. Now, when my work is viewed through the lens of queerness and abstraction this gets reiterated to the point that I actually feel like I want to put my foot down, and say NO!! This tits-and-balls reading of my work is neither very sexy, nor does it help the work or me as I try to make it. I want so much more than this—a better sexiness—but also to think harder, feel deeper, and see differently. I can see how the desire for intensity that I’m voicing here is indebted to affect theory and queer studies, and I appreciate the work of the writers and thinkers that cross

over, reach out, and contribute to the project of bringing language to modes of making art and working with form that have a tenuous relation to words. But sometimes a circle is just a circle.

Of course I’m being polemic, but maybe what it boils down to is that art is a place where identity labels ultimately are not helpful. I know that the term queer once held the promise of being a political category not defined by any one identity, but I must say I lost my trust in that. Labels like “women artist” or “queer artist” seem to belittle and reassert marginality. I think that we’ve come far enough as feminists and as artists to consider statements by artists, who also were women, and who reject gender as the basis for their studio work and therefore might have been considered antifeminist at the time. Artists, who consciously strive to separate themselves from their femininity (Anne Truitt), work from a hermaphroditic place (Bridget Riley), or bluntly claim that “art exists sans gender, race, religion” (Jo Baer). I’m with Baer when she claims that this is “in fact, one of the best reasons for making art.”<sup>2</sup> I’ve said before that the person at work in my studio is not a woman artist, that in my experience in moments of creative absorption the pressures of gender and other social norms are temporarily suspended. This is a space that I want to protect, and that I’m ready to defend if need be.

**HH:** I, too, do not wish to be confined by labels, however, I find they can be useful at times, albeit minimally (providing some sort of historic/political/aesthetic orientation), as long as I continue to redefine and articulate those labels on my own terms in various locations of time and space—in other words, they are only a box if you let them be so. (I’ve probably paid a price for this.) Given the historical erasure, the issue is how to not avoid, erase, disregard, or minimize the experiences of women and queers, yet at the same time not overemphasize or make these experiences into more than what they are—especially in relationship to the art we make.

With rare exceptions (that work made in response to a particular event), I do not think about making feminist, lesbian, or queer art when I go into the studio. Nor, for that matter, do I think about abstraction, although I’ve always been interested in the various ways content can be engaged in

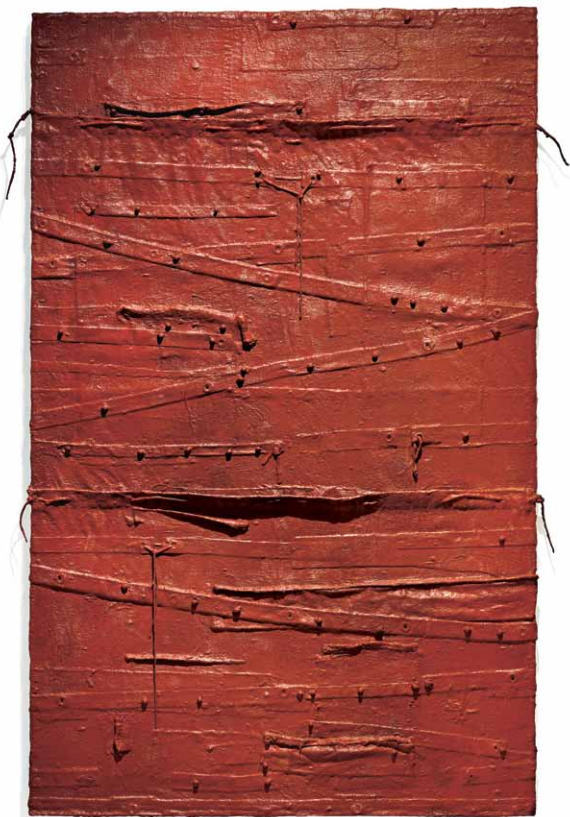
1 Bob Gallagher and Alexander Wilson in conversation with Michael Foucault, “Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity,” *The Advocate* 400 (August 7, 1984), 26–30, 58; <https://schwarzemilch.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/foucault-sex-power-and-the-politics-of-identity.pdf>.

2 Jo Baer, “Unused Statement: American Woman Artist, 1971,” in *Broadsides and Belles Lettres: Selected Writings and Interviews 1965–2010*, ed. Roel Arkesteijn (Amsterdam: Roma Publications, 2010), 70.

abstraction. For better or worse, I am a “material girl.” My job is to listen and tease meaning out of the materials—their histories, manipulation, combination, and presentation. It’s actually a very open sensuous space that I rather enjoy.

But to go back to the issue of labels, clustering works under any rubric such as “painting,” “abstract,” “monochrome,” “modernist,” “formalist,” “feminist,” “queer,” etc., allows us to examine sameness and difference without eliminating either. Like I’ve said many times, all art participates in multiple narratives. Certainly mine does. It can be discussed in relation to any and all of these categories in terms of how it responds to, participates in, interrupts, and/or resists those narratives. Hopefully, this is what makes the work layered and rich.

Fig. 157  
Harmony Hammond, *Red Bed*, 2011



**UM:** In a continued attempt to sort out my terms I have been more interested in form than in abstraction, and more drawn to thinking about figuration than about bodies. Over the past few years it has been productive—and fun!—to try and rethink both form and figuration in dynamic, relational ways. It helps me in calibrating a place for my work where exactitude and openness coexist.

**HH:** Can you be a bit more precise?

**UM:** In *The Life of Forms in Art*, a book that’s pretty old by now and that I have been dragging around for a couple of years, Henri Focillon defines form as not primarily line and color, but rather the “dynamic organization that brings into play the concrete texture of the world as the sum of the body’s reactions to that which surrounds it.”<sup>3</sup> And the art historian Kerstin Stakemeier suggested after a recent studio visit that the movement in my work isn’t as much an abstraction from something concrete (e.g., Mondrian’s cow), but might have to be thought of rather as moving “toward.” This sounds right to me, and I think that in those movements toward something not yet defined, the concrete textures of the world, the sum of the body’s reactions, as well as the specific constellations of objects and people are crucially important.

**HH:** How are the forms in your enamel paintings determined? How do you make them? How do they perform?

**UM:** For me it seems really important to be able to surprise myself, to look at something that I made and realize that it isn’t something that I could consciously construct. In a way I’m trying to push beyond myself, and maybe that is another reason why I resist the label queer for my work—it makes it too much about myself, or about myself in the wrong way.

Since we’re talking about the round shapes already, it might be helpful to say that I do not use a compass but rather trace all these circles from round objects. It started with rolls of tape, my water glass, things that I had on my studio table, and now I have a small collection of round things in the studio. It seems to make a difference for those shapes to quite literally be the shadows or footprints of objects.

**HH:** I think my favorites are what I am going to call the “scallop paintings.” They are both decorative and toothy-edged. Flirtatious. They present positive and negative spaces as equals.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Focillon, cited in Jean Molino, introduction to Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 17.

**UM:** Funny, I also call those shapes scallops. The larger ones are traced from yogurt cups, the small ones from coins, such as pennies or quarters.

**HH:** Well, I bring my gendered body to the reading of your work! In many of your enameled paintings the forms initially feel like familiar body parts but refuse to read as such, which is why I like what art historian Aruna D'Souza wrote about these paintings—that “the body is everywhere and nowhere.”<sup>4</sup> I don't know what you think about her observation, but it rings true for me. At the same time, however, I am semi-consciously noting how your forms relate to each other and the edges of the painting: Do they touch or not, and what is the tension of almost touching? I am interested in how your forms often appear to be flipped, one side the mirror image of the other, except there are calculated differences (sameness and difference again—surely we might consider that lesbian or queer!), and how your forms translate across materials—oil paint on linen, enameled metal, quilts, woven textiles—to expand the painting field, calling up formalist painting but also cloisonné jewelry, craft kits, signage, fashion, home craft decor items—high art and objects that might be sold in a womens' bookstore.



Fig. 158  
Ulrike Müller, *Mirrors*, 2013

**UM:** Yes, I guess I can get behind the idea of one's body being “everywhere and nowhere” at the same time. But I also think that around the work I made for my first gallery show in New York about a year and a half ago, I started to trust that because of decisions having to do with scale and material and specific formal ideas, body-ness would just be there anyway. I realized I didn't need to worry about it. That actually freed me up a lot and moved me deeper into an actual painting space, which is where I want to be.

I had this realization sometime last year that really I'm an non-anti-painter, which means I am moving toward painting in a particular roundabout way that feels a lot like math, when two negatives make a positive. And I look to you as someone who inhabits that space that I circle, someone who has a deeply painterly, material practice.

Reading your manifesto on the “near monochrome,”<sup>5</sup> I was struck by how you stack up adjectives to describe your paintings and their surfaces. They appear in groups and accumulate in a very particular way across your text. For the sake of argument I'm going to list only the positively descriptive terms (and leave out the instances where you distinguish your paintings by saying what they are not.) Here we go, in order of appearance: large, thickly painted, near-monochrome; formal, frontal, condensed; layered, built from the inside out; blotchy, encrusted, both matte and gloss, simultaneously elegant, raw, crude—definitely handmade; burned, weathered, patinated; hidden, revealed, buried, muffled, pushing up from underneath.

**HH:** Hmm. Your observation is interesting. I use adjectives to physically describe the paintings, to say what they are and what they aren't, to acknowledge the ways in which they participate in the narrative of the modernist painting field at the same time listing specific qualities that interrupt, resist, or refuse that territory, to say how they materially and conceptually occupy space, to stake out a claim on my terms.

The manifesto was initially written as an attempt to describe what was going on in my paintings—especially the dark blue almost black paintings from around 2004–09, where despite the thick paint, color, and surface are elusive, or to use my word “fugitive” (in all its outlaw meanings). While the paintings don't “look queer”—whatever that means—we could say they perform queerly. From a distance they appear to be monochrome but

4 Aruna D'Souza, “Ulrike Müller's Feminist Forms,” in *Franza, Fever 103, and Quilts*, ed. Achim Hochdörfer and Barbara Schröder (New York: Dancing Fox Press, 2012), 41.

5 Harmony Hammond, “A Manifesto (Personal) of Monochrome (Sort Of),” in *Harmony Hammond: Becoming/UnBecoming Monochrome* (Denver: RedLine, 2014), 3–4.



up close one sees that other colors show through. Accumulation and layering are extremely important—what is buried, hidden, or muffled, pushing up and asserting itself from inside or underneath. The painting surface under stress. The paintings are “near-monochrome,” almost but not quite monochrome, becoming or unbecoming monochrome.

I first used these words “becoming” and “unbecoming” in my manifesto to describe the unfixed state of my paintings as material objects. Art historian Tirza True Latimer then situated my words in relation to Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of becoming and unbecoming, where, to quote Latimer, “becoming something different always requires unbecoming that which came before. They use the term ‘becoming’ to describe an evolutionary dynamic where unbecoming is an integral part of becoming.”<sup>6</sup> As she points out, “Unbecoming resists continuity, unity, coherence. [...] Becoming reassembles, resignifies. Because of this give and take, becoming can never be absolutely definitive; it engages perpetually in its own reconception.”<sup>7</sup> While I wasn’t aware of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts when I began these paintings, they feel totally on the mark. The art came first—the theory after.

Fig. 159  
Ulrike Müller, *Weather*, 2013

Fig. 160  
Ulrike Müller, *Weather*,  
installation view, 2014



**UM:** I can see that layering is crucial to what you do. My work is slow also, but the process tends to disappear along the way. The enamel paintings are based on to-scale drawings that are premised on a searching movement and repetition. Sometimes I will get an image right quickly, but often I redo a drawing several times until it reaches the place where I want it to be. Working from these drawings as templates, I think of enamel, weaving, and printing as fixing techniques. They move the work away from my hand, without however removing the notion of hand or of touch. And they freeze the form—the drawing would smudge if you touched it, the enamel painting, rug, or lithograph won’t—which together with the distancing of the reproductive technique seems to more firmly establish the kind of interior instability/uncertainty and movement that I am looking for in my images.

**HH:** My work is the opposite. Despite the materiality of thick textured paint, many of my paintings have this unfixed fugitive quality due to the dark colors I use, how paint is applied, and the way light hits the surface of the brushstrokes. It’s not that the surface dematerializes, but it looks almost metallic—you can’t quite locate what is happening. Indexicality is important. Lumps, bumps, patches, scars, seams, and connecting strategies are intentionally left visible.

**UM:** Would it be fair to say that the organizing principle for you is accumulation, and for me it is editing? Maybe this is why I have had to start this conversation by saying no so vehemently! But, seriously, I have been thinking about negation, as a way of not simply rejecting an idea or concept but rather saying “not like this.” In his short essay on negation,<sup>8</sup> Freud says that our sense of judgment has to make two principal determinations: one is whether to grant reality to an idea or imagined thing, the other is to acknowledge or disallow a quality in a thing. We decide what to ingest or what to spit out, and by doing so delimit where inner and outer realities touch. This then could mean that for a woman-identified artist to say that her work is not about gender would be deeply critical of the qualities commonly identified with femininity, which I would argue is a feminist stance.

6 Tirza True Latimer, “Harmony Hammond: Becoming/UnBecoming Monochrome,” in *Harmony Hammond*, 26. As referred to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

7 Latimer, “Harmony Hammond,” 26.

8 Sigmund Freud, “Die Verneinung” (1925), in *Psychologie des Unbewußten 2*, Studienausgabe, ed. Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards, and James Strachey (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000), 371–77.

**HH:** This sounds somewhat similar to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming and unbecoming.

**UM:** I think I know what you mean. I also wanted to ask how you think about bodies in relation to your work? One thing that I've noticed is the verticality of the support and the horizontality of the straps. Is your painting body always a bound body? A held body? What holds bodies in their place socially, emotionally, economically?

**HH:** I prefer the orientation of vertical rectangles because they indirectly reference the body. But people focus too much on the straps. While they certainly circulate around the paintings, I get annoyed by readings that reduce the work to binding/bondage/bandage associations. The meaning is much more complex and nuanced than that.

The restrictions aren't there as much as we perceive them to be. The grommets simply provide the illusion of constriction or tying down. They really aren't all that tight. Despite being affixed to the surface, they are fairly loose—somewhat temporal or provisional. They provide possibilities of connection. If you look carefully, it is not the straps but the paint and the act of painting that hold the painting object and, therefore, the "painting body" together.

Currently, I am more interested in the grommets holes in and of themselves rather than the straps. They literally open up the painting space, alluding to what is underneath the surface, at the same time they reference body orifices. No longer found only on the straps, the reinforced holes seem to take on a new and different visual and conceptual function that I am still trying to figure out. Frankly, I am not sure if these new paintings perform queerly—it's just not what I think about while working.

**UM:** Ha! Now you're resisting the iconographic pin-down! I can't say I don't like that.

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# Becoming Plural

## An Interview

### Collage

#### of Roe Rosen's

#### Conversations

#### with Hila Peleg,

#### Erika Balsom,

#### Dietmar Schwärzler,

#### and the Audience

Dietmar Schwärzler

**Dietmar Schwärzler: When I first saw *Two Women and a Man* (2005) at the Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen in 2012, I didn't realize immediately that Justine Frank was an invented figure. After I had done my research on this character, I have to admit, that I also didn't care that she is just a fake figure. It was even more inspiring to think about her as an invented and constructed character. You made a huge oeuvre as Justine Frank. Besides the film itself, there are lots of paintings, then there's a pornographic novel called *Sweet Sweat*, which is published side by side with her biography, as well as an analysis of Justine Frank's artwork, which you did under another pseudonym. What were your main parameters in the construction of this figure?**

**Roe Rosen: There were two or three issues that were key for me. One was my feeling that the division between documentary and fiction or fantasy is not as stable as it might seem. In many ways fantasies are perceived as real, fantasies tell us a lot about reality and vice versa. Documentaries are always a kind of fiction, a fiction with hidden, sometimes dubious manipulations. On one level, I wanted to pursue a documentary practice, but one that would feel very uncomfortable not only to the viewers, but also to myself doing it. Not only rendering a person that has a morally problematic character, but also rendering the documentary practice itself as morally suspect. More important than that was to create a situation where even if someone knows that Justine Frank is fake, the claim she makes to be real will still seem viable on some level. And this is achieved not only by an extensive body of work, but also because she fills up historical gaps that need to be filled up, particularly in two foundational scenes: European avant-garde and Zionism—two scenes that are very crucial for me. In a way it was like inventing a grandmother figure that was missing. The third issue was really trying to pursue the kind of ad-absurdum-potentials of becoming someone else. That means not only to extend yourself to one fictive character, like Justine Frank, but to become plural. Apart from Frank herself there is also the art critic and translator of the novel, Joanna Führer-Ha'sfari, Frank's life partner Fanja Hissin, and the art historian Anne Kastorp. There is also the possibility of attacking yourself, having these voices in disagreement. When I began working on the projects, I thought I would be able to "divide and rule"; in other words, that I could do Frank's work parallel to my own, but this soon proved to be impossible. For quite a while I had to dedicate myself fully to Justine Frank.**

**DS: In the film, your work and the work of Justine Frank are interwoven. We see, for example, your exhibition "Live and Die as Eva Braun" (1995–97), which was a real exhibition. What is the difference between Justine Frank's and your work?**

**RR: My work has much to do not only with self-negation (for example, by becoming someone else), but also with self-betrayal. When I do a project,**

I aim to do it whole-heartedly and as something cohesive and coherent. To fully stand behind it and then—deny it and do something completely different. The common denominator that is really obvious I think is that I always try to performatively engage a position that is morally uncomfortable. This means that most of my projects entail what I call an inner bifurcation.

The potential pursued by these bifurcations is of taking what is really the romantic legacy of identification with the other, wherein good intentions that cannot be dismissed entail the thorny problem of projection, which tend to be aggressive and universalizing toward other people. The attempt, then, is to return to the experience of identification, but in a way that is unresolved—that is not cathartic but rather stages the problem. With “Live and Die as Eva Braun” the situation was rather different in the sense that I knew that it would stir up a scandal. I was aiming for a radically different take on the historical chapter of World War II and the Holocaust, an approach that stood in opposition to the kind of discourse prevalent in Israel at that time, which was a discourse premised on exploiting the voice of the victim. Begging to assume a position that reflected upon the evil within you, a self-implicating position niched in the present rather than in the past, was really scandalous for some people, like certain politicians for whom the Holocaust is really a *métier*.

DS: I'd be curious to hear from you about some of the details within the construction or characterization of Justine Frank. In her biography you mention that we know only a few things about her education and her time in Paris. We are told, for instance, that she tried to gain access to the inner circle of the Surrealists, that she had an affair with George Bataille, that she met her partner Fanja Hissin at a screening of Buñuel's *L'Age d'Or* (1930) in Paris. In Tel Aviv she is living in Herzl Street, although she is an anti-Zionist. We learn that she is allergic to cotton, suffers from an eating disorder, likes to strip in public, etc. Can you tell us a little bit about these ascriptions?

RR: It's hard to answer this question in a sound byte, because she was such a complex persona. What I wanted to do was to create a person who is both compelling, but also defies our notion of a coherent character. There are more holes than matter; what we know about her is far less than what we don't know. The little we do know, as Joanna Führer-Ha'sfari says, is open to at least two or three different interpretations. So the appearance, for instance, of her animated, pornographic Hebrew alphabet can be perceived as an aggressive manifestation of anti-Zionism or it can be seen as a form of black mysticism; there is speculation that she was related to Jakob Frank, whom Gershom Scholem defined as the most frightening figure in the history of Jewish mysticism. Frank believed



Fig. 161  
Justine Frank, *The Sisters Frankomas*, 1931

in redemption through sin. For him, to sin intentionally—for instance, by committing incest, participating in orgies, holding feasts on Yom Kippur (the day of atonement, when you're not supposed to eat), and living under fake personas—was to precipitate the coming of the Messiah. In that sense, Justine Frank might be a follower of Jakob Frank. So you can perceive her as a sort of proto-feminist radical, completely secular and profane, or as some perverted version of Jewish mysticism. Or, yet another view, she might have been a very astute scholar of the constructs of the Jew throughout the history of European anti-Semitism, since these constructs play a big part in the way she visualizes what Judaism might be.

**Audience:** Is the person completely fictionalized or did you have some concrete models?

RR: There are certain models, like the Surrealist photographer Claude Cahun, both in terms of how Justine asserts her Jewish identity as well as her lesbian identity, and in her life story. Like Cahun, she was marginalized by the Surrealists, and later tried to fight against the Nazis in a strange, naive way. There were a few marginal characters like that and I think that might be part of the reason why Justine Frank is or may be a convincing person. History recognizes certain types that can accommodate economic and historical scenarios. We know that there are also the margins, that there are people who disagree with those histories. You can see people like that, for instance, in André Breton's "Anthology of Black Humour"; some people are very much known to us, like the Marquis de Sade, but then you have also lot of outcasts, on the margins of society.

**Audience:** It makes total sense that you had to create a woman, but still I wonder: How does it feel to be a feminist artist, also in terms of changing your gender?

RR: I do it pathologically. At one point I thought of myself as my own harem—like a whole community of women. Another aspect is the emancipation through art in a really romantic way. After all, we are supposedly doomed to follow our genitalia. We were given a certain package when we were born, and it's hard to challenge. And art can provide this option to become another gender. It's a serious case of vagina envy, I guess. But with Justine I really wanted to articulate this desire to become a woman as a problem as well. Here we have this fabrication of a self-empowering woman who also gives voice to her sexual fantasies. But at the end of the day, it's yet again a male fantasy. I thought that this premise puts me in a really uncomfortable position.



Fig. 162  
Justine Frank, *Frank's Guild*, 1936

Erika Balsom:

That trajectory of migration to Israel features in a number of your works in different ways. In the Justine Frank project (1998–2005), we encounter a fictive artist born in Antwerp who spends time in Paris before eventually settling in Palestine in 1934. In *The Confessions of Roeë Rosen* (2007–08), illegal foreign workers residing in Israel voice your confessions in Hebrew by reading transliterations off of a teleprompter. Generally speaking, these works do not conceive of the move to Israel as a migration to the "Promised Land." Rather, these are situations in which promises remain unfulfilled. These migrants have a rather fraught relationship to Israeli culture.

Yes, I was born in Israel but as a child I felt disengaged and suspicious of the particular narrative of Zionism. I felt this intuitively; it was not an intellectual analysis. My sense of identification was more geared towards an imaginary notion of the diasporic Jew. My father did come to Israel from Poland and my mother's grandparents from Russia, but I say that it is imaginary because, of course, I was never in those parts. I think this divide between, let's say, a virile, positive image of an indigenous Israeli and the historic wandering Jew, historically construed as effeminate, left me more identified with the latter. Again, I'm not sure whether to place this in the realm of a child's perception or later intellectual analysis, but perhaps the crucial intuition for me was that one does not forge one's own identity patently or inherently.

Do you think that the idea of an externally constituted identity is part of why ventriloquism plays such a consistent role throughout your work? You often speak through fictive identities. In *Out*, a young woman is possessed by Avigdor Lieberman, who speaks through her. It seems like in many of your works people never really speak their own words. Or their voices are never truly their own but rather are linked in some way to external forces.

I was imprecise in suggesting that identity is constituted externally. Rather, the experience I wish



to convey is that the binary divide between an inherent, genuine identity and an external, fabricated one is misleading—and that's why ventriloquism as a figure of a doubled or plural voice is important. In art, figures of authority often assume a coherent, cohesive, integral voice by adopting something like a trademark style (in painting), or a distinct, first-person position (in literature). We recognize these fictions of the self as authoritative voices. And then you can have the opposite view, which is that identity is nothing but a contextually inflected construct. What I try to enact are forms of inner bifurcation, inner conflicts, or a self-incommensurate performances of the voice: identity as something that is dynamic, fluctuating, conflictual, and multilayered.

Hila Peleg:

HP: In *Out* the Israeli foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman is featured as a demon who possesses the body of a young Israeli woman of Ukraine origins. Could you introduce the film's protagonists as they double and collide through the three central scenes?

RR: The central scene presents a BDSM (Bondage Domination Sadomasochism) session that is performed rather than enacted (being that the pain is real and that in their actual lives both participants pursue the meeting points between pleasure, pain, and domination scenarios). But instead of the blows resulting only in gasps and cries of pain, the *Sub*, Ela, spews out sentences in response to them, and these sentences are someone else's – Avigdor Lieberman's. Thus, in a way, the session does not only become an exorcism, but it also suggests a speech-machine (that is, voice and words that do not abide by our customary perception and categorization, which for me is one of a series of speech machines in other works I have done). The blows release verbal expressions from within the body as if the words and the voice were secretions, fluids, uncontrolled or foreign iterations.

This scene is preceded by an interview with the two participants. It begins as a seemingly straightforward documentary wherein the two women talk of their own experiences with BDSM, but soon dissolves into an exposition of the premise by which one is an exorcist, while the other is possessed. But Lieberman is inserted into the text – through a supposedly encyclopedic description of him – even before this premise is asserted, so that he is immediately rendered as belonging to the private sphere of both women. In fact, being that the *Dom*, Yoana, is a political and queer activist while the *Sub* grew up in a right-wing home, this indivisibility of the private from the public, the erotic from the political, is persistently substantiated by particular details. For example, the fact that Lieberman was born on Moldova brings forth the possibility that he possessed Ela over there, because she did visit Moldova as an infant. The scene also sets the exorcism's strategy: the need to be armed not only with hostility to the demon, but also with empathy and a sense of identification.

The last scene is a musical epilogue, in which a singer, Igor, performs the Russian Sergey Yesenin's *A Letter to Mother*, accompanied by the accordion. While the scene might seem completely detached from the exorcism, I feel it is the result of the emotional crescendo that precedes it (in fact, the final convulsions of Ela lead directly to the wave-like body gestures of the accordionist, Boris). In many ways the scene is a hybrid as well: Yesenin is an almost mythic incarnation of both Russian modernism and of the trope of the Russian "soul." But his figure also reverberated strongly in early Zionism through Hebrew poets who came from Russia and modeled their Hebrew poetry

Fig. 163

Roeë Rosen and Erika Balsom, "Dead and Alive, A Conversation," 2014

Fig. 164

Roeë Rosen and Erika Balsom, "Dead and Alive, A Conversation," 2014

after Yesenin's. Yet more than that, the scene is a somewhat twisted homage to a scene I really love, the ending song of Dusan Makavejev's WR: *The Mysteries of the Organism* (1971).

These three scenes are realized in very different styles: the first part as a talking heads documentary; the second with ample echoes of 70's horror flicks, and the last as a 7-minute long single shot that translates the epic dimensions of Makavejev's outdoors scene into the space of the apartment, where, in fact, my entire film was shot in one day.

HP: Do you see relevance between issues of "domination and submission", as discussed in *Out*, and theories of spectatorship - as we know to be strategic cross points in the discussion on art and politics?

RR: There is an evident spectacular dimension to BDSM in that it willfully addresses and stages the power relations that are always there, and at its best can do so through a dialogue that is both sensitive and transgressive. Yoana, the *Dom* in *Out* articulates this relation succinctly in the first part of the film. This spectacular dimension of an opposition was very much on my mind as a continuation of *The Confessions*. That film dealt with the dichotomy of confessions as the person who confesses internalized the role of the inquisitor (the priest, the policeman, the parent, etc). So a BDSM session seemed by its very nature to complete that scene, with one in which the struggle of powers is divided, (like in confessions under torture), which, of course, is patently political. I don't know if I succeed, but I certainly hope that there's a process of self-implication in what I do that extends to the viewer, that is, that viewing a certain staging of power relations as a spectacle circumscribes the viewer as a participant, assigns him or her an active role. To put it concretely: if the declared political persona discussed is Lieberman, I hope it is experienced as if you and I are no less present as political subjects. Yoana says as much when she speaks of a sense of identification as necessary so as to lure the demon out, and that the demon, in fact moves from one surrogate to another, and "belongs" to them all, he is ours, in other words. This process of self-implication is always on my mind when meddling with the pleasures that art offers (beauty, desires, fantasies, aesthetics) as bound with politics (power, discontent, reality, ethics).

Erika Balsom: How did you come across the work of the Buried Alive Group?

Roe Rosen: According to the story I was introduced to Maxim Komar-Myshkin when I was working on *Out* (Tse, 2010), a video that dealt with Avigdor Lieberman, the leader of the ultra right-wing party "Israel Our Home," who at the time was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I needed help translating sources from the Russian because I believed that he might address his ex-Soviet electorate a little differently than when speaking to native Hebrew

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speakers. Students and young artists who knew Maxim Komar-Myshkin recommended him for this translation job and then, we became close. After he committed suicide in 2011 and *Vladimir's Night*, his magnum opus, was discovered in his estate, I was asked by members of the former collective to edit the book, more because of my professional clout than my knowledge of Russian culture.

Can you say a little bit about *Vladimir's Night*, given that this is the most important work Komar-Myshkin left behind?

*Vladimir's Night* is an album that harks back in terms of style to works produced by Ilya Kabakov and Viktor Pivovarov in the 1960s in Moscow. Both were unofficial artists who made their living doing—among other things—illustrations for children's books. They imported this draftsmanship into a new conceptual medium they called "albums," construed not as books, but rather as a sort of a performance, with the different plates of each album displayed in space. *Vladimir's Night* harks back to that, but also political pamphlets, Gory Martyrdom tales and *Lubok*, which is the historical folk form of Russian illustrated books. The story of the album has Vladimir as a hybrid of a little child and a leader. He is vacationing in his summer mansion, being served by his lover who is dressed as a dog. After dinner when he is about to fall asleep, he imagines seeing faces in the wood veneer of the wardrobe in the front of the bed. The faces actually begin to move, a mouth opens up and animated objects begin to flow out

of it: some of them very mundane, like sweaters, socks, an iron, but also machine guns, a variety of pills, etc. They all cuddle in bed with him. We're still very much in the atmosphere of a children's book, but then it gets gradually more and more violent. Ultimately the objects torture, rape, and murder Vladimir Putin. Being that Komar-Myshkin suffered from paranoia and believed that Putin would attempt to assassinate him, the work reflects a conspiratorial perception: both the verses and the illustrations are replete with hints to financial transactions, political events, the history of Russian art and other things as well. Of course, this calls for an annotation. This will be done in the book, not by myself because I don't know enough about Russian culture, but rather by another fictive person, Rosa Chabanova, who is a young comparative literature scholar who lives in Tel Aviv.

It strikes me that there are significant continuities but also significant differences between this project and your earlier work on Justine Frank. In both cases we are dealing with invented artists who migrate from Europe to Israel. But in the case of Justine Frank, you were responsible for the creation of the entire project, whereas here it's the case that you are working collaboratively with the Russian community in Israel.

Well, it depends whether you want to address the collective as fictive or not. I can answer this question in a few different ways. I think on a certain level art is always collaborative. We never invent everything ourselves; that is part of the pleasure of projecting the present onto the past and making the past come to life. It is a matter of planting yourself within something that already exists, so that you are nourished by it. You're being forged by the past, but you also speculatively change it. With "Justine Frank," I tried to do it in a way that really would make the imaginary have a real claim to be understood as real because she offsets blind spots within the patriarchal scenes in which she operated: the European avant-garde, specifically Surrealism, and the pre-Israel Palestinian-Jewish communities of the 1930s and 1940s. In both scenes she assumes a very disagreeable polemic stance, but one that I feel is a very compelling position.

Fig. 165  
Hila Peleg, "Hila Peleg in Conversation with Roe Rosen," 2011

Fig. 166  
Roe Rosen and Erika Balsom, "Dead and Alive, A Conversation," 2014

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**Vladimir's belly is filled with complicated matter.**

**You cannot find a pin within that serpentine intestine pile.**

**Do not despair, dear Diners Club, American Express and MasterCard, soon Vladimir will be disemboweled.**

The mandorla composition alludes to the icon *Christ in Majesty* (1408) by Russia's most venerated medieval artist, Andrei Rublev. The image is thus offensive in more ways than one: it debases the celebrated painting, even as it blatantly emphasizes the vaginal semblance of the mandorla (traditionally reserved for depictions of the Savior or the Holy Mother), only to have the gaping cleft offer intestines rather than an image of heavenly import or pure femininity. It was Komar-Myshkin, it turns out, who urged Yulia to shower infrequently and avoid soap, and she since maintained her sex and ass in that candid, stirring state. I can thus profoundly and deeply understand the lofty experience behind the image of Vladimir's visceral vagina. Yulia sometimes demanded that I service her fully dressed, and when I did take off my clothes, she wanted me to shower, so as to offset her pungent offering. It had become our erotic rite, to have me busy with her cunt and rectum, although she did not care to penetrate me, let alone kiss me, as she did Komar-Myshkin.



Andrei Rublev, *Christ in Majesty*, 1408.

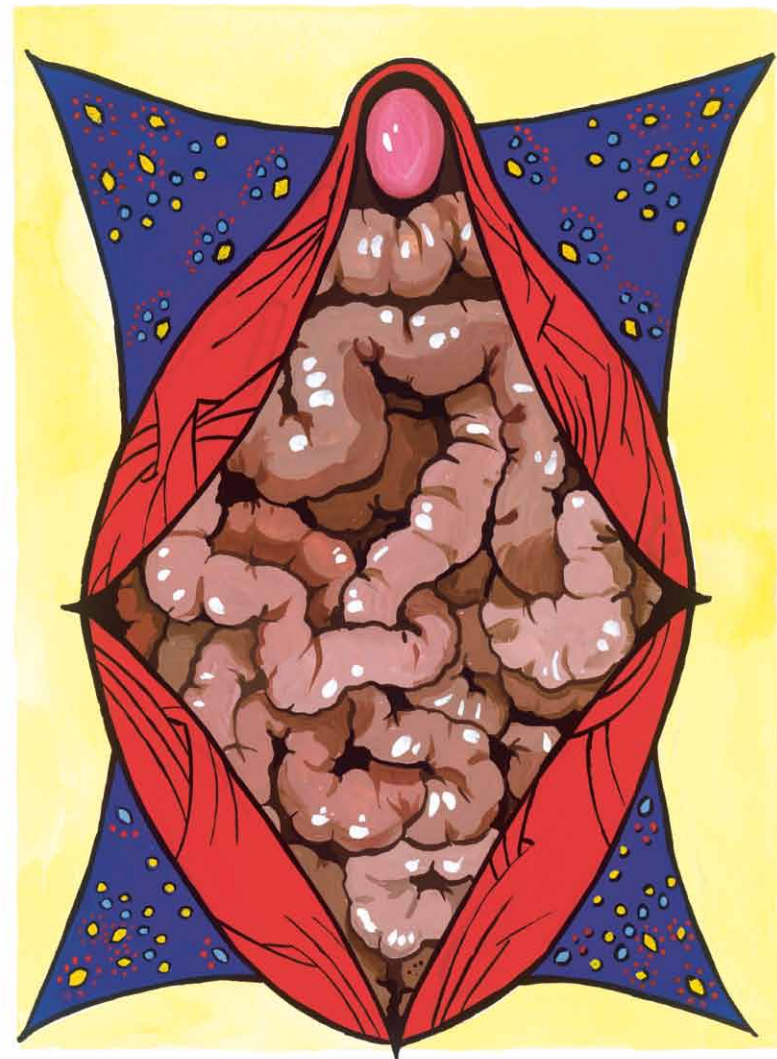
Figs. 167–168

Roe Rosen, *Vladimir's Night*: Maxim Komar-Myshkin, 2014.

## 21

**СКОЛЬКО ЗАГАДОЧНЫХ ВЕЩЕЙ У НЕГО В ЖИВОТЕ!**

**ЭТО КАК ИСКАТЬ ИГОЛКУ В КУЧЕ КИШАЩИХ КИШОК.**



**ДОВОЛЬНО ДУМАТЬ О ДУРНОМ, ДОРОГИЕ ДАЙНЕРС,  
АМЕРИКАН ЭКСПРЕСС И МАСТЕР КАРД,  
НЕ ПЕЧАЛЬТЕСЬ, СКОРО ВЛАДИМИР БУДЕТ РАСПОТРОШЕН.**



Justine Frank began as a cinematic idea for a series of fictive documentaries entitled *Obscene Personae* that were meant to be collaborations. I

wanted other people to invent morally dubious characters, but also for the artists to understand their own practice as filmmakers as immoral. In other words, these collaborators would be pursuing a documentary practice knowing full well that the documentary claims for impartiality, evidence, and judgment are always manipulative and entail a willful construction. They would realize that documentary practices always hide the fiction that fiction would not hide. At any rate, I gave up this idea for a series of films based on collaboration because I felt unable to organize, produce, raise funds, and began constructing Justine Frank through zero budget and solitary means: words and images. I think that one of my flaws as an artist is being very incompetent with fundraising, which led me early on to employ D.I.Y. forms. Writing and painting were things that I could always do by myself. The film *Two Women and A Man* (2005), which is a late appendix to the project, was the first occasion where I felt I could do a film quickly and without a budget. I was helped with editing by the video artist Boaz Arad, and watching him work I realized that video can be viable even for someone like me. And then, very happily, I could engage in something that was more collaborative in terms of creation. Cinema is by definition a collaborative affair. I began my engagement with Maxim Komar-Myshkin in 2010 and until last year I was working on the album, the poetry, and the annotations. So again, I was alone in the studio. But of course there was a crucial collaborative dimension on the level of language and research. I was aided by other people, in fact, some of the very people the *Buried Alive* attempts to render, especially Max Lomborg. So, there is a dichotomy here between a solitary dimension and a profoundly collaborative one. It was only last year that the videos were produced.

Fig. 169  
Roee Rosen and Erika Balsom, "Dead and Alive, A Conversation," 2014

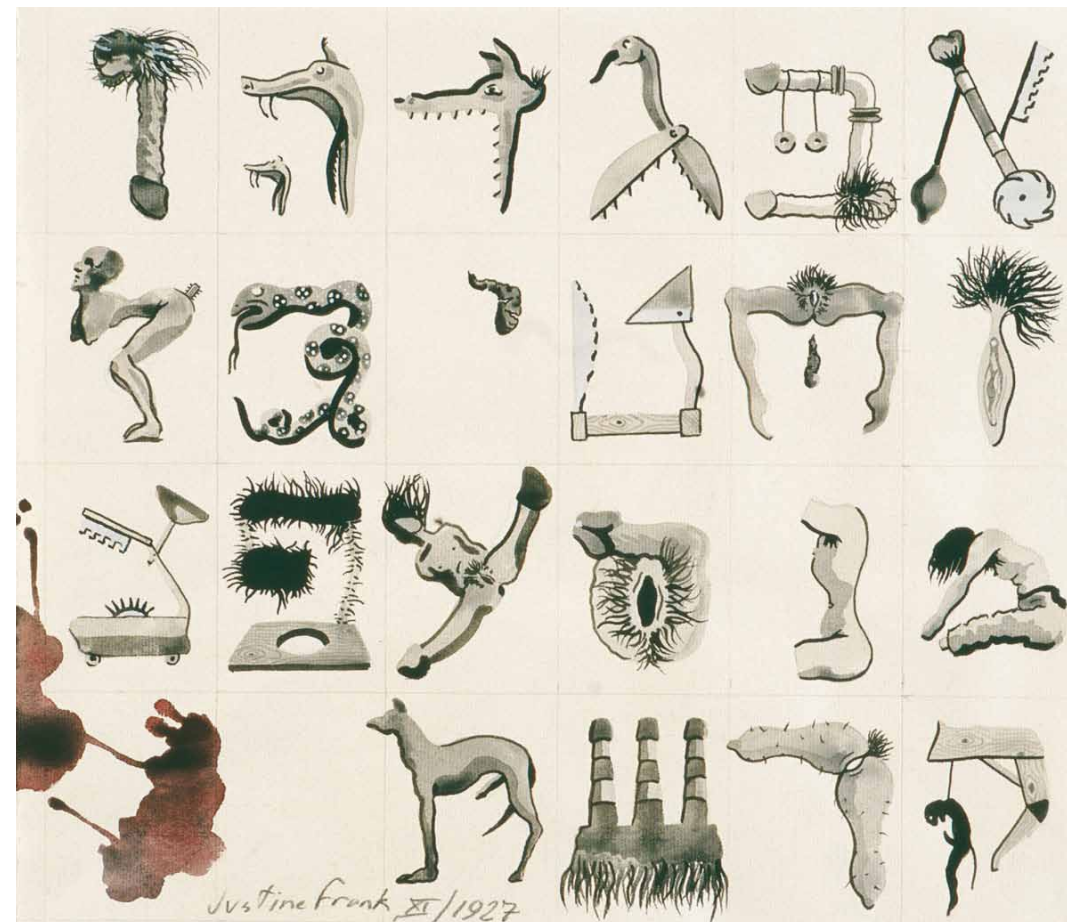


Fig. 170  
Justine Frank, *The Stained Portfolio No. 56 (The Hebrew Alphabet)*, 1927

## Literature

Public conversation between Roe Rosen and Dietmar Schwärzler as part of the screening program *Truth or Dare: In Person Roe Rosen*, Vienna, Museum of Modern Art (mumok), January 8, 2014.

Peleg, Hila. "Hila Peleg in Conversation with Roe Rosen," January 2011, In *Constelaciones de Lenguaje/Language Constellations*, edited by Eduardo Thomas, 134–47. Mexico City: Injerto, 2011.

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# On the Natural, the Obscure, and Anal Tests

Raed Rafei

There, you should be careful not to drop a coin. No one can guarantee what can happen to you.

You don't get it? Here's another image to dwell on.

A man was traveling toward this city on foot (it's an age-old story not rooted in a precise time period). Every now and then, he would see a sign indicating how far he was from the city. As he got closer, the sign was placed lower and lower. At the entrance of that city the sign was literally laid on the ground. As he bent over to look at it, he was taken off-guard by someone humping him.

There is Tripoli, a bustling city on the northern coast of Lebanon, known for its ancient mosques, lively souks, and a fortress built by crusaders. Despite the conservative nature of the place, these popular jokes mischievously hinting at the penchant that men here have for sodomy have managed to somehow permeate the thick societal wall of indisputable moral values.

It could be that these images are remnants of times when male-to-male sexual practices were common outside any frame of sexual identity or categorical sexuality. Since male bonding at emotional, physical, and intellectual levels was traditionally celebrated in social contexts of unflagging separation of the sexes, it is not far-fetched to imagine that male camaraderie slipped now and then into the realm of the sensual and even the sexual without posing threats to concepts of manhood.

Without adopting a romanticizing or "Orientalist" vision of a precolonial Levant, I can simply relate stories I repeatedly heard, as a native of Tripoli, of adult men who were entertained by boys as protégés and apprentices into the ways of life, much like what we imagine happened during Greek times. Another thought put forward by an anthropologist is that Tripoli, like any other big city surrounded by villages, was regarded as a center for looser values and more debauched practices. City men are everywhere usually regarded as "softer" than their "rough" counterparts who lead the tough life of the countryside.

Whatever the roots of these popular jokes alluding to sodomy in Tripoli are, they stand as visible vestiges of times when sexual practices among men were seen under a different light. They open the door for research into the understanding of homosexuality in non-Western countries outside the framework of modern-time values of universal human rights tied to concepts of liberalism and individualism.

Arabic literature is rife with homoerotic sentiment as well as subtle and not-so-subtle allusions to sensual and sexual interactions between men.

Here comes to mind an excerpt from a poem by Abu Nuwas, one of the Arab history's most extravagant poets born in the mid-eighth century:

And we slept, but as the cock was about to crow  
I made for him, my garments trailing, my ram ready for butting.  
When I plunged my spear into him  
He awoke as a wounded man awakes from his wounds.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, homosexuality was decriminalized in the Ottoman Empire in 1858, as part of wider legal reforms. Tripoli was then under Ottoman rule. It wasn't until the French Mandate in the early nineteenth century and later on with the country's independence and the adoption of criminal laws, inspired by French codes, that homosexuality became explicitly criminalized.

Today, the Lebanese government does not chase homosexuals actively. But men are arrested, every now and then, and accused of practicing homosexual acts. Venues that cater openly for the gay community exist in Beirut and are left relatively undisturbed. Homophobia remains rather rampant, even if pockets of acceptance exist within the multilayered Lebanese social context.

The text of the antihomosexuality law itself is vague. Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code states that "sexual intercourse contrary to nature" is punishable for up to one year in prison. Thus, it draws the barrier between sanctioned sex and illicit sex as one determined by the laws of nature.

But what is nature? The natural? Natural people? Natural behavior? Natural relations? Natural love?

I carried these questions to where nature is celebrated the most in the concrete jungle that is Tripoli today: the city's central public garden. This enticing garden, adorned with vigorous orange trees and blossoming flowers, carries an elegant water fountain at its center and is overlooked by a gracious clock tower. On any typical day, it is bustling with people from all walks of life: those quickly passing through and those procrastinating on its many green benches.

Inspired by the inquisitiveness of Pier Paolo Pasolini in his documentary *Love Meetings (Comizi d'Amore, 1964)*, I went to ask people questions around the idea of nature. What follows is a random amalgam of what was said. One should note that in Arabic the word "natural" could be understood to mean "normal" and the word "unnatural" to mean "abnormal."

"Nature is the most beautiful thing in the universe."

"Nature gives us joy and bliss without harming us."

"The abnormal person is the egoist who doesn't share his loaf of bread with his Muslim brother, the one who only thinks of what is good for him."

"God forbid. It's corruption of society."

"An abnormal, a pervert is the one who lies outside the laws of nature. The laws of nature draw limits. Outside these limits is the unnatural."

"You can know a pervert from the way he behaves. He acts like a *tante*."

"Nature embraces all kinds of behavior."

"I don't accept them 100 percent. But this is how society is. You can't simply deny their existence."

Most answers elicited expressions of unease when interviewees realized we were hinting at homosexuality. For many here, homosexuals are almost like "chimeric creatures" they have never met in their real lives. Even though media has been talking more and more about homosexuality, most gays in Lebanon are completely or partially closeted.

I thought that simply asking these questions within the legal framework of the "natural" could be fruit for thought in a place where society is not yet asked to react to homosexuality in the public sphere.

The bustling park at day becomes quiet and deserted at night.

As a teenager, I heard rumors about the public garden becoming a place for illicit sexual activities after dark. I was never able to confirm this hearsay. In the past few years, rundown cinemas and hammams became sites for sexual encounters among men, both real and imagined.

In Tripoli, most hammams have become dysfunctional. Once central venues of public life, they have gradually lost their function as places of relaxation, communal bonding, and festive celebrations. In the city's old town, there are still some bathhouses that are hundreds of years old, although they are in ruins with moss and wild vegetation covering their stones.

<sup>1</sup> Abu Nuwas, "Tu'atibu-ni 'ala Surbi Stibahi," *queercult\**, trans. Philip F. Kennedy,

<http://queercult.com/2010/10/01/abu-nuwas/>.

At one of those hammams, I watch rays of light filtering through a battered ceiling. A patchwork of dark and light zones accentuates the aura of mystery. The rundown, abandoned aspect carries all the symbolism of a world of sensuality and wellbeing that has slid into the realm of the illicit, the punishable, the brutal ...

A police raid on a renovated hammam in Beirut in summer 2014 resulted in the arrest of dozens of people: customers and Syrian refugee workers. They were interrogated, tortured, jailed for several weeks, and accused of “public indecency” and *liwaat* (an Arabic term that refers pejoratively to homosexual acts and is derived from Lot, the biblical figure linked to Sodom and Gomorrah).

I have interviewed several of them after their release. What transpires (presented below as an amalgam of unordered thoughts) is the thin line between pleasure and pain, the desire of the flesh and fear of punishment, the rush of pleasure before an ejaculation, and the rush of a racing heart of someone afraid of being caught; maybe the two feelings are just two sides of the same coin.

“You enter the hamamm with a back pain or a neck pain and leave it feeling like a horse.”

“They welcomed me with a slap and a kick in the stomach ... and told other prisoners that we are ‘rabbits.’ They shaved our heads and eyebrows to mark us as ... rabbits.”

“There are echoes ... but mainly smells, steam, and moisture. It was dirty ... This definitely increases the erotic charge.”

“Look at how he protrudes his lips ... This one loves to suck.”

“I feel eroticism and fear at the same time ... Even during the act itself, there is a hint of fear ... Maybe this is what makes you become addicted.”

At the Morals Protection Bureau of a police station in Beirut, testosterone can be literally felt in the air. Men in gray uniforms use racy language, scratch their balls, and throw fierce, dirty looks. This is where one is brought if he is suspected of being a *looti* (a homosexual). At best, one is mocked for being a sissy who lacks virility. One can also be slapped and beaten up. The purpose is chiefly to humiliate. And if they don’t manage to extract a “confession,” then comes the threat of the anal test, a pseudo-scientific medical examination that could elucidate if someone is passive.

This medical test derives from the works of a nineteenth-century French forensic doctor Auguste Ambroise Tardieu. He theorized that passives showed six “characteristic signs”: “The excessive development of the buttocks; the funnel-shaped deformation of the anus; the relaxation of the sphincter; the effacement of the folds, the crests, and the wattles at the circumference of the anus; the extreme dilation of the anal orifice; and ulcerations, hemorrhoids, fistules.”<sup>2</sup> Among these, the “infundibuliform” or funneled anus was “the unique sign and the only unequivocal mark of [passive] pederasty;”<sup>3</sup> Tardieu argued.

Modern science totally discredits the validity of these examinations considered as medical torture. They are, however, practiced by authorities in Egypt. In Lebanon, an outcry by civil society in recent years led to the banning of anal tests, pinned as “tests of shame.” Nevertheless, reports still emerge every now and then claiming that the tests are still being performed.

I have never been subjected to the test. The very thought of it is frightening. It inspired the dialogue presented below.

“Did it hurt?”

“It wasn’t particularly painful, no ...” (*Silence*) “I felt a deluge of emotions: panic, anger, a lot of anger, and then my brain surrendered to a stream of neutral thoughts, sweet detached memories. I remembered my first visit to the school doctor. It was my first memory of pulling my pants down in front of a stranger.”

“Were they rude to you?”

“They were dry and bored as if they were repeating a familiar refrain. One was particularly sarcastic. He asked me if I took pleasure in having it ‘played with.’”

“I am sorry. I so wish I could have protected you from all this.”

“In a twisted, strange way, I am glad it happened.”

“I can understand the darkness you must be feeling.”

<sup>2</sup> August Ambroise Tardieu, *Étude Médico-Légale sur les Attentats aux Mœurs*, 3rd ed. (Paris: J. B. Bailliere, 1859), 142–43, 142.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

"It's not really that. Ever since I've become aware of my inclinations, I was fatalistically drawn toward that moment. I constantly thought about it, about being caught and punished. It has even become part of my fantasies."  
(*Laughter*)

"I am glad you can laugh about it ... How many were they?"

"At first, they were two. The cigarette-smelling officer. He was middle-aged with a bulging belly and a mustache. He was sitting behind his desk, he never stood up. I imagined the soles of his feet glued to the floor. He only used his hands. He didn't seem to need his other bodily functions. There was always someone to execute his orders: open the door, look through the files, bring coffee, return it you donkey, can't you see it's cold, bring another one, fast ... "

"That was the sarcastic one?"

"No. The sarcastic one was the other officer, the young one ... He had olive green eyes. Just like yours but with thick dark eyebrows."

"Stop, you're making me horny." (*Uneasy laughter followed by silence*) "Sometimes, I don't know how to react to this situation. I want to hold you in my arms and make you forget, just wipe the whole thing from your head."

"I want to remember ... I need to remember."

"Did they bring in an examiner?"

"Yes. There was someone dressed in plain clothes who came in later. They called him 'doctor.' He affected better manners. But it was all very fake. He reeked of self-righteousness."

"Did he try to convince you to repent or seek treatment?"

"No, he just asked me to pull down my pants and turn. I did what he asked. In the beginning, it just felt natural, like being at a doctor's clinic. But when the second set of instructions arrived, I blanked. He said, 'Bend and push.' I said, 'I don't understand.' So he repeated the words again, louder, spelling out every letter. 'BEND AND PUSH.' I still couldn't understand. (*Silence*) Then the young officer came closer and laid his hand on my back and exerted pressure, making my body lean forward. He wasn't forceful. My body showed no resistance. From that moment on I was literally numb. I was transfixed into my new curved position. The doctor put on latex gloves and calmly said, 'Now, push.' I stared at a crack in the wall and pushed."

#### Literature

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# Search in Clouded Terrain

Anna Daučíková in Conversation with Christiane Erharter

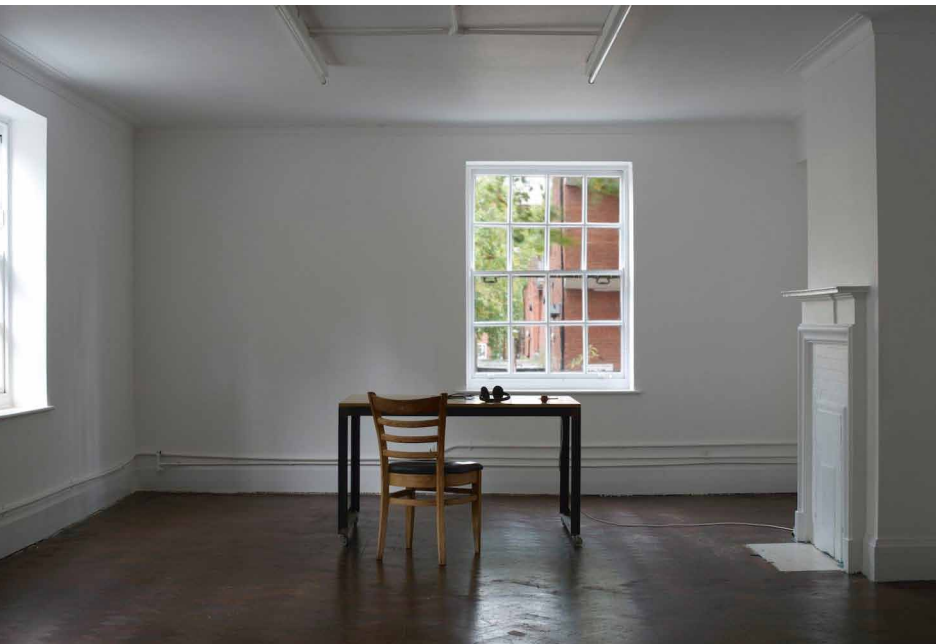


Fig. 171  
Anča Daučíková, *33 Scenes*, 2014

Anna Daučíková's *33 Scenes* is a voluminous multimedia project describing everyday life, including sexuality in the former Soviet Union. This is done through a record of situations from the past of which the oldest one dates back to 1945. Many of the situations took place in the 1980s, when Daučíková was living in Moscow. She collected some of the stories from friends; some of the situations she experienced herself. These multifaceted situations are collected and compiled into a solid structure of a dossier referring to the concealed files of the secret service's databases. The context of each situation is crucial—its absurdity is mixed with the in/humanity of the persons involved. *33 Scenes* is not the portrayal of the people featured; rather, it is a document of ordinary life in the Soviet Union.

**Christiane Erharter:** In the exhibition "Pink Labor on Golden Streets" you presented a fragment of your situations project. In a video installation entitled *Search in Clouded Terrain: 3 Situations (2012)* you displayed three situations that took place in the former Soviet Union.

**Anna Daučíková:** The exposed three videos are one of the variants—the first phase of a bigger project entitled *33 Scenes*. The full-size artwork describes thirty-three situations that had taken place in the former Soviet Union. During the 1980s, I was living in Moscow. Most of the situations I experienced myself, and some I collected from friends. The oldest one dates back to 1945, many of the situations took place in the 1980s, and the most recent—in fact, the last one—in 1995. Later, the work was exposed in other exhibitions in different frameworks, using different fragments and also various media, like audio-installations, book formats, multichannel video installations.

I still continue to elaborate on this issue of grasping my own past, and it takes on a new shape using another media, always in relation to the given exhibition. So it turned out to be a sort of a chain of works on one theme exploiting various media. Now, for example, I am preparing some more scenes in collaboration with performance artists Muda Mathis and Sus Zwick—and hopefully more women artists from Basel.

**CE:** Could one say that the stories are about unhappy or unfulfilled love—you call it "exiled sexuality"?

**AD:** Not really. There is nothing about unhappiness in them. That would be really ... kitschy. Rather, I wanted to take special care to make it understandable that life in the USSR was sexualized in a multifaceted way—and included, for example, a rich experience of homosexuality, of course clandestine—as it was everywhere else at that time. Especially nowadays you can hear in the former Eastern places that all the "bad things," like

2

<i>Place</i>	MOSCOW (1984) Embassy of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, a large Stalinist style building. Consulate office room: on the wall, a large oil painting of a landscape with industrial construction, red flags on each crest; sturdy bureau and upholstered chairs.
<i>Person(s)</i>	<p>Senior officer: a man about 50 years old, swollen face, steady eyes, blue and cold. Apart from regular sex with his wife, he has been having short affairs with his female colleagues, but he always found it not interesting enough.</p> <p>Junior officer: 24 years old, pale face, inflamed eyes.*</p> <p>A visitor: a woman, citizen of Czechoslovakia, 33 years old. She is staying in USSR because of a love affair with a Russian woman.</p>
<i>Situation</i>	<p>The visitor puts her CSSR passport on the table and says: "I'm coming to give up my citizenship. After three years of living here in Moscow, I have decided to stay here and become a citizen of the Soviet Union."</p> <p>Long silence.</p> <p>The senior officer is leafing slowly through the passport, then his steady gaze starts drilling the visitor's eyes and the senior officer says: "Comrade Daucikova, you certainly understand, that, be this, say, in New York, we would react differently. But being here, in Moscow, in the most progressive country in the world, I say, with great pleasure, right decision, congratulations!"</p>
<i>Note(s)</i>	* The legs of the junior officer, under the table, for the whole time of the visit are being crossed and pressed forcefully together. His last affair with a waitress finished with a bad genital infection. Since then he is practising only a daily masturbation.

Fig. 172  
Anča Daučíková, *Scene Book*, 2014

gay, lesbian, transsexuality, are simply an import from the West, as if they had never existed in Russia. Moreover, I hope it makes also clear that sexuality is a more complex experience than a single identity issue.

**CE:** Could the information in the reports still be used, e.g., to sue or blackmail someone, or at the court?<sup>1</sup>

**AD:** I cannot say if it will. I hope it won't. I think I did everything possible to avoid something like that.

**CE:** At a time when people were trying to leave the communist regime, why did you decide to move to Moscow of all places? Why not to the West, e.g., to Vienna, Germany, or the United States?

**AD:** It was simply because of a relationship. But if I would have met such a good and interesting circle of friends and had the possibility to move to, say, Mars, I think I would have done that, too. It was easy to decide to leave Bratislava in the late 1970s.

**CE:** You used a standardized template to report each scene. You indicate the number, place, persons, situation, notes. The situation is described, the place where it took place (sometimes also the exact date), the people involved. The form includes a field for notes as well. Why did you use such a standardized form to document the scenes?

**AD:** It is a picture of life as a dossier referring to the secret files of the Soviet secret databases, medical records, etc. It has to do with an almost constant feeling of being watched—control being present in one's life during the times of the totalitarian regime. Each scene is a sort of form to fill in, to register an "anomaly" in the highly controlled system where in

1 The history of discrimination against homosexuals in Russia is—like every national history of discrimination against homosexuals—long and complex. Under the tsarist antisodomy act almost exclusively, gay men were legally prosecuted, homosexual women were rather put through the system of medical "cure." With the discarding of the antisodomy act in 1917, homosexuality was more and more seen as a crime against society, and homosexual men and women were committed to psychiatric institutions. In Stalinist Russia, homosexual men and women were treated as political criminals, the elimination of homosexuality was seen as necessary in

the fight against fascism, resulting in a union-wide antihomosexuality law passed in 1933—and introduced to the public by Maksim Gorky, amended several times, and in action until 1993. Then, Yeltsin reversed the antisodomy code and a time of ease for homosexuals began. Today, Russia belongs to the most homophobic countries, passing laws that criminalize homosexuality and condone the public shaming of homosexuals. For an extensive history of the legal and social treatment of homosexuality in Russia, see Laurie Essig, *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self, and the Other* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).



8

<i>Place</i>	MOSCOW (1945) Building of the Moscow State Conservatory.
<i>Person(s)</i>	<p>Tatiana Palagina: 19 years old, student of theatre acting.</p> <p>She eagerly enjoyed the early post-war period of 1945, a short period of universal relief and enthusiastic expectation.*</p> <p>2 men: around 40 years old, KGB agents.</p>
<i>Situation</i>	Tatiana is leaving the building of the Conservatory, descending the wide, monumental stairs. She is dressed in her white dancing dress, with a short, airy pleated skirt, white stockings and pink, glittering classical ballet shoes.** From both sides she is held firmly by the two men in dark winter coats.***
<i>Note(s)</i>	<p>* During this time, Moscow's elites celebrated the end of war at parties and receptions held by the Allied embassies. She fell in love with Bill, a member of US Mission to the USSR and immediately moved into his apartment.</p> <p>** During the ballet class, the two KGB agents entered the classroom. Saying few quiet words to the teacher, they approached Tatiana and asked her to follow them. Her classmates and relatives saw her again 20 years later.</p> <p>*** Tatiana was brought to Lubyanka and sentenced according two paragraphs: "Betrayal of Motherland" and "Prostitution". She got the so-called 10+10: 10 years of labour camp followed by 10 years living in exile at least 100 km away from Moscow.</p>

Fig. 173  
Anča Daučíková, *Scene Book*, 2014

fact the anomaly becomes a norm visible at the "odd side of the life." That's why the fields—place, persons, situation, etc. You can take it also as a forensic report or a stage direction, demonstrating the mosaic of Soviet reality from a private perspective. Multifaceted, miscellaneous, incidental, ambiguous, lovely, and cruel situations are collected and compiled into a solid structure.

**CE: How important is the personal story behind the situation and the role of the individual? In the video you also show photographs and documents. Are these directly related to the scenes—in the meaning of proofs and evidences?**

**AD:** The photos are a mix of found footage and pictures I have taken myself. It is not an evidence of the happenings; rather, the accompaniment of the situation described. They belong to that time and speak for themselves and the only logic is the one of the life coincidences.

The main issue for me was the situation with the personal and the sociopolitical context, and its preservation. The need to prevent us from amnesia. It is personal, and the personal is important, but it is not the question of making a rigid copy or reenactment of the reality of a certain individual.

**CE: From the described scenes we learn that homosexuals could only have clandestine relationships. What was the situation for gay and lesbians in Moscow in the 1980s? Was there a community at all? Were there any trans-persons or cross-dressers, drags, or travesty artists?**

**AD:** I do not know what the situation was. We are now speaking about the 1980s. I was the only homosexual living among a narrow circle of people practicing heterosexual relations. But they were accepting me in my full sexual difference. I need to add that it was a circle of educated persons—artists, writers, intellectuals. But to a certain extent—also generally taken and according to my personal experience—the people in Moscow seemed to be able to show more easiness with sexual diversity than say, people in Czechoslovakia of that time. Maybe because life was too hard in Moscow, so one becomes more indifferent, and it just may look like tolerance.

**CE: According to the notes, butch-looking heterosexual women were common in the Soviet Union. To look butch was no indication that the woman was lesbian. How did lesbian women identify each other? Were there codes or certain places where one could encounter them? From Karol Radziszewski's research and the films by Mária Takács we know that in Poland, in Warsaw, or in Budapest there existed scenes and certain bars and establishments**

9

<i>Place</i>	MOSCOW (1976) Ground floor apartment, 1 room + kitchen, in a Soviet panel house, far from the city centre.
<i>Person(s)</i>	Nadezhda Yakovlevna Mandelstam: writer, Soviet regime's persona non grata, followed by KGB, a widow after her partner, the poet Osip Mandelstam, died and disappeared somewhere in the Stalinist GULAG, c. 1937-38. Throughout her long life she had sex with one single person, namely her partner.*  Anna Zavarova: a close friend.  Anca: another guest, artist from the CSSR.
<i>Situation</i>	Lying in bed and smoking her favorite "papirosa" BELOMOR: "Yesterday I got drunk for the last time in my life. I had a visit. An angel, an extremely lovely and clever English writer.** His eyes were beautiful. I do not know his work. We drunk the whole bottle of miserable champagne he brought."***
<i>Note(s)</i>	* Russian writer V. Y. told me recently (being very drunk) that Nadezhda Yakovlevna was lesbian: "Gosh, then, they had all been doing everything with each other!" I left him alone with his fantasies.  ** Bruce Chatwin.  *** See: What Am I Doing Here, p. 83.

Fig. 174  
Anča Daučíková, *Scene Book*, 2014

where like-minded people—mostly gay men—could meet. I spoke once with Hungarian filmmaker Takács who did the documentary *Secret Years* about lesbian women in Hungary during socialism, and she confirmed that one “just knew” each other, one could tell by seeing it. I found that too unspecific.

**AD:** I would say the “butch-looking heterosexual woman” is not an adequate description. It is rather the fact that the exhausting life and poverty could have made it difficult to notice the difference between a heterosexual woman and a butch lesbian. I cannot say anything about a lesbian community in Moscow in 1980s. I suppose that hardly anything like that existed. One needs to know the life in Moscow at that time to imagine how different it was from life in Budapest or other cities, as for the cafés and restaurants culture. Soviet people lived their socializing in privacy. But I don't want to say the lesbian community didn't exist, it's just I hadn't seen any of that.

**CE:** The material leaves space for the viewer's speculations and as you said it allows us to read the possibilities of the “queer” encoded in one's once lived reality. What are the queer aspects in the situations? You said yourself that it is uncertain and of invisible nature.

**AD:** In 1980 there was no use of the word “queer”—there were only the terms “homosexual” or “gay/lesbian” and “bisexual.” In my scenes, I am bringing it in as equally as I bring in heterosexual, asexual, or other behaviour involving sexual satisfaction. The queer aspects are a part of the picture and, you are right, today we can let the viewer speculate.

**CE:** You presented some of the situations in a performance at the Quite Queer Lab in Bremen.<sup>2</sup> You suggest that “queer should include the conversation with the past. It should include a conversation with death and its liberating influence on queer lives.”<sup>3</sup> Can you elaborate?

**AD:** I definitely have no intention of “queering the death.” I was invited in Bremen to make a dialogue with a queer counterpart. At that moment I had no such person around, so I tried to talk with the phantoms of my friends, who already passed away, and with whom I had little or no time to discuss the meaning of queer. So, I did that in front of the public as a dispute with the ghosts.

<sup>2</sup> Quite Queer Lab, Spedition Kunst- und Kulturverein e.V., Am Güterbahnhof, Bremen, June 29–July 1, 2012. Organized by thealit Frauen.Kultur.Labor.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Daučíková, “Conversations with Ghosts,” in *Quite Queer*, ed. Claudia Reiche (Bremen: thealit, 2014), 9–16.

**CE:** Are all scenes authentic in the sense that they really took place? Did you also include fictional stories? And to what extent are the scenes autobiographic?

For example, in situation number two:

Place MOSCOW (1984) Embassy of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic ... Person(s) ... A visitor: a woman, citizen of Czechoslovakia, 33 years old. She is staying in USSR because of a love affair with a Russian woman. Situation. The visitor puts her CSSR passport on the table and says: 'I'm coming to give up my citizenship. After three years of living here in Moscow, I have decided to stay here and become a citizen of the Soviet Union.' Long silence.<sup>4</sup>

Or in situation number fifteen:

Place CRIMEA (1980) ... Person(s) Anna: an artist, traveling around, on her way from Alushta to Planerskoe. To avoid problems she is living in a sort of clandestinity. Independently of any specific situation she is concealing that she is a foreigner, immigrant without permission to move, a woman, lesbian, living in a happy relationship with a woman.<sup>5</sup>

**AD:** To a large extent it is autobiographic. I saw those situations, sometimes I had to act, and of a few situations I had heard from people who acted in it. For ethical reasons I have changed some names and details, so there is an element of fiction in it. However, all what is written in the scenes had taken place, in one or another way.

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<sup>4</sup> Anča Daučíková, *Scene Book* (London: Vargas Organisation, 2014), 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

# Off-White Tulips (*Kırık Beyaz Laleler*) A Short Film by Aykan Safoğlu (2013)

Cana Bilir-Meier and Madeleine Bernstorff

James Baldwin, an African-American writer was born in 1924 in New York. From 1961–71, he spent periods of time in Istanbul. Aykan Safoğlu, born in 1984 in Istanbul, intertwines narratives of Baldwin's visits and his childhood memories of the city. Baldwin says to his Kurdish colleague Yaşar Kemal: "I feel free in Turkey." Kemal answers: "Jimmy, that's because you're an American."

The filmmaker narrates through images by Istanbul-based photographer Sedat Pakay who documented Baldwin's stay and images taken from the Safoğlu family's archive. Thus relating to Baldwin and Istanbul. Safoğlu was especially inspired by Magdalena Zaborowska's book *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade: Erotics of Exile* (2009). In his voice-over, Safoğlu subtly reflects on society. Safoğlu talks to Baldwin in a dialogue,<sup>1</sup> differentiating processes, thoughts and discrepancies, complementing the others.<sup>2</sup> Safoğlu also talks to his own family, specifying regimes of racism, class, migration, hegemonic historiography, and popular culture. This specific form of memories within histories illustrates that histories are very often a mere product of cultural appropriation.<sup>3</sup> Agents of popular culture and politics relate to each other. Objects, such as photos and stars determine the era, as well as the camera: they became autonomous and the film's protagonists, through images, which are placed over, next to, and above each other. Baldwin moved to Istanbul to free himself of the discriminatory US policies. Nevertheless he also experienced discrimination in Turkey.

The film *Off-White Tulips (Kırık Beyaz Laleler)* does not aim at a retrospective perspective nor a specific truth regarding its protagonists, Safoğlu calls it "biomythography." Author Audre Lorde is quoting Ted Warburton here: "Biomythography is the weaving together of myth, history and biography in epic narrative form, a style of composition that represents all the ways in which we perceive the world!"<sup>4</sup> Biographies are reinterpreted and defined anew through the usage of a specific frame, defined point of view, point in time and perspective thus becoming fiction. The following text sketches the film's topoi and actors and cites Safoğlu's personal and poetic questioning address to Baldwin.

1 This text was conceived in dialogue as well, conducted via e-mail between Madeleine Bernstorff, Aykan Safoğlu, and Cana Bilir-Meier.

2 Leah Bretz and Nadine Lantzsich, *Queer, Feminismus: Label & Lebensrealität* (Münster: Unrast, 2003).

3 It must be mentioned that history is always multifaceted, has various positions, and is non-explicit. See Leah Bretz and Nadine Lantzsich, *Queer, Feminismus: Label & Lebensrealität* (Münster: Unrast, 2003: 7).

4 Ted Warburton, cited in "About Biomythography," *Biomyth* (blog), <https://biomyth.wordpress.com/about/>.

**ISTANBUL**, “You explained that you felt more comfortable here as a black gay man. You felt less oppressed.”<sup>5</sup> A city that slowly forgets its history. “A place where I can find out again—who I am—and what I must do. [...] A place where I can stop and do nothing in order to start again. To begin again demands a certain silence, a certain privacy that is not, at least for me, to be found elsewhere.”<sup>6</sup> Istanbul is turned into a very special place, but for him exiles are tainted, as “there are no untroubled countries.”<sup>7</sup> Turkey was caught in heavy political weather—the military coup—and Baldwin’s good friend Yaşar Kemal was even arrested.

**JAMES BALDWIN**, 1924 (New York/USA)–1987 (Saint-Paul de Vence/France), African-American writer and civil rights activist. “You see, I had left America after the funeral [of Malcolm X] and gone to Istanbul. Worked—or tried to—there.”<sup>8</sup> He wrote novels, poems, dramas, and film scripts. Between 1961–71 Baldwin traveled several times to Istanbul. “You were jaded and in search for a way out. [...] Maybe you were dreaming of an order that can hold everyone together regardless of race.” Young Baldwin worked as preacher, later he broke his tie with the church. He regarded Islam in Turkey neutrally. He engaged himself in the civil rights movement and fought against everyday and institutionalized racism in US society.

**AYKANS AFOĞLU**, 1984 in Istanbul, artist and filmmaker, lives in Berlin since 2007.

**PHOTOS**, the film’s montage works through photos that are placed over, next to, and under each other. “To be able to understand you and this country that did your writings good. I’d like to have a closer look at your photographs.”

**BERLIN**, the place where Safoğlu partly shoots and cuts the film.

**SEDAT PAKAY**, born in 1945 in Istanbul, filmmaker, photographer, lives in New York. Pakay documents James Baldwin’s stays in Istanbul from 1964 onward. In 1970 he shoots the 16 mm, black-and-white short film *From Another Place*. The images are keystones of the film. Pakay becomes a close friend of Baldwin. “Baldwin rented a house in the middle of Istanbul. I said let’s do [the film] here. A good friend who did feature films had his own camera. [This person might be Ömer Kavur.] The very first morning, the maid answered the door and I asked where was Mr. Baldwin, and she said he’s sleeping. I said to the cameraman, ‘Let’s go into the bedroom.’ We barged into his room as he was waking. We finished filming, and I couldn’t take it out because Turkey had very strict rules about exporting film. You had to go through a censor board and government agencies. The film sat in my family’s apartment [and] my clever uncle found a way to get this film out. It came to my apartment in New York City.”<sup>9</sup>

**MAGDALENA J. ZABOROWSKA** wrote intensely in 2009 in *James Baldwin’s Turkish Decade* about James Baldwin’s stay in Istanbul. The cultural scientist revealed how influential the local people, culture, and friends in Istanbul were on Baldwin’s life. She described how his time there made him reflect his self-conception as Black\_Queer\_Writer, how he perceived his US identity in regard to regimes of racism anew.

**THE CAMERA**, which has a malfunctioning white balancing. “Anyway ... there won’t be a certain white balance setting for this film.” Film critic Richard Dyer discusses in *White* how to make the representation of whiteness in Western visual culture invisible, especially film and painting: “White people are not literally or symbolically white, yet they are called white. What does this mean?”<sup>10</sup> And in 1976 James Baldwin researched in his essay “The Devil Finds Work” the identity-creating supplies through US mainstream cinema in the (post-) McCarthy era: “The slimy depths to which the bulk of White Americans allowed themselves to sink: noisily, gracelessly, flatulent and foul with patriotism.”

**THE PARTY** in Istanbul in 1970 at which Baldwin gets to know his friends Gülriz Sururi, Bülent Erbaşar, and Oktay Balamir with whom he spends quite a bit of time. “Immediately you felt warmth for these otherwise distant people because you love people.”

**ISTANBUL, DEC. 10, 1961**, the day on which Baldwin finishes his novel *Another Country*, which has worn him out. “In this distant city, no one wanted to interview him, no one was pressing him for social prophecy. He knew few people. He couldn’t speak the language. There was time to work. He stayed for two months, and he was at another party—Baldwin would always find another party—calmly writing at a kitchen counter covered with glasses and papers and *hors d’oeuvres*, when he put down the final words of *Another Country*.”<sup>11</sup>

**AVNİSALBAŞ**, African-Turk, close friend of Baldwin. Salbaş perceived blackness differently to Baldwin and defined himself and his family as Arabs from the South. “The villagers who took the frail American black man under

5 Cited sentences: quotations from the film’s subtext.

6 Anna Clark, “Beginning Again: James Baldwin in Istanbul,” *Isak* (blog), August 27, 2012, <http://isak.typepad.com/isak/2012/08/beginning-again-james-baldwin-in-istanbul.html>.

7 Magdalena Zaborowska, *James Baldwin’s Turkish Decade: Erotics of Exile* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 16.

8 Clark, *Beginning Again*.

9 Sedat Pakay, interview by Robin Lindley, “Social Critic James Baldwin’s Hidden Side Surfaces at NW African American Museum,” *Crosscut*, December 26, 2012, <http://crosscut.com/2012/12/james-baldwin-photographs-robin-lindley/>.

10 Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1996).

11 Clark: *Beginning Again*.

their wing and all of Baldwin's Turkish friends referred to him as 'Arab Jimmy.' [...] As much as the term connotes someone of foreign ethnic and geographic origins, it does not, as Cezzar, Leeming, and others assured me, connote references to blackness and essentialized racial difference in the same way that 'Negro' or 'African' and 'black' or even 'of color' do in American culture."<sup>12</sup>

In 1960 Baldwin sends a postcard to Avni and Oya Salbaş: "In memory of your great welcoming. In fact, the very greatest in my life—my love. James Baldwin."

**ENGINEZZAR**, born in 1940 Istanbul, actor. In 1963 he staged Shakespeare's *Othello*. The first director to stage it for a larger Turkish audience. Cezzar became a close friend of Baldwin and together with Gülriz Sururi spent time with him. Cezzar played the lead in *Giovanni's Room* (1956), which is based on Baldwin's novel and was premiered in New York. "In 1961, a weary and uncentered James Baldwin unexpectedly showed up at the doorstep of the young Turkish actor Engin Cezzar, whom he had befriended years before in New York. Cezzar was Baldwin's choice to play Giovanni in a Broadway adaptation of *Giovanni's Room*, an adaptation that came to nothing."<sup>13</sup>

**GÜLRIZSURURI**, born in 1942 Istanbul, stage actress, friend of Baldwin. She lives with Engin Cezzar. "Could this young acting couple and their (actor) friends take you away from New York? [...] How far could you run away from the U.S.?"

**J. F. KENNEDY**

**MUSTAFAK. ATATÜRK**

**TIMEMAGAZINECOVER**: on May 17, 1963, Baldwin was on *TIME* magazine's cover. The racist and discriminating headline read "The Negroes Push for Equality." "It put him on the cover of *TIME* Magazine in 1963: the May 17 issue. [...] And in a few weeks, when the magazine with his face on it was already dated, Baldwin's friend Medgar Evers would be murdered on the driveway of his home in Jackson, Mississippi."<sup>14</sup>

**BEAUFORDELANEY**, born in 1901 (Tennessee/USA)–1970 (Paris/France), African-American artist/painter, close friend of Baldwin. He visits Baldwin in Istanbul and draws some portraits of him. Baldwin introduces Gülriz to Delaney and he paints a portrait of her. "The pressures of being 'black and gay in a racist and homophobic society' would have been difficult enough—but Delaney's own Christian upbringing and 'disapproval' of homosexuality, the presence of a family member (his artist-brother Joseph) in the New York art scene and the 'macho' abstract expressionists emerging in lower Manhattan's art scene added to this pressure."<sup>15</sup> Delaney is for Baldwin like an older brother and turns into his "spiritual father." When Delaney dies Baldwin says: "The first living

proof, for me, that a black man could be an artist. [...] Perhaps I should not say, flatly, what I believe—that he is a great painter—among the very greatest; but I do know that great art can only be created out of love, and that no greater lover has ever held a brush."<sup>16</sup>

**ZENCI**, stems from the Farsi word *zangi*, meaning "rusty." "With their language revealing and feeding discrimination, they probably didn't know how to define you. Zenci stands in Arabic for dark-skinned or African. It is widely believed that this word in Ottoman Turkish originated from Arabic."

**ERDEK**, city near Istanbul, at the Marmara Sea. Baldwin spent time there. Here he is brutally beaten by a stranger once.

**ELIJAHMUHAMMAD**, 1897 (Washington/USA)–1975 (Chicago/USA), US civil-rights activist and founder of Nation of Islam. Baldwin meets Muhammad in Chicago. "Maybe you were trying to digest the dinner you had in Chicago with Elijah Muhammad, [...] and his disciples in Istanbul."

**JAMES**, Baldwin's nephew. He had a very close relationship to his nephew who lived in the United States. "You knew what it was to be a black child in the US, what the fear meant. You remembered your adolescent years, the tension they created."

**FIRENEXTTIME**, is a 1963 publication by Baldwin with two essays: "My Dungeon Shook—Letter to my Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation" and "Down at the Cross—Letter from a Region of My Mind." He writes, "White Americans seem to feel that happy songs are happy and sad songs are sad." The first essay is written as a letter addressing his nephew James, describing discrimination in US society. The second text is about discrimination and religion. Baldwin talks about his perspective of and experience with the church.

**BIGBILLBROONZY**, 1893–1958 (USA), African-American blues musician and composer. Safoğlu quotes the song *Letter to My Baby* (1952). Just as Baldwin does in *Fire Next Time*. Broonzy sings in *Black, Brown and White* about his experiences being an African-American and omnipresent racism: "If you're black and gotta work for livin', Now, this is what they will say to you, They say: "If

<sup>12</sup> Zaborowska, *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Clark: *Beginning Again*.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Caryn E. Neumann, "Delaney, Beauford (1901–1979)," *An Encyclopedia of Gay*,

*Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender & Queer Culture*, [http://www.glbtc.com/arts/delaney\\_b.html](http://www.glbtc.com/arts/delaney_b.html).

<sup>16</sup> James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948–1985* (New York: Library of Congress, 1985).

you was white, You's alright, If you was brown, Stick around, But if you's black, oh, brother, Get back, get back, get back. [...] Me and a man was workin' side by side, Now, this is what it meant: They was payin' him a dollar an hour, And they was payin' me fifty cent. They said: If you was white, You'd be alright, If you was brown, You could stick around, But as you's black, oh, brother, Get back, get back, get back."

**BEBEKTEAHOUSE**, a tea room in Istanbul's Beşiktaş quarter. One of Sedat Pakay's photo pictures Baldwin with two waiters, deep in conversation.

**ORHANGENCEBAY**, born in 1944 (Samsun/Turkey), singer, actor, known for his interpretations of Arabesque music. He sings in one of his songs: "Not a single flawless subject exists. Love me with my mistakes." Gencebay is also referred to Orhan Baba. "My father likes playing with his rosary and smoking too. Sometimes he sounds like Orhan Baba." Safoğlu places in this scene an image of his father next to one from Gencebay.

**MARLONBRANDO**, 1924 (Omaha/USA)–2004 (Los Angeles/USA), US actor, friend of Baldwin. He is pictured in one image sitting with Baldwin at Restaurant Urca. Brando used his celebrity status to voice and criticize socially relevant themes in the United States. He was a supporter of the civil rights movement of African-Americans and the indigenous American Indian movement. In 1973 Brando declined his Academy Award for *The Godfather* and sent Sacheen Littlefeather, a First Nation actress, to speak at the ceremony. Brando thus protested against racism against the indigenous people. In 1973 he also supported the occupation of Wounded Knee through the militant American Indian Movement. Brando criticized the presentation, treatment, and representation of indigenous people with the white film industry.

**AYKANSAFOĞLU'SPARENTS**, "Have you ever met my father?" Most probably the parents met while walking at Bosphorus river. His father worked in the oil industry, in a venture owned by his father-in-law. Safoğlu's father catered for Restaurant Urca where James Baldwin and Marlon Brando met. The owner is a friend of Mr. Safoğlu.

**THISISISTANBUL** in the 1960s. It has wide streets, which were used more and more by cars. "In those years the city faces a rapid change." The population grew within one decade, from the beginning of the 1960s, from 1.4 million to 2.1 million. In 1960 Turkey saw its first military coup, against the Adnan Menderes government.

**AYŞECİK**, her civil name is Zeynep Değirmencioğlu, she was born in 1954 in Istanbul and was a celebrated child actress in the 1960s. "While the peasant migrants tried to grasp the bitter city life, they met Ayşecik. Ayşecik was a kid

hero who could retain her happiness despite malice." Within two years, she played her first film role. Most films in which she acted carried her name in the title, for example: *Ayşecik, the Poor Princess* (*Ayşecik Fakir Prenses*, 1963) or *Young Angel Ayşecik* (*Ayşecik Yavru Melek*, 1962). "In movies, she had one after the other, oblivious to her childhood she was saving adults from many troubles. Poor but proud. Hungry but prudent."

**EMRAH**, born in 1971 Diyarbakır, singer, actor, and child celebrity with Kurdish descent, his civil name is Emrah Erdoğan.

**SEZERCİK**, born in 1967, Istanbul, his civil name is Sezer İnanoğlu, he became a child celebrity at the age of four, currently works as director and actor in Turkey. "Then came Sezercik. That's how the famous *Could I call you mother?* line was included in Turkish." Sezercik continuously asks in all his films female co-protagonists whether he might call them mother. Very often they actually became/were his mother in the script who had lost their son and were then happily reunited.

**YUMURCAK**, born in 1965, Istanbul, brother of Sezercik, child celebrity, civil name: İlker İnanoğlu.

**ÖMERCİK**, "Although he didn't look like the other kids in the hood this orphan child could speak to the heart of Turkish people." Born in 1959 in Istanbul, civil name: Ömer Dönmez, when young he was a Turkish celebrity, due to his blond/golden hair.

**THEPOSTCARDOFABLONDCHILD**, in the 1970s it could be found in almost every Turkish household. "As if this blonde trouble boy were adopted by everyone."

**ISTANBUL** at the end of the 1970s an oil tanker explodes on Bosphorus. Baldwin leaves Istanbul. "In those years the population of urban blonde women was increasing. I guess, it was around that time when the first oil tanker exploded on the Bosphorus."

**AJDAPEKKAN**, born in 1946, Istanbul, famous pop singer and actress. Her song *Petrol* (1980) uses oil as metaphor for love. She enters the 1980 Eurovision Song Contest with *Aman Petrol* and ends up second last. Four years later Aykan Safoğlu is born. One of the film's pictures shows Aykan's mother with dyed-blond hair, wearing high heels, and pregnant with Aykan, smiling at the camera.

**ISTANBUL** in the 1980s: "My family's oil business went bankrupt and the empty tankers turned into my playground."

**AYÇASAFOĞLU**, Aykan Safoğlu's older sister.

**AYKUTSAFOĞLU**, Aykan Safoğlu's older brother.

**AY**, means moon.

**LATOYAJACKSON**, born in 1956, Gary/USA, US pop star, member of the Jackson clan. "Because being tanned was hip in my childhood, every summer my sister got darker and I look as La Toya gets whiter on the posters." The children's room of Aykan's siblings is totally covered with posters. Some depict Madonna and a Marlboro advertisement. "My sister getting darker as La Toya gets whiter was preoccupying my mind."

**NEDİM** (1681–1730), poet from the Tulip Age, known for his poems on Istanbul, "I would sacrifice all Persia for one of your stones, is what the most famous poet of the Tulip Age Nedim said about Istanbul."

**TULIPAGE**, an era in Turkish history (1718–1730). "The golden age of the Ottomans, also called the Tulip Age, ended with the insurgency of the oppressed classes. The tulips went from Istanbul to Amsterdam and became Europeanized."

**AYKANSAFOĞLU'SSCHOOLFRIENDS**, one photo depicts Aykan with his classmates from different social classes from Istanbul, in the classroom. He plays the lead in a stage play at school and performs a text in front of his class. The film shows a woman walking over a bed of tulips, destroying them.

**AWOMANDESTROYINGTULIPS**, on May 1, 1996, three left-wing protesters were killed and thirty-three policemen injured. For quite some time Turkish media didn't understand the anger of the woman whose frustration was taken out on the flowers, because one of her friends had been killed in the afternoon by the police. The year 1996 marked the peak of Kurdish resistance—in Turkey as well as Europe.<sup>17</sup>

**ACEMİ**, in Arabic means: a person who only knows Arabic languages very superficially. In Turkish it means inexperienced.

**JOHNHERBERT** was a Canadian stage writer and director. In 1970 Baldwin staged Herbert's play *Fortune and Men's Eyes*: about young men in an Istanbul prison. "You the Acemi of Istanbul, directed a play there too. It was John Herbert's play and took place in a prison. It was about sexual exploitation and homosexuality. A critique of the modern western societies [...] You are sitting there, watching the actors from Istanbul, who are inexperienced in representing Canadians. It was not easy to translate the heavy gay jargon into Turkish."

**DALLAS** is an internationally exported popular US television series (1978–91) about the imagined bourgeois white, oil-industrialist Ewing family. The program is centered on the main character J. R. Ewing. As a child Safoğlu watches the dubbed series and disappointingly realized in his teens that the US family doesn't speak a single word of Turkish.

**PETERGABRIEL'STHEFEELINGBEGINS** is a song from his album *Passion* (1989): "Why were all the TV pictures of the first Gulf War always accompanied by the same music? [...] Wasn't this touchy music in the background of the war scenery an Armenian melody?"

## MADELEINEALBRIGHT

### CNN

**ALETTERFROMTHETURKISHMILITARY** to Aykan Safoğlu. "This is the envelope of the last mail that came to my address in Istanbul. Sent by the Turkish Armed Forces; it included a medical report stating my exemption from military service."

**THEFICTIONCERTIFICATE** is a German document stating provisional residence permit. "Initially I didn't understand when the German government handed me this document."

**RAKI**, a Turkish alcoholic beverage, also called "lion's milk." Often water is added and the color changes to a broken nuance of white. Safoğlu's father likes his with a shot of water and ice cubes. "At the dining table where you sat across the Bosphorus ... you were only drinking wine. You don't drink raki as my father did. Raki has no color. My mum drinks it dry. My father takes double shots with water."

**THEDREAM**, "drunk with raki, I had weird dreams one night." In this dream various characters and objects of the film begin a surreal dialogue, change the narrated plot, and weave it anew. Marlon Brando refuses the award and sends in Ajda Pekkan as speaker. Instead of photos, drawings are used and are placed above, next to, and under each other. "After her thank you speech, Ajda starts singing like Aman Petrol, my heart petrol [...] At that moment a patriot hits the stage and Oscars turns into Eurovision. There the audience appears. You are among them. [...] In the end Marlon's 'Father' was the king of Arabesque."

<sup>17</sup> See "Chronologie: 28 Jahre Kurdenkonflikt," *Arte Journal*, August 15, 2012, <http://www.arte.tv/de/chronologie-28->

[jahre-kurdenkonflikt/6869416,CmC=6869420.html](http://www.arte.tv/de/chronologie-28-jahre-kurdenkonflikt/6869416,CmC=6869420.html).



**BERLIN, MARCH 01, 2013**, Safoğlu finishes the film. "The idea that one has to write, almost as a virtual obligation, also reminds us of the very many spaces where we are voiceless. Spaces we usually cannot enter, and which have to 'be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary pace.'<sup>18</sup>

**KIRIKBEYAZ** means not really white, rather cream, beige, off-white; *kirik* is also a synonym for gay or queer.

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18 Grada Kilomba, "Becoming a Subject," in *Mythen Subjekte Masken*, ed. Maureen Maisha Eggers et al. (Münster: Unrast, 2005).

# “No Church in the Wild” Anarchy Now\*

Jack Halberstam

## 1. No Church in the Wild

New protest politics have emerged in the last three years in the wake of financial disaster, economic meltdown, the waning of the nation-state, and the rise of transnational corporate sovereignty. Art has not been separate from the boom-bust economy and in fact, the art market has become a safe bet for white-collar criminals seeking to hide their loot. At a time when the very rich are consolidating their ill-gotten gains at the expense of the growing numbers of the poor, the dispossessed, the criminalized, the pathologized, the foreign, the deportable, disposable, dispensable, deplorable mob, at this time, we should start to talk about anarchy. When the state is actually the author of the very problems it proposes to cure—lack of public funds, low rate of education and health care, business models for everything from governance to education, no redistribution of wealth, homelessness—we need to seek alternatives to the state. When the church has more power than the people, when the military gets more funding than schools, when white people get away with murder and people of color linger in overcrowded prisons for possession of marijuana, we need to seek alternatives to law and order.

Those alternatives have been cropping up in a variety of cultural sites, low and high culture, museum culture, and street culture. So let me start with an example of the emergence of a startling song of anarchy and revolt that pops up in a mainstream venue—Jay Z and Kanye West’s “No Church in the Wild,” in order to point to a kind of emergent cultural idiom that speaks in the language of anarchistic revolt. The idea I want to take from this song and its framing of new logics of power is the idea of a space of “wildness” that opens up within the institutionalized spaces of law and order and that holds open other possibilities for thinking and being—no church in the wild.

So, I use this mainstream intervention with its familiar visual framing of revolt as masculinist confrontation and militarization to begin a conversation about the aesthetics and history of anarchism. I want to think and talk with you about new expressions of political will—gaga expressions I call them—as they emerge in a moment of radical uncertainty, a time when shifts in ruling elites do not change basic existing conditions and yet, as Lauren Berlant explains in her latest book, we still hold out hope for alternatives through the embrace of “cruel optimism.” After showing us the form of cruel optimism in our congested present—a fantasy that sustains our attachments to objects and things that are the obstacle to getting what we want—Berlant also turns to anarchy by way

\* Jack Halberstam, “No Church in the Wild: Anarchy Now” (lecture, “Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction,” Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, November 2012).

of conclusion and argues that anarchists enact "repair" by recommitting to politics without believing either in "good life fantasies" or in "the transformative effectiveness of one's actions."<sup>1</sup> Instead, the anarchist "does politics," she says, "to be in the political with others." This includes participating in art projects, communal efforts, cooperation both of the kind that anarchist Kropotkin wrote about and of the variety discussed more recently by Richard Sennett in his book *Together*.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Squinting Like an Anarchist

Rather than seeing anarchy as an ideologically closed or scientific system that needs to be learned, studied, applied, and adjusted, I see anarchy as an aesthetic, a way of thinking, a way of seeing—"squinting" in James C. Scott's terms—and a way of being in relation to others, separate from logics of state rule. How can we think about anarchy as something queer, hold it open to new forms of political intervention before it turns into more of the same? How can we pull into and out of anarchy a queer way of seeing and being—a squinting? In *Wärmeland 2* Kerstin Drechsel, whom I will talk about more later, captures the queerness of this moment of riot and revolt in her rendering of the masked solidarity of Pussy Riot, the Russian punk-feminist band currently serving jail time for critiquing the government in a church—reminding us why we hope there is no church in the wild!

So, I would like to ask what new aesthetic forms accompany these public manifestations of political exhaustion and outrage? Can we find an aesthetic that maps onto anarchy and stages a refusal of late-capitalist logics? What is the erotic economy of such work? At this point, we have available to us a rich archive of art projects that stage interventions into the ordinary and the normative as well as into the unusual and the elite. In recent years, books like *The Interventionists*, *Living as Form*, and *Beautiful Trouble* have narrated the ways in which art in the age of the art market needs to become an experimental zone, a place where groups, artists, activists, and theorists rehearse revolt, disruption, and invent spontaneous and unpredictable arenas of disorder and opposition.<sup>3</sup> Some interventionist art practices draw from traditions like Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*, while others draw directly from the dialogic models fostered in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.<sup>4</sup> Most stress performance and most break down the split between artist and spectator, performer, and audience. Anarchist art, or wild art, moves decisively away from market value modes of production and finds new forms of value in social interaction and world-making practices. As Nato Thompson and Gregory Sholette of *Beautiful Trouble* say of their art project, that it is designed to "lay out the core tactics, principles and theoretical concepts that drive creative activism, providing analytic tools for *changemakers* to learn from their own

successes and failures."<sup>5</sup> Providing us with strategies, histories, tactics and listing projects and antecedents, the volume becomes a toolbox for change with a distinct DIY aesthetic and an advocacy orientation. And in *Living as Form*, radical curator Thompson moves away from typical and clichéd formulations of the relation between art and reality and he asks *not* what we mean by art but what we mean by life or living. Living, Thompson proposes, also has a form; it has as much form as an artwork in fact and so we should think of "living as form" and counter reality TV and the "vast spectacle" of contemporary media with the long-term, durational project dedicated to transformation to which we wish to recruit people—life itself! Thompson writes: "Socially engaged art is not an art movement. Rather, these cultural practices indicate a new social order, ways of life that emphasize participation, challenge power and span disciplines."<sup>6</sup>

If it is true, as Scott claims in *Two Cheers for Anarchism*,<sup>7</sup> that we have unlearned cooperative ways of living, then art, as many practitioners have claimed, becomes a way of reintroducing the concepts of sharing, cooperation, mutuality. If it is also true, as Scott offers, that we have incorporated low levels of quotidian obedience into our ordinary lives (waiting for walk signs in calm and empty streets; filling out forms whenever asked; submitting information about ourselves online) that then prep us for much higher levels of dangerous political and economic conformity (believing in choice in two-party systems; paying way too much money for simple everyday staples; borrowing money we know we can never repay), then we need to practice counter-intuitive knowledge production and rebellion also in the everyday options we encounter—we can walk against the cross sign; find new modes of exchange and mutual aid; refuse or fake information—in order to find our way back to a different way of being.

If, finally, we have mostly come to see, think, and listen "like states"—attributing harmony and symmetry and order to state rule, and seeing dissonance and disorder as part and parcel of anarchy, then one of the primary functions for protest art in this era might just be to enable and enact new visions, new sounds, and new aesthetics of being—in the process of engaging, participating, and enjoying protest art, we redefine politics, art, and desire itself. In what

1 Laurent Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 260.

2 Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (New York: Penguin, 2013).

3 Nato Thompson and Gregory Sholette, eds., *The Interventionists Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

4 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970).

5 Thompson and Sholette, *The Interventionists*, 78.

6 *Ibid.*, 67.

7 James C. Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

follows, I want to follow a trail of potentially anarchistic and avowedly queer image making to see where it may lead, to ask what aesthetics emerge from this *dérive*, what worlds can be glimpsed, what new modes of distraction, disruption, and disorder they offer us and what, finally, queerness looks like in the wild.

### 3. Representing Chaos

What does chaos look like then? What does it do? What does it allow? In an extraordinary body of work, Kerstin Drechsel explores the sexual entropy of the every day and the chaos inherent to capitalism: refusing the neat division between a chaotic world ordered by capitalist modes of production, Drechsel's work recognizes that a) capitalism too is chaotic and disordered; b) the world we live in tends toward breakdown, chaos, and disorder; and c) that the state simply manages chaos and marshals it for capital accumulation, on the one hand, and bio-power, on the other. Anarchy is no more oriented to chaos than capitalism.

And so Drechsel's work gives us two different ways of thinking about the human in relation to chaos: first, she offers us images of semi-human objects spinning out of control in their domestic prisons. And second, she offers us images of waste, the accumulation of junk that is the excessive side of chaos capital. I just want to take a quick survey of these two projects of hers—the first works with Barbie-like dolls, the second works with the mess of living.

The wild lives that get shoehorned into domestic prisons are expressed through Drechsel's work with Barbie/dildo figures. She creates dioramas of scenes of domestic hell with squat, Smurf-like Barbies living in them in order to emphasize the plasticity of the human, on the one hand, and the structures that mold them, on the other. There is a nod to psychoanalysis in this work and particularly to the idea of wild forms of sexual expression that get channeled into family, domestic routines and so on. We might understand this model of sexuality via a short essay written by Freud in 1912 warning about the dangers of allowing people to practice psychoanalysis in the wild—i.e., outside of the confines of the discipline he had created for it.<sup>8</sup> Without the structure, the training, and the focus that the discipline offered, he feared that patients would be led astray, that the psychoanalytic focus on sexuality would be misread as advocacy for all kinds of forms of sexual expression—that sexual expression would be cast as the cure for sexual repression—and that analysts would turn the patient away from the family form, the couple, love, and romance and would advocate for a kind of unrestrained sexual instinct. He called these kinds of untrained analyses of patients "wild." What Freud feared, of course, was that his own practice would be undercut by wild practitioners, and that the

domesticated forms of sexuality within the family, marriage, and the couple would come to be sites of anxiety and neurosis compared to the wild and free sexuality that struggled to free itself from such constraints.

The lesson on wildness in Freud and elsewhere should not lead us to some idea of a utopian and unfettered space of free expression, free love, uncaged sensuality, and so on, but it allows us to see the wildness that our domestic environments contain and the chaotic systems of waste and disorder that they also produce—not all anarchy is chaotic, not all hierarchy is orderly. Look at a few of these Barbie images: in *Wärmeland #2*, Drechsel places handmade Barbie dolls in dollhouse-like settings and manipulates them pornographically both to reveal the sexuality that the dolls represent anyway, and to remake the meaning of the domestic, and of desire itself. Creating alluring sex scenes with the Barbies, one blonde and one brunette, and then placing the two lusty bodies in candy-colored environments that make perverse use of Barbie merchandise—like Barbie's backyard pool, her doctor's office and uniform, her moped, her horses—Drechsel draws out not only the desires we project onto the doll bodies but also the much more compelling set of desires that draws us (and draws the kids who play with the dolls) to the accessories, to the backdrops, to the objects in our worlds. The subject/object relation is both blurred and eroticized here, *Flaming Ears*<sup>9</sup> and *Dandy Dust*<sup>10</sup> both play on this same eroticism. As we peer into the dollhouse-like settings, exterior as well as interior (although all exteriors feel interior in Barbie's world—see the camping setup) we begin to see the sets as prisons, as domestic cages, but also as film sets and stages for strange miniature sexual dramas. Drechsel crafts the figures themselves out of animation clay and so the dolls have a roughness to them, an unfinished look: they have messy hair, they smoke cigarettes, they are presenting in grooming environments like beauty parlors and hair salons but they give the appearance of being ungroomed—always on the edge of wildness. The Drechsel project with Barbies is also reminiscent of the Barbie Liberation Organization of the 1990s in which a group of artists and activists engaged in culture jamming by switching the voices of Barbie and Ken dolls in toy stores around the country. While previously a Barbie may have been programmed to say, "I am not so good at math," after the BLO liberated it, it says: "Vengeance is mine!" I will just close this section with a few paintings from Drechsel's series on domestic disorder—these are like scenes from housewife Armageddon—the house takes on its own energy of waste, decline, ruin. In the series "Unser Haus,"<sup>11</sup> she confronts

8 Sigmund Freud, "Taboo and Emotional Ambivalence," in *Imago: Zeitschrift für Anwendung der Psychoanalyse auf die Geisteswissenschaften* (Vienna: Hugo Heller, 1912–1937).

9 Ursula Pürerer, Dietmar Schipek, and Hans Scheirl, *Flaming Ears* (1992), 84 min.

10 Hans Scheirl, *Dandy Dust* (1998), 94 min.

11 See <http://www.september-berlin.com/artist/gallery/1/en>.

messiness directly in paintings of explicitly junky domestic interiors: she offers up rooms overflowing with books and papers; discarded media; closets stuffed with discarded materials and reams of toilet paper; pantries overflowing with cans and household goods. In some spaces, the books and the paper overwhelm the spaces that should contain them; in others, the materials we use to clean away the traces of dirt—toilet paper, for instance, becomes waste itself. In these series an aesthetic of disorder prevails and the paintings dare the viewer to take them home, to hang them on the wall, and they threaten to mirror back to the viewer/owner a desperate image of the disorder that the house barely keeps at bay and that this art encourages. The paintings of messy interiors taunt the collector and liken the collecting of art to the collecting of things, useless things, *stuff*. They menace and snarl; they refuse to be the accent on a minimal interior; they promise to sow disorder and shove any environment firmly in the direction of anarchy. In Drechsel's work and world, the human is just a small inhabitant of a literal wasteland of objects and things. Her world is chaotic and she herself is dedicated to trying to wax, slim, domesticate, train—she is working hard toward a conformity that is always just out a reach.

#### 4. No More Heroes: Wildness

One of punk's enduring anthems by way of The Stranglers back in 1977 was "No More Heroes"—"Whatever happened to Leon Trotsky? He got an ice pick, that made his ears burn ... " For The Stranglers this meant reconciling to the end of socialism, the end of revolutionary hopes and the beginning of different kinds of political projects less oriented to heroics and heroes and more modest and anarchistic in form and content. My project begins an exploration of an anarchist trajectory—precisely at the place where the faith in socialism and its continued belief in heroes, normative families, and top-down rule ends. We are looking to anarchistic modes of being for a project that reconciles itself to the limits of the human and in the process produces new forms of politics that lack leaders, refuse redemption, and try to break with masculinist logics of heroic rebellion.

"No more heroes" means, for a start, recognizing that the subject has limited access to anything like full agency but does have some capacity for something like speech! And so let's turn next to a couple of projects that engage this notion of the discursive subject who protests in new seemingly passive and quiet ways. In her project *Signs that Say What You Want Them to Say and Not Signs that Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say* (1992–93), Gillian Wearing, a British artist and video maker who names what she does as "editing life," asked people in the street to write a message on a sheet of paper and hold it up to be photographed. A businessman holds up a sign that reads "I'm Desperate," a policeman holds up a sign that reads "Help." In Wearing's project,

the sign system that envelopes subjects in the small dramas of hope, aspiration, and fantasy—"cruel optimism," in Berlant's term, is replaced with another sign system that speaks back in the language of desperation, hopelessness, and need. The businessman is desperate and the policeman in need of help. The signs are cries for help but they are at least speech; surprising speech at that and they almost turn their bearers into conduits for a message that must be spoken. For Wearing this is what intervention into the quotidian means—breaking open social convention to see what it covers.

In the work of Wu Tsang, a Los Angeles-based artist, public space is also the space of intervention. In his recent film *Wildness* (2012), cowritten with Roya Rastegar, Tsang documented a weekly club that he ran with some friends in Los Angeles' rampart division in an old tranny club called The Silver Platter. The club quickly became a queer, hipster hangout but it also displaced the Latina transgender women who lived and worked there. The film was precisely about spaces that can be opened up by artists within a boom-bust economy but it was also about the gentrification that comes with all attempts to create alternatives. In the film, the space of wildness was not simply the club night that Tsang and Ashland Mines created, it was a space where the avant-garde crowd on Tuesdays confronted the Latin-American transgender women who worked, danced, and lived in the bar on the other six nights of the week. *Wildness*, then, was not the Tuesday night disruption of the weekly schedule, it was a longer arc of community building and dismantling that occurred in the space, and it was a kind of relation to others through loss.

Tsang says in the film that he never learned Chinese from his father and so lacked a language for a part of himself. He continues: "That missing piece became how I felt close to people." Relation to loss, across languages, through gesture and rhythm holds open a way of being in space with other bodies that are unlike you without immediately falling into hierarchies of being and having.

Tsang has a long performance career that has been dedicated to making space. His work can therefore be compared to that of other queer artists like Sharon Hayes, who variously interrupts the silent, random, and anonymous vectors of the public sphere by making a speech about love, or positioning herself within the public sphere as a sign that demands to be read. Like a hustler, a billboard, a busker, or a panhandler, Hayes forces herself on passersby, gives them her message, and often recruits them to also voice; here, here the dialogic mode of Freire and Boas becomes an aesthetic project in which the artist enlists strangers to all speak together—often the text comes from history, from a specific event and so it is not original speech—they instead become a living archive of protest history. In one project, *In the Near Future* (2009), Hayes invites people to come and witness her recreation of moments of protest from the past—this one from the 1968 Memphis Sanitation strike restaged in New York

City at an ACT UP protest site—she thus makes connections between past eruptions of wild and inventive protest and allows those moments to talk to each other to produce a "near future." Hayes reminds us that politics is work between strangers and not just cooperation between familiars.

Both Hayes and Wearing provide vectors for unconventional speech—they eschew the heroic notion of a willed subject speaking truth to power but nor do they turn the speaking subject into simply a vessel for signification—instead, the speaking and silent subjects in both artists' work seem to be channeling messages of desperation, love, hope, and hopelessness. Hayes says it best: "What if queer studies didn't steer itself so intensely toward visibility but instead steered itself toward questions of speech? What if, following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, we were focused as much on hearing and speaking as on seeing?"

## 5. "No Church in the Wild"—The Remix

I want to end today then by thinking about speech, hearing, and the remix and so we return to where the wild things are in the form of a remix of the popular masculine protest song with which we began. And while thinking and listening together to a remixed version of "No Church in the Wild" by a young queer rapper, I don't want to oppose the queer female version to the masculine song in order to say that one is preferable to the other, but rather to hear in anarchy a form of genealogy that does not demand that one thing give way to another. The anarchy that the song references should be considered in relation to the many intellectual traditions of anarchy—some black, some transnational. While anarchy for Emma Goldman and others means a reinvention of "existing conditions";<sup>12</sup> for other thinkers of the period, including black/Mexican intellectual/activist Lucy Parsons, about whom Shelley Streeby has written so eloquently,<sup>13</sup> anarchy becomes a call to arms for people of color, the poor, and the workers who find no protection from the state in the first place so feel no qualms about moving beyond state forms of power—Parsons as a speaker!

Angel Haze, a black, native, and queer performer who grew up in Michigan and New York City, and, by her own account, survived a youth spent in a religious cult, performs her own songs and mixed-tape versions of other people's songs with an unusual combination of passion, vulnerability, and rage. She also articulates a black-queer feminism and a critique of black masculinist nationalism at the same time and takes us out of the modern and mannered interactions of urban polite society and into an anarchistic space of the wild. Haze recently chose Jay Z and Kanye West's brilliant song from *Watch the Throne* "No Church in the Wild" to freestyle to and the results are mesmerizing. While

the Jay Z/Kanye West anthem, with chorus by gay hip-hop artist Frank Ocean, is already a fascinating combination of black masculine protest, epic imagery, and angry revolt, in Haze's hands the driving rhythm becomes the sound of a new rebellion, one crafted specifically in the territory that we are calling anarchistic or gaga.

So what happens when Haze goes gaga on this song and takes *her* understanding of freedom to a whole other level. She begins by building on the hook at the beginning: "Human beings in a mob / What's a mob to a king? What's a king to a god? What's a God to a non believer who don't believe in anything? Will he make it out alive? Alright, alright, no church in the wild." But Haze then drops the great chain of being analysis altogether and heads straight for the critique of the masculinism of the whole structure: "What's a king to a God?" she asks and moves quickly on to, "What are humans to the king of the sky this pride that I am wearing and these things on my mind." Further on into the song where Kanye West begins to rap about sexual freedom, Haze makes freedom a battle of the people against the politicians, a battle of realness against representation, language against feelings, and she builds to her own theoretical climax: "Is nothing really real huh? They ain't got shit you can feel huh? Cos none of it is tangible no church in the wild."

In the hands of Haze, an anarchist anthem is unleashed from a song about masculine revolt. There is "no church in the wild" because the hierarchies that hold black and white, male and female, queer and straight in place have fallen, and power finds new sources and new soul and new expression. And the challenge for the next generation of queer artists, activists, and thinkers will not be how to make themselves seen but how to inhabit sound, listening, hearing, and the wildness that lives at the heart of the music of change.

12 Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911).

13 Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

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# Music, Zines, Films, Drawings, Clothes, & Girls

G. B. Jones in Conversation with Dietmar Schwärzler

**Dietmar Schwärzler:** You are a zine expert. You started in the 1980s with *Hide*, together with Caroline Azar, which was followed by the legendary zine *J.D.s* you did from 1985–91, in collaboration with Bruce LaBruce. This zine was followed by *Double Bill* (together with Jena von Brucker, Caroline Azar, Johnny Noxzema, and Rex), which is often described as an “antizine” or “hatezine.” Could you explain a little the ideas behind these different zines?

**G. B. Jones:** *Hide* had been already started by Caroline Azar, Candy Parker, and Kathleen Pirrie-Adams. Kathleen left after the first issue, and I started working with them from the second issue on. Candy left with the third issue and afterward just Caroline and I were doing this zine. We published five issues altogether. It was an overview of punk underground culture, very music-oriented but covering everything from independent underground filmmakers like Vivienne Dick and Ross McLaren to political protests and stories about male sex-trade workers. The concept of this zine was, in a way, moving in the direction of *J.D.s*, but the priority was music and cultural activities. Starting with the second issue of *Hide* we also put together compilation cassettes, which we distributed with every issue. The compilations were pretty diverse; we had punk bands, but also very experimental and industrial bands or avant-garde and experimental music. Bands like ASF, Believer’s Voice of Victory, The Curse, My Dolls, Racer X, Ragged Bags, Really Red, Rongwrong, and of course Fifth Column.



Fig. 175  
Cover of *Hide*, issue 5, 1985



The zine was, like the others, photocopied, and in that area Caroline was a huge inspiration for me. She would literally photocopy everything that was in her apartment: lace doilies, maps, wrapping paper, weird place mats that she got from restaurants that would have pictures on it, pieces of chicken wire, etc. Everything was going on the Xerox machine. She threw away all the rules and just did whatever she liked. That was a huge influence on me in terms of becoming interested in what a photocopier could do, using it as a tool to create art with.

**DS: What kind of background did Caroline and you have?**

**GBJ:** Caroline was a child actress and when she got older, she went to theater school at university and studied theater for several years. She also made a number of underground movies before I met her. In our band Fifth Column we were really happy when she joined because we thought, we have an underground film star in our band!

I went to art school for a while, studied film with Ross McLaren, which was an amazing opportunity for me. He was a Super 8 filmmaker and also part of a collective who ran an independent theater called The Funnel that showed experimental film in Toronto. We lived right around the corner, so I was going there nearly every weekend. There I had the chance to see almost the entire history of experimental film.

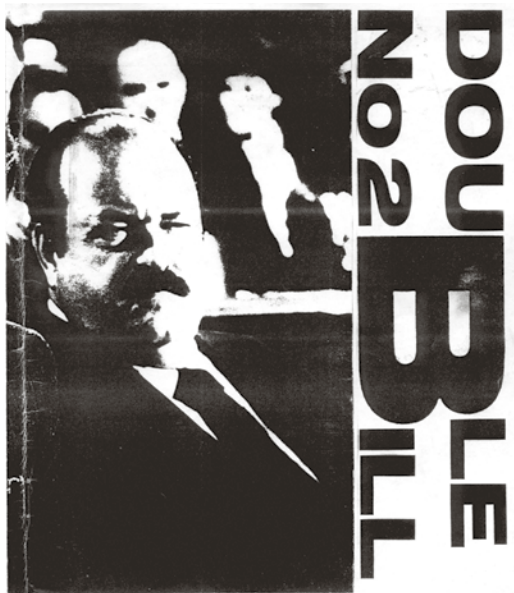


Fig. 176  
Cover of *Double Bill*, issue 2, 1992

**DS: Super 8 films also played a major role in this process.**

**GBJ:** From going to The Funnel I was already very familiar with Super 8 film. Almost everybody was using Super 8 film at that time. In the second year of Fifth Column, we started working with John Porter, who was also an experimental Super 8 filmmaker and part of The Funnel collective. He created tape loops to project with us while we played. Right from the beginning we were not at all interested in being a typical punk rock band. We were interested in experimenting with what we can do with film and video. To a certain extent *Hide* was an extension of Fifth Column, but in the print medium.

**DS: How did J.D.s start then?**

**GBJ:** We were all working in a restaurant called “Just Desserts”—*J.D.s*—which is one inspiration for the title. Just Desserts is famous for being the site of a holdup while the restaurant was open and filled with customers, in which one twenty-three-year-old woman, Georgina Leimonis, was shot and killed. There’s even a page for it on Wikipedia.

**DS: But J.D.s also refers to “juvenile delinquents” ...**

**GBJ:** Yes—that was the official name. Our private joke was that it stands for Just Desserts, where we all worked. That is also the place where we met Bruce (LaBruce), and he started doing stuff with us. Caroline got him to dance as a go-go boy with Fifth Column, and he did guest vocals on the song “The Fairview Mall Story” with us. One day I just asked him if he wanted do a zine together, because I wanted to try a social experiment.

**DS: What was this social experiment about?**

**GBJ:** To create the impression that there was an alternative universe in which queer punk bands played for queer punk kids who made queer punk zines.

**DS: What was the idea behind *Double Bill* and how did it start?**

**GBJ:** That was in the 1990s; we produced five issues between 1991 and 2001. One night we were all at Caroline’s apartment and we were watching a rerun of *Cannon* (1971–76), an American television show, which stars William Conrad. He was a star in the 1940s and 1950s and also made a career in television. He starred in shows like *Nero Wolfe* (1981) and in *Jake and the Fat Man* (1987–92). Conrad was a good actor, a big man, a fine human being. In most of the episodes of *Cannon* he is mainly seen driving

around in his huge sedan car, although he is a private detective who solves cases and frequently rescues women. While we were all watching this show, I asked the others, “Why can’t gay people worship William Conrad instead of William Burroughs?” You know, Burroughs killed his wife and was also very abusive with young people, so we couldn’t understand why anyone would worship him. So we all laughed and that might have been it, but then Jena proposed to do a zine about that and everybody was excited about the idea. Caroline came up with the title *Double Bill*, which was the perfect name for it. So we went to Johnny and Rex’s house where they had a photocopier, and we started working on it that same night. And in the morning around 7 a.m. we finished, packed fifty zines in an envelope, and put them in the mailbox on the way home.

In *Double Bill*, we also featured letters and artworks we received, e.g., from Anonymous Boy, Vaginal Davis, Gary Fembot, Kevin Joy, Jeffery Kennedy, Robert Kirby, Lois Maffeo, Bart Plantenga, Lisa Suckdog, and many others.

**DS: Let’s go back for a moment to *J.D.s.*, which is often credited with coining “homocore,” and later “queercore” as a term and a movement. How did this term come up and how did the movement start?**

**GBJ:** Before we started doing the zine, I was making mixtapes on cassettes and I was putting songs by various hardcore and punk groups on these tapes that had some gay content in it. It didn’t matter to me if it was negative or positive. That was never a concern. Besides Fifth Column I had stuff from the Angry Samoans, ASF, Big Boys, Coil, The Dicks, The Leather Nun, Mighty Sphincter, The Nip Drivers, The Raincoats, Shock Headed Peters, Victim’s Family, and others.

When I finished the tape I decided to call it homocore, pretending that it was a whole new genre of punk. Very soon after that we started to do the zine, so we had a name for our little movement. Later on we decided to change it to queercore because there was just an avalanche of guys writing to *J.D.s* and it started to become a little bit weird, because they thought it was only about queer punk boys. It had an effect that I didn’t like, making other people feel excluded, and we wanted to include all different kinds of queer people.

**DS: How do you perceive “queer” today? The term is used in very different ways—from a synonym for LGBTI people to a theoretical concept to an interpretation of a lifestyle.**

**GBJ:** Strategically, it just doesn’t have the same meaning that it used to have. Words change their meaning over time. They are useful up to a

certain point, but the term queer has been co-opted. And there is not really something else to replace it, so people keep on using it. The usefulness of having these defining terms only works as long as people are investing in the meanings of them. I am not investing in the meaning of it anymore, but I think a lot of people are. So it’s useful for other people.

**DS: In the DIY culture, specific practices like photocopying, recordings on cassettes, Super 8 movies were highlighted. Did you use these working methods out of aesthetic reasons or because it was cheap? Or was it both of it?**

**GBJ:** It was definitely both of them. I loved the photocopy machine, because you could do amazing things with it.

**DS: Why this specific love for the photocopy machine?**

**GBJ:** It’s the idea that you can make multiples of anything. For instance, when you photocopy one image and then photocopy the copy and then photocopy that copy, the machine starts doing incredible things to the images. I like to see what machines can do. It’s like having a partner that is working with you. The aesthetic is really amazing and it can interject random variables into the work that I find really exciting. I studied photocopy art at art school with the artist Barbara Astman, who was one of the pioneering photocopy artists in Toronto in the 1970s. Meeting and working with Caroline, Kathleen, and Candy, who did *Hide*, was the perfect marriage between something that was really cheap and practical to be able to disseminate ideas, but also an aesthetic form that was very appealing.

**DS: *J.D.s* was a mix of (personal) sex stories, music reviews, homocore hit parades, comics, party photos, interviews (for instance with Peter Berlin), some of your drawings, frank political controversies, notes from readers, upcoming events, and lots of naked images. All these things together created a kind of mystique around this zine, although not that many people really know about the zine, I guess. How do you perceive the mystique around *J.D.s*?**

**GBJ:** A lot of people don’t even know about *J.D.s*. There is a guy—Kevin Prested—who wrote recently in his book *Punk USA: The Rise and Fall of Lookout Records* that “queercore” started in Olympia, Washington.<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning, most people in Toronto had no idea what we were doing. We were mailing our zines out to people in the States, Australia, and

<sup>1</sup> See Kevin Prested, *Punk USA: The Rise and Fall of Lookout Record* (Portland: Microcosm Publishing, 2014).

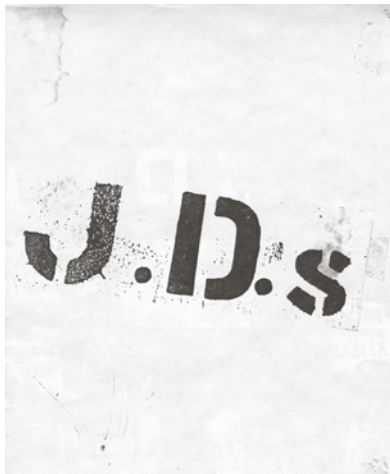


Fig. 177  
Cover of *J.D.s*, issue 1, 1985



Fig. 178  
Cover of *J.D.s*, issue 5, 1988

in the United Kingdom. We also mailed a few copies to people in Vancouver and Montreal, but most of it was outside of the country. That might be part of the reason why it has that mystic about it. For others, who came to our parties, or to the film screenings, or read about us in *Maximum-rocknroll* later in the 1980s, they found out about it after quite a few issues had already come out. The zine had this slow building effect, after people began writing us and publishing zines or starting bands in their own cities.

At the same time, a lot of people hated *J.D.s*. The Montreal anarchist store refused to carry it and the gay bookshop in Toronto didn't want it. Obviously the people at the post office didn't like it at all because our mail was constantly being searched. So it was really difficult to get it to people. I don't think people in Toronto were aware that we had done *J.D.s* until it was over and they found out about it in the 1990s. And outside of Canada, I think people are incredulous that we would have started this movement—I'm guessing, if that book is any indication, that they imagine it must have started in the USA.

These days people are starting to rewrite history, not just trying to erase the role of *J.D.s* in the history of queer culture but who was involved. There are, for example, a couple of dissertations I've read recently by people claiming everyone in *J.D.s* was white.<sup>2</sup>

I think it's really sad because first of all it entirely erases the history of the queer people of color who actually worked with us and appeared in the

magazine. It erases the history of Leslie Mah, who was in numerous issues of *J.D.s* and in my movie *The YoYo Gang* (1992). It erases the history of musician Celina Carroll (aka Cizzy Che), who was on the cover of issue six and who was in my movie *The Troublemakers* (1990). It erases the history of artist David Findley, who was on the cover of issue five. It erases the participation of Vaginal Davis, who was in a couple of our issues and also in my movie *The Lollipop Generation* (2008).

It's really hard when people just skim the surface and don't really look at the work you are doing.

**DS:** It's also a very ahistorical argument, because it only looks—in this case even wrongly—at something from a current academic perspective, and doesn't get the context of punk. I am not a friend of categorical thinking, although I think it's important to have a mixture of perspectives and a broad range of different backgrounds. But this should not lead to a superficial question of representation that just marks people as belonging to a certain category, whether it's gender, class, ethnicity, age, HIV, sexuality, or whatever.

**GBJ:** The same thing is happening to the Riot Grrrl movement, which is also perceived now from a very academic point of view.

**DS:** In her article "From Riot Grrrl to Crimething: A Lineage of Expressive Negation in Feminist Punk and Queercore," Johanna Isaacson writes:

Feminist zines and punk are often described by their producers in terms of their ability to liberate creative potential in girls while combating sexism, objectification, and passivity. This is seen as an intensely pleasurable and empowering process for the women who create DIY zines, music, and art. And yet, much of the imagery at work in these forms of cultural production is intentionally ugly, angry, and critical of mundane pleasures and practices.<sup>3</sup>

Could you comment on this?

2 Camille Erickson, "Querying Sex, Gender, and Race through the Queercore Zine Movement: G. B. Jones and Vaginal Davis Protest Conformity" (2013), paper 4, <http://digitalcommons.mcalester.edu/studentawards/4/>; or Curran Jacob Nault, "Queer As Punk: Queercore and the Production of an Anti-Normative Media Subculture" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2013), <http://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/27163/>

NAULT-DISSERTATION-2013.pdf?sequence=1.

3 Johanna Isaacson, "From Riot Grrrl to Crimething: A Lineage of Expressive Negation in Feminist Punk and Queercore," in *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 7, no. 4 (December 2011), <https://www.lexandermag.org/fromriotgrrrl-tocrimethincalineageofexpressive-negationinfeministpunkandqueercore/>.

**GBJ:** I agree that for many people, punk and making zines was probably a cathartic experience. I can't agree with the weight of her judgment that things are intentionally ugly, because I would not have looked at anything we did as ugly, even if it was confrontational. But I think dissonance is very interesting. It depends on your aesthetic, I think. However, aesthetics is a broad terrain and is dependent on people's socialization, expectations, and their investment in the dominant culture. If you are making films, for instance, you are confronted with a lot of criteria, or what's called "industry standards" that determine whether or not your film will be shown at certain film festivals or on television. This also concerns aesthetics— you gain access to film festivals and television by having a certain "look" that's been created using very expensive technology. I think that's one way a capitalist culture erects barriers and decides who has a voice to speak and who will be denied to speak. What was interesting about the popularity of the photocopier was that all of a sudden all these people who previously didn't have a voice, a medium to reach others, suddenly had one. I still think that's also possible today, maybe even more possible, because people have access to more technology now. But people become trained to only want to look at a certain quality of the image. For example, a Super 8 image is accepted in a rock video, but at a film festival it seems to be unacceptable. It's amazing to me that we've set up a culture where we only have certain types of images the people can accept, although there is such a huge range of images. We could look at Super 8 images, 16 mm images, images from VCR, even 35 mm, which will also soon be disappearing. A huge amount of possibilities gets lost and we limit it to one technology, one look: the digital. Because we are so unimaginative we can't even visualize what the possibilities could be like.

**DS:** A month ago I watched *No Skin Off My Ass* (1993) again, which is credited as LaBruce's first feature film. You are part of the film as well, as actress and as part of the production collective The New Lavender Panthers. Have you watched the film again in the last couple of years, and how would you describe your collaboration with LaBruce?

**GBJ:** I haven't watched it for many years. I will always be so happy that I had an opportunity to be in an incredibly beautiful black-and-white film, which was shot on Super 8 and blown up to 16 mm. I really have to thank Bruce for making that possible. Not everyone gets to be in a black-and-white movie.

**DS:** You play the sister of the skinhead, a radical lesbian film director, who does screen tests with her girlfriend for a film called *The Girls of the SLA*. Can you say a little bit about the script?

**GBJ:** At that time I was planning to make that movie *The Girls of the SLA* because I was really interested in the fact that some of the women in the SLA [Symbionese Liberation Army] were bisexual or lesbians. It seemed to me that it was possible that their marginalized position in society due to their sexuality could have been a deciding factor in joining this really radical group. I was always thinking of making a film that might explore those ideas. I was very interested in really radical groups, pursuing that kind of confrontation with society. I kept trying to encourage Bruce; I was really trying to push us to become like more of a terrorist group (*laughing*), but everyone was just too lazy. No one wanted to get up early in the morning, exercise, and run around.

**DS:** That explains the reference to the Black Panthers.

**GBJ:** Yes, I thought they were inspirational and read all of their books: *Seize the Time* by Bobby Seale,<sup>4</sup> *Soul on Ice* by Eldridge Cleaver.<sup>5</sup> They were obviously a big influence on what we were doing. I didn't read *A Taste of Power* by Elaine Brown, but I should have.<sup>6</sup>

**DS:** You are also well known for your drawings, the appropriation or female versions of Tom of Finland: *The Tom Girls*. How did you come across the artwork of Tom of Finland?

**GBJ:** I first saw some of Tom's drawings when I was a teenager and then later someone gave me one of his books. So I was aware of his work for a while and then when punk happened a couple years later, I couldn't help but notice that one of the T-shirts that Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren's store SEX produced had incorporated an image of two cowboys that looked like Tom of Finland drew it, although it was actually from Colt Studio. So it was a natural next step for me to appropriate that idea. The punks had already appropriated it from the gay community and I thought I'd appropriate it from them and use it for our purposes, to talk more about ideas of gender, sexual politics, power, authority, and society. I started drawing them specifically for *J.D.s*; that's the reason I did them.

4 Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991).

5 Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

6 Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: First Anchor Books Edition, 1994).

**DS:** The key characteristics in the Tom of Finland drawings are muscular guys with huge cocks and luscious butts. But you didn't sexualize the female body as Tom did with the male body.

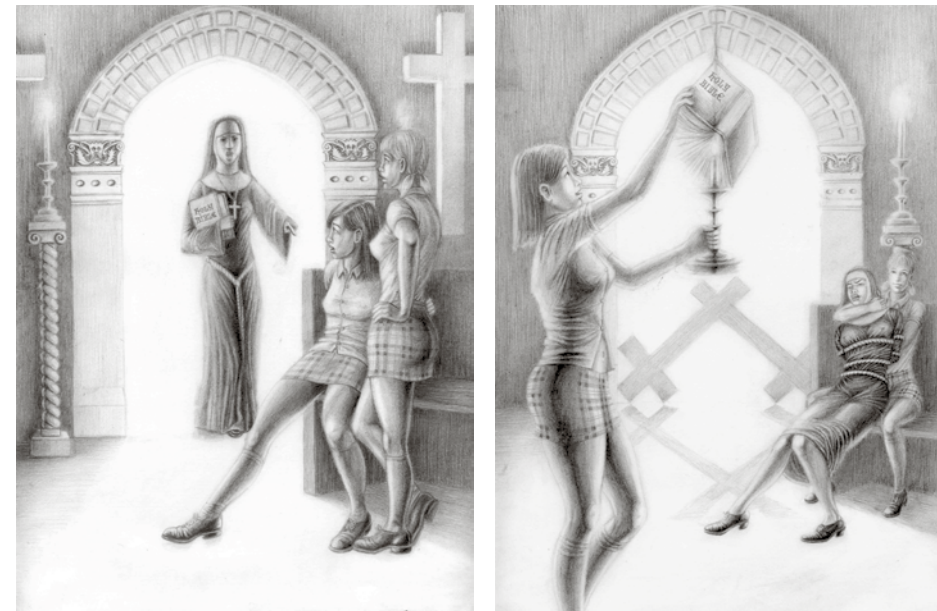
**GBJ:** That's true. I didn't exaggerate as much like Tom, but of course I'm taking a different position. With *The Tom Girls* I took the position that pornography has an underpinning ideology, pornography has an agenda. As Angela Carter said in *The Sadeian Woman*, pornography is "art with work to do"<sup>7</sup>—but I'm saying it's taken on a number of jobs. And so it's not necessary to make the same types of exaggerations in the characterization of the figures. What is exaggerated in Tom's drawings are attributes that are associated with power: the muscles, the strength, the hardness; this is what was highlighted in his work. At the same time that I was celebrating the idea of his work, I wanted to undermine some of the ideology I saw in his work, so the axis of power has shifted in my drawings. The women in my drawings are sexual, but in a different way. And yet, they hopefully still do the job they're supposed to do.

**DS:** Surprisingly—at least to me—Tom of Finland is not that well known in the heterosexual world. In my office, only one gay guy knows his work, the other five—all heterosexual—don't. In Finland, postage stamps with drawings from Tom of Finland have been issued, and you can find his images on bedsheets or towels. It would be great if some of your *Tom Girls* would appear on stamps as well, especially because you are one of the few people who are still writing letters by hand. Do you have shirts or other things with the *Tom Girls*?

**GBJ:** In Finland, Tom's work is in their art museum, but you know that's not going to happen in North America. I doubt I'll ever have a drawing on a stamp, but I did have shirts. On different occasions people have made up shirts, starting in the 1990s. There was also the Fifth Column record cover, *All-Time Queen of the World*, for which we used one of my drawings and we had T-shirts for that. Then there was this horrible magazine called *Richardson* in New York, who used one of my drawings on a T-shirt and told me that they would pay me, but of course they never did. So don't buy that one.

**DS:** Some of these drawings have very telling titles. What is the story behind these two drawings called *Tribute to Félicien Rops*?

**GBJ:** Félicien Rops was a Belgian symbolist artist from the nineteenth century. A lot of his work deals with ideas around death and sex, Satanism and forbidden sexuality. I really love his work. I wanted to explore the story of two young girls who are living in a convent or school for girls. But



Figs. 179–180

G. B. Jones, *Tribute to Félicien Rops*, 2005

they go over to the dark side (*laughing*). In the first drawing the two girls are sitting on a pew in the church and the nun is obviously very angry with them, because they are so close to each other. Their response is to knock over the crosses, burn the Bible, and tie up the nun (*laughing*). The issue is how queer people deal with oppression from religious authorities.

I did a series of drawings for *Hex Magazine*, a neo-paganist magazine about Ásatrú, based on Celtic Stelae, different kind of stones, all of which had historical and spiritual meanings. I am interested in exploring ideas around religion. I am just not interested in religions that oppress people in a totalitarian way. Especially nowadays, we really need to undermine the fundamentalist religions that try to oppress people because of their sexuality, gender, whatever excuse they are given. A lot of my work has been devoted to undermine those kinds of ideologies.

**DS:** And the *Look! Look!* drawings?

<sup>7</sup> Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (1979; repr. London: Virago Press, 2013), 13.

**GBJ:** They were done for a zine called *F.O.D* in the 1980s to accompany a short story written by Lynna Landstreet about women attacking Richard Kern. Another series is called *Bar Room Brawl*. That was a collaboration with Jennifer Camper, who is a graphic artist in New York. She put together a compilation of different artists and writers collaborating together. She wrote the story and I did all the illustrations—it was published in her graphic novel compilation *Juicy Mother #1*.<sup>8</sup> For *Juicy Mother #2*, I worked with Scott Treleaven and illustrated his story “Sackhead.”<sup>9</sup>

**DS:** Girl gangs are a big issue in all of your drawings, films, and also the zines. What kind of potential lies in these girl gangs?

**GBJ:** All through the 1980s and the 1990s I basically grew up and lived in a girl gang for fifteen years. Fifth Column was basically a girl gang. Obviously that’s reflected in the movies and drawings I made. We went places together, we could travel around, go out at night, do what we wanted to do. Being in a girl gang is an amazing experience. For years afterward, we would hear about how scared and threatened people felt by us. It’s amazing to reverse that power dynamic; usually women go out on the street alone and have to fear being attacked, harassed, or abused in some way. In a gang you can pretty much go wherever you want to and you can do all the things you cannot do when you are alone. It totally changes the power dynamics. I would hope and pray that every girl has the chance to be in a girl gang when they are growing up.

**DS:** You also seem to be a very collaborative person, at least from my perception.

**GBJ:** I think that’s true. I really enjoy working with other people. Right now I am working with Minus Smile, who was in the bands Kids on TV, Violence and the Sacred, Believer’s Voice of Victory, and The Party’s Over, among others. We play in Opera Arcana, we are writing songs and soundtracks, and doing performances together. Caroline Azar wrote a play for us called *The Bruised Spirits of Southern Ontario* that we performed with two other members of the band at the art space Videofag, here in Toronto. I’ve been extremely fortunate to work with Caroline for so many years. She is a genius.

**DS:** This collaborative aspect can also be seen in your films, where you often filmed your surroundings, your friends, partners. These films seem to be like a performative diary for you.

**GBJ:** That’s true. Although they are documents of what was happening



Fig. 181  
G. B. Jones, *Bar Room Brawl*, 1999

at that time, they were acted and the people performed. Most of the people I was working with are performers; they were either in bands or are actors or directors or artists, and they bring a sense of performance to their roles in the films. Having said that, there is an overlap between our real life and the roles they play. There are also a lot of scenes in the films that were very spontaneous and improvised—that weren’t scripted. I wanted to document the lives of the type of people whose lives would usually go unrecorded and unnoticed by society. I felt it was particularly important to document specifically those people and those scenes that mainstream culture doesn’t want to know about.

**DS:** Let’s go back to the beginning: Fifth Column, an all-female punk band. How did that happen for you?

**GBJ:** I was going to school and had been in a band call Bunny and the Lakers with my friends Peter Morgan, Howard Pope, and Wendy King. Within the year I joined, Wendy left the band, Peter moved to England, Howard moved to New York, and the band had obviously broken up, although we were all still friends. I was really sad about that, but my friend John Brown, the painter, introduced me to these two women who were

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Camper, *Juicy Mother 1: Celebration* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2005), 78–82. Illustrations for *Look! Look!*, by G. B. Jones and story by Jennifer Camper.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Camper, *Juicy Mother 2: How They Met* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2007), 119–23. Illustrations for “Sackhead” by G. B. Jones, and story by Scott Treleaven.

starting a band, Janet Martin and Kathleen Pirrie Adams. Janet was an amazing guitarist, Kathleen a really interesting bass player, and they both had a fascinating sensibility I was taken with. I pretended that I could play drums so that I could join the band. I just played drums once before, but I had been in Bunny and the Lakers, played piano, and I was in a choir when I was growing up, so I had some ideas about music. I somehow faked it well enough for them to let me join the band. Soon after we were looking for a singer, and when Caroline came over she was clearly the first choice. She brought the keyboard to the band.

Although we were a punk band, we had a definite psych rock influence at the same time. It also became quite quickly a multimedia project with films, zines, and performances. Fifth Column also composed a soundtrack for Paulette Phillips and Geoffrey Shea's *Work* video, and we were on other soundtracks as well. It came to the point where we were doing so many different things at once that after a while it just collapsed, like from fatigue.

#### DS: What was the political agenda in the band?

**GBJ:** We were obviously feminist. We were concerned about the role of women in society and we spent really a lot of time talking about this issue. Also the role of the band, what kind of image we wanted to project and how other women would feel about this image. It was actually a very different landscape to maneuver. We were very aware of Laura Mulvey's text "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975).<sup>10</sup> We tried to negotiate our image; we were working with various photographers. Bands are, by necessity, all about image. We were creating our own kind of feminism at that time: we really rejected the second wave of feminism and tried to imagine what would later become the third wave of feminism. And that was a big part of Fifth Column; to redefine what it could mean to be feminist.

The feminism that we encountered in the 1980s was one that was just full of restrictions and rules: "You can't do this, you should not wear that, and if you do you're a reflection of patriarchal ideas of women ..." It was so rigid. We were coming from the punk scene and we were not really having it. We were impressed with Kate Millett, who lived at her "Women's Art Colony Farm," which she founded in 1971 outside of New York, and wrote about how the women on the farm drove her crazy in her book *The Loony Bin Trip*.<sup>11</sup> We were also very anticonsumer—we wanted to create things DIY-style, along with all the other punks that weren't reliant on expensive technologies. We wanted to create alternative spaces for people to exist outside the systems, whether it was religion or politics, which we found very oppressive. We just wanted some freedom.

DS: Female punk singers had to design a persona, sometimes aggressive,



Fig. 182  
G. B. Jones, *Subversive Literature* #2, 1995

Fig. 183  
G. B. Jones, *Motorcycle Girls*, 1987

<sup>10</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> Kate Millett, *The Loony Bin Trip* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990).

sometimes oversexualized. How would you describe the persona you built around your person?

**GBJ:** Obviously that is a conscious choice I perceive as part of my artwork. I don't isolate these different fields—music, drawing, filmmaking, or the way I have performed in films or on stage. It's an aesthetic that is very conscious of the history of film, whether film noir in the 1940s, or the New Wave films from France, or exploitation films from the 1960s, combined with punk. All these elements were coming together to form us. You can look at the position of women very specifically in all these genres of films, and you will see exactly why they are so influential for us and for me. Our aesthetic is bound up in that.

**DS:** I just read the new biography of Viv Albertine, where she talks about *The Slits* and, among other things, her passion for fashion or clothes. **SEX**—the shop of Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren—had a big impact on her.<sup>12</sup> How important are clothes and styling for you?

**GBJ:** They are very important for me. That was how I found alternative culture. I started shopping at secondhand stores when I was twelve years old. I remember so well the very first thing I bought was a coat. It was an avenue to finding out all about alternative culture because at that store they also sold underground newspapers, which I also bought.

From that time on, I constantly shopped at secondhand and thrift stores for all my clothes. I don't think I've bought something new literally in years. All the other band members have been like that too. The world has enough stuff, we don't need more, we need to recycle what we have. And when you do, you find that it's an education in excavating different eras in clothing design and style. With the band, I started making jackets for everyone. I took these denim jackets and cut the collars off, bleached them till they were almost white, and sprayed paint stencils all over them. Making your own clothes, going to thrift stores, putting items together that are not automatically connected—you can be a collection of references to rebellion through the ages.

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<sup>12</sup> Viv Albertine, *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes, Music, Music, Music, Boys, Boys, Boys* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014).



# Between “Bodies without Bodies” and Body Landscapes Queer Artistic Negotiations

Barbara Paul

There is currently a controversy within queer aesthetic discourse around questions of bodies, embodiments, and nonbodies. Alongside ongoing debates over “true,” “false,” or “alternative” bodies, the discussion revolves around the efficacy of visibility and invisibility as well as visualization’s artistic opportunities, limitations, and political implications. A variety of paths are being explored that take a critical stance on representation—depicting traces of bodies, for example, or investigating perceptions of bodies. Other works—and/or their interpretations—attempt to probe the potential of “queer abstraction.” The prospect of “exploring [the] concept of ‘queer abstraction,’” alongside other conceptions of queerness, was the subject of the exhibition “Pink Labor on Golden Streets,” hosted in 2012 by the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and curated by Christiane Erharter and Dietmar Schwärzler.

Jack Halberstam, the queer theorist and scholar of anglophone literature, had initiated a discussion around the idea of “queer abstraction” in 2005 by seeking (visual) representations in the context of gender, sexuality, and desire that do not explicitly portray bodies. Halberstam advocates a broad definition of “queer” that encompasses “non-normative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time.” The Vienna exhibition took Halberstam’s cited definition of queer as a starting point.<sup>2</sup> “Pink Labor” was also part of a conference organized by Hans Scheirl and Ruby Sircar called “Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction,” which additionally featured panels, performances, film screenings, workshops, and club nights. The conference’s subtitle likewise invokes the term “queer abstraction,” while its main title focuses on the interesting role in queer theory played by the anus, an orifice all genders have in common.

Writing ten years ago, Halberstam departed from the frequently voyeuristic display of transgender bodies to examine abstract paintings by artists like Linda Besemer, which the author interprets as rejections of heteronormative representations. Halberstam juxtaposes the dictum of the “purely formalist,” which the art critic Clement Greenberg was very influential in propagating from the late 1930s into the 1960s,<sup>3</sup> with the “nonnarrative” category, which the art

- 1 Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, “Pink Labor on Golden Streets,” [https://www.akbild.ac.at/portal\\_en/exhibiting/xhibit/exhibitions/2012/rosa-arbeit-auf-goldender-strasse?set\\_language=en&cl=en](https://www.akbild.ac.at/portal_en/exhibiting/xhibit/exhibitions/2012/rosa-arbeit-auf-goldender-strasse?set_language=en&cl=en).
- 2 The quote was printed in informational leaflets by Erharter and Schwärzler for the 2012 exhibition. It was taken from Judith Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6. The second major reference

- point was a German quote by Martin Büsser characterizing queerness “as a tactic of bewilderment” that calls into question “any personal or external assignment of identity.” This quote was likewise printed in the leaflets and was taken from: Martin Büsser, “For Your Pleasure: Fragmente einer Porno-Komparatistik,” in *Testcard #17: Sex*, ed. Roger Behrens et al. (Mainz: Ventil-Verlag, 2008), 83.
- 3 Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939) and “Modernist Painting” (1960).

historian Meyer Schapiro proposed with a much narrower impact. Rather, Halberstam concludes that the point of queer abstraction is "to reclaim formalism for a queer artmaking practice and to adapt the non-narrative potential of abstract art into an oppositional practice."<sup>4</sup> Although the search for antinormative queer structures is sensible, this interpretation ought to be approached with a measure of skepticism given that the term "abstraction" is weighed down heavily by its previous uses in the institutional system of art. Greenberg's argument was founded on his adherence to a formalist aesthetic, but he tried to exploit it personally: both to legitimize his own authority as an art critic and to immunize himself against hostile views. After the Second World War, when the United States was again taking steps toward geopolitical and economic hegemony, Greenberg and his many supporters used the same argument to establish abstract, especially Abstract Expressionist, painting as the epitome of modern art. Greenberg superimposed a social and political agenda on an abstract stylistic vocabulary, lending it political utility by asserting that it stood for freedom and democracy. Not only did this cement the special social role of the ingenious artist, it also reinforced the roles of the interpreting art critic and other viewers thanks to the open possibilities of ascribed identification.<sup>5</sup> In the art system at large and the art market in particular, abstract painting gained an extremely dominant role over several decades, one that it still enjoys to this day. These days any "retreat" into aesthetically beautiful, "sugarcoated," and/or apolitical material faces suspicion.

On the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna website, the curators point out reprovingly that a "satisfactory explanation" of Halberstam's queer abstraction "is still lacking."<sup>6</sup> They observe "a resurgence of interest" among the fine arts "in an abstracted presentation of forms of sexuality beyond homo and heterosexual norms" and conclude that "derivations, omissions, and exclusions—abstractions—of common body images and discourses are what we want to bring to light" as a form of queer abstraction.<sup>7</sup> Artistic processes such as derivation and omission—processes of abstracting, if you will—should certainly be discussed. The term abstraction is, in my opinion, much too overloaded in the artistic context and is often exploited to other ends.

In queer contexts, there are still other proposals for how to treat images of bodies and the question of visibility. For instance, in 2009 Renate Lorenz turned her attention to the "not-showing" of bodies. Her essay "Bodies without Bodies: Queer Desire as Method"<sup>8</sup> investigates representations of bodies without bodies, with a special focus on the installations of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, such as "Untitled" (*Portrait of Ross in L. A.*) (1991), a vacancy produced by the artistic work. Rather than marking some bodies as normative or others as queer, the installation represents desire and sexuality as wishes and conceptions that are fluid, socially decentralized, and processual. While on a concrete level, the weight of the candy on display in "Untitled" (*Portrait of Ross*

in L. A.) references the body weight of the titular Ross, the artist's lover who died in 1991, this installation and others like it are open to a much broader sphere of interpretation, offering space for experimentation, imagination, and reverie. In so doing, the imaginary may create space for the utopic.

As early as 1966 in *Utopian Body*, Michael Foucault characterized the "body without body" as a site of utopia: "Utopia is a place outside all places, but it is a place where I will have a body without body [...]. Untethered, invisible, protected—always transfigured. [...] The land of fairies, land of gnomes, of genies,



Fig. 184  
Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled"  
(*Portrait of Ross in L.A.*), 1991

Reprinted in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988–95); vol. 1: *Perceptions and Judgments 1939–1944* (1988), 5–22; and vol. 4: *Modernism with a Vengeance 1957–1969* (1995), 85–94.

- 4 Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 121. At the conference in Vienna in November 2012, Halberstam decided not to present on the topic of "queer abstraction" as announced, but did touch on the eddie gesso's installation *Attempt #2, #3, and #4 to Complicate Baby Pink and Baby Blue with Baby Yellow*, which she considers an example of queer abstraction. See, for instance, *trans\*\_homo: differenzen, alianzen, widersprüche, differences alliances, contradictions*, ed. Jannik Franzen and Justin Time (Berlin: NoNo, 2012), 77–79, which

was published in conjunction with the exhibition "Trans\*\_homo – von lesbischen Trans\*schwulen und anderen Normalitäten" at the Schwules Museum in Berlin.

- 5 For space reasons, this article cannot delve into the later critiques of Greenberg's system of appraisal, especially the feminist art criticism and theory put forward by Lucy Lippard in the 1970s and Griselda Pollock in the 1990s.
- 6 See Academy of Fine Arts Vienna website.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Renate Lorenz, "Bodies without Bodies: Queer Desire as Method," trans. Lisa Rosenblatt and Charlotte Eckler, in *Mehr(wert) queer—Queer Added (Value): Visuelle Kultur, Kunst und Gender-Politiken—Visual Culture, Art, and Gender Politics*, ed. Barbara Paul and Johanna Schaffer (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), 152–64.

magicians. [...] It is the land where you're visible when you want, invisible when you desire."<sup>9</sup> Artistic arguments repeatedly return to these and similar ideas. Likewise, the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari relativizes this conception, asserting that de-territorialization processes always cause re-territorializations and that such re-territorializations gradually come to be perceived as discursively potent territorializations. Thus in their view, de- and re-territorializations are tightly intertwined and any "new territorialization, in the form of a new fetishism or a new 'hypocrisy,'" is corrected by the territorial or despotic machine.<sup>10</sup> Models of new spaces of possibility are always temporary and partial, presenting a certain dilemma but also an opportunity.

"Pink Labor on Golden Streets" included several artists' statements that can be situated within Foucault's notion of the disembodied body and its utopian potential. Some of these works employ compelling artistic processes such as camouflage, parody, and montage, and develop a range of bodily landscapes in a spectrum between the bodied and the disembodied. In this article, I will discuss selected pieces by Julian Göthe, Toni Schmale, Viktoria Tremmel, Stefanie Seibold, and Hans Scheirl.



Fig. 185  
Julian Göthe, *The Impossible Net*, 2012

The Julian Göthe installation *The Impossible Net* was on display as a teaser in the lobby of the exhibit gallery space. The work, developed specifically for the exhibition and mounted on the wall around the door to the exhibit, was a network-like construction that referenced bodies by way of a cartography of coordinates. This reading is primarily based on familiarity with some of Göthe's other installations in which he harnesses, quantifies, and traps stereotypical, especially "gay," bodies cast in steel.<sup>11</sup> The key to unraveling this site-specific installation at the Vienna Academy is the male nude by Johann Martin Fischer,

a sculpture permanently exhibited at the gable end of the lobby, with which the coordinate net appears to be in dialogue. Fischer, who joined the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 1786 as a professor of sculpture and became its director in 1815, was known for his numerous studies of anatomy and proportion, and created sculptural models that were used for artistic instruction. He designed the "muscle man," with its lifted left arm, based on a cadaver in order to make it as anatomically precise as was then possible. Indeed, the historical "muscle man" is not caught directly by the net, whose creator is now also a professor of (object) sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Rather, the study of anatomy, formerly dogma and now out of fashion, is thwarted by the exclusion of the body from the cartographic web.



Fig. 186  
Toni Schmale, *bend over your boyfriend*, 2010

Similarly, Toni Schmale opts for a merely mediated reference to bodies in the piece *bend over your boyfriend*, which is made of concrete and measures 117 centimeters tall by 67 centimeters wide. Schmale also makes artistic use of

9 Michel Foucault, "Utopian Body," trans. Lucia Allais, in *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 229. Originally published in 1966.

10 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari,

*Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Continuum, 2004), 281. Originally published in 1972.

11 For other work, see the exhibition catalogue: Julian Göthe, *You Are Living in a World of Magic*, ed. Martin Germann (Cologne: Koenig, 2011).

parody, initiating a shift within the existing discourse. In 1985 Linda Hutcheon characterized parody as not an oppositional text, but an ancillary or alternative text.<sup>12</sup> Along these lines, Schmale's sculpture achieves parodic effect through the juxtaposition of its title and the reference to a butt plug, or anal dildo. The initial reaction to the butt plug's extreme enlargement and unusual material is alienation, but this gradually gives way to aspects of parody.



Fig. 187  
Exhibition view, Viktoria Tremmel, *Sewing Your Own Balls, Breast Supporter with Hollow Penis Attachment, Do Not Look in the Hole, The Hole*, 2011

By contrast, Viktoria Tremmel's work often manifests elements of camouflage. The artist uses ambiguity and oscillation between multiple semantic meanings to stage gender representations that resist straightforward readings. Rather, her portrayals of bodies and fragments of bodies, as well as contraptions and prosthetics for bodily use, are the artistic outcome of a malleability exacted at close range. Instead of products of nature, she presents bodies as works in progress, able to be shaped and interrogated, modified and extended, estranged, and exaggerated into parody—in short, freshly reenvisioned and reimagined at will. This perspective becomes especially apparent in pieces that address bodily orifices and novel ways to look at them, such as the object entitled *The Hole* and the accompanying pencil drawing *Do Not Look in the Hole*. The piece *Breast Supporter with Hollow Penis Attachment*, which again consists of an object accompanied by a drawing, demonstrates how to use a bodily apparatus that culminates in a sort of telescope. The inside of the "hollow" tubular contraption remains hidden, as does the image that the user might see through it; once again, our imagination is called upon.

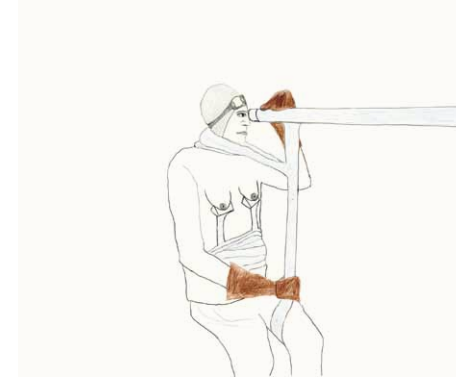


Fig. 188  
Viktoria Tremmel, *Breast Supporter with Hollow Penis Attachment* (detail), 2011

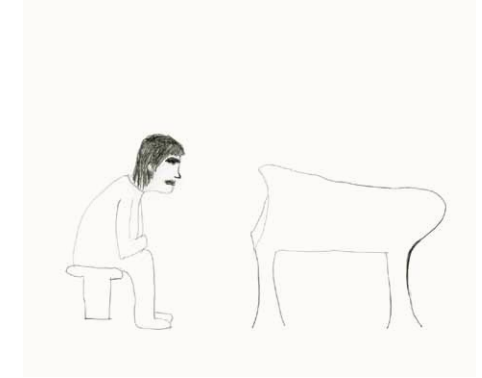


Fig. 189  
Viktoria Tremmel, *Do Not Look in the Hole* (detail), 2011

In Stefanie Seibold's sculpture *Untitled (Corner Piece)* (2012), the artist works with the geometrical shape known as the deltoid or kite. This shape, especially when formed with both thumbs and index fingers, has been adopted by feminists and lesbians as the "vagina symbol" since the 1970s. Seibold's work melds the sculpture with the viewers' ever-shifting truncated reflections. These first appear in camouflaged form before erupting into constantly rearranging, faceted images and image landscapes until the bodily landscape becomes predominantly parodic.

The installation *Dandy's Gut—Bowels of a Film* by Hans Scheirl (2012), conceived specifically for the exhibition and presented at its center, can be characterized as a monstrous queer body landscape. The intestines, the largest human organ, are withdrawn from the body cavity and drastically expanded to nearly colossal proportions. Visitors can peer into several openings within this artistic—associatively phallic—rendering of an intestinal passage, which proceeds along level, winding, and vertical routes. Inside, it contains a comprehensive montage comprising many photos, props, storyboard clippings, film sequences, an audio sample of answering-machine messages, and much more—all originating from or connected to Scheirl's 1998 film *Dandy Dust* and its production process. The film, characterized as "a channel-surfing escapade in the guise of a 'sci-fi/horror/splatter comedy, a genre-bending, transgender/cyberlesbian/horror comic strip,'" and categorized as an example of

<sup>12</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 32, 37.

<sup>13</sup> *Dandy Dust* (1998), 94 min. See Film.at, [http://www.film.at/dandy\\_dust/](http://www.film.at/dandy_dust/).



Fig. 190  
Stefanie Seibold, *Untitled (Corner Piece)*, 2012

queer cinema,<sup>14</sup> provoked abundant commentary. Claudia Reiche, in analyzing sexuality of "television static" in Hans Scheirl's *Dandy Dust* asserts an "oscillating gender" and a "trans-media gesture" that, in conceptual terms, "always triggers an oscillation of doubt, indeed disorientation and interpretational precariousness."<sup>15</sup> To cite another viewpoint on *Dandy Dust*, Eliza Steinbock argues that through the rejection of definitive, self-contained messages, the body in the film is shown to be "always in the process of composition." Following the film's example, Steinbock calls for transgender studies to "use affective operations to mobilize curiosity' in ways that destabilize the normalized, identity-based understanding of transgender as a medical transition, a one-way trip, arriving at a logical conclusion."<sup>16</sup> Similar to the film *Dandy Dust*, Scheirl's installation *Dandy's Gut* embodies, almost literally, a Foucauldian utopian space. Yet this space is not disembodied in Scheirl's case. It is an imagined, "always transfigured," many-faceted trans\*/queer body landscape, one that elicits in its audience innumerable (gender nonnormative) effects and flights of imagination.

Translated from the German by Jake Schneider



Fig. 191  
Installation view, Hans Scheirl,  
*Dandy's Gut—Bowels of a Film*,  
2012



Fig. 192  
Installation view, Hans Scheirl,  
*Dandy's Gut—Bowels of a Film*  
(detail), 2012

14 Alice A. Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 224ff.

15 Claudia Reiche, "Transmediale Netze: Zur Geschlechtlichkeit des 'Fernseherschens' in Hans Scheirl's *Dandy Dust*," in *Digitaler Feminismus* (Bremen: Thealit Frauen. Kultur.Labor, 2006), 388.

16 Eliza Steinbock, "Groping Theory: Haptic Cinema and Trans-Curiosity in Hans Scheirl's *Dandy Dust*," in *The Transgender Studies Reader: Part 2*, ed. Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), 101.

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# Display, Performance

Johannes Porsch

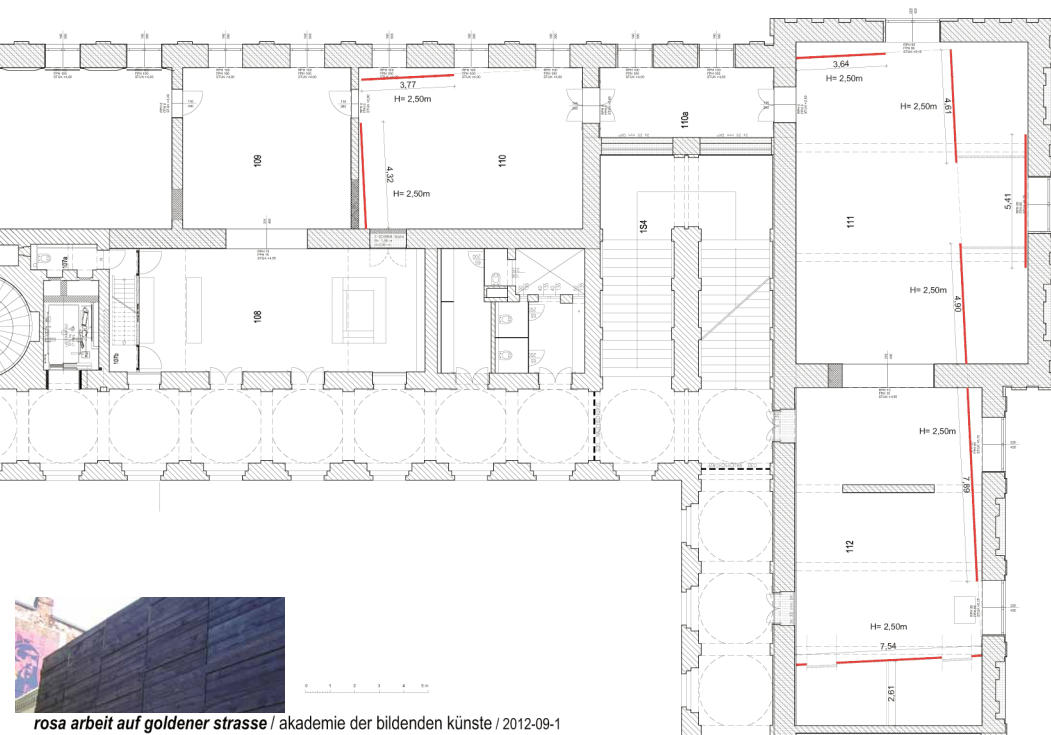


Fig. 193  
Robert Vörös, blueprint of the exhibition's interior design, 2012

In the following article, Johannes Porsch offers food for thought about Robert Vörös's interior design for the exhibition "Pink Labor on Golden Streets," contextualizing a description of the space among unresolved questions and contradictions. The result is a textual performance in its own right.

Porsch's text, with all its discrepancies and loose threads, references the diversity of circumstances and symbolic resonances evoked by the Vörös's design for the exhibition space. At the same time, it speaks to the concentric historical layers that the text peels away, source by cited source, picking apart their conflicting internal and external relationships, their positions, debates, discourses, subjectivities, institutions, networks, affiliations, social protocols, flights of fancy, and projections.

If licking someone's leather boots turns you (and him) on, neither of you is making a statement subversive of macho masculinity. Parody is an erotic turn-off, and all gay men know this. Much campy talk is parodistic, and while that may be fun at a dinner party, if you're out to make someone you turn off the camp.<sup>1</sup>

We here are ... not completely outside of the economic circuits ... So, what we do need to do is to speak about how art potentially can challenge some of these seemingly omnipotent forms of economics and power. And that is what I want to explore today, by making a track through certain forms of queer art making and queer space making to see what strategies and tactics are available within those projects for thinking about an alternative way of being. But I also want to notice that alternatives pop up all over the place in the cultures that we live in. So if we are only looking into the subcultures or if we are only looking into the avant-garde's alternative realm—we can miss things that appear in the mainstream.<sup>2</sup>

Lyrics to the chorus of "No Church in the Wild" by Jay-Z and Kanye West, featuring Frank Ocean:

Human beings in a mob. What's a mob to a king? What's a king to a god?  
What's a god to a non-believer? Who don't believe in anything? We make  
it out alive. All right, all right. No church in the wild.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," in "AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism," ed. Douglas Crimp, special issue, *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 197–222, 208.
- 2 Jack Halberstam, "'No Church in the Wild': Anarchy Now," lecture at the conference

- 3 "Dildo Anus Power: Queer Abstraction" at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, November 22–24, 2012. See also this volume, 208–18.
- 3 Kanye West and Jay-Z, "No Church in the Wild," *Watch the Throne*, Roc-A-Fella Records, Roc Nation, Def Jam Recordings, 2011.

For me this is a very provocative phrase, I don't know exactly what they mean by it, I am not even sure what I mean by it, but I do think it asks us to think about institutions, their logics and what lies outside of them. At what point do we not care about the king (etc.), what happens when we do not care about the king (etc.)—and in those moments there is something opening up, we could call provisionally 'the wild.' [...] The anarchist does politics. Why? To be in a political space, to be in a political space of your own making with other people [...] and this might include doing art projects, common efforts like in an event like this. The protest that's going on in Vienna today [...] but in any way: it is about cooperating, cooperating not necessarily with people you know, but cooperating potentially with strangers. [...] Let's think about it along these lines: being together with other people in public spaces with other people to create something, I call 'wild.' How to make an intervention in the everyday? Not making an intervention by having an art show, in a museum, and having you come in, pay money, look at the art, be pleased by it, and go home [...] but bringing art as a protest, as an art event into public ground, rather than safely contained within a museum [...] I think we have a very twentieth-century modernist understanding of the institution. We think the institution is a building, a place, and you go there and you are doing what you are supposed to do in that building. That is really not how institutions work any longer: institutionalized logics of power work discursively. So, we know that. Given that, there are actually multiple places and sites of disruption, and they can be inside or outside of this discursive institutional space. Any one of us is trained to do something, so you can do that inside of an institution but there is nothing to stop you doing it outside [...] It's about taking what you do and making sure that part of what you do with it is outside of not simply the building, but also of some of the discursive structures, in terms of everything has its price for example, or everything wants to uphold the institutional values. In terms of the art market lots of people are making art that can be in a museum but really is not for sale, it would be difficult for you to buy some of the installation pieces that are shown.<sup>4</sup>

If we assume that the conditions of an advanced spectacle society—as the conditions of production for a visual industry—hold sway in the art world as well, then the schema of internal and external relationships, implied by concepts such as autonomy and heteronomy, falls apart. "Art did not first become another production factor upon the advent of post-Fordism and its discovery of art's productive momentum in creative industries. In fact, it was always involved in production, at least in the form of isolated luxury items that industrialists themselves could use as cultural capital in order to set themselves apart from their own manufacturing, or as the concept of the quasi-religious appeal and engine of speculation."<sup>5</sup> In drawing an internal division within aesthetic practice while asserting art's autonomy, the model of the aesthetic object reveals the internal contradictions within both societal conditions and the dominant logics of production; the process of sublating these dialectical opposites encourages

the development of critical faculties. In this conception—a substance-based definition of art—art is allotted "the specific quality of embodied fulfillment and arrival ... that overcomes the divisions constantly produced by modern-day knowledge, production, and society. Therein lies, without a doubt, the ideological aspect of the notion of autonomy."<sup>6</sup> Although autonomy generates temporary alternatives, "spaces free of societal frameworks of utility,"<sup>7</sup> these never represent "empty spaces for neutral use";<sup>8</sup> rather, they are already freighted with "ideological codes and connotations."<sup>9</sup> As such, critical applications of this are at risk of reproducing "the same exact ideological elements."<sup>10</sup> That means addressing "the rifts within the field,"<sup>11</sup> "the relationship between autonomy and heteronomy as well as that between professional specialization and claims to totality."<sup>12</sup> This form of critique "exists as a realization of the division engendered by the institution of art as we know it today: the division of the realm of culture into specialized and commonplace production and consumption without which fairly autonomous art would not exist; the division of the institution of art into the subjects and objects of artistic inquiry as engendered by the historical avant-gardes' self-critique."<sup>13</sup> This form of critique "embodies this division that we too have internalized and embraces its irreducibility by rejecting projections—the "outside world," the "everyday"—and idealizations—myths of artistic radicality and creative omnipotence."<sup>14</sup> This form of critique draws upon the image of a "dual rift"<sup>15</sup> within art itself—of being "simultaneously specific and totalitarian, autonomous and heteronomous"<sup>16</sup>—and concludes that critique is "performed site-specifically and reflectively"<sup>17</sup> when it pays attention to the power formations and forms of production inherent to its "direct field of operation."<sup>18</sup> This is the locus of its political practice and its "practical principle."<sup>19</sup> And yet such a political practice cannot be engaged in without complications, for its practical principle aims to change relationships, which means "intervening in the realization of those relationships."<sup>20</sup> Yet intervening in the "enactment of relationships"<sup>21</sup> implies participation and, consequently, complicity. Thus, the interwovenness of critical intervention and complicity, an ambivalent mode of critique, could unwind the advancing logic of a realm constituted by a dual rift. Societal relations are not "out there"<sup>22</sup> in

4 Jack Halberstam, "No Church in the Wild," lecture; see also pp. 208–18 in this volume.

5 Helmut Draxler, *Gefährliche Substanzen: Zum Verhältnis von Kritik und Kunst* (Berlin: b\_books, 2007), 59–65, 68.

6 *Ibid.*, 63.

7 *Ibid.*, 64.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 Andrea Fraser, "Was ist Institutionskritik?," in *Texte zur Kunst*, vol. 59 *Institutionskritik* (September 2005): 86–89, 88.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Helmut Draxler, *Gefährliche Substanzen*, 65.

17 Andrea Fraser, "Was ist Institutionskritik?," 88.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*, 89.

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*



the “places and situations”<sup>23</sup> of everyday life, nor is a societal realm exclusively “institutionalized in organizations and substantiated in objects. More than anything, it is internalized, embodied, and enacted in what Pierre Bourdieu called habitus: the skills, dispositions, forms of perception and practice, interests, and ambitions that define both our membership in the field and our ability to have an impact within it. We are the institution of art: the subject of our critiques, our attacks, is also always within ourselves.”<sup>24</sup>

“But just as art cannot exist outside the field of art, we cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc. And what we do outside the field, to the extent that it remains outside, can have no effect within it. So if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a totally administered society, or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can’t get outside of ourselves.”<sup>25</sup>



Fig. 194  
Robert Vörös, 2012

In writing about the display of the exhibition “Pink Labor on Golden Streets,” I am referencing materials—blueprints and a photograph—used to prepare the project. These materials have discursive value insofar as they extend the exhibition’s physical space and the intervention within that space by bringing signs into circulation, chains of signs that can be impactful as repertoires of knowledge and power formations, disseminating institutional values by way of the subjects that act through these signs, both mediating and mediated by them. The subjective aspect of this configuration is heightened as I return to impressions that I gathered from visiting the exhibition on multiple occasions. I compare these memories with the photographic documentation prepared by the exhibition, its institutional representation. I view a blueprint, which I believe is drawn to 1:50 scale. Blueprints at that scale are used to arrange interior furnishings, for instance. The blueprint depicts a detail of an historical building, specifically the northwestern corner of the second story of the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, where the exhibit exhibition space is “located.”\* Inscribed in this blueprint, whose black-and-white lines are suffused with the building’s historicity, are thick red strokes. These absorb the preexisting space’s geometry and respond to it, forming a right angle that is rotated approximately five degrees counterclockwise from the outline of the room. This creates a space at odds with the previous paradigm, enabling observation: a space that cannot be entered, a buffer zone, a remainder that cannot be dissolved or occupied, which feeds back into the visitor’s perception of the surroundings

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique” in *Institutional Critique and After*, (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2006): 123–34, 130–31.

\* Originally part of the Academy of Fine Arts painting gallery, the space was disassociated from the historical and institutional context of the painting gallery and the Institute for Fine Arts in 2009 on the initiative of the rector at the time, who repurposed the space as a gallery for exhibition projects that focus on dialogues between the traditional collection and the contemporary production of students and staff, on artistic research and on showcasing the graphics collection. (See *The New Exhibition Space of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna*, image folder, Vienna, 2010) One idea in this context was for students to work together there with international curators—within the institution—to develop advanced exhibition practices and explore their discursive nature

(Cf. the exhibition “Attitude and Canon,” September 23–October 24, 2010). With the arrival of a new rectorate in 2011, the exhibition programming concept was changed so that this intra-institutional networking effort, with its orientation toward the art world, was no longer central part of the programming concept of the exhibition space. The exhibition program today is generated through a call for project proposals; a commission selects the proposals. I consider this brief story worth noting, as it shows how this exhibition space is pervaded by multiple inherent disconnects, discursive attributions, affiliations with operational logics, and their respective politics and economies: in short, concepts of value. To put it another way, the story of the various interests at play in the “gallery” as an entity tacitly reflects institutionality, both in its spatial conditions and its discursive scope, along with the resulting demarcations, internal and external relationships, and participation in tactics of inclusion and exclusion.

and comments upon it. This also creates intermediate spaces that, by opening additional interiors, offer a distancing from the surroundings and that also, at least in the illustration of the blueprint, inversely articulate surroundings cut out from the existing rooms. The architectural gesture of inserting a figure traced by an enclosure (that is, repeating a premise), and of affirmatively deviating from that preexisting structure's dominant order, establishes a dual relationship of interior and exterior that will never completely come inside or go outside, nor remain solely on one side or the other: "But anything happening well the inside and the outside are not the inside and the outside inside. Let me do that again. The inside and the outside, the outside which is outside and the inside which is inside are not when they are inside and outside are not inside in short they are not existing, that is inside, and when the outside is entirely outside that is is not at all inside then it is not at all inside and so it is not existing."<sup>26</sup>

To be sure, the architectural setting is in response to a curatorial requirement that has become standard at many contemporary exhibitions: the task of accommodating both the "white cube" and "black box" exhibition formats, of reconciling a brightly lit exhibition room with a dim screening room. Vörös, who developed the exhibition's architecture, solved this practical requirement, both in terms of the content on display and its structural theme, using spatial translation to create a sense of ambiguity. This play with ambiguity comes from the spatial design's materiality and significance, although it carries complicating connotations. A photograph is attached to the bottom-left corner of the blueprint as reference. The photograph's framing trims away the surroundings and thus decontextualizes the image's scenario; the selection of a fragment steers the viewer, through example and thematic association, on a narrow path toward meaning and legibility. The elements of the image excerpted in the clipping comment on one another, implying a narrative, a mood, on the sly. The image depicts a street scene. A snapshot, taken from the vantage point of a visitor looking upward, displays a partition constructed of boards painted blackish-brown. Is this some form of makeshift, interim solution? A temporary structure erected to conceal a rundown facade or scaffolding? Or an unstable architectural intervention within the cityscape, appropriating space, intervening in the urban realm to propose an alternative public space? The surface's matter-of-fact utility is semantically underpinned by two details in the upper- and lower-left corners of the background: First, the ornamental cornice on the adjacent facade gives the partitioned area a certain rugged sensibility. Second, a work of almost cliché graffiti painted over a pink background on the windowless wall behind it—a likeness, rendered in high-contrast bright and shadowy tones, of a bleakly combative-looking male figure—overlays this "rugged sensibility" with a radical flavor. Yet, upon inspecting the clipping more closely, one's fleeting first impression of the scene is called into question: what initially seems wild and raw appears progressively smoother and more

polished, even distinctively placed. The improvisatory touch—as I would now like to point out—could very well be a calculated effect on the part of the designer. Details such as the slight deviations in the boards' placement, the irregularly modulated relief animated by the uniform grid pattern caused by the boards' uniform sizes, the sublimely unfinished effect of the boards' brownish-black paint, and the surface jutting out from the building are reminiscent more of the trademark effects of contemporary "lifestyle architecture" (albeit conceptually fortified by a taste for the improvisatory, as in patchwork and bricolage) than of the pragmatic aesthetic of a precariously appropriated urban habitat (my first association or projection). Might the "unfinished" quality suggested by the design be the vocabulary of some branding or marketing concept symbolizing "radical chic"? Which street is this in the first place? What dynamics of urban politics play out on this street? When I entered the exhibition during the opening, I was as yet unfamiliar with the scenario described above. It is no surprise, then, that at the time I was overtaken by an entirely different chain of associations that took a different route but, in roundabout fashion, reached a similar destination. Through the scale and materiality of the added walls, the interior display created a sense of distance from the gallery's architecture, withdrawing from it in order to reoccupy and co-opt it all at once. The consistent 2.5-meter height of the added vertical elements—i.e., the walls—bisected the lofty, historicist room with an extra pseudo-story. By running along the exterior walls, these additional structures underscored the "string of beads" spatial logic of the traditional gallery yet simultaneously subverted it by ignoring the exterior walls' rhythmic fenestration, partly concealing or undoing it by means of a homogenizing logic of their own. Subsuming the room, this horizontal fragmentation echoed the horizontal treatment of boards that combined to form coherent wall surfaces upon which drawings, photographs, and paintings could be hung, but whose laconic conspicuousness became an exterior encroaching upon the internal workings of the pieces displayed on them. In a reenactment of alienation as a spatial operation, I found myself transported in situ to another place. In addition, this transfer was brought home semantically—in material language—by the dark, almost black, paint of the smoothed boards. The pairing of "wood" together with "black," or minimalistic form and reduced, assembly-line processing together with the spatial setting not only sparked a reference to Tom Burr's "site-specific," gay-subcultural installations, but also—through the physical directness, even banality, of that reference—sparked notions of transgressive projections into the heterotopias of the bathhouse, the sex bar, and the darkroom. "I fall deeper and deeper the further I go, it gets sweeter and sweeter the more that I know."<sup>27</sup> ... Thus the

26 Gertrude Stein, *Narration: Four Lectures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 39.

27 Madonna, "Deeper and Deeper," *Erotica*, Maverick, 1992.

cross-fading of the white cube and the black box not only satisfied the inherent functional requirements of a multimedia exhibition and enacted a hybrid performance to parallel the art's content, but also—at least in my modality of experience, spontaneous memories triggered by material signifiers—assembled structures of desire and the consequent social interactions of two societal spaces that could almost be considered polar opposites—the art gallery and the sex club—in the conflictual and therefore destabilizing dynamic of a non-identitarian depiction ... Orifices, closures ... simultaneously insulated and impenetrable ... upon whose entry one feels excluded ... Rites entailing a certain admission, acknowledgement, the enactment of certain gestures ... “To put the matter polemically and even rather brutally, we have been telling a few lies—lies whose strategic value I fully understand, but which the AIDS crisis has rendered obsolescent. I do not, for example, find it helpful to suggest, as Dennis Altman has suggested, that gay baths created ‘a sort of Whitmanesque democracy, a desire to know and trust other men in a type of brotherhood far removed from the male bondage of rank, hierarchy, and competition that characterize much of the outside world.’ Anyone who has ever spent one night in a gay bathhouse knows that it is (or was) one of the most ruthlessly ranked, hierarchized, and competitive environments imaginable. Your looks, muscles, hair distribution, size of cock, and shape of ass determined exactly how happy you were going to be during those few hours, and rejection, generally accompanied by two or three words at most, could be swift and brutal, with none of the civilizing hypocrisies with which we get rid of undesirables in the outside world.”<sup>28</sup>

Translated from the German by Jake Schneider

#### Literature

Altman, Dennis. *The Homosexualisation of America: The Americanisation of the Homosexual*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Bersani, Leo. “Is the Rectum a Grave?” “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism,” edited by Douglas Crimp. Special issue, *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 197–222.

Draxler, Helmut. *Gefährliche Substanzen: Zum Verhältnis von Kritik und Kunst*. Berlin: b\_books, 2007.

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—. “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique.” In *Institutional Critique and After*, edited by John C. Welchman, 123–34. Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2006.

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<sup>28</sup> Altman, cited in Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?,” 197–222, 206. See also: Dennis Altman, *The Homosexualisation of America: The Americanisation of the Homosexual* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 79–80.



Fig. 195  
Julian Göthe, installation view



Fig. 196  
Ulrike Müller,  
Viktoria Tremmel,  
and David Zeller,  
exhibition view



Fig. 197  
Viktoria Tremmel, David Zeller, and  
Katrina Daschner, exhibition view

## Exhibition: "Rosa Arbeit auf goldener Straße" ("Pink Labor on Golden Streets")

Dates: November 10, 2012–February 3, 2013

Place: xhibit, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

Artists: Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz,  
Kaucyila Brooke, Katrina Daschner, Anna  
Daučíková, Vaginal Davis/Damiana Garcia,  
Justine Frank, Julian Göthe, Nilbar Güreş,  
Stefan Hayn, Katarzyna Kozyra, Mateusz  
Lesman, Ulrike Müller, Rosa von Praunheim,  
Karol Radziszewski, Rooe Rosen, Hans  
Scheirl, Toni Schmale, Stefanie Seibold,  
Tejal Shah, Viktoria Tremmel, David Zeller

Curators: Christiane Erharter,  
Dietmar Schwärzler

Performance at the opening (November 9, 2012):  
Jakob Lena Knebl with Peter Kozek and  
Andreas Riegler

Exhibition design: Robert Vörös

Exhibition management: Melanie Ohnemus

PR: Claudia Kaiser, Linda Klösel, Sabine Riegler

Fig. 198  
Katrina Daschner, Viktoria Tremmel, and  
Rosa von Praunheim, exhibition view





Fig. 199  
Karol Radziszewski  
and Justine Frank,  
exhibition view

Fig. 200  
Justine Frank and  
Hans Scheirl,  
exhibition view



## Works in the exhibition

### Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz

*Toxic*, video installation, 2012. Super 16 mm on HD, 13 min.; performers Werner Hirsch and Ginger Brooks Takahashi; vitrine with photographs; fanzine. Courtesy of the artists and Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam.

### Kaucyila Brooke

*Wakeenah Falls Upper, Horsetail Fall, Wakeenah Falls Lower*, 2012. Three photos from the series "The Last Time I Saw You," C-prints, 102.7 × 79.8 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Andreas Huber, Vienna.

### Katrina Daschner

*Bertha, Lichtstrahl, Silber Glitter, Projektion, Las Vegas, Position Drehbühne*, 2012. Embroidery on canvas, each 44 × 44 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Krobath, Vienna.

### Anna Daučíková

*Search in Clouded Terrain: 3 Situations*, 2012. Video, 9 min. Courtesy of the artist.

### Justine Frank

*The Stained Portfolio No. 56 (The Hebrew Alphabet)*, 1927. Gouache on paper, each 33 × 38 cm. *The Sisters Frankomas*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 90 × 120 cm. *Frank's Guild*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm. Courtesy of Roe Rosen and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv.

### Damiana Garcia/Vaginal Davis

*Vaginal Davis in Bed with Damiana Garcia*, 2010. Video, 4 min. Courtesy of Damiana Garcia.



Fig. 201  
Anna Daučíková and Justine Frank,  
exhibition view



Fig. 202  
Mateusz Lesman,  
exhibition view

### Julian Göthe

*The Impossible Net*, 2012. In-situ installation: ropes (dimensions variable), 655 × 452 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne.

### Nilbar Güreş

*Llorando*, 2012. Two-parts, stickers, paper, pigment, thread, and pen on fabric, 90 × 108 cm and 90 × 57 cm. Courtesy of the Collection Alexia Stuefer, Vienna.

### Stefan Hayn

*Piss*, 1989/90. Super 8 on DVD, 20 min. *Queeny film*, 1989/90. Super 8 blown up to 16 mm, 3 min. Courtesy of the artist and Arsenal – Institut für Film und Videokunst e.V., Berlin.

### Katarzyna Kozyra

*Il Castrato*, 2006. Video performance, 15 min. Courtesy of the artist and Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw. The performance *Il Castrato* was coproduced by the Gender Bender Gay Culture Festival.

### Mateusz Lesman

*Skizzenbuch III*, exhibition copy, 2009–11. *Skizzenbuch IV*, 2011–12. Courtesy of the artist.

### Ulrike Müller

*Fever 103*, 2010. Four works of the series, vitreous enamel on steel, 39.4 × 30.5 cm. *Blue* (with a photograph by Sherif Sonbol), 2011. Inkjet and papier collé on paper, 36 × 28 cm. Courtesy of the artist and private collection.



Fig. 203  
Tejal Shah,  
exhibition view



Fig. 204  
Hans Scheirl, Stefanie Seibold,  
Nilbar Güreş, Kauçyila Brooke,  
exhibition view



Fig. 205  
Kauçyila Brooke, Ulrike Müller,  
Hans Scheirl, Anna Daučíková,  
Justine Frank, and Vaginal Davis/  
Damiana Garcia, exhibition view

#### Rosa von Praunheim

*Rosa Arbeiter auf goldener Straße, II*, 1968.  
16 mm on DVD, 11 min. Courtesy of the artist.

#### Karol Radziszewski

*Kisieland*, 2009–ongoing. Inkjet print  
on paper, dimensions variable,  
photographs. *DIK Fagazine Before '89*,  
no. 8, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

#### Roe Rosen

*Two Women and a Man*, 2005. Video,  
16 min. Courtesy of the artist and Rosenfeld  
Gallery, Tel Aviv.

#### Hans Scheirl

*Dandy's Gut—Bowels of a Film*, 2012.  
Installation with props and storyboards  
of the film *Dandy Dust* (1998);  
answering machine recordings; mixed-  
media. Courtesy of the artist and  
Margarete Neumann, Andrea B. Braidt,  
private collection of Maren Gröning,  
and Sabine Schwaighofer.



Fig. 206  
Stefan Hayn and David  
Zeller, exhibition view

#### Appendix



Fig. 207  
Toni Schmale and Pauline Boudry/  
Renate Lorenz, exhibition view



Figs. 208–209  
Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz,  
exhibition view

#### Toni Schmale

*bend over your boyfriend*, 2010. Object,  
concrete, 117 × 63 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

#### Stefanie Seibold

*Untitled (Corner Piece)*, 2012. Object,  
carton, polystyrene plate, 125 × 47 × 37 cm.  
Courtesy of the artist.

#### Tejal Shah

*I AM*, 2010. Digital slideshow, dimensions  
variable. Courtesy of the artist and  
Project 88 Gallery, Bombay.

#### Viktoria Tremmel

*Sewing Your Own Balls*, 2011. Object  
made of wood and metal; drawing, pencil  
on paper, 30 × 30 cm. *The Hole*, 2011.  
Object, two part, wood, metal, modeling  
clay, table; drawing. *Do Not Look in the  
Hole*, 2011. Drawing, pencil on paper,  
21 × 30 cm. *Breast Supporter with Hollow  
Penis Attachment*, 2011. Object, mixed-media;  
drawing, pencil on paper, 30 × 42 cm.  
Courtesy of the artist and Hamish Morrison  
Galerie, Berlin.



Fig. 210  
Katarzyna Kozyra, exhibition view

#### David Zeller

*Studie zu Tropen*, 2011. Oil on primed  
hardboard, 50 × 70 cm. *Tropen #1*, 2012.  
Oil on carton, 59 × 78.5 cm. Courtesy  
of the artist.

Conference:  
 "Dildo Anus Macht: Queere  
 Abstraktion" ("Dildo Anus  
 Power: Queer Abstraktion")

Dates: November 22–24, 2012

Place: Academy of Fine Arts Vienna,  
 auditorium

Concept, idea: Jakob Lena Knebl,  
 Hans Scheirl, Ruby Sircar, Tim Stüttgen,  
 Sophia Süßmilch

Project team: Hans Scheirl, Ruby Sircar

Interior design: Students of Contextual  
 Painting, Institute of Fine Arts

## Program

### November 22

**Place: Academy of Fine Arts Vienna**

- Lectures by Andrea B. Braidt,  
 Diedrich Diedrichsen, Johnny Golding/  
 de Philo, Hans Scheirl, Tim Stüttgen
- Guided exhibition tour

**Place: brut im Konzerthaus,  
 theater, Vienna**

- Performance program *Swans Reflecting  
 Elephants* by Stefanie Seibold  
 in cooperation with TJC and guests
- Chubby Chubby Boom Boom Club by  
 Hyo Lee

### November 23

**Place: Academy of Fine Arts Vienna**

- Lectures by Antke Engel, Marina Gržinic,  
 Hanna Hacker, Maria Llopis, Gin Müller,  
 Hans Scheirl, Eliza Steinbock, Tim Stüttgen

**Place: Top Kino, cinema, Vienna**

- Screening of *Dandy Dust* (Hans A. Scheirl,  
 1998)
- Short film program curated by Tim  
 Stüttgen: *J* (Arantxa Martinez, 2007),  
*Mi sexualidad es una creación artística*  
 (Lucy Sombra, 2011), *The Adventures  
 of Hans and Del* (Hans Scheirl, Del La Grace,  
 Volcano, 1996), *Here Is My Honey*  
 (Evi Rüsseler, 2010/12), *Arrêt la machine!*  
*Postpone Postporn Happiness* (Ulrike Feser,  
 Nicolas Siepen, Tim Stüttgen, 2011),  
*CONTAGIOUS!* (Pauline Boudry/Renate  
 Lorenz, 2010), *The Bagwell in Me*  
 (Ann Liv Young, 2009)

### November 24

**Place: Academy of Fine Arts Vienna**

- Lectures by Jack Halberstam,  
 Renate Lorenz, Ivana Marjanović,  
 Tejal Shah
- Presentations by Bernadette Anzengruber,  
 Mareike Bernien, Florian Buder, Diva Cup,  
 Karin Ferrari, Moira Hille, Ana Hoffner,  
 Liesa Kovacs, Hyo Lee, Nina Prader, Nick  
 Prokesch, Nicole Sabella, Siriluck Sinarak,  
 Janine Schneider, Kerstin Schroedinger,  
 Dorothea Zeyringer

**Place: Marea Alta, club, Vienna**

- Performance and party night *Mutti* by  
 Andreas Riegler

**QQ:****Queer and Questioning  
Dietmar Schwärzler**

Fig. 1  
Johannes Schweiger, *Offijism Chair – Missoni*, 2015. Terry cloth, 100 percent cotton, metal, plastic. Design: Flammati Painterly Stripe / Cento Settanta. *Offijism Chair – Pitpull Polished Leather*, 2015. Terry cloth, 100 percent cotton, blackened goat skin, metal, plastic. *Partitions / Cabin Walls / Glory Slits*, 2015. Porcelain, aged pin wood panels, Swiss navy silicone lubricant. Installation view, weloveschool.org © Johannes Schweiger. Courtesy of the artist.

**Queer in Trans-Formation****A Conversation between Jakob Lena Knebl,  
Hans Scheirl, and Ruby Sircar**

Fig. 2  
Roberta Lima, *Setting Foot: deconstructing the sapatão (Self-portrait 01)*, 2013. Black-and-white silver gelatin (on Baryt paper), 125 × 165 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

**Appearing Differently:****Abstraction's Transgender and  
Queer Capacities****David J. Getsy in Conversation with  
William J. Simmons**

Fig. 3  
Gordon Hall, *SET (V)*, 2014. Acrylic and pigmented joint compound on wood, 47.6 × 50.8 × 3.2 cm. © Gordon Hall. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 4  
Jonah Groeneboer, *bent hip*, 2014. Thread and brass bars, 213.4 × 53.3 × 76.2 cm. © Jonah Groeneboer. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 5  
Prem Sahib, *You & Me Both II*, 2013. Steel and paint, 10 × 30 × 10 cm. Edition of 3. © Prem Sahib. Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, Rome.

Fig. 6  
Heather Cassils, *The Resilience of the 20%*, 2013. Poured black concrete cast of clay bash. 122 × 91.5 × 61 cm. © Heather Cassils. Courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Fig. 7  
Jimmy DeSana, *Instant Camera*, 1980. Vintage C-print, 56.8 × 76.5 cm. Courtesy of the Estate of Jimmy DeSana and Salon 94, New York.

**Eyelips:****On Tejal Shah's *Between the Waves*  
Nanna Heidenreich**

Figs. 8–13  
Tejal Shah, *Between the Waves*, 2012. Main film, channel I, color, b/w, surround sound 5.1, 26:20 min, film still. © Tejal Shah. Courtesy of the artist.

**To Think with the Whole Body****Katia Sepúlveda in Conversation with Nina  
Hoechtli**

Figs. 14–19  
Katia Sepúlveda, *Untitled*, 2005. Drawing on paper, 20 × 25 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Figs. 20–22  
Katia Sepúlveda, *Lx jotx nostrx*, 2014. Street art in Tijuana México. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Melina Mao.

Figs. 23–26  
Katia Sepúlveda, *Pascha Revolution!*, 2012. Performances in Cologne, Germany. Documentation by Auriel. Courtesy of the artist.

Figs. 27–29  
Katia Sepúlveda, *Postsexual*, 2007. Video still. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 30  
Katia Sepúlveda, *Wish*, 2010/11. Video still. Courtesy of the artist.

**Notes on the Category of "Gay Film" [1995]****Stefan Hayn**

Figs. 31–139  
Stefan Hayn, *Pissen/Piss*, 1989/90. Filmstills, Super 8 blown up to 16 mm, optical sound, 12 min. Courtesy of Stefan Hayn.

**The Politics of Queer Archives****Karol Radziszewski**

Fig. 140  
Ryszard Kisiel, *Filo*, 1989. Magazine mock-up. Courtesy of Karol Radziszewski.

Fig. 141  
Karol Radziszewski, vitrine (*Filo*, 1986–90, and *DIK Fagazine*, 2005–14, magazines). Photo: Wojciech Olech. Courtesy of the artist and CoCA in Torun.

Fig. 142  
Karol Radziszewski, *Kisieland*, 2012. Film still. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 143  
Karol Radziszewski, *Kisieland*, 2014. Installation view (from left to right): *AIDS Wallpaper*, digital print, 2012, dimensions variable; *AIDS (Cadmium red)*, 2013, acrylic



on canvas, 100 × 100 cm; *AIDS (Cobalt Blue)*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 200 × 200 cm; vitrine (*DIK Fagazine*, 2005–14, and *Filo*, 1986–90, magazines); Ryszard Kisiel, photographs, digital print, 1985–86, each 100 × 66 cm; *Kisieland*, film, 2012, 30 min. Centre of Contemporary Art “Znaki Czasu” in Torun. Photo: Wojciech Olech. Courtesy of the artist and CoCA.

#### A Chart of Universal History

##### Kaucyila Brooke and Vaginal Davis in Conversation with Daniel Hendrickson

Fig. 144  
Kaucyila Brooke with Gala Porras-Kim, graphic rendering of *Unofficial Seal*, 2012. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 145  
Vaginal Davis, *Denham Fouts – The Best Kept Boy in the World*, 2015. Clay, Wet & Wild solid gold nail polish, hydrogen peroxide, glycerine, AquaNet hair spray, and witch hazel, 17 × 10.5 × 3 cm. Courtesy of the Rod Bianco Gallery, Oslo.

#### Disfiguration:

##### On Violence and Negativity in Queer Art

##### Eliza Steinbock

Figs. 146–147  
eddie gesso, detail from “Attempt to Complicate” series, 2007. Paint on canvas and wood panels, 33 × 33 cm. © eddie gesso. Courtesy of the artist.

Figs. 148–149  
Heather Cassils, *Becoming an Image*, 2012. C-print, 55.8 × 76.2 cm. © Heather Cassils. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 150  
Heather Cassils, *Advertisement: Homage to Benglis*, from the series “Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture,” 2011. C-print, 76.2 × 101.6 cm. © Heather Cassils. Photograph by the artist and Robin Black. Courtesy of the artist.

Figs. 151–153  
Josephine Krieg, *Gender Violence*, Stockholm Pride, 2004. Digital photograph. © Del LaGrace Volcano. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 154  
Del LaGrace Volcano, *Herm Back*, 2011. Digital C-print, 40.6 × 50.8 cm. © Del LaGrace Volcano. Courtesy of the artist.

#### Editors and Fugitives

##### Ulrike Müller in Conversation with Harmony Hammond

Fig. 155  
Harmony Hammond, *Rib*, 2013. Oil and mixed-media on canvas, 268.61 × 178.44 cm. © HarmonyHammond/Licensed by VAGA, New York. Courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York. Photo: John Vokoun.

Fig. 156  
Harmony Hammond, *Rib* (detail), 2013. Oil and mixed-media on canvas, 268.61 × 178.44 cm. © HarmonyHammond/Licensed by VAGA, New York. Courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York. Photo: John Vokoun.

Fig. 157  
Harmony Hammond, *Red Bed*, 2011. Oil and mixed-media on canvas, 204.47 × 138.43 cm. © HarmonyHammond/Licensed by VAGA, New York. Courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York. Photo: John Vokoun.

Fig. 158  
Ulrike Müller, *Mirrors*, 2013. Vitreous enamel on steel, 39.5 × 30.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts. Photo: Chris Austin.

Fig. 159  
Ulrike Müller, *Weather*, 2013. Vitreous enamel on steel, 39.5 × 30.5 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts. Photo: Chris Austin.

Fig. 160  
Ulrike Müller, *Weather*, installation view at Callicoon Fine Arts, New York, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Callicoon Fine Arts. Photo: Chris Austin.

#### Becoming Plural:

##### An Interview Collage of Roe Rosen’s Conversations with Hila Peleg, Erika Balsom, Dietmar Schwärzler, and the Audience Dietmar Schwärzler

Fig. 161  
Justine Frank, *The Sisters Frankomas*, 1931. Oil on canvas. 90 × 120 cm. Courtesy of Roe Rosen and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv.

Fig. 162  
Justine Frank, *Frank’s Guild*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm. Courtesy of Roe Rosen and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv.

Fig. 163  
Roe Rosen and Erika Balsom, “Dead and Alive, A Conversation,” in *Berlin Documentary Forum 3* (Berlin: Haus der

Kulturen der Welt, 2014), 178–81, 179–80. Collage by Dietmar Schwärzler. Courtesy of Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (Eds.).

Fig. 164  
Hila Peleg, “Hila Peleg in Conversation with Roe Rosen,” January 2011, in *Constelaciones de Lenguaje/Language Constellations*, ed. Eduardo Thomas (Mexico City: Injerto, 2011), 134–47, 137. Collage by Dietmar Schwärzler. Courtesy of Hila Peleg and Eduardo Thomas.

Fig. 165  
Hila Peleg, “Hila Peleg in Conversation with Roe Rosen,” January 2011, in *Constelaciones de Lenguaje/Language Constellations*, ed. Eduardo Thomas (Mexico City: Injerto, 2011), 134–47, 139. Collage by Dietmar Schwärzler. Courtesy of Hila Peleg and Eduardo Thomas.

Fig. 166  
Roe Rosen and Erika Balsom, “Dead and Alive, A Conversation,” in *Berlin Documentary Forum 3* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2014), 178–81, 178–79. Collage by Dietmar Schwärzler. Courtesy of Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (Eds.).

Fig. 167  
Roe Rosen, *Vladimir’s Night: Maxim Komar-Myshkin* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 139. Courtesy of Roe Rosen.

Fig. 168  
Roe Rosen, *Vladimir’s Night: Maxim Komar-Myshkin* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 51. Courtesy of Roe Rosen.

Fig. 169  
Roe Rosen and Erika Balsom, “Dead and Alive, A Conversation,” in *Berlin Documentary Forum 3* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2014), 178–81, 180–81. Collage by Dietmar Schwärzler. Courtesy of Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (Eds.).

Fig. 170  
Justine Frank, *The Stained Portfolio No. 56 (The Hebrew Alphabet)*, 1927. Gouache on paper, 33 × 38 cm. Courtesy of Roe Rosen and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv.

#### Search in Clouded Terrain

##### Anna Daučíková in Conversation with Christiane Erharter

Fig. 171  
Anča Daučíková, 33 *Scenes*, installation view, The Function Room, London, 2014. Photo: The Function Room, London.

Figs. 172–174  
Anča Daučíková, *Scene Book*, 2014. Thirty-six sheets, 29.7 × 21 cm, coil bound.

Published by Vargas Organisation, London, on the occasion of Daučíková’s exhibition “33 Scenes,” The Function Room, London, October 2014. Photo: Vargas Organisation, London.

#### Music, Zines, Films, Drawings, Clothes, & Girls

##### G. B. Jones in Conversation with Dietmar Schwärzler

Fig. 175  
Cover of *Hide*, issue 5, 1985. Courtesy of G. B. Jones.

Fig. 176  
Cover of *Double Bill*, issue 2, 1992. Courtesy of G. B. Jones.

Fig. 177  
Cover of *J.D.s*, issue 1, 1985. Courtesy of G. B. Jones.

Fig. 178  
Cover of *J.D.s*, issue 5, 1988. Courtesy of G. B. Jones.

Figs. 179–180  
G. B. Jones, *Tribute to Félicien Rops*, 2005. Pencil on paper, 22.86 × 30.48 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 181  
G. B. Jones, *Bar Room Brawl*, 1999. Pencil on paper, 22.86 × 30.48 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 182  
G. B. Jones, *Subversive Literature #2*, 1995. Pencil on paper, 22.86 × 30.48 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 183  
G. B. Jones, *Motorcycle Girls*, 1987. Pencil on paper, 21.59 × 35.56 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

#### Between “Bodies without Bodies” and Body Landscapes:

##### Queer Artistic Negotiations

##### Barbara Paul

Fig. 184  
Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled” (*Portrait of Ross in L.A.*), 1991. Endless supply of candies individually wrapped in multi-colored cellophane. Overall dimensions vary with installation, ideal weight: 175 lbs. © The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.

Fig. 185  
Julian Göthe, *The Impossible Net*, 2012. Wall installation, ropes, variable, 655 × 452 cm. © Julian Göthe and Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 186

Toni Schmale, *bend over your boyfriend*, 2010. Object made of concrete, extent 117 cm, height 63 cm.

© Toni Schmale. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 187

Viktoria Tremmel, *Sewing Your Own Balls*, 2011. Object made of wood and metal, 50 × 50 cm and drawing, pencil, crayon on paper, 30 × 30 cm, framed; *Breast Supporter with Hollow Penis Attachment*, 2011. Objects, four part, mixed-media and drawing, pencil, crayon, and marker on paper, 20 × 42 cm, framed; *Do Not Look in the Hole*, object *The Hole*, two part, wood, metal, table, and drawing, pencil on paper, 21 × 30 cm, framed, 2011.

© Viktoria Tremmel and Hamish Morrison Galerie, Berlin. Photo: Viktoria Tremmel.

Fig. 188

Viktoria Tremmel, *Breast Supporter with Hollow Penis Attachment*, 2011. Drawing, pencil, crayon, and marker on paper, 20 × 42 cm, framed. © Viktoria Tremmel and Hamish Morrison Galerie, Berlin. Photo: Viktoria Tremmel.

Fig. 189

Viktoria Tremmel, *Do Not Look in the Hole*, 2011. Pencil on paper, 21 × 30 cm, framed. © Viktoria Tremmel and Hamish Morrison Galerie, Berlin. Photo: Viktoria Tremmel.

Fig. 190

Stefanie Seibold, *Untitled (Corner Piece)*, 2012. Cardboard polystyrene mirror, 125 × 47 × 37 cm. Courtesy of Artothek des Bundes, Vienna. Photo: Pascal Petignat.

Fig. 191

Hans Scheirl, *Dandy's Gut—Bowels of a Film*, 2012. Mixed-media installation: sculpture, sound, papier mâché, diverse objects, wood, installation with props, storyboards, etc., from the film *Dandy Dust*, 1998. Sound: answering-machine messages from the production time of *Dandy Dust*, dimensions variable. © Hans Scheirl. Background (left to right): Anna Daučíková, *Search in Clouded Terrain: 3 Situations*, 2012. Video, 9 min. © Anna Daučíková; Justine Frank, *The Sisters Frankomas*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 90 × 120 cm; *Frank's Guild*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 100 × 100 cm, framed; *From the Stained Portfolio*, 1927. Gouache on paper, 33 × 38 cm, framed. © Roee Rosen and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv; Damiana Garcia and Vaginal Davis, *Vaginal Davis In Bed With Damiana Garcia*, 2010.

Video, 4 min. © Michael Lucid.

Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 192

Hans Scheirl, *Dandy's Gut—Bowels of a Film*, 2012. Mixed-media installation: sculpture, sound, papier mâché, diverse objects, wood, installation with props, storyboards, etc., from the film *Dandy Dust*, 1998. Sound: answering-machine messages from the production time of *Dandy Dust*, dimensions variable.

© Hans Scheirl. Background (left to right): Kaucyila Brooke, *The Last Time I Saw You (Wakeenah Falls Upper, Horsetail Fall, Wakeenah Falls Lower)*, 2012. C-prints, 102.7 × 79.8 cm, framed. © Kaucyila Brooke and Galerie Andreas Huber, Vienna. Ulrike Müller, *Blue* (with a photograph by Sherif Sonbol), 2011. Inkjet and paper collé on paper, 36 × 28 cm, framed.

© Ulrike Müller. Anna Daučíková, *Search in Clouded Terrain: 3 Situations*, 2012.

Video, 9 min. © Anna Daučíková.

Photo: Lisa Rastl.

#### Display, Performance

##### Johannes Porsch

Fig. 193

Robert Vörös, blueprint of the exhibition's interior design for "Pink Labor on Golden Streets," Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2012. Courtesy of Robert Vörös.

Fig. 194

Robert Vörös, reference photograph of the exhibition's interior design, 2012.

Photograph courtesy of Robert Vörös.

#### Appendix

Fig. 195

Foyer with installation by Julian Göthe, *The Impossible Net*, 2012. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 196

Left to right: Ulrike Müller, 4 vitreous enamels on steel from the series *Fever 103*, 2010; sculptures and drawings by Viktoria Tremmel, *Sewing Your Own Balls*, *The Hole*, *Do Not Look in the Hole*, *Breast Supporter with Hollow Penis Attachment*, 2011; on the easel a draft by David Zeller, *Studie zu Tropen*, 2011. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 197

Left to right: Sculptures by Viktoria Tremmel; David Zeller; Katrina Daschner, *Bertha*, *Lichtstrahl*, *Silber Glitter*, *Projektion*, *Las Vegas*, *Position Drehbühne*, 2012. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 198

Left to right: Katrina Daschner; Viktoria Tremmel; film by Rosa von Praunheim, *Rosa Arbeiter auf goldener Straße, Teil II*, 1968. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 199

Foreground: wallpaper by Karol Radziszewski, *Kisieland*, 2009–2012. Background: two paintings by Justine Frank, *The Sisters Frankomas*, 1931; *Frank's Guild*, 1936.

Fig. 200

From left to right: Justine Frank; sculpture by Hans Scheirl, *Dandy's Gut—Bowels of a Film*, 2012. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 201

Left: video installation by Anna Daučíková, *Search in Clouded Terrain: 3 Situations*, 2012. Right: Justine Frank, *The Sisters Frankomas*, 1931, *Frank's Guild*, 1936, *From the Stained Portfolio*, 1927.

Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 202

Mateusz Lesman, *Skizzenbuch III*, 2009–11, *Skizzenbuch IV*, 2011–12. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 203

Tejal Shah, *I AM*, 2010. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 204

Foreground: Hans Scheirl. Background (left to right) Stefanie Seibold, *Untitled (Corner Piece)*, 2012; Nilbar Güreş, *Llorando*, 2012; Kaucyila Brooke. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 205

Left to right: Kaucyila Brooke; Ulrike Müller; Hans Scheirl; Anna Daučíková; Justine Frank; film by Vaginal Davis/Damiana Garcia, *In Bed With Damiana Garcia*, 2010. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 206

Left to right: Stefan Hayn, *Queeny film*, 1988–89; David Zeller, *Tropen #1*, 2012. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 207

In the front sculpture by Toni Schmale, *bend over your boyfriend*, 2010. Left: Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 208

Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, *Toxic*, 2012. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 209

Vitrine: Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, *Toxic*, 2012. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Fig. 210

Katarzyna Kozyra, *Il Castrato*, 2006. Photo: Lisa Rastl.

Erika Balsom is a lecturer in film studies and liberal arts at King's College London, specializing in the study of artists' film and video. Among other publications, she is the author of the book *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (2013) and a frequent contributor to *Artforum*.

Madeleine Bernstorff is based in Berlin, initiates film programs—preferably in collaborations—and also writes and teaches in the 2015 summer semester. She is involved in the gender/queer seminar “slapstick revisited” with Sasha Pirker at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Recent film programs include: with Kinothek Asta Nielsen F/M: “Alle Tage wieder, Die Kamerahelme von Margaret Raspé,” 2014; with Manuela Schininá: “Caméra au Poing! – Video-activism by Carole Roussopoulos and Colleagues,” 2013; with Sebastian Bodirsky and Brigitta Kuster: “Ohne Genehmigung: Die Filme von René Vautier: Cinéma militant, Internationalismus, anti-koloniale Kämpfe,” 2012. <http://www.madeleinebernstorff.de>

Cana Bilir-Meier studied Pedagogy in the Arts, Video/Video Installation, and Art and Digital Media at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. She studied at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences/Sabancı University Istanbul in 2015. Stipend kùltür gemma!, Projekt zur Förderung migrantischer Kunst- und Kulturproduktion. Short films include *Semra Ertan*, 2013, and *Soshana*, 2011. Selected Screenings: Mumok Vienna, Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, L'Alternativa MACBA Barcelona, Kasseler DokFest, Halle für Kunst Lüneburg. She was nominated for German Film Critic Award 2014. She has written for publications including *Frauen und Film 67* (2015), *Stimme: Zeitschrift der Initiative Minderheiten 94* (2015). <http://www.canabilirmeier.com>

Kaucyila Brooke is based in Los Angeles. She works primarily in photography, text and image, video drawing, and critical essays. Her 2012 retrospective “Do You Want Me to Draw You a Diagram?” at the Badischer Kunstverein, focused on narrative projects starting from the 1980s. In 2014 recent selections from her photo novella *Tit for Tat* (1992–ongoing) were shown at Commonwealth and Council in Los Angeles. She is

the codirector of the program in photography and media at CalArts where she has been a member of the faculty since 1992. <http://www.kaucyilabrooke.com>

Ginger Brooks Takahashi's collaborative, project-based, and socially engaged practice is an extension of feminist spaces and queer inquiry, actively building community and nurturing alternative forms of information distribution. She is cofounder of the queer and feminist journal *LTR*, the project *MOBILIVRE BOOKMOBILE*, the touring musical act MEN and General Sisters. She has presented work at the Art Gallery of Ontario, 2014; Brooklyn Museum, 2013; New Museum, New York, 2009; and Serpentine Gallery, London, 2008. <http://brookstakahashi.com>

Anna Daučíková is a visual artist. She is based in Bratislava and in Prague, where she is head of the School of New Media and Vice-Rector for Science, Research, and International Relations at the Academy of Fine Arts Prague. Recent exhibitions include: “33 Scenes,” Function Room, London, 2014; “Eastern Window,” Manifesta 10, Saint Petersburg, 2014; “Good Girls,” MNAC, Bucharest, 2013; “Maps – Art Cartography in the Centre of Europe,” Mirbach Palace, Bratislava, 2011; “Ars Homo Erotica,” National Museum, Warsaw, 2010; “Formate der Transformation 89–09,” MUSA, Vienna, 2010; “Kunst und Öffentlichkeit,” 40 Jahre Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, 2009; “Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe,” MUMOK, Vienna, 2009.

Vaginal Davis was born and raised in the poorest sections of Los Angeles, California. Ms. Davis has been living in Berlin for over a decade where she curates and hosts the monthly performative film screening mega event “Rising Stars, Falling Stars” at Arsenal Institut für Film und Videokunst. Along with Susanne Sachsse, Marcuse Siegelstein, and Daniel Hendrickson, she has been a part of the Berlin-based art collective CHEAP since 2001. Ms Davis has taught seminars as a guest professor of her spiky brand of performance and live art at the Chicago Art Institute, Harvard University, NYU, Malmö Art Academy/Lund University, among others. Her experimental films, videos, collages, paintings,

performances, and installations have been presented at Tate Modern, London; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna; Getty Art Center, Los Angeles; MoMA, New York; and Palais de Tokyo, Paris. <http://www.vaginaldavis.com>

Christiane Erharter is a curator and project manager. She graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and holds a postgraduate degree in critical studies from the University of Lund. She has worked at the Office for Contemporary Art Norway, Oslo (2002–05), and at the Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck (2000–02). Since 2006 she has been working for the ERSTE foundation, conceptualizing and curating exhibitions, such as “Anna Jermolaewa: Good Times, Bad Times,” Zachęta National Gallery, Warsaw, 2015; “AT YOUR SERVICE – ART AND LABOUR,” Tehnički muzej Zagreb, 2014, and Technisches Museum Wien, 2012–13; “Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe,” MUMOK, Vienna, 2009. Her research areas include (pop) music, visual art, and feminism. She contributes regularly to the feminist magazine *an.schläge*.

David J. Getsy is the Goldabelle McComb Finn Distinguished Professor of Art History at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His books include *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (2015), *Rodin: Sex and the Making of Modern Sculpture* (2010), *Body Doubles: Sculpture in Britain, 1877–1905* (2004), and, as editor, *Scott Burton: Collected Writings on Art and Performance, 1965–1975* (2012). He coorganized a special issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* on “Trans Cultural Production” in 2014, and is a member of the editorial board of *The Art Bulletin*. Appearing in 2016 will be his edited anthology *Queer* for the Whitechapel Gallery’s Documents of Contemporary Art book series.

Jack Halberstam is Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity, Gender Studies, and Comparative Literature at the University of Southern California. Halberstam is the author of several books including: *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (2012), *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), and *In A Queer Time and Place*

(2005). His writing has appeared in numerous journals and collections and he has coedited a number of anthologies. <http://www.jackhalberstam.com>

Harmony Hammond lives in Galisteo, New Mexico. Working in a range of traditional and nontraditional materials, she treads the difficult edge between political content and abstraction within the expanded painting field. Hammond’s work has been exhibited at PS1 Contemporary Art Center, the New Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Bronx Museum in New York; the Hammer Museum and Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art in California; the Neue Galerie in Graz, Austria; and the ZKM Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany, among others. Her work is represented by Alexander Gray Associates in New York. <http://www.harmonyhammond.com>

Stefan Hayn is a painter and filmmaker. His work is situated between visual art and cinema. His films *A Film about the Worker* (1997), *Painting Now* (1998–2005), or *STRAUB* (2006–14) try to make the gaps between affirmation and subversion, progress and regress, artistic form, and so-called critical content emotionally perceptible. From 2012 to 2014 he taught as a fellow of the Graduate School for the Arts and the Sciences at the Berlin University of the Arts.

Nanna Heidenreich is researcher / lecturer in media studies at the University of the Arts in Braunschweig / Germany (HBK Braunschweig). She is also cocurator of Forum Expanded at the Berlinale. Her research and curatorial work focuses on migration, theories of racism, the intersections of art, cinema and politics/activism, and visual culture. She lives in Berlin.

Daniel Hendrickson is a translator and member of the artists group CHEAP. He regularly collaborates with Vaginal Davis on the film series “Rising Stars, Falling Stars” at Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art. He lives and works in Berlin.

Werner Hirsch was born in 1968 and grew up in West Germany. Shortly before the Abitur, he emigrated to the United States to set

up a ranch. There he fell in love with the drag queen Agnes B., with whom he still lives. Hirsch has been working since 2002 as a freelance artist and has been living in Cotswolds, Great Britain. Through his lover he discovered and in time conquered the stage as Prince Greenhorn. In 2002 he was honored with the first prize of the Grand Prix d’Amour at Staatsbank Berlin. The following year, he created the film *Kings & Disasters*. Since 2004 he has performed in the films/installations by Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz. Since 2005 he has worked occasionally as a dancer, and recently as a musician together with Frédéric Bigot. In his spare time Hirsch occasionally appears and performs as Antonia Baehr.

Nina Hoechtl is an artist and researcher. Her projects often explore the practice of fiction making as a political process in art, literature, politics, history, and popular culture, with an emphasis on feminist, queer, post- and decolonial theories and practices. This interest is closely intertwined with questions of linguistic, cultural and sociopolitical processes of transformation and translation. She is currently a postdoctoral fellow of the Institute for Aesthetic Research, UNAM. <http://www.ninahoechtl.org>

Jakob Lena Knebl lives and works in Vienna. Current exhibitions (selection): “Gender as a Performance,” Fotogallerie Poznan (2015), “There Are More Things,” Tiroler Künstlerschaft, Innsbruck (2014), “Look at Me,” Centre of Contemporary Art, Torun (2014), “Sculpture Me,” Kunstraum Niederösterreich (2014), “Schwule Sau,” KÖR, Vienna (2013); “An Eye of the Disposition of a Cloud,” Salzburger Kunstverein (2013); “Erfinde dich selbst,” Kunstverein Wolfsburg (2013); “The Only Performances that Make It All the Way,” Künstlerhaus Graz (2013); Contemporary Art Fair, Istanbul (2013), among others. <http://www.jakoblenaknebl.com>

Michael Lucid is a Los Angeles-based queer comedic writer, performer, and filmmaker, with work that ranges from sketch comedy to documentary and animation. He is the cofounder and costar of the award-winning online gender-playful sketch comedy show *Pretty Things*, and he

currently performs regularly with the Upright Citizens Brigade Theater in Los Angeles. He has been producing online comedic videos as his drag lady reporter character Damiana Garcia since 2006.

Ulrike Müller is an Austria-born, New York-based artist, whose practice investigates of form as a mode of critical engagement. Her work explores the relationships between abstraction and bodies through a conception of painting that is not limited to brush and canvas. Müller’s work has been shown in PS1 Contemporary Art Center, at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, at the Kunsthau Regenz, at the Brooklyn Museum, as part of the Cairo Biennial, at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, at the New Museum for Contemporary Art in New York, and at the Generali Foundation in Vienna, among others. <http://um.encore.at>

G. B. Jones makes movies, drawings, and creates music with Minus Smile as a member of the Southern Ontario Gothic band *Opera Arcana*. Jones lives in Southern Ontario, Canada, and in her spare time she travels around the province taking photos of haunted relics and the remains of a vanishing past.

Barbara Paul is professor of art history at the Institute of Art and Visual Cultures at Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg and chair of the Helene Lange Kolleg “Queer Studies und Intermedialität: Kunst – Musik – Medienkultur” (Queer studies and intermediality: art – music – media culture); from 2003 to 2008 she was professor of art history and art theory/gender studies at the University of Art and Design Linz, Austria. Recent publications include *un/verblümt: Queere Politiken in Ästhetik und Theorie* (Berlin: Revolver 2014), edited with Josch Hoenes; *Wanderungen: Migrationen und Transformationen aus geschlechterwissenschaftlichen Perspektiven* (Bielefeld: transcript 2013), edited with Annika McPherson, Sylvia Pritsch, Melanie Unseld, and Silke Wenk.

Hila Peleg is a curator and filmmaker based in Berlin. She has curated solo shows, large-scale group exhibitions, and various interdisciplinary cultural events in public institutions across Europe. Peleg is the

founder and artistic director of the Berlin Documentary Forum. Initiated at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in 2010, this biannual event is devoted to the production and presentation of contemporary and historical documentary practices in an interdisciplinary context. Peleg is curator of documenta 14 (2017).

Johannes Porsch is an artist, curator, and writer based in Vienna. Focusing on the narrative and its mediation, he provokes a close examination of how to deal with images, text, language, and space as media. He relates to modes and conditions of the production of meaning within which he debates mediativity, perception, and aesthetic experience. He has a background in architecture and is regularly developing display systems and exhibition architectures.

Karol Radziszewski was born in 1980 and lives and works in Warsaw (Poland) where he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in 2004. He works with film, photography, installation, and creates interdisciplinary projects. Since 2005 he is publisher and editor-in-chief of *DIK Magazine*. His work has been presented in venues such as the National Museum, Museum of Modern Art, and Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw; Kunsthalle Wien; New Museum, New York; Cobra Museum, Amsterdam; Muzeum Sztuki in Lodz; Performa 13, New York; 7th Göteborg Biennial, and 4th Prague Biennale. <http://www.karolradziszewski.com>

Raed Rafei is a Beirut-based writer, videographer and filmmaker. For the past ten years, he has covered the Middle East for local and international media outlets. His debut feature film, *74 (The Reconstitution of a Struggle)*, released in 2012 and codirected with Rania Rafei, was screened at international film festivals and received several awards. Rafei is currently working on his second feature film, *Eccomi ... Eccoti (Here I am ... Here you are)*.

Roee Rosen is an Israeli-American artist, filmmaker, and writer. He is known for complex and polemic works that enmesh sexuality and politics, humor and horror, history and the present. Rosen's film *Tse [Out]* won the Orizzonti Award for best medium-length film at the Venice Film Festival in 2010.

His latest book, *Maxim Komar-Myshkin: Vladimir's Night*, was published in 2014 by Sternberg Press. Rosen is a professor at Ha'Midrasha Art College, and at the Bezalel Art Academy, Israel. His retrospective is forthcoming at the Tel Aviv Museum in January 2016. <http://roeeosen.com>

Hans Scheirl was born 1956 in Salzburg, Austria. He studied from 1975–80 at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna (restoration of art). From 1978 to 1985 he was involved in performative music experiments with 8 oder 9 and the female formation Ungünstige Vorzeichen. Between 1979–96 Scheirl made around fifty short films. Hans—formerly “Angela”—became known for the feature-length films *Flaming Ears* (1991) and *Dandy Dust* (1998). Scheirl has lived in London for sixteen years, and in 2003 he received an MA in Fine Arts at Central Saint Martins College of Art, London. Since 2006 Scheirl has been professor for Contextual Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. <http://hansscheirl.jimdo.com>

Dietmar Schwärzler is a film mediator, freelance curator, and writer based in Vienna. He has conceived and organized several projects in the film and art world on topics such as Austrian television and film history, early films by well-known feature film directors, concepts of friendship, queer art practices, and feminist performance art. Since 1999 he has worked at the distribution company sixpackfilm and as co-programmer of the DVD label INDEX, which focuses on Austrian and international film and media art. He is also in the editorial team of the film magazine *kolik.film*. In 2013 he published the comprehensive monograph *Friedl Kubelka vom Gröller: Photography & Film* (JRP-Ringier, in collaboration with Index).

Katia Sepúlveda studied photography at the ARCOS Institute of Arts and Communication in Chile, followed by a postgraduate course in cinematographic direction at the University of Chile. On receiving a DAAD arts scholarship, she moved to Germany in 2004 to study at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne where she attended VALIE EXPORT's classes. In 2006 she went on to pursue a master's degree in media art and completed her studies at the beginning of 2009. <http://katiasepulveda.com>

Ruby Sircar's work is focused on popular media issues and performative practices. She holds a PhD in Contemporary Art and Post-Colonial Studies, currently teaches as senior artist at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, was researcher at the Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht. Her artistic work has been exhibited at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Gallery for Contemporary Art Leipzig, Essor Gallery London, Kunstverein Salzburg, and Austrian Cultural Forum London.

William J. Simmons is a critic based in New York and is a PhD student at the Graduate Center, CUNY. His work has appeared in *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *frieze*, *BOMB*, and *Aperture*.

Eliza Steinbock is currently an assistant professor at the Film and Literary Studies Department of Leiden University, and a 2014 Veni laureate at Leiden University Center for the Arts in Society. She completed a PhD in Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam. Steinbock's current research project, “Vital Art: Transgender Portraiture as Visual Activism,” examines contemporary visual art practices that create worlds that harbor at-risk trans subjectivity and critique the discrimination of gender nonconforming bodies. <http://www.elizasteinbock.com>

## Acknowledgments

Anthony Auerbach, Erika Balsom, Jasmin Bauer, Christa Benzer, Andrew Blackley (Félix González-Torres Foundation), Eva Blimlinger, Andrea B. Braidt, Thomas Brooks, Andrea Ecker and Olga Okunev (Bundeskanzleramt Kunst und Kultur), Nora Frohmann, Lena Rosa Händle, Martina Huber, Claudia Kaiser, Elisabeth Mahmoud and Winfried Nußbaumüller (Land Vorarlberg, Kultur), Steph Morris, Melanie Ohnemus, Hila Peleg, Aykan Safoğlu, Florian Scheirl, Angela Schwarz and Ursula Struppe (Stadt Wien, MA 17), Johannes Schweiger, Tejal Shah, Heinrich Siegl and team, Amy Sillman, Tim Smith (Rod Bianco Gallery), Tim Stüttgen, Sophia Süßmilch, Eduardo Thomas, Robert Vörös

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