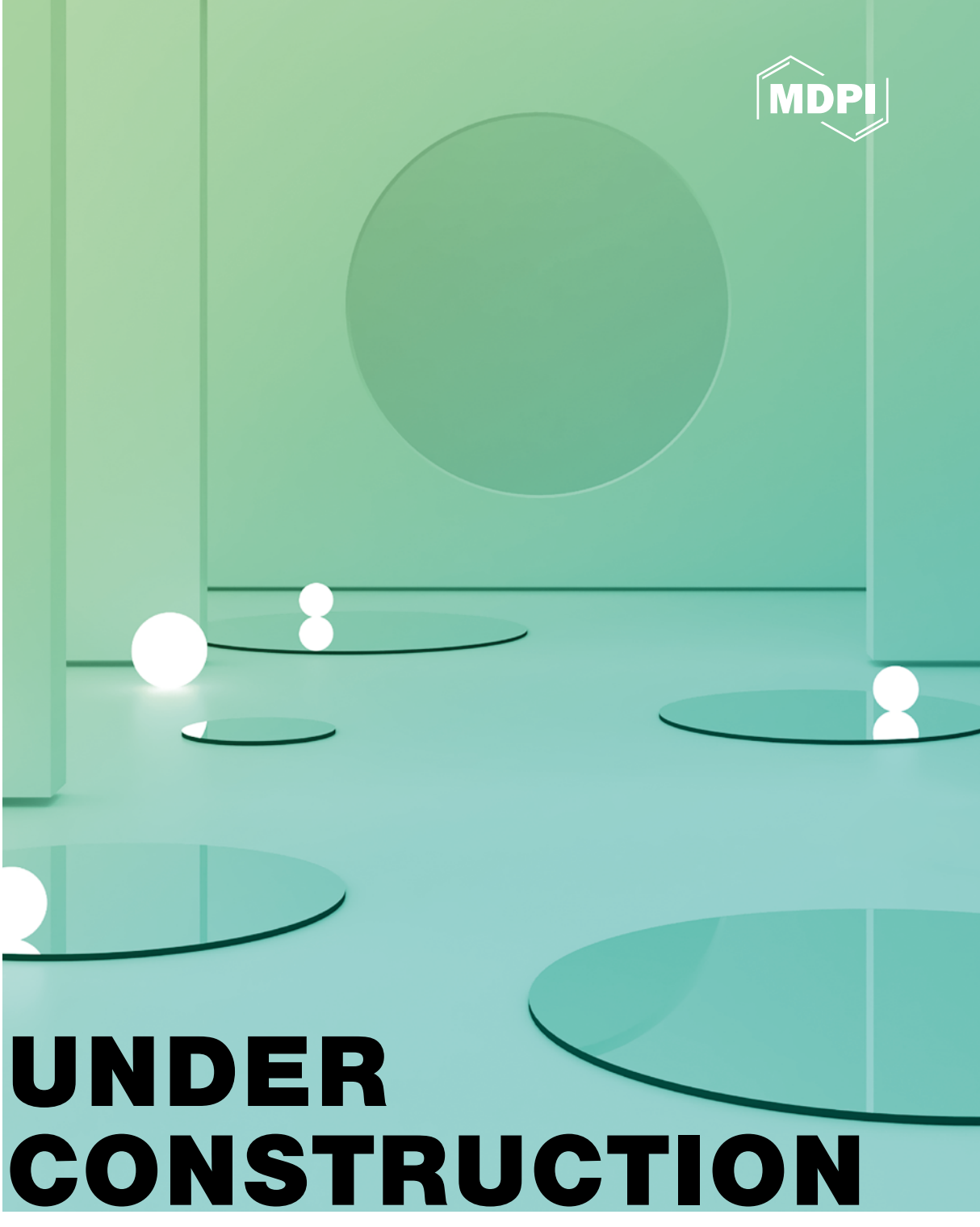

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

PERFORMING CRITICAL IDENTITY

EDITED BY MARIE-ANNE KOHL

Under Construction

State of the Arts–Reflecting Contemporary Cultural Expression

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Under Construction

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Marie-Anne Kohl (Ed.)

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Milo Rau and the theatre company Agrupación Señor Serrano. His studies also concern practices of signification of the urban space, both artistic (e.g., the dialectical between monument and counter-monument) and not (e.g., the "performative violence" staged during the street demonstrations). He has attended various international conferences and published his contributions in several collective volumes and academic journals.

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Chanda VanderHart enjoys a tripartite, interdisciplinary career as a musicologist, collaborative pianist, and *Musikvermittlung* expert. She has performance degrees from the Eastman School of Music and collected three graduate collaborative piano degrees from Milan and Austria before completing a PhD in musicology from the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna (mdw) in 2016 with the dissertation, *Die Entwicklung des Kunstliedes im Wiener Konzertleben zwischen 1848 und 1897*. Her international performance career has taken her to the Musikverein in Vienna, the Malmö Opera, the Banff Centre, Kala Mandir in Kolkata, and the City Recital Hall in Sydney, and she is currently adjunct faculty at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. VanderHart has also lectured at the Sorbonne, the Institute for European Studies, the Kunst Universität Graz, and at AIMS. She has published for the Albert-Ludwigs-University Freiburg Centre for Popular Culture and Music, authored the lexicon article on Ernestine de Bauduin for MUGI (Music and Gender on the Internet), and is currently writing a monograph on song recital practices in Vienna edited by Susan Youens and Melanie Unseld. She lives in Vienna with her husband and daughter.

Under Construction: Performing Critical Identity—A Short Introduction

Marie-Anne Kohl

"Who am we?" Sherry Turkle

"Who needs 'identity'?" Stuart Hall

At the turn of the 2020s, identity seems to remain an omnipresent and somewhat unseizable term, serving different views in and outside academia, in politics, in everyday talk, in intellectual and popular jargon, as well as in the arts. While, currently, identitarian ideologies and essentialist notions of identity that tend to simplify and reduce life experience to simple factors globally regain massive attention, it becomes inevitable to recollect the thorough discussions of identity concepts of the past decades, which had moved away from such notions—concepts which also reflect an awareness of and capacity to deal with the complexity and diversity of the world we live in. However, this volume, "Under Construction: Performing Critical Identity", does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of identity concepts, nor to develop a uniform definition or theory of identity. Rather, it strives to add new and critical positions and perspectives to an ongoing discussion, as dealing with the concept of identity remains relevant for a wide range of academic and artistic disciplines, taking different aspects of identity into account. These presented perspectives promise to offer innovative insights by focusing on performance and the performative as both an artistic practice and mode of expression and as a process of constructing identity. While, to some, the idea of identity might be suspicious because of the danger of essentialism, and also because of the incoherent definitions and understandings of the term, it is precisely this openness that also offers the potential for escaping such fixations—an openness clearly reflected in the diversity of identity notions offered by the contributions in this volume. Linking these different perspectives, this volume stresses the notion that social identities such as gender, sexuality, race, class, dis/ability, age or non/religiosity are closely linked to the historical, social, regional and political dimensions of their formation. From this perspective, identities are hardly one-dimensional but complex and intersectional, and are rather to be thought of as a process of identification and belonging than as a consistent essence. In terms of identity, otherwise understood as, for example, a (cognitive) self-image, as a habitual imprint, as a social role or attribution, as a performative achievement,

as a constructed narrative, etc.,[1] it is not only the individual who is in the spotlight, but also culture, society or community as bearers of identities.

Artists have always played a major role in the potential reflection and transformation of perceptions and conceptions of the world, and their artistic praxis and positionings have been key to the development of processual and pluralistic concepts of identity, which gained momentum in the 1990s in the face of a changing, globalizing and postmodern world. Famously, Judith Butler refers to the theatricality of drag for her concept of the performativity of gendered identity (Butler 1990), and Stuart Hall's influential concept of cultural identity was closely interwoven with his personal and intellectual connection to the British Black Arts Movement (Hall 1992; Fisher 2014). It was Cindy Sherman's photo series "Shermans", as self-portraits that have no underlying identity in the sense of a substantial person, that provided the basis for Wolfgang Welsch's concept of variable identities—identities in transition and identities in the plural—as paradigmatic of a postmodern affirmation of plurality and a counter-concept to Western notions of unity and wholeness (Welsch 2010). Moreover, Homi K. Bhabha developed the foundations of his postcolonial thoughts on identification based on terms such as differentiation, splitting, repetition, mimicry, hybridity, third space, and the ambivalent interweaving of the construction of identity and otherness by means of some reflections on the artistic works of such artists as Renée Green, Barbara Kruger, performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña, conceptual artist Pepon Osorio and photographer Alan Sekula, or on the poetry by Meiling Jin or Adil Jussawalla, and the literary work by Toni Morrison and Nadine Gardimer (Bhabha 1997a, 1997b, 2004). Anthony Appiah mentions the "language of art" as a factor that provides material for the social construction of identity, and compares the process of identification to some extent with the decisions of an artist on which aspects of her inherited traditions will define her art and creativity. Appiah thus recognizes a certain agency of individuals in terms of the adoption of categories of identity, which, even though socially predetermined and normative, can also be mobilized for a self-affirmative identity (Appiah 2005). The affirmation of specific identity categories also plays an important role in the context of so-called "strategic essentialism", a term coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, understood deconstructively and as a political tool that allows for the temporary, strategic adoption of essentialist claims of identity categories for the collective representation, resistance and empowerment of marginalized groups for specific political objectives.[2] 'Identity politics' still play a role in political

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1 Author's translation of (Zirfas 2010), "Identität in der Moderne. Eine Einleitung", p. 9.

2 However, Spivak herself later dismissed the term "strategic essentialism" in face of its misuse for nationalist, essentialist agendas, and also warns against "identity politics" as a trap that can tie

struggles for recognition and visibility, as well as in the fields of artistic activism or artistic self-positioning.

The field of identity is contested and suspicious, especially because of the danger of fixing groups or individuals on alleged pre-given essential characteristics that are actually positionings that have been created on the basis of social norms and projections. After all, the very concept of identity primarily emerged from the idea of a substantial core. It can be dated back to the Enlightenment and 17th century epistemology and the definition of substance as a permanent entity—developed by René Descartes—which prepared the notion of a "basis for a substantial conception of identity" and of a human being equipped with a fixed, inherent core whose essential features remain essentially identical throughout its entire existence (Nicke 2018). Stuart Hall calls this "Cartesian concept of substance" (ibid.) the "Enlightenment subject," equipped with the "essential centre of the self [as] a person's identity" (Hall 1992, p. 275). On the basis of this genesis, the concept of identity also reveals itself as a Western enterprise. Peter Geschiere and Birgit Meyer pointed out with Roger Rouse that the "search for identity" is not universal, but "part and parcel of Western imperialism—strongly promoted ... by the efforts of colonial regimes to fix the new identities of their new subject through the 'identity card'", turning colonised subjects into defined identities to be governed. They see questions of self-identification as part of the capitalist discourse with its notion of "private ownership: one has to 'own' an identity just as the capitalist owns his (sic) capital" (Meyer and Geschiere 1998, p. 609). Furthermore, in the course of globalization, not only flows and homogenization are to be considered, but also the emergence, closure and fixing of new borders and identities, for example, as national identities (ibid.). Today, such a fixation of essentialist identity models manifests itself especially in identitarian, namely right-wing populist, identity constructions that promise orientation for the individual self through claims of a substantial core of essence based on an alleged "national belonging of descent", "cultural heritage", "historical past", "genuine tradition" or specific "national character" (Nicke 2018).

The continued presence and recurrence of strong essentialist concepts of identity and their Eurocentric and (neo)colonial foundation may be one reason why questions of identity and their critique still seem to be relevant to broader social, political and artistic discourses today. In particular, in critical artistic positions, this often becomes apparent in practices of decentering and dissolving alleged fixed identities, and in the emphatic display and reflection of the pluralities of personal identities within one individual and their intersectionality. Re-claiming such identities and positionings,

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individuals and groups to expectations and traditions. (See, e.g., (Nadig 2018), "Gayatri Spivak Warns Students against Falling 'into the Trap of' Identity Politics", or (Mambrol 2016), "Strategic Essentialism".

as well as shifting and re-inventing them, are further artistic practices, practices that are engaged with visibility, representation, and self-empowerment. They again refer to the extra-individual, relational character of identities and acts of identification, which are produced performatively along social norms, preconditions, expectations, and preconceived images, and are, therefore, always to be understood as both "recognition and imposition" (Appiah 2005).

This volume, "Under Construction: Performing Critical Identity", points to the performative practices of artists that bring to the fore a critical (self-)awareness and (self-)positioning concerning identification and belonging. As different and maybe contradictory, among themselves, as they are, the performative works and identity positions presented and analyzed in this volume share a critical approach towards the notion of pre-determined stable identities and the hegemonic norms and stereotyping immanent to such a notion, as well as a critical appraisal of representations on the basis of identities. The artists and groups introduced in the contributions in this volume stand for different perspectives, approaches and artistic strategies, with authors who equally choose different approaches, angles, perspectives and methods. This collection is intentionally neither genre-specific nor identity-specific, nor limited to a particular geographical area or historical period. It invites readers to explore various artistic strategies and perspectives of artists when they address different identity issues or identities, such as when they target power relations, or when they empower concepts of diversity. It offers a broad range of analytical approaches and methods as well as theories and contexts underlying the arguments. Common ground for this issue is the critical stance towards the construction of identity, performed by the artists and/or the scholars dealing with this area.

The first contributions in this volume deal with a single artist's work on issues of identity, followed by papers that focus on a specific category of identity construction and then by contributions that are engaged in collective identities. The collection is concluded by a report from curatorial practice.

In "I Am Black Now: A Phenomenologically Grounded Autoethnography of Becoming *Black* in Berlin", Solomon A. Mekonen lets the reader participate in his personal experience of changing self- and world-perception when wandering out of what is familiar to him and into a new, unknown *Lebenswelt*. While being the unquestioned norm in his home, Ethiopia, he found himself suddenly being made 'the Other' when he moved to Berlin, Germany. This insight brought him to reflect on the constructedness and performativity of identities and the power of unquestioned, imposed, and universalized norms, and ultimately led him to a conceptually informed critique of hegemonic, colonial-based powers of definition. To work through these changes in perception, reflection, and self-positioning, he chooses the innovative, substantial approach of autoethnographic and creative writing.

In “Subverting Identity: Cesare Viel’s Performative Works”, Matteo Valentini introduces the Italian conceptual artist’s take on the plurality and processuality of identity, and stresses the artist’s own engagement with theorists of performative and relational identity. In numerous performative works and different formats such as lecture performances or re-enactments, Viel presents the performative production of subjectivity and identity as ambiguous and as an act of constant becoming. His performance of self is one of constant movement through different categories of identity; he, thus, constantly subverts the idea of identity altogether.

With references to contemporary Disability Studies, the Disability Arts Movement and Disability Pride, in “’Let’s listen with Our Eyes … ’ The Deconstruction of Deafness in Christine Sun Kim’s Sound Art”, Anna K. Benedikt elaborates on an affirmative, positive perspective on disability as a social and identity category. She introduces Berlin-based US American sound artist Christine Sun Kim’s work, which is informed by her own sonic experience as a deaf person. By challenging normative understandings of sound and hearing, Sun Kim shows that deafness is a social construction and definition. Her performance of her deaf identity can be understood as a critique as she “shifts her identity from non-hearing to differently hearing” (Benedikt) and de/constructs it into a positive identity category.

At the center of the critical identity performance by Berlin-based South African artist Lerato Shadi, presented by Katja Gentric in “Makhubu, Seriti Se, Basupa Tsela—Where We’re at According to Lerato Shadi”, lies the contrasting juxtaposition of two concepts of identity, namely the egocentric Cartesian Enlightenment model, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the South African philosophical concept of expressing and perceiving one’s own self through the relation to a “you”. In her performative works, Lerato challenges the Western, Eurocentric concept of identity and takes up the concept of relational identity and subjectivity, which also has great significance in the context of recent student protests and decolonization efforts in South Africa, by taking a strong, self-confident position in relation to her pioneers and ancestresses in spirit.

In ““Transgressing” Wisdom and Elderhood in Times of War? The Shifting Identity of the Elderly Queen in the Performance of *Women of Owu*”, Pepetual Mforbe Chiangong discusses the intersectionality of gender and old age (elderhood) in a changing African/Yoruba context on the basis of a production of Femi Osofian’s play at the University of Ibadan (Nigeria). She discusses how the normative confinement of individuals to certain categories of identity brings them into crisis. On the basis of a close analysis of the theatrical, performative means of the production, Mforbe Chiangong shows the enabling of “enacting an identity in crisis on stage”. She embeds her findings in the broader context of African women’s rights and feminisms from a global perspective.

In her paper "Voicing Challenge: Trans* Singers and the Performance of Vocal Gender", Anke Charton examines the (self-)representations and careers of heroic baritone Lucia Lukas, male mezzo-soprano Adrian Angelico and bass-baritone Aiden K. Feltkamp to discuss the role of trans*singers and trans*identities in challenging the gendered Fach system of classical Western singing and casting conventions in the opera industry. She embeds her examinations in the contexts of the historical construction of gendered, binary voice systematization in classical Western singing and how it has been analyzed and perpetuated by musicologists. While, due to its specific performance practices, opera has always offered space for non-normative performativity and representations of gender, even beyond heteronormative and cisgender identities, Charton shows that the picture is a very different one when it comes to opera singing.

In "Queer Abstraction: Visual Strategies to See New Queer Futures", Rocca Holly-Nambi investigates visual strategies of representing queer identities and queer culture in the context of a violent, homophobic social and legal situation. While the queer community in Uganda is under increasing pressure from Uganda's infamous anti-homosexuality laws, Holly-Nambi observes a growing aesthetic productivity in Kampala, which deals with queerness and, in doing so, pursues abstraction as a communication tactic. She raises the question of whether these new visual representations and their interpretation from a queer theoretical perspective carry the promise of new queer futures in Uganda.

David AJ Murrieta Flores's ""A Motherfucker is a Werewolf": Gang Identity and Avant-Garde Rebellion in *Up Against the Wall Motherfucker* and the *International Werewolf Conspiracy* (1968–1970)" examines the attempt of the aforementioned art gangs to gain a radically anti-capitalist redefinition of American identity, conceived as both an individual and collective identity, and to detach it from a national–territorial definition or any given, societal norms. Murrieta Flores places this attempt of an anti-capitalist redefinition in the historical context of a general social criticism of the avant-garde. He also critically wonders to what extent the envisaged inclusion of marginalized groups into this new American identity could actually work through the representations undertaken by these primarily *white* and male art gangs.

With "Shifting Identities of Feminism to Challenge the Classical Music Canon Practices: A Beginners Guide to Guerrilla Gender Musicology", Chandra VanderHart and Abigail Gower offer a sort of manifesto to change the strategies and tactics employed when dealing with gender-based misrepresentations in the Western classical music sector. The so-called musical canon is the main target of their criticism, which continues to make women virtually invisible in music. They examine and compare different feminist strategies of the past that have had only limited success. With their "Guerilla Gender Musicology", they propose an alternative, more subtle approach to minimizing the gender bias in the classical music canon.

To conclude the collection of contributions in this volume, "Under Construction: Performing Critical Identity", after the academic papers, we add an account from art practice. In "*Precarious Art*: How an Intersectional Approach to Exhibiting Led to Multi-Dimensional Performances of Identity", curators Stacie CC Graham and Katharina Koch recapitulate a multi-part series of exhibitions and events, in whose realization I myself was involved as co-curator. The starting points for this series were the experiences of intersectional identities of Black Women Artists and Women Artists of Color in the Berlin and London art fields and the discriminatory structures and representational practices that shape and perpetuate these experiences and realities of life. The objective for the discussion was to create perspectives and strategies for change. Using several artistic positions from the project, Graham and Koch present the specificity and precarity of intersecting identities and the importance of "performing those identities as a survival strategy".

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I Am Black Now: A Phenomenologically Grounded Autoethnography of Becoming *Black* in Berlin †

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Abstract: This essay is an autoethnography of *becoming* Black. It engages my coming to terms with the fact that I have been cornered, as it were, and *forced* to recognise myself as a being who is othered in a racial classification that was not consciously part of my self-identification before I came to study in Berlin. While exploring the phenomenology of Blackness in spaces where I find myself othered, I also draw a comparative outlook from domestic intercultural power relations in my country of origin, Ethiopia, where the ethnic group I belong to, the Amharas, do the othering. I argue, in my sense-making and ethnographic journey, that the ambiguity and intricacy of Blackness has granted me a redemptive stability in navigating the world and in demystifying the *logic* of my oppression as a newly profiled black person in Berlin and the *logic* of my cultural positioning as an oppressor in Ethiopia. The essay, as such, is an invitation for a reflection on the confluence of the two positions.

Prologue

In the summer of 2016, I embarked on a long train ride from Berlin to Vienna, intending to follow rivers, cross mountains, and swiftly live the spirits of small European towns rather than simply fly over them. However, being the only person in the train cabin for half of the journey produced boredom when there was not much for the eyes in the rushing scenery. It was then, in one of the small towns, that I was joined by a gentleman from Senegal who was friendly and fast enough to strike a conversation just before I fell into slumber. He asked, as I did immediately after, *where* I was a local—the city I was born in and my country of nationality. It took us only a few minutes to realise that we had an utter ignorance, awkwardly so, about each other's country. The awkwardness was not so much about the ignorance—we rather openly admitted it as we noted it, but about the bizarre feeling, which consumed both of us in no time, that we were somehow expected to know about each other. I wasn't even sure about the agency—who would expect it and why—even though, unintentionally, I cared.

To spice up our conversation, nevertheless, we turned to the easy problem-solving mechanism of my generation—the Internet. We found out that Dakar, Senegal's capital, is almost a thousand kilometres farther away from Addis Ababa, my own capital, than it is from Berlin. Berlin, to our surprise, is closer to both Dakar and Addis Ababa than the two cities are to each other.

He speaks Wolof, I speak Amharic.
He is a Muslim, I was raised Ethiopian Orthodox Christian and am irreligious now.
He eats Thiebou jenn, and I Injera.
He dances to hip hop, and I to techno.
He works for the Senegalese Embassy in Berlin, I was a student at Freie Universität Berlin.

We could hardly find anything that would enable us to bond, but our conversation was rekindled the moment we started talking about our experiences in Europe. Experience seemed to have come to our rescue and unite us.

Flying to Vienna after several months, I wrote myself a little poem in the air—a farewell of sorts—to a naïve train-travelling self that lingers to this day, despite the fact that I have truly become someone else.

I counted every drop of the rain decanting into my blood
Throbbed from my heart to my body as mud
I flew up to the sky to slumber in the cloud
Attired the mist for my heart's burial shroud
I sat on the wings of a plane to muse
A stone's throw away from my blues
I cleansed the murky sea with tears
I veered off you, my old self, veneers of my soul free
Veered off you the steer you were to become for me
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I would not have anticipated just few years back that my wandering out of my *Lebenswelt*—my "unquestioned, practical, historically conditioned, pretheoretical and familiar world (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, p. 91)—would culminate in an absolute reassessment of my own personhood, subjectivity, place in the planet and a critical appraisal of the *Lebenswelt* itself. In this lifeworld that I happened to be born into, I am the norm. As epitomized by a Marxist student activist (Mekonnen 1969) in his contentious and influential article "On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia", my lifeworld "is not really one nation. It is made up of a dozen nationalities with their own languages, ways of dressing, history, social organization and territorial entity." (ibid., pp. 1–2) In this multi-ethnic country, however, my mother tongue, Amharic, is the most widely spoken

one. My folk costume is the de facto national dress. My physical features and skin pigmentation are the standard from which any divergence is measured. My heritage, the Amhara–Tigrayan and to a lesser extent the Agaw heritage of northern and central modern-day Ethiopia (or what a Temple University professor of history calls the "Ge'ez[1] civilization", Tibebu 1995, p. xxii) is made to shine against the backdrop of the rest, while insisting to impose and universalise itself on it.

Tibebu classifies the scholarly literature on Ethiopia into three paradigms, of which the one he calls the Orientalist Semiticist intellectual tradition "dominated Ethiopianist Studies until recently" (Tibebu 1995, p. xvi). According to this tradition, Ethiopians are seen as "being superior to Black Africans, including the many peoples inside Ethiopia itself, like the Oromo. For they are Christian, literate, civilized, handsome, and sovereign for millennia" (ibid.). In this supremacy myth and privilege of finding oneself as the norm who defines a multi-ethnic country in one's own image and vision, one doesn't have to be confronted by the need to actively recognise the intractable othering[2] configurations of the hegemonising *northern* identity—which I automatically drew my self-image from—in the Ethiopian state. To the delay of my enlightenment on the othering arrangements of this dominant Ge'ez civilization narrative, the segregating ethnogeographical nature of the country further kept the othered-from-within people of the country out of my immediate eyesight. It would take me finding myself in a similar othered position to fully comprehend the extent to and the ways in which my unscrutinised self-image of an Ethiopian is founded in fantasy and is exclusionary and oppressive.

On a continental level, apartheid South Africa crumbled, and Nelson Mandela came to power when the struggle of the colonized world—in its global sense—entered my imagination. I was just turning 11 at South Africa's new beginning. The narratives around Nelson Mandela and his Ethiopian connection was something inescapable even to a young mind who would now have to reimagine the world beyond the Amharic-speaking dominated Ethiopia. Mandela would be selectively quoted over and over again:

> Ethiopia has always held a special place in my own imagination and the prospect of visiting Ethiopia attracted me more strongly than a trip to France, England, and America combined. I felt I would be visiting my own genesis, unearthing the roots of what made me an African. (Mandela 1994, p. 282)

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1 Ge'ez can be easily understood as what Latin is to the West. It has not been used as a spoken language for a long while but is considered a precursor to Ethiopia's Semitic languages. It has its own script, which the Semitic languages of Ethiopia and Eritrea (Amharic, Tigrinya, Tigré etc.) have adopted.

2 Othering is the construction and identification of the self, or in-group, and the other, or out-group, in mutual, unequal opposition by attributing relative inferiority and/or radical alienness to the other/out-group (Brons 2015).

No one either read to me or told me, for instance, that he also said, just below the above quote, that "contemporary Ethiopia was not a model when it comes to democracy" (ibid.). In this early imagination of mine of the outside world then, there are the Whites, whom people like Mandela have to fight against. These are similar to those the Ethiopian empire triumphed against in the Battle of Adwa,[3] cousins of the *evil* Italian colonisers. And there are the Blacks who had to endure the horrors of apartheid and all the viciousness the Whites seem to be capable of inflicting, as shown on Ethiopian Television. But, there is *us*—who trained Mandela to be a soldier, *us* who gave him a fake passport so that he could travel (Dale 2013), *us* the good ones, *us* the uncolonised ones, *us*!

In line with the *northern* Ethiopian fantasy I mentioned earlier, at home, there was also my uncle—very proud of his ruling class lineage. In the prescriptive marriage advice he gave to his nephews and nieces, there were also people to be avoided because of their "impure blood"—they were descendants of slaves. In my grandmother's description of the chattel slaves her grandfather had bought, those would look "jet-black skinned and wide-nosed." I now know that refers to mostly peoples from southern Ethiopia. "Find a girl," my uncle would say, "find a girl who is from *yebalabat zer*"—descended from the ruling class like his grandparents. "A girl" he would say "a girl!" Heaven forbid I possibly be attracted to my own gender.

The process of my self-image formation as an Amhara who simply identifies as Ethiopian—an unmarked category in the way other ethnic groups of Ethiopia are marked and named at will—was perhaps too comfortable to have a critical outlook on. "To be a 'genuine Ethiopian'", the Marxist student activist Mekonnen writes:

> One has to speak Amharic, to listen to Amharic music, to accept the Amhara–Tigre religion, Orthodox Christianity and to wear the Amhara–Tigre Shamma in international conferences. In some cases to be an "Ethiopian", you will even have to change your name. In short to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear an Amhara mask (to use Fanon's expression). (Mekonnen 1969, p. 2)

Not only was this self-image too comfortable to be critical of but also the tools that allowed me to systematically scrutinise it were absent until I left Ethiopia. It was after finishing my bachelor's degree in Bangkok, Thailand, and subsequently coming to Berlin, Germany, for a master's degree, and finding myself being someone else's Other, that I gradually realised that my experience of being an Amhara in Ethiopia was also a violent encroachment on the many peoples of Ethiopia, did come from othering

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[3] In the Battle of Adwa, the colonizing Italian troops were decisively defeated, making Ethiopia the only African state to escape Western colonisation other than Liberia.

them from within and is akin to the reverse of my experience as a non-White person in Berlin (although one needs to be careful not to draw a simplistic comparison).

I paused while passing by Hegelplatz at the Humboldt University of Berlin and stared at the statue of Hegel (Figure 1). I was wearing a T-shirt a friend of mine had given me as a present before I came to Berlin. On the T-shirt, the picture of the Obelisk of Axum[4] (Figure 2) was printed. "In the 3rd Century AD, the Persian philosopher Mani described Axum as one of the four greatest kingdoms in the world, along with Rome, China and Persia" (Murphy 2005). A swift puerile desire crossed my mind, being an interlocutor to Hegel. It was not the fact that this man had imagined me "outside the dialectic, outside history itself" (Wright 2004, p. 39) that I wanted to probe, nor the vicious consequences of his dialectic as a colonialist imperative, but the fact that I am the Other no more from without but from within, and the fact that I am becoming the Black in "this antagonistic and aggressive binary between the white self and Black Other that has become the cornerstone for Western theories of subjectivity" (ibid.). I mused how Hegel's case for colonialism and the nation-state might have shaped the scramble for Africa—which Gann and Duignan accuse Ethiopia itself of taking part in (Gann and Duignan 1981, p. 104). In his comparative analysis of the African American movements in the United States of America and the Oromo movements in Ethiopia, sociologist Asafa Jalata asserts that "the Ethiopian empire was created by the alliance of Ethiopian colonialism and European imperialism during the 'scramble' for Africa by enslaving and colonizing Oromos, Sidamas, Somalis, Walayitas, and other ethnonations in the Horn of Africa" (Jalata 2001, p. 4).

Here I stood, and time froze in front of the monument for the most quintessential eurocentrist, as I confronted my own subjectivity, which comes from othering the many peoples of the Ethiopian state. My religious upbringing briefly overrode my current lack of religious beliefs, and I felt some sort of wistful revelation. As I cognised the dual positions I found myself in, I crawled back inside and craved for some redemption. A redeemer from othering and being the Other at once. A miracle that could purge me from othering my own countrymen and women and from "being for other, as described by Hegel." (Fanon 1967, p. 86)

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[4] UNESCO. Last accessed June 2018. http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/15/.

Figure 1. Statue of Hegel, Berlin. 6 May 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 2. The Obelisk of Axum, Axum. Photo by Ondřej Žváček [5].

Writer and broadcast journalist Susan Saulny, quoting one of America's most widely read scholars, Manning Marble, writes "whiteness is the negation of something else. The something else are Africans who are described by Europeans not by their

[5] This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Generic License. To view a copy of this license, visit https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rome_Stele.jpg.

religion or nationality but by the colour of their skin. And nowhere in Africa did Africans call themselves 'black'" (Saulny 2001). Black as a racial category was constructed by Europeans with "the forced removal of West Africans to the Western Hemisphere" (Wright 2004, p. 1). One of the early diasporic Black thinkers who theorised counter discourses on the Black subject against the prevailing racist Euro-American anti-Black discourse of the time, Frantz Fanon, notes that "ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man, since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon 1967, p. 89). This relation forged by historical and political forces reverberates to this day, configuring the contemporary world. Race, for anthropologist Yolanda T. Moses, is

> about power relations, and continues to be an ideology to legitimize the dominance of certain groups. Race and its consequence racism are fundamentally part of a global system of structural racial stratification and inequality. (Moses 2015)

So Black is what I am—I declared to myself. It must have all started in that train cabin I mentioned—*discovering* I am Black, with my Senegalese acquaintance, my *brother* in experience, although we can never be friends, we both are Blacks. And now I averred it in front of a monument for Hegel; a man who had never been where my ancestors dwelt, who did not take part in our everyday poetry production, who did not learn our alphabets, who did not hear about the Oromo *Gadaa* system,[6] dare I say, our indigenous democratic socio-political system, and who simply dismissed me as outside his analytic history about two centuries ago.

Frantz Fanon, among many others, was able to construct counterdiscourses within the same dialectic discourses which had been used by the masterminds of anti-Black racism, such as Hegel and Gobineau (Wright 2004, p. 11). Fanon's contribution to race phenomenology is highlighted in his 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks.* Dissecting the works of racialist projects of historical and contemporary White discourses, which defined (defines) the White subject in relation to the Black Other, Fanon shows the contradiction which placed the "Black male as the negation of the white thesis who is then himself negated" (ibid.). Fanon's phenomenology of the black body, Sara Ahmed posits, is better understood "in terms of the bodily and social experience of restriction, uncertainty and blockage" (Ahmed 2007, p. 161).

Despite the fact that "Fanon's counterdiscourses provided useful models for resistance and response," professor of African American Studies Michelle M. Wright (2004, p. 132) notes:

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[6] The *Gadda* System was inscribed by UNESCO in 2016 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

> Their (re) construction of a gendered agency in nationalist discourse disabled the possibility of a Black female subject at the same time that it enabled the Black male subject who, like his white male counterpart, comes into being through the denial of another's subjectivity—in this case, Black women.

In order for me not to fall into a similar negligence and erasure of the female subject, I will be using both *he* and *she* interchangeably in my writing when addressing both Black and White subjects.

"As long as the black man remains on his home territory," says Fanon, "except for petty internal quarrels, he will not have to experience his being for others. There is in fact a 'being for other', as described by Hegel" (Fanon 1967, p. 86). Suddenly, finding myself as a being for other, quite unprepared, I turned my ethnographic gaze towards my own process of acquiring an identity which had not been necessarily or consciously embodied in my self-identification before inhabiting white spaces. As Müller states (Müller 2016):

> Ethnographic varieties can also be distinguished by the (starting) position of the researcher in relation to the field. 'Not being the phenomenon' (as in ethnological research), 'becoming the phenomenon' (as, for example, in some subculture studies), and 'being the phenomenon' (when exploring one's own culture) . . .

In alignment with Müller's classification, my ethnographic journey can be understood from *discovering* I was Black to leveraging my anthropological practice to the process of *becoming* Black and, finally, to *being* Black consciously and actively.

Phenomenology, according to Desjarlais and Throop (2011), "is the study of things as they appear in our lived experiences." As such, the knowledge produced in this article is an intersubjective construction of my lived experience and that of my informants. However, for the scope of this article, I will mostly focus on my experiences. As per Michael Jackson's (Jackson 1996) suggestion to focus on the *Lebenswelt* rather than on the *Weltanschaungen* in phenomenologically inclined anthropological inquiries, I have treated my own body as a research tool. In addition to that, as modes of appearing in phenomenology are different for different individuals, when implementing phenomenological interviews with my informants, I have interpreted and constructed meanings with them of our lived intersubjective experiences. Therefore, in effect, this research project is grounded in phenomenology.

Sociologist Leon Anderson (Anderson 2006) makes the case for the vital advantages autoethnography provides in qualitative research and proposes his own version, analytic ethnography—against the dominance of evocative autoethnography. In his proposal, he outlines the researcher in analytic autoethnography to be: "(1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social

phenomena." (ibid., p. 373) In analysing the experiences of Black bodies in Berlin as a "full member in the research group", therefore, I have relied on diasporic Black identities which "simultaneously incorporate the diversity of Black identities in the diaspora yet also link all those identities to show that they indeed constitute a diaspora rather than an unconnected aggregate of different peoples linked only in name" (Wright 2004, p. 2).

In so doing—towards an understanding of Black phenomenology as experienced and perceived by Black bodies in Berlin—I had a glimpse of fragments of the lives and experiences of Black bodies in the city beyond myself. I was able to deploy participant observation by deliberately withdrawing from the social interactions I engaged in or from the events I was invited to, or sometimes, by simply following my informants around to see how they navigated the city.

As I learned how to be Black, so to speak, I was careful not to see the natural world I was conducting my research in solely based on my newly acquired experience-based knowledge. In other words, I was practicing "*phenomenological epoché*—the act of suspending judgment about the natural world that precedes phenomenological analysis" (Desjarlais and Throop 2011, p. 88). It was impossible, it has to be admitted, to completely remove myself from passing judgment on situations that invited my ethnographic gaze, despite my attempt not to. Did the woman who crossed to the other side of the street, avoiding my informant, do so because she noticed his foreignness or maleness? I am well aware that women do not have the privilege to navigate the city in a way that I, a male person, can do without constant fear of being harassed. By the same token, did the woman who, at a bus stop in the middle of the night, warily passed me and chose to stand on the other side where white boys were standing (who unfortunately were drunk and had been cat-calling every woman passing) do so for the same reason? After all, it was I who stood in solidarity with her when things got a bit out of control. I told myself, "if she had made her assessment of avoiding danger based on bearing rather than colour, that unpleasant situation would have been avoided", but I will never know for sure if my assumption that she assessed her environment based on colour was true.

In all such ambiguities, I have always asked my informants what their interpretation would be. It has to be mentioned, in a curious, agonizing way, that many of my informants have had similar experiences to my own. It was aborting a transaction at an ATM when I arrived—and strangely queueing again behind me—for me. It was a bag-clutching for my Burkinabe informant. It was an entrance door slamming shut for my Kenyan friend by a neighbour who must not have known that he owns an apartment in the building and lives there. It was a failure to extend the common courtesy of stopping an elevator for my Malagasy informant. It was being mistaken for a drug dealer for my Senegalese train acquaintance. It was being offered money repeatedly on gay dating apps for my gay Eritrean friend.

"It is not so much the number of cases seen that matters in phenomenology," states the psychiatrist Karl Jaspers, "but the extent of the inner exploration of the individual case, which needs to be carried to the furthest possible limit" (Jasper 1997, p. 56). It has then become my preoccupation to go beyond my intersubjective construction of meanings with my informants. I started to isolate situations and probe them to the fullest of my capacity. For example, when a white flatmate explained Ethiopia, in the spirit of *whitesplaining* (Ramsey 2015), to my own guests at the dinner table, I had a several-hour-long discussion with him after the guests left in order to affirm or negate my supposition of why that was happening.

Nowhere in Berlin am I as absorbed in the enthrallment of my Blackness and its white fantasy origin as when I stand at the Marx-Engels-Forum and look towards the ongoing construction of the controversy-drenched Humboldt Forum (Figure 3) across the canal. The Humboldt Forum will house Berlin's non-European ethnological collections. The art historian Bénédicte Savoy publicly resigned from its advisory board in 2017, "want[ing] to know how much blood is dripping from each artwork" (Dalley 2018). It leaves one to wonder whether or not the project of imperial fantasy and its manifestation through colonisation has ever finished when one sees this seemingly colonial nostalgia blatantly flaunted. The irony of it all is, of course, to see this colonial nostalgia and the fight to hold on to the very history it is claimed Africa did not have.

Figure 3. Humboldt Forum, Berlin. 28 July 2019. Photo by author.

"The modern white subject, some two hundred years old," writes Wright (2004, p 29), "is exactly as old as the Black Other on which he relies." It makes sense. The White desperately needs me as his binary opposite. Otherwise, why this infantile fixation on my otherness?! I say "infantile" for a reason—because it goes beyond just hoarding other peoples' heritages as colonial domination;

infantile—because I see an arbitrariness to my ascription of Black in White fantasies. In fact, the basis for such a racialised typology has little to do with me. The Ethiopian triumph over Italy, dubbed by Mockler (1984, p. xli) as "the greatest single disaster in European colonial history", for instance, shook racist Europe to the extent that instead of admitting that it was defeated by Black people, it created a myth that Ethiopians were in fact Black Caucasians (Tibebu 1996). Ostensibly then, even I was briefly made White.

The harrowing complexity of this realisation couldn't even leave me be at my university in Berlin, which I had naively thought was a safe space. Leaving aside the fact that the weight of the *crimes* of anthropology disproportionately weigh heavier on me, leaving aside the fact that the programme I attended, Visual and Media Anthropology at Freie Universität Berlin, still has a graded course named "Applied Visual Anthropology in Health in Africa"—as if Africa is a homogenous entity (the course only deals with two countries, namely, Mozambique and the DR Congo) (Frömming 2019), leaving aside the casual and unintentionally patronizing attitude my classmates of European origin exhibit so effortlessly towards their fellow non-European students as if they are trained to do so—which I find just as deplorable as prejudice—the issue of representation would come and expose my anthropology classroom to be simply the reflection of the outside world. A film called *Enjoy Poverty* (Martens 2008) by a Dutch artist named Renzo Martens was being screened at one of my classes. It is Kevin Carter's "The vulture and the little girl" (Wikipedia 2019) all over again. Intense. The filmmaker wants wedding photographers to commodify their poverty. He wants to teach them how photographing raped women, malnourished children, etc. is more profitable than photographing weddings. He asks them whether they would like to earn one dollar a month or a thousand dollars a month. Well, they might answer one dollar a month, who knows—after all, these men are depicted as extremely passive. Martens is seen very frequently in the picture, as some sort of self-absorbed protagonist who seeks to shine against the passivity of these Congolese men.

Martens as quoted in Penney describes his film as "primarily a piece of art" (Penney 2010). Noticing his audacity to depict Congolese men in that familiar colonial nostalgia some white men seem to be yearning for, as well as his reduction of a global structure to a mere personal one, I protested against the curious idea the classroom seemed to have adopted: that the film invites us to see the hypocrisy of the Western world. I saw some of my white friends taking on the burden of explaining because I "was not getting it". I can't possibly be getting it when a decontextualised fetishisation of poverty is "primarily", and I quote, "a piece of art". Perhaps, he should do a film in Brussels as the hypocrisy seems to me rife there. What purpose could this film have, except to make an opportunist White popular, I wondered. How many Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 1997) would Europe need to face its hypocrisy?

The filmmaker gained fame and made a living out of the film, obviously. So, at whose expense are we really facing our own hypocrisy?

I am Black. I am still learning how to be Black. It is my redemption insofar as this persisting white fantasy depends on it. As long as this white fantasy project and its relentless attempt to inferiorise its others persist, I won't stop being Black. "It's up to you", offers James Baldwin, "as long as you think you're white, there is no hope for you. As long as you think you're white, I'm going to be forced to think I'm black" (Baldwin, in Levine 2014).

I am Black because I still—I must—mourn Patrice Lumumba. He has become my hero. He was the first democratically elected prime minister of Congo. To Jean-Paul Sartre, he was "a meteor in the African firmament" (Witte 2002, p. xxii). Belgian sociologist Ludo De Witte says "the Belgian government of Gaston Eyskens is directly responsible for the assassination of the Congolese prime minister" (ibid.). I don't remember knowing Lumumba when I was in Ethiopia, it was a name like a fleeting autumn leaf—beautiful—one that I must have heard but paid no attention to and which vanished. I didn't have to know about Patrice. I wasn't Black yet.

I yearned for a hero under this white gaze in Berlin, and there he was, shining above the crimes and the inhumanity of Brussels. "It was Belgian advice, Belgian orders, and finally Belgian hands that killed Lumumba" (ibid.). I am Black because I must expose a lost moral legitimacy. The course of the whole continent could have been changed. I must mourn—for I am becoming Black.

One must come to realise one's Blackness under the white gaze; a gaze which oscillates between patronising and hostile. In this gaze, the Black is fixed under the proud and profound unfamiliarity of the White. The White appears to be unsuspecting that her ignorance reflects poorly on her. Her ignorance is crammed by infantile exoticism and fantasy of primitivism of the Other, the Black. The Black is pathologically different outside of the collective unconscious of the White and the Black's continent is homogeneous.

The White has perfected the manners of the ally. He is a plane ticket away to play saviour should disaster hit Africa. He doesn't have to think about Patrice Lumumba or the possibility that the Patrices of the continent, if allowed to exist, could have made his saviour complex unnecessary. The White, she, is the guardian of democracy and human rights. She is not bothered to explain why a democratically elected prime minster would be purposefully removed from the face of the earth by Europe. It is a stifling confrontation. In this confrontation, the Black takes full responsibility for her condition. In this confrontation, Europe's age-old, what I would call parasitic, economic relationship with Africa and its effect on the peoples of Africa is hardly discussed, yet the White is very swift to assume a saviour and expert role in the predicaments of the continent, which, without absolving Africans of agency and culpability, cannot possibly be reckoned with without attending to this historical and

current parasitic relationship that Europe has succeeded in forging. I am becoming Black because I can't afford an ahistorical reading of my condition if I were to make sense of it. The White, he, insists the past is the past, while I am here carrying it for both of us. The White insists the past is the past, while the indelible mark of his Whiteness oozes on the brown faces of indigenous people of the Americas and Australia to this day.

Linköping University's Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson (Hansen and Jonsson 2015) have shown in their book-length contribution to the series *Theory for a Global Age* how the desire to jointly exploit Africa played a key role in the European integration projects that culminated in today's European Union. "Or to be straight, the EU would not have come into existence at this point in time had it not been conceived as a Eurafrican enterprise in which colonialism was Europeanized" (ibid., p. 13). Reading through the accounts of Hansen and Jonsson, how Europeans viewed their colonial project on the continent of Africa to be unending to the point their hubris prevented them from recognising the inevitability of decolonisation that was happening before their eyes after World War II, one cannot help but appreciate the level of delusion Whiteness, in its superiority fantasy, exhibits. Despite the fact that formal colonisation has ended, Hansen and Jonsson bring to our attention the harrowing reality of Europe's colonial project in Africa as a process which has been merely transformed and which continues to evolve, in the concluding chapter of their book: "Ending Colonialism by Securing its Continuation" (ibid., p. 239). A report published by a group of NGOs led by Global Justice Now, Jubilee Debt Coalition and Health Poverty Action (Curtis and Jones 2017), calculates the movement of financial resources in and out of Africa, and in its estimate Africa is a net creditor to the rest of the world. Nobel laureate Joseph E. Stiglitz notes that Western global financial institutions—the IMF and World Bank—have "the feel of the colonial ruler" to them (Stiglitz 2002, p. 40). The New York-based activist and writer Lee Wongraf (Wongraf 2018) demonstrates in her book *Extracting Profit: Imperialism, Neoliberalism and the New Scramble for Africa* how the historically rooted the West's parasitic economic practices in Africa thrive unremittingly today.

> Decades of loans and structural adjustment policies from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank […] have placed an economic stranglehold on African and other Third World nations. […] Using the IMF and World Bank as a battering ram, the neoliberal policy of trade liberalization forced its way across Africa and the rest of the globe, leaving in its wake decimated social programs, a debt crisis, and low wages—that is, conditions favorable for US investment. The last few decades of neoliberal policy have spelled disaster for the vast majority of ordinary Africans. (Wongraf 2018, p. 33)

. . . for Berlin

. . . and the desire for familiarity
The longing for the known
The craving for the sight of accustomed vivacity
Or even the hankering for the dearth of elegance
The particular smell, the smirk, the sourness, the roughness
And the tenderness . . .

August 2016

Berlin! A city where the Black Germans (Afro-Germans) I meet appear to show a feeling of some sort of closeness and an unfamiliar familiarity to me, the outsider, that they don't grant their fellow white Germans. A city where Blackness, stripped of its intricacy, cannons into Africa so fast that the city gazes unseeingly at its hyphenated Berliners who couldn't be anything but Germans when they say "We are not a figment of your imagination or an exotic answer to your desires" (Opitz et al. 1992, p. viii). According to Wright, "Black Germans, despite having been born and raised in Germany and belonging to no other culture or nation, are often read not as German but rather as 'African' (as if a continent of 750 million people and 1000 languages is a homogeneous community)" (Wright 2004, p. 185).

Berlin. I bike usually. Biking through history—East Berlin, West Berlin. I pass its streets east to west, its wide streets whose historical divide is apparent to this day. I see some of its streets refusing to let go of the city's racist past (Sousa 2017). Its nightclubs insist on frustrating me unfailingly when Berliners interrupt my dance to ask if I am "selling something"—the something being drugs. But I love Berlin. Berlin *mein Zuhause*—my home. My home away from home. It, in its own way, feels like home. I know where to go to dance to techno on a Monday afternoon. I have now got used to buses arriving on time. When there was a power cut the other day for the first time in four years, I complained, and the fact that I complained did not feel strange.

Past Wilhelmstraße—and the commemorative plaque of the infamous Berlin Conference (see Figure 4), which made possible the Scramble for Africa—lies my favourite café. There I read an article by the award-winning author on imperialism, (Smith 2019), entitled *Imperialism in a coffee cup*, while sipping my coffee, the taste of which I know too well—the Ethiopian coffee. According to the article, an imaginably small amount of the price I pay for my cup of coffee goes to the farmer in Ethiopia, who Smith calls "super exploited" (ibid.), and whose hard labour cultivated and harvested the coffee beans. A big chunk ends up in the GDP of the country where the coffee is consumed. If a portion of that money ends in public spending in, say, Germany, would that mean that an Ethiopian farmer, who struggles to feed his family,

helps to pay for my bus to arrive on time? Is it inconceivable to think that the German government even might send a cent or two as foreign aid to Ethiopia, I wondered. Richard Dyer, one of the key contributors to the understanding of Whiteness in visual culture, notes the inextricable nexus between the unfair global trade terms and what he calls "racial imagery" when he writes:

> Racial imagery is central to the organization of the modern world. At what cost regions and countries export their goods, whose voices are listened to at international gatherings, who bombs and who is bombed, who gets what jobs, housing, access to health care and education, what cultural activities are subsidized and sold, in what terms they are validated—these are all largely inextricable from racial imagery. (Dyer 1997, p. 1)

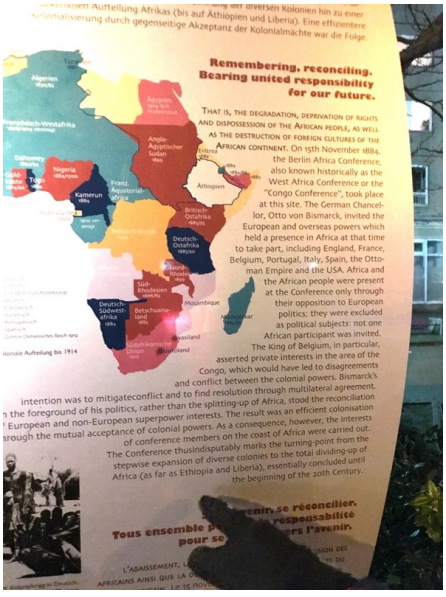

Figure 4. Wilhelmstraße, Berlin. 28 July2019. Photo by author.

Coffee is one of the major exports of Ethiopia. It also grows mostly in the southern part of the country. If we bring in the dynamics of the north–south relations of the country, it is apparent that a great deal of economic resources lies in the south, while historically political power stayed among the northerners. Professor of History Gebru Tareke exposes the "paternalistic and arrogant Abyssinians" who:

> … looked upon and treated the indigenous people as backward, heathen, filthy, deceitful, lazy, and even stupid—stereotypes that European colonialists commonly ascribed to their African subjects. Both literally

> and symbolically, southerners became the object of scorn and ridicule. (Tareke 1991, p. 71)

Once again, while blankly gazing at my unfinished and by now cold coffee, I ruminated, like I did in front of the statue of Hegel, the arduous position I found myself in. I am needed as the binary opposite of someone else's self-definition and justification of economic plunder, in the same way I need the Others of Ethiopia. I yearned for salvation. And I know that many fellow Amharic-speaking Ethiopians, who have no problem dissecting the white man for a similar crime, won't join me in the quest for this salvation. They are content with Amharic being the dominant in a country of more than 80 languages. They are too satisfied that the whole country is moulded in their own image. They are Ethiopians and they insist everyone else is Ethiopian too. Imposition is only bad when a white man does it. And we stopped the white man. We had Christianity before the white man. We know how to write. When we impose, it's nation-building.

The Others of Ethiopia are fixed under my gaze—my cruel gaze. My gaze is suffocating, here I admit it. I did not even know I had it. My gaze is particularly wary of the Oromo, as they outnumber us. I make fun of their accent when they speak Amharic. I don't speak Afan-Oromo, it never crossed my mind to learn it. I never bothered to pronounce Oromo names correctly. Some of them have adopted Amharic names. It is late, but I must be redeemable from this gaze of mine—from this gaze of the collective unconscious of my Amhara-Tigrayan heritage. I must "unbecome" an Amhara and become an Ethiopian, which the Others of the country are imagining, and which truly includes them.

It is not only what superiority fantasies do to the oppressed that must be contended and reflected upon, but also what they do to the oppressor. In their extreme manifestation, their ability to take away the humanity of the ones with the superiority complex and their structural potential to allow the infliction of violence and terror are ghastly. The recent indiscriminate killing of ethnically Gumuz and Sinasha by Amhara chauvinists is a case in point (Endeshaw 2019). The harrowing realisation of the potential of terror and violence of the white superiority fantasy in its paranoiac desperation and its structural capability to slide so easily to barbarism also meant, for me, to be utterly shaken by the inhumanity that could eliminate, for instance, a Trayvon Martin (or the many black teenagers in the United States of America, whom the racist structures of their country seem to have an insatiable desire to kill and maim) from the face of the earth with impunity and still maintain an audacity to question his innocence—for I realise that Martin is me!

> The root of the black man's hatred is rage,
> and he does not so much hate white men

as simply wants them out of his way,
out of his children's way. (Baldwin, in Peck 2017, p. 60)

The journey of my becoming Black is one of demystification of the White and his stagnated imagination about his Other and of his continued fantasy of supremacy and its apparent tie to global capitalism and to myself. It is also a story of resistance insofar as the White insists that I should be ashamed of what he imagined me to be and because, quite simply put, I am not ashamed of who and what I am. I have become Black. But what exactly is being Black? Is it just declaring one's Blackness? How is it enmeshed in my Ethiopianness and Africanness? These are questions that deserve their own thorough engagement, which I hope to undertake as my being Black for now is a start of another journey.

It is tempting to assume, as some of my informants, either blatantly or by implying it, do, that there is some inherent evilness in Whiteness—no one has matched the crimes done in the name of Whiteness. Becoming Black, for me, also meant to recognise the human capability of compassion in people who happen to be White and "begin to suspect", with James Baldwin, "that white people did not act as they did because they were white, but for some other reason." (Baldwin, in Peck 2017, p. 19) I nodded repeatedly when I came across the poem of Baldwin, as he captured my sentiment fully.

I attest to this:
the world is not white;
it never was white,
cannot be white.
White is a metaphor for power,
and that is simply a way of describing
Chase Manhattan Bank. (ibid., p. 107)
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Subverting Identity: Cesare Viel's Performative Works

Matteo Valentini

Abstract: "Enough with us, you, them/Enough with me, you, her/Enough with him." The identity issue is one of the major topics in the performative works of the renowned Italian artist Cesare Viel (1964), as it emerges from the above quoted incipit of the script of his first performance, I Folletti irritati, held during the Art Fair in Bologna, on 28 January 1996. The identity questioned by Viel in his works is neither a monad nor the subject of a sort of histrionic autobiographical narration. As a part of the self that reveals itself during the performative action, it is a blurry entity constantly modified by the discrete and uncertain crossing of presences, spaces, and times, which are in turn liable to change and to be reinterpreted. This concept of a constantly subverted identity is explored through the metaphoric representation (Infinita ricomposizione, 2015), the lecture-performances devoted to his favorite writers (Cesare Pavese—Ritratto di un amico, 2000), the re-enactment of events of his youth (Lost in meditation, 1999), the camouflage (To the Lighthouse. Cesare Viel as Virginia Woolf, 2004, 2005, 2017), in the latter case following a line that, from Marcel Duchamp's "Rose Sélavy", crosses 20th century art, culminating in the disguised self-portraits by Andy Warhol and Urs Lüthi. This contribution aims to highlight the dialogue that Cesare Viel consciously engages with influential theoreticians of performative and relational identity such as Judith Butler, Adriana Cavarero, Gilles Deleuze, to name just a few of them, which the artist subtly recalls when he states: "What's identity but a 'difference', a continuous deviation from what we think we are?"

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1. Introduction

The Post Human traveling exhibit, curated by Jeffrey Deitch in 1992, represents the first effort made in Europe to collect and systematize some of the most significant artistic reflections regarding identity and corporeity, reflections that had been developed during the eighties and the early nineties by artists such as Cindy Sherman (consider, for example, the *Untitled* works, obscene compositions of anthropomorphic figures and organic and inorganic elements). Although many celebrated artists are absent (Orlan and Stelarc, to name a couple) and although there are occasionally theoretical overlaps between "post-human" and "trans-human" in the catalogue's

text[1], for Deitch the research that led to curating this exhibition forebode the season of the post-human: "The modern era might be characterized as a period of the discovery of self. Our current post-modern era can be characterized as a transitional period of the disintegration of self. Perhaps the coming "post-human" period will be characterized by the reconstruction of self" (Deitch 1992, p. 32). Continuing with this reasoning, Deitch states:

> Many contemporary people have little sense of past and little sense of future, only a sense of the present. Disconnected from traditional family history, people are more prone to start their self-identity with the present. There is less need to psychologically interpret or "discover" oneself and more of a feeling that the self can be altered and reinvented. [...] Reality, fantasy, and fiction are merging into the inspiration for a new model of personality organization. The interchangeable identities of Madonna and the extraordinary self-transformation of Ivana Trump are examples of this shuffling of reality and fantasy into a reassembled fictional personality that quickly becomes fact. The search for the absolute "true" self has been replaced by a constant scanning for new alternatives. (ibid.)

Two years later, the exhibition entitled *soggettoSoggetto* (24 June–28 August 1994), curated by Francesca Pasini and Giorgio Verzotti at the Castello di Rivoli, near Turin (not surprisingly *Post Human* was held at this venue 1 October–22 November 1992), revives this questioning of "modern" identity. Whereas "modern" identity had been conceived as monolithic and often predetermined, a "mobile perspective" was now favored (Alfano Miglietti 1997, p. 65).

Far from the interest that *Post Human* places on the social representation of the body/simulation or of the enhanced body (Deitch dedicates a large part of the catalogue to tabloids images taken from advertising and elsewhere, which express the social questions about new bodies, efficient minds, rapid communications), *soggettoSoggetto* can be inserted in the trend labeled by Nicolas Bourriaud a few years later as "Relational Art" (Bourriaud 1998). This movement was already taking shape in the early 1980s, for example, with Maria Lai's celebrated installation *Legarsi alla*

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[1] Keeping in line with (Subrizi 2008): on the one hand, the post-human individual moves away from the anthropocentric position traditionally reserved for human beings, sets himself in ontological continuity with animals and nature, and tends towards a hybridization with his own technological inventions; on the other hand, the trans-human individual, by means of technology, desires to level and resolve the undesirable defects in the human nature (such as illness and aging), thereby remaining well within an anthropocentric position. Jeffrey Deitch seems to make his own trans-human assumptions writing in the *Post Human* catalogue: "Our society will soon have access to the biotechnology that will allow us to make direct choices about how we want our species to further evolve. This new techno-evolutionary phase will bring us far beyond eugenics. Our children's generation could very well be the last generation of 'pure' humans" (Subrizi 2008, p. 30).

montagna in 1981: this installation counted on a close collaboration between the artist and the people of her hometown, Ulassai, in Sardinia, a veritable subjugation of the latter to the mountain dominating it.

The contemporary peculiarity that Italian curators aim to exhibit is that of the "intersubjective" relationship among the artists, their works and the spectators, which calls into question the connection "subject–object" in favor of "subject–subject"; it is generally deemed that the relationship between a human being and environmental elements that surround him/her can no longer be exhausted in a unidirectional dynamic of possession, but rather that it should develop into an encounter. Francesca Pasini writes:

> "As I become, I remember you" (Iragray, *To be Two*, 1994). And this is the perception that I have of art: it is never connected to the possession of the object, but to *my becoming*, that is, to that development of awareness which can take shape by capturing that which strikes me about a color, an image, a phrase, a sound, and translating it into an expression of my own. It is an intersubjective movement that allows me to bring a moment to life and at the same time gives consistency to the perception of my contemporaneity, whether I stand in front of artwork from the past, or I participate in an artwork of the present.[2] (Pasini and Verzotti 1994, pp. 12–13)

Besides well-known international artists such as Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Philippe Parreno, or Wolfang Tillmans, some Italian artists of the generation of the 1960s are also represented in the exhibition *soggettoSoggetto,* including Maurizio Cattelan, Eva Marisaldi, Vanessa Beecroft, Liliana Moro, and Cesare Viel.

In the present paper I examine specifically the works by Cesare Viel, performance artist and professor at the Accademia Ligustica di Belle Arti of Genoa, dividing them into two categories and following a chronological order whenever possible. On the one hand I analyze works that counterpose an identity in continuous performative construction to the presumed binary nature of gender identity; on the other hand, I consider works where Viel incorporates the stories and identities of subjects other than his own—often literary figures—in a process of narration and, more importantly, of auto-narration, far from the representative forms and the mimesis of theater. His works are analyzed with a particular regard to the theoretical and philosophical

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[2] My translation from Italian: ""Mentre divengo io mi ricordo di te" (L. Irigaray, *Essere due*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1994). E questa è la percezione che ho dell'arte: non è mai legata al possesso dell'oggetto, ma al *mio divenire*, cioè a quella crescita di consapevolezza che trova forma nel trattenere ciò che mi ha colpito di un colore, di un'immagine, di una frase, di un suono e nel tradurlo nella mia espressione. È un movimento intersoggettivo che mi consente di rendere vivo il ricordo e al contempo dà consistenza alla percezione della mia contemporaneità, sia quando mi trovo di fronte all'arte del passato, sia quando partecipo a quella del presente".

points raised by the artist himself in seminars and workshops held at the University of Genoa in 2018 and 2019. Carla Lonzi's concept of "relational identity" and Adriana Cavarero's "narratable identity", for example, are the basis of the two categories outlined above, as well as Deleuze's theories on the "deterritorialization" and Judith Butler's reflections on the "performative identity of gender".

2. What Kind of Identity?

In *Soggettosoggetto* Cesare Viel exhibits a video installation entitled *Androginia* (Figure 1). Here, for the first time, he confronts the issue of identity as a process in continuous transformation, which he will further develop. Two aluminum-lined, photographic panels are lowered from the ceiling in the room housing the work. Each panel is set opposite to a monitor, set against a wall. The monitors show a video of the artist reading a text of his own creation, dubbed respectively by an Italian and an English actress. The panels show photographic portraits of the two dubbing actresses in a cutting room, with lines taken from Viel's typescript placed next to them (Figure 2).

This is not a simple speech that is recorded and dubbed but the result of an actual performance with no audience. It is carried out in a recording studio and achieved thanks to montage, violating the performative ideal of *hic et nunc*[3] to obtain the surprising effect of alienation, helpful in surpassing a rigid understanding of identity[4].

> Well then, it's me that's talking to you. A person with an age and an experience. You that are listening to me, will look for a reason, an aim and a motive in my words. You that are seeing me, will try to identify a move that betrays a particular element or an identity in my presence. You will try to perceive a person. (Pasini and Verzotti 1994, p. 119)

The video starts with these words, almost challenging the preconceptions of the spectator regarding gender identity, with the caveat to not confuse the multiplicity of identity with multiple identity. We are in front of a specific person, with set characteristics, which do not correspond to the dichotomous distinction between

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[3] One of the first artists to display his body on video, thereby removing himself from the audience, was Bruce Nauman, whom Viel refers to in his action *Seasonal Affective Disorder*, which was inspired by A*rt Make-Up* (1968), a video where Nauman applies make-up of various colors to his face and upper body.

[4] In a lecture held at the University of Genoa on 13 March 2019, Viel defined this room as a "Brechtian box", making an explicit reference to the technique of alienation used by the German dramatist, which conveys the impossibility of completely identifying with the representation on the stage, and, consequently, the ignition of an analytical flame that investigates the social issues being represented.

male and female and, above all, are not fixed but rather in a magmatic sequence of calm and excitement.

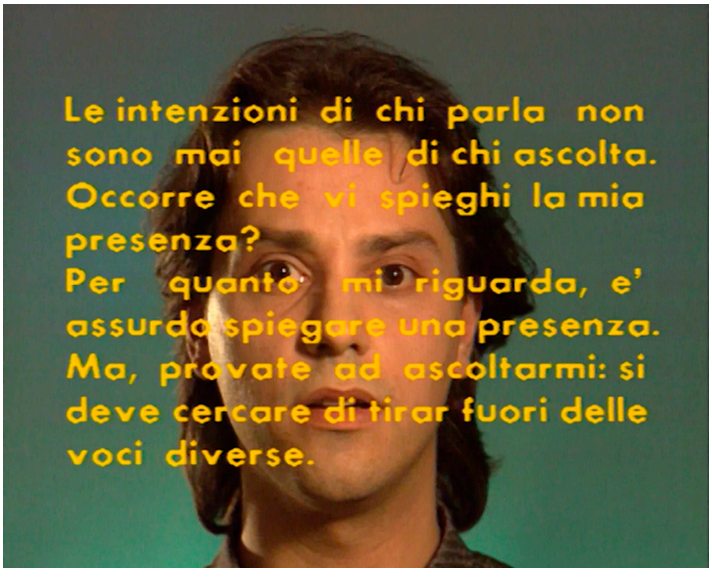

Figure 1. Cesare Viel, *Androginia*, 1994, video, color, sound, 8', courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.

Figure 2. Cesare Viel, *Androginia*, 1994, installation, two monitors, two videos, two color photographic panels on aluminum, 110 × 120 cm each, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Castello di Rivoli, photo Roberto Marossi. Used with permission.

These ideas can be traced back to Gilles Deleuze's writings, a philosopher read regularly by Viel and a point of reference for his art. Deleuze held lectures on Spinoza at the University of Vincennes between November 1980 and March 1981, where he expressed the concept of the individual as a composition and a relationship of infinite bodies, continuously related to external influences which determine its capacity to express its own power[5]. The individual, in fact, is power and its body is "defined by the ensemble of relations which compose it, or, what amounts to exactly the same thing, by its power of being affected".[6]

In relation to this, it reacts to the encounters with the bodies that surround it, developing or consuming its own power; thus, it bears witness to a continuous variation in intensity, a topic that has a central role in several of Viel's works.

The philosopher and art critic, Carla Lonzi, who was among the first in Italy to deal with the issues of self-awareness and difference of the sexes, represents another source of inspiration for *Androginia*. In particular, within her dialogue with the sculptor and ex-partner Pietro Consagra, from which the book *Vai pure, Dialogo con Pietro Consagra* came into being, Lonzi is critically at odds with the system of society, of art, of relationship, and of the individual, a system dominated by an individualist perspective and, in the last analysis, a male chauvinistic one. She opposes this with a system radically based in reciprocity and relationship, by which to reach real self-awareness as well as awareness of the other: "For me relationship means reciprocal knowledge and a conscious modification of oneself

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5 One of the many examples with which Deleuze disseminates his lectures can help to clarify this point and to comprehend how this concept relates to the individual, chiefly on a physical level:

"vous rappelez que les infiniment petits reçoivent constamment des influences du dehors, ils passent leur temps à être en rapport avec les autres collections d'infiniment petits. Supposez qu'une collection d'infiniment petits soit déterminée du dehors à prendre un autre rapport que celui sous lequel elle m'appartient. Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire? Ça veut dire: je meurs! [...]sous l'action de l'arsenic, les particules infiniment petites qui composent mon sang, qui composent mon sang sous tel rapport, vont être déterminées à entrer sous un autre rapport. Dès lors cet ensemble infini va entrer dans la composition d'un autre corps, ce ne sera plus le mien: je meurs!" ("www.webdeleuze.com", https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/40).

"you recall that the infinitely small are constantly influenced from the outside, they pass their time by being in relation with other collections of the infinitely small. Suppose that an infinite collection of the infinitely small is determined from the outside to take another relation than the one under which it belongs to me. What does this mean? It means that: I die! [...]under the action of arsenic, the infinitely small particles which compose the blood, which compose my blood under such a relation, are going to be determined to enter under another relation. Because of this, this infinite set is going to enter in the composition of another body, it will no longer be mine: I die!" ("www.webdeleuze.com", https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/42).

6 Translation from French by Timothy S. Murphy: "doit être défini par l'ensemble des rapports qui le composent, ou, ce qui revient exactement au même, par son pouvoir d'être affecté" ("www.webdeleuze.com", https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/11).

within this framework. For this to occur, all the other aims of life must be secondary" (Lonzi 2011, p. 12)[7]. These other aims of life are, fundamentally, self-affirmation and improvement of the individual condition. This attitude substantiates the cultural myth of the protagonist, according to which the individual, a man in particular, behaves, develops his self-awareness, and creates a self on his own, extracted and removed from the environment that surrounds him. In the artistic sphere this myth is strictly connected with the romantic idea of the artist as a genius devoted to his artwork, unconcerned with relationships and identities outside himself, unless they are instrumental to or useful for passive incitement. Carla Lonzi refutes this point of view: "This activity which I carry out [...] is ultimately based on human relationships, on reciprocal knowing, on the demolition of the cultural myth of the protagonist. It's based on showing that things always unfold through a dialogue, that truths are always in relationship. [...] It is a culture [the one of the myth of the protagonist], indeed a way of becoming conscious that changes when another historic subject enters and says 'look, things are not at all like this, I know because I have become conscious of what I represent, and I'm sorry but I will no longer allow a schematization that excludes me, that doesn't correspond to the truth and doesn't mirror my experience at all'"[8] (ibid., p. 40).

Carla Lonzi does not in the least call into question the limits of gender, rather she emphasizes the differences in male and female attitudes. On the other hand, Cesare Viel in *Androginia*, while reclaiming the relational dimension suggested by Lonzi, advances the hypothesis of an identity without boundaries. It is an identity which, entrusting itself to the flux of desire and the urge to break free from norms and standards(I will return to this point), takes charge of its own becoming: Viel replaces the boundaries of gender, which impede the flow of becoming, with the divergences, which exalt the power of that flow.

Cesare Viel presented one of his first public performances, *Seasonal Affective Disorder*, at Artra Gallery in Milan in 1998. The artist is seated in front of a long table that is covered with colorful sheets of paper, cosmetics and a mirror. He puts the make up on and colors his face while a recorded voice—his own—describes and

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[7] My translation from Italian: "Per me rapporto significa conoscenza reciproca e modificazione cosciente di sé all'interno di questa. Perché ciò avvenga tutti gli altri scopi della vita devono andare in sottordine".

[8] My translation from Italian: "Questa attività che svolgo io [...] in definitiva si basa sul rapporto umano, sulla conoscenza reciproca, sulla demolizione proprio del mito culturale del protagonista. Si basa sul far vedere che le cose si svolgono sempre attraverso un dialogo, che le verità sono sempre in rapporto [...] È una cultura [quella del mito del protagonista], appunto, un modo di prendere coscienza delle cose che cambia quando un altro soggetto storico entra dentro e dice "guardate, le cose non stanno affatto così, lo so io perché personalmente ho preso coscienza di quello che ho rappresentato, e mi dispiace ma non lascio più che avvenga una schematizzazione che mi esclude, non corrisponde a verità e non rispecchia affatto la mia esperienza".

comments, somewhat contemptuously, on the situation, acting as a hidden alter-ego and so adding a certain note of alienation.

In the book *Cesare Viel, Azioni*, edited by Carla Subrizi in 2008, the artist reports having read about the illness known as "Seasonal Affective Disorder" in a reportage written by Luigi Malerba. The disorder strikes inhabitants of Northern Europe due to a lack of sunlight in winter. Viel states: "This particular environmental condition supposedly causes a deep depression in some individuals, bringing a person to the painful perception of a loss of that meaning which each of us constructs daily in order to live. I thought it could be a great inspiration for a possible project"[9] (Subrizi 2008, p. 24). The disorientation provoked by a state of depression, inertia, and fatigue is the starting point for a reflection on identity, which Viel sees in constant movement and flux, in a continuous process of deterritorialization. Referencing Deleuze again, "Territory only has value by reason of movement by which one can exit. [...] There is no territory without a path for exit from the territory and there is no exit from the territory, that is deterritorialization, without at the same time an effort at deterritorialization elsewhere"[10] (Deleuze 1996, 00:14.37). These feelings produce the overwhelming impulse to cover his face with make-up, to remove it and apply it again—to enter a manifestation of identity, and then come out of it. Despite the absence of excitement or dramatization, Viel's gesture is that of a frustrated groping around, whose outcome collapses in the search itself; the concept of an objective is shattered and the failure, the mistake, is accepted as a real and integral part of the search for identity:

> This impossible state of being, this condition of soul's misery, of dismay, in other words, of confusion, would have cause this man, whom I saw—or rather glimpsed, because I only saw him from behind (as I was behind him)—to start thinking that he was someone else and to begin to furiously apply make-up to his face, his eyes, his mouth. Honestly, almost outrageous! And above all, I think, because in the end he's still the same person, himself, in other words the same one, who indecently tries to be someone else,

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[9] My translation from Italian in (Subrizi 2008, p. 30): "Questa particolare condizione ambientale produrrebbe in alcuni individui un profondo umore depressivo, e porterebbe alla dolorosa percezione della perdita del senso che ognuno di noi si costruisce quotidianamente per vivere. Ho pensato che si trattava di un ottimo spunto per un possibile lavoro".

[10] My translation from French: "le territoire ne vaut que par rapport au mouvement par lequel on en sort [...] il n'y a pas de territoire, sans un vecteur de sortie du territoire, il n'y a pas de sortie de territoire c'est-à-dire de déterritorialisation, sans en même temps un effort pour se reterritorialiser ailleurs, sur autre chose".

instead of really becoming someone else, he becomes himself trying to be someone else.[11] (Subrizi 2008, p. 30)

Returning to the reflection on the identity of gender, blatantly interpreted from a relational point of view, in 1999 Cesare Viel produced a video, *Domande d'identità*, in which he interviews people he encounters on the streets of Milan. The artist, in this case, has an important forerunner: Pier Paolo Pasolini who, during the filming of his documentary *Comizi d'amore,* travelled throughout Italy with an almost encyclopedic effort to interview people from every region, age-group, and gender, and from different social and working classes, and collected opinions about taboo, sexual habits, matrimonial law, and public decency. Pasolini went on to, with the help of the writer Alberto Moravia and the psychoanalyst Cesare Musatti, put the public relationship Italians had with sex and the awareness with which they behaved within the sexual sphere under the microscope.

Thirty-five years later, Viel seems to renew the Pasolinian intent, albeit moving forward with a more simplified, and less analytical, approach. Certain themes in *Comizi d'amore*, such as the right to a divorce or to commit honor killings, the lawfulness in keeping women in an inferior status, have since been surpassed by a progressive development of awareness—or of righteousness. However, certain others, such as the difference between homosexuality and so-called "normalcy", seem to be as yet unresolved. Interviewed by Viel on the right to gay marriage (in Italy in 1999 this law had not yet been contemplated), one girl responds: "They too have a right to live, for pity's sake, if they were born like that ... but only if they were born like that! I discriminate against those who are not gay, yet who perform homosexual acts. But those who are gay, poor souls, what can be done? Just as there are disabled people...unfortunately it's not their fault"[12]. (Viel 1999, 00:04.30).

What mainly interests Viel in this sort of action/investigation is understanding how people consider gender identity. Through questions regarding "tolerance" towards homosexuals, acceptance of their right to marriage and to adopt children, the artist attempts to examine questions such as: "is sexual difference natural? Are we born a man or a woman, or do we become one? Is it a cultural question

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[11] My translation from Viel in (Subrizi 2008, p. 30): "Questo stato d'animo impossibile, questa condizione di miseria dell'anima, di sconcerto, di confusione insomma, avrebbe portato questo tizio che qui ho visto, o meglio ho intravisto, perché l'ho visto sempre di spalle (io restandogli dietro), a incominciare a pensare di essere qualcun altro e a truccarsi con ostinazione il volto, la faccia, gli occhi, la bocca. Insomma una cosa quasi indecente! Soprattutto, dico io, perché in fondo è sempre la stessa persona, cioè se stesso, il medesimo insomma, che cerca indecentemente di essere un altro e, invece di diventare realmente un altro, diventa un se stesso che cerca di diventare qualcun altro".

[12] My translation from Italian: "Hanno diritto di vivere anche loro, per carità, se sono nati così ... Ma solo se sono nati così! Io discrimino chi non è gay, chi lo fa. Chi invece lo è, poverino, cosa bisogna fare? Come ci sono gli handicappati ... Purtroppo non è colpa loro".

tied to schooling, to family, to a country's culture, to society?"[13] (ibid., 00:02.50). It is significant that often the dialogue is interrupted early on, due to an excess of hostility or because of the embarrassment of the interviewee, and you encounter a sort of "scandalous barrier", which blocks the dialogue before it can touch upon the themes that are central to Viel's art. With regard to this, it is interesting to cite the conversation between Pasolini and Moravia half way through the film *Comizi d'amore*:

- What you understand cannot shock you [...] A person who is shocked is someone who sees something which is different from them and, at the same time, threatening. Not only is it different, but it also threatens the person, both physically and in the terms of the image this person has of themselves. Outrage is fear of losing one's personality, it is a primitive fear [...]
- Indignation is thus part of our conservation instinct [14] (Pasolini 1964, 00:48.19)

Therefore, one could consider scandal as a sort of agent of containment of the subject, which impedes recognition of the legitimacy of an identity in the making: *Domande d'identità* reflects on this agent. It provokes it, it probes its limits and uncertainties, but it also reveals the necessity of admitting its presence and its power in Italian society, which after 35 years does not appear to have changed at all, as far as conformity and cultural rigidity are concerned.

To conclude on the relationship between Viel and gender identity, it may be useful to consider a passage from the preface of the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* by Judith Butler, an author that Viel associated with off and on. It summarizes the profound meaning of the performances taken under consideration until now:

> The moment in which one's staid and usual cultural perceptions fail, when one cannot with surety read the body that one sees, is precisely the moment when one is no longer sure whether the body encountered is that of a man or a woman. The vacillation between the categories itself constitutes the experience of the body in question. When such categories come into question, the reality of gender is also put into crisis: it becomes unclear how to distinguish the real from the unreal. And this is the occasion in which we come to understand that what we take to be "real," what we

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[13] My translation from Italian: "La differenza sessuale è naturale? Si nasce uomini e si nasce donne oppure lo si diventa? È una questione culturale legata alla scuola, alla famiglia, alla cultura di un Paese, alla società?".

[14] "Le cose che si capiscono non scandalizzano ... La persona che si scandalizza vede qualcosa di diverso da se stesso e, al tempo stesso, di minaccioso da se stesso. Non soltanto una cosa è diversa, ma minaccia la propria persona, sia fisicamente sia nel senso dell'immagine che questa persona si fa di se stesso. Lo scandalo in fondo è una paura di perdere la propria personalità, è una paura primitiva ... ""Lo scandalo è un elemento dell'istinto di conservazione" ((Pasolini 1964), 00:48.19).

invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality. (Butler 1999, p. XXIII)

3. Cesare Viel as ...

Between the nineties and the beginning of the new century, Viel's art takes a slightly different turn. Staying within the line of reasoning of multiple identities, it no longer presents itself blatantly inside the question of gender in the strict sense, but moves its attention to the investigation of narratable identity. He openly refers to the essay *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti, Filosofia della narrazione*, published in 1998 by Adriana Cavarero, important philosopher on the subject of sexual difference [15].

> Why [...] is the meaning of identity *always* entrusted to others' telling of one's own life story? Hannah Arendt would have no trouble unpacking this strange paradox, it follows from the fact that the category of personal identity postulates *another* as necessary. Even before another can render tangible the identity of someone by telling him/her his/her story, many others have indeed been spectator of the constitutive exposure of the very same identity to their gaze [...] "The urge toward self-display by which living things fit themselves into a world of appearances' makes of identity an in-born [*in-nato*] exposure of the *who* to the gaze and to others' questions [...] Only in Arendt does this cosmic feast of reciprocity marry with radical phenomenology, which for her is concentrated in the formula for which "*Being and Appearing coincide*" [...] The expositive and the relational character of identity are thus indistinguishable. One always appears to someone. One cannot appear if there is no one else there.[16] (Cavarero 2000, p. 20)

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[15] In the artwork *Tu che mi hai disegnato* (for more in-depth information see: (Valenti 2015)) the reference to Cavarero's essay is evident, but, as we will see, the theories of the Italian philosopher also have a major influence on other works by Viel.

[16] Translation from Italian by Paul A. Kottman: "Perché ... il significato dell'identità è *sempre* affidato al racconto altrui della propria storia di vita? Hannah Arendt non avrebbe nessuna difficoltà a sciogliere questo strano paradosso. Esso consegue al fatto che la categoria di identità personale postula sempre come necessario l'*altro*. Prima ancora che un altro possa rendere tangibile l'identità di qualcuno raccontandone la storia, molti altri sono stati infatti spettatori del costitutivo esporsi dell'identità medesima al loro sguardo ... "L'impulso all'autoesibizione, [che consiste] nel reagire col mostrarsi all'effetto schiacciante dell'essere mostrati" (Arendt, *La vita della mente*), fa dell'identità un in-nato esporsi del *chi* allo sguardo e alla domanda altrui ... In Arendt questa festa cosmica della reciprocità si sposa con il fenomenismo radicale da lei concentrato nella formula per cui "Essere e Apparire coincidono" (Arendt, *La vita della mente*) ... Il carattere espositivo e quello relazionale dell'identità sono perciò indistinguibili: si appare sempre a qualcuno, non si può apparire se non c'è nessun altro" (Cavarero 1997, pp. 31–32).

Obviously, the themes of gender that interested Viel until now do not disappear into thin air; on the contrary, they continue to make up a robust theoretical and methodological basis. Nevertheless, there is an evident willingness on the part of the performer to concentrate his work on authors and artists who have made their mark on his life, and those who have become constructive parts of his identity: he incorporates them, evokes them, speaks of them and, at the same time, narrates himself through their concerns and words without indulging in any staging and without leading the audience into a process of identification. "Witnesses of the self": he defines them as such in one of his lectures held at the University of Genoa in the Spring of 2019.

In 1999, Viel planned a performance in Turin in room 346 of the Hotel Roma, the same room where the writer and poet Cesare Pavese took his life at the end of August in 1950. The intention of the artist was to read a short text entitled *Ritratto di un amico* to a few people at a time. The text, by another Torinese writer, Natalia Ginzburg, was written to remember her friend and colleague who passed away prematurely. With this reading, Cesare Viel wants to be a conscious medium in an environment charged with energy and meaning, "creating an emotional short circuit and promoting the experience of shared mourning" (Viel 1999, 00:01.29). On 24 November 1999, the day before the performance, two articles appeared in the main daily newspaper "La Stampa" that questioned the legitimacy of Viel's intentions: one by Pavese's granddaughter and the other—more incendiary—written by the critic Lorenzo Mondo, who goes so far as to accuse the artist of being a "vampire", wanting to make a spectacle of the tragic death of the writer[17]. Under the pressure of this "scandal", the hotel mangers denied the artist permission, previously given, to use room 346. They proposed, rather, that he meet his audience in the lobby. The artist declined their offer, choosing to call off the act. The next day, the people who had reserved to attend the reading found Viel in front of the entrance to the hotel. After explaining what had happened and his reasons for canceling the performance, he distributed photocopies of *Ritratto di un amico*, revealing again his tendency to be a relational artist.

As in the case of *Domande d'identità*, it is interesting to note the social reactions when it comes to facing a limitation or a taboo, in this case the one represented by death: scandal, scorn, denial, shame, and fear.

In 2000, Viel returned to reflecting on Pavese's death and to what had happened the year before. With the help of director Gianfranco Barberi, he produced a film entitled *Hotel Roma (Ritratto di un amico)*, in which he finally holds the disputed reading in room 346 (clearly without an audience) and commits himself to a metaphorical

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[17] Lorenzo Mondo, *Vampiri abusivi*, "La Stampa", 24 Novembre 1999.

"dérive" in Turin, whose aim is not to actualize a psychogeographic situationist map or to discover the unity of environment or influential trends, but to conduct a difficult and sober study of the slags of a city that does not exist anymore, trying to trace back in them the presence of Cesare Pavese[18]:

> The city that was dear to our friend is the same as ever. There's been some change, but nothing much: they've added trolleys, built some subways. There are no new movie houses. The old ones still remain with their long-ago names, names whose syllables, when repeated, reawaken our childhood and youth [...] Our city, we realize now, resembles the friend we lost, who loved it dearly. It is industrious, as he was, frowning in its fevered, stubborn busyness, yet at the same time indolent, inclined to be idle and dream. In this city that so resembles him, we sense our friend come to life again wherever we go. At every corner, at every turn, it seems he might suddenly appear—the tall figure in his dark martingale coat, face hidden in the collar, hat pulled down over his eyes[19]. (Ginzburg 2002, pp. 62–63)

The film shows the artist progressively affirming his own presence in the room: his books, his cigarettes, his unmade bed, his clothes. His inhabiting the room is the departure point for a dialogue with the dead writer rather than his theatrical personification or interpretation. In fact, we perceive the consistency of Viel's actions for the length of the whole film: a sense of tense and insoluble suspension, which allows one to distinguish him from the writer with whom he establishes a relationship of reciprocal narrative. This sense of non-presence is all the more felt in a hotel room, which is by definition a transitory space, but its substance also echoes in Viel's later performances.

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[18] Dérive, born as a playful activity within Lettrism, is established as a conscious act of urban wandering during the development of Situationism: its aim is the crossing of different environmental units that constitute a city (an environmental unit is the psychogeographic version of a neighborhood, separated from its usual urban context). Their mapping is based on influential streams which develop from the state of mind of the person moving through those places. For more in depth information, as well as for bibliographic information about the theory of dérive developed by Guy Debord and regarding Situationism in general, see: (Careri 2006; Lippolis 2007)

[19] Translation from Italian by Lynne Sharon Schwartz: "La città che era cara al nostro amico è sempre la stessa: c'è qualche cambiamento, ma cose da poco: hanno messo dei filobus, hanno fatto qualche sottopassaggio. Non ci sono cinematografi nuovi. Quelli antichi ci sono sempre, coi nomi d'una volta: nomi che ridestano in noi, a ripeterli, la giovinezza e l'infanzia ... La nostra città rassomiglia, noi adesso ce ne accorgiamo, all'amico che abbiamo perduto e che l'aveva cara; è, come era lui, laboriosa, aggrondata in una sua operosità febbrile e testarda; ed è nello stesso tempo svogliata e disposta a oziare e a sognare. Nella città che gli rassomiglia, noi sentiamo rivivere il nostro amico dovunque andiamo; in ogni angolo e ad ogni svolta ci sembra che possa a un tratto apparire la sua alta figura dal cappotto scuro a martingala, la faccia nascosta nel bavero, il cappello calato sugli occhi." (Ginzburg 1962, pp. 15–16).

"Woolf wrote enlightening pages about male–female gender, and about the androgynous mind of the artist. The question of identity in my work is a strange version of Arianna's thread: it never led me out, but maybe had me enter further into the labyrinth. It was inevitable to meet Virginia Woolf sooner or later and, somehow, to be possessed by her"[20], writes Viel in the introduction to his first performance dedicated to the English author: *To the Lighthouse, Cesare Viel as Virginia Woolf* (Figure 3). If its productions and dynamics change based on the location in which this performance takes place, the fixed point of this action is the "halfway" disguise, for which Viel uses a portrait of Woolf taken by Gisèle Freund two years before the author's death. Viel wears a wig and make-up, a silk blouse with a velvet ribbon, a dark jacket, and men's trousers and shoes. What happens is what the performer himself calls "a gradual aesthetic convergence", strengthened by the presence of an actual set with a sofa, a table, a twenties-style lamp, and the photograph of Woolf that inspired the whole action. During the performance, Viel's recorded voice recites parts of the second chapter of *To the Lighthouse*, *Time Passes*, a text with great performative power (it recounts how natural forces on the Island of Skye won back the abandoned house of the Ramseys), while the artist, seated, experiences together with his audience the vision evoked by the novel's passages. This performance takes place in a room of Teatro degli Atti of Rimini in October 2004. A year later, at PAC—Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan—the performer got up repeatedly from his seat to walk along the railing of the internal balcony. In 2017 the artist decided to take this performance to the Teatro Sociale of Camogli, a historic Italian theater that had recently reopened in the little town of the Ligurian Riviera. The average spectators of this theater were mainly accustomed to symphonies and traditional plays or dramas: Viel's minimalistic gestures, his distinctly notable disguise, and his placid, continuous, narrating voice caused a sense of unruliness and boredom in an audience so foreign to contemporary forms of art expression—in a brief phone conversation the artist himself told me that his gallerists, colleagues, and friends who attended the performance referred to the annoyance and displeasure felt by the audience. Ideally, boredom conquers the visual space that is being progressively occupied by forms of entertainment to which the contemporary individual submits himself: a relational "net" is woven, upon which the art of narrating and listening is based. One enters into a dimension where time has no direction towards a given target, but is felt as pure marching of time. The mechanism of boredom makes any sort of identification impossible for the spectator. Viel does not present himself as an actor,

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[20] My translation from Italian in (Subrizi 2008, p. 66): "La Woolf scrisse pagine illuminanti sul genere maschile e femminile, e sulla mente androgina dell'artista. La questione dell'identità nel mio lavoro è uno strano filo d'Arianna: non mi ha fatto uscire ma, caso mai, entrare sempre più nella dimensione del labirinto. Era inevitabile prima o poi incontrare Virginia Woolf e, in qualche modo, farsene possedere".

he does not pretend, he does not dramatize, he does not act, rather, he performs an act, and he shows himself as he acts. The aspect of boredom was perhaps less obvious in the spaces where the artist previously presented this performance. To let boredom emerge, an inexperienced audience was necessary. In this way, Viel achieves what he defines as "A physical and a metaphysical body. A fragmented screen, onto which others project parts of themselves, elements of desire, fears, emotions"[21] (Subrizi 2008, p. 118). "The performance", continues the artist,

> can be the metaphorical space of a politics of sharing glances and bodies. A space where the performer may stand next to the others like a strange presence, discrete but unsettling. The body displayed in the performance is inevitably also a political body. The performing act consigns the body of the performer through its own exposure [...] to the other's glance. A public and private self always in tension, an intersecting-self crossed by other selves who appear on the set, even if they are not completely aware. In fact, because they are not aware[22]. (ibid., p. 118)

The reference to the body of the performer as a political body brings us to consider one of Viel's actions from 2003, which refers to the events of the previous year at the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow. The theater was occupied by a group of Chechen independents who took 850 civilians as hostages while a show was taking place, asking for the immediate retreat of Russian troops from Chechnya. After days of negotiations, special Russian forces were able to penetrate the theater where the attackers were barricaded, thanks to a large amount of gas derived from fentanyl (a potent synthetic opioid painkiller) that was pumped into the theater. Thirty-three members of the separatist group and 129 hostages died during the seize as well as in the days following, due to wounds by firearms, heart failure, or suffocation.

The hostage crisis at Dubrovka Theater received growing media coverage from the beginning, reaching its peak once the journalists had full access to the inside of the theater. Photographs of the "black widows" piled up, lifeless, on the armchairs in the theater and often still wearing their explosive belts, were seen by the entire world.

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[21] Cesare Viel, *Il corpo relazionale della performance*, paper held at the conference *Le politiche del corpo*, Fondazione Baruchello, Rome on 29 May 2005. In (Subrizi 2008, p. 118). My translation from Italian: "Un corpo fisico e metaforico. Uno schermo frammentato, sul quale gli altri proiettano parti di sé, elementi di desiderio, paure, emozioni".

[22] My translation from Italian: "La performance può essere lo spazio metaforico di una politica di condivisione degli sguardi e dei corpi. Uno spazio in cui il performer stia accanto agli altri come una strana presenza umana in modo discreto ma perturbante. Il corpo esposto nella performance è inevitabilmente anche un corpo politico. L'azione performativa consegna il corpo del performer allo sguardo dell'altro attraverso l'esposizione del sé [...] Un sé pubblico e privato sempre in tensione, un sé-intersezione attraversato da altri sé che si mettono in scena, anche senza esserne completamente consapevole. Anzi proprio perché non ne è consapevole."

In the introduction of *Il corpo del nemico ucciso*, the historian Giovanni De Luna talks about the bodies that he used as sources in writing his essay, bodies of victims of war: "in the majority of the cases these were bodies that were posed, dramatized, displayed in the best light to be photographed" (De Luna 2006, p. XIII). With a view to this, the bodies of the "black widows" can be defined as media bodies: impotent and harmless, exposed to the gaze of the audience, in a process of spectacularization of death triggered at the moment in which the theater was repossessed.

Figure 3. Cesare Viel, *To the Lighthouse. Cesare Viel as Virginia Woolf*, 2004, performance, Teatro degli Atti, Rimini, photo Carlo Fei. Used with permission.

Viel's performance, entitled *Operazione Bufera* (Figure 4), reclaims one of the most iconic images of the entire media operation that developed around this massacre, and it restates it, or "re-mediates" it, in a manner that is similar to the one used for the portrait of Virginia Woolf. The subject in question is a fallen Chechen woman kamikaze spread out on a red armchair, head bent backwards, mouth half open, with a veil over her eyes. Viel, lit by a spotlight, appears to the audience sitting in the same position as the "black widow", on a seat similar to the one in the Dubrovka Theater, but dressed as a man. In an environmental audio his recorded voice speaks aloud the possible stories and thoughts of some individuals present in the Dubrovka Theater during those dramatic days: a kamikaze, a hostage, a Chechen militant. Once again, Viel let other bodies pass through him, resorting to a narration that always makes clear his external position with respect to the events that surround the individuals he is talking about.

Figure 4. Cesare Viel, *Operazione Bufera*, 2003, performance, Piccolo Teatro Carambolage, BZ, color photo printing, 124 × 87 cm. Used with permission.

In this way, Viel rejects the alleged truth of live broadcasted news and images. In the setting that the audience has access to, at the Klein Kunst Theater in Bolzano or at the Fondazione Baruchello in Rome, Viel's body, clearly disguised, is a delayed body: it relates to a precise referent—to the image of the Chechen kamikaze—and at the same time it signals its distance from it, while his voice artificially recreates the supposed thoughts of the people who were inside the Dubrovka Theater. He takes inspiration from the newspaper and television news, with the awareness that whatever is reconstructed is definitively lost[23]. Unlike the past performances, the artist does not engage in a dialogue with the protagonists of the hostage-taking—not even with the Chechen militant whom he impersonates—but he reflects on the process of dissemination of images, presenting himself as a simulacrum body. He does not incarnate them, but their media images.

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[23] I refer to a contribution by (Alphen 2001) concerning the re-actualization of the Holocaust in the works of Christian Boltanski.

In one of Cesare Viel's last performances, *Verso Jorn* (Figure 5), held in October 2016, the pre-recorded voice of the artist is played in the living room in Casa Museo Jorn, in Albisola Marina, a little town on the Ligurian Western Riviera. Viel attempts to outline an emotional geography in the home of Asger Jorn, where the Danish artist lived from 1957 until close to his death. He tries to orient himself inside a stream of personal memories evoked by the place where he acts (Viel also lived in Albisola Marina from the age of 7 to 22; then he moved to Genoa to get his degree in Art History with a thesis on Asger Jorn and the Co.Br.A group), which inevitably meets with artistic impressions and theoretical references (particularly with Guy Debord's Situationism and Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's "thousand plateaus"):

> I wanted to make a map of this whole process, but its borders are not clear to me, they get lost more and more; they unravel; they drift. It is impossible, I realize, to make a rational map, complete with these strange movements, groping around in the dark. Honestly, I cannot make this map in this room, because of all the overlapping levels: a complete and contradictory stratification of all the emotions.[24] (Viel 2016, 00:11.45)

Figure 5. Cesare Viel, *Verso Jorn*, 2016, performance, Casa Museo Jorn, Albisola Marina, photo Cocis Ferrari. Used with permission.

[24] My transaltion from Italian: "Pensavo di fare una mappa di tutto questo processo, ma i confini di questo disegno non mi sono chiari, si perdono sempre di più, si disfano, vanno alla deriva. È impossibile, me ne accorgo, fare una mappa razionale, esauriente di questi movimenti così strani, a tentoni nel buio. Insomma, non mi riesce di fare questa mappa in questa stanza, tanti sono i livelli che si accavallano uno sull'altro: una stratificazione intera e contraddittoria di tutte le emozioni."

Viel creates a physical and metaphorical map (like the body he was alluding to previously) of this "mutable current", through the movement of some ceramic potsherds found in the basement of Jorn's house, a proper example of the synthesis of the arts. Viel echoes here another of his performances, *Infinita ricomposizione* (Figures 6 and 7), in which, with the help of four assistants, he places and replaces colorful felt pieces on the black floor of the Pinksummer Gallery in Genoa. The forms are enlarged shapes taken from some of Henri Matisse's paintings, an artist which Viel considers "able to cancel the hierarchy of compositional planes and create new meanings through their constant becoming"[25] (Valenti 2015, p. 101). Here the performer acts like a sort of shaman who feels the various levels in the room: he gradually becomes aware of them, he explores them and lets them be explored without prescribing a univocal way to do that, rather indicating a mutable point of tension, a variable path of power that vibrates between the gaps. "Maybe we can make a map that goes crazy, that jumps, a map that breathes, that wheezes and coughs, and even sings, [. . .] an unexpected map, invisible, made of dust, of dirt, of leftovers and remains, a map of losing one's way"[26] (Viel 2016, 00:12.20).

Figure 6. Cesare Viel, *Infinita ricomposizione*, 2015–2019, PAC Milano, photo Lorenzo Palmieri. Used with permission.

[25] My translation from Italian: "capace di annullare le gerarchie dei piani compositivi e creare nuovi sistemi di senso attraverso il loro costante divenire".

[26] My translation from Italian: "Forse si può fare una mappa che impazzisce, che salta, una mappa che respira, che rantola e tossisce, e forse anche che canta [. . .], una mappa imprevista, invisibile, fatta di polvere, di terriccio, di rimasugli e residui, una mappa del perdersi".

In a lecture he held at the University of Genoa in Spring 2019, Cesare Viel declared his intent to get to a minimal degree in his actions in opposition not only to the request from the contemporary society for activeness and achievement, but also to what we could call the "performant side of the performance", to the so-called "endurance performance"[27]. The latter celebrates the pure, and at times spectacular, endurance of the artist's body. Viel indeed intends to work on the opposite aspect of boredom, "namely the first level of the unfamiliar: once boredom passes, a strong, non-utilitarian attention is activated towards an experiential journey which stands at the center of the performance"[28]. The spectator is thereby encouraged not to be surprised and astounded by what he observes, but rather to concentrate and increase his own emotional and intellectual alertness.

Figure 7. Cesare Viel. *Infinita ricomposizione*, performance, 2019, PAC Milano, photo Lorenzo Palmieri. Used with permission.

It is first and foremost on a similar conceptual level that Viel develops both his criticism regarding the biological and cultural separation between masculine and feminine and his belief that identity is all but an independent construct, solid and

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[27] In *The Burnout Society*, the Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2010) speak about the passage, precisely in late Capitalism, from the "obedience-subject" to the "achievement-subject".

[28] Cesare Viel in the lecture held on 27 February 2019 at the University of Genoa.

self-contemplative. The alternative he offers is a fluctuating identity, protean and relational.

In an interview with the art critic Emanuela De Cecco about the conceptual and practical development of his work, the artist states:

> The form that seemed to me to be the most appropriate one was the dialogue, the conversation. [. . .] Confronting the proposition of language with the awareness of speaking has helped me to reconsider an ethical dimension by making use of the possibility to say to myself: it is me speaking and therefore I am conscious. (De Cecco 1992, p. 64)

Hence, the shaping of a critical identity in Viel's works is enucleated foremost in becoming aware of himself as an individual, through a dialogue, to then become different-from-himself, within a process that is never fully accomplished but is in an ongoing transformative tension. For this reason, it is important to conclude by quoting once again from the text of *Androginia*, a sort of manifesto for all of Viel's work to date:

> We all have to really think that we are plural, and that gradually become something that wasn't there before. A person who didn't exist before, but one makes oneself heard because one constructs oneself together with other people's voices and presences. The other that I am, the outside that belongs to me: because we are all involved. I know I could be very happy if the pretences that I'm working out were useful in giving a new sense to identity. It's difficult: I don't want to offer all of this as an accomplished fact. So, I tell myself: don't think of a fixed identity but think, rather, of anyone who is searching one's own existence for a path without prejudice, without set limits. (Pasini and Verzotti 1994, p. 119)

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"Let's Listen with Our Eyes . . . " The Deconstruction of Deafness in Christine Sun Kim's Sound Art

Anna K. Benedikt

Abstract: The academic discipline of Disability Studies investigates the cultural discourses and meanings around disability. Therefore, disability was introduced as a social category based on bodily variations but also as an identity issue. Since 2000, the so called 'affirmative model of disability' has started to gain momentum by drawing upon the spirit of the Disability Arts Movement and Disability Pride. It suggests that impairments are core parts of a person's being and of their experience. This model challenges the underlying assumption that impairments are personal tragedies. It offers "essentially a non-tragic view of disability and impairment which encompasses positive social identities, both individual and collective, for disabled people grounded in the benefits of lifestyle and life experience of being impaired and disabled" (Swain and French 2000, p. 569). Such a perspective on disability is of course also represented in many contemporary artistic disciplines. In my article I will focus on selected works by the New York- and Berlin-based Sound Artist Christine Sun Kim. Using her own sonic experience, which is influenced by her deafness, Kim provokes the audience to question a one-dimensional mode of (auditory) perception by directing the attention on the visual, haptic, or conceptional perception of sound. Thus, Kim reveals deafness as a culturally defined impairment/disability: through her artistic practice Kim shifts her identity from non-hearing to differently hearing, not as a rejection of her deafness, but as an expression of her unique relationship to sound. Therefore, she deconstructs disability by exposing deafness as a positive identity category, which triggers and causes certain abilities.

1. Introduction—Disability Rights Movement, Disability Identity and Disability Studies

Deafness and other impairments have been historically defined as disabilities by pathologizing clinical discourses and pejorative literary and social narratives (Mitchell and Snyder 2014) which can be summarized as audist or ableist[1]. However,

[1] 'Ableism' is defined as discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities, 'audism' is defined as the discrimination against deaf and hard of hearing people.

in the past, being disabled was by no means an identity label and people with impairments did not identify as a minority group: "Throughout American history, disabled people have been more likely to identify themselves in terms of a specific group than as disabled" (Baynton 2008, p. 309). There was no need for them to create unity, but as Lennard J. Davis (Davis 2006, p. 232) points out, with the return of many impaired veterans from the Vietnam War (1955–1975), people with impairments started to fight together against their social oppression and for equality and their official status as members of an oppressed minority group. Thus, a civil rights movement for people with disabilities was formed gradually. However, like in other civil rights movements this first phase of unity seeking was replaced by discovering the diversity within the group, which led to conflict rather than unity. Conflicts grew out of questions like: Who is speaking for whom? Whose voices can be heard? Who can actually be part of the disability rights movement? Who has the right to speak?

Those questions have been especially crucial to deaf people and people with hearing impairments. Can deafness be labelled a disability? Or should deaf people be labelled as an ethnic group with specific social beliefs, behaviours, art, literary traditions, history and values? Or are they a linguistic minority, defined by using sign languages as their main mode of communication? According to Harlan Lane (Lane 2002) deaf people have to resist the label of disability, because first and most of all deafness is neither an impairment nor a disability. Secondly, deaf people do not have common interests with the disability rights movement:

> The disability rights movement seeks independence for people with disabilities, Deaf people[2] do not have any concern with independent living than people in general [...]. Whereas people with disabilities seek total integration into society at large, Deaf people cherish their unique identity and seek integration that honors their distinct language and culture. (Lane 2002, p. 369)

However, within the rejection of the disability label lays a dilemma: Historically, deaf people were granted fundamental rights as citizens because of major legal improvements for disabled people. Additionally, at present, financial assistance from the state is often granted by registering as disabled (Lane 2002, pp. 374–375). According to Lennard J. Davis (Davis 2008, pp. 323–324), rejecting the disability label would actually be ableist, because it lies at the core of disability theory that people with disabilities are not disabled by their impairments but by society.

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[2] 'Deaf' (uppercase D) refers to people who identity as members of a linguistic and cultural minority, 'deaf' (lowercase d) refers to hearing loss as medical condition.

Another alternative option has been provided by Douglas C. Baynton (Baynton 2008), who stresses the need for solidarity among people who experience discrimination upon common (bodily) grounds:

> Disabled people differ significantly from one another, but they share common experiences resisting the medicalization of their identity, coping with inferior 'special' education, fighting for autonomy and self-determination—in short, they share a common oppression, they have undertaken to forge a common liberation. (Baynton 2008, p. 309)

Baynton emphasizes not only to use the disability label but rather to declare disability as an identity category: "By claiming disability as an identity, however, disabled people name the oppression under which they live, declare solidarity with others similarly oppressed, and set themselves in opposition to it" (Baynton 2008, p. 296).

But how can 'disability identity' be defined? To answer that question, one has to deal with the definition of identities in general. According to the British sociologist Stuart Hall (Hall 1996),

> [. . .] identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. (Hall 1996, p. 4)

Disability was articulated as a minority identity for the first time within the aforementioned disability rights movement. The struggle against discrimination shaped a community, "[. . .] galvanizing a diverse and diffuse population of disabled people helping to forge what many have come to understand as disability identity" (Rodas 2015, p. 103). The core of 'disability identity' is the 'social model of disability', a constructivist concept that defines disability as a social category that has been shaped by cultural and historical processes rather than being determined primarily by the body. The social model was the theoretical basis for forming a collective which was united through the shared experience of discrimination, or with Simi Linton's words:

> We are all bound together, not by this list of our collective symptoms but by the social and political circumstances that have forged us as a group. We have found one another and found a voice to express not despair at our fate but outrage at our social positioning. (Linton 1998, p. 4)

In contrast to the medical model of disability, which conceives of disability solely as the result of physical or mental conditions, the social model in contrast

defines disability as the result of social prejudices and limited opportunities for participation (Shakespeare 2006). The theoretical key to the social model was the distinction between impairment and disability. Therefore, it was possible to link disability theoretically to other identity categories like ethnicity, gender or class that are understood as socially produced. Many scholars from humanities and social science disciplines began to focus on disability and disablement as—in the words of Joan Wallach Scotts (Scott 1986)—useful categories of historical and cultural analyses. As a result, the interdisciplinary academic discipline of Disability Studies was born.[3]

The formulation of the social model was crucial for the development of disability theory and therefore also for activism, but the model has also been challenged in recent years (Dewsbury et al. 2004).

Since 2000, the so-called 'affirmative model of disability' has started to gain momentum by drawing upon the spirit of the Disability Arts Movement and Disability Pride. The Disability Arts Movement grew out of the disability politics of the late 1970s, especially in the UK and USA. According to Masefield (2006), it is "art by disabled people for disabled people that speaks the truth about the disability experience" (Masefield 2006, p. 22). Most commonly, Disability Art is understood as an artistic practice which is inspired by the social model of disability and affirming the identities of disabled people:

> Through song lyrics, poetry, writing, drama and so on, disabled people have celebrated difference and rejected the ideology of normality in which disabled people are devalued as 'abnormal'. They are creating images of strength and pride, the antithesis of dependency and helplessness. (Swain and French 2000, pp. 577–78)

Within the affirmative model, impairments are considered as core parts of a person's being and their experience. Therefore, this model challenges the underlying assumption that impairments are personal tragedies. It offers "essentially a non-tragic view of disability and impairment which encompasses positive social identities, both individual and collective, for disabled people grounded in the benefits of lifestyle and life experience of being impaired and disabled" (Swain and French 2000, p. 569). Against most common prejudices, being disabled "[. . .] may [. . .] enhance life or provide a lifestyle of equal satisfaction and worth" (Swain and French 2000, p. 570). For Swain and French, the affirmative model is foremost represented in contemporary literature by people with disabilities but still also in the Disability Arts Movement.

Those alternative views on disability have also been represented in contemporary artistic disciplines. As an example, works of the New York- and Berlin-based Sound

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[3] Disability Studies is an interdisciplinary academic discipline that examines the social, cultural and political dimensions of the concept of disability.

Artist Christine Sun Kim have been especially inspired by her deafness or rather her deaf auditory perception. But how is Christine Sun Kim's work inspired by her deafness and how is an alternative perspective on disability represented?

2. *Let's Listen with Our Eyes*—The Representation of Deafness as an Identity Category in Christine Sun Kim's Sound Art

Originally a painter, Christine Sun Kim has been working in a variety of media ranging from installations and Sound Art to performance and drawings. After studying at the Rochester Institute of Technology, she graduated from the School of Visual Arts in New York and in 2013 she finished her Master's in Music and Sound at Bard College. During a trip to Berlin, Kim got in touch with Sound Art. Sound Art is an umbrella term for a variety of art forms, ranging from sound installations and sound sculptures to field recordings and soundscape compositions. Roughly speaking, Sound Art projects have in common that they utilize sound as their main means of expression or that they trigger an alternative listening perception (Wong 2012).

Being in a crisis because she had not yet found her artistic medium as a visual artist, Kim became curious in working with sound. She described her relationship with sound prior to her experience in Berlin as hierarchical: due to her deafness, she was raised believing that sound was not a part of her life. However, Kim noticed how important sound was for her surroundings by observing how people behave according to sound and how they respond to it. Slowly she discovered the rules of sound—the artist described them as 'sound etiquette' —which have been influencing her life as well:

> People who have access to sound naturally own it and have a say in it. There were all these conventions for what was proper sound. They would tell me: Be quiet. Don't burp, don't drag your feet, make loud noises. I learned to be respectful of their sound. I saw sound as their possession. Now I'm reclaiming sound as my property. (Nowness 2011, min. 02:37–03:08)

In her TED Talk from 2015, Kim also emphasized the involvement of sound in power dynamics. Therefore, she defined sound also as social currency:

> I realized: sound is like money, power, control—social currency. In the back of my mind, I've always felt that sound was your thing, a hearing person's thing. And sound is so powerful that it could either disempower me and my artwork, or it could empower me. I chose to be empowered. (Kim 2015, min. 04:56–06:00)

Since then, Christine Sun Kim has been empowered and she has reclaimed sound as her property by exploring its materiality in a variety of media. That means

for example that she makes sound perceivable in various forms, may it be visually, physically or conceptually. The central thread of her entire artistic practice is its inspiration, namely Kim's personal auditory perception, which is caused by her deafness. Thus, Christine Sun Kim pleads for a multidimensional perception of sound, which is not primarily dependent on hearing: "Let's listen with our Eyes and not just our Ears", so the artist, "let's look at the bigger picture" (Nowness 2011, min. 07:56–08:08).

It is by no means something new that the perception of sound is multidimensional, especially not in Sound Art. Though it is striking that just because of a lack of one sense, namely the hearing sense, it is commonly assumed that sound and music play no role in the lives of deaf people. It is common knowledge that the perception of sound is deeply social. The communication theorists Tom Humphries and Carol Padden (Padden and Humphries 1988) remind us that "in any discussion of Deaf people's knowledge of sound, it is important to keep in mind that perception of sound is not automatic or straightforward, but is shaped through learned, culturally defined practices" (Padden and Humphries 1988, p. 93).

Kim discusses these 'culturally defined practices' with her artistic practice by shifting the focus from a one- to a multi-dimensional auditory perception, which does not depend solely on an intact hearing sense. She directs her audience's attention on the visual, haptic or conceptional perception of sound. For example, in *Speaker Drawings* (2012) she placed paint-dipped brushes on top of subwoofers covered in paper. Kim then projected her voice to make the subwoofers vibrate, which caused the items to move around the paper, creating imprints, a visualization of her voice. In *Piano Wires and Transducers* (2013) however, Kim focused on the haptic qualities of sound. The name speaks for itself—in this performance she vocalized through a set of piano wires what made the audience actually feel Kim's voice.

Another example is Kim's installation *Calibration Room* which was hosted by the University of Texas in 2015. Entering the installation, visitors heard a variety of prior recorded sounds (e.g., walking in sand). Those sounds were played back, adjusted to each participant's individual listening spectrum. A technician outside the room was responsible for setting the right decibel level. For Kim, it was important that the installation was accessible to people who can hear sounds at a variety of levels: "Each individual's hearing level is very personal. It's just like vision; everyone's vision is different, and everyone requires a different prescription if they have glasses. It's the same thing with our ability to hear" (Cantrell 2015). In *Calibration Room*, hearing then became an individual ability, independent from a normative hearing scale: "The concept is that no matter what your decibel level is, you won't miss anything in that space. In that space, I'm not considered deaf. I'm accessing all the sound" (Cantrell 2015). So, in Kim's case the recordings were played back in very low frequencies in order to be perceptible. As a result, the distinction between hearing

and non-hearing was, technically speaking, dissolved. Therefore, deafness was no longer considered a disability, but just one possible aspect of human diversity.

These examples show that Kim not only triggers an alternative perception of sound, but that she also does not interpret her deafness as an impairment or a disability: she performs an identity shift, from 'non-hearing' to 'differently hearing'; therefore, she exposes her culturally defined impairment—her deafness—not as a disability. Kim's works reflect that deafness is not a deficit, but that it rather causes certain abilities. Thus, she breaks stereotypes and therefore causes a revaluation of deafness as a positive identity category (Benedikt 2017, pp. 163–64).

Christine Sun Kim's personal experiences with communication between the deaf and the non-deaf worlds are also reflected in her artistic practice. For example in the playbill for *Subjective Loudness* (Woof Media 2013), where Kim asked her audience to recite words into microphones that sounded through 200 speakers, she wrote "as part of my practice, I will depend on audience participation as my platform, instead of using the actual stage" (Woof Media[1] n.d.). Because Kim's main mode of communication is American Sign Language (ASL), she often collaborates with others (e.g., interpreters or audience members) to express her voice and her ideas in spoken language:

> Others become like an extension of my identity [...] my voice doesn't really exist without someone or something supplementing it [...] I am beginning to see that the more I collaborate with audiences and artists, the more sonorous my voice gets. (Mansfield 2015)

As an example, in *Game of Skill 2.0*, an installation which was constructed in 2015 in New York, the audience was invited to listen to a text about the future of New York which was written by Kim and voiced by another person. The text became audible by holding up a custom-built device against Velcro strips, which led through the gallery where the installation took place. If the antenna of the device was held appropriately against the Velcro, it would have emitted sound which was relative to the participant's movement. Therefore, each person had to discover for themselves which speed of movement was adequate to achieve comprehension. Kim explains that this exertion of a special effort should "make explicit the particular form of labor involved in listening, which is often regarded as a passive activity" (Woof Media[2] n.d.). Referring to the social model of disability, another aspect of *Game of Skill 2.0* was to point out that hearing is an individual ability which is not dependent on normative scales. The artist explained "It shows that everyone hears at various levels, like different small amounts of deafness. But they all need to learn how to walk and hold up a device in a particular way to hear full sentences; they function like human turntable needles. It takes practice" (Wilk 2015).

When Kim raises that 'collaborative voice' through audience participation or technical devices, for example, it can be described as an act of self-empowerment and an instance of interdependence rather than dependence:

> I became interested in guiding people to become my voice. Others become like an extension of my identity. If they vocalize the way I envision [. . .]. I can almost feel my presence being audibly recognized. My voice doesn't really exist without someone or something supplementing it. (Mansfield 2015)

Living in a society oriented towards speech and hearing, Kim's 'voice' as a person who speaks a signed language is not audible. As Tom Humphries (Humphries 1996) states, "a self cannot exist if it is not heard. Deaf people have had to create voices, learn to hear their own voices, and now it remains to compel others to listen" (Humphries 1996, p. 105). The author, feminist, and social activist bell hooks (hooks 1989) describes how especially important an audible voice for members of minority groups is to become independent and autonomous individuals. In a speech-centred society like ours, one can primarily be heard when an audible voice can be raised. Christine Sun Kim compels others to listen through her artistic practice with sound, which can therefore be described as an organ of speech: "For many years as an artist, I really struggled to find my voice. Yet ironically enough, I found it in sound. This is not some political statement, but an amazing personal and complex trajectory" (Lincoln Motor Co. 2014, min. 1:10–1:38).

Through her artistic projects Kim finally creates what she calls her 'sonic identity': "Art gives my voice a far greater significance [...] I feel my voice flow out. This confirms its existence and therefore my own" (Krolczyk 2013).

3. Conclusion

Christine Sun Kim's aforementioned works can be described as highly self-referential by dealing with the multidimensionality of (auditory) perception on the one hand and on the other hand, communication errors, the supremacy of spoken languages and speechlessness forced by society. As a result, the audience is either actively or passively provoked to question normative modes of perception and/or communication. Although Kim speaks out for her deafness as influencing her artistic practice, she accentuates it as only one layer of her identity:

> My deafness has clearly contributed to and influenced my work, but so have many other factors such as my upbringing, family, communication and interests. Ideally, there would be no adjectives preceding the identity 'artist.' After all, 'deafness' and 'disability' are words that carry a certain stigma. But on the other hand, these terms can be helpful and acknowledge the elephant in the room—giving the audience a chance to get past this

> superficial layer of my identity. So maybe I shouldn't be averse to such words, and just let things be—I believe my work is strong enough to stand on its own. (Hyung Lee 2013)

Nevertheless, Christine Sun Kim performs an identity change from 'non-hearing' to 'differently-hearing' by highlighting her own multi-sensory sound perception which is actually influenced by her deafness.

The artist's works so far have been practical implementations of the alternative models of disability and their focus on societal barriers and disability pride. Her artistic practice is highlighting the abilities that go along with deafness—a commonly supposed impairment/disability. By counteracting the common deficit-oriented definition of deafness she also works against social conventions and normative guidelines by breaking stereotypes, because who is finally expecting a deaf person to be a Sound Artist?

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Makhubu, Seriti Se, Basupa Tsela—Where We're at According to Lerato Shadi †

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Abstract: The focus of this text is on three installations/performances by the South African artist Lerato Shadi: *Makhubu*, *Seriti Se* (both since 2014) and *Basupa Tsela* (2017/2018). The works dialogue with a remark made in a public interview in 2016, where Shadi postulated self-positioning in two diametrically opposed ways: to express one's self-perception as "I am because you are" (which is situated within the philosophical traditions that are particular to South Africa), and the seemingly incompatible Cartesian "*Je pense donc je suis*". While the initial context for this set of ideas stems from the writings of Yvette Abrahams, Pumla Dineo Gqola, Steve Biko and Frantz Fanon, Shadi's remark is also connected with the student protests, which, since 2015, have claimed the recognition of situated subjectivities while aiming towards a decolonised South Africa. Shadi's work operates within processes of political transition, of institutional and structural erasures. The artist asserts a position by means of dividual subjectivation, stating her subjectivity and agency in the beginning of the twenty-first century. According to Shadi, this position is claimed by calling out to those who have shown her the way.

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1. Introduction

Three contributions by the South African artist Lerato Shadi provide an entry point to crystallizing divergent ways of conceiving one's "being in the world". To say "where we're at" implies that this act of self-positionning, approached as artistic practice asserting an individuated position, emerges in reciprocity with a changing constellation of circumstances—a form of interpersonal and dialectical interconnectedness or "dividual participation" (Ott 2015). The three chosen proposals are performance drawings, making use of a video, or culminating in an installation, as the case may be: *Makhubu* (performed several times since 2014), *Seriti Se* (also since 2014) and *Basupa Tsela* (2017/2018).

The initial gesture in each of these artistic interventions is that of writing immediately followed by erasure—rubbing out—drawing attention to the material paradox of producing by undoing. By putting effacing into action, the three

interventions can be read as three experimental replies[2] to the problem of (dis)identification, which coincidentally also transpires from a public conversation between Lerato Shadi (Shadi 2016) and art critic Neelika Jayawardane held in Grahamstown, South Africa, on 8 July 2016. N. Jayawardane (2016, pp. 19, 21) launched the discussion by referring to historical erasure. As in any critical rereading of history,[3] she is well aware that this erasure is omnipresent in the ways in which history is presented from a Western point of view—all too often written as if the majority of decisive actors were Western and male—and as though the rest of the world had played a marginal role. It turns out that rather than being a mere omission, this erasure is a deliberately constructed and artificially maintained myth. The two interlocutors (L. Shadi and N. Jayawardane) exchange their experiences of how this silencing configures in relation to their personal family history and in their artistic or theoretical work. At a crucial moment in the debate, Lerato Shadi conflicts two ways of defining her subjectivity: expressing self-perception by stating "I am because you are" and the seemingly incompatible Cartesian "*Je pense donc je suis*" ("I think therefore I am").[4] Shadi points out that if one of the postulates were used to judge the other, both philosophical attitudes would be doomed to failure. By introducing the notion of judgment, Shadi considers that the problem is of a philosophical nature. Since the first—"I am because you are"—is based on an idea of multitude, while the second—"I think therefore I am"—reasons in singularities and binary notions, Shadi points out that the dialogue between the two perspectives, positioning themselves at diametrically opposed points of view, are condemned to perpetual misunderstanding.

Several members of the South African public who attended the debate enthusiastically supported Shadi's proposal, and broadened the discussion with new questions. This strong interest in Shadi's remark can show that, in the South African context, this is an important concern, and that it struck a chord in on-going debates. Indeed, the South African interlocutors are the first public targeted by this remark (Legalamitlwa 2016, p. 8). In the European context, however, reception proves more complicated. While Shadi's hypothetical European interlocutors would easily be able to identify "I think, therefore I am" as a Cartesian postulate, they will need supplementary information before the complexity of the reasoning behind

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2 The other voices in this hypothetical dialogue would be those of Frantz Fanon, Steven Biko, Achille Mbembe, Yvette Abrahams, Sylvia Wynter, Gilbert Simondon and Michaela Ott; see below.

3 The term "historical erasure" is used by most of the writers referenced here, notably in Jayawardane (2016) and in Mbembe (2016b).

4 (Shadi 2016). Within the 90-min interview, the remark is made at [00:22:15]; a member of the audience who did not introduce himself deepens and contextualizes what has been said in a rather intuitive way—Shadi agrees without reservation. Further research has not permitted the authors to identify the speaker.

"I am because you are" may become intelligible to them. This task can be started by analysing Shadi's three performances in order to complexify and contextualise the tensions between the two ways in which social "belonging" is positioned and conceptualised, i.e., in the way the task of self-positioning (Pumla Dineo Gqola 2006, p. 72) is approached as a dividuation process (Ott 2015). The fact that the first two performances, *Makhubu* and *Seriti Se*, preceded the 2016 interview shows that Shadi thought about and materialized this problem in other formats before expressing it in articulated speech. The third performance, *Basupa Tsela*, which followed two years later, is a provisional synthesis of this set of questions. Before specifying (dis)identification, as articulated by Shadi, in order to underline its urgency, its contextualization within recent South African cultural production is necessary as a preliminary step.

2. "I'm Not Who You Think I'm Not": The South African Context and Questions of (dis)Identification

On 27 April 1994, at South Africa's first elections by universal suffrage, the country emerged from half a century of racial segregation imposed by nationalist legislation. This turned out to be a moment when interpretations of the past had to be re-examined, and when all South African citizens were compelled to radically revise the way they perceived themselves (Baderoon 2011). While, before 1994, life in this country was compartmentalized and segregated, they now needed to "learn to unlearn" to think by these categories. A vast amount of memory work that does not seek to avoid misunderstandings and violence (Coetzee 2013) is still to be provided before a non-segregated society can become operational.

Before 1994, the nationalist government imposed its version of history that ignored the stories of the vast majority of the population in an act of deliberate erasure. Since the emergence from apartheid legislation, the endeavour to fill the void thus produced has become a crucial concern of the human sciences. In this context, it may have seemed self-evident that identity questions[5] were the main concern put to artists in the early "post-apartheid" years. The plethora of responses (Atkinson and Breitz 1999) written to Okwui Enwezor's critical text, "Reframing the Black subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation"

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[5] This implicit assumption should be put into perspective. According to most viewpoints, the institutional framework (on a national or foreign level) seeking to establish categories orchestrating a so-called "South African" identity is not a legitimate voice. Many artists would have preferred to be questioned about the complexities and subtleties underlying their artistic work rather than about the various markers of their "identity" (family, religion, language, etc.). But it is also true that the question of identity is a matter of urgency since, as Sharlene Khan points out following Stuart Hall, one must know how to find the position from which to speak in order to participate in a dialogue. Khan (2014, pp. 23, 26) introduces the notion of a process of collective redefinition.

(Enwezor 1997, pp. 21–25), demonstrates the unhealthy twists and turns that these debates have taken. Enwezor addressed a lack of self-criticism on the part of artists already recognized by the system, which betrayed their lack of lucidity about the complexity and gravity of identity issues. The ensuing debate highlighted the overwhelming predominance of attention to male subjectivity in somewhat hasty readings of Enwezor's criticism (Greig 1999, pp. 310–13). The period 1997–2007 saw a number of exhibitions for which artists were selected according to their ability to become ambassadors of a presumed new national identity. Among the pioneering artists of this period, Tracey Rose and Berni Searle have a special significance for Lerato Shadi; they represented personalities with whom Shadi, as a woman of colour, could identify.[6] Despite the criticism that an exaggerated form of "identity politics"[7] undeniably necessitates, this generation of artists has laid the foundations on which the artists emerging after 2000 can build their contributions.

The polemics and controversies of questioning identity—debated with the seriousness imposed by the political situation during the immediate post-apartheid period—are taken up a generation later in the form of humorous deflection or by claiming the urgent necessity of pushing beyond constructions of officialised identity. In curating the 2018 Berlin Biennale, Gabi Ngcobo (Ngcobo 2018) writes "*I'm Not Who You Think I'm Not,* disavowing assumed beingness and know-hows. Those assumptions are based on existing, constructed social frameworks and their associated speculations about particular subjectivities". Ngcobo (2013, pp. 237–40) also describes this process as "the unknowing grammar of inhabiting an identity or a subjectivity".

The spirit of deflection can be exemplified when paralleling the work of Athi-patra Ruga with that of Barend de Wet. In a carnivalesque mood, the former sets in motion a "slow, time-inspired unveiling of identities" (Ruga quoted in Fourie 2015, p. 66–69). Athi-patra Ruga devises a "costume" of balloons filled with liquid paint, which, once pierced, flood the performer with multiple colours—Ruga refers to a "utopian counter-proposal to the sad dogma of the division between mind and body". In reverse of this "unveiling" gesture, Barend de Wet (Fourie 2015, pp. 26–29) asks his friends to dress him, in an endless series of possible identities. Although both approaches (dressing or revealing) can be seen as a humorous diversion from the seriousness of the introspective exercises of previous years, both cases reveal underlying tensions. Created in 2012 and 2013 respectively, these performances foreshadow a new radical change in South African society.

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6 Shadi refers to Rose and Searle, in particular, during interviews with Katja Gentric in Berlin, 14 and 20 November 2017.

7 Jamal (2017, pp. 11–13) points out that identity issues in contemporary South Africa can lead to a form of "dangerously exclusionary identity politics".

Since March 2015, the resurgence of conflicts in the form of student protests on all South African campuses show how fragile the new, presumably non-segregated society is, and that the challenges facing it are far from being resolved. Among other demands, directed against their untenable financial situation under the neo-liberal policies of the current government, the students denounce the very phlegmatic process of decolonisation and the excruciatingly reluctant dismantling of white privilege (Gamedze and Naidoo 2018). Students from each campus in South Africa respond to the protests by adding their own most urgent grievances: among others, the protest concerns rape culture, institutional racism, and intersectionality; it opposes outsourcing, and claims equal opportunities for all. The expression "Fallism" initially appears as an umbrella term for the individual names the movements use to refer to themselves, of which "Rhodes must Fall" and "Fees must Fall", which originated at UCT and at WITS, are the most widely known. "Fallism" has since acquired the status of a decolonial framework wherein future academia and future society are heedful of the issues raised by the students. A performance by Sethembile Msezane titled *Chapungu—The day Rhodes Fell* (Msezane 2015) has become emblematic of the movement, because it condenses its multifaceted concerns into a single gesture. While problematizing the position of women in public space, S. Msezane points to the urgency with which a new organisation, recognizing the ancestral dimension[8] and adapted to the daily life of the connected generation,[9] is sought. Some activist collectives seek to apply the hoped for change in mentalities by experimenting with forms of organization where the group operates horizontally, where all decisions are taken collectively, where thought evolves by interconnectivity (Nkosi 2016). This horizontal organization is also evident in the way women activists become increasingly vigilant about compliance with parity laws, countering leaders who in the first phase of the protest were exclusively male and permitted themselves dominant, even abusive, behaviour[10].

Discussions around these very complex challenges frequently reference a worldview that would be able to encompass apparently irreconcilable dualities and to overcome the categorizations inherited from apartheid. These debates, in turn, have a history that should be outlined here. In the publications of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996–1998), for example, *Ubuntu* (Commission 1998, p. 126) is defined as a social attitude based on sharing and respect. In isiXhosa, it is transcribed by the sentence: "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (a person is a person because of other people). In Sepedi, the same sentence would read: "*motho ke*

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8 This dimension is represented here by the reference to the *chapungu*, the eagle of Great Zimbabwe.

9 Present in the image through the countless portable devices used by demonstrators/activists.

10 In some universities, protests against the culture of rape become a concern for activists (Ratele 2018), also see Miller (2016, pp. 278–79).

motho ka batho": the individual is defined on the basis of his or her belonging to the community. This principle of interdependence can be extended to the relationship that the individual has with his or her material surroundings (Nyamnjoh 2015, p. 1–10).

"*Ubuntu*", a word from isiXhosa, has been adopted more generally to designate a consciousness that exists in most languages in southern Africa, as in a large majority of African countries. Western observers have interpreted this form of social organization as a "holistic" philosophy, a premise that was widely adhered to during the colonial period, as exemplified by the French CNRS Congress in 1971 (Bastide and Dieterlen 1973). A critical look shows that crude simplifications were drawn from the observation of communal agency. Scientific descriptions of "holistic" social organizations were ultimately instrumentalised to justify and reiterate forms of administration that erased the individual. An oversimplified reinterpretation of this so-called "holism" is still found today, in the cultural domain, amongst others, in the ways in which a Western "free will" is emphasized as opposed to a so-called "non-Western determinism" (Garnier 2014, p. 389).

As far as South Africa is concerned, the popularization of *Ubuntu* was greeted with enthusiasm as part of early post-apartheid optimism, eager to promote the miraculous harmony of the "rainbow nation" (Samarbakhsh-Liberge 2000). The somewhat too idealistic reading of the notion of *Ubuntu* is countered by Françis Nyamnjoh, a Cameroonian anthropologist living and teaching in South Africa. Beyond the ancestral ideal to be recovered, he sees in it an emancipatory potential to be mobilized as a critique of modernity in the West. But Nyamnjoh also points to abuses committed in the name of what he calls "dead-end ubuntu-ism": "To argue for inclusivity, domesticated agency, conviviality or *Ubuntu-ism* and the opportunities it affords individuals and collectivities does not imply the absence of opportunism and conflict in societies that ascribe to such aspirations. Indeed, opportunism and conflict are the products of inclusivity" (Nyamnjoh 2015, pp. 83–84, 127).

In the name of the same scepticism, ideas of shared responsibility in horizontal forms of organization advocated by students of the 2015 protest movements are criticized for defending a utopian cause. The students' arguments are considered unrealistic and impracticable; some interpretations may go as far as to suggest that the struggle for recognition of the individual's subjectivity was incommensurable with the demands of a horizontal social organization. This categorical analysis of the situation proves to be a simplification; it is perfectly possible to behave as an autonomous and responsible individual while subscribing to an interdependent ("holistic") social organization (Nyamnjoh 2015, pp. 6–8).

Pushing beyond the complications inherent in the term "*ubuntu*", Achille Mbembe (Mbembe 2017, p. 25) uses the formula "*l'éthique du devenir-avec-les-autres*" (the ethics of becoming-in-midst-of-others), and describes a way of operating where:

"*Le moi se forme au point de rencontre avec l'autre. Il n'y a pas de moi limité au moi: l'Autre est notre origine par définition. [...] Ce qui fait notre humanité est notre capacité à partager notre condition...*"[11].

It is in this context, taking into account the divergent and sometimes abusive ways of reading the notions of "holism", "ubuntuism" and "becoming-in-midst-of-others", that Shadi's remark must be placed when she sets "I am because you are" in conflict with the Cartesian "I think therefore I am". In doing so, she seeks to place her artistic activity among the dominant narratives of society, where the personal stories of her fellow human beings—by which she means all social groups marginalized under apartheid and any other form of colonial state or normative thinking—have been successfully erased. The debate referred to as "Black Feminism", led by thinkers such as bell hooks, takes the complexities of this situation into account (Shadi 2018, pp. 13, 34, 42). Many South African students since 2015 challenge the scientific rejection of local knowledge in the same spirit as they challenge the separation between body and mind that is the basis of Western thought. These debates have repercussions in the dialogues around contemporary art in South Africa (Legalamitlwa 2016, p. 7), and Lerato Shadi identifies with the questions raised in this context, expressing a strengthening interest in Black Feminism. In her master's thesis, Shadi (2018) reacts to the Sarah Bartmann debate, from which Bartmann's own voice is entirely absent while, under the pretence of scientific interest, her physical presence is abusively discussed way beyond the limits of ethical conduct. The concept of "hypervisibility" coined by Pumla Dineo Gqola (2006, p. 45) expresses the anomaly wherein unhealthy racist over-curiosity in physical appearance is coupled with drastic silencing and effacement of the sensibility and intelligence of an individual, who is thus successfully objectified as a research specimen.

By means of the description of Shadi's three performances, coupled with a re-membering process of how the presumed mind and body duality (or to put it in Athi-patra Ruga's words, the "sad dogma of the division between mind and body") came to be erected in a philosophical "given", or a priori, it is possible to complexify and contextualize the tension between the different self-perceptions and to describe the line of thought that leads Shadi to set the cartesian and "holistic" aphorism against one another. The artistic work that led to the first two performances preceded their theorization (Shadi 2016).

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[11] The self is formed at the point of intersection with the other. There is no self limited to the self: the Other is our origin by definition. What makes us human is our ability to share our condition. (our translation).

3. Where We're at—Artistic Positioning in *Makhubu* and *Seriti Se*

Makhubu can be translated as "wave", (Macmillan Setswana and English illustrated Dictionary 2012, pp. 273, 1175). On the wall of the exhibition space, Shadi writes her personal biography supplemented by her projections of the future. How to find a place for these memories and how to find the trace of these lives?[12] How might these thoughts and actions attain recognition? As part of the performed action, which lasts several days, Shadi enacts several cycles of writing (Figure 1) and effacing (Figure 2). Unlike previous interventions, for example *Seipone* (shown twice in 2012), *Makhubu* is positioned in a space where the public can see the artist. The body of the performer bends and stretches to produce three circles in accordance with her bodily measurements; the analyst might be tempted to refer to them as "Vitruvian". When opting for the shape of the circle, Shadi is well aware that her performance speaks of gravitational force, of autonomy, of her capacity to take action. *Makhubu's* phase of constructive intervention (Figure 1) is followed by perpetual "undoing"—like water going back and forth when the waves meet the shore. However, in undoing, this action leaves tangible traces in the form of remnants of rubber and faded crayon marks on the wall. No less than writing, erasing requires significant physical investment on behalf of the artist—the photographs show the artist leaning in, in order to exert sufficient pressure on her rubber to wipe out the words written in red crayon (Figure 2). The same physical involvement on the part of the performer is called for in *Seriti Se*, which, in its choreographic aspect, goes further because it also involves the body of the audience (Figure 4).

Seriti Se (Figure 3) can be translated as "shadow", "aura", "charism", "presence" or "status"[13]. The performative action is preceded by a long research period seeking names of women of colour who have made significant contributions to society without their names becoming regarded as general knowledge (Figures 3 and 4). Everything happens as if they had been consciously erased from the history books while, by their contribution to the common good, their recognition/presence (*seriti se*) in this pantheon would have been entirely justified. Shadi lists the names of women

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[12] As Steven Biko puts it: "Thus a lot of attention has to be paid to our history if we as blacks want to rewrite our own history and produce in it the heroes that have formed the core of our resistance to the white invaders..." (Biko [1978] 2004, p. 105).

[13] *Macmillan Setswana and English illustrated Dictionary*, p. 485; also see Shadi (2018, p. 73): "*Seriti Se* means this dignity, this honor, this aura and this shadow. Translation in this case is difficult because it does not take into account the cultural context of what is being translated, how meaning can be lost when the context of what is being said is not taken in to account, in addition to how meaning can be changed when the context of the conversation is not clarified and respected. I am interested in what happens when translation requires a history lesson. When translation requires a pronouncement of tonal and facial demonstration to fully express meaning."—The form *Seriti Se* indicates possession which I interpret it as "her presence" or "her charisma"—"what we can recognize her by" and, conversely, "her recognition".

researchers in nuclear physics, Olympic sports, airline pilots, dancers, activists, politicians, doctors, etc.

Figure 1. Lerato Shadi, *Makhubu,* performance drawing and installation, (Iniva, London, 2014/15) photo by dewil.ch (cc by-nc-nd 4.0 int)—2014.

Figure 2. Lerato Shadi, *Makhubu,* performance drawing and installation, (Iniva, London, 2014/15) photo by dewil.ch (cc by-nc-nd 4.0 int)—2014.

Figure 3. Lerato Shadi, *Seriti Se,* installation and performance drawing, Lerato Shadi (Galerie-Wedding, Berlin, 2015) photo by dewil.ch (cc by-nc-nd 4.0 int)—2015.

Figure 4. Lerato Shadi, *Seriti Se,* installation and performance drawing, (GoetheOnMain, Johannesburg, 2016) photo by dewil.ch (cc by-nc-nd 4.0 int)—2016.

This research sometimes required Shadi to travel in order to access specialized archives, but most of the work could be done via the Internet. This process is guided by the hope that it will be possible to revise canonical knowledge "from below". During a first phase of the performance, Shadi writes the names directly on the gallery wall. She writes at a height where she has to stretch—stand on a plinth, even—and very low, which forces her to lower herself. Then, by making a brush and white paint available to the public, she invites her visitors to re-enact the gesture of erasure these women have been victims of (Figure 4). By his/her involvement, the visitor assumes responsibility for the name he/she deletes and becomes its guardian. In the gallery, Shadi does not give information on the identity or the personal story of the women; it is up to the visitor–come–guardian to do his/her own research. Shadi highlights the cynicism of the paradoxical lack of fame by the fact that, unlikely as it might have seemed to some, "they [the names] are googleable" (Shadi 2017). While being intensely critical of digital research engine methods, where dominant knowledge is continuously prioritized by means of algorithms—still reinforcing the current inequalities—Shadi insists that it is possible to become familiar with the names of these women by the simple act of launching a "google search". If, after participating in Shadi's project, the public continues to deny knowing these women when their

names, thanks to the globalized computing tool, would be so easy to integrate into general knowledge, this ignorance would amount to perpetuating the act of voluntary erasure. Given the uncomfortable positions (near the floor or more than two metres above the ground) at which Shadi writes the names, the spectator-participants, like Shadi before them, are forced to "bend to the task", in order to accomplish (and owe up to) the act of erasure, as they will be obliged to take on the research entrusted to them.

In both performances, *Makhubu* and *Seriti Se*, Shadi fully involves the corporeal in the activity of writing and erasing. During this action, she shows impressive endurance, working for several days at a pace that leaves little time for rest. With *Seriti Se*, the artist entrusts part of the task to the audience. By means of the gestures performed. A reciprocal relationship is built between speech and corporeal movement. Unlike *Seriti Se*, *Makhubu* is a cyclical work—concentric in relation to the scale of the length of the performer's arms. The activity revolves around central points, divided into three circles. In *Seriti Se*, which links a multitude of elements in a linear, hierarchically equivalent way, Shadi writes the names of a multitude of women. Meanwhile, in *Makhubu*, she writes the biography of only one, her own. *Makhubu* could then seem to be an individual struggle, while *Seriti Se* would be a collective effort. In both proposals, however, the circular or linear organization and the individual or collective effort are not attributable to a specific metaphorical meaning. Through a work as circumspect as it is meticulous, Shadi moves back and forth multiple times—as would replies in a dialogue—between two ways of perceiving one's identity while putting both into action through repetitive bodily movements. According to Shadi, the two projects are a form of struggle claiming the right to be there, to occupy space, just as they would be a commemoration of the lives by which we identify ourselves when we speak, write, or perform.[14] In each of the two bodies of work, the immediacy of the performance seeks to position itself between past and future; the two amount to a staging of repeated erasures as well as their multiform historical dimensions in an open-ended temporal continuity. In *Makhubu* and *Seriti Se,* Shadi shows a radical progression from previous work performed in 2010, for example *Thlogo* and *Se sa feleng* or *Mmitlwa*, where only the performer's own body was involved (Shadi n.d.). In the two performances of 2014, Shadi uses her body to launch the trajectory that evidences the presence or absence of all the women to whom Shadi refers. They can be understood as tangible investigations of an idea that will be expressed in the form of a philosophical remark two years later.

In no case should comments on the back-and-forth between two identity perspectives be read as instating yet another dualism: *Cogito* versus *Ubuntu*. It is

[14] Interview Shadi/Gentric, Berlin, 14 and 20 November 2017.

not a question of defining an "either–or" binary opposition between two mutually incompatible world orders. Rather, Lerato Shadi warns us of the perpetual dilemma we all face in the globalized world where multiple ways of positioning ourselves must be negotiated on a daily basis (Nyamnjoh 2015, p. 140). When approaching an as yet unknown person, entering into dialogue, helping each other, organizing ourselves, i.e., becoming a coherent organism, Shadi warns against judging others according to any personal world view, while forgetting to take into account that our interlocutor may well proceed from an entirely different position. When Shadi chooses to mention only women's names in her performances, which seemingly amounts to ignoring men's names, she does not seek to establish a new form of discrimination. She made this choice in order to compensate for a scandalously unbalanced situation (Ahmed 2017, p. 15). Shadi's work does not immediately intend to militate for the feminist cause, but aims at a form of retribution of the wrongs of the past in the form of an artistic proposal. By enacting the same performances in turn on the African and European continents, the challenge can be interpreted as follows: ask the Cartesian subject to imagine how the Cogito would be read in view to an ethics of "becoming-in-midst-of-others". This judgment would ultimately be none other than a "mirror attitude" of a tradition that the Western observer has been repeating for several centuries now, wherever he was confronted with cultural divergence (Abrahams 2007).

4. Re–Organize? (The Activity of "Being Human")

To articulate the re-organization that Shadi envisioned as an artistic action in both performative installations, it seems useful to sketch an intellectual path that could take Frantz Fanon as a starting point when he positions himself as a non-Western subject caught up in in the colonial situation. This subject is faced with the task of imposing itself on a struggle for recognition as a thinking, emotionally conscious individual. Fanon wrote in 1952: "*Amener l'homme à être* actionnel, *en maintenant dans sa circularité le respect des valeurs fondamentales qui font un monde humain, telle est la première urgence de celui qui, après avoir réfléchi, s'apprête à agir*"[15] (Fanon [1952] 2011, p. 243).

It would be erroneous to insinuate that Lerato Shadi meant to illustrate Fanon's words in any way, but *Makhubu* seems to give a plastic form to Fanon's intent. Shadi would know the essence of Fanon's thinking through the filter of Steve Biko's texts. Formulating the Black Consciousness Movement in the early 1970s (1969–72),

[15] To lead man to be an individual taking action, while maintaining in his circularity a respect for the fundamental values that make up a human world, this is the first urgency for the one who, after having reflected, is about to act. (our translation).

Biko tries to put words to everyday experiences he is faced with, observing society's cleavages along contradictory ontologies in the South Africa of the late 1960s, when the laws of segregation were implemented and when they were felt in their full brutality. These were the harshest years of apartheid. Biko nevertheless maintains that "[o]urs is a true man-centred society whose sacred tradition is that of sharing. We must reject, as we have been doing, the individualistic, cold approach to life that is the cornerstone of the Anglo-Boer culture. We must seek to restore to the black man the great importance we used to give human relationships, the high regard for people and their property and for life in general...". He adds that, in the name of Black Consciousness, resistance cannot do without intellectual recognition because "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed". (Biko [1978] 2004, pp. 101, 106).

In 2015, Biko's words are taken up amongst the student movements' motivations. The students point out how intellectual equality is complicated by the fact that scientific knowledge and criteria for its recognition are subject to a system of thought that is diametrically opposed to theirs by thinking in binary categories and oppositions (Mogorosi 2018). Shadi refers to Yvette Abrahams, who, by what she defines as "womanist methodology" endeavours to summon the necessary mental strength to impose a form of embodied knowledge (Abrahams 1997, 2007). The historian applies this method in her approach of historical personalities (giving a predominant position to Sarah Bartmann), claiming common family membership, and thus identifying herself personally with her research subject. Rather than illustrating Yvette Abrahams' claims, Shadi puts them into action through her own bodily involvement. Abrahams' method, combining the corporeal and the narrative, is similar in many ways to the one chosen by Jayawardane and Shadi in the 2016 interview, and also to the approach of the Caribbean historian Sylvia Wynter. The latter stresses the essential narrativity underpinning human consciousness as a central point of her thinking. Wynter rereads Fanon by highlighting man as a hybrid being: ("the human as a hybrid-auto-instituting-languaging-storytelling species: bios/mythoi." (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, p. 23)). Her argument introduces the idea that, according to this model, the expression "human being" does not function as a noun but as a verb, referring to the activity of being human. According to Wynter's model, because of their essential hybridity, humans would extend beyond their bodily presence and be intimately intertwined (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, p. 43–45) with their environment. An interdependence that Shadi claims by identifying herself with the names of women and their paradoxical presence in erased form, but also by using the digital tool in the reorganization of knowledge, a logic that sees interdependence also in inter-connectivity in the digital sense; this is an idea Achille Mbembe (Mbembe and Van Der Haak 2015) adheres to in several of his texts, especially in the distinction he makes between an "Afrocentric" and an "Afrofuturist" (Mbembe 2016b, pp. 145–51)

reading when it comes to defining the humanism in "*une Afrique à venir*", yet another expression borrowed from Frantz Fanon.

Through the notion of Afrofuturism, Mbembe positions himself in a context (Heidenreich-Seleme and O'Toole 2016) where philosophic defences of the black cause connect with debates on socio(techno)logical processes of the early 21st century (Mbembe 2016a, 2016b). The unlimited inter-connectivity we maintain with our environment (including languages, images, sensory technologies, social and ecological surroundings), which is virtually extended to all humanity, and which also implies the genetic understandings delimiting an organism (Sorgner 2015), calls into question the indivisible nature of what (Western) philosophy constructed as an autonomous "individual" (literally "that which can't be further subdivided"). For this reason, Michaela Ott proposes to increase the notion of the process of individuation (as she finds it in Deleuze 1983, p. 131 or Simondon [1958] 2013) by the notion of "becoming dividual" (Ott 2015). Simondon ([1958] 2013, p. 325) described the "*problématique interne et externe toujours tendue*", defining ethics as that by which "*le sujet reste sujet, refusant de devenir individu absolu, domaine fermé de réalité, singularité détachée*"[16]. Extending upon Simondon, Ott's notion of "becoming dividual" implies "*Teilhabeprozesse*", literally "the processes of being part of", and "*Teilhabvervielfältigung*", "the multiplication of being part of" (Ott 2015, pp. 15, 36, 40), and is repositioned in a self-perception which is aware of the multiple participation processes it is inevitably part of. It is, however, also an ethics aware of the fact that our virtual or "connected" identities would be reduced to a despotic *cul-de-sac-ubuntuism* (Nyamnjoh 2015) from which it would be impossible to extract ourselves[17] if it were not for a situation of mutual reciprocity (Mbembe 2016b, pp. 43–44) and re-cognition (Mogorosi 2018, p. 51). Dividual participation as suggested by Michaela Ott thus speaks of an "empathic 'consubstantiality', which signifies at once participation in 'Self' and 'Other'",[18] and which reads artworks not as self-contained entities, but with attention to "*Verwiesenheit*" (Ott 2015, p. 306–12), reading any aesthetic articulation as "a partial and non-concluded statement", referring to artworks and "their new way of relating to themselves, self-subdivided and participating in a number of Others".[19]

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16 "The perpetual tension of the simultaneously internal and external problematic" which defines ethics as that by which... "the subject remains subject, refusing to become an absolute individual, i.e., a closed domain of reality, a detached singularity". (our translation).

17 Ott (2015, pp. 26–38) refers to "*Teilhabezwang*" and "*Teihabepflicht*" (coercion and obligation to participate), forced interactivity in the digital age.

18 Michaela Ott, "Dividual participations? A history of the entwining and disentangling of European-African-Antillan cultural understandings", manuscript transmitted to the author on 26 March 2019.

19 Ott, *ibid*, p. 9.

It turns out that on the ethical and aesthetical level the question of the "individual" needs to be approached quite differently today at the beginning of the 21st century; the new form of interdependent thinking (whether we want to refer to it as an "ethic of becoming-in-midst-of-others" or as a form of "dividuation") would be particularly efficient for organizing ourselves in our contemporary "connected" world. This form of re-organization can be exemplified through the artistic gesture. By the attention that Shadi pays to the ethical implications of her position, by contravening any judgment or prejudgment whatsoever, she goes beyond South African "identity politics". Instead, she puts her thesis into action—enacting it—by "being" human in both a bodily and a narrative sense.

5. Basupa Tsela (Dinonyane Tse Pedi)

In a performative intervention presented at the Documenta in Kassel in 2017 (Figure 5), Lerato Shadi produced a synthesis of the questions raised in the interview and in the two works of 2014. The public program with the title "The parliament of bodies—How does it feel to be a problem?" claimed that the intention was not to look for identities but for "critical processes of disidentification". Shadi responds to this invitation with an aesthetic articulation, combining a performance entitled *Dinonyane tse Pedi* and a video with the title *Basupa Tsela* (Shadi 2017). The video *Basupa Tsela*[20] shows a blank sheet of paper and the hands of the artist, writing. Using a red crayon, Shadi writes the names of her female pantheon, one by one. She writes the name and then erases it, writing a new name in its place. The soundtrack consists of the ambient noises generated by this work: the dry and abrasive scraping that occurs when the pencil scratches against the paper, then the rather hollow but softly rhythmic beat of the eraser, and finally, the silky rustle when Shadi passes her hand over the textured paper to wipe away the leftovers of rubber. Mechanically, Shadi writes and deletes name after name. As she works, the eraser is reduced, consumed, mere crumbed rubbings remain, turned red because of the crayon—while the paper retains the traces of each new act of writing, impossible to erase without leaving a red shadow deeply embedded in the sheet, layer upon layer. The paper, too, is consumed, weakened; the action lasts until the sheet tears after about thirty minutes. The lines inscribing the letters of the names overlap and form a surface of intertwined lines ("*Tsela*" meaning line, or path), like a disordered, finely textured, graphic, organic and meaningful woven fabric.

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[20] *Basupatsela* is a combination of the rootword *-supa,* "to recognise", "to testify", "to point" or "to show" and *tsela,* meaning "line" or "path". *Basupatsela* are the guides that show the way (Macmillan Setswana and English illustrated Dictionary, pp. 539–540).

Figure 5. Lerato Shadi, *Basupa Tsela*, video-still, (cc by-nc-nd 4.0 int) 2018.

Shadi stands facing the projection. She pronounces the names at the rhythm of her breathing. With the title *Dinonyane tse Pedi* (two birds), Shadi references the lyrics of a song about the movements of two birds in flight, twirling, becoming interchangeable as in a dialogue. Words fly away as soon as they are spoken, as they detach themselves from the one who pronounces them, venturing into the environing space, they occupy it. In several of her previous performances, Shadi submits to meditation exercises, punctuated by breathing. In Kassel, Shadi uses a microphone to ensure that, in addition to her voice, her breathing will be heard throughout the auditorium. In the way these women's names are pronounced, Shadi's voice invokes them,[21] one after the other, calling each of them in turn. With their names spreading throughout space, we are indeed in their presence. Shadi would like her listeners to get to know these women. The semantic root "*-supa*" (we will recognize the root of the word *basupa*) means "to attest", "to give a testimony"; it is therefore a call to recognition. But beyond this testimony, Shadi refers to the expression "stand on the shoulders of giants",[22] by which the title has an additional meaning: *Basupatsela* means "guides". *Basupa Tsela* (which, in its first reading translates as "path", or "line") turns out to be a case where "translation requires a history lesson" (Shadi 2018, p. 73); these women are also the guides who showed the way (*tsela*) to the young artist. Without these other women (the "giants"), Shadi would not be in Kassel on 27 April 2017[23] at 8:45 p.m., where she can pronounce their names in the presence of an assembly of attentive and listening bodies, at a high place of contemporary art of the 21st century.

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[21] For a comparable and equally complex logic, see Tracey Rose's ambulant invocations in her video *Die wit man* (O'Toole 2016).

[22] Shadi/Gentric interview in Berlin, 14 and 20 November 2017. Shadi compares her approach to that of the student movements.

[23] 27 April 2017 is the 23rd anniversary of the first democratic elections in South Africa.

When Shadi interprets the tearing of the paper as representative of systemic and structural violence,[24] she refers to the concomitant fragility and violence in the struggle of South African students claiming a decolonial curriculum by which they intend to overcome binary thinking and the segregation of the past. Shadi also thinks of the sorority of the thinkers of black feminism who intend to reorganize knowledge and institutions beyond the violence of historical erasure. With the expression "stand on shoulders of giants" Lerato Shadi surpasses this violence because it dissolves the alleged contradiction between the individual and society (Miller 2016, pp. 277, 285). According to Shadi, violence can only be defeated by collective action, claiming that every member of the public who undertakes the search for one of the names she invokes is part of the collective overcoming of the violence of historical erasure.[25]

Shadi's invocation is both auditory and visual; she pronounces a name aloud and writes it in a double gesture of inscription/deletion. By pronouncing the names, she, like those she has chosen to follow, asserts her position in a dual past and future movement. The traces of the invocations persist in the form of a "drawing" that turns out to be an "erasure" which is always on the verge of tearing apart; a story or narrative intertwined and infinitely complex, a recognition (*-supa*), made of writings, erasures, multiple layers, systemic ruptures, multiple individuals, a whole, an ethics of becoming-in-midst-of-others, who, again and again, seek a way to say "I" by saying "us". *Makhubu*: making waves (a concentric work extended to the past and the future); *Seriti Se*: obtaining recognition (a linear multitude retrieving names from the past for the future); and *Basupa Tsela*: following those who have come before us (call and response between image and sound affirming a presence in a place) are strengthened by action, recognition, memory and future. The subject, who is the artist, Shadi, ventures out into the 21st century, having positioned herself in time and space, taking action: where we're at.

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[24] Interview Shadi/Gentric Florence 2 March 2018.
[25] Interview Shadi/Gentric 19 July 2018.

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"Transgressing" Wisdom and Elderhood in Times of War? The Shifting Identity of the Elderly Queen in the Performance of *Women of Owu*

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Abstract: Old age is a relatively new area of critical inquiry in African literary and, particularly, theatre studies. This paper aims to explore in what ways an elderly Queen, Erelu Afin, in a 2016 University of Ibadan production of Femi Osofisan's Women of Owu is a subject of cultural and ideological debates that disrupt, supposedly, normative understandings of old age, enabling one to reflect on the assumptions embedded in gender discourse. Wisdom and experience are often interlaced with life course and, ultimately, with elderhood in such ways that a presumable absence of these factors opens up the role and status of an elderly person to interrogation. The paper engages Stuart Hall's understanding of identity in order to reflect on the shifting potential of one's identity when it comes to the elderly Queen in particular and gender in general. Coupled with visual elements, an exploration of speech enunciations, situations of interlocution and kinesic factors, as they are performed in collation with other characters in the performance, will allow me to explore the dynamism of gender identity as it correlates with old age in a politically turbulent environment.

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1. Introduction

The African woman's right to agency and autonomy, which are interlinked with the heterogeneity of African societies and cultures, dates back centuries (Farrar 1997; Familusi 2012; Sesan 2018). The patriarchal and patrilineal norms and practices that ignite such self-determination are, of course, rooted not only in feminisms in Africa but have also projected issues concerning the African woman on the global stage. This debate flavoured the feminist discourses in their second and third waves. Nevertheless, social and cultural constructions about gender norms in a rapidly changing African/Yoruba context put the female subject under scrutiny. Marked by growing complexities and anxieties about gender and identities, which are caught in the process of "production" and discontinuity, fixated normativity is challenged and dismantled. Such complexities are further compounded by the categories of class, ethnicity, sexuality, and old age (elderhood). Coercing individuals to act in a certain way based on their age, gender, and class, usually under strict observation,

results in dislocation and crisis of identity. Enacting an identity in crisis on stage is significantly enabled by performative utterances embodied in speech acts and indices that are representational through visual elements. Utterances deliver experiences, anticipations, facts, embodied feelings and emotions through "constative" (Baumbach and Nünning 2009) enunciations. Speech acts, indices, and constative declarations propel body movement, voice, gesture, and facial expression into action (Baumbach and Nünning 2009, p. 93). Baumbach and Nünning concur that "all utterances are citations in that they connect to something familiar and are based on conventions, shared codes, or established patterns which make their understanding possible" (Baumbach and Nünning 2009, p. 93). Coupled with kinesics and the use of space on stage (proxemics), such utterances enable modes of performativity that are central to our understanding of societal norms and self-representation. This paper explores the dynamics of gender and elderhood and a shift in identity with relation to the role of the elderly queen, Erelu Afin, in a 2016 University of Ibadan production of Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* directed by Tunde Awosanmi. Staged at the Femi Osofisan, Post-Negritude Tradition and 50 Years of Literary Drama conference to celebrate the life and works of Femi Osofisan on his 70th birthday, the play captures the devastation, disillusionment, torture, and trauma experienced by victims in the wake of a military invasion. Erelu's performance and demeanour towards the other captives, all women, allow us to reconsider societal norms associated with gender and old age (elderhood) in this paper. The Yoruba culture conceptualises old age in terms of respect, yet these perceptions are also changing because of social and economic crises rooted in rapid urbanisation processes. However, considering elderhood as the epitome of wisdom, knowledge, and reverence in most African societies, Erelu Afin—who is currently the regent—instead propels herself towards a state of indecision and disillusionment because of the military assault. While the following sections provide an overview of the play, they explore the foregone considerations by furnishing the readers with the context in which Erelu Afin operates in the 2016 Ibadan performance. An account of the role of women in Yoruba culture as a whole is enabled as a prism through which one might potentially envision the perceived expectations and role of Erelu Afin in the context of the war. In doing so, I integrate an understanding of identity that could empower a new appreciation of gender, class/status, and elderhood in their interaction with a shifting identity which is perceived as entangled in a crisis. Does Erelu, as an elder, a queen, and regent, transgress the supposedly privileged position bestowed upon her by her age, status, and society to succumb to the vagaries of the devastation and trauma of a war in which all the men and boys have been captured and slaughtered and her treasured city ransacked?

2. Résumé of the Play

Although Osofisan's play is a Yoruba adaptation of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, it captures historical events marking social, cultural, and political institutions that experienced alteration in the wake of wars that Yorubaland waged against one another in the 18th and 19th centuries. Set around 1821 in the Yoruba Kingdom of Owu, the performance of *Women of Owu* captures an attack on the city of Owu by the Allied Forces consisting of Ife, Ijebu, and Oyo warriors. They invade the city and execute all the men and male children "with the pretext of liberating the flourishing market of Apomu from Owu's control" (Osofisan 2006a). Oba Akinjobi, the reigning Olowu of Owu Ipole, together with his sons and grandson, is captured and summarily executed. The play also carries with it a postcolonial connotation that one would not divorce from contemporary conflicts in which a neocolonial oppressor is apparent. As Felix Budelmann has suggested, Osofisan's play "alludes to the 2003 invasion of Iraq" especially in the way it focuses on "the consequences of military aggression anytime, anywhere: in nineteenth and twentieth century Africa, in the Middle East, and wherever audiences care to make connection" (Budelmann 2006, p. 92).

The survivors of the war are a small group of women who are led by Erelu Afin, the queen of the murdered Oba Akinjobi of Owu Ipole. The nature of the attack is captured through images of a burning Owu that not only fragments its identity as a "model city-state, one of the most prosperous and best organized of those times" (Osofisan 2006a, p. vii), but also disintegrates previously established architectural, spiritual, and human entities. Cries and screams issuing from the burning city and escaping bodies as the former is reduced into smithereens invite the spectators to live the horror and human cost of armed conflict performed on stage. Visual representations of the said horror are symbolised by tortured and desolate bodies strewn on the grounds of the open market on which the city has crumbled. This is enacted on the captured subjects with raised machetes and the use of live ammunition. The competent and authoritative deployment of objects of war (Figure 1) by the invading soldiers is telling of the devastation left behind when they retreat temporarily to their camps. Nefarious consequences of such an invasion are visible on the captives. Offering a background to the play, Azeez Akinwumi Sesan comments, "Femi Osofisan is one of the Nigerian playwrights who have shown serious concern in the re-interrogation of some of the Yoruba eighteenth- and nineteenth-century wars [. . .] because *[Women of Owu]* revolves around [. . .] historical and mythical experiences that have shaped the sociology and politics of the Yoruba nationality" (Sesan 2018, p. 184). Paralleled with the devastation of modern wars, such carnage is imagined through the words of Ndubuisi Nnanna when he states, "Osofisan's Women of Owu is a sordid tale of unimaginable grief. It is a story of extreme plunder, pillage, and dehumanization, especially, of womanhood.

Little wonder that its blurb is replete with dolorous reviews evoking intense images of suffering and ravishment" (Nnanna 2016, p. 57; see also Götrick 2008). The delight in causing pain to a victimised female body is highlighted in this paper as I examine the role of Erelu Afin. As an elderly queen, the rest of the captured women expect her to guide and encourage them, albeit in the wake of husbands, sons, and a grandson being overwhelmed and slaughtered, and daughters and women being raped and enslaved. These acts are rooted in what one of the Ijebu soldiers, Gesinde, describes as the logic of war in which an elderly woman, other women, and children become vulnerable sites on which brutality, vengeance, and rage are enacted.

Figure 1. Attack of Owu by the Ife, Oyo, and Ijebu warriors led by their general, Okunade. Photo by author.

3. Gender and Old Age Considerations

Elderly women in specific African sociocultural contexts encounter insurmountable challenges related to ageism. Further challenges emerge when one explores the correlation of gender and old age, drawing from stereotypes and prejudices to which elderly women are often subjected. The ambiguity of gender and old age highlight the complexity in defining identity, which Stuart Hall effectively relates to "a distinctive type of structural change [that] is transforming modern societies in the late twentieth century. This is fragmenting the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and nationality which gave us firm location as social individuals" (Hall 1996, p. 596). Of course, the question arises whether an identity can be fixed. And if it can, who determines the terms. In response, Hall speaks of an "individualist" conception of the subject and "his" [. . .] identity" (Hall 1996, p. 597). Although Hall refers to the late modernity and its accompanying hegemonic tendencies, his understanding of identity legitimately reflects the shift in the political,

social, and cultural structure in Yoruba societies before the mid-19th century as captured in the 2016 performance of *Women of Owu*. However, this depiction, according to Osofisan, legitimately enunciates any situation of war that is not strictly Yoruba. It is at the juncture of this theatrical representation of warfare and culturally constructed gender norms in Osofisan/Awosanmi's theatre that a supposedly fixed identity experiences a decentring and shifting mode. The complexity of being an elder, a grandmother, a woman, a queen and, eventually, a slave reflects the emerging tensions accompanying Erelu Afin's identity and self-determination in the performance. In association with this, Hall further asserts that

> Old identities which stabilized the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject. This so-called "crisis of identity" is seen as part of a wider process of change which is dislocating the central structures and processes of modern societies and undermining the frameworks which gave individuals stable anchorage in the social world (Hall 1996, p. 596).

It is exactly at that interstitial space, a declining one for that matter, that we relocate Erelu, the elderly widowed queen of Oba Akinjobi, in a space that disassociates itself from the fundamental assumptions of Homi Bhabha's (Bhabha 2004) productive third space of enunciation. Buffeted, condescendingly, from nobility to victimhood as a result of war, Erelu unimaginably loses her status as a powerful woman of her kingdom as she disavows physical resistance. Warfare, in this context, is a remarkable determinant of transformation of both society and people. A looming invocation of selling the war victims to European slave traders runs deep in the discourse of modernity that is, at least partly, accountable for the transformation of society and its people, including Erelu. Foregrounding the elderly queen as the quintessence of this analysis, an understanding of old age in an African context is required as it is perceived differently in different cultures of the globe. In an African context, old age embodies both a chronological age (60+) together with the status of an individual in the community (see also Chiangong 2018). Viewed in terms of cultural representation, Friday Asiazobor Eboiyeh asserts that "[t]hey constitute systems of ideas, values, and customs related to old age that is treated by members of the society as if they were established reality" (Eboiyeh 2015, p. 3). Ebioyeh's supposition drawn from cultural representation highlights the esteem and reverence that aged individuals enjoy within their families and communities. In Botswana, old age is revered equally as seniority unsettles what Bagwasi and Sunderland term "masculine power" (Bagwasi and Sunderland 2013, p. 54). The elderly "are frequently called upon to settle disputes among younger members of the family" (Bagwasi and Sunderland 2013, p. 72) and, by extension, the community. Therefore, they are perceived as a repository of knowledge and the history of the community (Ajala 2006); they are believed to be endowed with wisdom rooted in life experiences. As traditional

authorities and spiritual leaders, they are viewed as intermediaries of the supernatural and the human world. However, the disintegration of traditional care systems as a consequence of intergenerational conflicts, modernisation, and urbanisation has distorted the original perception of the elderly. Consequently, reverence and esteem shown towards them are sometimes marred by stereotypes, prejudices, disrespect, neglect, and abandonment, which indeed are other subjects of inquiry and critique. Germane to the status of women and elderhood in Yorubaland, Fadipe (1970) adds that

> [A]fter the menopause [...] possibly because of motherly pride in adult sons and daughters who in some cases have become mothers, women progressively develop a freedom of speech and action in their husband's compound. They are in the position to speak out their minds without fear (where previously they merely deferred to others) and [...] assume arbitrary authority in the compound. (Fadipe 1970, p. 116)

Given that old age entails varied contextual definitions, how is Erelu's identity as an elderly person determined in the performance? She employs self-referential markers at scenes where she laments over her fate not only as a prisoner of war but also as an imminent elderly slave; "will they put padlocks/On these **wrinkled lips**, and chains on these **old** and/**Withered feet**?" Further, when the women insist that she leads them in a ritual to repose the souls of the men killed in the war before they (the women) are caged as slaves, she invites the women to "join these **old bones** in our ritual of valediction to the dead". Further, her daughter-in-law, Adumaadan, together with an Ijebu soldier, address her as "old woman" as a show of abhorrence towards an unfavourable decision she made both as a mother and as a queen. It is worthwhile to add that these referential markers clearly depict not only Erelu's internalisation of ageist stereotypes, but also hint at how societies across Africa sometimes view aged individuals from a similar perspective (see also Bagwasi and Sunderland 2013).

Therefore, old age and elderly womanhood in an African context are marked by chronological determinants that correspond with status and class. The normative understanding of old age is, however, mutable not only in the contemporary definition of old age—as a result of modernisation—but also in the context of the performance, thereby interrogating its very normativity. This attests that its meaning and perception are dynamic, and are experiencing a decentring that affects the established norms of representations and the value of meaning. This alteration, therefore, demands that we briefly explore the status of women in precolonial Yoruba society in a bid to understand the shift in Erelu Afin's identity—as a queen, regent, and the only surviving elder/priestess—in a precolonial context of the kingdom of Owu.

4. Women's Status in Precolonial Yoruba Society

In spite of patriarchal norms, women played prominent roles in the development of Yoruba communities. Although they operated within heteronormative gender dynamic conclaves, they were indeed independent and fiercely assertive when it came to economic, entrepreneurial, and political matters. In addition, gender constructions were and are fluid, aptly determined by the expectations of both men and women, highlighting the fact that "gender construct does not translate to notions of oppression and the domination of women by men as happens in other cultures, because it is mediated by the philosophy of complementary gender relations" (Olajubu 2004, p. 43; see also Oyewumi 1997). Accordingly, Oyewumi affirms that "gender was not an organizing principle in Yoruba society, prior to colonization of the West", highlighting that, "the social categories "men" and "women" were non-existent, and hence no gender system was in place" (Oyewumi 1997, p. 31). Therefore, a closer look at precolonial Yoruba society informs us that gender dynamics in the theatre of Osofisan, as Tejumola Olaniyan states, "traverses and undermines our contemporary gendered absolutes and [...] reveals them as neither natural nor inevitable but as partisan, ideological constructs that can and need to be altered." To Olaniyan, Osofisan's theatre reveals that "the sources of many of these specific and now generalised contemporary gendered divisions are external to the societies and are to be found very often in their colonial heritage" (Olaniyan 2006, p. 144). Elsewhere, LaRay Denzer (Denzer 1994) offers a captivating account of the status of precolonial Yoruba women, showing how Nigerian women as a whole played a vital role in the development of their communities. Working within patriarchal family assemblages, Yoruba women engaged in industrial and entrepreneurial activities that impacted tremendously on their local and wider official economy (Denzer 1994, p. 3). Moreover, as wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers, they "had access to land, the use of their father's houses, a share in the profits from their fathers' farms and participation in the ancestral and *orisa* cults of their paternal lineage" (Denzer 1994, p. 5; see also Olasupo 2013; Law 1995). Denzer reveals how Yoruba women were indefatigable as they were deeply entrenched in trading activities, travelling often in caravans to different communities within and beyond Yorubaland in search of wealth. Their astute economic power translated into political power and leadership.

On the political level, Yoruba women are known to have founded and ruled kingdoms, for example, Madame Efunroye Tinubu, the *Iyalode* (title of recognition conferred on her for her wealth and standing) of Abeokuta, *Iyalode* Efunsetan Aniwura of Ibadan, and Madam Omosa, who was an influential Ibadan trader. These nineteenth century economic and politically influential Yoruba women not only provided weapons and ammunition during enemy attack and warfare but accumulated ample wealth and power which "rested on prosperous trade in arms, ammunition, slaves, palm oil and locally produced food and manufactures" (Denzer

1994, p. 12). For instance, Madam Omosa was the first to purchase sophisticated weapons which she employed to "mobilise and lead a defensive force that defeated and thwarted the attack when Ijebu forces threatened her city, Ibadan" (Denzer 1994, p. 13). Interestingly, even within the royal palaces, the *ayaba*, as Denver observes, formed what she describes as an intricate system of female officers which included

> the *iya afin* (wives of the preceding oba), followed by the *ayaba* of the reigning oba, the female *ilari* (female officials), and last, ordinary slave women [who] ... served as advisers, priestesses presiding over the shrines inside and outside the palace, protectors of the oba [the King], influence-bookers between the commoners and the oba, intelligence agents, and domestic servants. (Denzer 1994, p. 9)

Besides, "Queen mothers, king's sisters, King's wives, priestesses, and market women's leaders occupied a variety of titled offices through which they influenced domestic politics and foreign affairs either directly or indirectly" (Denzer 1994, p. 11). Concerning leadership and chieftaincy, women may seem not to be prioritised because of gender norms and the socially constructed regulations around gender, sociopolitical status, ability, and age that precisely determine a male child's claim to such positions. Fadipe emphasises that such claims are made based on "hereditary and elective principles of succession" which are rigorously restricted by customary norms. In spite of this restriction which may speak of specific enclaves of the Yoruba society, it is known that women have been enthroned as traditional leaders of their communities—for example, in Ijesaland—and correspondingly engaged in the religious, economic, spiritual welfare, and development of their communities like male leaders (Trager 2001, p. 92; see also McIntosh 2009). Capturing the political status of the Yoruba women, which was disrupted during colonial and missionary intrusion, Fadipe (1970) states that women in colonial Yoruba towns who belonged to political associations such as *Egbe Iyalode* were invested with the power to discuss business with the council that managed the affairs of the state. In addition, "any representation[s] made [...] are listened to with respect whether they are concerned with their trading interests or with some broader political issue" (Fadipe 1970, p. 253). However, the leader of the women's political association used their status to enact what Fadipe describes as "the superior judgement of the males" (Fadipe 1970, , p. 253). Credible accounts that inform on Yoruba society up to the 19th century allow us to imagine the power conferred on Erelu Afin in *Women of Owu* before the war breaks out. Bearing in mind that Owu was a prosperous kingdom at this time, Erelu's status of royalty/nobility and her advanced age logically positioned her as a woman to whom subordinates would turn to for leadership precisely in times of crisis. But would Erelu, in spite of her economic and political power, provide the leadership expected of her?

5. Enacting Negation of Resilience

The study argues that Erelu Afin experiences and enacts physical and psychological distress in the situation of war explored earlier. This does not undermine her political strength because in the face of adversity, she summons resilience through her performance of the senselessness of warfare. In enacting agony, she protests against the attack of Ijebu, Oyo, and Ife warriors, making her resilience seemingly internal. Her act contributes a different understanding to African feminist discourse as it rewrites her identity as a powerful elderly queen transformed to a victim of war. This transition marks her state of victimhood, which indirectly frames her sentiment as an active political act. She supports African feminist discourse which is not bound to confront patriarchal norms and social constructions of gender roles (see Atanga 2013), but also creates a site on which pain and despondency are given agency through self-reflexivity. However, the paper chose to focus on her externalisation of pain, which, in my view, affects her status as an elderly queen. Significant emblems of self-worthlessness and lack of motivation mark Erelu's performance. Physical, emotional, and psychological pain shatter her sense of worth and well-being as an elderly leader. For the majority of the Ibadan performance, she mourns, wails, and sprawls in the dust in dejection. She often either throws her arms helplessly in the air or folds them to her chest. Her reluctant exploration of the performance space is discernible in her uncertain movements.

She is often seen taking despondent body postures in which her head is bent towards her chest or shoulders (Figure 2), contributing to an atmosphere of empathy in the auditorium.

Figure 2. Erelu in a standing position that expresses desolation. Photo by author.

She frequently employs her hand to support her bent head, which summons the audience to share in her ordeal. While Erelu narrates the travails imposed by the war, the spectator constantly decodes pain and trauma in her sombre facial expressions as the auditorium is enveloped in silence at those moments. Such gestures and body positions clearly articulate grief, vulnerability, and resignation.

Her body, with those of the other captured women, is smeared in soot, illustrative of the fact that the victims are caught in a smouldering site. Apropos experiencing war and human loss, her testimony and those of the other women negate the accolades of royalty and nobility that come with Erelu's status and advanced age. Ultimately, she laments over the loss of her political status and the soldiers' derision over her mother—and woman—hood. Erelu Afin does not engage in most of the songs and dances performed by the women. Presumably, these songs privilege the remembrance of a stable community life before the invasion, but also inadvertently enable the women to gain and maintain unity and strength in captivity. But as Budelmann (2006, p. 93) adds, the songs and dances, also articulated in one of the women's remarks, are performed in times of calamity, bearing with it a tradition handed down to them by their ancestors. Therefore, one of the women states "so let us dance my friends as we wait, as our mothers taught us to do at such moments. Dance the Dance of the Days of Woe!" (Osofisan 2006b, p.17) and "Sing my friends! Let us celebrate/Our new-worn freedom of chains!" (Osofisan 2006b, p.13) (Figure 3). Have they, the women, not emerged from the war "with our spirits broken and our faces swollen waiting to be turned into whores and housemaids in your *[implying the Allied Forces]* towns?" (Osofisan 2006b, p. 12). The women perform the dances and songs to intense drumming, which are an enactment of Yoruba oral aesthetic patterns and rooted in the community as a Yoruba cultural element. Although the dances import satirical connotations that critique dictatorship and political callousness, they are obviously an enactment of the continuity and emerging trends of such oral performance in the communities in which these women will ultimately be in servitude.

Erelu performs the dirge "*Atupa gbepo nle felepo* (lamp, yield your oil to the oil seller)" (Osofisan 2006b, p. 69). As the women, including Erelu, perform the dance in a circle each holding a lit lamp, they energetically push their torsos in and out to the rhythm of the dirge and drumming, as if to build up an energetic tempo and momentum to engage an action that is yet to be revealed to the audience. While the dancing women, who also perform using complex dance movements, exit stage left with their lit lamps, Erelu moves to centre stage and crumbles to the ground once again. Throughout the entire performance, she is often seen standing aloof and away from the rest of the other women as a symbol of hopelessness and misery (Figure 4). However, ambiguity shrouds this aloofness which one could connect to her majestic status. But, as mentioned earlier, grief overwhelms her efforts to maintain her status of royalty.

Figure 3. One of the dances performed by the women without Erelu to celebrate their new–worn freedom of chains. Photo by author.

Figure 4. Erelu is often seen standing aloof from the rest of the women. Photo by author.

The following utterances, which Erelu makes in the performance, capture her state of devastation, indignation, and ultimate defeat from the war, and probably inform the audience of her loss of leadership in the kingdom.

> **Ah, am I** the one sprawled on the ground like this, In the dust, like a common mongrel! Me!
> But what's the use getting up? **To go where,**
> Or to achieve **what purpose?** Of course **I am sorry for myself**, But so what?
> When fate has decided to strike you down,
> What amount of crying can help?
> That's what **I keep telling myself. I say-Resign yourself, Erelu Afin, and accept it all with forbearance!**
> But nature is weak: my tears pour out nevertheless! [...]
> **Who will look at me now, and remember I was once a queen here, in this broken city,**
> **Or that in that palace over there, now burning to ashes I gave my husband five splendid sons?**
> **And my daughters, dear women**! **These** same eyes saw my daughters
> **Seized by their hair, their clothes ripped off their bodies By brutal men, and their innocence shredded forever**
> In an orgy of senseless rapine [. . .] Now those laughing girls
> Are going into the kitchens of uncultured louts! [...]
> **Oh I wish I could die, die! Or fall silent**
> **In a hole where sorrow can no longer reach me! Who will save Erelu Afin? Who can save me now**?[...]

Erelu's performance in this scene is analysed using indexical components and speech acts that communicate action and knowledge, in a specific context, as strategies to articulate the progress of her decentring identity. Her utterances are accompanied by actions of distress as the spectators watch her sprawling in the dust. Her position is constant as her motivation to embrace her state with perseverance and self-control is thwarted by the destruction of her city and her status as its queen. When she finally moves from her position on the ground, she engages almost quick seemingly seditious steps towards downstage left only to be entrapped by sorrow as she taps her palms several times on her abdomen as an index to emphasise the "five splendid sons" that she gave her husband and who have been killed in the war. Incessant mourning and the wish for death to end her suffering is a recurrent desire. Her constant use of the personal pronoun "I", which she utters while directing her fingers towards her chest (Figure 5), refers to her status as a queen in the former wealthy Kingdom of Owu and to her wish to not move, but rather to die: "**I** keep telling myself. **I** say—Resign yourself [. . .] **I** was once a queen here, in this broken city [. . .] Oh **I** wish **I** could die, die!" (Osofisan 2006b, p. 10).

Figure 5. Erelu enacting the "I" pronoun and the "my" as she refers to the consequence of the war on her being. Photo by author.

Faced with calamity, Erelu is obviously caught in a crisis of identity, manifest by ambivalences and contradictions, which demands that she either succumb to the disaster or embrace it with strength. In an attempt to negotiate these new developments of her identity, Erelu—the queen, mother, grandmother and wife—ultimately resigns herself to her fate because her "tears pour out nevertheless!" Further, her use of demonstrative pronouns invites the audience's gaze towards the subjects that she is referring to, "**These** same eyes saw my daughters/ Seized by their hair, their clothes ripped off their bodies [. . .] **That's** what I keep telling myself. I say—Resign yourself [. . . .] Or that in **that** palace over there, now burning to ashes/I gave my husband five splendid sons?" Serving as indexical signs, these pronouns, according to Johansen and Larsen, ensure designations "that signify by pointing to something [. . .] point us to an object, drawing our intention to it, as if urging us to '*take a look at that*'" (Johansen and Larsen 2002, p. 35; see also West 2014). Erelu's eyes, to which "these" point, invite the audience to imagine and share in her testimony, specifically watching her daughters brutalised through the act of rape by Ijebu, Oyo, and Ife soldiers. Such a scene does not require a stage enactment since Erelu's deportment, as narrated by her, transmits the lived trauma of the incident to the audience. Further, resigning to fate is "that" decision she is willing

to embrace because "that" city, now smouldering, is the site where she conceived her now slaughtered five sons and lost her husband. These designations direct the audience's eye and imagination towards the physical, psychological, and emotional torture of war. Further, these indexical elements describe her current state and the events that goaded her into such episodes now unfolding in her life. The "I" and "me" designations localise her in the spotlight vis-à-vis the women, as the audience is constantly reminded of her destroyed kingdom and the violent usurpation of her political authority. She has, of course, been rendered a homeless, vanquished and childless widow/queen, and grandmother.

The demonstrative and personal pronouns—"that", "these", "those", I"—that she utilises in the above utterances relate to those elements that do not only form the core of her identity constructed by Yoruba perception of royalty, but also reference her dislocation to what she describes as "a common mongrel". The deaths, together with the devastation inflicted by the war, have shifted her identity to a pitiful state in which she chooses to cry, wail, and scream as she elects, frequently, to express self-pity. Worse still, her imagination of her future state exacerbates her current state of grief.

The thought of being sold into slavery in Kano, Abomey, or to the Europeans who are currently settled at the Cape Coast in Ghana provokes further enactment of melancholy. If her destination is the Cape Coast, her thoughts of being silenced with a padlock put on her wrinkled lips and chains bounded on her old feet, or perhaps being branded with a hot iron, will annihilate her humanity. Such a predictable outcome, of course, engenders panic as she exclaims; "Me! I am going to be maid to some foreign matron:/I will watch night and day over her brats,/Or slog away in her kitchen, picking vegetables,/My body covered in sores! Me, the Erelu of Owu!" Erelu raises ethical questions about the slave trade and draws the audience's attention to the illogicality of slavery that affected people irrespective of status and age. Erelu's language in this circumstance can be associated with Makoni and Stroeken's supposition that "[t]he language spoken by older persons in both illness and health [encapsulate] an older person's experience and recollections of the past, as well as vision and hopes for the future in the current political reality" (Makoni and Stroeken 2002, p. 1). In Erelu's mind, however, she would rather die than submit herself to any of the situations prescribed by the war, which also encompasses serving as a concubine to any of the Allied Forces. Hence, in her state of disillusionment, she encourages the women to wail via a cadence of a dirge.

Her internalised resilience, expression of silent protest, and non-confrontational approach in the performance are also captured in her interrogation of the abstention of the gods in preventing the war. The ancestor Anlugba arrives only after the city of Owu has been destroyed. As he simultaneously chastises humans for their incessant thirst for calamity and blood, the women—whom he blames for not summoning

him—ironically interrogate his relevance as a god and ancestor in the life of the kingdom. They demand Anlugba's whereabouts when they, the women, performed sacrifices at his shrine to invoke his protection during the war. Correspondingly, Erelu insists on the gods' detachment from the people when she pronounces,

> The gods are not worth much! They lie and lie all the time and deceive us! They will take all our sacrifices,
>
> Wear us down in supplication, but they have their own designs onus all the time! Did we not pray enough? Did we not offer sacrifice upon sacrifice! Yet see what they have made of our city! The gods are not worth much respect!

The women are convinced that the intervention of the gods would have precluded the war, the devastation and, specifically, the execution of Erelu's baby grandson by the Allied Forces. When the baby's head is bashed against a tree and its remains brought to Erelu to be buried (Figure 6), the elderly queen is, of course, inconsolable.

Figure 6. Enactment of grief as the lifeless body of Erelu's grandson arrives. Photo by author.

Dazed, she cuddles his lifeless body in the cloth of her dead son and wanders aimlessly across the stage as she sings a dirge pervaded with praises to his departed soul. Shrouded in angst, some of the women clutch their heads and bosoms with their hands. Others, as a grieving gesture and questioning the gods, direct their raised arms to the heavens.

6. Performing Normativity

Normativity is perceived here as the antithesis of Erelu's denial of confrontation and internalised resilience. Normativity's internal logic in the play is conceived, distinctively, to establish certain moral and ethical values in the community. Therefore, the normative category that espouses the perception of correctness as wrong is eloquently chastised. Symptomatic of respect and deference in the Yoruba community, perceived correctness is enacted in the performance with specific voice intonations, costumes, body positions, and gestures. Based on veneration addressed to individuals with political authority, economic power, and elderhood, the women in the performance underscore that Erelu poses as a source of physical resilience in the aftermath of the war. Their accentuation is rooted in respect for elders and royalty which Tejumola Olaniyan affirms is relevant to Yoruba culture; "[t]he story of the engendering of Yoruba culture [. . .] which autochthonously privileges age and not sex/gender as mode of assigning hierarchy [. . .]" (Olaniyan 2006, p. 144). Such reverence is traded with guidance and responsibility expected of the elderly individuals. The women simulate gestures of prostration—bows, respectful clasping of hands and kneeling—while addressing Erelu. Specific modes of the usage of space that separates the women from Erelu also signal their esteem of the elderly queen. Respect for old age is an integral code of the Yoruba culture within which gender relations are fluid; hence, in this context, they create a backdrop against which economically and politically influential women emerged to contribute to the economic and political development of their society. Women's affiliation to royalty commanded respect from the populace since regents and priestesses were expected to rule and perform important rituals. Erelu's status in the performance and, by implication, in the Kingdom of Owu is modelled on the preceding precepts.

Since the costume of the Yoruba women, visually and symbolically, authenticates their different statuses in the society, Erelu's costume—which is a handwoven fabric, *Aso-oke*—is mostly worn at exclusive traditional ceremonies and festivals, signifying her status. The string of coral beads that adorns her wrist are worn during important celebrations across communities in Nigeria as a symbol of royalty and a unique marker of traditional titleholders. Their use within the context of royalty presupposes that the coral beads are endowed with supernatural powers and thus used as ritual objects. The rest of the women wear locally dyed fabrics known among the Yoruba people as the *adire.* The *adire* is quite common and more affordable than the *Aso-oke* and coral beads. Together with the difference in costume, the women, as depicted in all the pictures embedded in this paper, adopt positions indicative of reverence and loyalty towards Erelu Afin. Sometimes they create respectful distances from her (Figure 4) or kneel (Figures 2, 7 and 8). These acts are also gestures of subordination, which in some scenes are performed by firmly clasping their hands while addressing Erelu. Grief, portrayed through their facial expressions and songs, is the major factor

that homogenises the group. It therefore comes as no surprise that the women seek counsel from the eldest and leader among them.

Figure 7. The women beseech Erelu to perform the ritual of valediction. Photo by author.

Adherence to the norms of Yoruba culture defines the women's interactions with Erelu in the performance. They clearly empathise with her and attempt to assuage her distress. However, in spite of the devastation caused by the war, the women remind Erelu of her duties as the queen, the regent, and the only elderly individual left to lead them in political and spiritual matters. By implication, she has to contribute her quota of responsibility in return for the veneration conferred on her by her society. That said, they begin by rebuking Erelu for her total submission to distress that often interrupts the performance of their dances and songs, "Your cries of anguish, Erelu Afin/Are like the talons of a hawk clawing at our breasts/They pierce our ears with terror. But we have been /Defeated [...]". In spite of their reprove, the women nevertheless encourage her to "preserve your strength so that we too can preserve ours" (Osofisan 2006b, p.13) and Erelu, of course, retorts with a lamentation. In their efforts to uplift the vanquished queen, the women are persistent in seeking Erelu's leadership when they seek her advice and her suggestion of actions that must be taken to avert the impending enslavement. As we would imagine, Erelu again responds by wailing. But, according to the women, Erelu must lead the ritual of valediction, an act deemed necessary to cleanse their community of the lingering

negativity of the war as the souls of the victims are equally reposed. The ritual, they believe, will protect the future of the dispersed survivors in captivity. Caught in uncertainty, Erelu's wish to die is as strong as the thought of leaving with Allied Forces who arrive on stage to take the women away. As she attempts to bid farewell to the rest of the women, there is also the immediate need to perform the ritual. The deposed queen's refusal to comply for lack of strength impels all the women to sink to their knees (Figure 7), imploring her to execute her functions. They express that Erelu is the only surviving elder and spiritual leader, and also "the mother of the city, the only/Mouth we [the women] have left now to speak to our ancestors" (Osofisan 2006b, p. 62), with directives speech acts, but the leader of the women is resolute:

Figure 8. Women's show of allegiance to Erelu who, traumatised, is unable to advise and lead the women. Photo by author.

No, Erelu not yet! In spite of your bitterness,
I beg you, remember who you are, what you still have to do,
[. . .]
I know how you feel, Erelu, but Kabiyesi
Your husband is no longer here. All our priests and
Princes have been turned to corpses. Their bodies lie around [. . .] unburied.
They and other victims
Need someone to release their spirits and send them back Safely home to the ancestors. Someone trained in the task. Among us there's no such person left now.
Except you.

The women are aware that tradition forbids them from performing such a ritual of valediction given that an elder and queen is present. However, the war and its consequences have sapped the queen of her strength and motivation and, in the process, decentred her identity of royalty, divination, economic strength, and elderhood to an overwhelmed and traumatised childless widow. Embracing her new identity, she informs the women and the audience of her current psychological state, "This is no longer/The Erelu you knew, but just another corpse still talking./Grief has drained out my powers" (Osofisan 2006b, p. 62). While making these utterances, she seeks support from the women who, in turn, hold her and each other's hands (Figures 7 and 8).

Not yielding to Erelu's physical and psychological state, the women's persistence ultimately results in Erelu agreeing to perform the ritual. As the ritual of invocation is in progress, the women summon Anlugba the ancestor with lit lamps through a performance of the dirge. Anlugba appears on stage in the form of a masquerade. Possessed by the spirit of the ancestor, an entranced Erelu and Anlugba interlock their bodies in a backward grip. In this physical and spiritual embodiment, both personae rebuke humans for their role in igniting the war. However, they refer to the formation of the African/Yoruba diaspora from the enslaved and dispersed survivors of the war. Before Anlugba ascends to heaven in a backward movement from the stage, both disengage as the play ends with Erelu collapsing to the ground and remaining motionless.

7. Conclusion

The paper illustrates that Erelu's political authority in the kingdom of Owu is reminiscent of the powerful women of 19th century Yorubaland discussed earlier. Endowed with such trappings of power together with elderhood and royalty, Erelu relinquishes these elements to narrate a human story that is wrought from the trauma of war. Although the community that surrounds her insists that she perform her duties in accordance with her age and status in the kingdom, she, rather, enacts angst and distress, to which all humans, irrespective of these elements, are susceptible during wartime. Therefore, the category of age, power, and royalty are not relevant to the playwright and director as both artists seek to highlight humanitarian concerns that emerged in warfare. It is, therefore, difficult to muster the thought that Osofisan reproduces prejudicial representation of female characters in *Women of Owu* like early male African authors (Achebe, Ngugi wa'Thiongo, Okot p'Bitek etc . . .) if one perceives Erelu as a subordinate emotional woman, mother, widow, grandmother, and wife. In addition, the study does not undermine her role by assigning pervasive ageist stereotypes such as the doddering and complaining old woman to her identity. Victimhood as well as collective and individual trauma become the playwright and director's subjects of exploration and critique. It is along this line of argument that

Erelu performs self-worthlessness as she transgresses the norms of her privileged status, mainly to enunciate and denounce the devastation of war. In doing so, she questions the rationale behind warfare, in which humans are decimated. At no point in the performance does Erelu attempt to utilise coercion against the Allied Forces except in a string of curses in which she verbally lashes out against them from a distance. Perhaps, in transgressing wisdom, one could argue that the ritual of valediction that she finally leads serves as a symbolic transition into the ancestral realm as she lays motionless on stage when the play ends. Her current state is one of the resolutions she had echoed to "fall silent/In a hole where sorrow can no longer reach me!" (Osofisan 2006b, p.11). While this symbolic transition precludes us from the imaginations of Erelu's life in servitude, it gives equal agency to the other women. The women's persistence does not only enable the continuity of traditional values, but inadvertently protects Erelu from her fate as a slave by way of maintaining that she performs the ritual. Her "death" in the end therefore highlights the relevance of valorising certain traditional practices and their role in preserving certain cultural, ethical, and moral codes that include reverence and responsibility. Further, it is via the technique of spirit possession that both the transfigured Erelu/Anlugba blame humans for their atrocious role in causing wars and human disasters. The spiritual and physical embodiment of both personae further elucidate the previously mentioned fluidity of gender roles in Yoruba society, in which gender relations are not strictly defined along patriarchal lines. Thematising the transatlantic slave trade and warfare over which Erelu laments serves as a useful reminder of core Yoruba/African values annihilated by slavery, colonialism, and Christianity. Extant Yoruba and African Diaspora traditions, I argue, can be traced to resistant acts like those performed by the women in the play who insist that their queen and spiritual leader must perform those traditions that unify the community before their forceful dispersion. Such a strategy of ensuring the survival of culture results in indigenous knowledge production reinvigorated by a group of grassroots women who are generally a site of agency, resilience, and empowerment across Africa. These grassroots values make an equally powerful statement about African feminisms (see Steady 1994; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994; Nfah-Abbenyi 1997; Oyewumi 1997; Hudson-Weems 2004; Walker 2005, for a selection), which are not only rooted in concepts developed by African feminist theorists, but also allow us to rethink how they correlate, historically, with feminisms emerging from the African Diaspora.

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Voicing Challenge: Trans* Singers and the Performance of Vocal Gender

Anke Charton

Abstract: This paper investigates the impact of trans* singers on the discursive framework of the gendered systematizations in classical singing, focusing on the opera industry and its casting and voice classifications. Whereas research on voice and gender has been a part of New Musicology for the past two and a half decades, inquiries into, e.g., cross-casting have largely happened against a backdrop of binary gender norms and have not prominently considered trans* voices and trans* identities. This paper investigates the current presentation of trans* voices within opera through press coverage, casting practices, and self-statements and engages with materials on three singers as a qualitative sample. Narrative patterns are singled out and applied to questions of gender in opera, thinking of trans* singers as a vital part of the equation and coming to the result that, while opera has always had spaces that move beyond cisgender norms, opera singing is still strongly guarded by binary gender conventions. A stronger presence of trans* voices throws these conventions into stark light and allows challenging ideas of normative gender performativity in opera and beyond, though it also raises ethical concerns regarding the instrumentalization of marginalized identities in theoretical discourse.

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1. Introduction

While Western, secular classical singing since the late 16th century has always entailed performance practices that move beyond a cis-heteronormative representation of gender, it largely reframes and restrains these practices to a stage diegesis, while maintaining and reconfirming binary conceptualizations of gender in its infrastructure. This is both a legacy of 19th-century gender norms and of 20th-century staging and casting traditions, with the availability of these traditions on record exerting a continuous influence on vocal aesthetics. These aesthetics, in turn, are imbedded into a heavily gendered fach system that is not sufficiently understood as historically flexible.

An emerging generation of classically trained trans* singers—this paper considers the careers and media (self)representation of heroic baritone Lucia Lukas (Lucas n.d.), male mezzo-soprano Adrian Angelico (Angelico n.d.), and bass-baritone Aiden K. Feltkamp (Feltkamp n.d.)—is currently drawing new attention to the limits of the fach system and its categorization of voices as men's and women's foremost. Trans* singers also call into question binary traditions of operatic cross-casting (Knaus

2011), the (im)possibility of an ungendered stage body (Barba 1995, pp. 9–11), and the performativity of gender identity at large (Butler 1990). Following that, I trace the historical construction of vocal gender and its assessments in musicological research, to then question its configuration through the lens of trans* singers' careers and presentations.

2. Historical Development

The 19th-century reframing of gender as an essentialized biological dichotomy echoed in mental and affective dispositions—which casts earlier configurations of power, class, and gender such as the *femme forte* aside—limited the earlier scope of onstage gender expression in opera. With singing voices being divided into men's and women's voices first, earlier flexibility was largely abolished. Bass, baritone, and tenor were codified as exclusively male vocal profiles. They were also codified as the only profiles available to men, while contralto, mezzo-soprano, and soprano became equivalent female sound ranges. This binary set-up was mirrored in gendering technical approaches, such as the use of chest and head register. From the 1840s onward, it left only marginal space for so-called cross-casting practices that saw male roles embodied by female singers and, scarcely, female roles written for male singers (Hadlock 2001; Seedorf 2015). Within those operatic spaces, there will likely have been singers who might have identified, in current terminology and current cultural settings, as trans*. Some interpretations—theirs and others—will have been queerer than the available terminology depicts. A detailed historic case study should delve into that. Here, I merely want to stress that the term 'cross-casting', which implies exchanging one thing for another as if it were a binary scale achieving an inverted balance, can obscure prior presence of trans* performances. The term 'cisgender' carries similar coinage of opposites (Enke 2012). It is used here with the intention to visibilize essentialized ascriptions.

Male roles written expressively for cisgender female singers as of the mid-19th century fell exclusively into the realm of adolescent contested masculinity, framed most popularly in the figure of the pageboy (Hadlock 2001; André 2006; Charton 2012a). These parts could not be taken on by a grown cisgender male singer without destabilizing his masculinity. Some of these parts were even written within an emerging consciousness of lesbian identity that in turn overrode the gender assignation of the stage diegesis (Reynolds 1995, pp. 132, 143–46; Charton 2012a, pp. 298–99). It served to fetishize women's bodies for a male gaze, while at the same time offering an involuntary space of queer self-recognition (Blackmer and Smith 1995).

Women's roles for male singers appeared rarely and were generally stigmatized as negative, e.g., with the tenor casting of the Witch in Humperdinck's *Hänsel and Gretel* or the hellish Cook in Prokofiev's *Love for the Three Oranges*.

These castings worked against the backdrop of a gendered voice system that assigned absolute tone ranges to men's and women's voices. Since tone ranges largely overlap, even if in different parts of a voice (i.e., the highest notes of a bass or baritone may equal the lowest notes of a high soprano) (Grotjahn 2005, p. 36; Nadoleczny 1923, p. 30), this system also prescribed a gendered approach to those ranges to clearly differentiate sound as either male or female. This is most evident in the debates concerning the use of chest register in women's voices, seen as poor in taste, and of *voix mixte* and use of head register in male voices. The male falsetto was judged as effeminate and unartistic for most of the 20th century (Fuchs 1967, p. 120). It is obvious in these ongoing negotiations of gendered vocal spaces that there are no fixed male or female tone ranges and that categorizations depend on shifting notions of gender, both in relation to voice and at large (Grotjahn 2005).

The pre-1840s opera repertoire offers a glance at vocal embodiments of heroic masculinity which was tied to a high voice range, independent of the sex of the singer taking on the role. Heroic femininity was situated in the same voice range. Absolute tonal ranges were not gendered until the late eighteenth century, in particular in the core genre of *opera seria*. The soprano voice, embodying an also metaphorical height that placed it close to the celestial, was the preferred range for the vocal depiction of Baroque heroes and heroines alike (McClary 2013), whether emitted by a body presenting as male or female offstage. This allowed for casting practices that did not tie gender performance exclusively to identically sexed bodies (Seedorf 2016, pp. 205–9). It still largely reified a gender binary in an array of heroic and marginalized male or female identities, but allowed for exceptions and placed less importance on a singer's sex.

The role repertoire of Early Baroque and Baroque opera frequently includes supernatural, allegorical, and mythical roles which also go beyond a simple assignation of male or female. While they may not fully escape gendered notions toward a nonbinary conceptualization, they move and shift instead between the numinous sphere of the deities of Antiquity and the trickster-like gender fluidity of commedia dell'arte-inspired roles.

Reassessing these spaces outside of a binary matrix, and the diverse histories that may be attached to them, is necessary in the presence of classically trained trans* singers. They make clear how much casting practices in the opera industry still rely on a gender binary rooted in the 19th century. Trans* singers also invite us to critically reevaluate the stance of queer musicology and its preconceptions in addressing gender in opera. Although musicological research of the past twenty-five years has investigated classical singing as a space where queer gender expression has held a place for centuries, this space has been largely thought from a cisgender and binary perspective of cross-casting.

Vocal gender and the recognition thereof is not a given; it is learned and performed and read as such. It can, if applied rigidly, limit spaces of artistic expression. Thinking of trans* voices both as singing voices and as identities expressed as part of the choir enriches classical singing: they challenge notions of fixed vocal classification and exclusionary casting practices that ultimately limit chances of artistic expression for all singers and their audiences.

The growing field of Transgender Studies (Stryker 2006) is echoed by a more largely visible scene of trans* and nonbinary artists. Contemporary composers who may identify as trans* or nonbinary address specific voice-related issues of transitioning, such as vocal mutation linked to testosterone, in their work (Hennies 2017; Veloce n.d.; Hülcker n.d.). Neo Hülcker's collaborative performance *Konzert für Stimme im Stimmbruch* (2018), e.g., addressed his own vocal mutation into lower tonal range.

Research in musicology that addresses the construction of vocal gender and the relation of gender, singing, and stage performance from a queer perspective, in particular as gay and lesbian perspectives, can be traced back to the mid-1990s (Koestenbaum 1993; Brett et al. 1994; Blackmer and Smith 1995; Abel 1997; Smart 2000). It built on earlier feminist research (McClary 1991). Nonetheless, while this research opened a space for thinking gay and queer identities in classical music, it largely conceptualized queerness through an implicitly cisgender lens, though genderfluidity was, in the vocabulary of the time, addressed (see, e.g., Heller 2003, pp. 220–62).

Applying a later terminology—such as "trans*" and "cis"—to earlier timeframes is necessarily anachronistic. An existing terminology elevates and marginalizes, it shapes how we describe ourselves and how we can imagine ourselves. It governs self-expression and available identities. Talking about one era with the tools of another is a work both frustrating and inevitable, as the tools have not been made for that specific context, yet we do not have others at our disposal. Considering the long history of opera and history of queer musicology alike, there will always have been instances that, in a later terminology, we would now describe as queer or trans*. Just because these words—these tools—were not present then, it does not mean that the desires and understandings they address and frame were not present. They were—and they were tied into different wordings inside different social and cultural realities. Sometimes, they were silenced by a lack of terminology. Some of them, we can uncover. Others, we can only guess at. To consider past voices, to make them audible without denying their historic specificity, is an ongoing challenge. The past thirty years of historiographical research in relation to the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' are a good example of that. It runs the gamut from an assumption of absence (since specific words did not exist or were not applied in that manner) and denial of past realities to imagined genealogies uncritical of specific contexts.

The epistemological cornerstone against which much of the research on gender as (musical) performance was conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s was Butler's *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1990). The most prominent site of discussing gender transgression beyond a cisgendered framework was the castrato (e.g., Bergeron 1996; Herr 2002; Freitas 2003. For a discussion of research approaches, see the summary in Charton 2012a, pp. 214–20). These discussions often focused on the castrato's body as a site of gender definition and overlooked the agency of the castrato voice in and through performance. This approach has since changed (see, e.g., Feldman 2015). Trans* singers, whose bodies may or may not have been surgically altered in relation to gender, readdress the agency of performance as a site of establishing autonomy, both in regard to bodies and to identities.

The Performative Turn that swept across the Humanities as of the mid-1990s resonated doubly across Theatre and Performance Studies. Here, investigating gender (and sex) as performative practices of identity could connect to established thought patterns of meanings derived through (stage) performance. Western research on the classical singing voice in this context has been preoccupied with dismantling the notion of a given vocal gender and an essentialist distinction between voices as men's and women's voices, respectively (Grotjahn 2005, pp. 36–39; Charton 2012a, pp. 90–95); it has shown the historic variability in how voices were thought in relation to gender, if they were thought so at all.

Until the disappearance of the castrato singers in the late 18th and early 19th century, the soprano voice was not understood as exclusively feminine. Rather, 'soprano' was a universal voice type accessible independent of gender. It was a tonal space and range occupied by women, boys, castrato singers and falsettists alike. Traces of a continuous practice can still be found and concern classical singing and popular music alike (McClary 2013; Jarman-Ivens 2007). This connection between genres of classical and popular music should, however, not overshadow the fact the "invention of vocal gender" (Charton 2012b, pp. 39–40) was coined specifically within Western classical singing. A mere glance at international singing practices, such as the *katajjaq* of the Arctic First Nations, is enough to showcase the absurdity of constructing tonal ranges as limited by gendered biology. Nonetheless, early to mid-20th century remarks tried to argue exactly that: The male falsetto, e.g., would only be valid for cross-gender travesty (Nadoleczny 1923, pp. 28–29; Fuchs 1967, p. 120). This illustrates the perception of falsetto as a place of unstable and illegitimate femininity and exemplifies how the high tonal range was, in a system of gendered vocalities, perceived as exclusively feminine—a perception now counteracted by the emergence of male falsettists in opera.

The presence of more out trans* singers will similarly unravel inflexible notions of vocal gender. It will hopefully aid in developing an industry that will cast roles based on range and timbre, without excluding singers for an offstage gender identity

that differs from the role in question. Events and publications centering trans* voices show that a more inclusive future is already happening (Jackson Hearns and Kremer 2018; One Voice:: Transgender Voices Festival 2018 n.d.; Cayari 2019, p. 119, Solomon 2019).

3. Materials and Methods

This paper investigates how, currently, trans* singers question the way gender is still often conceptualized in classical singing. This applies in particular to opera, where a stage performance is added to a vocal one. To this purpose, I focus on the careers of three trans* opera singers through a selection of media (self)representation.

Trans* experiences are varied. "There is no universal trans experience. My experience is singular. It might resemble someone else's, but it equally might be completely different." (Feltkamp 2019a) I have therefore tried to include different experiences and perspectives regarding voice types, repertoires, positions in the opera industry, and media presentation.

Lucia Lukas, a heroic baritone who sings mostly male roles, has worked inside the German *stadttheater* system and was employed in Karlsruhe during her transition. She is now an internationally booked freelance singer whose U.S. debut as Don Giovanni with Tulsa Opera took place in early May 2019. She occasionally blogs about her life as an opera singer, including writing on trans* issues (Lucas 2014).

Adrian Angelico is a male mezzo-soprano who debuted under this name, after a prior career, in 2017. He works internationally as a freelance singer and specializes in trouser roles. He recently completed a 2019 run as Octavian in Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* at Norske Opera Oslo (Den Norske Opera 2018).

Aiden K. Feltkamp is a New York-based, self-described "opera creator" (Feltkamp n.d.). They work as a librettist, educator and singer, and founded OperaRox, a nonprofit opera company, in 2015. They identify as trans* nonbinary and work primarily outside the established opera house system. Feltkamp, after having trained initially as a mezzo-soprano and after having, over the course of their transition, sung as a countertenor and a tenor, currently trains and performs as a bass-baritone. They advocate against inflexible and gendered voice classifications (Feltkamp 2019a).

All three singers address their having been assigned a different gender at birth in some way in their media appearances. All three have appeared on opera stages before their transitions. I do not reference their earlier names here. Assigned designations are often a sensitive issue for trans* people, and it is not my place to link their current careers to former designations. I did ask myself whether this approach would exclude vital materials from this paper, but since my interest here is in how these three singers are portrayed now, as out trans* singers, I found the prior materials to be negligible. My focus is on how trans* singers can inform a reconceptualization of vocal gender.

My researcher position is that of an outsider: I am writing this paper as a cisgender person. My aim is to lend my expertise as a performance and voice historian to a more inclusive examination of (vocal) gender in opera.

Trans* singers' unique position in this debate—one usually gained at great personal expense—inevitably leads to the question of whether thinking about trans* singers as an epistemological figure of un/doing gender equals an instrumentalization of trans* lives in the line of theoretical discourse. To answer these concerns, I have decided to primarily use materials that are interviews, refer to interviews, or are self-statements. This confers as much agency as possible on the individual singers, while I still examine public perception and the reflection of casting practices. I have included the professional websites and, if applicable, adjacent blogs, though not private or partly private social media accounts.

In this paper, I am using the term trans* with an asterisk to mark the variety of trans* experiences as well as the fluidity and expansiveness of conceptualizations of trans* from within the trans* community.

The materials considered for my analysis are, for Lucia Lucas, her official website, her Operabase page, her blog, an interview feature by Lucy Nurnberg for Accent Magazine, an announcement for her 2019 Oklahoma debut that ran on NBC News, an interview with Aidan Quigley for GCN Magazine, and a portrait by Barbara Opitz for Stern Magazine (Lucas n.d., n.d., n.d.; Nurnberg 2017; Eaton 2018; Quigley 2017; Opitz 2017).

For Adrian Angelico, I turned to his official website and Operabase page, his page on the website of his management, the production page for the 2019 run of *Der Rosenkavalier* at Den Norske Opera Oslo, a short FRK video featurette, and two brief reviews of his Prince Orlofsky at Elbphilharmonie Hamburg on New Year's Eve 2018 (Angelico n.d., n.d.; Stellis Polaris n.d.; Den Norske Opera 2018; Nygaard 2017; Hamburger Abendblatt 2018; Nellissen 2019).

For Aiden K. Feltkamp, I concentrate on their personal website (Feltkamp n.d., 2018) and their four-part draft of a nongendered system of vocal classification (Feltkamp 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d).

The questions I ask in relation to these materials are grouped around repertoire, casting practices, and challenges that trans* singers face. What repertoire does each singer sing, and where? Are there changes in repertoire linked to transitioning, and how is this framed in description? Are discriminatory casting practices recognizable?

Is being trans* mentioned, in particular when relating to singing and voice, either by the singers themselves or by interviewers and authors? Is trans* exploited as otherness and/or misrepresented? What suggestions, if any, are made to improve the situation of singers who identify as trans*?

Within a wider perspective of gender performativity in opera, I ask how the singers position themselves, and how are they positioned, in navigating onstage and offstage gender identities. Are trans* singers' specific contributions recognized?

4. Results

The repertoire of all three singers is governed by voice type first, and by available repertoire second. Lucia Lucas, as a dramatic baritone, is predominantly singing 18th- and 19th-century male roles. She has debuted successfully as Wotan in *Die Walküre* in Magdeburg in late 2018, a role she cites as her dream role since before becoming a singer (Lucas n.d.). She made her U.S. debut as Don Giovanni in May 2019. Her repertoire (Lucas n.d.) has not changed through transitioning. Her fixed contract in Karlsruhe, where she was under contract during her transition, was not extended following a change in management, citing vocal reasons (Opitz 2017). While Lucas continues to be booked both nationally and internationally, she arguably sang in bigger houses before transitioning.

Adrian Angelico's website begins his biography with his 2014 debut at the Royal Opera House (Angelico n.d.). It makes no mention of female roles, although there are two early photos of him in female roles in his photo gallery. The website of his management adds that he "also sings female roles in the mezzo range", lists his prior last name, and cites an interpretation of Carmen that occurred pre-transitioning (Stellis Polaris n.d.). Angelico now sings primarily male roles in mezzo range, especially the late-19th- and early-20th-century trouser role repertoire originally written for female singers. He is booked by high-profile venues (Royal Opera House, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg) internationally. Repercussions or discrimination in casting related to his transition cannot be assessed, since Angelico chooses not to address transitioning in his narrative. His management's website, however, prominently cites a 2017 review for his Marquise de Merteuil in *Quartett*, a role that switches back and forth between male and female presentation. The review explicitly praises Angelico for being uniquely qualified for this role (Stellis Polaris n.d.). Angelico's Operabase page goes back only to 2015 (Angelico 2019) and lists female, male and—with Merteuil—genderqueer parts. If Angelico has been offered female roles since presenting as male, it is possible that he has rejected these offers. Likewise, it is possible that no such offers have been made.

Aiden K. Feltkamp studied as a mezzo-soprano and was transitioning at the time this paper was written; they present as transgender nonbinary (Feltkamp n.d.). Their work is centered around writing and educating, although they continue to sing, chronicling openly the changes and challenges of switching fach and register due to testosterone. Their repertoire pre-transitioning included both female roles (Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Ottavia in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*) and trouser roles

(Cherubino, Hänsel, Valletto in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*). Additionally, they have sung queer roles in New Music, such as Elizabeth in Griffin Candey's *Sweets for Kate*.

Feltkamp's repertoire has changed completely due to their transitioning, as their voice range has moved from mezzo-soprano to now bass-baritone. Feltkamp also addresses the change in technical approach brought on by the changes of their vocal chords: "(T)he mechanism that I've spent years training as a mezzo-soprano feels and operates completely differently since hormone replacement therapy caused it to change." (Feltkamp 2019b) Feltkamp, of the three singers considered here, is the only one who has gone through a fundamental change of voice range and technique. It is, in their case, impossible to discern repertoire changes and discrimination in casting within the same voice type. They had not previously debuted anywhere on the denser European opera circuit but had positioned themselves as an advocate for inclusive New Music within a field that both gives them agency and is inclusive of their being trans* nonbinary.

A similar story of a change of voice range after having completed an education as a mezzo-soprano is that of Holden Madagame (Madagame n.d.), who now trains as a tenor and was featured in 2017 as one of the participants of Glyndebourne's diversity-oriented young artist's Academy (Madagame 2017).

The second complex of questions addressed trans* narratives in relation to gender and voice.

Both Lucia Lucas and Aiden K. Feltkamp describe themselves as trans* activists. They also appear in New Music performances that center explicitly queer and trans* perspectives. They are both very open about their transitioning processes; Lucia Lucas in particular has shared personal aspects of her journey such as facial operations that could be linked to technical aspects of singing but are not usually framed this way. Press coverage of Lucas uses this personal angle as an avenue of positive identification. A 2017 *Stern* feature spins a melodramatic but very supportive tale that echoes 1940s film star and queer icon Zarah Leander in describing Lucas as a "woman singing in a dark baritone voice" (Opitz 2017). In an interview with *GCN*, Lucia Lucas connected her own to other trans* stories (Quigley 2017). Her *Accent* portrait (Nurnberg 2017) is accompanied by a series of body-positive photos that prevent exploitation through taking agency. Lucas owns her being trans* so openly that misrepresentation is difficult to be construed. While she does not address the situation for trans* people in the opera industry on a systematic level, she does so for her own repertoire and separates onstage and offstage gender expression: "Lucia Lucas spent so long trying to play a boy/man in real life, she is adept at playing men and is always happy to play a man onstage (so long as she doesn't have to play one in real life). She welcomes the majority of her work to be masculine presenting and her personal life to remain personal." (Lucas n.d.) Press coverage of her Don

Giovanni debut did connect on- and offstage gender performance in an NBC article in a sensationalizing, but ultimately positive way (Eaton 2018).

Like Lucas, Feltkamp openly discusses their transition, which they frame as an ongoing journey (Feltkamp 2019a). They situate their story within the mechanisms of the opera industry and actively work toward a more inclusive future through educating other opera professionals (Feltkamp 2018). Feltkamp displays their early mezzo-soprano repertoire on their website (Feltkamp n.d.), which may also be linked to general visibility. As they are only beginning to build a repertoire for their new voice range, there is not much else to be displayed yet. Since they move largely out of the mainstream opera circuit and within New Music that more easily undoes gender conventions of mainstream repertoire, they are situated within a context that makes exploitation of their trans* identity less likely. In addition, much like with Lucia Lucas, their openness partially prevents misrepresentation.

Adrian Angelico does not address his transition or his prior career on any of his official outlets. His website's tagline is simply "male operatic mezzo-soprano" (Angelico n.d.). Merely his management's website mentions his being assigned female at birth (Stellis Polaris n.d.). If not for the late romanticist repertoire he sings, he might at first glance be taken for a cisgender countertenor. Angelico is not visibly involved in trans*-related activism, though it could be argued that living recognizably as a trans* person is already an act of activism. Through choosing not to address his transition as much, it is possible that Angelico is more vulnerable to misrepresentation and exploitation. Notably, one of two stills chosen by Den Norske Opera to promote their 2019 *Rosenkavalier* shows Angelico as Octavian in bed with the Princess Werdenberg—a common iconographic choice—with a wide-open shirtfront that capitalizes on his surgically altered body (Den Norske Opera 2018). Moreso, Angelico's being cast in the semi-staged *Fledermaus* at Elbphilharmonie Hamburg in 2018 raises questions as to him being fetishized as a trans* person. He was pigeonholed into the traditionally flamboyant gender performance of the trouser role of Prince Orlofsky, placed in an outfit that more resembled a dress, with reviews describing him as "confusingly androgynous" (Hamburger Abendblatt 2018) and having a "subtly lascivious physicality" (Nellissen 2019). These descriptions echo an idea of gender as originated by a cisgendered body and not through a performance that is then temporarily covered by another layer of performance for the stage.

My third and finals set of question is concerned with the wider perspective of gender performativity in opera and navigating onstage and offstage ascriptions.

Lucia Lucas, due to her voice range and type, is singing primarily male roles, which she matter-of-factly addresses: She would be excellently trained, through her personal experience, to present as male (Angelico, perhaps echoing her, uses the same argument in a 2017 interview: He would have ample training in presenting as female (Nygaard 2017)). It could hence be argued that a specific trans* contribution

is singled out here. Clearly, Lucia Lucas does not see her femininity destabilized by appearing onstage as a man, and she frames stage performance as separate from offstage identity in terms of gender.

Lucas has, in the *stadttheater* system, gained the broadest repertoire among the singers discussed here (Lucas 2019). Changing her learned repertoire based on paralleling her gender onstage would limit her job opportunities drastically, as there are barely any female roles written in baritone range in the mainstream repertoire. Lucas would, in that case, have to rely on adaptions and New Music written specifically for female baritones. Lucas' repertoire is framed differently than cross-casting. It illustrates how the operatic convention of cross-casting is actually confined to very specific eras and parts. It is generally based on binary-sexed bodies for a commentary across the fourth wall, such as having (presumably) female singers take on marginalized masculinities, or framing female roles embodied by (presumably) male singers as ridiculous or unnatural.

Aiden K. Feltkamp positions themselves as a creator of inclusive new opera as well as a consultant the industry, eschewing questions of a limited repertoire. Their questioning of the fach system (Feltkamp 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d) does not argue from a viewpoint of historic variability, but from the personal experience of vocal change that is not limited to a trans* experience. Likewise, it does not mirror all trans* singers' experiences: Both Lucia Lukas and Adrian Angelico continue to sing in their trained range and fach. Feltkamp points out that the rigidity of the fach system limits cisgender and transgender singers alike. They give the common example of a mezzo-soprano moving into soprano fach and offer a performer's perspective on the casting process. Citing prior repertoire would cast into doubt the new voice fach; omitting repertoire would mean less visibility of qualifications (Feltkamp 2019a).

Feltkamp also addresses the issue of gender paralleling and cross-casting. They highlight how in the hurried and conventionalized process of auditioning, a difference between gender presentation (in their case, as trans*masculine) and listed repertoire (in their case, mostly female mezzo-soprano roles) could easily result in not being considered as a contender for a role (Feltkamp 2019a).

Feltkamp moves beyond the issue of cross-casting when they question the gendered matrix of the fach system at large. They suggest instead a classification that allows for fluidity without centering gender: listing tonal range from 1 (low bass voice) to 12 (high soprano range), with adding qualifiers of timbre and heft. These could then be traced on flexible scales of "lyric" to "flexible", of "light" to "dramatic" (Feltkamp 2019d). How adjectives such as "lyric" carry gendered semantics would be a topic for a follow-up discussion. Feltkamp themselves does mention the difficulty of untangling vocal color from gender (Feltkamp 2019c), though using established vocabulary from within the industry allows for easier applicability.

As a nonbinary performer, Feltkamp does not position themselves explicitly regarding repertoire they would take on or not in relation to gender. They address their vocal journey beyond limits of gender (Feltkamp 2019c). Their focus on fach flexibility to accommodate voice changes and to create new inclusive repertoire is not limited to trans* voices, but Feltkamp's specific trans* expertise is recognized by the community and the local and national industry (Feltkamp 2018).

The onstage gender identities taken on by Adrian Angelico largely align with his offstage gender presentation. In that, it parallels a pattern of most cisgender singers, in particular that of cisgender men. Cross-casting is addressed differently here, as Angelico sings a repertoire written for cisgender women as an embodiment of marginal masculinities. It is a power imbalance that he, as a male singer, calls into sight as well as into question. Angelico has gone on record saying that he would also sing female roles again, "in drag": "I have a life-long experience pretending to be a woman (. . .) Just hand me some fake boobs and a wig, then I'll 'drag' for you" (Nygaard 2017, 00:02:14). This quote is taken from a short 2017 TV featurette on NRK, conducted by Arnfinn Nygaard and filmed around Angelico's debut as Adrian Angelico, in the role of the Composer in Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* in Bodø.

The featurette at least partially reifies a normative essentialized gender binary in asking Angelico prominently about his top surgery and mentioning his prior name. It also shows him presenting as female prior to his transition in a glittering evening gown during a concert performance. Angelico is also asked how he feels about being in the men's dressing room (Nygaard 2017, 00:00:34) and whether he would now be "finally" his "complete self on stage" (Nygaard 2017, 00:05:21). This implies that an offstage/onstage gender parallel is mandatory and ties onstage interpretation to offstage presentation in a problematic manner. A different issue would be a trans* singer wishing to focus on repertoire paralleling their gender, which none of the singers featured in this paper have expressed.

An aspect touched upon in passing is transitioning under future contracts. Angelico and his management had to inform houses that the singer they had booked was a man and would fulfill the engagement now presenting as such. It is not mentioned whether Angelico has lost contracts due to his transition. Neither is it addressed whether he is not cast for specific roles any longer. His contributions as a trans* singer are not explicitly reflected in the materials available, although the director of the Bodø opera, Katharina Jakhelln Semb, is asked in the video feature whether the opera industry is "ready for transgender singers". Semb answers slowly, weighing her words. Her answer is: "It simply has to be." (Nygaard 2017, 00:04:16)

5. Discussion

Careers and Transitioning

As the analysis of the various media materials shows, experiences of trans* singers differ greatly. Any conclusions drawn in this discussion should thus not

be taken as applying to trans* singers at large. Commonly shared influences on career trajectories are, foremost, whether transitioning entails a change of voice range, which does not only change the repertoire, but also technique. As Feltkamp puts it, "I'd expected the change from my 'female' voice box to a testosterone-affected one to be more like learning how to play the violin after playing the cello. Instead, it's much more like giving up the cello for the trumpet" (Feltkamp 2019c).

Other factors are the sites of a career (such as high-profile international houses, a stable community theatre contract or avantgarde work outside the mainstream industry) and the point in time in relation to the career. Lucia Lucas was already established as a baritone when she transitioned and held a stable position. Angelico transitioned within running contracts. Feltkamp worked outside the house system. This also relates to geographies. Job opportunities for opera are denser in Europe, whereas influence of conservative donors in a largely privatized opera industry, as mentioned by Lucas (Quigley 2017), can be an added risk of losing work.

Repertoire beyond voice range is another site affected by transitioning. Singers who are well-established in New Music, or who in general have an established concert career beyond the opera stage, may experience fewer repercussions than singers who are anchored in the mainstream opera repertoire of the late 18th to early 20th century with its rigid gender conventions.

Rethinking Repertoire

While trans* roles for trans* singers are created in contemporary music, trans* singers need not be confined to New Music. Neither need they be confined to trans* and nonbinary roles, though individual singers might choose to do so.

Beyond the important issue of creating new and more diverse opera that also counteracts the sexism and racism inscribed into many of the industry's conventions, trans* and nonbinary singers can inspire fresh perspectives on existing works. This, in turn, could lead to more trans* representation not just in singers, but also in roles portrayed. Roles in Early Baroque opera may more easily be read as genderfluid or nonbinary, but smart staging concepts are discovering new ways to interrogate gender also in the mainstream canon, which may contain more queer history than we know of.

A hundred years ago, the early-20th-century Handel revival in Germany overwhelmingly transposed male parts in mezzo range to tenor or baritone. Now, such practice of moving range would be frowned upon. This example illustrates that casting conventions do change: They reflect societal realities. Likewise, the castrato singers of the Baroque age explicitly replaced falsettists, yet today, falsettists are overwhelmingly singing castrato repertoire. Whether it should matter whom parts were originally written for—in gender and vocal color—is another question that builds a framework for casting. Since the contexts of earlier works, their conventions,

and their conceptualizations of gender (for both artists and audiences) cannot be reproduced, a narrative of 'true origin' will always be unstable.

While there is an established repertoire of male and genderfluid roles in high voice range, female and genderqueer roles written for low voice range appear more frequently in Early Baroque repertoire. They are only rare occurrences in 19th and early-20th-century repertoire. In early 21st century contemporary music, parts are beginning to be written specifically for trans* voices, such as the part of Caitlin Jenner in Dana Kaufman's *Opera Kardashian* (Johanson 2018), which Kaufmann insists be cast only with trans* women. In this, she creates a space for trans* voices and highlights trans* qualifications.

Gender and Performance

Rethinking repertoire for trans* singers does have a ripple effect in framing onstage gender performance at large. Can stage gender be thought completely apart from offstage gender, as Barba states in the context of theatre anthropology? Barba understands anybody on stage as a neutral entity that only then begins to create its meanings, including gender (Barba 1995, p. 9). Or would offstage and onstage performances commenting on each other also be a powerful tool to frame issues of social justice?

As long as the commenting level is not a tokenization that takes away agency or exploits marginalized identities, both approaches can coexist. Opera roles should be cast based on voice. Opera casting should not prioritize elements like gender, race, body type or disabilities of the singer. Nonetheless, casting conventions, in their biases, also invite reflection that could possibly be echoed in social change. Concordantly, opera's self-narrative of gender inclusiveness needs to be interrogated further. While there are genderfluid roles and non-cisgender casting practices, the overwhelming majority of the repertoire is still strictly gendered as male or female and cis-cast, which also obscures earlier flexibilities.

Bubbles of established gender transgression—such as the trouser repertoire or the older turn-about wet nurse parts in Early Baroque opera—are confined to a limited repertoire that does not belong to mainstream canon. In addition, practices of cross-casting still rely heavily on a binary gender opposition and tend to exclude trans* and nonbinary singers.

Gender conventions in opera do extend beyond the stage and heavily govern not only auditions, but also competitions. There, the expected gender presentation is not just cisgender, but also highly standardized, allowing little to no leeway in questions of hairstyle, dress or movements. An upper middle-class, white setting is entrenched in this and is equally problematic.

Increasing Inclusiveness

It is no coincidence that all three singers discussed in this article are white or white-passing (Adrian Angelico is sometimes introduced as Sámi-Norwegian,

marking his identity as a member of the ethnic minority of the Sámi (Nygaard 2017); the briefly mentioned Holden Madagame identifies as Native American (Madagame 2017)) and work on the Western opera circuit. Opera is still overwhelmingly white and elite as an industry. Additionally, while addressing the situation of trans* singers is a central issue at this moment, it is notable that none of the trans* opera singers more widely present in the media is a person of color. Within the European hegemony of ethnicities, it is telling that there are no Eastern European or Southern European names on the map.

Opera casting largely disregards age, though women may be placed at different disadvantages depending on their voice type and repertoire. Nevertheless, in particular in dramatic repertoire, singers will most often be older than the age they have to portray onstage. This productive separation of onstage and offstage presentations does offer a casting framework to also address issues of race, ethnicity, and gender.

Nonetheless, while casting is slowly becoming more racially and ethnically diverse (which raises issues of unequal pay and orientalist stereotyping), conventional stagings of 19th-century canon works still largely fetishize non-white and non-Western roles and continue to blackface or whitewash them. How the axis of gender in opera will be affected and possibly reframed by a growing presence of trans* singers remains to be seen. How these changes will intersect with issues of race and age should be equally considered by the industry and in scholarly work.

6. Conclusion

This paper set out to trace how the construction of vocal gender is heavily tied into a historical gender binary, an issue musicological research has not yet addressed sufficiently from a trans*-inclusive perspective. Examining media (self-)representation of three trans* singers, my analysis then tried to glean how trans* singers are challenging the opera industry within a greater context of vocal gender, and gender as performance.

All examples cited in this paper are recent. The singers discussed were born in the 1980s; they transitioned between 2014 and 2019, in years with a higher media presence of trans* people than previously in many Western countries. Transitioning did have an impact on their careers. It did mean work in smaller houses, without a stable contract or with a smaller repertoire. In the case of Feltkamp, it even meant not working primarily as a singer. When discussing the change in discursive framework that trans* singers bring to gender performance in opera, it should be remembered that this change involves trans* singers risking their professional livelihoods. Lucia Lukas, Adrian Angelico, and Aiden K. Feltkamp have all stated that being who they are is ultimately more important to them than their opera careers (Feltkamp 2019a; Nygaard 2017; Nurnberg 2017). What if they could have both, though?—"More

and more trans artists are realizing that they can be both trans and an opera singer, something I once believed impossible," Feltkamp writes (Feltkamp 2019a). Opera as the proverbial impossible art form may indeed have proven a beacon for queer artists precisely because it makes the affective performativity of gender perceptible.

Trans* singers highlight issues of vocal and physical change that affect all singers. A more flexible framework of thinking voices and voice types would benefit singers at large. It would offer a chance to untangle opera casting from an early-20th-century construction of vocal gender that is, in its essentialism, already defied by the variety of repertoire from different centuries performed today. Trans* singers are dismantling fictions of essentialized gender that limit artistic expression and scope of roles for all singers. When Lucia Lucas stars as Don Giovanni in 2019, her offstage gender identity should, one the one hand, not influence opinions on her onstage portrayal. On the other hand, casting Don Giovanni with a woman in the age of #MeToo is perhaps the most forward way to investigate the romanticized umbra of the role: a way that requires a female baritone.

Moving forward, the presence of trans* singers offers a chance to rethink gendered implications of the fach system, to design inclusive contemporary music, and to develop more diverse staging concepts for established repertoire.

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Queer Abstraction: Visual Strategies to See New Queer Futures

Rocca Holly-Nambi

Abstract: Uganda's anti-homosexuality laws are infamous. In 2014 and the years preceding it there was a marked intensification in unsatisfactory legal structures, and growing social debate surrounding how queer people can live their lives. When the queer community is under increasing pressure to be silent, what is the contribution of visual culture to the hearing of queer voices? There is currently a heightened and intense aesthetic conversation emerging in Kampala. The quantity of visual culture being produced—both celebrating and condemning queerness—is increasing. This production is being driven by a myriad of sources: artists; media and press houses; religious figures; governments; schools; universities; and medical institutions. This production of culture lies alongside both an intensification and fluctuation in homophobic laws—and social stigmas—regarding queer lives in Uganda. Artists and audiences are dialoguing about queer aesthetics and making art rigorously in response to this social and legal situation. With one artwork, produced in 2014, as a focus, this essay explores abstraction as a visual tactic to communicate through contexts of violence and homophobia. Despite media prominence and academic attention on Uganda's homosexual politics (Sadgrove 2012; Rao 2015; Tamale 2011), the conflict has never been analyzed through a visual lens. In order to apply new insights to this contemporary dilemma, this essay draws from and contributes to the interdisciplinary field of queer visual culture, a discipline that applies queer theoretical scrutiny to readings of contemporary visual culture and the understanding of social change (Sanders 2007). What can we learn from the visual representations of queerness that are being presented to us; if we squint hard enough, are we able to visualize possibilities for new queer futures?

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1. Introduction: An Atmosphere of Violence

I first saw *Chain of Love* (Figure 1) when visiting the studio of Ugandan visual artist, Babirye Leilah. The studio door was open, but the artist was absent. The artwork was hanging on the wall, but the artist had fled to Kenya to seek refuge from the recently passed Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2014. In witnessing the work, what struck me was that despite the atmosphere of violence in which the work was made, *Chain of Love* did not visually scream. A looped chain passing through two symmetrical circles is placed and pinned onto a discarded and scarred wooden board. There are different possible readings of the work but, for me, *Chain of Love* holds a

sense of balance, of dignity, yet the use of decayed wood, chains, padlocks, and pins points to a muffled anguish underlying this impression of calm.

Figure 1. Chain of Love, Babirye Leilah, 2014.

2. Law and Life

Uganda's anti-homosexuality laws are infamous. The criminality of homosexuality has its foundations in the British colonial government's Penal Code Act of 1950, prohibiting "same-sex sexual acts as felonies" (The Penal Code Act 1950, pp. 145–147). New laws have since been constructed, created, removed, and debated in Uganda, increasingly so in the last ten years. Marking a climax in these fluctuations, the Anti-Homosexuality Act was signed in parliament by President Museveni on February 24, 2014. The act was termed the "kill the gays bill" by western media for its allowance of those convicted of homosexuality to be subject to the death penalty, although this was later altered to imprisonment for life (Fallon 2014, p. 9). Upon implementation of the act, a collision of celebrations and fear resulted. At a stadium in Kampala, thirty thousand Ugandans gathered to give thanks to president Yoweri Museveni for passing the act. The event, organized by the inter-religious council of Uganda, combined the fanfare of a mass political meeting with the party atmosphere of a cultural festival.[1] Elsewhere, the queer community went into hiding,[2] silenced by anxiety and apprehension for what might happen next. Prior to the Anti-Homosexuality Act, life for queer Ugandans was already restrictive and dangerously precarious. In 2011, prominent LGBT activist David Kato was murdered in his home after having his identity revealed in the Ugandan tabloid, Rolling Stones.[3] The queer community, however, was not destroyed but rather emboldened by the tragedy. In 2012, the first gay pride march took place in Uganda. A few hundred queer Ugandans and their allies gathered in Entebbe,

1 See (Hodes 2014).
2 See (Johnston 2014).
3 See (Akinyemi 2016).

a town neighboring Uganda's capital, Kampala, to undertake a celebration and as activist Frank Mugisha described it, take a "moment of happiness and peace denied to us the rest of the year" (Mugisha 2017, p. 4). Despite the vicious context for queer lives in Uganda, people were "tired of hearing a story that ignored their nuance[d] experiences of both joy and hardship" (Okeowo 2012, p. 1). The pride event became a place and a moment to visualize the layered nature of the queer struggle. The Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2014, therefore, came as a blockade to these glimmers of hope on Uganda's queer horizon.

The terminology within Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act was both ambiguous and all-encompassing, with homosexuality being defined in broad terms, including one who touches another person with the intention of committing an act of homosexuality being liable, upon conviction, to imprisonment for life.[4] Coupled with this elusive definition, the act included legal consequences for both the promotion of homosexuality and for the protection of homosexuals. In a speech on 18 November, 2009 at the Human Rights and Peace Centre, Ugandan academic Dr. Sylvia Tamale presented an argument to Member of Parliament David Bahati, co-author of the Anti-Homosexuality Act (then in draft stage), for the bill not to be passed. Tamale describes how "with homosexuality defined in such a broad fashion as to include touching another person with the intention of committing the act of homosexuality, this is a provision highly prone to abuse and puts all citizens (both hetero and homosexuals) at great risk" (Tamale 2014, pp. 61–66). Tamale stressed that by creating such an ambiguous and expansive legal definition of homosexuality, a context of paranoia, confusion, and violence would be created. In 2016, reflecting on the passing of the act in 2014, artist and lawyer Angelo Kakande confirmed Tamale's concerns and described how the act ensured its own implementation beyond a state-enforced policing of sexual liberties, i.e., through citizen-to-citizen policing. Kakande recalls a fear that lay not with the legal implementation of the act, but with the public interpretation of the law: "We knew no court would enforce this law, except one, the court of public opinion. Here, in this country, killing a gay person in front of the police is ok. There's the law and then there's the public law. I knew a community could be protected in the law, but not in the people's law" (Kakande 2016). Kenyan activist Jane Wothaya Thirikwa highlights how the combination of an escalation and broadening of legal structures built on homophobic foundations with an allowance of public interpretation and implementation of these laws results in "stigmatising and discriminatory attitudes, and radically undermines human rights efforts for sexual minorities" (Thirikwa 2018, p. 307). As one victim of these actions describes, "The police arrest you and parade you, but then they release you because

[4] See (The Anti-Homosexuality Act 2014).

they have nothing to charge you with. Once you go back to the community, you are at the mercy of the people you live with" (ibid., p. 309).

Fear of the application of the law by the public continues. The legal structures against homosexuality in Uganda have fluctuated significantly since 2009, and the legislative context is unpredictable; however, the public's reading of the law has been shown to be growing in conviction.[5] In 2009, Uganda's ruling party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), first introduced Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act; however, the NRM's President Yoweri Museveni refused to sign the bill amid international pressure.[6] Writing in Transition Magazine, Richard Ssebaggala recalled that "The Bahati bill is on life support thanks entirely to the self-preservation instincts of Uganda's president, rather than changing attitudes in Uganda. People are routinely harassed and maligned: a local tabloid published the pictures and contact information of gay activists along with an imperative to 'hang them' and one prominent gay rights activist, David Kato, was killed in early 2011" (Ssebaggala 2011, p. 106). In August 2014, just six months after its signing into law, the Anti-Homosexuality Act was annulled (Harding 2014, p. 1). Importantly, the act was withdrawn on procedural grounds, and not for moral reasons. The annulment was on the grounds that the Parliament of Uganda had passed the law without the requisite quorum as provided for by the country's constitution.[7] Kakande recalls: "The Act was legally nulled, but the public hysteria the Act instigated into everyday lives ensured that street hate, mob justice, and atrocities such as corrective rape still occurred and continue to exist in Uganda today" (Kakande 2016).

3. Queer Abstraction: A Strategy to Speak

> "She whispers so one can hear, but not all".
>
> 'Angelo Kakande on the artwork of Babirye Leilah, 2016.

It is within this context of fluctuating legal frameworks and tangible violent realities that *Chain of Love* was made. Babirye Leilah describes her artistic practice as abstract sculpture: "Recently my process has been fueled by a need to find a language to respond to the recent passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act in Uganda. Through the act of burning, nailing and assembling I aim to address the realities of being gay in the context of Uganda" (Leilah 2016, p. 3). Within an atmosphere of violence, visual statements must be carefully considered. Babirye Leilah turns to both physical and metaphorical processes to represent the dangerous pressure being placed upon her as a queer Ugandan. On the strategy of *Chain of Love*, Kakande remarks: "Right now

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5 See (Uganda Anti-Gay Timeline 2014).
6 See (Branson 2013).
7 See (Jjuuko and Mutesi 2018).

she could only make a statement that's abstract and whimsical, she couldn't make it outright and obvious" (Kakande 2016). For Babiyre Leilah, abstraction became a strategy to represent a muted voice and an absent body. The artist was unable to be physically present in Kampala, a chained artwork left behind spoke of love on the artist's behalf. Combined with the abstraction of metal shapes against wooden board, the symbolism of two circles chained and padlocked together, speaks to an impossible and yet irrepressible love. The combination of both chain and love in the title of the work prompts the viewer to question whether an impossible way of life might one day become possible.

This ability of an artwork to speak when the artist cannot is the route through which this essay passes, examining how abstraction is being used as a visual strategy to communicate in contexts of violence and homophobia. By continuing to speak, how are artists and artworks affecting audiences and the way in which we might see queer lives?

3.1. Abstraction: "The Process of Removing Something, Especially Water from a River or Other Source".[8]

Uganda's 2014 Anti-Homosexuality Act was overturned, not for ethical reasons but, rather, the decision was made based on legal technicalities. The bodies subjugated to violence were removed from the court's consideration. The abstraction of the human from this process points to the violence embedded within the law. The ability for abstraction to remove, ignore, and erase humans from such processes points to the violence of abstraction itself. Uganda's Act desired queer bodies to be abstracted from society through a 14-year jail sentence, or through the public court of opinion, ostracization, shame, and violence. When such political abstractions are applied to marginalized bodies, critical human rights issues are raised. Nora N. Khan describes that, "The social imaginary of civilization thrives on some bodies being abstracted, and some, real" (Khan 2018, p. 19). In Uganda, the heterosexual body is given permission to remain, the homosexual to disappear. The gathering of crowds to celebrate the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2014 in Kampala validates their heterosexual existence. The atmosphere of violence surrounding the queer community forces them to (temporarily) disappear and remove themselves from society.

The violence in abstraction is the violence of removal, the violence of erasure. This abstraction is seen vividly through the work of African-American artist, Sondra Perry, and her exhibition *Typhoon Coming On*, shown in 2018 at the Serpentine Sackler

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[8] Each of the next sub-titles drives from the three key Oxford English definitions of Abstraction, see: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/abstraction.

Gallery in London.[9] In 1781, the British slave ship, Zong, sailed from Accra to Jamaica with 442 enslaved Africans on board. Upon experiencing rough waters and becoming low on essential supplies, the ship's crew murdered over 130 African people by throwing them overboard in order to claim insurance money for the loss of 'their property'.[10] Upon discovering the fraudulent claim, the ship owners were sued by the insurance company for a false insurance claim, not for the loss of life. In the gallery, Perry digitally projects an 1840 painting by William Turner titled *The Slave Ship*. Originally titled *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhoon coming on*, the painting depicts the Zong massacre, bodies are seen in the wake of the ship as it sails forward into the horizon. Perry projects Turner's *The Slave Ship* digitally and in extreme close up against a gallery wall, to the extent that the bodies drowning in the waves of Turner's painting become impossible to see. The bodies are missing, and yet they don't need to be there to feel the violence that is present. Instead, the viewer is immersed in the abyss of Perry's digital installation and within the sea itself, forcing audiences to become entangled in the United Kingdom's complicity in the dehumanization of black people. The absence in Perry's work points to the enormity of violence she so wants us never to forget. Curator Adrienne Edwards attests that "Blackness is the original abstraction; people are living abstractions, meaning [they are] made up, conjured" (Rodney 2017, p. 6). Blackness becomes a space of racial projection, of people's fears and desires, not allowing the human itself to be seen. Black people's humanity is hidden, ignored, like the vanished people of the Zong slave ship.

In parallel, queer people in Uganda are told they do not exist, that they are the imaginings of a Western mode of living, that they are un-African, unaccepted by Uganda's nation-building projects, and unwanted by families.[11] Queer Ugandans are abstracted from society; the very concept of their queerness is denied. In conversation with writer and academic Saidiya Hartman, interviewer Patricia J. Saunders asks, "How do you get to know black bodies when they have been so abstracted?" (Saunders 2008, p. 2). Is it enough to understand slavery by looking to the archives in the absence of objects of memory, bones, and tombstones? How can we see queer bodies when so many attempts have been made to control and erase them from personal and public narratives? The archive becomes unsatisfactory when, for example, one tries to think critically about what it meant to throw "one hundred and fifty human beings overboard a ship in order to collect insurance monies", and yet, all that is in the archive is a two-page legal document (ibid., p. 3). And in remembering the lives of

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[9] Sondra Perry, Typhoon Coming On, the Serpentine Gallery: https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/sondra-perry-typhoon-coming-on.

[10] For a full account see (Perry 2018).

[11] See (Tamale 2003).

queer people, do we care more about legal successes or personal triumphs? In these cases, relating such accounts becomes both essential and impossible, and, therefore, perhaps the path to follow is that of Hartman's response to Saunder's question. Hartman admits the impossibility of writing "about a history that is this encounter with nothing; or to write about a past that has been obliterated so that even traces aren't left" (ibid., p. 4), and, therefore, the act of "not telling" (ibid., p. 4) sometimes becomes the only way forward. Within *Chain of Love*, the obscurity of the context for queerness is met with a strategic obscurity of aesthetics. The use of abstraction gives agility to the artist who needed to alter the intensity of her voice when the surrounding social and legal risks were in a dangerous state of flux. Not telling all became a way to continue to speak. Through the strategic aesthetic of removal, a strategic loudness is heard. The abstraction within *Chain of Love* responds to the erasure of queer Ugandan bodies. Abstraction, though, is not just about removing or silencing form, but about a specificity of form. The attempt to eliminate queer lives is met with a strategic erasure of the figurative form. Through an abstraction of herself in the work, the artist creates "an explicit parallel between abstraction in art and the abstraction of people" (Judah 2018, p. 11). No bodies are depicted, the work has been figuratively hushed, and yet, at the same time, the work is clearly rooted in a painful "shout" (Rodney 2017, p. 7).

This essay turns to abstract art as a means to learn more about queer lives in Uganda. This is not just a choice of the researcher, but an observation of the way artists in Uganda are using the specificity of abstraction to control who sees and hears their work and who must not. Abstraction is the purposeful and considered removal of some forms, and the tactical inclusion of others. To simply erase or silence form is not enough; this would leave the artist muted. Instead, abstraction is a malleable tool to both fluctuate between being seen and staying safe. But what does it mean to be focusing on artworks that are abstract rather than realistic during such an intensely social situation? What can the movements of metal over wood tell us, as opposed to those of a body? Does abstraction depoliticize?

3.2. Abstraction: "Freedom from Representational Qualities in Art".[12]

> "Abstraction isn't neutral"
>
> Sondra Perry, 2016.

It is widely known but not always acknowledged that Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, considered to be seminal in the early development of both Cubism and modernist art, is the direct result of Picasso's confrontation with African artefacts

[12] Oxford English definition of Abstract, see: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/abstraction.

(Jafa 2015, p. 244). Arthur Jafa describes in *My Black Death*[13] how, at the time of the creation of the work, Western art was limited by the spatial confinements of the singular perspective of the Renaissance. The artefacts Picasso encountered dramatically shifted his perception of time and space, as the African objects he drew inspiration from were never meant to be viewed from a single vantage point, but rather, to interact with and circulate around bodies. The artefacts Picasso encountered could themselves have agency over the viewer. This was a radical change from Western art which believed it was only the viewing subject that had agency over the viewed object, a highly problematic position when seeing works, for example, about black women created and viewed by white men. In *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Picasso breaks up the image he is portraying and reassembles it into an abstracted form, giving the viewer the possibility of viewing a work from a multitude of perspectives. But beyond artefacts, Picasso also gained access to photographic postcards of West African women (mostly naked) by Edmund Fortier, a French photographer based in Dakar. The photograph's influence in the creation of *Demoiselles d'Avignon* has also been widely discussed. In the painting, there are five naked women's bodies, three of which are of darker complexion than two. The figurative abstraction of the three darker women's bodies in Picasso's painting is critiqued to denote the rejection of the black body by Europeans. The three women's bodies are stylized, with their faces partially masked and all averting their eyes from the viewer, demonstrating a lack of acceptance of the black body in a white space. The lighter bodies have non-abstracted faces, which both confront and confidently gaze back at the viewer of the painting. The acceptance and full portrayal of the black body would undermine the notion of the white European body being the defining model of humanity, and therefore, the abstraction of blackness in this particular work problematically allowed for a distance from this reality. Abstraction of the black body through paintings such as *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and movements such as Cubism, thus, for Jafa, arise from a "simple refusal of, or resistance to, the ontological fact of black being" (ibid., p. 246).

Today, artists are using abstraction to counter this refusal of, and resistance to, blackness. There is an urgent limitation of black representation in visual art, and yet blackness has a "seemingly unlimited usefulness in the history of modern art" (Edwards 2015, p. 9). Black artists have a particularly close relationship to abstraction, not merely through the well-known influences of, for example, the black jazz movement on Jackson Pollock's abstract paintings (or the impact of African artefacts on Picasso's paintings), but through the early abstract creations of artists such as Barbara Chase-Riboud, Melvin Edwards, and Jack Whitten (ibid., p. 3). Curator Lowery Stokes Sims reminds us of abstraction's historical association with

[13] See (Jafa 2015).

blackness: "If you take the track that abstraction came out of African art, then we are just claiming our birth right" (Rodney 2017, p. 7). Abstraction, thus, is not just an art movement rooted in the aesthetic desires of such European and American artists as Kandinsky and Pollock, but one steeped in black historical and political consequences.

There is a current animated and evolving relationship between abstraction and the representation of blackness, with the choices of when and how artists use abstraction being particularly pertinent. As Adrienne Edwards describes through her 2015 exhibition, *Blackness in Abstraction*,[14] "Blackness in abstraction, shifts analysis away from the black artist as subject and instead emphasizes blackness as material, method and mode, insisting on blackness as a multiplicity" (Edwards 2015, p. 2). This ability of abstraction to go beyond the subject and the biographical allows the artist and viewer to see and show beyond all that is legible and established. An aesthetic emerges that drives the art market beyond the desires of audiences to consume a certain type of black figuration, which, as art critic Seph Rodney notes, although it makes the black body visible, can lead to troubling problematics (Rodney 2017, p. 11). Sondra Perry works with abstraction throughout her Serpentine exhibition, shifting perceptions of abstraction as an apolitical technique to an aesthetic tactic with a "tremendous amount of power" which gives Perry "a type of freedom of expression, an expanding of the visual language" (Coon 2016, p. 10). This expansionist ability within abstraction is also seen within *Chain of Love*, as the work turns away from a figurative, indexical representation of queerness and towards a gestural, emotive response. To directly represent the body in *Chain of Love* leaves the artist vulnerable to unwanted and unsympathetic stares. For the queer body, the representational can further misinform by pointing to binaries of normal and abnormal.[15] Furthermore, a realistic representation leaves the work open to risks of audiences sensationalizing the portrayal of a black queer body by mediating other kinds of violent, intrusive, or unwanted narratives. The artist challenges such assumptive and misinformed narratives through abstraction by carefully calibrating how and under what conditions the body is seen. Instead of a figure, a gesture of a scream created by signifiers of entrapment, i.e., a locked padlock, chain, and the nailing of metal onto wood, ensures the work is heard by those who already share a connection with the artist's struggle whilst tactically keeping others out. Abstraction thus becomes a queer strategy to refuse representative norms.[16] By moving away from the representational, *Chain of Love* receives a freedom to communicate.

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[14] See (Edwards 2015).
[15] See (Halberstam 2018).
[16] See (Reuter 2015).

A second work created in 2014 by Babirye Leilah, *The Game* (Figure 2), represents what might be interpreted as a hand-drawn chessboard painted onto another piece of discarded wood. It was at the point of making this work that the Anti-Homosexuality Act was signed into law and then, months later, overturned. A violent game was taking place with Uganda's queer communities. Both *Chain of Love* and *The Game* are mixed-media assemblages; the choice of everyday materials points to an urgency to find items in the artist's immediate environment in order to rapidly make a statement about the immediate situation. Both works are less than arm's length in size, again pointing to a rapidity and accessibility of both making and viewing. But, despite being produced in a minimal amount of time, Babirye Leilah's specific use and considered combination of abstract forms sensitively and decisively points to the storyline taking place around her. Through careful consideration of materials and their associated visual signals, Babiyre Leilah was able to continue to speak through her work, even when it was too dangerous for her own body to be present. Critics, however, have accused the artist of turning her back on the struggle by choosing abstraction over a more literal narrative of the situation. Angelo Kakande describes his response to one such critique:

> Leilah tries to make a message, a message that is abstract, even too abstract for anyone to understand, this is the strategy. She can't shout, you can't shout in the Uganda Museum. She can't tell anyone what they (the artworks) mean. She'd lose the opportunity to place her statement. Some people say, 'If you're going to make these subdued statements because you fear the sanctions, you better shut up anyway—you're not assisting the struggle.' I don't agree with this—where is David Kato[17]? He is six feet under. (Kakande 2016)

[17] David Kato was a queer Ugandan activist who was brutally murdered in Kampala in 2011.

Figure 2. The Game, Babirye Leilah, 2014.

Freedom is complicated, and sometimes it can be derived from choosing to remain unseen. As Zachary Small puts it, "That's a nuance of queer aesthetics that can be hard to parse, that some queer artists indeed find bliss in self-erasure" (Small 2017, p. 9). Other queer Ugandan artists have looked and are continuing to look to the self-erasing tactics of abstraction as a way to find this bliss. Ugandan poet, Gloria Kiconco, comments on their abstracted written work: "People like me have found a new space in the guise of non-belonging" (Kiconco 2014, p. 1). Other artists are using abstraction on themselves by turning to the use of pseudonyms as well as to the play and erasure of their family names in order to continue to produce new work without having their identities directly revealed to families and audiences. It is through the purposeful act of erasure of the figurative and literal that, paradoxically, the freedom to make a new statement is created. By controlling one's visibility, and purposefully playing between visibility and invisibility, abstraction can provide artists with a political agency to choose how they want to be seen and by whom. There's a dignity in silence when it's by choice, rather than force. Abstraction can then be thought of as a purposeful and intentional erasure, an intentional failure of communication. It is the purposefulness of the failure that makes abstraction an act of resistance, a strategy of survival.[18] Purposeful erasure becomes an act of defiance

[18] See (Halberstam 2011).

against the rigid structures of homophobia, and abstraction becomes a powerful tool with which to visualize queer lives without reliance on representation. However, dangers come with any level of visibility in Uganda. The Ugandan media has used extreme tactics to generate a hypervisibility around queer people, the most infamous example perhaps being an article written in 2011 by the Ugandan magazine Rolling Stone revealing the identity and addresses of alleged gay members of Ugandan society.[19] It was this article that led to the murder of activist David Kato. In 2014, a Ugandan transgender woman recalls her experience of being visually degraded: "I became like a cartoon for the police. They would call the press, every five minutes I was in and out of the cell. They would make me sit there and ask me embarrassing questions, some of which were difficult to answer" (Jjuuko and Mutesi 2018, p. 269). South African author Pumla Dineo Gqola explains that it is inaccurate to claim that black queer bodies are invisible, but that through namings and attacks, they are, in fact, highly visible manifestations of the undesirable.[20] As a queer community refuses to remain silent and visualizes itself through strategic aesthetic tactics, a surrounding social context hyper-visualizes that same community, forcing upon them an unsafe level of exposure and an unchosen narrative. The issue then lies in the control of how the queer community is seen. Can abstraction be a means to reclaim an agency over the way in which queerness presents itself? Or are we just pointing to vagueness?

3.3. Abstraction: "the Quality of Dealing with Ideas Rather Than Events".[21]

Abstraction offers the possibility of a diversity and multiplicity of readings. *Chain of Love* and *The Game* purposefully fail to communicate directly and, in so doing, open up a field of questions and meanings. The artist works with an undisciplined knowledge, giving up on the success of realism in order to pose more questions than answers.[22] This openness empowers the audience to decide upon the reading of the work for themselves, and provides the artist with the ability to communicate ideas beyond just the events taking place at the time in which the work was made. Babiyre Leilah's two artworks produced in 2014 live beyond the events taking place in Kampala; rather, they are an ongoing reminder of the lived experience of queerness in contexts of homophobia, both in and beyond Uganda.

Abstraction, then, rather than pointing to vagueness through the absence of a figure, has the ability to point to a specific openness. Through a purposeful entanglement of queerness and abstract aesthetics, definitions and binaries are not

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19 See (Rice 2011a, 2011b).
20 See (Gqola 2011).
21 Oxford English definition of Abstract, see: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/abstraction.
22 See (Halberstam 2005).

allowed to concretize.[23] Abstraction becomes a method by which to illustrate and pluralize different modes of queerness and queer abstraction, thus creating the ability to reply to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's call to both "pluralize and specify" sexuality and gender (Sedgwick 2008, p. 67). Queer abstraction gives us the tools with which to start to understand new possibilities of sexuality and gender beyond monolithic notions, whilst ensuring that intimate localities, histories, and sensitivities are also heard.[24] There is particular importance of this plurality in Uganda. A widely-used argument to disconnect queerness from nation-building (and to force queerness into invisibility) is the accusation that homosexuality is un-African, i.e., that it is a western import.[25] There is a bitter irony to this argument, as Uganda's Penal Code Act was created by the British colonial administration in 1950, with the criminalization of homosexuality being largely a problem for the Commonwealth.[26] Despite there being many divisions along political, social, and ethnic lines in Uganda, and no overarching consensus on what Ugandan identity looks like, Ugandans from all walks of life have come together to present Uganda as definitively not gay, and not a country for homosexuals.[27] This type of identity formation is paving the ground for what writer Jasbir Puar terms homonationalism, the co-opting of homosexual politics into discourses of nationalism.[28] Homosexual rights (or the lack thereof) become the maker of civil society. There is something dangerous and disingenuous about this way of talking about place, to say that homosexuality comes from one location and not another. With this discourse, homosexual rights become a way to distinguish the "modern geographies from the savage", fixing some countries as free and others as oppressed (depending on a country's outlook) (Rao 2015, p. 32). Paradoxically, in 2014, in Uganda we witnessed the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act in February while, just a month later, the United Kingdom (Uganda's former colonizer) legalized same-sex marriage. Despite constructing and implementing what is still the current legal framework for homophobia in Uganda, the United Kingdom was

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23 In their article 'Forging Queer Identity with Abstraction' Abe Ahn comments on the exhibition *Surface of Color*, which brings together work by ten artists who use abstraction as a conduit to examine ideas of personal identity, race and queerness 'The works in the show are not interested in universalising gender or sexuality under a single banner but rather in giving accounts of the multiple ways in which queerness can be embodied' (Ahn 2015).

24 See (Sedgwick 1993).

25 See (Heerden 2018).

26 Of the 2.9 billion who live where same-sex intimacy is a crime, 2.1 billion live in the Commonwealth See: Criminalising Homosexuality: Irreconcilable with Good Governance by the Human Dignity Trust https://www.humandignitytrust.org/wp-content/uploads/resources/1.-Synopsis-and-Recommendations.pdf.

27 References from a presentation by Dr. Aida Holly-Nambi at Stanford University titled: *Against the Order of Nature: Queerness and Ugandanness, now and then*, 2015.

28 See (Puar 2017).

accused of a "bullying mentality" by Ugandan officials for threatening to cut aid to Uganda for its anti-homosexuality laws.[29]

In response to Uganda's homonationalist stance, the queer community in Uganda is constructing legal and social arguments highlighting how it was not homosexuality, but homophobia, that was imported through colonial and missionary activities.[30] Through a plurality of methods including advocacy, legal cases, and the production of visual culture, the queer community is carefully constructing narratives by which to rethink Uganda's attitude to sexuality. Coupled with and adding to this process is a rejection of the terms "gay" and "homosexual" in their most binary form, instead referencing the multiple offerings and understandings queerness can bring. For Thabo Msibi, the term "gay" characterizes a specific group of people and evolved out of a Western "specific cultural history" (Msibi 2011, p. 5), i.e., predominantly a white, middle-class group. Queerness is instead utilized by communities in Uganda to describe the plurality and possibilities of same-sex intimacies and to criticize the binaries of gay and lesbian, homosexual and heterosexual.[31] Perhaps most importantly, it is through queerness that communities are able to visualize a myriad of sexualities that are disconnected from colonial constructions of what is right, what is wrong, what is ahead, and what is behind. Debunking the myth that homosexuality is a western import, artists and academics are highlighting how same-sex practices predate colonialism in Uganda. Sylvia Tamale gives the example of "the Langi of northern Uganda, where the mudoko dako "males" were treated as women and could marry men" (Driberg 1923). Perhaps the most well-known, and yet at the same time hidden, case is that of the Buganda monarchy of the Kabaka (king) Mwanga who engaged in numerous same sex practices (Faupel 1962).[32] By excavating and publishing queer Ugandan histories from a precolonial era, it is clearly revealed that queerness and same-sex intimacies predate the homophobic interventions of the British colonial administration. Alongside these advocacy efforts, East African artists, such as Kenyan filmmaker Jim Chuchu, are producing bodies of work that play with and point to the aesthetics of precolonial queerness. An exhibition produced by Chuchu in 2015, titled *Invocations*, uses abstract signifiers to point to the possibilities of queer lives and to the entanglement of queerness with African spirituality. This spiritual aspect is pertinent, as structures of homophobia in Uganda continue to be fueled and funded by religious (predominantly Christian) institutions.[33] In viewing *Invocations*, the audience is implored to see an aesthetic

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29 See (Uganda Fury at David Cameron Aid Threat over Gay Rights 2011).
30 See (Kuloba 2014; Rao 2015).
31 See (Reuter 2015).
32 See (Faupel 1962).
33 See (Lusimbo and Bryan 2018).

of the future that looks to the precolonial in order to create a contemporary queer aesthetic.[34] The expansive possibilities of abstraction allow for such an exploration of queerness. Through queer abstraction, the artist can take the viewer on a journey beyond a specific event and into notions of what a queer future could look like in a space like today's Uganda.

4. Seeing New Queer Futures through Abstraction

Queerness is purposefully slippery; it gives a name to what rigid modes of heterosexuality leave out.[35] Like abstraction, queerness has its own story of anarchy and defiance. In the 1980s, the word queer was reclaimed from a term of abuse to a concept that purposefully celebrates its own oddity and strangeness.[36] It can be argued that in the 1980s, a queer aesthetic was born in the wake of the feminist movement and the AIDS crisis.[37] It can also be argued that these canonical observations rely heavily on a Euro- and North American-centric gaze. However, although queer theory has its theoretical background in the US-American queer movement of the 1990s, it does not mean that the theoretical framework itself is always chained to the concepts used within that context.[38] Scholars such as Stella Nyanzi, Tavia Nyong'o, Jasbir Puar, and (the late) José Esteban Muñoz define their research as queer and continuously challenge Western concepts. Queerness is a critical term owned by communities in Uganda to challenge the binaries of homo- and hetero- sexuality which serves to move away from historical colonial references of sexuality and to open up communities to more plural interpretations of same-sex intimacies. Thus, queerness is a term of expansive possibilities. An umbrella term, not grounded in any geographical region, around which a myriad of possibilities of gender and sexuality can be debated.

Queerness, when viewed through productions of visual culture, becomes a technique of "doing" rather than "being". Queerness becomes a performative of the disruptive, and a disruptive of the norm.[39] It has the radical potential to break down assumptions and break up conventions. Rather than a sexual identity tied to the biography of the artist, the expansive possibilities of a queer aesthetic allow us to see all that is beyond the legible and the established. For José Esteban Muñoz, queerness is such an expansive term that it is not yet even here but can be seen as an ideality. "Put another way, we are not yet queer, but we can feel (queerness) as the warm

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34 See (Chuchu).
35 See (Pilcher 2017).
36 Ibid.
37 See (Kornak 2015).
38 See (Gunkel 2010).
39 See (Lancaster 2017).

illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality (Muñoz 2009, p. 1)". Queerness thus becomes an active place for imaginations. Visualizing queerness, perhaps through the two symmetrical holes of *Chain of Love*, one might envisage other possible ways of being in the world, ways of being where anti-queerness and anti-blackness may not exist. The visualizing of queerness, though, can be complicated; how can you see something that is so elusive, something that is not a thing but rather a way of doing or a potential way of being? Despite its expansive potentialities, queerness is still a difficult and dangerous aesthetic to visualize in Uganda: difficult, due to the impossibility of visualizing a theory that is in constant flux, and dangerous, due to the vehement social, legal, and physical oppression to which queer people are subjected. Abstraction both adds to and carves a path through these challenges.[40] Abstraction can complicate the desire to express oneself visually, by muddling and complicating queerness and the queer aesthetic through its ability to simultaneously mask and signal difference. Abstraction becomes "a subtle mask that gestures to the queer identity hiding beneath it" (Small 2017, p. 10). This complication, however, is no bad thing, especially within Kampala's current climate. Through abstraction, artists are given a choice regarding their own visibility, a choice between how exposed you want to become, including not wanting to be seen at all.[41] Through abstraction, an artist can retain some control of what they communicate, they can open and close the door for an audience, allowing those they want to enter into their refuge to do so, and keeping others safely out. Kenyan fashion stylist, Sunny Dolat describes such tactics of abstraction: "We have coded ways of speaking to each other, we use ambiguity to see what's underneath. We could be violently inappropriate without anyone knowing about it, there's a power in this" (Dolat 2017). This power is critical, especially when anti-homosexual legal and social agendas intensify, putting pressure upon the lives and freedoms of queer people. Muñoz also assures us that it is through the artworks themselves that we see the possibilities of queerness:

> The artist's representational practice helps us see the not-yet conscious, knowable only as a feeling of utopia and experienced through the anticipatory illumination of art. The visual language that emerges is sometimes loud, and sometimes barely seen: indeed, to access queer visuality we may need to squint, to strain our vision and force it to see otherwise, beyond the limited vista of the here and now. (Muñoz 2009, p. 7)

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40 See (Small 2017).

41 Whilst curating *FOUND: Queer Archaeology; Queer Abstraction* curator Avram Finkelstein asks "if abstraction might become a refuge, a place of experimentation and nest-making for queer artists". See (Finkelstein 2017).

Visualizing queerness allows us to see new potential for how we might understand ways of being in the world together. The expansive and active nature of queerness ensures that these perspectives are ever changing. But, sometimes, to view these narratives we need tactics and tools, especially in contexts where such visualities are banned. Abstraction, with its plural abilities, becomes such a tool. Through abstraction, the artist and their artwork can hint at the radical possibilities of queerness, urging their audiences to see into their work and to see their illumination of a horizon imbued with queer potentiality.

5. Conclusion

"The thing that they can no longer say is that we do not exist".

Frank Mugisha, Executive Director of Sexual Minorities Uganda, 2016

There is a power and importance of being seen. Speaking of lesbian photography in 1981, Joan E. Biren described the method of defining oneself through the creation of an oral, written, and visual language.[42] Biren noted that "without a visual identity we have no community, no support network, no movement. Making ourselves visible is a political act. Making ourselves visible is a continual process" (Biren 1983, p. 81). It is through visual evidence that queer people are documented to exist, and it is through this visual evidence that others can be held to account. Abstraction provides artists with the aesthetic tools with which to ensure that a queer visual archive both grows and is seen, within and beyond the borders of Uganda. Through this ongoing visualization, coupled with purposeful visual refusals, the queer community in Uganda ensures that it can be acknowledged, safeguarded, and celebrated.

Jane Wothaya Thirikwa explains how the introduction of sexual diversity into public discourse is an extreme challenge for organizations due to the nonexistence of visibility channels.[43] A leading media house in Uganda, the Vision Group, had (and still has) an editorial policy that prevents the publication or broadcasting of content, including advertisements, that "propagates" homosexuality, and can publish only content from the president, parliament, or courts (Jjuuko and Mutesi 2018, p. 32). The production of visual culture in Uganda today is under pressures of censorship; in February, 2019, the Ugandan government announced plans to introduce new regulations restricting artistic freedom of expression (Freemuse 2019, p. 6). This is a dangerous space in which to be. South African visual activist Zanele Muholi tells us: "If there are legal restrictions placed upon the visualisation of queerness, it is not just subjects and materials and texts that are not visible, but also no categories are

[42] See (Biren 1983).
[43] See (Thirikwa 2018).

produced for the cultural products and the subjectivities of queer subjects" (Muholi 2012, p. 113). Without the visualization of queerness, a community has no chance of survival, there are no reference points with which to create relationships and connections, and the chances for a network and a movement of support to develop are erased. The inclusion of archival visual culture gives us the opportunity to understand not just the way things were, but the way they felt.[44] The erasure of queer visuals means that not only does queerness become invisible, so do the stories of those that suffered most from violence.

Despite restrictions and the current context for queerness in Kampala today, artists are coming together to create communities that support the production of visual culture, pointing and hinting at a queer visuality. The production of artworks such as *Chain of Love* are seeping through the gaps of censorship, ensuring that queer Ugandan stories have a place in the archive. Through the tactic of abstraction, this community is choosing by whom it wants to be heard. By altering a visual language from one that is loud to one that is barely seen, artists are creating codes of visibility that are legible to those they want to keep in, locking out those who do not deserve to see their story.

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[44] See (Velázquez 2015).

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"A Motherfucker is a Werewolf": Gang Identity and Avant-Garde Rebellion in Up Against the Wall Motherfucker and the International Werewolf Conspiracy (1968–1970)

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Abstract: In late 1968, a collective from the Lower East Side of New York City started to distribute self-published pamphlets and magazines that outlined the operations of what Alan W. Moore has called an "art gang". Based upon a redefinition of identity to serve a radical anti-capitalist purpose, the avant-garde group Up Against the Wall Motherfucker (UAWMF) and one of its splinter successors, the International Werewolf Conspiracy (IWWC), articulated an intuitive discourse about how to alter the existing conditions of the world. Against the nationalist notions of what it meant to be 'American', they mobilized a collage of images that included Native Americans, hippie aesthetics, and futurist-inspired militancy. Along with the development of the organizational concept of "affinity group", UAWMF attempted to redefine the American identity as an individual and collective category, its hybrid cut-up resulting, at first, in the 'motherfucker' as an honor-bound member of a gang and, finally, as a monster represented by the figure of the werewolf. At first, the 'motherfucker' attempted to enact an open confrontation with the nation state, tying identity to a certain territory and a certain people, but after police crackdowns on gang activity led to the dissolution of UAWMF, some of its ex-members reformulated the confrontation in conspiratorial terms. The IWWC described its members as revolutionaries in disguise, coming to involve the body in the transformation of an identity whose key elements would be fundamentally opposed to those given by society. This essay will focus on the critiques implied in redefining the identity of an "American" within the framework of avant-garde rejection of society at large, tracing the different implications and limitations of creating a new identity wholly opposed to capitalism.

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1. Introduction

A poem published anonymously under the name of "henry", as mass demonstrations were surreptitiously called by New York radicals around 1968 (Neumann 2008, p. 216) read: "When the vast body moves thru battlefield streets/it

walks on many legs/hungry cells and angry bellys [sic] [...]/this body knows and aches, this body/will suffer to be chained no more!" ("henry/uaw-mf", 1968) The poem accompanied a collage of three flies encircled as if under a microscope, the biggest one sporting the talon of a bird of prey instead of a back leg (Figure 1).

Figure 1. "henry/uaw-mf", Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

The body of the community formed by the protest is a hybrid, monstrous one, its repulsive awakening a powerful image of how the collective associated with "henry", "uaw-mf" (Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, hereon UAWMF), wanted to be seen. By exploiting the disgust and sickness associated with common flies, the image and the text produce a distinct othering. It does not rely on the

conciliatory humanist tactics usually adopted by moderate factions of protests, which normally attempt to generate empathy with onlookers. Humanizing demands and appealing to reason are not among this group's concerns, which tend instead towards a confrontation that sets them entirely apart from whoever does not identify with monsters. This blockade against the empathy of the onlooker works as a firm division of "us" and "them", drawing a line between the body of the monster and the body of the human—its hybridity does not result in the Leviathan, a homogeneous social organism, but its opposite, with multiple "hungry cells and angry bellys" that have no unitary form.

UAWMF continually sought to reaffirm the line between "us" and "them", articulating their position through images of the American society's dregs. They connected as many semiotic elements as possible of what the group deemed America to be afraid, and, thus, what the American identity rejected as not belonging. The very first step in this process was, on one side, the practical considerations of forming an anti-capitalist, artistically inclined collective and, on the other, a question raised by one of the group's founders, Ben Morea, which can be formulated thusly: "what does it mean to be an *American* radical?" (Kugelberg 2014, p. 13) (emphasis mine). Based in New York City, the first step of the process meant theorizing and adopting organizational forms that would be apt not only to the urban environment but, specifically, to the neighborhood from which the group would operate. The second step meant crafting an identity that would distinguish it from the institutionally viable, even polite, manners of identification of most anti-capitalist organizations. Against the class-based nodal points of unions or the social-role-based ones of student bodies, UAWMF developed a vitalist solution that focused on the lived experience of members, on the transformation of their bodies into monstrous weapons of war, on the attachment of their selves to a particular time and place and to each other. Therefore, the very shape of their collective, which is to say their aesthetics, was channeled through the anarchist concept of the affinity group into an intimate relationship that politically is best described as a *gang*. While Alan W. Moore refers to "art gangs" as collectives in which a flow of resistant and protective cultural formations that shift shape in accordance to changes in artists' lives (Moore 2011, p. 3), he leaves out the criminal, violent element commonly associated with the term.[1] UAWMF not only parted from resistance to capitalism and protection of their

[1] He also avoids defining more exactly what an "art gang" would consist of. Throughout his book, he wields the concept in an aesthetic manner, more than a sociological one, to refer more to the rebellious image of the groups he overviews than the composition of their relationships. The purpose of this essay is to reintroduce, in a limited manner, said relationship between the aesthetic and the social, through the medium of the political. In the case of UAWMF, this is seen in their conception of the affinity group, which is mobilized as a *gang*, as the threat of a criminal social entity, in the neighborhood of the Lower East Side, New York.

own while attempting to "make a living", they also continually performed symbolic and material violence upon capitalism and its identifying signs, conceiving of their position towards them as all-out war. Thus, UAWMF as such resists the "art" part of the "art gang" notion, inasmuch as they rejected entirely the institution of art while emphasizing the potential for an aesthetico-political engagement with capitalism in the very streets of New York as a gang. This position developed from the previous iteration of the group, called Black Mask, founded around 1966, which understood their practices as a move away from the institutions of art and the identity of the artist. They produced various texts and performances in the anarchist milieu that emerged in that decade, coming to organize protests, political spaces and programs to support the activist community (Grindon 2014, p. 4).

The magazine produced by Black Mask attempted, in general terms, to re-draw a link between art and politics, affirming an avant-garde concept for which the work of art became a tool to think about and modify present conditions of existence. Aesthetics was no longer a realm separate from political activity and, in fact, the practice of revolution would have to begin from the very body of the individual, from which follows the body of the community. The last number of the magazine produced by Black Mask, for instance, contained two texts that "argued for the inseparability of any kind of revolutionary practice or thought from embodied experience (Millner-Larsen 2014).

This is the launching point from which UAWMF articulated its own position in late 1967–early 1968. Settling in the Lower East Side of New York, one of the poorest communities in the city at the time, and from which the group evolved its various identifying signifiers, they came to be known as "the Motherfuckers"[2] and later on "the Family". Art, in this sense, is key to the ideas at play in UAWMF's discourse, and the images that they produced serve the purpose of *enacting* said ideas into the political field. Although their aesthetic is heterogeneous, there is a clear purpose to unify as many elements as possible into an identity that does not rely upon social status or professionalization (what Black Mask did for "artist"). Its practical implications meant establishing a tight-knit community of opposition to the sorts of selves produced by capitalism.

Pressure from the city authorities (Calhoun 2016, Chapter 17, para. 46) meant, however, that UAWMF had to dissolve (McIntyre 2006) and, by 1969, they had to devise new approaches to the openness of an identity meant to link every monster of society. The group's heterogeneity meant that various other sorts of identities emerged

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[2] Throughout this essay, I sometimes use the singular form of "Motherfuckers" to signal the point at which the group identity is applied at an individual level. When "Motherfucker" is used, it means the individual member of the "Motherfuckers".

(with subgroups that had names such as "Winos for Freedom" (Grindon 2014, p. 21), but one of the most aesthetically powerful mutations of the UAWMF identity was that of the International Werewolf Conspiracy (IWWC). Playing with the figure of union internationalism (IWW—Industrial Workers of the World), the IWWC developed a conspiratorial version of the Motherfucker ("A Motherfucker is a Werewolf!") that no longer needed the territorial and communitarian associations or attachments that the group had previously upheld, opting instead for a Gothic, phantasmal image that synthesized presence and absence. It simply flipped the open monstrosity of the UAWMF community into the sinister and the uncanny, channeling the confrontation from the certainty of territorial gang warfare into the uncertainty of a conspiracy biding its time to strike.

The counter-cultural context in which UAWMF formed was rich in avant-garde and activist groups sourced in what is historiographically understood as the New Left. Among them, one of the most prominent was the Yippies, who, through the interpretations and analysis of media by figures such as Abbie Hoffman, added a spectacular dimension to their practices. The issue of the historical role and immense growth of the culture industry after the second World War was a common thread to the various movements of the 1960s in the Western hemisphere, whether more politically conventional, like the Students for a Democratic Society in the US, or more avant-garde in nature, like the Situationist International in France. In New York, the Yippies' engagement with this issue led to an interventionist practice, in which "pseudo-events" were organized for the purpose of maximum media representation and reproduction (Joselit 2002, pp. 63–64). Inscribed under the general purpose of speaking truth to power while promoting its destruction, on one side, and revealing its repressive mechanisms to a mass public, on the other, the Yippies' practices were nonetheless at constant odds with their revolutionary principles. As Joselit put it: "if the yippies change the message of the commercial by selling revolution instead of soap or automobiles, they nonetheless risk leaving the structure of the network TV intact." (Joselit 2002, p. 67) It is possible to make an analogy here within the terms of the history of the left, as a tension between reform and revolution, the risk of being appropriated vs. the fulfillment of revolutionary appropriation. Connected through New York's burgeoning radical network (Grindon 2014, p. 19), the Yippies and UAWMF collided over the role of the media, with the latter preferring an underground approach. In it, an international mirror of "straight" society was developed by counter-cultural movements, creating press organisms and networks that avoided the gaze of mainstream media. UAWMF openly rejected the Yippie strategy, beginning with the un-printable quality of the collective's name, an act noted by Abbie Hoffman himself (Grindon 2014, p. 38). In this sense, the group chose to focus on revolutionary activity *from* the underground (instead of *on air*, the way the Yippies would have it) and "into the streets", as their initial communiqué stated

(Hahne and Morea 2011, p. 86). Their mainstream media presence was null, while their underground media presence was full of activity, mostly thanks to their constant publications in *Rat Subterranean News*, as seen below. In this sense, this article follows Grindon (2014) in saying that even though their reach was limited, UAWMF did have an important impact on their context regarding radical activist social movements (Grindon 2014, p. 34), more widely affirming the necessary reflection for art history beyond the professional limits of the institutions of art.

This essay overviews the paths taken by UAWMF in this endeavor to constitute American radicalism through gang identity. First, it overviews its conceptions as a "warrior clan", the organizational form of which attempts to appropriate the family structure by replacing each member's surname with "Motherfucker" (hence their also becoming known as "The Family"). Finally, it overviews the group's derivation into the IWWC's monstrously-oriented forms of uncanny identification. The objective is to outline their engagement with the American identity in order to appropriate and re-produce it. Because revolution was something to be incarnated by every individual but supported in common, UAWMF's approach was to question the fundamental associations of what it meant to be American as an everyday, communal practice. Their solution was, as is explained further on, to dislodge the settler–colonial meanings of the nationalist view on Americans' relationship to nature. Instead, they offered a new anchor in the *radical* image of the Native American. However, their aesthetic move towards that new identity was mediated by primitivism, common to the avant-gardes of the 20th century, which meant a problematic play of appropriation towards said image. The form of this new identity as an everyday practice could not follow, of course, the patterns of the nation-state, nor could it be associated with any traditionally organized body politic or historical agent, a trait shared more generally with the New Left's positioning against both camps of the Cold War. Thus, they rejected labor entities and historical figures like that of the proletariat as much as they rejected capitalism at large. The role of the gang is here central, which, through the concept of the affinity group, aided in the hollowing out of the meanings of "family". The reformulated "Family", characterized with primitivist notions and the potential for (gang) violence in the streets, gave the (American) identity of the Motherfucker a core form of association in practice. As is analyzed below, these issues are all reflected in the images and texts produced by the collective. The essay ends with the dissolution of the American radical into something else, when the group disbanded, with one of its founders, Ben Morea, going on to create the IWWC. Even though it also attempted to formulate a new identity as a response to new conditions for practice, the impossibility of the group's continued operations in New York led to it simply withering away.

2. The Affinity Group as a Warrior Tribe

The basic concept for UAWMF's organization was that of the affinity group. Adapted by Morea and others from the anarchist milieu, it was defined by UAWMF as the

> coming-together out of mutual need or desire: cohesive historical groups unite out of the share of necessities of the struggle for survival, while dreaming of the possibility of love. [...] The immediate need is for mutual desire to manifest itself as the organization for revolutionary struggle, for a new technological organization of resources, a new distribution of wealth, re-establishment of ecological principles [...], to create a whole new complex of free relations between people, that can satisfy all our complex needs for change & our consuming desire to be new & to be whole.[3] (UAWMF 1968)

Aligned with a romantic and avant-garde view of the opposition between fragmentation and unity, the affinity group is here projected as a form that shifts with the needs of revolution, a tool in the overcoming of separation and the old. The revolutionary principle that guides this form of organization already draws a political line of "us" and "them", a line that was aestheticized by UAWMF as an identity rooted, first, on the loyalty of commitment to a group, second, to the group's belonging to a certain land, and lastly, on the opposition to fragmentation. The romanticism at the root of these three elements led Ben Morea to link their struggle to that of Native Americans. "Socially and politically", he stated, "I related to the Native American as the origin of the American identity" (Kugelberg 2014, p. 13), *rooting* the answer of what it meant to be an American *radical* in a historical oppression viewed from a romantic perspective. Through images such as the *Armed Love/Love Armed* pamphlet, which juxtaposes a 19th century portrait of Geronimo[4] with a target and a skull and bones collage, along with a text that portrays the UAWMF community as one that "destroys middle-class Amerikan values as it strives to create life's totality"[5] (Armed Love 1968), UAWMF developed a set of romanticized,

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[3] It is interesting to note how the main components of an affinity group, namely, members' deep knowledge of each other, a relatively small scale of operation, and the communization of both living and of objectives, somewhat mirror the components of the gang form.

[4] Geronimo (1829–1909) was an Apache leader who led a thirty-year war against both Mexico and the US (1851–1885). He was infamous for his military achievements against forces deemed superior, earning him a fierce reputation that would endure even after his imprisonment in the US in 1887.

[5] The deliberate misspelling of the country's name was a common refrain among US radicals of the 1960s, possibly popularized by the Yippies. Another version, used by black radicals, read "Amerikkka", which directly referenced the white supremacist organization, the KKK, as an integral component of the country's identity. In the case of the single "k" version, it represents a "Germanization" of the

primitivist[6] associations for their organization (Figure 2). This inherently problematic approach not only ignores the plight of contemporary Native Americans within the settler–colonial dynamics of capitalism, it also conceptualizes the 'Native American' as a singular, totalizing category that ignores the politicization of distinct cultures themselves in their historical relationship to the US state(s). As Caitlin Casey put it,

> Native Americans' supposed authenticity and willingness to fight for their culture attracted the Motherfuckers, but the Motherfuckers' understanding of actual Native Americans was simplistic and even cartoonish. In a 1968 interview, Morea asserted that American Indians had "a nonviolent community. ... There was little fighting between themselves." When contradicted by the reporter—"But they had extensive tribal wars. American history verifies that"—Morea immediately changed the subject.[7] (Casey 2017, p. 174)

Figure 2. "Armed Love", Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

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country's name, easily (perhaps even lazily) associating it to Nazism. Given UAWMF's continual characterization of the US as a fascist country, this interpretation is apt. (Vinen 2018, p. 32)

6 This is arguably the legacy of modernism and avant-garde movements, but also a generalized cultural position by the mid-twentieth century in the US and Europe.

7 Casey misses the opportunity to point this out, but it is significant that the interviewer insists on the point by means of the descriptor of "American history". Morea's evasion might have been related to this particular issue; regardless, the significance resides in an unwitting admittance that there is indeed a discursive struggle taking place over the meaning of "American" itself.

The whitewashed,[8] Westernized version of Morea's 'Native American' continues the primitivist practices of the avant-garde, which enact a double movement: to reaffirm the civilization/barbarism divide in Enlightened anthropological terms, in which the civilized has a history and the primitive does not, and invert the value of such a divide, resulting in a positive vision of the primitive over the civilized. However, this positive vision only masks the conceptual burdens that it attempts to invert, in the sense that it ultimately denies autonomy to that which is being represented. UAWMF's 'Native American' follows this same pattern, erasing and unifying the complexities of many cultures into an image that lingers *out of history*, and which consequently emerges from *nature* instead of culture.

This is emphasized in the description of the historical projection that UAWMF make for the affinity group, which is intuitively born from nature (even natural law): "[it] is a pre-organization force, it represents the drive out of which organization is formed" (UAWMF 1968). It also has a pre-modern history: "in so-called 'primitive' unitary societies the affinity group attempts to balance a complexity so thorough that it approaches totality." (UAWMF 1968) The resulting identity rests upon a certain primitivist idealism that claims for itself a root that grows in the shadow of American history, an alternative path towards the *American* that rejects the liberal–democratic order and its purportedly false ways of making community. Instead of a liberal–institutional dichotomy between individuality and state, which creates a distant, self-interested citizen ("Amerikan values" (UAWMF 1968)), this alternative community offers a dialectical solution that allows individuality to flourish *in* the practice of mutual aid, of "mutual need and desire" (UAWMF 1968), creating relationships so close that the group becomes a *totality*. Furthermore, UAWMF pitches the community as one inherently at siege, philosophically staging their confrontation with capitalism as one between life and death, where life is an avant-garde force:

> Those who seek to engage us in a debate between violence and non-violence are creating a false argument. The real struggle is between Life and Death. Establishment murder and passive acceptance of being murdered are both forms of death. Our non-violent Love and the violent Defense of our

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[8] Almost all of the 'core members' of the group were white, with Latinos and blacks following (Neumann 2008, p. 59), perhaps solely due to the group's positioning in the Lower East Side of New York. UAWMF's anti-racism depended on the overarching concept of the "Hip Community", of the Motherfucker coming to erase any and all traces of past identities, including those codified as racial. This romanticized identification fails, however, to account for the specificities of race relations within the group, as is common to attempts to replace racial categories with national ones, and which share the same romantic root of community and identity-building as UAWMF.

community are the true expressions of nature and life – destroying what is old and rotten to make way for what is new. (Armed Love 1968)

A manifesto entitled "From the old reality comes the new", published in *Rat Subterranean News* in 1969, explores the anthropological concepts that UAWMF intuitively crafted as the basis of their identity (Figure 3). The drawings are a primitivist collage of US Native American designs, and they serve the purpose of aestheticizing each concept: In the family, "each being stands separately, but not alone"; the tribe encircles the familial body that makes its first letter as "those who realize a similar identity"; the community derives into a mythological snake that collects "families, communes and tribes within one local geographical space"; finally, the people is an abstract composition of circles within circles that encompass the entire cosmos—"the identity as a people". This final evolution of an identity that is coextensive with the world is represented by the drawing of a horned figure that holds feathers in both hands and which stands right in the middle of the definition.

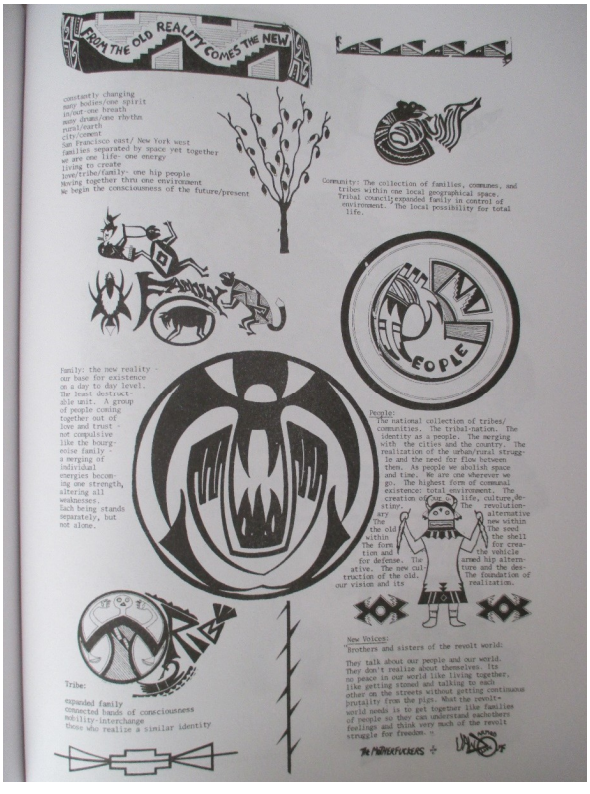

Figure 3. *Rat Subterranean News*, vol. 2, no. 1, March 14–21, Fales Archive, New York, 1969. Used with permission.

The American identity that the group is attempting to hollow out is the Enlightened, Jeffersonian view of a pastoral, rural people that, with the advent of nationalism and ideas such as that of "Manifest Destiny", veered towards the domination of nature. The tensions added by Romanticism positioned the "American" as an individualist whose relationship to nature was ambivalent, inasmuch as it was both spiritual and rational (Yoder 1973, p. 707). The wilderness as both idealization and space of expansion underlined the colonial aspects of this identity, under which Romantics like Emerson claimed to be *natives* (Yoder 1973, p. 708). UAWMF's response, mediated by primitivism, is to give the wilderness a voice, to invert the American identity and conceive of it not as the product of an isolated white individual whose reign over nature is both sublime and material, but the product of a collective, harmonious relationship anchored on the *original* inhabitants of the country.

The horned figure was featured in another spread in *Rat* magazine, signaled as a warrior and paired with what appears to be a shaman (Figure 4). The image illustrates a quote from the book *Black Elk Speaks* (1932), a recompilation of oral accounts by an Oglala Lakota holy man, made by John G. Neihardt, a poet from Illinois. It depicts a ritual that mixes North and Mesoamerican iconography in a primitivist manner; the tree of life and the animals feed into a rainbow that fills both humans with color. The gesture intuitively and *naturally* unites them by means of a ritual in which the world is not made, controlled, or mastered but understood as the sheer potential for creativity—"'Take this,' he said. 'It is the power to make live [sic] and it is yours.' Now he had a bow in his hands. 'Take this,' he said. 'it is the power to destroy, and it is yours.'" (*Rat* 1969, pp. 12–13) The dialectic of life and death becomes a dialectic of love and hatred as it traverses the ritual of familial union, transforming its role as an oppressive, economic entity into a political association for freedom that sees in destruction and creation a necessary duality for life. Aligned with the idea of self-defense and the siege of the "natural" community by capitalism, these people breed warriors: "I was attracted to the holy warrior", said Ben Morea. "I coined the term 'armed love'. Because you know we were theoretically part of the 'love generation', yet we were warriors." (Kugelberg 2014, p. 13) The identity of the Motherfucker as a warrior, through images such as these, comes to include a bodily discipline that does not necessarily distinguish between the practice of love and the practice of war. Osha Neumann, who joined UAWMF in 1967, later said that Ben Morea would inscribe in the organization a code of honor forged in 'the code of the street' and struggles with the police. It was a code that would create in members an aggressive, exclusionary demand for loyalty that "knew no boundaries" (Neumann 2008, p. 56) and that equated 'family' dynamics with those of a gang. It is significant that, played out in the streets, these dynamics and the aesthetic ideals that informed them did follow the conceptions of "turf" and rivalry between groups frowned-upon by legality. According to Calhoun, the Motherfuckers struck a truce with a biker gang

that wanted to take over the Lower East Side by dividing the area into territories and arguing that "we represent the people already here" (Calhoun 2016, Chapter 17, para. 34). Towards the state, the collective projected a menacing image of unity, a violent entity without qualms about confronting the police. In the neighborhood, their practice attempted to support mutual aid networks and a protective stance; the aesthetics are *armed*, the politics are *love*.

Figure 4. *Rat Subterranean News*, vol. 2, no. 18, September 10–23, Fales Archive, New York, 1969, p. 12–13. Used with permission.

Warfare framed as one between life and death, nature and capitalism, became one of the core elements of the UAWMF identity, and its conjunction was perhaps best represented by one of the pages in their (only) magazine (Figure 5), the first line of which read: "My utopia is an environment that works so well that we can run wild in it." (UAWMF 1968) The phrase's position suggests it being enunciated by the animal, one that not only speaks but is repressed by an environment from which it is now menacingly emerging. "Until our most fantastic demands are met, fantasy will be at war with society", the text continues, describing fantasy as an ideological infection meant to spread amongst every current organization under capitalism as the final cycle of life (which begins in the street as "urban guerrilla warfare", moves through the office, the home, and the government and, returning to the streets, "its victory is inevitable"—thus all cycles end with it). The text doubles as war propaganda in avant-garde fashion, declaring that "we are the vanguard of fantasy" and that "where we live is liberated territory in which fantasy moves/about freely at all hours of the day, from which it mounts/its attacks on occupied territory." (UAWMF 1968) This vanguard disarticulates environments as they are, waging a war on a

realism implicitly defined as the lack of a future, a lack of alternatives, a civilizational ordering that allows no wildness and therefore no imagination. Animality is here weaponized while the community is equated with fantasy, suggesting that existence itself could become an affront to capitalist society by daring not only to run wild but to run free in a territory no longer under its control. Wilderness, then, is the source of the American radical's voice, opposed to the civilizational tone of the American identity as produced by capitalism. It is a voice that speaks directly by pulling down, so to speak, concepts like "vanguard" or "liberated territory" into the communicative urgency of the street. The wilderness it portrays is not the idealized nature of the Romantics, but the material fragmentation of the modern(ist) city. This language is meant to produce threat and confusion to whoever does not belong, while simultaneously affirming the sense of belonging of those who would use it, attached always, in this case, to the people of the Lower East Side.

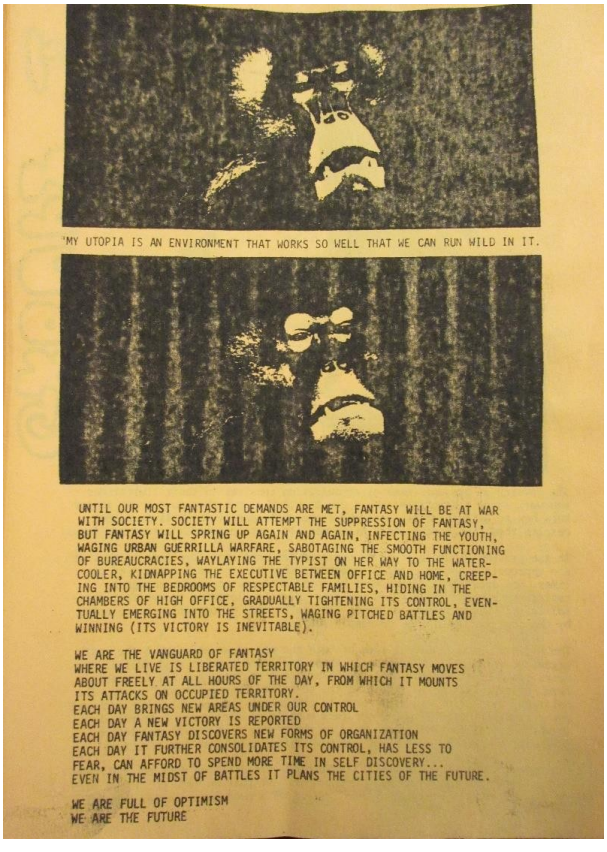

Figure 5. Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

3. Into the Streets

The affinity group as a wild warrior tribe, a gang attached to a land and a people, was mobilized by UAWMF in a way that amalgamated individuality and group identity, first and foremost through the 'Family name'. To be a Motherfucker required a warrior's individual training and skill, crucial to the metaphorical (and masculinist) gathering of resources that more concretely meant pillaging commodities in "enemy territory"; the family structure appropriated by UAWMF simultaneously worked like a network of fail-safes destined to, for example, raise money for the imprisoned, run 'free stores' in which all items (sometimes stolen, sometimes donated) were gifted away to whoever needed them, and to establish community sub-organizations that sought to give concreteness to the idea of a "liberated territory". In principle, every member fulfilled the same role, to contribute to the needs and desires of the group, and when context demanded it that role was modified by aesthetics into a political stance. In other words, the role is modified by sensory experiences (a police siren, a middle-class suit, etc.) into offensive/defensive codes that intertwine. This weaving together represents the idea that "perhaps the closest we ever came to a unifying purpose as a group (hindsight) was the often articulated and seldom completely defined attempt to achieve the Ultimate Synthesis of IMAGE & CONTENT." (J.S., 1992) In contrast to the false claims of capitalist society, in which image and content remain separate, UAWMF attempted to do away with the alienation said distance brings. Thus, the affinity group, via the Family, became a set of relations that rejected blood in the name of commitment, economic ties in the name of political ones, and private property in the name of communal property. By giving each member the same, familial surname, the community's identity became a boon (of belonging), a responsibility, and a representation in which image (the body of the member) deeply connects to content (the body of the community). Its function is analogical, and an act of one is an act of many and vice versa: Individual and collective cannot be separated, and the alienation integral to common (capitalist) American identity comes to an end. In its place, a *radical* American comes to be, emphasizing the federative qualities of *original* American societies, organic, and whole (Casey 2017, p. 173).[9]

Just as the regular economy is mobilized for war and with it the family unit, so the 'Family', in its formulation as affinity group, becomes part of an armed effort of self-defense in which the weaponized beings of the members represent the very first line of battle in a field that is first and foremost ideological. The image of the affinity group is emblematic (Figure 6). Not only is it openly sexual, it also presents an ambivalent three-directional fulfillment of desire. It invites the viewer to participate

[9] From the point of view, of course, of primitivist idealization.

in a sexuality that has aesthetically broken through the various configurations of the family form of the 1960s, whether in its incipient stage of the heterosexual couple or its later development into a family unit that ought to reproduce itself. In this sense, the woman that stands comes to replace male verticality, at least in her casual demeanor as she glances downwards with a barely visible smile, evoking modernist paintings in which "deviated" sexualities are suggested by means of bodies and eyes that meet the spectator with the challenge of *decadence*. Nevertheless, the egalitarian discourse of the group clashed with their actual sexual practices, in which "the position of women [...] left much to be desired." (G.A.N. 1969) Women "played a distinctly ancillary role" (Neumann 2008, p. 58): The objectification of the women in the image of the affinity group, much more prominent than that of the man, suggests this masculinist approach in which equality comes to be discursively displayed but not actually practiced. Against the group's attempts to bridge politics and aesthetics, in the case of gender relations, it firmly remained in the aesthetic field, affirming both patriarchal and heteronormative positions. That is why the *image* of decadence is here more important than the actual practice of equal relationships: it *represents* a tear in the instrumental aspect of the family as an ideological factory that perpetuates itself, and it (merely) depicts community as fluid in accordance to each member's needs and desires. This idea about the subverted family that nevertheless maintains patriarchal relationships is not only, in general terms, indicated by the primarily virile associations of the appropriated Native American images. The back of the only magazine produced by the collective (Figure 7) reproduces an image of an armed, white family; while not necessarily so, the presupposition of it being a family is confirmed by the classical referents of the family portrait in commercial photography. Even though the woman is at the very center of the frame, holding the assault rifle at a menacing angle, and the face of the man is lost in the xerox ink, this particular appropriation of the family portrait format does not really challenge the terms of the format itself. The children's alignment (and in the case of the left one, attachment) with the woman as the man stands back simply re-conceptualizes traditional gender roles in which women are *naturally* bound to infants, and in which the father's stance signals the protective aura of masculinity over the family. It is a literalized version of "love armed/armed love", but instead of the principles of the affinity group it attempts to install in the family, it aesthetically reaffirms old gender dynamics. The decadence at which this image points is, like that of the affinity group, a virility-inclined incoherence of a life in which identities shift, as seen in the next image (Figure 8).

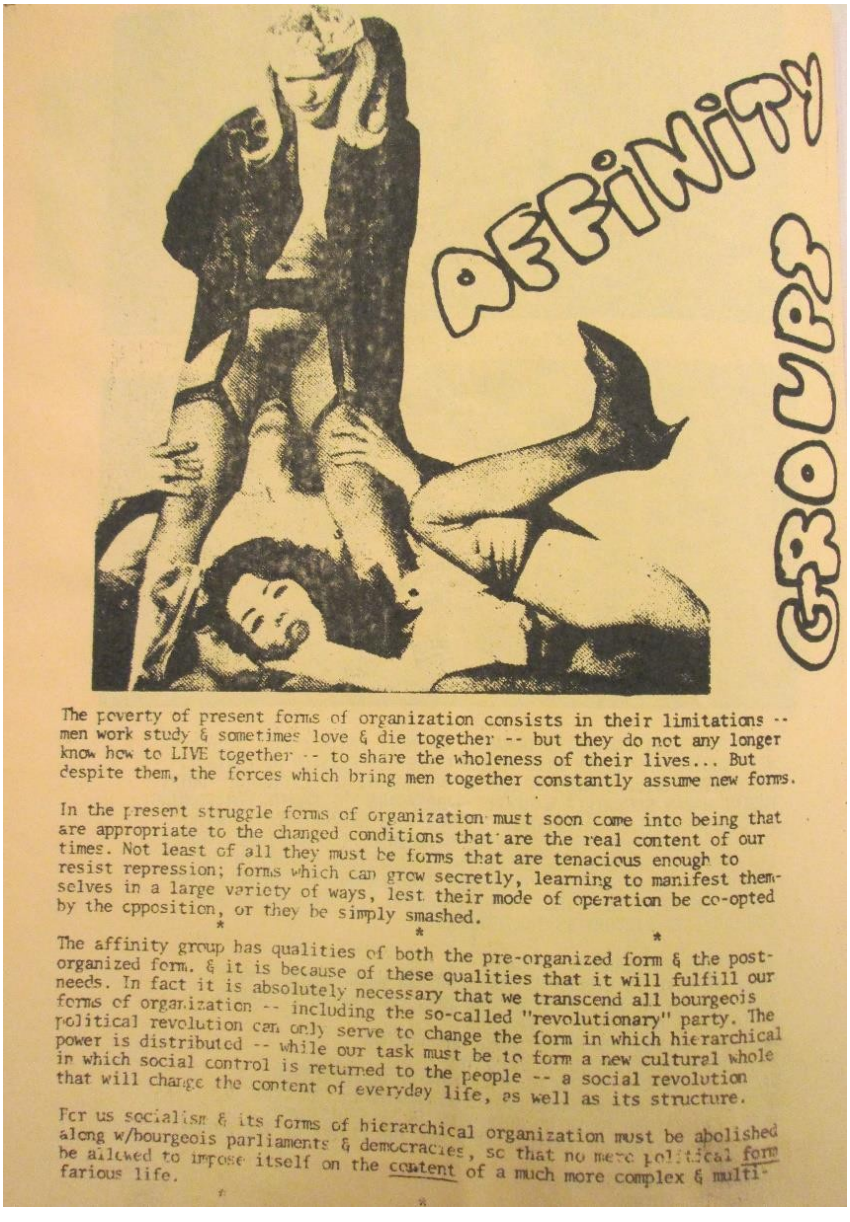

Figure 6. *Up Against the Wall Motherfucker*, Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

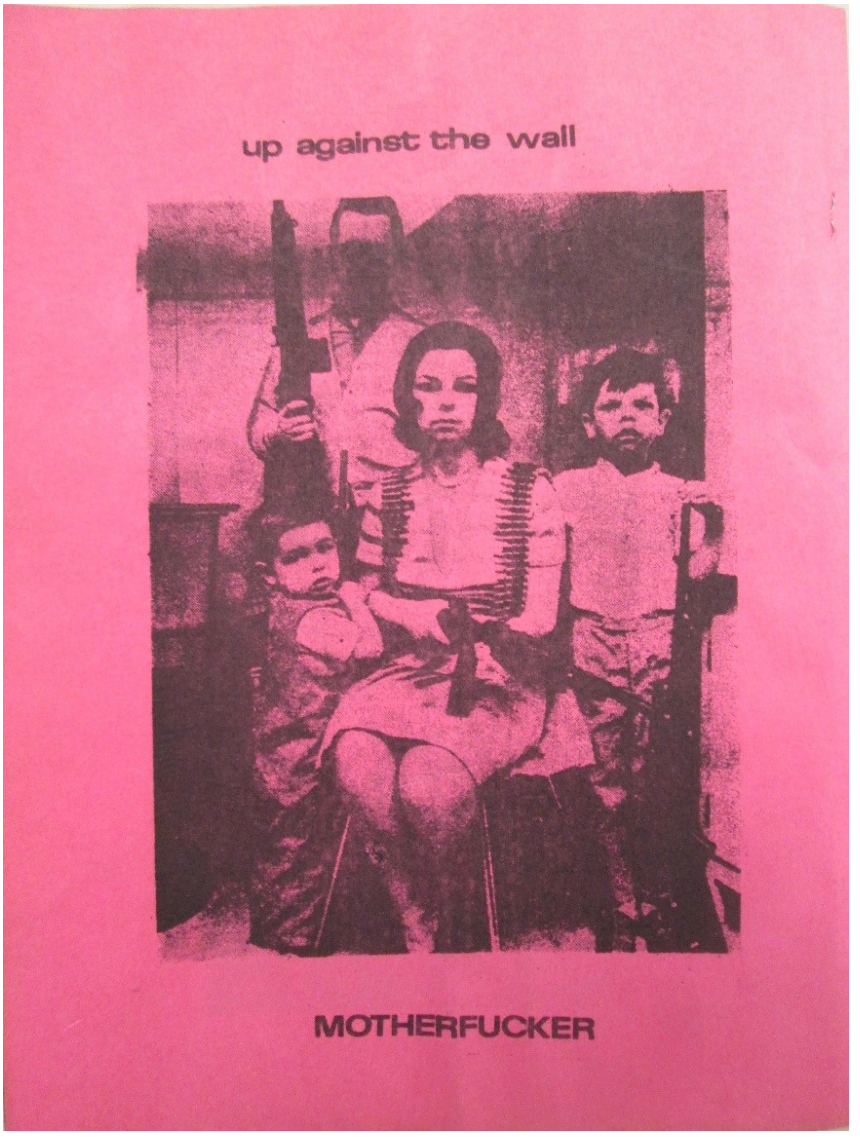

Figure 7. *Up Against the Wall Motherfucker*, Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

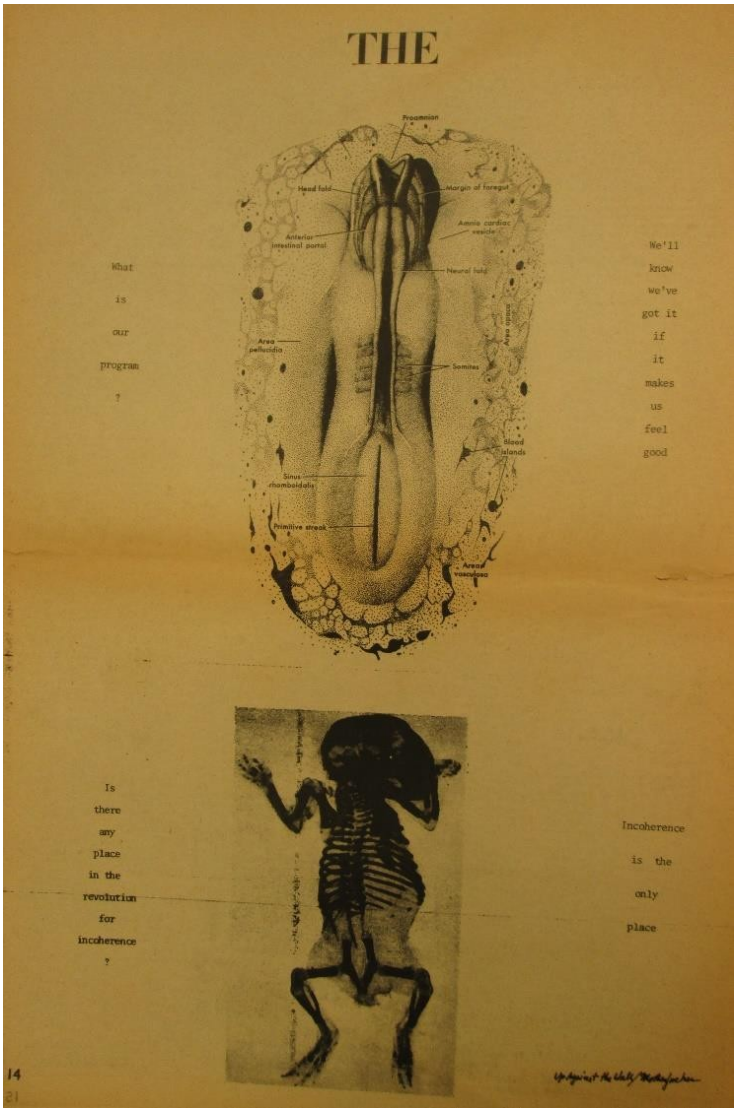

Figure 8. *Rat Subterranean News*, vol. 1, no. 17, September 20–October 3, Fales Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

Two very specific questions ("What is our program?" and "Is there any place in the revolution for incoherence?") (UAWMF 1968) find their answers mediated by two images of life at its barest—the embryo and the X-ray of a newborn child. Between them, there is no narrative beyond a leap in cellular evolution, two steps of the same being that remain, visually at least, disconnected in spite of a well-charted course. The program, as the Yippies would have it, was either "rhetoric"

(Hoffman 1970, p. 137) or none, simply because the movement was made coherent in/by *media:* "we are living TV ads, movies." (Hoffman 1970, p. 84) For UAWMF, in contrast, the program is purely intuitive, purely erotic, and "incoherence is the only place" revolution can begin. Progress becomes obsolete as a framework for politics and economics, favoring instead the decadence of eroticism, the decadence of a creativity that is simultaneously individualistic and communistic, untied from the media spectacle. Unlike the family, the Family as an affinity group is deeply incoherent, leading to a situation in which "except for our core group, it was never entirely clear who was and was not a Motherfucker. [...] If you spent enough time with us, and you wished to be a Motherfucker, and participated in our actions, you became part of the family." (Neumann 2008, p. 58) The coherence of sexual repression, then, is set against the incoherence of sexual liberation, of shifting partnerships that in principle implied the 'natural' stability of the affinity group, which ultimately allows for a true exercise of democracy. Of course, the sexual liberation actually practiced by the group, against the suggestions of its egalitarian discourse, was male-dominated. The ambiguity of the image of the affinity group devolves into an image not of women *in* power but of women *as* power. The masculinist identity of the Motherfucker rejects every kind of structural demarcation, even if the name of 'family' is used; on one side, it is not something to be born into, just as it is something that is not strictly given, but something into which the person *becomes* by means of (virile) revolutionary action. Whatever the gender, to be a Motherfucker is to become a *man*, and to embrace the heteropatriarchal associations of a public liberty exercised thanks to the private survival of traditional gender roles.[10] Even then, it is not entirely clear how exactly it is that one becomes a Motherfucker, which is why the monstrous nature of the community described by the poem and the insect image mentioned in the Introduction is perhaps the best (or only) resource to give better sense to its identity.

4. The International Werewolf Conspiracy

"The INTERNATIONAL WEREWOLF CONSPIRACY is the Hip Revolutionary Community in Action", says a spread in *Rat*, adding that it is "insanely hungry for the chance to discover how to live, and rabid for the blood and guts of the honkies and pigs who infect everything they see with the plague of living death"

[10] The critique made by G.A.N and Osha Neumann of the group's actual sexual practices reveals that the group remained clearly within the confused confines of the counter-culture at large, in which sex became subsumed to an expression of rebellion easily co-optable by the (heterosexual) family form: open relationships, unstable partnerships (as a straightforward inversion of its repressed instance, adultery), and other relations that never lead to a community, preventing its political configuration from the start.

(*Rat* 1968). The spread (Figure 9), titled "The Myth Killer", presents a series of elements associated with the idea of a revolutionary underground and a violence that could no longer be exerted within the terms of an open declaration of war and "occupied territories". As the New York authorities cracked down on gang activity and protests in late 1968, the Motherfuckers were dispersed, their membership suffering considerably, and their various sub-organizations being abandoned over the first months of 1969. The pride of their impact in the Lower East Side and of having successfully constituted a revolutionary collective gave way to something far more ambiguous, focused more on absence than on presence. The militant, openly confrontational images of the UAWMF magazine gave way to dungeons, killers, images of death, and pop-cultural allusions to monstrosity. Where UAWMF was the result of a series of victories that can be traced all the way back to Black Mask's activism since 1966, the IWWC was the result of defeat, of having to re-calibrate the terms of the collective as wider, plural, more expansive, and without a *physical* presence. The shadows from which the IWWC operated promoted a Gothic shift in self-representation, enacting a new identity anchored to haunting places in which it attempts to spread like a contagion.

"Wherever we are the Hip Community exists" (*Rat* 1968), the IWWC claims, suggesting both a displacement of the community and its opposite, its simultaneous existence and non-existence. Territory no longer plays the role it had for UAWMF as one of the classical keys of open warfare: "the place doesn't matter", and "we cannot allow the man to define us or our space" (*Rat* 1968). And yet, "we must create the hip revolutionary community" (*Rat* 1968), the text continues, opposing the portrayal of hippies in media and the participation of the culture industry in defining what the IWWC calls "Hip Revolution" (*Rat* 1968), undermining the strength with which the first claim is made. This ambiguity is faintly resolved by dissociating the collective from a specific place, turning territory into a psychedelic extension of a communal self: "WHAT'S REAL TO US IS SPACE TO SURVIVE" (*Rat* 1968). Territory, in this sense, becomes an aesthetic–political field instead of a purely politico-economic one, codified by the myth the collective now vows to kill. "We must develop our own standard of beauty" (*Rat* 1968), declares the monster, effecting the relativization implied in destroying the coherence, the unitary nature, of the myth that is "Bullshit Amerika", who "has been defining what we do and who we are", "everywhere we turn". The spread ends with an appropriation of the most famous phrase in *The Communist Manifesto*,[11] proclaiming: "WEREWOLVES OF THE WORLD, JOIN THE FEAST" (*Rat* 1968). The idea of a "Bullshit Amerika" works here still as an ambiguous

[11] The first English edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, approved by Friedrich Engels in 1888, and which has been kept for most re-editions of the text up until now, translates its final phrase as "Working Men of All Countries, Unite!" (Marx and Engels 2005, p. 258). However, a popularized version that changes

sign, suggesting both that there might be an authentic America and that there might be no possibility for reconciliation with the American identity. It would be the latter, however, that would be emphasized in later images.

Figure 9. *Rat Subterranean News*, n/v, n/n, November 15–28, Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

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the phrasing to "Workers of the World, Unite!" became a common political slogan in English-speaking countries in the 20th century, which is the version the IWWC modified.

The theme of the monster consuming its enemy in a festive moment of revelry recurs in the imagery of the IWWC, and in one of its contributions to *Rat* magazine, the community, the "us", is depicted as a hairy cyclopean giant, barbarous and "primitive" as it roasts some diminutive men ("them") (Figure 10). "AMERIKAN CORPORATE CULTURE WEARING 'HIP' MASK PIMPING OUR MUSIC/CULTURE/LIFE FOR ITS PIGMEAT", the text reads, "RIP AWAY AMERIKAN MASK/WE ARE ROASTING!" (*Rat* 1969). The monster represents here a possibility of action, the coalition of a multiplicity of communities that, originating in the wild, can come together into an enormous force that is able to destroy those who wish to recuperate them in the name of capitalism. Signed as Armed Love, IWWC, and UAWMF, it signals an organizational heterogeneity that did not necessarily mean different groups, and yet it works to make it seem like there are many at play. They all have the same objective: to destroy the "Amerikan mask" in a grotesque, disgusting dinner in which the monster adopts a relaxed pose as the flesh of the two impaled humans chars—to rip away the mask is to maim the body of society, to rip it in the most visceral sense of the word. "MEDIA/TRUTH/GUNS" becomes the basis for the roast, mirroring "MUSIC/CULTURE/LIFE" as their weaponized form, as the battlefields where the identity of the American (equated to Nazism by means of the swastika) is to be revealed as pure deceit, and therefore crushed. It is no longer possible to be an *American radical*, because America is fascism itself and, thus, the new identity cannot be attached to a specific place and people; it must be radically heterogeneous, monstrously incoherent, and truthfully ambiguous—not a mask but a multiple way of being. "We related to the idea of the werewolf" said Ben Morea, "meaning the human who changes to his true nature, which is animal" (Kugelberg 2014, p. 14).

The IWWC produced a manifesto, also signed by UAWMF, in which this multiple identity, this true nature, is described in simple terms: "A MOTHERFUCKER IS A WEREWOLF" (*Rat* 1969) (Figure 11). The drawn face of the werewolf irrupts the page as the phrase slithers from its bone-filled mouth; the pop Gothicism of the image, its messy textures, and its darkened photographs of a nude hairy man in tow subvert the clarity and wild colorfulness of the American radical. The warrior, the affinity group, war (politics), and aesthetics (collective and individual images of self) acquire new meanings in the face of a monstrous force; strength (physical and 'spiritual'), violence, and the self as society's Other come to the fore, while self-defense, territory, and tribal forms of understanding affinity subside into the background. These last three parts come to be replaced by elements born of new configurations, giving way to the menace of the de-territorialization implied in conspiracy, and an animal affinity.

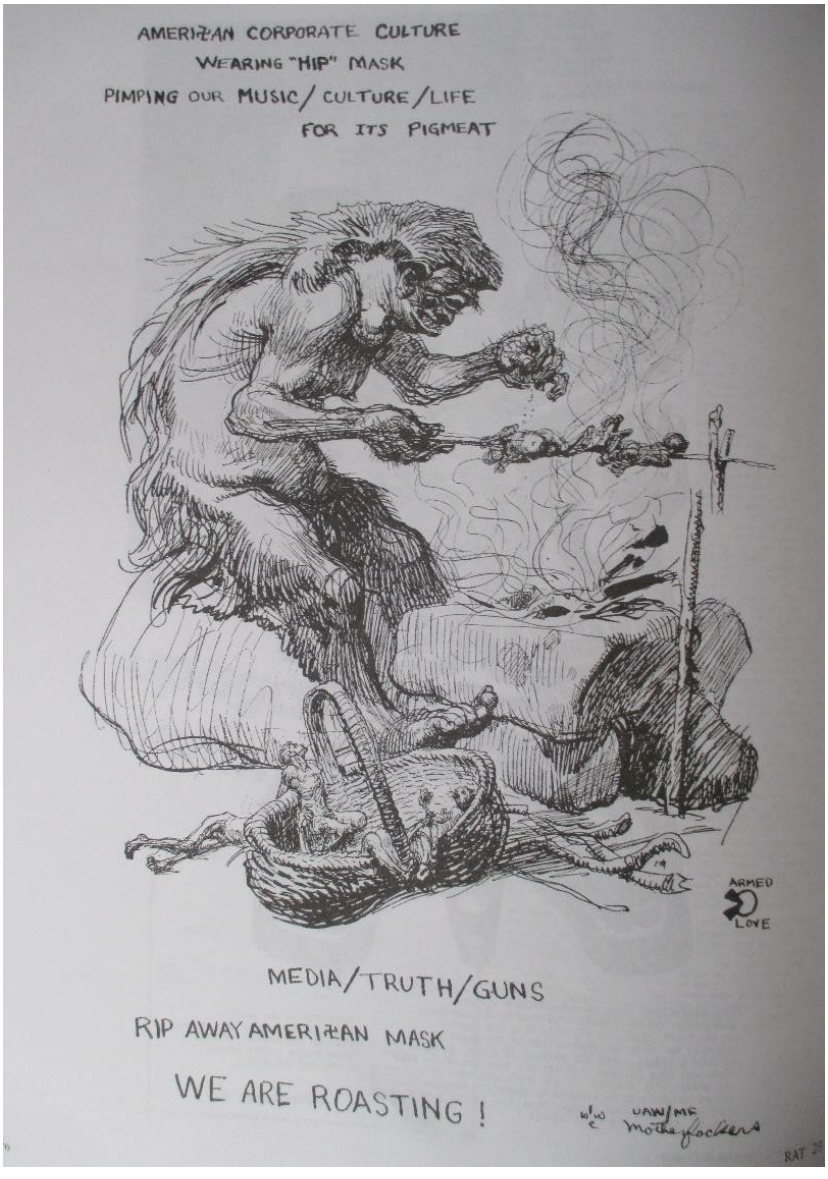

Figure 10. *Rat Subterranean News*, vol. 2, n/n, August 12–26, Fales Archive, New York, 1969. Used with permission.

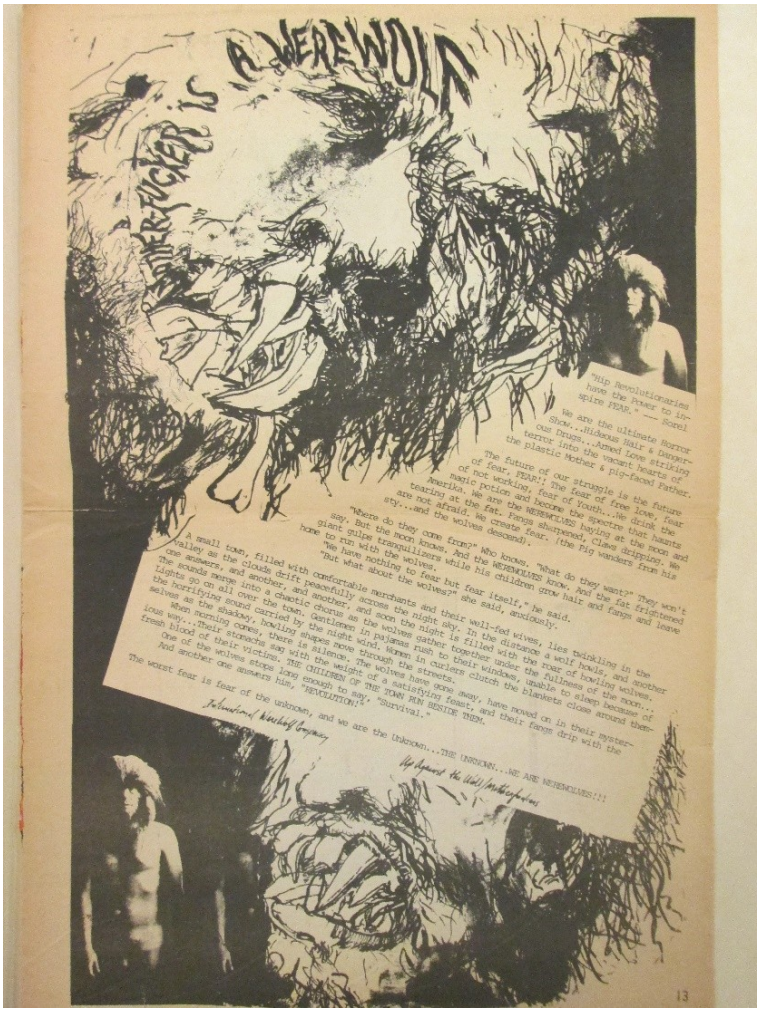

Figure 11. *Rat Subterranean News*, n/v, n/n, Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1969. Used with permission.

The warrior's re-signification is perhaps the most radical, because (he) has left the 'holiness' of honor and the defense of an overt way of life behind, transforming into an 'unholy' beast whose allegiances lie with those who share a hidden life based on a supernatural relation with the environment. This supernatural relation is grounded upon the uncertainty of identifying the werewolf, at the core of which is a fundamental lack to be filled only by revolutionary practice. Werewolves cannot be identified in daylight, nor can they identify amongst themselves (after all, in the context of late 1968, to look like a hippie was to invite police harassment) except in the act of coming together, temporarily, within the frame of contingent

revolutionary action. The warrior provides a political definition of "us" and "them", whereas his transformation into a beast dissolves said definition by hiding it within, by dis-articulating the aesthetics with which the enemy visualizes (or hears) him: "when morning comes, there is silence." The affinity group disperses, becoming an inner configuration that constantly connects the monster's individual, isolated existence to a whole that only comes to make sense under specific augurs that to those who are not 'hip' mean horror, but to those who are, mean "it is time" (for action, planning, etc.). The very vagueness of such a concept obscures the previous disciplinarity of UAWMF's organization, leaving it open to a collectivity that relies on an infectious imaginary that can or cannot be realized.

As for war and aesthetics, they are brought together and transformed by means of the esoteric, turning them into the basic signifiers for mystery and violent death. The first victim of the manifesto is Georges Sorel, whose text is mangled; what is perhaps the original quote, in the context of how social sectors exert influence on governments, states that "the workers have no money but they have at their disposal a far more effective means of action—they can inspire fear [...]." (Sorel 1999, p. 60) The IWWC's version, that "Hip Revolutionaries have the Power to inspire FEAR", does away with the phrase's wider context by integrating it in the word 'Power', and the replacement of the workers with 'Hip Revolutionaries' adds to it the focus previously developed by UAWMF regarding the 'dregs of society'.[12] This appropriation of the Sorel quote reflects a way of reading that attempts to infect the text with the same lycanthropy that the 'new' Motherfucker carries in his or her blood, grasping at basic idea and re-identifying it with a new context. The environment also becomes infected, ravaging it from within, transforming it each night into a fantasy of total decline, as the short story that closes the manifesto shows. It reformulates "the night", the "night wind", and "distance" into signals of an uncertainty so deep that incomprehension is the only possible reaction for a mind that is neither 'hip' nor 'revolutionary', thus creating "fear". This fantasy of a nature alive and willing captures the IWWC at the moment of dispersal of its members and the mythological articulation it needed to deploy in order to keep itself from falling apart. This political intent attempts to establish an indeterminacy that in the end, while having the same origin, contravenes the radically visible activism of UAWMF. By transferring the battle-lines to conspiratorial terms, it reflects Cold War paranoia and portrays the group as an empty signifier aesthetically charged enough to invite spectators/the non-hip to fill it with their pathological subjections to contemporary

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[12] In Marxist terms, the equivalent would be "lumpenproletariat". "We were always politically related to the IWW, but it was an old form of militancy based on the worker. We were from the non-worker generation, so to speak, but we liked the IWW." (Kugelberg 2014, p. 14).

ideology, with their incomprehension generating uncertainty and fear—"'Where do they come from?' Who knows. 'What do they want?' They won't say.'" (*Rat* 1969) This new identity cannot be armed in the same way it was before. It cannot be 'dressed for war' like the holy warriors of the Family, nor can it be nurtured in the communality of the affinity group. Instead, as the image of the naked werewolf shows, it is an evolution of those ideas into a form that gives primacy to a nude body of aggression, a performance of "the Unknown" understood as a pervasive supernatural force deeply embedded in a relationship with nature configured around a myth. In this case, that myth is the Cold War narrative of apocalypse brought about by a revolutionary enemy within. Hence, the werewolf[13] arises as a phantasmatic contradiction, killing myths by consuming them ("their stomachs sag with the weight of a satisfying feast") while remaining a myth themselves. And a myth they would remain: by the end of 1969, both groups had withered away, and founders like Ben Morea had gone into hiding, away from New York.

5. Conclusion

Starting with the concept of the affinity group, UAWMF developed a critique of American identity through the appropriation of Native American imagery, attempting to distinguish itself from what it saw as the individualist, consumerist, egoistic, authoritarian bases of being American. It proposed an idiosyncratic anthropology that re-functionalized the family to serve a purpose other than social reproduction of capitalist relationships, promoting an image of free sexuality that enacted the principle of "coming together according to mutual Need and Desire". By means of an avant-garde, revolutionary primitivism, UAWMF granted the Motherfucker a "warrior" element that was paired with the idea of "self-defense", and which was also tied to the politics-by-other-means notion of attachment to a territory and a people, which doubled as the image of a gang. The "war of fantasy" waged by UAWMF was a conflict implicitly viewed as the retaliation of the state of nature against capitalism, of wildness and animality striking back to destroy civilization. Due to police action against gangs in general (Calhoun 2016, Chapter 17, para. 46),

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[13] Among the archived letters about the group available in the Tamiment and Wagner Archive, there is an interesting side-note by a former member solely identified as "Jonathan S." In the letter, he suggests that the IWWC was increasingly focused on violence, beginning with the concept of the werewolf itself. "I remember a violent argument I had with Ben [Morea] about suing the "werewolf" designation, since this was also the chosen tag for post WW-II Nazi youth cells in Germany." (J.S., 1994) Certainly, there was a "werwolf" plan launched in 1944 as an attempt to articulate a "resistance force" in German territory occupied by the Allies. It did not achieve much, but it did wage a media war by means of a propaganda radio station called "Radio Werwolf". In an eerie parallel, it phantasmatically created a threat that held no actual power, but that did disturb the occupation forces with ghostly threats. (Fritz 2004).

that presence achieved by UAWMF was dispersed. By 1969 the group had shifted tactics and started identifying in new ways.[14] One of the most significant was the IWWC, which gave the Motherfucker a series of new elements that did not need "a territory" or even "a people": It only needed a conspiratorially-built system of signs whose revolutionary intent would cause fear in the enemy. The Motherfucker as a werewolf was split by the need to preserve an oppositional essence and destroy the "Amerikan mask" of fascism, but also to remain camouflaged—undetected in society until the right time (the "night" of revolution) would come to reveal itself as a monster all along. This self-presented monstrosity was, nevertheless, an important idea since the first few actions by the group, as evidenced by the "henry" poem and its accompanying image of gigantic flies.

It is important to emphasize that this process articulates the crossing between art, politics, and social movements, and that it is impossible to separate any of them from the group's activities. Even though at times it seemed like solely a political project, aesthetics and images continuously played an important role in answering the question of what it was to *live* in opposition to capitalism. UAWMF was born from the artistic collectivity of Black Mask and remained, even in the last moments the IWWC—inextricably tied to aesthetic concepts that modified, time and again, the identity of the Motherfucker. Ultimately, however, such an identity relied on the primitivist erasure of contemporary Native Americans, and sustained patriarchal relations in the private practices of the group and heteronormative positions regarding group composition; in other words, it relied on the exclusion of Native American, feminist, and queer challenges to identity-building.

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[14] As noted by Grindon, UAWMF splintered into various subgroups, including the IWWC. By that time, only Ben Morea and a few others like Jonathan Leake remained. After its short publication run, the IWWC also dispersed and Morea moved away from New York. He settled somewhere in New Mexico, where he remained for the next 40 years, only recently emerging again to give a few interviews to scholars and activists like Grindon, and to participate in the re-enaction of a few artworks he made before founding UAWMF.

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Shifting Identities of Feminism to Challenge Classical Music Canon Practices: A Beginners Guide to Guerrilla Gender Musicology

Chanda VanderHart and Abigail Gower

Abstract: Gender studies in musicology, a development closely linked to the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s, have actively worked to challenge the near-invisibility of women within classical music historiography, education and repertoire. Though significant advances have been made, canon practices today—as represented by mainstream repertoire, publication and educational norms—remain largely static. This paper reflects briefly on the origins and state of canon practices in terms of their pervasive and problematic gender bias. It then discusses approaches employed by gender studies in musicology since their establishment in the 1980s and 1990s. It examines case studies involving gender interests with respect to persuasion and change—in terms of both feminist aims (ratification of the equal rights amendment and Ruth Bader Ginsburg) and canon concerns (classical music collections and poetry anthologies), juxtaposing more subtle and more overt approaches, and explores the issue of backlash. Findings from research in behavioral psychology are presented, particularly, studies on persuasion focused on relationships between exposure, liking and resistance in regard to new stimuli. Based on these findings, in combination with evidence from the case studies, an alternative approach for rehabilitating canon practices with regard to gender is proposed. This approach, referred to as Guerrilla Gender Musicology, suggests more subtle, subversive, bottom-up methodologies and may be required to enhance and reframe current efforts in order to effectively reshape embedded canon practices with regard to gender bias in the long term.

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1. Introduction

In the 1980s and 1990s, a handful of musicologists began to recognize and address the pervasive problem of women's exclusion from the entirety of music history. In 1993, Marcia Citron wrote, "Before the early 1980s, musicology was mainly a positivist discipline [...]. The working, albeit unarticulated, assumption was that the object of study was male and usually undifferentiated as to class, race, sexuality, and other social factors. Yet because these variables were unstated, such studies tended to lay claim to universality. Consequently, important differences were papered

over and other groups marginalized, especially women" (Citron 1993, p. 66). Citron refers to her influential *Gender and the Musical Canon* as "a feminist analysis of those concepts and assumptions in the canon formation of Western art music that have had a direct bearing on women's position with respect to the canon" (ibid., p. 4). She indicates explicitly that her work's focus is the interplay between feminism and rising research interest in the works of female composers. Prompted by the women's rights movement and the concurrent dawn of gender studies in the 1960s, European—particularly German—and North American pioneers Susan McClary, Joseph Kerman and Marcia Citron, building on Eva Rieger's groundbreaking *Frau und Musik* (1980), extensively critiqued the classical music canon on the basis that it is "partial in its gender composition: it consists almost entirely of works by men" (Citron [1993] 2000, p. 4).

These efforts have since spawned numerous and multifaceted attempts within the field to challenge, rethink and reshape the canon and its related practices. Musicological work has unveiled implicit historiographical practices and challenged narratives including the genius concept and binary thought models around gender, while making explicit the gender bias in standards for inclusion/exclusion including professionalism and difference in spheres of activity (Macarthur 2010; Goehr 2002; Battersby 1989; Bramley n.d.; Holtsträter and Fischer 2017; Rode-Breymann 2007; Mantere and Kurkela 2015; Crowther 2007; Green 1997; Gerber 2016; Heesch and Losleben 2012; Pendle 2001; Schneider and Karbusicky 1997; Unseld and Kolb 2019). These and many others have opened the canon and its practices to critique and provided alternative historiographical narratives. This in turn has enabled the creation of gender studies publication formats, symposia and concert series and has allowed for gender studies programs and institutes within major music universities and *Musikhochschulen*. This has made possible the creation of gender lexica and digital humanities resources for gender studies in North America and Western Europe, including the *Lexikon Musik und Gender* (Kreutziger-Herr and Unseld 2010), Musik und Gender im Internet (MuGI) (Borchard and Noeske n.d.), the Collective Biographies of Women (Booth n.d.), *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Female Composers* (Tsou et al. 1996) and the Composer Diversity Database (Deemer 2019). Publishing houses such as Furore in Kassel have been established, which seek out and publish compositions exclusively by female composers, and on university campuses, gender studies departments, gender studies initiatives and identity-based concert series are now part of the accepted institutional fabric. Their activities often center around offering gender studies-specific lectures, organizing concerts explicitly programming female composers and generally advocating for visibility of female composers and other marginalized groups.

These developments have been invaluable in making information about female composers and alternative perspectives on music history available. There is no

doubt, however, that mainstream canon practices remain heavily gendered, and some point toward a recent backslide. In the words of Sally Macarthur, "In the 1990s, a wealth of research on women's music became available. The first decade of the twenty-first century, however, saw the early demise of that work." (Macarthur 2010, p. 1). A quarter century after *Gender and the Musical Canon* was published, a mere fraction of works of female composers are performed in major concert halls, taught in general music history courses, professionally recorded or published in a widely accessible and visible manner (Macarthur 2010, chp. 4). Compared to those of their male colleagues, female contributions continue not to figure prominently in widespread historical narratives. Current and past attempts to present female composers' works and narratives in classical music practice, educational institutions and historiography—though significant and necessary—have done much for identity but not made major inroads in reforming mainstream practices, which are still largely the domain of white, European, Christian men.

This dominion is particularly evident in repertoire and programming practices in major institutions. Even in the smaller format genres (lied and chamber music) where women were particularly active during the 19th and 20th centuries (Wollenberg and Kenny 2015; Williams 2007; Géliot 2009; Chapter 3.7 "Ernestine de Bauduin" in VanderHart 2016; Beer 2016; Tsou et al. 1996; Sadie and Samuel 1994), it is difficult to find one on a mainstream program. During the 2018–2019 Musikverein season in Vienna, seven "Liederabende" were programmed containing a total of 169 songs, with a single composition by a female composer, Clara Schumann's "Mein Stern." This inclusion may itself only have been a nod to the 200th anniversary of her birth; both seasons immediately prior to and following were comprised exclusively of male compositions.

The vast underrepresentation of women is conspicuous in mainstream music history reference volumes regularly used in music education throughout the world today, all of which are continuously republished and reissued, such as *Norton's History of Western Music*, *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and the *Oxford History of Western Music*.[1] Within these standard works, not only compositions by women but also their varied spheres of activity including salon culture and other, pre-institutional music production and non-professional composition and publication (Parton 2019; Bartsch 2007; Vezeau 2005) are still largely neglected. The aforementioned dictionaries of female composers (Tsou et al. 1996) are still separated from the main volumes,

[1] Oxford, arguably the most inclusive, includes comparatively brief paragraphs on primarily three female composers, Clara Schumann, Lili Boulanger and Ruth Crawford Seeger in the Early 20th Century volume. Other female composers are mentioned only in passing or relegated to footnotes. In contrast, pages 23–26 are entirely dedicated to a single chord in Mahler's Unfinished Symphony (Taruskin 2010).

relegated to the role of addendum, and are therefore used only in specifically gender studies and women's studies courses, not in general music survey courses.

Publication practices are likewise exclusive, and accessing publications by female composers is often a difficult task. These works are rarely stocked and then—when printed at all—only generally by small, boutique publishing houses that focus on women's compositions,[2] making them comparatively expensive and also less present both online and in music stores. Many of those interested in finding the music of female musicians they happen upon or those who want to casually explore will still be limited to antique dealers, major conservatory archives and both public and private music collections, and will have to spend time, energy and money getting otherwise unavailable scores copied, or transforming handwritten manuscripts into readable scores. These are significant obstacles to inclusion. The digital database, The International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP), is of enormous assistance here, making an ever-greater number of works potentially available in the public domain. It does, however, require the user to know what he or she is looking for—there is no casual browsing on this database as there is in a music shop.

Finally, practicing musicians are generally motivated to add compositions to their repertoire to which they have been exposed, via either recording or live concert, and fallen in love with. This is difficult to do without being introduced by teachers or peers at university, hearing works in mainstream concerts or happening upon them on YouTube. Though many universities and gender studies departments offer specialty concert series and lectures, this is a far cry from hearing compositions by female composers performed on degree recitals, in standard concerts or accidentally happening upon quality recordings of female composers[3] while browsing the internet.[4]

Some may argue that female composers are not known simply because they are not worth knowing about and would be encouraged to explore the chamber music, instrumental music and song of Lili Boulanger, Louise Farrenc, Amy Beach, Melanie Bonis, Ethyl Smyth and countless other compositions by female composers. But, even if one were to assume that all music by women is universally inferior to that of the male composers who are performed, taught and worth remembering (and to be clear, this is quite a contention), there are still issues with non-inclusion of women and other marginalized figures in our mainstream histories, curricula and concert programs. Inclusion is important beyond the question of quality, itself arguably a matter of subjective personal option. For one thing, ignoring 50% of society's

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2 Editions Fortin, Furore Verlag, Certosa to name a few.

3 Clara Schumann's songs now a thankful exception, having been beautifully recorded and uploaded by Diana Damrau and Helmut Deutsch.

4 This could be addressed by the authors' "Counterpoint" initiative detailed later in this article.

contributions is simply out of step with modern consciousness. The canon, according to Citron is "a narrative of the past and a template for the future" as well as "a means of instilling a sense of identity in a culture: who the constituents are, where they come from, and where they are going" (Citron [1993] 2000, p. 1). Canon practices that ignore the production of half of its members are not honest about the identity they are instilling. If, in fact, women are not truly integrated into the mainstream canon practices, we are actively cutting 50% of the population out of these past narratives and future templates, and denying them participation within the identity of their own culture.

Moreover, historical non-inclusion appears stubbornly self-perpetuating. The Donne Women in Music project found not only that compositions by men made up over 96% of classical orchestral works programmed in 2018–2020, including performances of new music; the existence of activist groups such as Gender Relations in New Music (GRINM) and studies by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra point out extreme gender bias even within the new music scene, where performances of music by living composers still skew to over 85% male, despite the fact that today the percentage of women graduating from major conservatories and music universities with composition degrees is much higher (O'Bannon 2018).

There is clearly a chasm between gender studies' musicological advances and their dissemination into mainstream music education and programming practices at both the collegiate level and in venerated music institutions. Some might argue that such changes simply take time but, while this is certainly the case, there is also reason to believe that the approach itself is also flawed—or at least incomplete. While publishing or performing specifically around a marginalized group—a primary tactic of university-based gender studies departments and gender studies projects—is powerful, perhaps even essential for creating identity, it is still an isolated space. Women have historically been relegated to the private sphere: parlors, tea rooms and salons, thereby excluded from having a public voice—made invisible (see, for example, Kuster 2018, pp. 217–19). Similarly, giving female composers specific forums, performances and scholarship, while essential for creating identity and making information available to those looking for it, still keeps them localized; they are rendered invisible within isolated spaces. This relegates women and their works to the margins of music history and industry, limiting their reach. Those interested seek out their company, but the mainstream, institutionalized classical music community can easily continue to ignore their existence. At some point, there must be integration or these composers and works will quietly die of consumption in relative isolation.

We propose a shift in technique—or at least an additional line of approach—which we have dubbed Guerrilla Gender Musicology, which advocates for a subtle shift in approach for all those interested in weaving women into the very framework of the classical music mainstream in terms of publication, education and programming,

thereby reshaping canon practices. The name of the theory is derived from the term "Guerrilla Warfare", defined as "a type of asymmetric warfare between opponents of unequal strength" (Tomes 2004, pp. 16–29). Guerrilla Gender Musicology considers itself irregular warfare. It strategically aims to enhance the impact of a small force on a larger, more cumbersome one (Van Creveld 2000, pp. 356–58). Through it, the interests of gender studies and feminism take aim at the status quo, striving not only to topple a tradition and system of canon practices functionally devoid of women, but also to increase popular support for these activities. Guerrilla Gender Musicology should not be understood as lying in opposition to the values and goals of feminist musicology or gender studies practices. Rather, we understand it as its next, necessary evolutionary step.

2. Backlash and Shifting Feminist Identities

Feminist identity has shifted a great deal since the high tide of the second wave, as have attitudes towards it. Substantial successes for the movement during the late 20th and early 21st century, including raised awareness of the pay gap in both Germany and the US, quotas designed to promote fairer gender representation in the workplace and an increased intolerance for predatory sexual behavior from powerful institutional figures have been accompanied by anxiety and pushback. The open, direct demand for change on social, economic and political levels which characterize all broad feminist movement[5] have been overtly and also subversively challenged.

Pronounced backlash in public policy, legislative protections and societal discourse during the early 21st century is verifiable. A study commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs identified several fields and strategies by which the backlash against gender equality and women's and girls' rights in Austria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia has been occurring at multiple levels. According to the report, efforts since 2005 "have decreased the level of protection of women and girls and reduced access to their rights" on a number of fronts (Juhász 2018, p. 1).

More subversively, the mainstream media have systematically framed feminism as an oppressive attempt to take opportunities regarded as traditionally feminine away from women (McRobbie 2009, pp. 18–22). Women identifying as feminists have been treated in the media as lonely, sexually deviant, potentially threatening and mentally unstable (see McRobbie's analysis of the 1987 blockbuster Fatal Attraction in McRobbie 2009, pp. 35–37). Such characterizations have resulted in a significant percentage of younger women today hesitating to identify as feminist, though they may espouse feminist ideals. Of the 2093 millennial women surveyed by

[5] Including those who identify as second-wave, third-wave, fourth-wave, radical or liberal.

Refinery29 and CBS News, 54% said that they would *not* consider themselves feminists, though many still value gender equality on principle (Refinery 2018). Feminist identity itself has grown fraught.

Resistance to the gender studies movement has likewise been steadfast in the classical music community where scholarly backlash against more inclusive historiographical narratives as well as canonic expansion is still mainstream.[6] Having a canon imbued with great influence over time itself gives weight and importance to those works established within it. Literary critic and theorist Barbara Herrnstein Smith indicates that making a work "unquestionable", canonizing it, gives it specific power. Over time, "it will also begin to perform certain characteristic cultural functions by virtue of the very fact that it has endured [...] and will be valued and preserved accordingly: as a witness to lost innocence, former glory, and/or apparently persistent communal interests and "values" and thus a banner of communal identity [...]" (Smith 1991, p. 33). For this reason, any forceful critique of something as significant as the canon to musicology is perceived by the status quo as an attack on their identity, culture and community. This challenges their basic worldview and therefore threatens their identity, causing anxiety and resistance (Smith 1991, p. 33). Walter's work illustrates this existential anxiety. He bemoans what he characterizes as the "immoderate expansion of the canon" as a threat to the very existence of musicology. "Whether one holds a lecture on the music of Louise Farrenc or on the music of Ludwig van Beethoven, on the music of Pauline Viardot-Garcia or that of Franz Liszt, is no longer important," he complains, contending that this has led musicology to the brink "not of an interdisciplinary golden era, but to its disintegration" (Walter 2013, p. 96).

The polarization that occurs around the concept of feminism hinders the efficacy of outright efforts that promote overhauling canon practices. The tactics that gender musicologists have preferred thus far are now polarizing simply because the very words "women", "female" and "gender" have been politicized. Overtly and purposefully gender-exclusive writing, publication and concert programming and using titles such as *Women in Music: A History* (Pendle 2001), *Sounds and Sweet Airs: The Forgotten Women of Classical Music* (Beer 2016), or *Project W: Works by Diverse Women Composers* (Chicago Sinfonietta et al. 2018) are not likely to incite greater acceptance or increased audience. When branded with the "Gender/Feminism" mark, the audience is automatically limited to those seeking to identify with those groups. Response to such efforts is split along ideological lines, creating backlash as well as support. Moreover, the viewer/listener/consumer is predisposed to assume that the

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[6] As an example, musicologist Michael Walter's contribution (Pietschmann and Wald-Fuhrmann 2012); (Assmann 2007); (Harold 1994); (Heydebrand 1998) and (Kaiser and Matuschek 2001).

composers featured in gender-driven books, concerts or CDs are presented because they are women and not because their accomplishments are inherently of value.

So, what is the way forward? If identification as feminist or as a proponent of gender studies is problematic, what could an alternative approach be? We look at two instances where women's interests have seen increased representation in other fields. Each case study features both overtly feminist/gender-specific approaches as well as alternative methodologies.

3. Case Study #1: Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the ERA

A feminist icon today, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg used her role during the 1970s as a leading voice in the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) Women's Rights Project's campaign for gender equality and did much to increase women's protections and equality under the law. During her confirmation in 1993, she was characterized as an incrementalist who thought Roe v. Wade might have gone too far and considered overcautious by many of her feminist colleagues. Looking back today, however, the impact of her legal achievements outshines those more direct approaches of her fellow feminists and their support for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

The force of the second-wave feminist movement, with which Ginsburg also identified, was primarily focused on fighting for ratification of the ERA—an amendment asserting the equality of women and men under the U.S. Constitution. The ERA, first introduced in 1923 and annually brought to the table throughout the 1940s, did not make headway until the feminist movement of the 1960s. It gained traction and seemed destined for ratification by the late 1960s and early 1970s but, due to heated backlash, it ultimately failed, largely because of conservative Phyllis Schlafly's opposition campaign. Not only did the ERA not meet the number of states required for ratification by its 1979 deadline, but five states that had already approved the amendment ultimately rescinded their ratification. The ERA has still not become a constitutional amendment.

Concurrently, Ginsburg and her colleagues at the Association for Progressive Communications Women's Rights Programme (WRP) were interested in similar rights for women but, instead of marching and direct lobbying, used a more nuanced approach. Realizing that the judges and general legal structure were formed and dominated by men who would not easily recognize gender-based discrimination against women as it was not a factor in their own experience, they chose male as well as female plaintiffs to make the case that gender discrimination against both men

and women was problematic enough to warrant "strict scrutiny."[7] The turning point occurred in 1976:

> Ms Ginsburg helped develop the legal strategy for Craig v. Boren, a case brought by a freshman at Oklahoma State University. The young man took issue with an Oklahoma law that permitted 18-year-old women to buy 3.2%-alcohol beer ... while delaying this honour for men until their 21st birthdays. [...]. Most notably, for the first time, a majority of the court elevated gender above the lowest level of review. (The Economist 2018)[8]

Although the court did not raise gender discrimination to strict scrutiny, they did grant it "intermediate scrutiny", a major step forward. This raised level of review then served as a Trojan horse for passing women's rights legislation. Methodically strengthened by precedent over the next decades, it steadily changed the playing field for gender equality under United States law by assuring that legal and administrative sex-based rulings were subject to a higher standard of judicial review. More importantly, it has not yet directly met the same level of violent—sometimes permanent—backlash as has often greeted more public, politicized wins.[9]

4. Case Study #2: Poetry

While the body of canonized classical composers is nearly exclusively male, one area of art that has a greater semblance of equality in terms of gender representation is poetry. Anthologies of poetry today include a significantly higher proportion of women than recordings or digital collections of classical music. A comparative survey of popular poetry anthologies and "Best Of" classical music compilations illustrates this nicely. In the book *100 Best Loved Poems* (Smith 1995), published by Dover Publications in 1995, 5 out of 55 poets listed are female. While representation just below 10% may feel like tokenism, the anthology in question includes multiple poems by certain poets. Emily Dickinson, therefore, ties for second place with William Shakespeare for the greatest number of featured poems. In the 2013 collection published by Amazon, *Poem Collection—1000+ Greatest Poems of All Time* (Chityil 2013), 379 poets are featured. Of those dating prior to 1700, 3% of the

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7 Strict scrutiny under the law had been the standard for racial discrimination since the Korematsu v. United States case in 1944.

8 The article is online and The Economist has a policy of not naming their authors, as detailed here: https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2013/09/04/why-are-the-economists-writers-anonymous.

9 "While suffragists won the vote in 1920, the following decade experienced a conservative reactionism similar to that of the Reagan era..." (Marshall 1991, p. 52). We refer as well to the consistent, strengthening backlash to the landmark 1973 "Roe v. Wade" decision which is currently coming to a head in the USA.

poets featured are female (4 out of 127). However, in the category of poets after 1700, 21% of poets featured are women (53 out of 252). Additionally, the book cover depicts a selection of poets, 5 out of 16 of whom are female. These books are not marketed in any gender-specific manner but rather combine male and female poets, ostensibly on the basis of talent and the significance of their contributions. In contrast, the CDs *100 Classical Hits* (Various Artists 2003) and *The Classical Album: The World's Greatest Composers, The World's Greatest Music* (Various Artists 2016) sold on the same platform feature a grand total of zero female composers.

Female poets have been integrated with comparative success into the canon, and the treatment of their work has differed from that of their musical counterparts. Emily Dickinson's first large-scale publications date from 1890 and 1891, 4 and 5 years following her death. They were overwhelmingly successful, with several editions reprinted within the next few years. One reviewer in 1892 claimed, "The world will not rest satisfied till every scrap of her writings, letters as well as literature, has been published" (Buckingham 1989, p. 295). These initial editions, titled simply, *Poems: Emily Dickinson,* presented Dickinson as a poet and an artist. This pattern is not unique to Dickinson; Maya Angelou's first major poetry publication, a collection nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, titled *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie* (Angelou 1971), and Sylvia Plath's *The Colossus and Other Poems* (Plath 1967) enjoyed similar outcomes. As these poets were presented as individuals and artists, focus was not drawn primarily to their gender, but rather to their work.

One reason that gender-specific publications are unlikely to effectively reshape canon practices is because of their relative isolation and limited audience. According to Amazon statistics, the best-selling gender-specific anthology of poetry is *Modernist Women Poets* (Hickman 2014), ranked number 327,000 in the library of books available for purchase on Amazon. Poetry anthologies that do not include exclusively female works but both male and female poetry enjoy better rankings, even those that specify a nationality. Such anthologies range in rankings between 22,000 and 25,000. Though fewer female poets are included within such collections, they reach a far greater number of readers, exposing more individuals to poetry penned by women. This indicates that if a parallel approach were to be applied to female composers (i.e., increased inclusion in gender neutral concerts, digital compilations, books, etc.) it may likewise increase exposure to the compositions by females compared with gender-specific approaches.

Both cases illustrate that employment of more subtle, subversive approaches have historically proven more successful and less prone to opposition than explicitly "feminist" strategies. These advances have proven robust, withstanding the test of time. The place in the poetry canon of Emily Dickinson and Maya Angelou is as secure as ever. Though the recent shift to a markedly conservative majority and bias within the U.S. Supreme Court with the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh may

very well seriously curtail the progress made by Justice Ginsburg and her colleagues, it will take enormous effort to undermine the integrity of decades of legal precedent and systematic progress.

This evidence suggests that gender musicologists may benefit from expanding their tactical arsenals in light of both changing conceptions of and opposition to overt feminism. As justified and reasonable as feminist demands for equality in representation are throughout scholarship, as well as in legislation, politics and social attitudes, the reality is that employing a Trojan horse when possible may be more effective long term than overt, explicit approaches. Quotas, however well-intentioned, inevitably incur backlash and do not alone solve the underlying issues.[10] In other words, instead of demanding that music by women has a fundamental right not to be ignored in public performance and scholarship because of the value of women, it may be more effective at times to instead encourage its acceptance through more subversive means. One key to acceptance, psychologists have indicated, is exposure.

5. The Mere Exposure Effect

How can we generate acceptance without inciting backlash? Psychology indicates that acceptance, or "liking", is directly linked to recognition and familiarity, which in turn is produced by exposure. The Mere Exposure Effect, an observation that "the liking for a stimulus increases on repeated exposure to that stimulus" was first recognized by Robert Zajonc in 1968 and has been reaffirmed by numerous publications between 1978 and 2016 (Montoya et al. 2017, pp. 459–498).

Related research specifies that conscious recognition to exposure is not necessary to promote liking. On the contrary, "the presence of recognition acts only to reduce liking via hastening the effects of satiation" (according to Ye and van Raaij, Montoya et al. 2017, p. 461). The Mere Exposure Effect is most effective when the recipient is exposed to a stimulus repeatedly in small doses, without being consciously aware of the exposure. If conscious recognition of the exposure remains low and relatively unstable, the recipient associates recognition with a liking of the stimulus. If the stimulus is presented more frequently and for longer durations, to the point that the recipient has a strong conscious awareness of the stimulus, liking decreases (Montoya et al. 2017, p. 462).

Zajonc and many other experts who have henceforth studied this effect, therefore, propose, "supraliminary exposed stimuli, relative to subliminally exposed stimuli are associated with activated cognitive processing that 'dilutes' the influence of effective

[10] See (Leibbrandt et al. 2018) and (Krook 2015). This is not new—see (Morantz 1978) for a reflection of systematic eradication of women from the medical profession around 1900 as part of a backlash movement.

processes, resulting in greater positive effects for subliminal than supraliminal presentations" (Montoya et al. 2017, p. 462).

Conclusions regarding the presentation type of new stimuli and its impact on liking are likewise helpful. Stimuli can be presented homogeneously—i.e., the same stimulus presented repeatedly, or heterogeneously, where "stimuli are intermixed as they are presented". Research indicates overwhelmingly that heterogeneous approaches are more effective (Montoya et al. 2017, p. 463).

Applying conclusions drawn from research regarding the Mere Exposure Effect to musicology may explain why overt attempts have not successfully altered repertoire or canon practices. Firstly, the negative effects of supraliminal exposure to stimuli—the negative response to conscious recognition of stimuli—have a parallel in consciously gendered approaches attempting to modify taste and the canon. Attempts to fundamentally change something as weighty as the canon involves persuading a significant group to accept that much of what they understand and believe is fundamentally flawed and that there is a pressing need to adjust their practices accordingly. When persuasion is openly attempted with any thrust, an inevitable result is resistance or backlash. According to psychology, communication science and marketing research, humans are motivated to resist persuasion. They do not want to be influenced and are reluctant to change. In the face of persuasive efforts, individuals commonly recognize persuasion as a threat to their freedom or power. They develop a multitude of strategies to resist overt persuasion, including avoidance, passively ignoring persuasion attempts, contestation, where they actively challenge the message, messenger or methodologies used, and bias-processing where they selectively understand the message in such a way that it reinforces their original attitudes and behavior (Fransen et al. 2015, p. 1201).

The Mere Exposure Effect implies that acceptance of a stimulus may best be gained by subversively and incrementally influencing exposure without overtly drawing attention to specific aims. The result is increased "liking" i.e., acceptance, instead of resistance. The recipient does not then feel intellectually obligated to alter preferences or feel like he or she is being coerced, both of which inevitably result in backlash and limiting change. An ideal approach involves exposing recipients to new or foreign stimuli in small doses over a large period of time, preferably heterogeneously mixed with an already well-known, already accepted stimulus. In this way, the recipient not only is disposed to eventually like and accept the stimulus but, additionally, will attribute the feeling of liking to an own decision and preference instead of outside coercion.

6. Introduction to Guerrilla Gender Musicology

How can the Mere Exposure Effect be applied to classical music canon practices? Could these principles be used by scholars and musicians to fundamentally shift norms in such pervasively conservative institutions?

Guerrilla Gender Musicology is focused on normalization and advocates for adding a bottom-up approach to top-down institutional attempts at change. It advocates for consistent and—most importantly—integrated exposure, utilizing the empirically proven psychological principles laid out in studies of the Mere Exposure Effect. This perspective contends that the integration of women into canon practices requires moving away from primarily presenting female composers in contexts where attention is brought to the gender of the composers.

This can be achieved by reframing, such as moving away from calling these disciplines "gender studies", which is still strongly associated with the "women's studies" from which it emerged (Stromquist 2001), and renaming them Power Studies[11] or Studies in Hegemony. Within musicology and music practice, it further advocates for women being presented the same way as male canonized composers are presented, not because they are male or female, but because they are composers. Rather than pushing particularly for the creation of publications, performances and spaces marked explicitly by "gender" categorizations, our long-term aim should be advocating for male and female, known and unknown composers and their gendered practices to be systematically integrated into textbooks, publications and concert programs, steadily increasing exposure of unknown works and narratives in combination with accepted ones.[12] Without further comment, the assumption is, then, that their compositions are worthy of study and performance. The goal is neither denial nor abdication of these composers' identities as female, but instead a shift away from it being their primary identity. Guerrilla Gender Musicology maximizes Mere Exposure Effect, mirroring similar successful tactics in recent history.

Approaches adopted by Gender Studies or Feminist Musicology have focused almost exclusively on "top-down" approaches, i.e., challenging power structures within institutions, setting quotas for inclusion of works and faculty in institutions and devising winning arguments to change the minds of scholars—all efforts which need to continue. That being said, back in the 1990s, Susan McClary pointed to

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[11] This term was proposed by Dr. Marie-Agnes Dittrich at the conference *Compositrices et interprètes en France et en Allemagne: approches analytiques, sociologiques et historiques* in Vienna in June, 2019 at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien. Dittrich contended that she is regularly confronted by male students and occasionally even faculty who do not feel Gender Studies have any application to their lives, despite their being human and therefore in possession of gender. This underlines how conflated in perception Women's Studies and Gender Studies continue to be.

[12] Understanding of course, that convincing decision-makers in this field to do so is a challenge in and of itself. These changes begin with the likeminded.

embedded institutional—particularly educational—issues which reinforce the canon through its various practices. She indicates in "Reshaping a Discipline" that, "most of us simply have internalized the hierarchy as it was given to us as students" (McClary 1993, p. 406). Despite the aforementioned strides made by gender studies movements and efforts since the 1990s, how much can we say that our mainstream, institutional canon practices have really changed with regard to the inclusion of women composers in mainstream histories, performances and repertories since that time? There is a clear disconnect between the advances made in musicological thought and gender musicology (with regard to breaking the binary, deconstructing notions of authorship, questioning concepts of value, genius, network and agency and de-marginalizing historiography and how burgeoning musicians are instructed and influenced.

We assert that there are still top-down, fundamental changes called for, including reshaping the books intensively used throughout a music student's education (moving away from the binary attitudes of history/herstory, i.e., female composers belong exclusively in women's studies classes, and only there) as well as music programming. The works presented to students as worthy for study and inclusion on their exams and for performance in their final recitals need diversification. Instructors should be offered opportunities to be further educated and provided with accessible, alternative repertoire options in line with modern attitudes towards diversity and inclusion.

All of this is no easy task and will inevitably meet with resistance. The key to minimizing this resistance may lie in focusing on college students at an impressionable age, when they are building and deepening their views on classical music. Guerrilla Gender Musicology advocates for focusing particularly on younger generations of musicians whose tastes and biases are more flexible.[13]

The authors presented one potential practical application of this approach, entitled "Counterpoint", at the conference *Compositrices et interprètes en France et en Allemagne: approches analytiques, sociologiques et historiques* in Vienna, in June 2019. In brief, "Counterpoint" promotes the "radical de-hierarchisation of music" (Macarthur 2010, p. 161) through the creation of an interactive, millennial-oriented, audio-visual YouTube channel. Here, chamber music and lieder compositions, with a heavy weight on marginalized composers, are freely mixed with works established in the canon. The idea is to promote subtle exposure to "unknown" stimuli—here, musical works—combined with known stimuli—here, canonized repertoire—thereby increasing liking without drawing attention to the Otherness of marginalized compositions. It does not aim to appeal to decision-makers, but instead

[13] The likelihood of changing the minds of established musicologists with an ingrained, differing worldview, such as musicologist Michael Walter, is slim. The chance of influencing the tastes of musicians and young audience members who are exposed to repertoire via the internet as much as from peers and teachers today is significantly higher.

to quietly begin reshaping a major part of the modern musical world, fundamentally influencing the next generation of musicians and audiences in terms of repertoire awareness. If students are exposed to a more balanced mix of music during their formative years, the chances of them being more motivated to establish the kind of top-down institutional shifts still required when they—in a generation—are making those sorts of decisions, are arguably increased. If they like and are familiar with quality music of currently marginalized female composers, they may advocate for—or at least be open to—creating space for them in history books and lexica, performing their work in mainstream concerts and including them and their compositions in the history courses and recital/exam repertories of the next generation of students.

A shift in mindset from overt to subtle integration may also increase prospective audiences while striving for equality. While gender equality is a generally agreeable concept today, many disagree on the details. Some believe that women should be equally represented in the canon, and others feel that female composers should be included purely on whatever they define as merit-based standards. A concert dedicated exclusively to female composers is appealing only to those who believe that we should actively strive for a more representative canon, but those who feel that gender should not influence inclusion will have objections. A concert that happens to include women without explicitly advocating a feminist cause leaves the audience with the implicit understanding that interest in the composition, not the gender of its creator, was the primary motivation for its programming choices. In other words, the former appeals to those who value equal gender representation but may repel those who see gender studies or feminism as problematic or distasteful. The latter has a chance to appeal to everyone.

Quotas, gender-specific literature and events and publications have all been valuable steps towards the legitimization and availability of scholarship around marginalized composers. They have, however, also experienced pushback and have their limitations. If over half of millennials espouse feminist values but dislike being identified by the term feminist (Refinery 2018) and if gender studies and feminist musicology are subject to backlash, it is time to rebrand and evolve our standards of how gender is packaged and presented. It is time to shift and multiply our approaches. Our feminist strategies for increasing gender equality must continuously evolve in order to more effectively involve women in classical music canon practices. Avoiding the language of feminism/gender in certain circumstances and focusing on emerging musicians and audiences, not merely on decision-makers in the classical music community, may grant this subtle approach to integration more long-term success than frontal offensives. If less consistently overtly linked to feminism, these efforts may also be more effectively guarded from common reactions of strawmanning and resistance.

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Curatorial Account

Precarious Art: How an Intersectional Approach to Exhibiting Led to Multi-Dimensional Performances of Identity

Stacie CC Graham and Katharina Koch

Abstract: *Precarious Art* was a three-part exhibition and event series that took place between 2015 and 2018 in Berlin, London and Bayreuth. The first installment, *Precarious Art: Protest and Resistance*, took place at alpha nova & galerie futura (Berlin) in 2015. It included an exhibition, film and spoken-word evenings as well as a two-day symposium. The subjects of racism and sexism within the Berlin art establishment as experienced by Black women artists and women artists of color were addressed. Participants included artists, academics and activists, who identified and discussed discriminatory structures and representation practices. The goal was to flesh out courses of action toward breaking open oppressive mechanisms as well as to build networks and alliances in order to initiate a sustainable collaborative process. The second, *Precarious Art: Artificial Boundaries*, took place at alpha nova & galerie futura as well as 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning (London) in 2017. The exhibition and interactive workshops confronted the possibilities, realities and strategies toward realizing long-term change in the struggle of daily and structural racist and sexist conditions in general, as well as within the art establishments of Berlin and London. The final installment, *Precarious Art: From Reflections to Mandate*, took place at the Iwalewahaus (Bayreuth) in 2018. With art and video installations as well as a panel discussion, the artists and curators reflected on the cultural shift that is taking place across Europe and to what extent this shift, on the one hand, can be resisted through art and, on the other hand, worsens the precarity of the personal lives of the artists. The unexpected thread that tied these three installments most closely together was the—both intentional and unintentional—performance of identities. In this article, we use different works from the three installments to exemplify the specificity of the precarity of intersecting identities by illustrating the importance of performing those identities as a survival strategy.

1. Introduction

Precarious Art was a three-part exhibition and event series that took place between 2015 and 2018 in Berlin, London and Bayreuth. It was organized in close collaboration between Stacie CC Graham, Katharina Koch, Marie-Anne Kohl, and the Berlin-based art space alpha nova & galerie futura. The overarching purpose of the series was to center Black women artists and women artists of color, their work and their experiences within the art establishment. The fact that this group was intentionally 'centered' points to their status in society, in that groups that encompass the greatest positions of power must not be intentionally centered because their centering is by default. While the purpose of the series was to normalize the existences and experiences of Black women artists and women artists of color, their marginalized positions in their profession and in society at large required space to unpack. This was not only true for the artists and their personal identities; their choices in work and their positioning of that work continuously highlighted to what extent identities—however intentionally or unintentionally, directly or indirectly—are performed through artistic and creative practices.

In this article, we use different works from the three installments of *Precarious Art* to exemplify the specificity of the precarity of intersecting identities by illustrating the importance of performing those identities as a survival strategy.

In the following, we define some of the terms that we use throughout the chapter. These are terms that have, to a certain extent, become ubiquitous in mainstream publications. We believe it is important to define them here, so that we share a point of departure with our readers.

1.1. White Supremacy

The discussion of defining white supremacy has again become relevant over the last three years with the US presidential election of 2016 as well as the rise of populism across all of Europe and beyond. The origins of race and white supremacist ideology are rooted in colonial America (Olusoga 2017). Current discourse in the West focuses on how wide and/or flat to cast the net of calling a person, institution or party white supremacist as well as how that effects vital distinctions among them. European discourse excludes itself from consideration, firmly claiming all expressions of racism to be a US-American issue. For the purposes of this chapter, we offer a framework of white supremacist ideology through the following definition of racism.

Racism, as delineated by Grada Kilomba, is attended by three simultaneous features: first, the construction of difference. An individual is described as different on account of categories that contribute to their identity in society. In that description, a group of people becomes the norm, the reference point from which all others 'differ'. So, the question is then asked "who is different from whom?" (Kilomba 2010).

Secondly, these 'differing' groups are then arranged hierarchically, and difference becomes identifiable using tools such as scarcity, shame, stigma and others. Finally, these differences are assigned positions of power or lack thereof. Power must be evaluated from economical, historical, political and social perspectives for the entire group, not simply individual members of the group. According to Kilomba, this is the defining point. Non-white racial groups can neither be racist nor perform racism, because economically, historically, politically and socially, they do not possess the power that whites do (Kilomba 2010). Other terms, such as prejudice, must be found and used to convey their actions against other races. This definition can be used for other -isms as well: sexism in a patriarchal society; homophobia in a heteronormative societ; and classism in a capitalist society.

With the above understanding of racism, the dangerous consequences of statements by white supremacists, such as David Lane, become clearer. He is quoted as saying, "we must secure the existence of our people and the future of White children". With the understanding of economic, historical, political and social power, this statement becomes a threat rather than one of evolutionary survival.

1.2. Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw set out to re-analyze the justice system due to a realization that the tendency was to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis. She examined how this single-axis framework was dominant in US antidiscrimination law and also reflected in feminist theory and antiracist politics. In race discrimination cases, discrimination tended to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus was on race- and class-privileged women. This focus on the most privileged group members marginalized those who are multiply burdened (Crenshaw 1989).

Today the term intersectionality is an often misused, contentious placeholder for saying something is complicated and thus cannot be further processed. Instead intersectionality should be treated as a lens through which it becomes possible to locate where power lies, collides and interlocks. Without an intersectional framework, an erasure of the experiences of those outside of the above-defined norm is the result.

1.3. Performance of Identity

Identity takes on many forms, such as ethnicity/race, gender, nationality, profession, religion/faith, sex and much more. There are indeed many who have argued that all of the previously named forms of identity can be reduced to (social) constructs originating from societal and/or cultural norms. In alignment with the spaces created for the artists who actively contributed to the exhibitions and events, we do not force philosophical, cultural or societal boundaries upon their identities. The artists whose work is examined below personally identified—at the

time of their contributions—as Black women artists or women artists of color. The performances that we examine are not their artistic contributions but rather their approach, positioning and explication of their artistic contributions.

According to Judith Butler, there is no gender without language (Butler 1990). That means that there is no gender that precedes language. It follows that there is no 'I' outside language, since identity is a signifying practice. Just as one performs identity in their choice of speech, clothing, hair and other cultural and socio-economically identifiable markers as (pre-)determined by the collective norm (the norm here being defined as fit for the relevant collectively shared context), it is, from our point of departure, so that the artists also performed their artistic identities through their selection, presentation and positioning of their works set within a context of exhibitions and events directly addressing their socially constructed identities of race and gender within the establishment of their culturally constructed identity of profession.

2. Multi-Dimensional Performances of Identity within the Project *Precarious Art*

2.1. Precarious Art: Protest and Resistance

The first installment, *Precarious Art: Protest and Resistance* (2015), took place at alpha nova & galerie futura in Berlin. It confronted the subject of structural and everyday racism within the Berlin art establishment. At the center of this inquiry was the concept intersectionality.

It is necessary to effectively recognize these social constructs, in their entirety, as forms of discrimination. For this purpose, we used an approach cemented by bell hooks, the US American feminist academic and activist, that consistently connects the structures of capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy and white supremacy in their entanglement and interaction (hooks 1996).

In her theoretical approach, hooks illustrates how the named structures in their entanglement lead to multiple forms of discrimination, marginalization and exclusion. In particular, she validates Black women and women of color as those most affected. At the same time, however, by developing a critical awareness of the interaction of these power structures, she points toward the possibility of resistance and the adoption of a strategic stance against all fronts in the process of self-determined social transformation.

We used this approach as our point of departure in order to subject the Berlin art establishment as a white, non-migrant, mostly male-dominated domain to a critical review and survey. At the same time, we wanted to explore together with the invited artists and theoreticians resistant possibilities of undermining the *white* art establishment—deconstructing and creating alternative counter spaces for art.

Even a cursory glance reveals that the actors involved in both established art spaces as well as so-called off spaces are almost always white and (re-)produce networks that are also predominantly white. A violent colonial past underlies this visible dominance of white actors which bred racist knowledge, structures and imaginations, the consequences of which persist into the present and continue to form the basis of the discrimination, exploitation, stereotyping, and exclusion of Black people and people of color. For example, Black artists and artists of color often still experience myriad forms of othering in the contemporary Western art scene, including outright exclusion or being marked as 'special' or even 'exotic' within it. They are stereotyped and marginalized and, as cultural producers, are reduced to their identity as a Black person or are invited for this very reason: to participate in an exhibition explicitly oriented towards the art of Black people and people of color (Micossé-Aikins 2011).

It becomes clear that, with few exceptions, Black women artists and women artists of color are not the decision makers in this sector. Further, there are few spaces in which they can present their work or in which they feel represented. They experience these structures not only as racist but also as sexist and therefore encounter their field of work—art—in many respects as exclusionary and precarious.

This statement is not based on statistical surveys, which simply do not exist within the German context. Instead, we consciously refer to the statements of Black artists and artists of color, to which we have access as members of the Black community or as allies to the community for years. In the lectures and discussions that took place within the framework of *Precarious Art: Protest and Resistance*, these experiences were also repeatedly described, and both individual and collective strategies of confronting it discussed.

We regard the articulation, recognition and analysis of subjective and collective experiences as a method of research and knowledge production equivalent to classical research approaches—especially those that make the voices and perspectives of marginalized people in hegemonic discourses audible and visible. In doing so, we reject the notion that the experiences of Black people and people of color are not enough and must always be backed up with quantitative research. We believe that demanding 'data and research' to back up statements that Black people and people of color make about their lived experiences is another way to invalidate, discredit and ultimately ignore them.

On the basis of the question of possibilities to adopt, infiltrate or produce alternative contexts, a dialogue on the different strategies emerged during the project, how Black women and women of color, as creative artists, can counteract structural racism, everyday racism, sexism as well as—more generally—their experiences of marginalization and non-representation in a white art establishment.

Strategies can be practiced as an expression of protest; they can also be implemented in the form of resistance through creating new structures and spaces.

Furthermore, discussions developed on the extent to which (art) spaces can provide true inclusion and what solidarity practices are imperative to do so. These discussions included a critical self-analysis and reflection of actual perspectives on the part of white actors in the art scene in order to put their spaces and thereby their privilege at disposal.

The project sought to highlight, break down and introduce long-term changes in discriminating structures and representation practices. With an examination of racism and sexism, an enduring discussion could be strengthened around possibilities for more inclusive and joint practices as well as the formation of networks and alliances. In the following, one example of work that illustrates such themes is examined.

2.1.1. The Company We Keep

The Company We Keep was commissioned by the three exhibition curators and became a collaborative work by the artists Melody LaVerne Bettencourt, Karina Griffith and Lerato Shadi. Initially, the curators suggested that the three artists might consider allowing an open studio for the new work that they would create for the exhibition, so that visitors could be present and observe the process. However, one of the artists felt strongly against this idea, as it might, in her opinion, perpetuate the European pastime of human zoos so often enacted and forced upon the Black female body. While that was not the intention of the curators, and there would have been enforceable boundaries to prevent such a context, the open studio became inconceivable after the utterance of such a possibility.

Instead, the artists decided to transform the white gallery space into a black space both literally and figuratively. Transforming the white into a black cube is a practice of appropriation and deconstruction of space and, simultaneously, a symbolic act. Below, their collective artists' statement is directly quoted:

> "As Black women living in white spaces that are not open to us, we wanted to thematize what it would be like or look like to live in a Black-friendly world, with the understanding that pro-Black does not mean anti-white, even though historically pro-white has meant anti anybody else. As Black women, as artists, as sisters, as mothers, we are cultural producers. As such we must deal with the fact that our perspectives are neither represented nor heard. The expectation when walking into a gallery space is to find white walls, just as it is expected to walk into spaces of power and privilege and find that those spaces are white spaces. In Germany, Europe, whiteness equals 'neutral'. We are questioning that.

> *Wir definieren uns selbst und lassen uns nicht definieren*. We locate tomorrow by becoming our own storytellers. We listen to the pain in Black knowledge. It is present in our growing consciousness. Our interconnectedness is our history and our strength. We invite the Black Atlantic to the table. Whether the Black women on the wall are famous or not is irrelevant. They reflect our complexity and our diversity. We are all of them and they are all of us. This is the company we keep" (artists statement in the frame of Precarious Art: Protest and Resistance, alpha nova & galerie futura, 2015).

The artists painted the walls black and used one of the longside walls for writing the names of Black women and women of color on it over the course of several days. The writing itself became a performative act. They spoke the names of the women aloud before writing them on the wall. They told the stories behind the names. The names were those of women from the past and present whom they admire, who inspired them in their careers as artists or who have other significant meanings for their personal and/or professional biographies. More than one hundred names were written, ranging from the very well-known Angela Davis and Toni Morrison to the names of family members, aunties, friends and colleagues. The named women received a personal appreciation with the exhibition that many of them have never received in their everyday existences.

The work showed and interlinked different layers of interventions into hegemonic, unequal socio-political structures by highlighting and performing identities: On the one hand, hegemonic historiography, which is based on exclusions and identity-political attributions, was countered by the visualization of largely marginalized female biographies. The names of the women on the wall demanded an audience. At the same time, they represented another form of narration: The oral history practices, as practiced in the performative act of writing and mutual narration of the artists on the individual biographies, undermined prevailing productions of history and knowledge and contrasted them with decolonial narratives and modes of narration.

On the other hand, one could consider this way of collaborative writing and storytelling an act of empowerment in order to allow an invisibilized collective as well as individual histories and knowledge to be experienced. Moreover, the artistic practices intervened into the *white* structures of a self-defined feminist art space. By doing so, they highlighted and confronted the privileges of the *white* actors of and in the space.

Within the framework and discussions during the project *Precarious Art: Protest and Resistance* it became clear that a central question was continually posed and needed to be attended to: Who gives whom space to speak, how and under what conditions are representation practices shaped? Even though the performance of identities, as such, was not an intended or direct subject of the exhibition and event

series, the notion of performing identities was broached in the art works as well as discussions.

2.2. Precarious Art: Artificial Boundaries

The second installment of the series, *Precarious Art: Artificial Boundaries*, took place at alpha nova & galerie futura as well as 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning (London) in 2017. The exhibition and workshop series confronted the possibilities, realities and strategies toward realizing long-term change in the struggle of daily and structural racist and sexist conditions in general, as well as within the art establishments of Berlin and London.

With *Precarious Art: Artificial Boundaries* the curators strived to meet their responsibility and duty to not only continue the discussion but also further the creation of art as well as subject-, medium-, and cross-regional exchange and collaboration among artists. bell hooks wrote: "[...] so what we see is that the mass media, film, TV, all of these things, are powerful vehicles for maintaining the kinds of systems of domination we live under, imperialism, racism, sexism etc. Often there's a denial of this and art is presented as politically neutral, as though it is not shaped by a reality of domination" (hooks 1996, p. 221).

The focus of this installment was on reimagining history and its documentation. It was structured around the question of who is telling whose story. It included an exhibition featuring artworks by Helen Cammock (London) and Rajkamal Kahlon (Berlin) as well as workshops in creative writing and theater. The works by the two artists indicated an examination of the Self set in a historical context as well as a confrontation with the type of hegemonic history writing that categorically marginalizes Black women artists and women artists of color and orders them according to niches corresponding to assigned identity. The artists challenged these exclusionary practices with self-empowering representations and in their own storytelling. Through performance, video, painting, and installation these themes were illustrated through a selection of existing as well as new works that the artists chose to present in the exhibition.

Alongside the exhibition in Berlin, workshops in the areas of theater/performance and creative writing were delivered. The workshops' content, aesthetics and media served as input for further development and creative expression, which included a reflection on the workshop process as a whole. Moreover, collective experimentation and production using different artistic genres while questioning practices of representation, community and public spaces, exchange and network building among the participants remained a priority.

The workshops were an important addition to this iteration of *Precarious Art* in that they responded to some of the feedback the curators received in 2015 that artists

and participants want to do more than intellectualize the subject matter. They wanted to become active in this space and explore the possibilities of protest and resistance via creative expression. Such practices foster not only moments of empowerment and solidarity but create and strengthen other narratives.

This project as such aimed to generate and disseminate knowledge in such a way that members of the underserved and underrepresented communities were not put in a position of educating those from socio-politically privileged points of departure. The intention was to raise the visibility of these artists and those they represent within a context of the 'norm' rather than from the gaze of a deviant political object. The artists presented their work and themselves as a part of the 'norm' and simultaneously as specific political subjects. In the following the works of the two exhibiting artists are detailed.

2.2.1. Helen Cammock Artworks

Helen Cammock works with photography, video, poetry, writing, printmaking and installation. Her practice considers how individual and collective experiences embody the consequences of structural inequality by exploring differing societal experiences within systems of representation. She weaves different contexts and forms together, and her fragmented narratives cross boundaries of time and place.

In the exhibition she presented two new video works. In her piece *There's a Hole in the Sky Part I*, Cammock took up questions regarding cultural and human values. She interacted with workers of one of the last sugar refineries in Barbados, as well as a sugar and rum plantation geared towards tourism in the island nation. The soundtrack that accompanied the film contained fragments of dialogue about work and cultural transfers created through the use of prose and song lyrics—the artist's own texts, excerpts from newspapers, as well as texts from writers like Maya Angelou, among others—in a separation between what is seen and what is heard.

The piece *There's a Hole in the Sky Part II: Listening to James Baldwin* is an imagined conversation with the American writer James Baldwin. In this video, Cammock dealt with the voluntary and involuntary migration history of Black writers and dancers from America to Europe, where they hoped to find more recognition and work opportunities. The film explored the dynamic between appropriation and power on multiple levels. The levels of image and sound were also formally separated and, in their artistic recombination, created a distinct language and aesthetic. Cammock described putting herself into the video as "having a stake" in the work. In her opinion all work is political, because humans are political beings. Through this conversation, she found a route into her work that gave room to explore different themes. She saw it as a way to connect her personal experiences with greater social, economic and global concerns.

Cammock's selection of works was especially poignant in respect to the theme of artificial boundaries. As a Black British artist, she explored themes of Caribbean-British (post-)colonial history, culture and the still unresolved and far-reaching economic and structural consequences on societies in the UK as well as on the islands today. This was, perhaps unintentionally, juxtaposed with an imagined conversation with a Black American writer, who was best known for continuously broaching the subject of the effects of racism across all parts of American society in his written and spoken works. After escaping to Europe, he eventually returned to the US yet never fully admitted that Europe was also no refuge from anti-Black racism.

Cammock crossed many geographical borders in her works to illustrate just how intertwined, and thus artificial, these borders are. This became apparent in the differences in responses to her works between the cities of Berlin and London. What those responses shared was the fact that viewers were forced to call into question their assumptions of Blackness and Black Britishness, the shared histories of those lineages and the continued denial of the connectedness and entirety of those identities. Intersectionality was a term the artist used to explain her works: the intersections of forced industries, forced migration and, hence, forced identities.

2.2.2. Rajkamal Kahlon Artworks

Rajkamal Kahlon's works are primarily interdisciplinary and question the formal and conceptual limits of painting, photography and sculpture. She uses images of colonialism—multiple materials from anthropological research from the late 19th and early 20th century—in order to juxtapose them with powerful, contemporary racist representational and behavioral practices in the wake of the 'war on terror.' She explores the visual legacy of ruling systems and makes continuities in hegemonic visual language visible.

In her selection of artworks for this exhibition, Kahlon showed the video work *Peoples of Afghanistan* (2016), a collage from found footage from the internet of an American bomber attack on Afghan territory and a slide projection with photographs of Afghan men. The photos were created in the 1960s during anthropological fieldwork led by Russian researchers and were published under the title *Physical Anthropology of Afghanistan*. In this installation connections are established between colonial representational practices in the form of anthropological images and modern political violence, which runs under the label of terrorism. Through the transformation, fragmentation, and recombination of images, particularly of such colonized subjects, Kahlon frees them of their original connotation and gives them, their bodies and histories, back their dignity. Bodies in Kahlon's works are, therefore, not only objects of political and intimate violence but also become an (experiential) space for transformation and resistance.

Two related canvas works from Kahlon's series *Blowback* (2013) were also shown. In her choice of the paintings, she exhibited two people, two faces who were first anonymized by German researchers cataloguing 'natives.' With these paintings she seeks to restore lost and forgotten identities as well as the dignity that was stolen from them. She goes a step further in dressing them in camouflage shirts in order to question who and what bodies get pathologized and criminalized. At the same time, the camouflage posed a representation of weapons and of arming the figures, so that they may protect themselves. Asking the question how to give former 'objects of study' a voice, she positioned the works as a response to the brutalized representation that certain bodies experienced during colonization as well as a reminder of how these histories and their present-day iterations accompany us every day. In contrast to earlier works where the artist often highlighted the violence enacted upon Black and brown (female) bodies, these works focused much more on the agency of the subjects by conjuring their own voice.

2.2.3. Similarities in Research Methodologies and Approaches

A convergence of research methodologies could be witnessed in the works of Cammock and Kahlon. The artists worked with state archives in order to develop the direction of their work. The archives that the artists sourced functioned as a catalogue of identities, yet the individuality of those identities was lessened through the act of archiving, if not completely overwritten. With their works the artists found a way to activate the archives and recreate the viewers' understanding of these forgotten identities.

Furthermore, similarities in their approaches to re-defining the 'subjects of study' could be witnessed in their videos and video installations, respectively. At first glance, the artists' works appear to study the 'native' through othering—identifying the differences of the native to the 'norm' as defined by the colonizer. In time it becomes clear that the works position the native as othering the colonizer. The artists achieved this through a multi-layered approach. Natives are centered as political subjects, and their stories unfold from their own perspective. They are offered the opportunity to tell their stories through interviews, imagined conversations and reconstructed faces as well as dignity. Moreover, their culture and society are contextualized in order to identify and illustrate the long-term and far-reaching economic and political consequences of being stripped of their humanity through centuries of colonialization. Lastly, the artists offer their subjects agency over their own destiny, in spite of intergenerational trauma and injustice, and leave the viewers with an overwhelming feeling of hope, in that a self-determined transformation of identity feels possible.

2.3. Precarious Art: From Reflections to Mandate

After journeying through Berlin and London, the exhibition and event series made its way to Bayreuth's Iwalewahaus under the title *From Reflections to Mandate*. The focus was on finding routes to implement the previously developed anti-racist and pro-womanist vision and strategies. Further, the curators felt it important to give artists who had participated in previous installments, as well as artists who had connected to the work of previous installments an opportunity to come together, exchange and somehow find a type of closure to what began three years earlier. Alongside an installation piece, video and poetry reading, the curators (both authors of this chapter) and artists presented work and insights of the preceding installments and debated to what extent change is possible and what steps must be taken to enact what had been discussed. In the following, an installation piece presented for the final exhibition is described.

Chair Nr. 38: Steering Identities, Heartbeats, Gun Shots in This Ch/Br_est

Of German-Jamaican parentage and brought up in England, China and Cyprus, Sonia Elizabeth Barrett has an international range of cultural influences. With a first degree in the subjects of philosophy, literature and international relations and a second degree in studio practice, her approach to work is distinct in that her purpose is intentional yet she explicitly allows a great deal of room for the viewer to explore and discover elements that were undisclosed and perhaps even unintended.

The artwork *Chair Nr. 38: Steering Identities, Heartbeats, Gun Shots in This Ch/Br_est* is made of a leatherette executive swivel chair with a footstool and massage function. It is part of a series of works with furniture Barrett has been dealing with for the past four years. In choosing this particular work for the event, the artist incisively refers to the subject of identity.

Barrett only works with used furniture. The used chair was a significant aspect of the piece. The executive swivel chair itself is made of black leather and is quite large. As she explained to the audience, the chair is viewed anthropomorphically and creates an impression in the imagination of an important person, a manager, or in German 'der Chef.' Without being directed, most people will think of a man using the chair. The next layer is the foot of the chair which—turned upside down—looks similar to the steering wheel of a car. Barrett uses that association to profoundly demonstrate driving or steering one's own identity by placing the wheel in an area that could be considered a face. However, in a twist, the central part of that face has a barrel. Yet another layer makes this feature especially stark: the chair has 14 massage functions, which in some cases sound like a weapon being fired and, in others, a heartbeat sometimes rapid and sometimes slow.

Barrett discerningly positions the contrasting elements: a used black leather executive swivel chair with soothing massage functions most likely used by a white

middle-class man holding a powerful position is transformed into an androgynous black figure that is beating its chest, or simply just trying to be as you listen to its heartbeat, or perhaps even an 'imposing' black figure completely powerless while being gunned down. At the viewing, she asked audience members to consider who is allowed to steer their own identity and who is allowed to be vulnerable. She also illustrated the ease with which identity can be manipulated. The artist states:

> [. . .] Whilst it was not a conscious decision I feel sure that the car based shootings of Black individuals in the USA are being worked out in this piece. The footstool which forms the hood of the figure has the text 'footstool do not sit here' written on it. As sitting on Black individuals has constituted some of the most shocking images of police brutality on Black people I think this is apt. [. . .] What is it that people see when they see a black figure and shoot could it be this animal, object, figure thing? (Sonia E. Barrett, artist statement)

Black identity undergoes a form of empowerment and emancipation in Barrett's work. Even parts of the title—*steering identities*—show a self-determined path. The steering wheel as a steering and thinking head is a clear sign; heartbeats and gunfire, however, are ambivalent. They suggest vitality and activity, but also anxiety (palpitations) and (passive) bodies, which are always in danger of becoming the target of racist repression and aggression. Thus, Barrett makes it clear that Black identity within a system subjected to white supremacy remains fragile, but also has powerful potential through community-building, alliances and solidarity to counter this system bit by bit.

3. Conclusion

Precarious Art, as a series, sought to create a space for Black women artists and women artists of color to exhibit, perform and simply be without their contributions being limited by or focused on their racial and gender identities. In some ways that stated purpose may appear to be an oxymoron. In that pursuit, it became clear from the first exhibition but also in every performance, installation, talk and discussion that performativity and the performance of identity had somehow become an innate consideration. This revelation is written as an observation rather than a judgment.

The Company We Keep is visionary and empowering by evoking possible decolonized futures and narrations where Black identity has become part of the 'norm' without losing a specific political significance. The works by Cammock and Kahlon function as tools to not only make visible marginalized bodies and identities but also to restore them with dignity and allow their stories to be re-written undermining hegemonic historiography. With *Chair Nr. 38: Steering Identities, Heartbeats, Gun Shots*

in This Ch/Br_est discussions of expectations, stereotyping and survival are invoked while simultaneously sparking notions of community building and solidarity.

Each of these examples creates a sense of urgency to forging a decolonized future through tangible acts and experiences that facilitate an unlearning of (internalized) oppressive behavior.

If indeed a central question is to explore who is telling whose story, then it means, on the one hand, to show how hegemonic historiography and representations are constructed and which roles in particular race and gender (and also other socially constructed categories) play in visibility. On the other hand, it is important to take a self-empowering position in order to reject discriminatory provisions, to fill gaps in history, and to strengthen and normalize other narratives without removing them from their political significance.

Artists' Statements

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