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REFRACT

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Letter from the Editor

Kate Korroch

Visual studies is a method of looking. Yet, it is a method of looking that aims to supersede what we might frame as "visual," interrogating hegemonic tropes vested in that which we "see." Visual studies is a contentious discipline, still preoccupied with defining itself or, perhaps, intent on evading a reified definition. Despite that, dozens of enthusiastic thinkers, including *Refract's* editorial board members, enroll in graduate programs annually in the United States, pointing to the value in such an elusive discipline.

Refract's aim is not to define visual studies, but to allow it to be debated openly through engagement with our contributors and readers. We seek divergent and contradicting perspectives and methodologies and, instead of singularly aligning with one, we highlight the details, which embody a visual studies that promotes our mission. As a journal we do not proclaim one particular strategy, instead we promote visual studies as an accumulation of diverse methods related to what is "seen" propagated by sundry thinkers. Through this and subsequent issues, we seek to enact a visual studies practice of prodding the familiar, stepping outside of boundaries, and bringing peripheries closer to an ever-evasive center.

Refract's founding members saw a need within visual studies as a discipline, within our own practices, and the scholarship with which we engage, to involve diverse histories and geographies that tend to be on the fringes of visual studies practices. The discipline emphasizes contemporary art and predominantly focuses on the United States and Europe, while other locations, cultures, and time periods are pushed to the periphery or completely unaddressed. For our inaugural issue, we received a number of submissions that undertake this quandary and over half of the contributions in the first issue begin to parse this dilemma. Our goal will

not be accomplished in one single issue but is one that will be achieved over time and will remain our guiding beacon through issues to come.

Introduction to "Refraction"

Refraction. The word evokes notions of light, optics, wave transmission, energy, and oblique angles. It is used in the field of physics to refer to the way a wave changes direction upon contact with a new medium through which it is transmitted. For instance, when sound waves hit the surface of water, their frequency changes—you may have experienced this yourself, noticing how noises become muffled when you are submerged in a busy swimming pool. Or this might occur when light waves, travelling through the air, come into contact with a new medium. For instance, you may use a straw in a glass of water and notice the straw looks bent at the point where it crosses the threshold of the water's surface.

Taking this notion of bending and shifting waves, the inaugural issue of *Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal* asks how refraction can be a tool for critically engaging with ways of seeing. Refraction can refer to ways in which viewpoints, epistemologies, or discourses can shift direction, so to speak. One could expand this metaphor to ask how changes in "medium" provoke different perceptions of the world. How might scholars, artists, thinkers, or makers manipulate these shifts in order to challenge hegemonic ways of knowing? To refract knowledge is to complicate discursive categories that are largely taken for granted. How can scholarly analysis, artistic projects, dialogues, and reviews refract dominant histories, geographies, cultural attitudes, among other things, and offer different possibilities for "knowing" and experiencing the world? This issue is an initial step into such an inquiry. Diverse in subject matter and methodological approach, the contributions in this issue reconsider existing narratives about the body, gender and sexuality, race, state control, the archive, trauma and memory, the built environment and space, and technologies of seeing.

Jamee Crusan's "The Double Edge of Visibility and Invisibility: Cassils and Queer Exhaustion" is a tour-de-force exploration of the work of gender non-conforming trans masculine artist Cassils. Cassils often uses their body in self-

portraits, videos, and visceral performances in which they appear isolated, fighting, or enduring instances of self-violence. Through two chapters and an epilogue, Crusan expands on the theory of "queer exhaustion," which the author defines as a constant "negotiation between invisibility and visibility," a dealing with feelings of self-erasure and self-abnegation that is usually required of "those outside heteronormative constructs to pivot on a dime for their safety." Like other pieces in this issue, Crusan's "The Double Edge" discusses how dominant technologies of seeing have historically sought to produce normative bodies. Crusan's piece is a certain, and much needed, elaboration on trans and non-binary academic visibility, exemplifying how scholars can "refract" dominant discourses by engaging with marginalized issues. Crusan also uses "refraction" as a writing strategy, mingling theoretical investigations with poignant first-person writing, recounting episodes such as being misgendered at age eight, or realizing their own past traumas while bearing witness to Cassils' jolting performances.

A number of the contributors to this issue use a similar strategy of introspective, first-person writing in order to engage with their subject matter in ways previously considered "off limits" for scholars. For instance, Joshua Nash's contribution, "Linguistic Spatial Violence: The Muslim Cameleers in the Australian Outback," is about the architectural and linguistic traces of some 2,000 Muslim cameleers crossing the Australian desert in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, Nash's piece is no mere historical account. He writes about his own search for this history in architectural form as well as in place-names littered across the outback. His writing is entirely introspective; he considers himself to be yet another nomadic traveler in this desert space, on a pilgrimage following the same path taken by the cameleers. Nash continuously refers to his field work as a "search," which is significant for it implies there are still no "answers," but merely clues, musings, observations, and emotions. His contribution to *Refract* is one manifestation of this search—it is not the final say. In this way, the article itself and Nash's writing style are examples of how historical narratives are constantly refracted through time, just as the architectural remnants of the Muslim cameleers constantly shift as they are discovered or lost.

While creating this issue, *Refract*'s editorial board was struck by the methodological choices our contributors were making, as well as the innovative content their submissions explored. Rather than merely put them side by side in an academic journal, we wanted to take more time to engage with the pieces as well as include areas of transparency in the editorial process. We have therefore included interviews with three of the contributors, including Joshua Nash's piece. This was partly in order to delve more fully into each submission—journal entries are often left "untouched" and the reader is assumed to make of it what they will.

Rather, this issue assumes all submissions are windows into larger discussions where more refraction is always a potential.

In our interview with Joshua Nash, we asked him to elaborate on how he uses strategies such as "spatial writing," a method not usually applied to architectural history. We also asked about the role of emotion in his writing style and how he views this piece as an example of "sensuous scholarship." Readers will find Nash's piece full of interesting editorial details such as moments in which one phrase contains a multitude of meanings: for instance, rather than saying something is "spatially violent," Nash describes it as "spatial(ly violent)." In moments such as this, something can be simultaneously spatial *and* spatially violent. It is this multiplication of meanings that evokes the notion of refraction, and the interview with Nash looks more closely at the thinking behind his strategic writing choices.

The *Refract* team also interviewed Erick Msumanje and Alexis Hithe about the film, *VOLTA VOLTA* (2017), included in this issue. Msumanje's short film explores the ways in which the Black body moves through "ritual spaces" and "ritual exchanges" and how it functions as a "container" that carries collective memory. While the first half of the film shows people engaged in mundane, everyday activities, the second half switches to a pitch-black, "digital" space. Incorporating documentary practices, the film ultimately subverts the genre of documentary and its voyeurism because the camera captures moments of people looking directly back at the viewer with a sense of knowing. Moreover, the artist statement was written by Msumanje's collaborator, Alexis Hithe. Hithe wrote the statement after viewing *VOLTA VOLTA* for the first time, and this exchange of authorship challenges the notion of individuality and isolation that is inherent in the artist statement, reflecting instead the "collectivity of the Black creative spirit."

In the interview with Msumanje and Hithe, *Refract* asked them to elaborate on the intersections of the Black body, the digital (or, as Msumanje puts it, "digitality"), the use of space, and the significance of ritual. The initial questions asked of Msumanje and Hithe led to linking *VOLTA VOLTA* to the traditions of the blues and Afrofuturism. One of the most generative ideas from the conversation was put forth by Hithe: "the Black body is a digital experience," as Black people represent themselves on online platforms, yet continue to be represented by and projected upon by others. *VOLTA VOLTA* seeks to disrupt and complicate readings of the Black body.

As Msumanje's *VOLTA VOLTA* exemplifies, one way this issue itself refracts scholarly analysis is by expanding the scope of what is usually in the purview of academic publications. The table of contents includes a wide range of submissions that are not categorized or segregated by medium. Rather, we

encourage our readers to look at the artistic projects interwoven between the scholarly articles as strategies for critically engaging with the refraction of knowledge.

While Msumanje's film focuses on spaces of ritual and digital experience, Mark Augustine's and Joseph Carr's triptych of drawings depict seemingly quotidian places that are also sites of ritual—the exam table, the dental chair, and the public bathroom. *Cough, Spit, Swallow* (2018) depicts these ritual spaces in a way that combines the architectural perspective and the comic illustration. The absence of human figures in the images invites viewers to make associations between the work's title and the three different spatial configurations they see. By looking at the disposition of furniture and its designs, one notices how these intimate, semi-public spaces are carefully constructed as to discipline and control the body. The actions in the title, *Cough, Spit, Swallow,* allude to an ironic take on how the normalized use of these spaces can be overturned or subverted depending on the specific cultural or socio-economic associations the viewer makes.

Other artistic projects reinterpret seemingly factual, objective data in a way that challenges how we come to "see" and "know" the world. *Endangered Data* (2017) by Zachary Norman is one such piece that challenges how atmospheric data is stored and visualized. The video comprises a series of color photographs showing scenic natural landscapes, such as seascapes or mountain views. As the video plays, the natural colors originally registered by the camera slowly transform as parts of the images become highly saturated and shift to bright, psychedelic hues. A clear blue sky changes into a glowing pink and green gradient. Pixels stand out, attracting the viewer's gaze to the quasi-abstract formations. In the artist's statement, Norman explains his interest in scientific data that has become "endangered" due to our current political climate. In the face of conservative, capitalist efforts to deny global warming, scientists working in institutions such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration have sought to "save" governmental data by storing it on private computers. For *Endangered Data*, Norman applied steganography, a cryptographic method through which it is possible to store or hide information within the pixels of a digital image. The shifting colors reveal atmospheric changes such as an increase of methane in the air. The resulting images warn us of a dystopian future, simulating the ultimate dissolution of natural landscapes as we know them. Data—refracted in pixels—becomes a depository of vital information for the planet's future.

Norman's contribution highlights and resists government regulation of information. Another piece that engages with the issue of state control is Henry Osman's "Glitching The State: The Mechanics of Resistance in Ricardo Piglia's La

Ciudad Ausente." This essay provides a new reading of Ricardo Piglia's 1992 novel *La Ciudad Ausente* by focusing on how the glitch serves as a form of resistance against the military dictatorship in Argentina (1976 – 1983). According to Osman, *La Ciudad Ausente* is a "post-trauma science fiction" that takes place in a dystopic Buenos Aires under control of the dictatorship. Combining fragmented and polyphonic language, Piglia's *La Ciudad Ausente* does not develop a linear narration about the horrors of the Argentine Dirty Wars. Instead, the novel engages with the mechanisms of the totalitarian regime through characters such as Elena, a mysterious cyborg machine that produces small fictions and narratives, often mistranslating foreign stories. While other studies have explored the novel's relationship to trauma, mourning, and memory, Osman focuses on the notion of "the glitch," generally defined as a "small, unforeseen computer error." Analyzing Elena's mistakes or mistranslations as glitches—more than simple errors—Osman argues that in the novel they act as a form of resistance. While in Piglia's *La Ciudad Ausente* citizens live in a constant state of amnesia, "oblivious to the crimes of the dictatorship," Elena—as a "female defense machine"— produces a counter narrative to the "official" stories of the state.

As a journal in dialogue with the discipline of visual studies, one of *Refract's* main goals is to present pieces that intervene in histories of seeing and in discourses around vision, visualization, and visuality. Many of the pieces focus on the notion of refracting vision through technologies of seeing, a broad term for the interaction between actual vision technologies (or as apparatuses that help enhance our vision) and discursive practices. A number of contributions to this issue address notions of vision, visuality, and visualization in their efforts to refract dominant ways of seeing. For instance, Natasha Eves reviews the 2009 film *Serious Games III (Immersion)* by Harun Farocki, which looks at a government virtual reality software called "Virtual Iraq" used to assist Post Traumatic Stress Disorder patients. For Eves, this virtual software becomes a mechanism for neutralizing and controlling the way military violence is perceived by the American public: "*Virtual Iraq* offers domestic, controlled environments in contrast to the original sites of trauma. The actual space beyond control becomes a virtual space of absolute control." Like Norman's *Endangered Data* and Osman's "Glitching the State," Eves is concerned with the way technologies of seeing can subvert state control.

Other contributors looked at the potential for technologies of seeing to enable new perceptions rather than function as tools of control. Katie Oates, in her essay "'Tool of Enlightenment': The Dreammachine's *Effects* for Individual Autonomy" discusses Brion Gysin's Dreamachine, invented in the 1960s, as a tool that enables multi-sensory, perceptual awareness and changes the relationship between observer and participant. Oates situates the Dreamachine in the context

of seventeenth century technologies of seeing such as the magic lantern, arguing Gysin's invention was supposed to counter the alienating effects of visuality produced by mass media such as television. Through the flickering effect of the object, viewers would have access to visionary experiences and a new "consciousness."

In the realm of discursive practices, the notion of "technologies of seeing" can be understood in regard to the social constructions that shape the field of visual representation. If one considers how representation is controlled by societal norms, these norms can also be understood as technologies of seeing that need to be constantly challenged in order to open spaces of non-normative visibility. In this issue of *Refract*, an example of such an intervention is Jamee Crusan's aforementioned essay on transgender artist Cassils as well as Ingrid Asplund's challenge to hegemonic categories of knowledge in her essay "Happy Bullish 2011!!!: Olek's Project B." This piece discusses Agata "Olek" Oleksiak's yarnbombing of Arturo di Modica's *Charging Bull* (1989), which endures as a symbol of power and masculinity on Wall Street in New York. *Project B* (2010) was an ephemeral piece; it was taken down shortly after its execution and now only exists in the digital archive. According to Asplund, the yarnbombing of *Charging Bull* represents the unraveling of various categories: masculine and feminine qualities, public and private spaces, art and craft, sculpture and performance. By positioning Olek's work beyond yarnbombing, which has been gendered as a "women's art movement" and dismissed as "craft," Asplund seeks to complicate an easy reading and categorization of *Project B* by considering yarnbombing's legitimacy as an art form, particularly by examining it under the purview of street art. Furthermore, Asplund connects *Project B* to the Occupy Wall Street movement, seeing both as the literal occupation of Wall Street's space with the physical presence of Olek and protesters, respectively. In this way, both Olek's practice and Asplund's writing refract the way artistic production is arbitrarily categorized.

In addition to the contributions discussed above, *Refract* solicited short meditations from two scholars, A. Mārata Ketekiri Tamaira and James Elkins, who are influential for thinking about the methods and dialogues of visual studies. As *Refract* takes shape, its intervention is not to align with one single point of view but to provide examples of visual studies' rich offerings. To this end, we hope each issue will include other voices in the constantly shifting field of visual studies.

A. Mārata Ketekiri Tamaira is a scholar of Māori descent who writes about European representations of Indigenous Pacific Islanders and contemporary art practices that challenge those representations. By using fiction and introspection as part of her analysis, Tamaira complicates histories from angles that are different from the mainstream narratives about the Indigenous Pacific. For this issue, we

asked Tamaira if she would contribute a piece that employs her methodology of pairing subjective, first person narrative with critical analysis. She generously agreed, sharing her review of the installation/performance piece *Dashboard Hula Girl* by Adrienne Pao and Robin Lasser (2017). Tamaira's review is theoretically grounded in the Hawaiian notion of 'ai kai, which refers to the in-between, liminal space where land and sea meet. In a similar fashion, Tamaira's writing "merge[s] scholarly analysis with embodied first-hand experience" in order to "simulat[e] in written form the enigmatic domain that comprises the convergence zone—that is, the 'ai kai—of intellectual understanding and felt encounter."

James Elkins' meditation "What is Radical Writing in Visual Studies?" offers an account of visual studies, specifically on *writing* about visual studies, which simultaneously serves as a call to future scholars to "learn the field you're trained in as well as possible…and then strike out on your own, without looking back." Implicit in this piece is a concern for a perceived presentism within visual studies. Elkins suggests there is an interesting divergence between the direction of visual studies scholarship and its pedagogy. New scholarship seems to be continuously less beholden to a visual studies historiography, at points lacking a crucial self-reflexivity. Elkins argues the primacy of the image within the discipline, and the necessity of the image to itself function as argument, has not yet come to fruition within visual studies. He asks to what extent visual studies scholarship is interested in, or capable of, addressing its unrealized proposition to de-prioritize text in favor of images as mechanisms of analysis, pointing to its original claims: "Images were not to accompany textual arguments, but to actually participate in them, steering and modifying what is claimed in texts."

In this spirit, *Refract* aims to allow artistic projects to fully participate in these conversations not only through the content of each submission but also in the structure of the journal. As noted above, the films, drawings, and photographs interspersed between the essays, and the interviews conducted with some contributors, are ways we can *think with* images rather than use them as mere examples of theories and methodologies that lay elsewhere. Elkins, one voice among many in visual studies, provides a call that is both generative and cautionary and acts as a springboard from which we can complicate disciplinary boundaries and methodologies. We welcome his prod to be self-reflexive and to know our histories even as we begin this project—and are heartened by his challenge.

As *Refract*'s team began writing the introduction, it was made clear that instead of a linear narrative with set themes, the contributions to this issue create a web of ideas that overlap and diverge in often surprising ways. This issue is not the only collection of works that refract knowledge, it is merely one collection of possible avenues of exploration. Our hope for readers of "Refraction" is that they

are able to encounter unanticipated threads that activate, or refract, their expectations. As more issues of *Refract* are published, we hope to continue the fruitful, experimental, and generative dialogues offered in the following pages.

What is Radical Writing in Visual Studies?

James Elkins

From its North American beginnings in the late 1980s, its German beginnings in the 1970s, and its prehistory, going back to Derrida, Benjamin, and before, visual studies has taken as part of its mission the breaking of disciplinary boundaries. Visual studies has always pictured itself questioning conceptual domains and hegemonic identities, inhabiting margins, rethinking received ideas of cultural inquiry, identity, and place. Refraction, the theme of this issue, is one such boundary formation.

Especially in its pre-war incarnations as *visuelle Kultur,* visual studies had broken with art history in its interest in film and photography, and later in animation, gaming, advertising, the digital, and alternative media. And yet one of the founders of visual culture studies, Michael Holly, was wistful and perhaps a little regretful when she remembered the original promises visual studies had made to itself in Rochester in the 1980s, in comparison with the discipline it became. (This is in the book *Farewell to Visual Studies.*) Visual studies had promised itself the daring juxtaposition of previously unstudied theoretical methods with previously unstudied art practices from all times and cultures, but it had solidified into a definable academic practice centered on contemporary first-world visual production, a reasonably predictable roster of theorists, and a consistent politics. Holly herself decamped to a position at the Clark, at the very center of a disciplinary allegiance that the founders of visual studies had avoided.

This paper is a meditation on what might still count as radical or otherwise innovative writing that can still take place under the banner of visual culture studies. I'll take as my example a book I helped edit, called *Theorizing Visual Studies: Writing Through the Discipline*. My co-editors were all graduate students, and all sixty-one of the book's chapters were written by graduate students. I helped out with copyediting and correspondence, and I wrote two of the book's three introductions, but I never voted on which essays should be included, and I never edited for content or made any suggestions about the book's organization.

The idea was to create a next-generation visual studies reader, one that could move past the existing anthologies. The publisher, Routledge, had asked me if I wanted to write a second edition of my book *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (2003). They were hoping, in part, to compete with the two best-selling introductions to visual studies, Nick Mirzoeff's *Visual Culture Reader* and Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken's *Practices of Looking.* This was in 2008. I suggested, in return, that instead of becoming the next "senior" scholar to compile an anthology or introduction to visual studies, it would be interesting to see what the latest writing and thinking looked like. I sent the editor a counter-proposal: I would assemble a group of MA students in visual studies, and we would issue an international call for paper from MA and PhD students around the world.

When we started, the graduate student group that planned *Theorizing Visual Studies* was about twenty people. As time went on—and some people graduated—the group shrank. The book lists five editors: myself, Kristi McGuire, Maureen Burns, Alicia Chester, and Joel Kuennen. It was an outlandish amount of work, as much as I have put in on any other book. First, the students decided they wanted to organize the book according to unusual concepts. Instead of the usual tropes of visual studies—hybridity, post-disciplinarity, nomadism, gender, and so forth—they invented their own, and planned to write a dozen encyclopedia-style entries that would then be sent to the students in other institutions who were going to contribute the bulk of the book, so that the book would present an alphabetically arranged vocabulary for visual studies—a new dictionary for the field, independent of the usual preoccupations. There was a lot of talk at the time about how old-fashioned Mirzoeff's and Sturken and Cartwright's Tables of Contents are. The student group wanted new metaphors and models. But the initial group dispersed and only a few of those essays got written. The remaining editors decided to issue an international call for contributions, still hoping for an A to Z of visual studies on unexpected topics but without the guidance of their original concepts. The initial responses were mixed, and we didn't have enough submissions to comprise a book, so we sent out a second call, using an email database of 11,000 academics and institutions in over 50 countries.

The book finally appeared in 2012. Over four years of work had gone into it. I myself read every one of the contributions, made thorough copyediting notes, sent it back to the authors, and cleaned up the resulting texts. The student editors did the same. Some of the sixty-odd chapters were edited as many as five times. It was by far the most time-consuming project I have ever worked on, including some large edited volumes in a series called the *Stone Art Theory Seminars,* several of which involve over 60 scholars.

From a publishing standpoint, the book was a failure (I think we made around $50 in royalties), and as far as I can tell, it has hardly been reviewed and is seldom assigned in classes. I do not think the reason has to do with the content, which is mainly what I want to revisit here. The lack of sales and textbook adoptions probably has much more to do with the fact that teachers naturally prefer to assign texts written by well-known contributors, or single-authored texts that can be read straight through. *Theorizing Visual Studies* is not easy to read or use.

Of the three introductions, Kristi McGuire's, tells the story of the students' ambitions and hopes, and the way the book metamorphosed from an idealistic post-disciplinary philosophic tract into an enormous anthology of brief chapters. One of my two introductions, the longer one, "An Introduction to the Visual as Argument," is an extended essay on what I still think is visual studies' central claim in relation to art history: visual studies has intermittently but consistently positioned itself as the discipline that will let images *argue,* will let images propose their own *theories.* Tom Mitchell has said this in various ways, and so has Susan Buck-Morss. The idea that the visual is also a form of theory, that there is "picture theory," has been traced to Benjamin and can be found, in other forms, in Jean-Francois Lyotard and others. Visual studies' self-imposed brief was to refuse to let images become ornaments, illustrations, or mnemonics, as they so often are in art history. Images were not to accompany textual arguments, but to actually participate in them, steering and modifying what is claimed in texts. That promise has never materialized, even in Mitchell's texts. This introduction was meant to explain what we all hoped was going to happen in the submissions we were gathering. The call for papers said explicitly that it was important that images should not be used only to illustrate arguments. Images, we said, should participate *as* arguments: they should sometimes direct or deflect arguments, and should be equal participants in whatever theories and interpretations the authors were pursuing. Only two or three of the hundreds of submissions we received did that. The introduction I wrote became an analysis of how visual studies was, in fact, continuing to use images the way art history does: as illustrations to arguments, as ornaments, as mnemonics.

The shorter introduction, "An Introduction to the Visual Studies That is Not in This Book," is a succinct bibliographic introduction to the history of visual studies, visual culture, and *Bildwissenschaft,* including many texts and names, and leading from the early twentieth century to 2009, when it was drafted. It's a useful essay, I think; there still isn't another history like it.

We anticipated that the texts in our reader would be easier to understand if we provided the background of the field because, as it turned out, almost none of the submissions made any extended use of earlier authorities. Lacan, Foucault, and Fanon were largely absent. If a reader were to use our book as her first introduction to visual studies, and if she skipped the introductions, she would have almost no sense that visual studies had been practiced before the twenty-first century. As the shorter essay's title implies, it is an exploration of the presentism of visual studies. I had been surprised by the contributors' detachment from the history of their own field, and their presentism about theory (their lack of interest in their potential dependence on, say, Foucault), but I wasn't disappointed. I thought that might be a sign that the contributors were thinking freely and radically in relation to the pasts they had probably been taught in their various institutions. But a close look at the book—and the exercise of repeatedly reading and re-reading for editorial purposes—made me see that most of the essays in *Theorizing Visual Studies* are conventional in their forms of argument and their politics. There are definitely some brilliant essays in the book, and a few that could easily be models for innovation; and there are a number of essays that explore subjects and art practices that are new to the field. The Table of Contents hints at the intermittent radicalism of the project. It begins:

Airborne Horses—Mike Gibisser
Anaesthetics—Kristi McGuire
Animal—Michelle Lindenblatt
Animations—Nea Ehrlich
Arial—Arden Stern
Ars Oblivionalis—Thomas Stubblefield
Artifact—Lucian Gomoll
Augmented Reality—Horea Avram
Breathing—Vivian Li
Collecting—Josephine Landback
Decolonial—Lara Haworth and Nicole Cormaci
Diaspora—W. Ian Bourland
Double-Consciousness—Cara Caddoo

But the majority of the essays are actually conventional in tone, narrative, interpretive strategies, rhetorical forms, and disciplinary allegiances. They are not the cutting edge of the field: they are the products of scholars just beginning to find their way, and strongly beholden to the expectations of peers and instructors. I know this is a harsh judgment, and there are some genuinely amazing exceptions—essays that should be anthologized in the next visual studies reader, and taught as models—but the overall lesson of the book, for me, points in a different direction.

Here are three of the principal conclusions that I think the book warrants. (Please forgive the long quotations: the passages I'm repeating here—modified from their original settings—present positions that have not been addressed within the field, problems that I think are crucial for the ongoing sense of visual studies.)

(1) Visual studies is presentist in relation to its own history. Here is an abbreviated version of the end of "An Introduction to the Visual Studies That is Not in This Book":

> The contributors to this book are insouciant about visual culture's disciplinary allegiances and historiography, and I take it that is one of this book's principal lessons. There are essays here that keep close to their theoretical mentors— one on Jonathan Crary, another on Georges Didi-Huberman, a third on Jacques Rancière—but most are inventive and opportunistic. And few have much to say about visual studies' sense of itself, at least as that sense can be gleaned from graduate seminars in the history of visual studies, or from journals such as *Journal of Visual Culture* or the University of Rochester's *Invisible Culture*.

> The histories and geographies I have briefly sketched in this introduction are largely a picture of what does not matter in this book. At the same time, those histories are increasingly important to the pedagogy of the field, as they are taught in most introductions—so I wanted to make a gesture in their direction. If you are new to visual studies, the sources listed here are crucial for a sense of the historiography of the field. But they may not matter in a direct, causal fashion: they're more a question of what senses of the recent past are being abandoned in order to make way for new work. The current moment in visual

studies is, I think, partly enabled by an insouciance regarding received versions of its own past: hence this introduction to a visual studies that is not, for the most part, in this book.

This presentism has not yet been addressed. Visual studies seminars and curricula continue to teach the same set of several dozen theorists and scholars. They are required reading, but they are not often part of the living discipline. That's an interesting condition, because it implies visual culture studies feels the need of a sense of its history that it does not use.

(2) Visual studies has not yet found ways to let images participate as equals in the production of arguments. This is from the end of "An Introduction to the Visual as Argument":

It may seem perverse to have written such a long introduction focusing on just this one problematic. It may also seem inappropriate to write an introduction criticizing some of the content of the book it introduces. And it may seem unhelpful to have presented this theme as an introduction to the current condition of visual studies, when this book itself makes it so abundantly clear that visual studies is going in many different directions. In fact, my own concerns about the field are in other books; they have only a little to do with what I have written here. Yet I believe that no matter what visual studies turns out to be in the coming decades, it will not really be about the visual until it comes to terms with this most fundamental issue. Images need to be central, and they need to never be fully controlled. They need to be able to suddenly derail or contradict an ongoing argument, or slow it, or distract it, or even overwhelm it. Will we dare to let images control our arguments? Will we pay enough attention to images to see how seldom they simply exemplify the ideas we hope they illustrate?

(3) Visual studies is not often actually visual. This last passage is a version of the opening of "An Introduction to the Visual as Argument":

> One of our principal starting points is the claim that despite its growing complexity and rhetorical sophistication, visual studies remains a field that is mainly engaged with kinds of argument that do not need to make continual, close, concerted, dialogic contact with images. To some degree that is the normal condition of several related fields, including art history and visual anthropology, but visual studies has always had the special brief of extended engagement with the visual world, so its wordiness is significant: the difficulty is in saying what that significance is, and how far its effects reach.
>
> Most of what is in any given book or article is text, and some texts on visual subjects have virtually no illustrations. This is a superficial observation, but also, I think, characteristic. It is probably equally true of art history and visual studies, although that can't be quantified because when the budget permits, art historical texts traditionally include lavishly printed illustrations even if the argument does not require visual detail. In general, an essay or book of visual studies will be mostly text. A quick look through my bookshelves suggests that the ratio of text to image might be around twenty or thirty to one. This is only a statistical observation: it is not at all easy to know what sorts of conclusions could be drawn from it. I am not suggesting, for example, that visual studies should tend toward a state where images predominate in sheer page count, or that there might somehow be a balance between images and writing. On the other hand, it seems there must be something to be said about a book like W.J.T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory,* which is less than ten percent images, even though it is centrally concerned with the proposal that pictures are theory, just as much as exemplifications of theory. I am not exempting any existing practices: my own book, *Visual Studies,* is one-quarter images, three-quarters text. This book, *Theorizing Visual Studies,* is no exception:

here, too, the pages devoted to text outnumber the pages given to images. There isn't a clear conclusion lurking here: the notion is just to start by pointing to the appearance of our texts, which must bear some relation to our ongoing interest in the theorization and conceptualization of images, and our concomitant distrust, discomfort, or lack of interest in those kinds of argument that might need images to be in continuous dialectical relation with texts—not to mention our aversion to the kinds of arguments that might let images lead the way.

I hope these thoughts might be helpful for young scholars who want to achieve work that is radical in relation to disciplinary expectations, unexpected in what is understood as interpretation, and surprising in the choice of subjects. A good strategy for writing texts that are strongly voiced, compellingly written, and intellectually and affectively independent is to learn the field you're trained in as well as possible—its histories and historiography, its senses of itself, its claims and promises, its presentism, its politics, its vexed relation to images, the forms it takes in different countries—and then strike out on your own, without looking back.

* * *

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VOLTA VOLTA

Erick Msumanje

Erick Msumanje, VOLTA VOLTA (still), 2018, 30 minutes 3 seconds.[1]

Notes

[1] *VOLTA VOLTA* (2018) is available for viewing at *Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal* on eScholarship. https://escholarship.org/uc/refract.

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VOLTA VOLTA: An Artist's Statement

Alexis Hithe

Reclaimer

> While the cinematic work of Erick Msumanje's MFA thesis statement was completed in 2017 at UC San Diego, *VOLTA VOLTA* (*VOLTA* for short) presents itself an opportunity to decode space in all forms, including perspective. This written work by Alexis Hithe, a friend and colleague, will serve as *AN* artist's statement—if not *THE* artist's statement—and a container for the two artists to reclaim the outdated, solitary space of "the artist's statement" as a critical, collaborative one, more suitable to the collectivity of the Black creative spirit.

Ritual Space Decoded

> Collective memory as an essential component to the survival of African people, enslaved and brutalized, dispersed and disoriented, finds an expression in *VOLTA VOLTA*. This expression begins quietly, gently, as we see images of Black bodies engaged in ritual spaces, such as young women dressed in white for a church ceremony, and ritual exchanges, like a man shaving himself in a small handheld mirror. These moments of the first half of the film are treated with delicacy and patience to match their reverence, allowing for the viewer to sit through any restlessness that surfaces as the camera observes with a steady gaze, and to arrive at a place of *knowing*.
>
> Perhaps this knowing is elusive to some, playing hid and go seek right before the eye in the digital space, until the second half of the film comes, with a

loudness and confidence in both image and sound. Again, ritual spaces and ritual exchanges are brought forth: like a woman beneath the foot of a cross, child in arms and a bull-man steadily drawing in a rope from the dark beyond as drums thunder, respectively. But it is in the dim theatric space—a space that can read as digital in its vast darkness—in which the images of the second act find themselves, that *VOLTA VOLTA* reinterprets itself. Rediscovers itself. Reimagines *itself*. And in doing so points back to the fact, to the *knowing* that comes at the beginning for some but not others, the collective memory of rituals carried through Black bodies for generations, that Blackness is an existence that transcends time and space to connect the past forward to the future, and the future back to the past, and the present with both. The body is the container for this, as the film is a container for the knowing of this. As the film makes reference to itself in digital and conceptual space on multiple layers, these truths are essentially decrypted from the Black body engaged in ritual, and *VOLTA VOLTA* remembers itself. *VOLTA VOLTA* is a film that lives.

<p align="center">* * *</p>

Story-making and history-telling, Alexis Hithe creates conceptual and experimental work that focuses on the Black experience and its imaginings. A graduate of University of California, San Diego's Visual Arts program, Alexis draws inspiration from her childhood in the Mojave Desert of southern California and takes a non-traditional approach to filmmaking; she believes that truth emerges somewhere between doing and dreaming, and practices radical patience as a part of her art process.

In Conversation with Erick Msumanje and Alexis Hithe

Erick Msumanje, Alexis Hithe, and Kristen Laciste

Erick Msumanje's short film, *VOLTA VOLTA*, and the accompanying artist statement, written by Alexis Hithe, reflect on the "ritual" and "digital" spaces experienced by Black bodies. Editorial board member Kristen Laciste had the privilege to interview Msumanje, who is currently a Film and Digital Media Ph.D. student at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Hithe, an alumna of the Visual Arts program at the University of California, San Diego, and a collaborator with the collective, Lotus. Laciste asked them about their endeavor, particularly the film's inspirations and the articulation of "ritual" and "digital." Laciste interviewed Msumanje in person and Hithe via Skype and over the phone on June 14, 2018. The following is the result of the dialogue between Msumanje, Hithe, and Laciste.

Kristen Laciste: How would you characterize the relationship between *VOLTA VOLTA* and *Refract*'s theme, "Refraction"?

Alexis Hithe: My understanding of "refract," physically speaking, calls to mind an example from high school chemistry when you stick a pencil in a cup of water. On the top surface, it looks like the pencil entered one direction, and on the bottom it looks like it entered from another, creating this break-up. In relation to *VOLTA VOLTA*, it would be about these two things that seem to be at different points through our perception that really begin at one origin. And the perception doesn't rule out any truth. The pencil is in two different spots broken up. You can't deny that physical seeing. So for me, *VOLTA VOLTA* visually and formally gives us that experience.

Erick Msumanje: How would you, Alexis, insert Blackness within "refraction"? In my mind, I viewed it as a code, or some kind of vessel that you use to break down the way in which we think about "refraction." If possible, could you walk us through what you were thinking and how you applied Blackness to open up the space of "refraction"?

AH: I think it's important to acknowledge the duality—the dualities—of Black bodies that W.E.B. Du Bois outlines in his theory of double consciousness and also further, a dual physicality to the Black body. It is a container for consciousness, but it is also a container that outside bodies fill with their projections in order for them to benefit in a certain way. So, the Black body is interesting to think about in terms of "refraction" because it is an entry point and an exit point. It's a place from which someone's consciousness comes from, and place from which someone else's consciousness projects into, and from that interaction, we can go back to the pencil. It's connected, they're not separate acts; they come from the same point, they come from the same history of dehumanization, enslavement, colonization, brutality. I think that's why we've seen many times before, for example in the tradition of Afrofuturism, the ways in which Black authors, theorists, illustrators and creators think these tropes or styles all to communicate the phenomenon that the Black body is a vessel, an entry and an exit point. Speaking in terms of Afrofuturism, you see the alien as a character that Black bodies are often attributed. You look at the cartoon body and magical beings beyond physical explanation—ghosts, spirits, shamans—all these kinds of vessels that Black bodies are assigned serve as allegorical devices to communicate this in-betweenness and this sameness, that is the entry and exit: the "refraction" of that existence.

KL: I was reminded of Frantz Fanon's "The Fact of Blackness" and his experience of being shocked, which is an understatement, by the young child who assigns a role to him, seeing him as a "foreigner" or "outsider." I appreciate that you're tying this into Afrofuturism as well. Afrofuturist authors and artists use these tropes to show how the Black body was, is, and continues to be projected. So, who are filmmakers or artists that you are in conversation with through this piece?

EM: The fantastic book *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri (1991) was the original inspiration behind *VOLTA VOLTA*. It's about a young boy named Azaro. He has the ability to see spirits and creatures from an alternate universe that interact with his current reality. He is a spirit child, which means that he is an *Abiku*. Loosely, it translates to "predestined death." This is because they have the ability

to navigate between the worlds of the living and dead. In fact, they are really unique because they possess the ability to be reborn. Still, the tension for Azaro is really what intrigued me. He is in the in-between space of life and death. That space was really inspirational. It allowed me to ask questions. How do you tell a story that exists in the in-between? How do you see the unseen? What is this sense of being like? Another point of inspiration is simply my grandpa telling me stories about him seeing spirits and talking to spirits, or interacting with his friends that have passed, like literally ending up sharing a beer with them. But the way in which he talks about them is not scary or weird, it just is what it is. I would say those are the base inspirations, and from there, comes works from John Akomfrah's *The Last Angel of History* (1996) and his concept of the Data Thief, how that character can move forwards and backwards. Another layer is Pedro Costa's phenomenal film called *Colossal Youth* (2007), which is about this old guy who's really slow. It relates to slow cinema; when you're bored or when you're idle and in a space where nothing happens, it becomes a space where everything happens. How do you create a space where everything, yet nothing, is happening? How does that look? And then a lot of African records, a lot of Haitian records. And then photography also really inspires the work.

AH: Speaking of photography, the constant issue of it being documentary comes up for me. I would be interested to know how you, Erick, would place *VOLTA VOLTA* in conversation with documentary?

EM: That's a good question. As soon as you asked it, I was taken back to a typical dialogue that comes up around my work, something that I always try to work through, and I think it has to do with the way Black bodies and Black spaces are represented. An easy reading is to say that the work shows Black people in a negative light, it's stereotypical. One of the things that I've been trying to work through is getting the work to move beyond that space, beyond that kind of reading. A lot of the time when people approach the work, they view it as documentary, particularly the first half. I tell them that actually a lot of these things that you're seeing incorporate documentary practices, but the little twist is that it's actually fiction, it's staged, it's improvised, there's collaboration happening. It can be difficult when submitting to a film festival, for example, to explain that the film has documentary qualities, but is actually a narrative piece that looks like a documentary. I think that's one of the challenges. How is a piece like *VOLTA VOLTA* supposed to be read? Where can a film like this or bodies of work like this exist? How does the maker, in this case me, negotiate that? As a Black filmmaker working in Black spaces with Black people, how do you not redo the

stereotypes? I think that's a challenge at times. It raises questions like: What's Black cinema? What's Black filmmaking? And to complicate it further, what's Black filmmaking like when it's a person from Tanzania filming in Haiti, connected by the slave trade?

KL: I also think of the ways in which documentary practices become further complicated once you insert yourself into the film and when you invite others to collaborate. Turning to the artist statement, Alexis, you mention "ritual spaces" and "ritual exchanges" repeatedly. Could you further elaborate what is meant by "ritual space"? And are these spaces in the film gendered?

AH: Ritual space is not limited to a building or a particular geography, but is a space, or a container for a ritual moment. In the film, we see the interior of a church where young girls are dressed in white. The ritual space is that church, but it could also be the pews, pulpit, or baptismal water basin. They have to do with the physical location. The ritual exchange refers to the specific action—in *VOLTA VOLTA*, the razor coming up against the face in a routine manner, up and down. It's made clearer by the way we see those ritual exchanges filmed; there's a sort of reverence for those moments. That's what points us to ritual for them. As far as those two things being gendered, that's interesting. I don't particularly see in the filming of these spaces and exchanges a gendering, but I think we can acknowledge that ritual is often gendered, so there is perhaps a gendered experience with those spaces. Speaking for my own self as a woman raised in a family where my grandparents on my mother's side were Baptist, and I would go to my aunt's church in the South, you have women sitting on one side of the church and men sitting on another. The ritual space becomes gendered because of that. I think there is definitely a potential for ritual spaces to be gendered, as well as exchanges, as bodies have an experience of gender, whether that be cis, trans, non-binary. The rituals that one has with one's own body definitely have a particularly gendered experience—shaving a beard for one body would be a completely different experience for another.

KL: Thank you so much for that clarification. Moreover, what is meant by "digital space"? And is this connected to "ritual space"?

AH: The digital space, connecting back to what we were speaking about earlier regarding Afrofuturism, is an allegorical space. In this film, we see it literally in a digital space because it's a film that we're viewing on a digital platform with digital codes and digital files. But on a larger scale, we're seeing it as an allegorical space.

I think it's important to point out that *VOLTA VOLTA* has that deep, dark, black space in the second half of the film. When we first cut to it, I think for me it immediately read as "digital," maybe because of the year I was born, and this experience is well-documented through Afrofuturist techniques: using the "digital" as an allegory for the Black body and for its experiences. Black children in the early 2000s were coding on platforms on MySpace in order to communicate with others, to explore new things, but also, it was about expression of identity. What song are you going to add to your page? What's the background? What photos are you going to use? How are you going to manipulate those photos to make them look totally different? There are so many expressions of and engagements with Black identity through a digital platform, and so when I see a black space like that in the film, I instantly think of the internet, which completely fucks up our way of thinking about the Black body. What happens when that body goes digital? What happens to that body when you cannot physically act on it, but you have a digital code for it. I think in my writing on the digital space, that's what I'm drawing on: that complication, the new perspectives that the Black body exists in. I remember when I saw *VOLTA VOLTA* and approached Erick, I said, "Hey, I really want to write something about the film, the Black body, and digital space." That was something I received from the film. I'd love to hear what Erick has to say or thinks about that digital space that I feel the film places the Black body within.

EM: I love how you talk about those two worlds in terms of the ritual and the digital, the ways in which they complement each other. And I think, for me, to take a step back, one of my earliest things that I was trying to tackle is: how do you tell a story in Black space? A space in which there isn't really a background to situate the viewer. How do movements work? Where does the sound come from? To give myself some grounding, I imagined the space operating in a circle. And then I thought about where things were happening vis-a-vis the sound. Maybe the sound is coming from the left or from the right, up or down. That's where I was kind of dabbling. As you were talking, I was thinking about how we engage in ritual every day, even though we don't call it "ritual." For some reason the term, perhaps viewed in the Western context, is this scary or alien thing, even though every day we wake up in the morning, make coffee, go to work—that's a ritual. And people forget how in terms of the digital and our reality, we're so connected, you know. So can one's life play out in the digital space? How does a Black body operate in the digital space? Is it still a body, and if it's code, what does that code mean? In connection to the question of gender, I was thinking about how in the digital, the body is fluid. The way I was thinking about digital space had to do with the traditional voodoo African practices. You know, you go to a medicine man and he

gives you something to transform you into something else. I think that's what the digital space does. It's a transformative apparatus where you can be yourself and everything at once. You can exist in various places, and that's how I imagined the digital space. Also in connection to the film, if we're treating the Black space as digital, and it's black, literally, how do you see in that space? How do you make things visible? How does listening work in that space? And that is how I was approaching "digital-tality" —is that a word?

KL: If not, then you're coining it!

AH: I've always wondered if every computer in the just world shuts down and nobody accesses the internet ever again, where does it all go?

EM: Uh-oh!

AH: I feel the same for Black people in this world. We have a problem where a lot of people who write sci-fi don't write Black people, people of color, in the script, and so we see these futuristic films coming out on the big screen without any people of color, and I wonder where did their impact on the world go? You can watch a whole film about zombies invading New York City, a city that was built by people you do not see in the film. For me, digital in the context of origin is so important to draw parallels to when we're talking about the Black experience and the Black body in a film like *VOLTA VOLTA.*

EM: When I started thinking about Blackness in relation to a technology, my form of inspiration, I guess in the margins of Afrofuturism a bit, is actually the blues. And in particular, Robert Johnson. He's known as the godfather of the blues, but the way that the legend is situated is that the blues is a Black technology that he got at the crossroads.

AH: I like how you brought up the blues and Robert Johnson. I am fixated on this idea currently that I speak a different language because I am Black. Not because I am speaking another language other than English, and not simply because of the regional dialects of English and vernacular that people have because I am in a body that experiences Blackness that reads as "Black." I am from a family of Black bodies, I have those Black experiences. I really believe that speaks another language because of my body. I believe that when I speak to someone who does not have a Black body, there is the great chance for misinterpretation or no communication at all. And I think what kick-started this idea for me that now feels

like a reality was when I was at a concert by a rapper named Isaiah Rashad. I think he's ahead of the curve because of his narrative use and exploration of his experiences with his particular body. When he was performing on stage there was a moment he stopped rapping, and just began to make noises with his throat. He was doing it melodically and rhythmically, but he wasn't saying anything. He was just using his voice, and he was trying to get the crowd—this was at UC San Diego by the way—to do this with him and to follow his rhythm, to move with him, and to make noises like that with him. There were very few Black people in this audience. I was with two Black friends of mine and I saw maybe three other Black people the whole night I was there. The three of us hummed back with him, rocked along to the rhythm back with him. And I looked up and no one else in the crowd was even moving. It blew my mind and I remember saying to my friends, "Do they not hear what he is saying?" For me, that was a moment of epiphany, because of this body; sometimes there are things that I say, or things that other people's bodies say that other people do not understand because it's coming from this body. They don't understand it.

I love that you were thinking of Robert Johnson and the blues because so much of it is about feeling and experience. The blues is completely expressive and also has a strong formal backbone. There are so many lyrics that the kings and queens of old blues sang on the spot. My favorite blues artist is Lead Belly. I didn't know until last year that most of his sound, songs, and recordings were made in prison in Louisiana. The money that was made from most of his recordings went to the white men who came to record him singing because they had heard that he was participating in this new folk sound. It really speaks to me about the Black body being that way. If we're speaking digitally, there is a code to the Black body and the Black experience that can't unlock simply by entering the code into one address bar and then it comes up. You either have that code or you don't. The word "code" comes from our understanding of DNA as well. And if your DNA does not have the right code, those cells will not be copied. So those are all the things that circulate in my head when you talk about Robert Johnson and his use of blues, and that very Black, very digital experience. I think you can go so far and say that the Black body is a digital experience.

EM: I know I wasn't there, but I've been thinking about sound studies here at UC Santa Cruz. I was thinking about listening. What is listening? How do we listen? And how are we trained to listen to certain sounds, and why do we hear certain sounds and leave others out? What does the sonic say about the human experience in general? In connection to *VOLTA VOLTA*. I've been thinking about the

concept of listening. To me, listening is seeing. Listening is reading. Listening is connecting.

* * *

Erick Msumanje is an award-winning hybrid filmmaker and visual artist. He holds a Masters in Fine Arts from the University of San Diego. His work primarily focuses on telling meditative and poetic stories that blur the lines between fiction and non-fiction. Currently, he is a Ph.D. student in the Film and Digital Media program at University of California, Santa Cruz.

Story-making and history-telling, Alexis Hithe creates conceptual and experimental work that focuses on the Black experience and its imaginings. A graduate of University of California, San Diego's Visual Arts program, Alexis draws inspiration from her childhood in the Mojave Desert of southern California and takes a non-traditional approach to filmmaking; she believes that truth emerges somewhere between doing and dreaming, and practices radical patience as a part of her art process.

The Double Edge of Visibility and Invisibility:
Cassils and Queer Exhaustion

Jamee Crusan

Introduction

I realized the power of gender identity after a slow-pitch softball game. I was eight. My hair was cut short; I had pierced ears but was not wearing any earrings. I had on shorts and a baggy yellow T-shirt with my name across the back in big black fuzzy iron-on letters: J-A-M-E-E. While shopping after the game with my mother, I noticed two girls following me around. I would go down an aisle, and they would come with me. Racing through the aisles trying to find my mother and trying to lose these two girls, I was panicked, embarrassed. I was standing in the middle of an aisle when the two heads poked around the end of the lane. Their gazes locked on me. "Jamee, that is the name of the hunk! There's the hunk!" one screamed. They both giggled and ran away. I ran up to my mother horrified, disoriented, and begged her for her earrings. My mother looked at me strangely, asking "Why?" "I need them," I answered. "Please just give them to me." After a few minutes of going back and forth, she finally pulled the gold balls out of her ears and gave them to me. I put them on and remember feeling a wash come over me. I was now a girl. I was now recognizable as a girl. Those earrings were the only way in which I was confident to be recognized as the gender I was assigned at birth and desired to be known as: female.

Culture produces a visual field as a system of power to help create normalized ideas of gender, sexuality, and desire seen in advertisements, film, and television. The visibility of images standardizes and romanticizes the male and female forms by showing straight, white, skinny, muscular, and cis-gendered individuals, thus painting a "real" picture of the way many view not just gender identity and gender performance, but desire. Trans-masculine, gender-non-

conforming artist Cassils creates contemporary conversations within visual arts around gender, sexual identity, and transphobic violence. Their body disrupts normalized gender ideals and adds to the trans landscape in the realm of performance-based visual practice while testifying to the struggle and endurance it takes to exist outside the hetero/homonormative structure of the gender binary.

In chapter one, I look at six of Cassils's works and their interaction with the history of photographic and performance-based art, in order to consider how these works intertwine with queer exhaustion. First, I analyze Cassils's earliest photographic works: *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture* (2011), *Lady Face//Man Body* (2011), and *Advertisement: Homage to Benglis* (2011), in comparison to works by Eleanor Antin, Linda Benglis, and Robert Mapplethorpe, to consider the struggle LGBTQI+ bodies undergo to be recognized. I also consider how Cassils uses tactics of revealing and concealing to convey agency in the struggle for trans or genderqueer individual equality and visibility. In chapter two, my analysis moves on to Cassils's *Becoming An Image* (2012-present) and *Powers That Be* (2015), where this study begins to link trauma and memory with visibility and invisibility located in queer exhaustion while exploring the physical ways Cassils activates disorientation in the viewer. I also tie in the importance of being witness to another's experience with trauma and how historically feminist performance artists, in particular Marina Abramovic and Yoko Ono, have engaged with witnessing. The epilogue analyzes *103 Shots* (2016), a film by Cassils that explores loss, love, and resilience within queer desire. Additionally, themes of loss and love are tied to queer exhaustion while showing ways in which Cassils speaks back to Robert Mapplethorpe.

Chapter One

Revealing and Concealing Trans-Masculine Identity–
The Early Works of Cassils

> The ongoing subordination of homosexuality to heterosexuality allows for heterosexuality to be institutionalized as the normal relations of the sexes.
>
> —Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*

In attempting to understand the divisive power of gender and sexuality, one can begin by pointing out that certain genders have more social and political visibility than others. Feminist post-structuralist philosopher Judith Butler reminds us that only in the naming or recognition as boy or girl can we become viable. Butler says, "Desire is always a desire for recognition and [...] it is only through the experience of recognition that any of us become constituted as socially viable beings."[1] To be viable, one must be recognized, and this battle for recognition within the power structures of gender and sexual identity catalyze queer exhaustion.

The term queer exhaustion appeared in the vernacular of queer art discourse in 2016 in Tina Takemoto's *Queer Exhaustion: Queers of Color Performance* (2016).[2] I adapt the term to outline a theory of queer exhaustion that names the stressful dialectic of social and political visibility and invisibility as experienced by queer, trans, and intersex individuals in contemporary culture of the United States. I consider queer exhaustion a product of the struggle between self-erasure and self-abnegation driven by continually negotiating hegemonic histories, desires, and experiences. In self-erasure, one erases parts of themselves; in self-abnegation, one

rejects parts of themselves. The negotiation between invisibility and visibility requires those outside heteronormative constructs to pivot on a dime for their safety. This continual swivel and whirl creates disorientation. This article uses queer exhaustion as a theoretical framework to examine the work of Cassils and think about disorientation as put forward by Butler and Sarah Ahmed. Ahmed writes in her book, *Queer Phenomenology*, "It is by understanding how we become orientated in moments of disorientation that we might learn what it means to be orientated in the first place."[3] The theory of queer exhaustion highlights ideas of recognition and disorientation founded in queer theory, feminist theory, and trauma studies. This includes Butler, queer scholars like Ahmed, Douglas Crimp, and David Getsy, and those in trauma studies, including Cathy Caruth, Ann Cvetkovich, and Dori Laub.[4]

Cassils disrupts normative ideas of gender by allowing their body to become sculptural material. Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah write in *Transgender Studies Quarterly*:

> Transgender people (self-identified or designated as such by others) can be subjects of knowledge as well as objects of knowledge. That is, they can articulate critical knowledge and body positions that would otherwise be rendered pathological, marginal, invisible, or unintelligible within dominant and normative organizations of power/knowledge.[5]

By looking at Cassils through the lens of queer exhaustion, this article considers the power of gender identity, the struggle to become recognizable, and the dangers that synonymously arise with that visibility. This sought-out recognition can come in many forms, recognition from the self, from a lover, or from the cis white patriarchy. Both Cassils's work and queer exhaustion explore the possibility of inhabiting the space of disorientation. According to Ahmed, "Disorientation can be a bodily feeling of losing one's place, and an effect of the loss of a place: it can be a violent feeling, and a feeling that is affected by violence, or shaped by violence directed toward the body."[6] The space of queer exhaustion does not simply include queer identifying people making endurance based art, which involves both physical and emotional ideas of labor. It also encompasses the emotional labor required in the continuous fight for fundamental human rights. More so, queer exhaustion questions what comes after we have failed queerly, and queer failure becomes recycled and co-opted into popular forms of art making and capitalizing on by the heteronormal. After we have fought and bled for visibility, our bodies and minds are continually confronted with violence and now our struggles are commodified

and summed up in a rainbow flag. Queer exhaustion challenges the psychic and physical double bind of visibility and invisibility. It is here we find ourselves in this double bind, in this in-between space, in the disorientation.

Carving and Cuts

Cassils utilizes the disorientation located within queer exhaustion by acknowledging iconic feminist artists who came before them and then complicating ideas of second wave feminism and previous ideas of the ideal female body. An early feminist work, Eleanor Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972), is a series of 148 black-and-white photographs that documented Antin on a crash diet, losing ten pounds of her body weight over 37.[7] The serial nude self-portraits of Antin are shot in front of a white background, showing four different sides of her body each day, repeated for the duration of the project. *Carving* makes visible the unhealthy ways in which women sculpt their bodies to be considered the ideal feminine form. To create the perfect form, Antin mimicked "removal" through visibly extreme and unhealthy weight loss. *Carving* comments on the drastic measures women take to become the ideal form, yet simultaneously shows that Antin is in control of her body because she is the sculptor of it. The image of women reclaiming not only their bodies, but their desirability was, at the time the piece was created, considered radical.

 Carving and Cassils's *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture* (2011) express the contrasting strategies of the reductive and the additive, of revealing and concealing. Forty years later, Cassils reversed the logic of Antin's piece in *Cuts* (2011) by adding twenty-three pounds of muscle to their body over a period of twenty-three weeks (Figure 1). During this transformation, they began to "cut" their body into the ideal masculine figure. Cassils's photographic documentation of their bodily transformation speaks back to Antin's photographs in a few ways, first of all in style composition. Both artists utilize front, back, and side views for the camera. The second is the contrast between Cassils's short hair and Antin's long, which traditionally is a signifier of man/woman, boy/girl, male/female. Lastly, Cassils's concealment of their genitals by wearing brief-style underwear suggests a strong emphasis on which reproductive organs one must have to be considered man or woman while simultaneously de-emphasizing the genitals, forcing further disruption of the gender nonconforming body.

 The reductive nature of dieting or carving away of Antin's body to become recognizable as the ideal female form opposes Cassils's manipulation of their body, adding muscle to get a "cut" masculine physique. With any dieting, whether adding
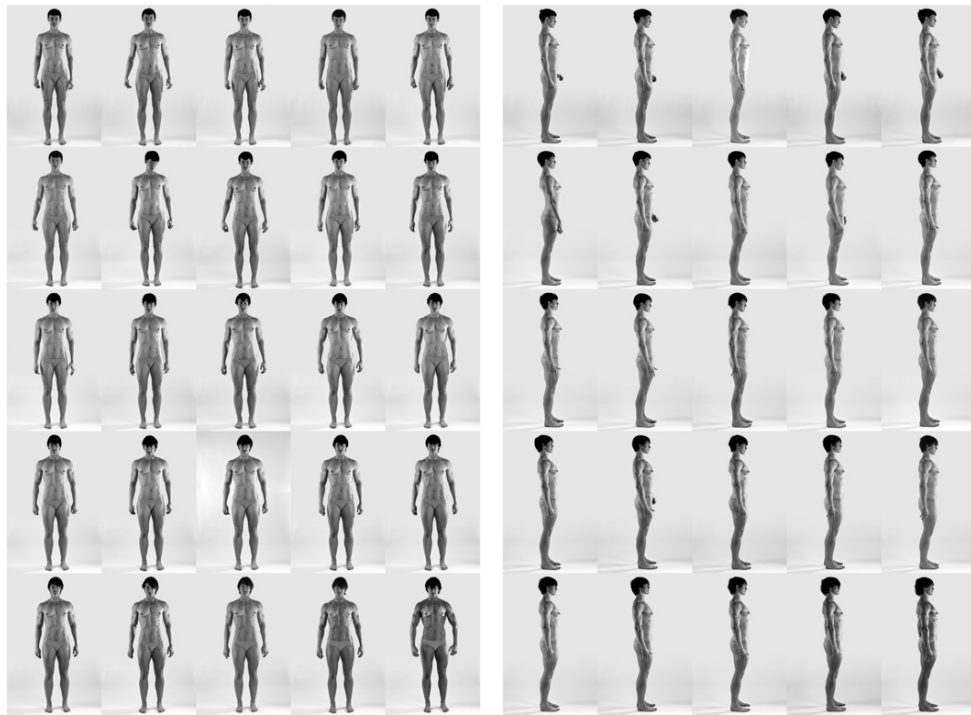
Figure 1 Cassils, Time Lapse (Front and Right) from Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture, 2011, archival pigment print, 60 x 40 inches, edition of 3. Image courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

or subtracting, the body is stressed via fluctuations in caloric intake; Antin was cutting calories, while Cassils was adding, eating as many as 3000 calories a day. This dramatic increase in calories, along with doses of injected testosterone, allowed Cassils to gain the necessary muscle.

The performance of these works ultimately allowed both artists to act out the societal standards of a represented gender ideal. By putting these works side by side, questions can be raised of what ideal feminine and masculine forms might be while questioning what it looks like to be constituted as the ideal man or woman. Moreover, it must be considered: How are bodies that disorientate the gender binary recognized as such? The powers that be, which reside in places of influence such as the medical industry and the media, promote the power of the phallus and the heteronormative cis white patriarchy, continuing to fragment the body into reproductive organs and perpetuating those binaries.

Here, the term "reveal," regarding Cassils's trans-masculine body, may be used to comment on the moment when the "truth" is exposed. Danielle M. Seid writes in *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, "The reveal is a moment in a trans person's life when the trans person is subjected to the pressures of the pervasive gender/sex

system that seeks to make public the 'truth' of the trans person's gender and sexed body."[8] Cassils is claiming agency, controlling the reveal throughout most of their work. The presence of penis or vagina often determines how a person is categorized as man or woman. Hidden by their briefs, which conceal the possibility of bottom surgery, Cassils's genitals remain covered. Cassils's photographs also show tan lines from a bathing-suit top, traces of a traditional garment used to conceal female breasts but, in Cassils's case, it covers pectorals because of their low body fat percentage. This act functions as a disruption that pushes against the binary of how gendered bodies are categorized by what they wear or how they wear it. However, this tan also mimics how bodybuilders tan their bodies before taking the stage for a competition to highlight and define cut figures. "Getting ripped" or "cut" are terms used in weightlifting as ways of talking about developing extreme muscle definition by "leaning out" one's body.[9] Cassils challenges the notions of the trans-masculine form by pushing against the belief that to have a trans-masculine body one has to be "cut" by a surgical blade while undergoing top or chest surgery. The six-month durational performance of *Cuts* generated a series of pendant artworks including *Advertisement: Homage to Benglis* (2011) and *LadyFace/ManBody* (2011).

Cassils leaves visible traces of the gender from which they are attempting to break free in the form of the tan lines while concealing their genitals. Antin reveals her breasts and genitals and offers her body as an object to be looked at. David Getsy writes, "Cassils remixes these methods as a means to demonstrate the potential for bodily transformation and to remake the sex body according to self-determination rather than existing codes of dimorphism."[10] Cassils transforms or cuts their female yet highly masculine body to a less curvy more androgynous trans-masculine body. Their neck thickens, and breasts become pecs, only revealed as breasts through the traces of the tan lines. Breasts can change because of age, body fat, chest binding, or implants. Since breasts are visible in these works, they don't carry the weight of gender identification that the power of the phallus does.

Bikini Tops, Dildos, and Jockstraps

Linda Benglis's *Artforum Ad* (1974), much like Antin's *Carving*, emerged from the feminist art movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Additional feminist and endurance-based artists from that time that impacted Cassils's works include Yoko Ono and Marina Abramovic. While making *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture*, Cassils also created *Advertisement: Homage to Benglis* (2011) and *LadyFace//ManBody* (2011), which I will

Figure 2 Cassils, Advertisement: Homage to Benglis, 2011, c-print, 40 x 30 inches, edition of 3, photo: Cassils with Robin Black. Image courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

discuss later on in this chapter. In *Advertisement: Homage to Benglis*, Cassils is exposed as they stand in front of a white background wearing a stark white jockstrap and bright red lipstick, with both nipples pierced (Figure 2). Cassils's gaze is passive as they stare off into the distance while standing like an erect statue, hands by their side, disclosing a scar on their abdomen while their chest oscillates between breasts and pectoral muscles. This fluctuation occurs when what you are looking at confronts and disrupts societal norms. Stark red lipstick and breasts contrast with defined pectoral muscles and a jockstrap. Although alluded to in the form of the jockstrap, their genitals once again remain masked. Cassils's photograph pays homage to Linda Benglis and the advertisement she placed in the November 1974 issue of *Artforum*. This image presents a nude Benglis with stark tan lines wearing sunglasses and holding a double dildo near her genitals. Benglis stares directly into the camera confronting those who are looking at her while her eyes are concealed behind sunglasses. Her body posture and position show movement and fill the frame up almost entirely. In Cassils's homage, their stoic masculine figure and red

lipstick substitute for the double dildo in Benglis's photograph, and the stark white jockstrap mimics the tan lines in Benglis's *Advertisement*. Both images are shot utilizing a bright and highly contrasted photographic aesthetic, activating a commercial feel of product and high fashion photography. In both instances the artists offer their image for consumption. Benglis's image is shot with flat lighting as a way of proposing no real dimensionality to the viewer while Cassils's image shows a shadow in the background provided depth within the subject. Tan lines again refer to what is revealed to the public, which otherwise would be kept hidden behind a bathing suit, or jockstrap, and rendered visible and revealed during intimate encounters. Evidence of the tan lines seen in *Cuts* demonstrates that Cassils typically conceals their breasts in public through the means of a bikini, as Benglis conceals her genitals.

The works ask, what does one need to do to get noticed? Benglis paid *Artforum* $3,000 to run this photograph as an advertisement to promote her upcoming show at Paula Cooper Gallery; in the process, she commented on the lack of visibility for women in the art world and how sexuality equated to power. Benglis and Antin simultaneously show the struggle to be recognized, and call out the divisive power of gender identity. Antin must either starve herself to obtain the desired feminine body or, as Benglis shows unabashedly, pay for an ad to advertise her body instead of her art, knowing one of the only ways to get recognized as a serious artist is to appear in *Artforum*. Benglis's infamous attempt, bypassing editorial censorship and creating more visibility for women artists, backfired when it was immediately pulled by *Artforum* in 1974.[11] During the summer of 2015, Cassils's *Homage to Benglis* was similarly pulled in Germany for an exhibition called *Homosexuality_ies*[12] in which the gallery had made Cassils's homage an advertisement to promote the upcoming show. According to the Schwules Museum, one of the organizers of the exhibition, they claimed the image was too "sexualized" and "sexist."[13] Cassils wrote a statement to *ARTnews*,

> While Benglis's original *Advertisement* acted as a commentary on sexist gender-based limitations in the art world, Cassils's *Homage* uses the same strategies to intervene in the gendered policing of trans and nonconforming bodies in the world at large […] This faux-feminist opposition to the display of the image is a glaring incident of transphobia, not just homophobia. The phobic response to Cassils's image here calls to mind broader instances of transphobia which seek to prohibit the presence of trans and gender-nonconforming bodies from public spaces.[14]

In the shifting sea of the gender-binary, bodies that cannot fit neatly into an either/or category are continually negotiating terms of recognition that do not include them. To increase conversations about trans visibility, Cassils created the zine *LadyFace/ManBody*, which includes several pin-up-style images. Complicating the traditional gender-based representation of passive and desirous female forms found in pin-ups such as short shorts, lipstick, and flirtatious looks, Cassils inserts their trans-masculine gender non-conforming body confronting the viewer to question if they are looking at the face of a lady or the body of a man.

In comparison, in Benglis's advertisement, she stares unapologetically from the centerfold of *Artforum* into the camera, confronting the gaze of the viewer, proposing a sort of "double fucking": "you're fucking me, while I'm fucking you."[15] The idea of the "double fucking" asks, "Who is the one really being fucked here?" Is it Benglis because of the lack of visibility given to woman and their work? Or is it Benglis "fucking" the editors at *Artforum* by bringing to light the sexist ways in which women are negated? As Benglis provokes a double fucking with a two-headed dildo, she questions the duplicitous nature of the power of having a penis, but even though she wields a two-sided penis she is still without power, leaving the power only to those who can claim the power of a phallus.

In *Homage to Benglis* and *LadyFace/ManBody*, Cassils's body acts as the stand-in not of the dildo but that of the phallus. With their chiseled physique and jockstrap, one must question if the trans-masculine body has a "real" cock in that jockstrap. Both Benglis and Cassils respond to the mediated imagery of advertisements that continually propose to constitute what a real man or woman might be. Although the struggles located in the feminist movement speak to issues around visibility and gender equality, one can also question where LGBTQI+ bodies were in the 1970s. Cassils creates their own history by inserting a trans-masculine, gender nonconforming body between two feminist icons who follow a strong feminist legacy.

With this direct tie to Benglis and Antin, Cassils enters a conversation with second-wave feminism. Feminist criticism and feminist art practice became closely aligned in the 1970s and highlighted the ways women have been hidden from history and left out of an ever-changing canon.[16] Feminist art generates agentic possibilities for the female body. However, with Cassils's tactics of revealing and concealing, they are also talking back to the feminist icons claiming their own place and agency, demanding new conversations surrounding what constitutes *woman*.

Figure 3 Cassils, Pin Up from the Magazine Lady Face/Man Body no. 2 and 3, 2011, c-print, 18 x 14 1/8 inches, edition of 10, photo: Cassils and Robin Black. Image courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

Cheesecake, Beefcake and Thinghood

Cassils's *LadyFace/ManBody* plays with the notion of "revealing" a "true" gender. The photographs in *LadyFace/ManBody* show Cassils utilizing various narratives found in pin-up images. Cassils appears with and without lipstick donning pectoral muscles rather than voluptuous breasts, short hair, and either a jockstrap, daisy duke style shorts or their hands masking their genitalia (Figure 3). Their flattened chest illustrates a chest after continual binding has damaged and flattened the muscle tissue, and in combination with the nipple rings, black BDSM jockstrap and harness, both pleasure and pain are alluded.

Gender nonconforming bodies push against not only the binary of cis white patriarchy but also binaries found in queer communities; it would be remiss not to call out the fact that standards exist in homonormative dialogues as well. When one does not identify as strictly man or woman, the spectrum between the binary pushes back on modes or operations of desire. The binary dictates that man should want a woman or woman should want a man, and the butch and femme dynamic is just as dangerous. If the binary is always a dynamic that one strives for, whether queer or straight, where does the non-gendered person or the lady

face/man body reside? *LadyFace/ManBody* allows us to see the way in which Cassils chooses to be positioned in a gendered conversation that remains binary-centric while commenting on the active role of looking, the passive role of being looked at, and the interplay between them. The trans imagery Cassils creates in *LadyFace/ManBody* shakes the structure of both the heteronormative and homonormative binaries.

LadyFace/ManBody comments on the notion of the ideal woman by titling each image using the words "pin-up." This idea of the pin-up has been around since the turn of the last century, and in a pop cultural sense, exemplifies the perfect woman. Pin-ups started off as illustrations emphasizing characteristics of the ideal woman. These drawings, typically made by men, led to pin-up or "cheesecake" photography.[17] The poses drawn in pin-ups were mimicked in the photographs, and used for Hollywood starlets like Marilyn Monroe, and referenced in Benglis's pose in her *Artforum* ad. As in the work of Antin and Benglis, ideas of sexed bodies, ideal forms, and what constitutes female or male continue to be confronted and questioned in the work of Cassils, while continually being complicated by their body, which renders the trans-masculine body *cheesecake* or *beefcake*?[18]

Cassils complicates this notion of the cheesecake and beefcake image positing their body in an in-between state, never truly occupying either gender. It is precisely because of this in-betweeness that Cassils disorients the viewers' ideas of not only gender but also desire. Cassils is not the first to complicate the gender binary or push ideas of the erotic in a photograph. Robert Mapplethorpe's use of erotic objectification is seen in *Lisa Lyon* (1982), where the cropped nude photograph renders Lyon anonymous, her hands positioned to conceal her biological sex. The lack of facial identification forces us to confront the simultaneously masculine and feminine body. Kobena Mercer writes, "Mapplethorpe's oeuvre as a whole: through his cool and deadly gaze each found object—'flowers, S/M, blacks'—is brought under the clinical precision of his master vision, his complete control of photo-technique, and thus aestheticized to the abject status of thinghood."[19] Mapplethorpe's utilization of the tightly cropped square frame and hard lighting isolates and fragments the subject, rendering them objects—a set of body parts—and transforming the body from model to sculpture.

The cis white male imaginary designates man or woman by what is beneath the hands or inside the jockstrap. *LadyFace/ManBody* destabilizes the gendered binary and its relationship with desire by employing stark red lipstick and a chiseled physique, complicating the conversation of the fragmented gaze of the cis white imaginary while the full frame of the portrait reclaims agency for the trans-masculine body.

Both Lyon and Cassils pose for the camera as if for a body-building competition. The clasping of the hands is traditionally understood as the most muscular pose, meant to increase definition so the judges can evaluate accordingly. The hands act as stand-ins to cover the one thing that for most of society makes one "truly" man or woman. Unlike Mapplethorpe's *Lisa Lyon* photograph, which shows a decapitated and fragmented body, Cassils occupies the full frame as a portrait. Cassils does not highlight specific parts of themselves, but owns themselves as a subject while combining the commercial formal aesthetics employed by Benglis with the coded aesthetics of BDSM culture and the gay male aesthetics of Mapplethorpe. Cassils merges dualistic tropes, plays with duality in the single frame, and thus forces a destabilization of the image. The use of bodybuilding techniques, black leather, and the starkly lit commercial photo shoot creates an interplay between cheesecake and beefcake that complements and disorients ideals of gender (Figure 3).

Mapplethorpe's black and white photograph *Patrice N.Y.C* (1977) depicts a man wearing a black leather jacket and a black leather harnessed jockstrap made of cotton. The frame is tightly cropped, isolating and fragmenting the genitals from the body, creating an erotic objectification. *Patrice N.Y.C* shows the ridge of the head of the penis as it is embraced by the almost translucent cotton package of the jockstrap and its two leather straps. Both images, *Patrice N.Y.C* and *LadyFace/ManBody*, allude to the high sexual power of what is contained in the jockstrap. The black leather suggests that, although one may not know what is underneath the jockstrap, you will enjoy it, if you dare. The alignment between fist and penis as seen in *Patrice N.Y.C* suggests a fist as a stand-in for a penis, as in the act of fisting. The sexual act of fist fucking can be both pleasurable and painful and commonly renders one submissive and the other dominant. This use of fist and genitals recurs in *Lisa Lyon* and *LadyFace/ManBody*, where the fists or hands replace the tools used to fuck or finger. Benglis also uses the double ended dildo as a stand-in for the real cock. However, she invites the viewer to partake in the erotic act of fucking where the active penetrator and receiver is shared between partners and in continuous flux.

The idea of revealing and concealing is double-sided. There is both danger and freedom in concealing or revealing the "truth" of one's sexed body. This double edge is shared with how visibility and invisibility function in queer exhaustion. In either case, the subject can claim agency over their body, but sometimes it comes with a cost. The precarity of remaining invisible holds sway whether a transgendered person passes or not. When one remains invisible, that helps stabilize the norm. Passing as one's desired gender offers safe visibility; however, there is a part that remains hidden. In passing as a female-to-male or

male-to-female transgendered person, or even passing as a straight individual, the body may be safer, but queerness or transness is not visible, rendering one a part of the hegemonic system one may choose to oppose. In understanding the struggle some have with being recognized, and how revealing and concealing or the visible or invisible are exhausting, one can start to understand how gender identity acts as catalyst for queer exhaustion.

Conclusion

Cassils's tactics of revealing and concealing as seen in *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture*, *Advertisement: Homage To Benglis*, and *LadyFace/ManBody* claim agency for a trans-masculine gender nonconforming body. Cassils self-positions between Benglis and Antin, two feminist icons creating a feminist discourse and challenging the definition of what a gendered body is. Cassils uses gendered aesthetics such as bikini tops, jock straps, stark-red lipstick, and bulging biceps to confront the viewer with their gendered expectations. So much of what Cassils advertises is countered with a shroud of secrecy, continually covering the one place on the body where society constitutes manliness or womanliness. Never revealed, this space leaves the viewer in a state of flux. Cassils makes things visible and invisible, creating an inbetweeness that never allows the viewer to land on what sex or gender this person is or is not; this creates spaces for disorientation.

I position Cassils in a conversation with Mapplethorpe as well, considering images that are fragmented and binary while commenting on the active role of looking, the passive role of being looked at, and the interplay between them. While Mapplethorpe fetishizes the male *beefcake* body through tight square cropping, Cassils places their trans-masculine body in the full frame not to be fetishized as a set of body parts, but to provide a platform to explore the whole body. These works consider the importance of recognition, and question the ideal feminine and masculine forms mediated by dominant powers. Gender categories like gender queer, gender nonconforming, gender fluid, non-binary, agender, cisgender, and transgender all pertain to the ways in which one refers to man/masculine or woman/feminine on a spectrum including both or neither. This new set of categories complicates and challenges the hetero/homonormative ideals of the confines of gender and how it desires.

The photographic works of these artists confront the invisibility of gaze and how this way of looking implicates all those involved in looking at a photograph or advertisement. Laura Mulvey writes about the complexities of the gaze in her 1975 essay, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema,"

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.[20]

Forty years have passed since Mulvey wrote her essay and since then a multitude of writers have come along to complicate the gaze including bell hooks' *Oppositional Gaze* (1992), and Kobena Mercer's *Welcome to the Jungle* (1996). Their writing complicates the dualistic spaces of the gaze to include black and brown bodies as well as queer and trans bodies. When Mulvey wrote about the gaze, she was specifically speaking about the white male heterosexual gaze and what that means for the passive positionality of white women.

A photograph creates a visual representation of a figure or a body that is simultaneously used as either an instrument for liberation from stereotypes or a means to cement them into hardened facts rendering them constructed fictions. Antin, Benglis, Mapplethorpe, and Cassils depict bodies—trans bodies, female bodies, dead and dying bodies—to challenge ideas of gender and desire through representation. Cassils creates agency for themselves by constructing the photograph and positioning themselves within the frame. In this decision, they are occupying both the invisibility of the gaze and the visibility of the represented body. There is an exhaustion and disorientation created in navigating the in-betweenness or the back and forth of what it means to become an image and how one perpetuates or subverts both gaze and representation. Photographic images allow us to make visible the otherwise invisible blind spots within our social failures so we understand what we have set into hard fact is the very thing we must work to undo.

<center>* * *</center>

Notes

[1] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York ; London: Routledge, 2009).

[2] Queer exhaustion has been used in multiple platforms such as Tina Takemoto's Performance *Queer Exhaustion: Queers of Color Performance* (July 2016); "Queer Exhaustion," *Reddit*, accessed September 9, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/genderqueer/comments/5ekzkz/queer_exhaustion/. and Australia's LGBTQI website http://www.samesame.com.au/, in their "2016: The Year of Queer Exhaustion" (Dec 2016).

[3] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 1st ed. (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2006), 6.

[4] Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 1st ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2003); Monica J. Casper and Eric Wertheimer, eds., *Critical Trauma Studies: Understanding Violence, Conflict and Memory in Everyday Life* (New York: NYU Press, 2016).

[5] Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah, "Postposttransexual - Introduction," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (May 1, 2014): 9, https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2398540.

[6] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* 160.

[7] Eleanor Antin is an American artist who uses a feminist lens in her performances, photographs, and installations while exploring histories and contemporary culture.

[8] D. M. Seid, "Reveal," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2014): 176–77, https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399947.

[9] The term leaning out is used when trying to obtain little to no body fat while retaining muscle mass.

[10] Julia Steinmetz and David J. Getsy, *Cassils* (Mu, 2015), 2.

[11] Kriston Capps, "Lynda Benglis/Robert Morris: 1973-1974," *Art in America*, accessed April 5, 2017, https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/lynda-benglisrobert-morris-19731974/.

[12] The exhibition was presented in two locations: the Deutsches Historisches Museum and the Schwules Museum. The first section documented 150 years of historical, political, and cultural oppression in Germany that criminalized homosexuals.

[13] Maximilíano Durón, "Ad for LGBTQ Show With Photo by Trans Artist Cassils Is Banned by German Rail, Then Allowed," *ARTnews*, accessed April 5, 2017, http://www.artnews.com/2016/05/12/ad-for-lgbtq-show-with-photo-by-trans-artist-cassils-is-banned-by-german-rail-then-allowed/.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Laura Barnett, "Lynda Benglis: 'Now You Are Ready,'" *The Guardian*, February 22, 2012, accessed April 5, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/feb/22/lynda-benglis-uk-retrospective-interview.

[16] David Macey, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London ; New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 125.

[17] Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.

[18] Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 8.

[19] Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 435-436.

[20] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (September 1, 1975): 6–18, https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6.

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Chapter Two

Grappling with Transphobic Violence—*Becoming an Image* and *Powers That Be*

> A fundamental fact of psychic life: violence is also self–inflicted.
>
> —Douglas Crimp, *Melancholy and Moralism*

Flashing back to the story where I was recognized as a "hunk" and misgendered at the age of eight, this failure to be seen as "normal," or as the gender I was assigned at birth, traumatized me completely. I could in no way tell this story to my mother because I was ashamed that someone would not see me as a girl. I was unable, at that moment, to authentically witness myself. Trauma, Cathy Caruth says, "can be experienced in at least two ways: as a memory that one cannot integrate into one's own experience, and as a catastrophic knowledge that one cannot communicate to others."[1] Trauma disorientates, it paralyzes, it fragments and traps all those caught in its wake whether or not we can authentically witness ourselves. It is precisely this, trauma's stealthy invisibility that requires us to have a witness to our grief and pain; we need a witness to the loss of ourselves. In Cassils's performance *Powers That Be* (2015), I finally witnessed my trauma. Writing about it and watching it still causes me tremendous anxiety and dread. I eventually realized it is not the brutality of the performance that triggers my body, but that I am witnessing one person fight themself: the same person occupying a dualistic

role as the oppressor and moved by the oppressed, the aggressor and the victim of both psychic trauma and physical violence, the powerful and the powerless. The invisible scar that trauma leaves takes time to heal and often remains in flux.

As chapter one explored the tactic of revealing and concealing to emulate both visibility and invisibility within queer exhaustion, chapter two explores visibility, invisibility, and disorientation created through both physical and psychic forms of trauma. By examining Cassils's two performances, *Powers That Be* (2015) and *Becoming An Image* (2012-current) through the lens of queer exhaustion we start to focus on the invisibility of trauma, the visibility of violence, and the disorientation created when bodies are in continual negotiation of hegemonic systems.

Held by Traumatic Memory

During a time when violence takes transgender lives at an increasing rate, encouraging visibility for trans individuals makes Cassils's work achieve a monumental quality. Cassils brings visibility into a system of hetero/homonormativity that historically imposed invisibility upon queer and trans bodies. Cassils makes experiences of violence visible by recreating situations in which queer and trans lives are brutally taken. Mimicking what a back-alley brawl might look like while walking home from the club on a Friday at 3 a.m., Cassils uses fighting techniques and staged stunt choreography to create these performances. In this section, we will look at how the performances *Powers That Be* and *Becoming An Image* utilize the power of invisibility and visibility as sensation that refers to psychic forms of trauma. *Powers That Be* forces one to confront the precarious duplicity of exhaustion while *Becoming An Image* engages viewers to consider the violence of traumatic memory.

Powers That Be debuted in the United States in 2016 at the Broad Museum in Los Angeles, where it was included in the "Tip of Her Tongue" series.[2] Curated by Jennifer Doyle and inspired by Barbara Kruger's 1983 photo-montage *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)*, the program featured feminist performance artists who work with language and embodiment. These performances explored the politics of representation and how stories circulate and move through, against, and with the body.[3]

A video clip of *Powers That Be* that Cassils posted on YouTube opens with the artist in the parking garage of the Broad Museum surrounded by an audience, and illuminated by headlights from parked cars.[4] Cassils stands naked, head down, right arm across their chest, left arm wrapped behind the head as if in a headlock.

Their face remains hidden until radio sounds and static begin to come from the stereo speakers of the surrounding cars. Cassils uses sound in *Powers That Be* to invisibly exhaust the senses. The carefully constructed audio track combines and overlaps reports of oppressive struggles as they play out in the media. While watching the video, you hear the static sounds produced as the radio dial is turned back and forth, interrupted by a guitar riff from a heavy metal band. The audio track never quite fully stops long enough for you to understand or orient your hearing to what is being said or heard. You struggle to hear fragments of a woman's voice saying, "Detectives are investigating the murder of a man who was dressed as a woman when his body was found." This intertwines with sounds of Latin American music, rap beats, and voices speaking. This soundtrack alludes to histories that are being intertwined, overlapped, and rewritten—histories excluded by the "powers that be," or the white heteronormal patriarchy. The soundtrack continues as a masculine voice says, "imperialist, racist, hetero-patriarchal society," then becomes overlaid with music radio static a myriad beats and Cassils grunts and groans. Simultaneously, Cassils's naked body is throwing itself against the hood of a vehicle. You hear metal bending and bowing, combined with a Beatles song from the 1950s.

With an abrupt movement, Cassils's face is finally revealed. It is in anguish, pained, and reddened from the rush of blood to the head. Their right arm slowly moves back as the left arm still holds their head down. The arm fully extends, the wrist is cocked as if in a wristlock. Another abrupt movement, and their head is released, followed by vicious elbowing intended for the unseen assailant behind them, the person holding them in a wristlock. Cassils swings around to get out of the wristlock and topples to the ground, landing on their back. They begin kicking and screaming for their life in an effort to ward off the relentless invisible attacker seeking to kill. *Powers That Be* oscillates between the visible and invisible or mental and psychological struggle associated with living a LGBTQI+ life. This performance makes evident an internal state continually at odds with itself, as in the struggle of internalized homophobia under the hegemonic gaze. Cassils wrestles with themselves and what it means to occupy the dualistic role of oppressor and the oppressed.

During the performance, Cassils's body continuously fluctuates between being the oppressed and the oppressor, even though they appear to be isolated and alone. This continual pivot makes visible the disorientation and isolation the subject encounters. This sense of disorientation and isolation mirrors the internal state that is in continuous flux with trauma which never allows the individual to reclaim their agency in some situations. Traumatic memories can create a fissure constructing a massive sense of disassociation, splintering one's mind and body.

For some, these memories can bind one in a closer relationship with their body while for others this separation alters their bodily relationship. Splintering created by such traumatic events can create two different selves for the survivor: one confident and ambitious and the other separated from their emotions, angry and even self-sabotaging. Many survivors describe surviving these events as experiencing their own deaths and in turn there is someone or something to grieve. This fissure and disassociation can alter the once solid and defined line between life and death making blurry and even obliterated it. This boundary forces the person into isolation and disorientation while raising the question of if they are of the land of the living or the dead.

Cassils stands isolated yet surrounded by onlookers. Isolation is a divisive form of control used to further the oppression of the raced or gendered body in systems of cis white patriarchy. At times, Cassils is the victim of the chokehold or headlock, and at other times they are the one applying the violent maneuver. This performed split positionality creates disorientation when the trans masculine body oscillates between the privilege or passing as a white man and the complexities faced when your same body has been violently marginalized by the very gender you are now recognized as: cis, white, and male. American writer Dorothy Allison writes in her essay "A Cure for Bitterness,"

> If I live in a world in which my experience is not reflected back to me, then maybe I'm not real enough; maybe I'm not real at all. Maybe I'm fiction. When our children read only fictions that reflect nothing of themselves back to them, we cripple them. That is a trauma: to see yourself never in the world. To feel yourself so unspeakable, forbidden, dangerous.[5]

The inability to have someone act as your witness to the trauma of missing histories, physical violence, or one's sexual desire is one reason why the internalized gaze of the heteronormal is so powerful and exhausting.

In Cassils's work, witnesses are not hidden by masks but revealed and held accountable in their roles as witnesses: the audience surveils the struggle between oppressor and the oppressed.[6] Audience members are implicated; this act of witnessing through looking and recording the event via cell phones blurs the lines between surveillance and witnessing. During *Powers that Be* the audience was encouraged to record the performance and to make visible what would have otherwise been invisible acts. The watcher and the watched, the oppressor and the oppressed, elicit points of power between the performer and audience. This duality

Figure 4 Installation view of Cassils's exhibition Melt/Carve/Forge: Embodied Sculptures by Cassils at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 2016. Image courtesy of the author.

functions between audience and artist while simultaneously allowing the viewer to witness Cassils's violent struggle. Cassils's question of what it means to simultaneously occupy the role of the oppressor and the oppressed depicts both an internal and external struggle. There is a price one pays to become an image as it is both self-affirming and exhausting. The desire to be recognized or visible by those who oppress you causes psychological torment when, in that recognition, you can be killed.

Bodies in the Dark

When I first saw Cassils's performance *Becoming An Image* in the fall of 2016, I flew to Philadelphia to attend the one-night show at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art (PAFA) where Cassils also had a solo exhibition, *Melt/Carve/Forge: Embodied Sculptures* (Figure 4). The show included performance stills from *Becoming An Image*, one bronze and one concrete cast of different "clay bash" sculptures titled *Resilience of the 20%* (2013–2016), and a sound piece, *Ghost* (2013), consisting of the grunts and groans, slaps and kicks heard in the performance of *Becoming An Image*.[7] These

artifacts act as memorials to lives lost while bringing attention to recurring violence. *Resilience of the 20%* and *Ghost* represent the actions undergone by the clay and the body. As Ann Cvetkovich writes in *An Archive of Feelings*, "Because trauma can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and dissociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all."[8] Trauma is something that is experienced, felt, and internalized.

Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts was founded in 1805 and is the oldest art museum and art school in the United States, known for its nineteenth- and twentieth century American paintings, sculptures, and works on paper. Founded by Charles Wilson Peale, a painter and scientist, and William Rush, a sculptor, the academy has historically offered both exhibitions and classes. In her book *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (2013), Jennifer Doyle points out that museums and art galleries are spaces in which we usually encounter culture on someone else's terms. Doyle then goes on to quote Jennifer González: "The museum as a whole, as an ideological home, does not welcome us equally."[9] By "us" she is talking about those outside the cis, straight, white, patriarchal system. One example is the most famous professor of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts: Thomas Eakins, who is best known for his painting *The Gross Clinic* (1875). This history is of importance because Cassils is a trans-masculine artist who would not have been welcomed in the space 200 years ago, let alone invited to perform in earlier periods.

At the outset of the performance, I stand in a room with about 60 other individuals who, like me, are waiting. A woman gets up and begins to explain the dos and don'ts for the audience. Absolutely no use of cell phones is allowed. They must be completely turned off, and we have to show our phones before we can enter the performance space. Then the woman states something that, once I hear it out loud, almost stops me from continuing: "Once you enter, you will not under any circumstances be allowed to leave. Also, the area you are entering is completely dark; you will be ushered in, placed by your escorts, and in no way are you to move from the location you were placed. Lastly, you will be standing in complete darkness for 40 minutes."

As someone who is mildly claustrophobic, I feel my chest tighten and my heart rate increase, and I realize that the prospect of being disoriented causes me anxiety and fear. There is something about being in a light-tight room, unable to see or leave, that does not sit well with me. I feel trapped and bound by someone else's rules, and I find myself trying to figure out ways to get out of the room in case I have a panic attack. Maybe I can count steps? I am part of the first group of five to go into the room. We are instructed to reach out and grab the shoulder of the person in front of us. This action itself is extremely uncomfortable. I need to

interact physically with some person I do not know, relying on them to lead me through the dark. Entering the space in a single-file line, participants are placed according to height and pressed together practically on top of one another. In darkness, one can feel just how close bodies are to one another. One can hear and feel individuals breathing while becoming aware of one's own body along with the bodies of others.

The experience of bodies in the dark can stimulate both desire and danger. This strategy helps Cassils to intensify the viewer's sense of embodiment and what we are all about to witness. As more and more people are ushered in, the sound of the audience increases. I think most people are conversing out of nervousness. In darkness one is vulnerable; one's senses heighten if left long enough, but one's eyes never fully adjust. Perhaps the scariest part of the dark is that it allows for a place to be emotional with no risk of anyone seeing emotion occur. After all, fear, like desire, is an emotion that cuts across audiences. Perhaps darkness offers a place for both pleasure and pain—the pleasure of witnessing art and the pain it can bring.

With no warning, I hear a loud grunt, and a flash from a camera bombards me. I hear a sound of a scene I later can barely see: the sound of a fist meeting clay (Figure 5). The performance has started, and a hush comes over the audience. A fight seems to take place between Cassils and a monolithic block of clay. The flash, which occurs every few seconds, is disorienting. I think I know what I am seeing, but I cannot be certain because the only image left is from the retinal burn of the flash. In this exhausting performance, the viewers' eyes become unreliable. Eliza Steinbock writes, "The performance creates a nervous system, literally making them nervous, on edge waiting for the next series of blows delivered with punches in the eye."[10] One's senses are exhausted and drained. Questions arise regarding what is real. What does Cassils's body actually look like, what does the clay looks like, the audience, the surrounding space?

Cassils is completely naked during the performance, exposed to the clay, to the gaze, and to the camera. A full-sized replica of Michelangelo's *David* looks down on the performance, nude and larger than life, with a chiseled chest and sculpted biceps, as if peering down from the heavens into the arena where Cassils fights. *David* stands in as the representative of hetero/homonormative constructs, and of gay male aesthetics.[11] Images from the performance allow us to compare *David*'s rock-solid biceps to Cassils's bulging fleshy ones, and the *David's* perfectly sculpted legs next to Cassils's. By superimposing the *David* onto Cassils, and Cassils onto *David*, one questions who the ideal man is. *David's* physique was created by Michelangelo through a removal of marble, while Cassils created their physique by

Figure 5 Cassils, Becoming an Image Performance Still no. 5 (Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Historic Casting Hall), 2016, color photographs, plexi mounted with aluminum backing, series of 6 images, 20 x 30 inches, edition 1/6, photo: Cassils with Zachary Hartzell. Image courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

adding muscle to themselves. Cassils exemplifies the male form, from their ripped six-pack abs to their shredded shoulders, despite their breasts or the difference in their genitals compared to *David's*. This reclamation renders Cassils the master, not Michelangelo (Figure 6).

If the *David* represents the perfect masculine figure; Cassils's body not only mimics the body of *David*, but surpasses it. Since it is Cassils that sculpts their own form out of flesh and blood, not marble, they render themselves subject, not object, transcending *David*. There is an interesting juxtaposition of scale that occurs when thinking about the story of David, the Biblical character. David is small in stature compared to his infamous nemesis, the giant Goliath. However the *David* becomes a stand-in for Goliath, because of its monstrous size, and as Cassils fights below the feet of *David*, Cassils becomes David from the story, small in comparison fighting someone or something much larger than themselves. The way Cassils hands are wrapped suggests MMA-style fighting and suggests battle. Cassils's ripped biceps and stamina recall what they have been preparing and training for: this fight. However, unlike an MMA fighter, whose rounds only last five minutes, Cassils's single continuous round of struggle lasts over 20 minutes.

Figure 6 Cassils, Becoming an Image Performance Still no. 3 (Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Historic Casting Hall), 2016, color photographs, plexi mounted with aluminum backing, series of 6 images, 20 x 30 inches, edition 1/6, photo: Cassils with Zachary Hartzell.. Image courtesy of artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

Cassils is beating into submission a minimalistic form and commenting on the gendering of the minimalist movement centered on artists like Frank Stella, Donald Judd, and Richard Serra. Minimalism rejected abstract expressionism and aimed to remove ideas of the self, or of biography. The distance that once separated viewer and the art object becomes dismantled in minimalism. Cassils inserts themself physically onto the clay, not only through the expression of violence but via the violent account of their gender nonconforming body. With fist and trans body Cassils dismantles the minimalistic characteristics and form of the monolith, creating a new object conceived from violence.

At the performance I attend, the sound of fists meeting the clay, or a thrusting knee slapping the clay block combined with the artist's groans, grunts, and screams. It makes me feel as though I am witnessing a BDSM scene, fully combining pleasure and pain, sex and violence with intimations of both life and death. Cassils's head is thrown backwards as they plunge their knee deep into the clay; their muscles tighten while their teeth clench. One thing made clear was the decimation of the once erect smooth clay monolith that stood the height of Cassils's body. Fists and knees create indentations on the fleshy structure holding memories of enacted violence.

When the flash goes off, the audience becomes illuminated along with massive reproductions of Grecco Roman and Renaissance sculptures surrounding Cassils. One moment, I can see Cassils, the audience, the plaster replicas surrounding the space as giant spectators, and the clay monolith, and the next moment, I can't. This continuous bombardment of the flash creates both a before- and after-image that is burnt into the retina. One begins to fill in the gaps created in their vision with preconceived notions or memories. According to Nietzsche, "If something is to stay in the memory, it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory."[12] In *Becoming An Image*, there is no time for eyesight to recover. The gaps between flashes provide momentary relaxation for the eyes, but gaps disrupt any attempt to restore what is seen, mirroring the fissures in memory.

This idea of the before-and-after is a theme used throughout Cassils's work and is notable in chapter one through *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture*, which shows the drastic change in their body after 23 weeks (Figure 1). This can be seen through the "before" and "after" depicted in the photographs of the remnant "clay bash." In *Cuts* and *Becoming An Image*, Cassils is the master of sculpting, whether with clay or their own body. During the performance of *Becoming An Image*, my sight is disrupted, but I can always hear: I can hear Cassils moving around the space, grunting and groaning, punching and kicking and sculpting the clay. Cassils is surrounded as if in an arena, not only by an audience of living human witnesses but also by the towering classical sculpture replicas. Steinbock writes, "The fight between trans-masculinity and a hunk of clay is a fight to sculpturally define each other."[13] Cassils gains muscle mass, gains power and strength, while the clay is beaten and destroyed.

The performance *Becoming An Image* ends as abruptly as it began; the house lights come up, revealing the monolith and Cassils's body is no longer present. There, in the center of the room, sits the once-erect geometric clay. It now appears lopsided and broken. The material of the clay absorbs and receives the blows. These kicks and punches act as markers of the physical trauma delivered and become scars: proof of survival. The clay becomes the ultimate receptacle of violence containing all that was delivered upon it. The area around the clay looks like a murder scene. There are broken pieces of clay scattered from the beating while all around smears of clay on the hardwood floor act as markers locating where Cassils's foot pushed and dragged the chunks during the assault. With Cassils absent from the scene the performance continues as the audience tries to come to its senses, quite literally. The sensory deprivation mixed with the assaulting flashes force the audience into a state of disorientation, where the world has acquired a new perspective. The audience stands quiet attempting to

comprehend what just happened, and what they just witnessed. Piecing the fragments of the performance back together is a near impossible endeavor. This moment holds a sense of solitude, of grief, of loss. The photographs of Cassils performing *Becoming An Image* are the only evidence of what we just witnessed, freezing Cassils in time. This concept of frozen time transcends across not only the photographic image but of what is experienced by those who have suffered horrific traumatic events. For survivors of such things, for the undead, or those incapable of living or dying, reorganizing the fragments of violence are a Sisyphean task of hard emotional labor that will never be finished.

By inflicting physical violence upon the clay, *Becoming An Image* recreates violence against LGBTQI+ bodies. The clay acts as visible evidence of a crime by representing a suffering body beaten down, mutilated, and scarred for life. In *Pink Labor on Golden Streets*, David Getsy states, "The history of queer practices in art have [sic] been wrapped up with a desire to testify to the existence of those who love and live differently."[14] This embodied sculpture or clay bash becomes memorialized in bronze while acting as a testimony of lives lost due to violence. The clay never recovers, it simply changes. Forever (Figure 4).

Vulnerable Bodies in The Gap

In the 1960s and 1970s, endurance art became known as a style of performance art that was marked by extreme time durations, and typically involved some hardship, pain, or exhaustion. Artists like Eleanor Antin, Marina Abramovic, and Yoko Ono deliberately put their bodies in dangerous situations and challenged roles of agency or lack thereof. Performance art allows the body to become a medium for living sculpture.

In Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*, performed for the first time in 1964 in Kyoto, Japan, the artist sits motionless and dressed in black. *Cut Piece* invites viewers to engage with the artist's body by cutting pieces from Ono's clothing during the performance. Ono examined power relations by evoking the oppression of gendered and minority bodies. In this work and those by related artists from the 1960s on, there is the potential not only to destroy an object but also to cause injury to the human body. Abramovic's *Rhythm 0*, for instance, comprised 72 objects and audience participation. The audience was invited to use any of the objects on the artist in any way they wanted. Abramovic states, "The instructions read, 'I'm an object, you can do whatever you want to do with me, and I will take all responsibility for six hours.'"[15] Some of the objects available for use included knives, razor blades, a loaded gun, a feather, a rose, and honey. Someone in the

audience did put the loaded gun to Abramovic's head, and at that moment the gallerist grabbed the gun and threw it out the window. Similarly, Ono made herself vulnerable to the touch of the audience by entrusting her safety into their hands.

The responsibility placed on the audience allows participants to either see the artist as a person/subject or have the artist remain an object. This tactic of offering up the artist as a vulnerable body to be stripped or abused, as seen in *Cut Piece*—or even killed, as in Abramovic's *Rhythm 0*—is carried through in much performance art. This exchange of agency in *Cut Piece* and *Rhythm 0*, which renders the artists unable to control what is revealed or concealed by audience participation, is diametrically opposed to the agency Cassils is claiming through their performance work.

Although their aesthetic methods differ, Antin, Benglis, Ono, and Abramovic all reference the idealized figure, the power of the gaze, and the vulnerability of a female body. These women investigate power dynamics while inhabiting the double position of both object and subject. Cassils disrupts the feminist critique by challenging the idea of sameness, or the uniformity of the female ideal. They flip the idea of sameness on its head with a lady face and a man body, making the viewer question whether this person is a *man* or a *woman*. In the first iterations of *Becoming An Image* and Powers That Be, Cassils starts by binding their breasts and concealing their genitals.[16] In this case, chest binding indicates a trans body. However, over time, Cassils has veered away from the binding and allows for more of an unapologetic introduction to transness. By removing the strips of cloth that double for a chest binder and underwear, their body can remain gender non-conforming.[17]

Ono and Abramovic offer their vulnerable bodies to the other, and replace agency with trust that the audience will treat their bodies with care. I argue that this surrender of agency and control to reveal their most intimate parts to strangers renders the performers powerless. Abramovic and Ono challenge the viewers to see their female bodies as either object or subject. *Rhythm 0* offers up Abramovic's female body as a sacrifice to those around her, causing either pleasure or pain. A boundary dissolves between the performer and the audience when the performance finally ends, and she moves of her free will. The threat of death allows for the barrier between artist and viewer to be dissolved. At that moment, the performer is a puppet, without agency, able to be killed, cut, or caressed.

Yet, the beating that the clay undergoes is suggestive not only of violence toward and death of LGBTQI+ bodies, but also of the violent, disruptive struggle of bodily transformation as a trans or gender nonconforming person. According to Judith Butler, "Violence against those who are already not quite lives, who are living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no

mark."[18] The individual fighting of someone or something that cannot be made visible in *Powers That Be* represents the trauma of this continual struggle. Butler writes, "Trauma is, by definition, not capturable through representation or indeed recollection; it is precisely that which renders all memory false, we might say, and which is known through the gap that disrupts all efforts at narrative reconstruction."[19] Since trauma is an invisible attacker that cannot be represented, the invisibility of the attacker in *Powers That Be* reminds the viewer of trauma. There is great danger in making your queer, trans, intersex, or gender nonconforming body visible. It is necessary, however, to be recognized as a viable being. Through witnessing these performances, one can start to understand the disorientation that occurs while negotiating the visible and invisible forces of queer exhaustion. The disorientation created in the in-betweenness of Cassils's performances creates a sense of embodiment in the viewer, which in turn leads to empathy.

"Embodiment" can mean many things across many theoretical discourses; however, I use the term in the most basic sense: by noticing and feeling your body, you can become aware of how different sensations create certain types of feeling located in the body. What I am proposing is that, in the noticing of the body, Cassils's performances evoke empathy. Again, empathy has multiple meanings across many discourses; however, I speak of empathy in its most basic sense: sharing the feelings of the "other," by providing a feeling of oneness.[20] We can acknowledge that everyone's experience is unique. But I am considering the act of engaging in embodiment through violent acts as seen in *Becoming An Image* and *Powers That Be.*

I propose that in Cassils's performance, their body is presented as subject, forcing the viewers' empathy to be activated. Acting as witness to the struggle between subject and object is how the viewer can participate in empathy. Butler states, "Specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living. If certain lives do not qualify as lives, or are, from the start, not conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames, then these lives are never lived nor lost in the full sense."[21] Cassils willingly offers their body up to symbolic acts of violence, allowing for the activation of empathy within the audience.

I have been using the term disorientation in two ways: first, as a bodily feeling; second, as an effect of loss and feeling affected by trauma and physical violence.[22] Empathy as defined by Edith Stein suggests a switching of orientations: "When I now interpret it as a sensible living body and empathically project myself into it, I obtain a new image of the special world and new zero point of orientation."[23] Once someone can understand that the precondition of human life is what connotes a living body and that I, a trans person, can identify as a living

body we can begin to change our orientation to trans life, being conceived as other. Once we recognize ourselves in another we can start to change how we orient ourselves to one another. This transformation in perspective, or disorientation, can create room for empathy which begins to create new points of orientation.

Conclusion

In control of what is concealed and revealed of their body, Cassils claims agency, as does Antin in *Carving* and Benglis in *Artforum*. I argue that Cassils operates as an active subject throughout their performances, while Ono and Abramovic fluctuate between passive object and subject. Cassils's role as active subject causes disorientation in the audience simply because they are witnesses and not active participants. The importance of the audience bearing witness to the performances is seen in the wallpaper lining the exhibition space for *Melt/Carve/Forge: Embodied Sculptures*. When your beloved or someone you love is a survivor of traumatic acts of violence the only thing you can do, at times, is sit and wait. Wait from a distance, wait in solidarity, wait until they stop grieving—if they ever do—and if they don't, wait with patience and reassurance and make sure that they are seen and that their experience is honored. The walls are covered with enlarged photographs of the audience showing their reactions to *Becoming An Image*. The audience is made larger than life not only to show the importance of the witness, but also to indicate how much power *and* disorientation bearing witness to another's trauma holds (Figure 7).

Disruption or disorientation occurs when people see a trans-masculine body, a body not "universal" like the *David* or a "normal" gendered body. Forms of disassociation and fragmentation separate one from the other, or an "I" from a "thou." We feel our body jolt when Cassils throws their body to the ground, or puts their head in a lock. Is it possible to get past the issue of what kind of body is being beaten; to seeing a human body being violently assaulted; to recognizing, "I am a human body therefore I can be assaulted"? Cassils uses a staged fight between themself and the clay as a stand-in for a beating.

These ideas of concealment and revelation are also utilized in Cassils's earlier works *Cuts*, *LadyFace//ManBody*, and *Advertisement*, and suggest the artist's strict adherence to keeping the genitals covered as a specific strategy to disorient the viewer. Cassils continues to not only disrupt the ideas of gender within the heteronormative binary but also to queer and transgender ideas of what it means to be trans, gender queer, or nonbinary. These notions of disrupting the binary are carried over from the photographs into the performances. Cassils's work

Figure 7 Installation view of Cassils's exhibition Melt/Carve/Forge: Embodied Sculptures by Cassils at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 2016. Image courtesy of the author.

exemplifies the traumatic and exhausting existence of queer and trans people by allowing viewers to witness brutality while bringing to light what it means simply to become recognizable and exposing the struggle to become an image as a gender nonconforming individual. Cassils's body only becomes visible during the flash. Only in a blinding instant does Cassils finally become an image.

The indexical nature of the photograph mimics the indexical nature of the clay and trans body as subjects that hold a history. The return to the photograph or the image continually reminds the viewer of how hard it is to become an image, and the violent struggle one must endure to become not only a viable being, but a body with a story and a history in the world. History is made by solidifying a physical moment. The photographs document physical signifiers of pain and exhaustion. Cassils's sweaty brow, red face, straining and quivering muscles: all are ways we see physical distress. Whether emotionally or physically, we are activated through our bodies, which carry both painful and pleasurable memories. The photographs of both performances and earlier works (*Cuts*, *LadyFace//ManBody*, *Advertisement*) are recovered fragments, snapshots, stills, and stopped memories of the exhausting struggle. These photographs reveal to the witnesses certain parts of the violent acts, or in some cases, as with the live performance of *Becoming An*

Image, do not present what is revealed only for the performance-goers. New language and canons start to take shape to place these performances in an art historical context. The entanglement and overlapping of histories resemble the layered audio in *Powers That Be*. Cassils's performance, sculpture, photography, and sound art offer ways to provide testimony about LGBTQI+ experiences. Lives memorialized within art allow for the creation of new histories.

In the attempt to reconstruct the fragmented memories of such trauma it proves an almost fruitless endeavor especially since trauma itself cannot be represented. Debra Jackson writes in *Critical Trauma Studies*, "Language also fails because traumatic experiences are incredible. That is, the events are so horrible that they elicit disbelief. At, best, we say that they are indescribable, unspeakable, or inexpressible."[24] In many cases there are no words to describe the feelings after surviving such events. Not only are some people incapable of describing these feeling to others but more so they are unable to describe the feelings to themselves. If trauma cannot be represented and language most certainly breaks up and falls apart when held under the weight of such experiences how does one survive such disorientation where everywhere you try to orientate yourself you are met with such failure? Hitting this wall of continual failure while contending with what spaces to feel safe or not safe in, or more so contending with where your body is safe or not can create feelings of exhaustion. Since nowhere can ever really feel safe, one can become isolated, much like Cassils standing alone surrounded by onlookers in the middle of the room in *Powers that Be*. For some who have suffered under severe oppression or survived traumatic events such as violence one can start to believe that death is preferable to life, after all, exhaustion dies with death.

* * *

Notes

[1] Jeremy Tambling, Cathy Caruth, and Michael S. Roth, "Trauma: Explorations in Memory," *The Modern Language Review* 94, no. 1 (January 1999): 256, https://doi.org/10.2307/3736129.
[2] Cassils was the recipient of the ANTI International Prize for Live Art in 2016. *Powers That Be* was a site-specific work created for this award and first performed in Kupio, Finland.
[3] "The Oculus Hall at The Broad," The Broad, 2017, accessed April 05, 2017, http://www.thebroad.org/programs/tip-her-tongue-martine-syms-misdirected-

kiss. Additional artists in the series include Xandra Ibarra, Dynasty Handbag, and Martine Syms.

[4] Cassils, *Powers That Be*, accessed September 9, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=7Zs-EjffEVs.

[5] Monica J. Casper and Eric Wertheimer, eds., *Critical Trauma Studies: Understanding Violence, Conflict and Memory in Everyday Life* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 246.

[6] Cassils's work recalls Edward Kienholz's installation *Five Car Stud* (1969) which was shown in Germany in 1972 and resurrected in the United States in 2011. *Five Car Stud* addresses civil rights, lynchings, and violent levels of intolerance. *Five Car Stud* depicts the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed, where the oppressor is clearly the power that reigns supreme, the cis white patriarchy. Headlights reveal the brutal beating and lynching of a black body as masks conceal the identities of the assailants and the witnesses to the atrocity.

[7] This installation also included video footage from a durational piece called *Tiresias* (2010–2013).

[8] Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2003), 7.

[9] Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2013), 5.

[10] William J. Simmons and David Getsy, "Appearing Differently: David J. Getsy in Conversation with William J. Simmons," in *Pink Labor on Golden Streets: Queer Art Practices*, ed. Christiane Erharter et al., Publication Series of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, volume 17 (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 143.

[11] If you choose to believe Michelangelo was a homosexual.

[12] Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, 2nd ed. (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 38.

[13] Simmons and Getsy, "Appearing Differently," 143.

[14] Simmons and Getsy, "Appearing Differently," 39.

[15] Marina Abramovic Institute, "Marina Abramovic on Rhythm 0 (1974)," Vimeo, accessed September 9, 2018, https://vimeo.com/71952791.

[16] *Becoming An Image* was first performed in 2012 as a site-specific work for the ONE archives in Los Angeles, California, which is the oldest LGBTQ archive in the United States.

[17] It is important to note there is a difference between gender non-conforming and transgender. Gender non-conforming simply means one's gender expression does not subscribe to the stereotypes or conventional ideas of masculine/feminine. While transgender simply means one does not identify with the gender one was

assigned at birth. Just because someone is transgender does not mean they are non-conforming. These two terms are not mutually exclusive.

[18] Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 25.

[19] Ibid., 153.

[20] Waltraut Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy: the Collected Works of Edith Stein Sister Teresa Bendicta of the Cross Discalced Carmelite Volume Three* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1989), 16.

[21] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 1.

[22] Ibid., 182.

[23] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 182.

[24] Ibid., 210.

Epilogue

Embracing disorientation in queer exhaustion:
Pulse and Cassils's *103 Shots*

> It is the realization that the lost ones are not coming back; the realization that what life is all about is precisely living with an unfulfilled hope; only this time with the sense that you are not alone any longer—that someone can be there as your companion—knowing you, living with you through the unfulfilled hope, someone saying: I'll be with you in the very process of your losing me. I am your witness.
>
> —Dori Laub, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*

When living in a world where one's desires are treated as abnormal and deviant, a club like Pulse offers a safe place away from those who choose to condemn our desires simply because we love and desire differently. The film *103 Shots* (2016) by Cassils was made in response to one survivor's statement: "You're sitting there having a great time at a club and you hear what sounds like fireworks and balloons popping, and you assume it's part of the show, and then you realize it's not the celebration you thought it was."[1] *103 Shots* responds to the Pulse massacre of 2016 and to the disorientation created when fear and anxiety impede expressions of love under the eye of violence. Peggy Phelan writes in *Mourning Sex*, "Queers are queer because we recognize that we have survived our own deaths. The Law of the Social has already repudiated us, spit us out, banished us, jailed us, and otherwise quarantined us from the cultural imagination it is so anxious to keep

clean, pristine, well-guarded."[2] Unfortunately, the labeling of queer love as deviant has not been exhausted.

On June 12, 2016, a shooter entered Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and killed 49 people and injured 53 others. When I heard, what had happened in Orlando, I was sitting at my parents' home in a small coal-mining town in western Pennsylvania, where my partner at the time and I were visiting. My partner sat on the couch watching MSNBC, panicked. I had no words to console her, simply because I had not understood what had just happened. She felt horrified, saddened, scared, and completely disoriented in rural Pennsylvania with a partner who was unable to offer her any emotional support. She excused herself and went upstairs.

My mother looked at me and asked, "What's wrong with her?" At that moment, I felt as though I had been punched in the stomach. I felt numb, had nowhere to turn—my mother was inadvertently confronting me with my invisibility as a trans identifying person and the invisibility of my love. Simultaneously, I realized that those people in Orlando could have been me, my friends, or my lover.

Queer exhaustion names the stressful dialectic of social and political visibility and invisibility as experienced by queer, trans, and intersex individuals. Queer exhaustion is the endless struggle between self-erasure and self-abnegation driven by continually negotiating hegemonic histories, desires, and experiences. The negotiation between invisibility and visibility requires those outside the heteronormative constructs to pivot on a dime for their safety. This continual swivel and whirl creates disorientation. Desiring queerly proves to be an exhausting endeavor when revealing your love for someone can lead to your death and in turn the concealing of your love produces psychic trauma because of the lack of recognition. For some people, they will never know what it is like to be afraid to kiss your lover in public for fear of verbal or physical violence. For some they will never know the unease of being both visibly and invisibly different from the rest of the world you encounter daily. We live in a world that uses categories to make meaning as a survival tool from our reptilian brain that questions, "What are you?", "Do I run from you or eat you?" Somehow, knowing whether someone is man or woman, straight or gay, of Thai or Caribbean heritage, helps us categorize our personal safety, but as we know, we are more than our gender, our sex, or our skin color. In this fast-paced society where we are categorized by how many followers, or "likes" we have, how can we ever have time to sit with our feelings, let alone empathize with one another? How can art provide this momentary relief as a sanctuary to feel? So, I ask, can an entrance for empathy be created by examining disorientation in queer exhaustion and *103 Shots*? By empathy I mean in the most

basic sense, sharing feelings of the "other," by providing a feeling of oneness. I suggest Cassils activates empathy in *103 Shots* using sharp cuts and assaulting sound as a tactic to disorient the senses.

After returning to San Francisco, weeks passed and Pride season was quickly underway. Pride was not usually an event I attended but that year I made an exception. Pride is historically a celebration inundated with rainbow flags, parades, music, drag queens, voguing, dykes on bikes, and the leather contingent. However, that year also consisted of the gaze of snipers perched atop the buildings surrounding Dolores Park. Amongst the snipers and wonderfully colored festivities I watched as one person got onto their knee, held up a tiny box, looked to their beloved and asked, "will you marry me?" In this moment I could hardly believe I was watching two people get engaged under the "protection" of those guns. Being "protected" by the same weapons of war used to kill our companions creates disorientation. Both psychic and physical distresses are implicit in the idea that people need to be protected to celebrate and proclaim their love. Also, under the watch of those snipers during Pride was Cassils, filming participants for *103 Shots*.

103 Shots is a little over two and a half minutes in length. The use of black and white as an aesthetic strategy evokes the past struggles with violence and loss within the LGBTQI+ community, while the infinite gradations of gray could also allude to expanding the black-and-white binary of male/female, boy/girl, and man/woman.[3] The first time I saw *103 Shots* was on YouTube a week after its release by the artist in 2016 but most recently I saw the film in the exhibition *A History of Violence* curated by Rudy Lemke at SOMArts in San Francisco, CA in June of 2018.[4] When the viewer approaches the larger than life projection they are engulfed in the action of the couples participating in this film. These couples were asked to stand facing one another and far enough apart for a white balloon to occupy the space between them. The weight of the couples' bodies provided just enough resistance so the balloon did not fall. The flexible rubber structure and malleable nature of the balloon, when filled with the oxygen from individuals' lungs, allows for pressure to be applied. Once positioned face to face in front of the stark white background, the couples tighten their embrace in an attempt to pop the balloon (Figure 8). The gesture of an embrace encourages one to hold tight. The expression of an embrace implies crossing a distance to visibly show love's existence, romantic or otherwise.

The audience who witnesses this specific installation of *103 Shots* sees clearly the rise and fall of people's chests during an embrace. It signals a violent loss of breath—or even loss of life—while simultaneously indicating the act of kissing or sexual excitement. The burst balloon ejects from in between the couples

Figure 8 Cassils, 103 Shots, 2016, single channel video with sound, 2:35 minutes. Image courtesy artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

like a bullet from a gun. With the absence of the balloon the couple's bodies slam into one another, causing skin to vibrate similarly to when someone is shot. In that case, flesh vibrates from the impact of the bullet passing through the body, and the body falls. The rise and fall hold a duplicity that signals a violent loss of breath or life while simultaneously signaling sexual excitement.

The sound of the bursting balloons causes the viewer to blink hard and recoil, like when one hears a gunshot. After a barrage of clashing bodies, a black screen appears, and the cadence of the exploding balloons plays in the background. The cadence quickens as though someone is firing a semiautomatic weapon, creating a pulse that runs through the film. The viewer becomes increasingly aware of their body as their chest tightens and fills with fear due to the loud pops occurring during each embrace.

When the couples in Cassils's film make the choice to embrace, bodies come together, bursting the fragile balloon that was keeping them apart. The quick cuts mimic a blink, a breath and a heartbeat. Unsure of when the balloon will burst, the participants' reactions in *103 Shots* vary from play and pleasure to pain and apprehension. Grimaces, closed eyes, tense jaws, and indirect gazes are visible as some embrace quickly, some slowly, others reluctantly. Mimicking feelings of sexual orgasm and falling in love, the bodies are in flux between a subtle beauty and a violent clash. The uncertain explosiveness that occurs when a balloon is suddenly put under too much pressure is both exciting and frightening.

The white balloon is an object of celebration usually added to party décor and appears harmless. The action of the embrace implies affection or love, so when the embrace or loving gesture causes a pop, mimicking a gunshot, disorientation occurs. Sara Ahmed writes in *Queer Phenomenology*, "We are affected by what we come into contact with. In other words, emotions are directed to what we come in contact with: They move us toward or away from such objects."[5] In this movement toward or away we are essentially analyzing risk. The risk of crossing a distance, of a bursting balloon, of living and loving. After all, love is just a word until someone crosses over and provides it with meaning. As the participants come in contact with their person there is potential for the balloon to burst or not to burst depending on the force that is generated during the embrace.[6] If to embrace your beloved you must endure the anxiety of whether or not a balloon will bust, one asks, *is the pleasure worth the possible pain?* Does the opportunity to gain pleasure or joy equal the risk of AIDS, loss, living, loving, and dying? Falling in love poses these same questions, are you willing to risk a part of yourself for the chance to be with another?

A minute into *103 Shots,* an image in the film allows the viewer's gaze to rest on the back of someone's head with their arm stretched out across a white background. Their gender is unidentifiable. The outstretched arm and white background recall Robert Mapplethorpe's *Self Portrait* (1975) in which the smiling artist appears with his arm stretched out across a white photographic background, fingers spread, looking directly at the camera. Eventually, Mapplethorpe crops the self-portrait to create *Arm (Self-Portrait)* (1976) in which his arm appears almost lifeless, while blue veins spread over his stark white translucent skin. *Arm (Self-Portrait)* serves as a *memento mori* to Mapplethorpe, as his life would be taken by complications with HIV/AIDS thirteen years later. [7]

Grappling with passing away into memory and the possibility of such tragedy becoming forgotten is why *103 Shots* functions as an important reminder not only to the LGBTQI+ community, but to society at large. Cassils brings together homophobic and transphobic violence throughout their work, which allows the LGBTQI+ community to come together to grieve the violence we have collectively suffered through while at the same time celebrating our love, desire, and pleasure.

Another Mapplethorpe image, *Embrace* (1982), was taken at the beginning of the AIDS pandemic and shows a black and white couple embracing. They're naked from the waist up, wearing jeans, and their heads, pressed together, press their faces into one another's shoulders. The couple is deeply entwined, as if afraid to let go. The intensity of this embrace shows a deep need in both parties and speaks to the fear and anxiety created during the AIDS epidemic. The pain of loss

and the grief created during the AIDS epidemic is one we are all still dealing with as a LGBTQI+ community. The lives lost in the arts community alone are staggering and included Mapplethorpe, David Wojnarowicz, Keith Haring, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and many others. Rebuilding a community after such losses and reconstructing sexual relations while reinvesting in sexual pleasures is indeed an exhaustive endeavor.

In Mapplethorpe's *Embrace* we do not know if these two are a couple, or friends, or to which community they belong. There is no latex, no condom, and no protection between their bodies, allowing them to meet skin to skin. This photo was taken at the height of the AIDS pandemic and therefore it is a radical act of love, shared loss and grieving for bodies that were not seen as even human. Their embrace is tight, it is sure and strong, it is the kind of embrace that appears to hold the bodies together by some magnetic and invisible bond. Short of ripping these two bodies away from one another, they will remain in this embrace, heads buried not letting go of one another. In comparison, a still from *103 Shots* reveals a couple embracing, naked from the waist up, wearing jeans, but they do not bury their heads; rather, they militantly gaze directly at the camera. The power of the gaze, as explored through much of the film, suggests that it allows participants to claim a sense of forcefulness, which makes them fearless in their love, and confronts the viewer.[8]

Cassils claims the same unapologetic confrontational gaze. There can be immense pleasure in being visible—after all, recognition determines viability. Ideas of pleasure tie into visibility in a club or social setting, where one not only desires recognition but simultaneously desires to be desirable, as in the case of the Pulse nightclub or at SF Pride. Individuals gather in what they have understood to be a safe place not only to come together, but also to allow themselves to be desired in a sexual way. We desire to be desired; we desire connectivity. Desire makes the pulse quicken and the heart beat hard. Whether it's a wink from across a crowded room or the prospect of your beloved's touch, our bodies are continually aware of desire.

The bodies in *103 Shots* represent a spectrum of gender and sexual identity. There are multiple ways one can desire, and this film underlines the beauty and tragedy, or the pleasure and pain, of queer desire. Cassils's and Mapplethorpe's works depict lost lives, utilizing death as the greatest leveler while confronting the viewer not only with recognizing these bodies, but also the desire and death they hold. Many demonized our desire as the cause of our deaths, rendering AIDS deaths and those in Orlando unable to be grieved by the public at large. Death does not see color, sexuality, or gender; death comes for us all.

Fragility in the balloon creates a point at which it does break. The balloon ruptures, it breaks, it breaks up, and breaks apart. Grief, trauma, and loss seemingly break apart all in its wake, especially after the loss of a loved one via a breakup, breakdown, or death. Through disorientation, one gains another, and the empathy created within *103 Shots* allows people witness the testimony of queer love and loss.

The balloon stands in for a multitude of things keeping lovers or families apart: belief systems, fear of loss, miscommunication, etc. To explain or understand the barrier, one must break apart and relinquish the most familiar parts of oneself to truly know someone. If one is to truly know the other, one must embrace the disorientation that comes with these things. Cassils's *103 Shots* and Mapplethorpe's *Embrace* show the struggle that occurs when fighting against what normalized modes deem the right way to love or to come into being. To quote Judith Butler:

> For if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the 'we' except by finding the way in which I am tied to 'you' by trying to translate but finding that my language must break up and yield if I am to know you. You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss. This is how the human being comes into being again and again as that which we have yet to know.[9]

Language must break up and yield, leaving one speechless, for there are no words to encompass trauma, loss, or grief. Perhaps it is empathy; perhaps it is exactly this, knowing there will be moments with unfulfilled hope and incomprehensible pain. Tremendous importance lies in having someone show up as your companion, someone who is allowed to witness your exhaustion, your pain and disorientation. This kind of grief and loss can create a tectonic shift where pieces that were no longer needed are broken off, allowing other things to pass through and attempt to fill the giant hole created when language is lost and silence is shrapnel. There is a space beyond grief, beyond sadness, and beyond heartbreak where language ceases to exist in its functionality and time stands still. Sometimes there is no getting past or through the other side of that place with no name: attempting to go past it simply brings it to light. There is no direction or true north to navigate these experiences because everything is frozen.

We will fail each other, we must fail each other so we can be witnessed as human, vulnerable and raw. We must become undone because in our own undoing we come face to face with ourselves and with our own failures, or what we feel are

our failures. However, they are not failures, they are our humanity, they are us at our most human, our most vulnerable. For some it is not easy to find someone who sees them, who sincerely sees who you are as a person in all your imperfections. So, when you finally find someone who sees you, and then that someone is lost, the overwhelming feeling of that absence and invisibility is beyond words. *103 Shots* asks the couples to walk through what they believe are their own failures and go toward one another in hopes of finding their own humanity and being witnessed as such. There are no right or wrong ways of tackling the loss of oneself or the absence of a loved one or a beloved despite what Western ideologies say.

Pulse, Pride, and a family's home are supposed to be safe places, but it is exhausting when you have nowhere you can truly feel safe and seen. Returning to the story of when I first heard about the Orlando shooting: I needed my partner. But I also needed to *be* a partner. I needed to bear witness to her pain and disorientation. I needed to *see* her struggle to finally come face to face with the invisibility of my desire and love to my family. I failed to fully witness my partner, just as my mother failed to see *us*, see *me*. By making our way through disorientation, we find where and who we come to feel at home with, and in witnessing the pain and trauma of others, we come to know our own.

The dilemmas of love and desire don't yield simple answers, for they create feelings of attachment. In these feelings of attachment and love, one realizes there is potentiality for great loss. The couples in *103 Shots* stand within reach of one another, yet the distance between threatens to divide, the chance to embrace slips away. *103 Shots* asks us to hold tight to one another in the face of fear, suffering, and great loss. The idea of embracing through the giant, unexpected "pop" is asking us not to let go but in fact squeeze harder. The realization that the lost ones are not coming back becomes the most disorienting, painful, and exhausting thing to navigate. How does one let go of someone when life without them is brutally exhausting? When unfulfilled hope is the only option one has, how can one ever really let go?

* * *

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writing practices are inspired by life events and encompass queer exhaustion, queer theory, trauma studies, and loss.

Notes

[1] Cassils, *103 Shots*, video, directed by Cassils, June 27, 2016, http://cassils.net/portfolio/103-shots/

[2]Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routledge, 2009), 33.

[3] Simultaneously, Cassils also pays homage to the AIDS artist collective, Gran Fury's, 1989 New York City bus posters titled *Kissing Doesn't Kill: Greed And Indifference Does*. Gran Fury (1985-1996) is a collective of AIDS activists retaliating against government and social institutions that make those living with AIDS invisible. Their most well-known graphic is the Silence = Death. Gran Fury's 12 x 3-foot poster depicts three different sets of interracial couples facing one another caught in the act of kissing: a man and woman, two men, and two women. These full color images are shot against a stark white background and sit below the blue text that reads, "KISSING DOESN'T KILL: GREED AND INDIFFERENCE DOES."

[4] *A History of Violence* was a multidisciplinary exploration of the social and political context of violence against and within queer communities. Some artists included in this show were Cassils, Angela Hennessy, Xandra Ibarra, and David Wojnarowicz.

[5] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

[6] The term "person" is used as a more accessible, less co-opted term instead of terms such as "partner," "girlfriend," or "boyfriend."

[7] Kobena Mercer talks about Mapplethorpe's images as *memento mori*: "In this mourning, there was something horribly accurate about the truism that death is the greatest leveler, because his pictures have now become *memento mori*, documentary traces of a style of life and a sexual ethics of the '70s and early '80s which of now largely disappeared and passed away into memory." Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 197.

[8] The underpinning of the homage is a thread throughout Cassils's work nodding to both Benglis and Mapplethorpe. Benglis and Mapplethorpe were critical in moving the erotic into the mainstream. The agency of women reclaiming their

own sexuality combined alongside Mapplethorpe's use of homoeroticism called attention to the ways both artists were censored during this time. Cassils acknowledges both artist and history; the feminist movement and the AIDS epidemic. Cassils complicates conversations and representations around feminism and the gendered body while highlighting the militancy of LGBTQI+ bodies and the celebration of our community.

[9]Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), 49.

Cough, Spit, Swallow

Mark Augustine and Joseph Carr

Culture is the beam of light flowing through the built environment and it is the medium that bends the stream of architecture and design. *Cough, Spit, Swallow* (2018) depicts three conventional sites of ritualized physical contact (intimacy) that have created unique, specialized, and broadly recognizable furniture: the exam table, the dental chair, and the glory hole (Figure 1). The work both satirizes conventional propriety and shows us a method of reading the messages inscribed in the seemingly mundane.

The wry title of the triptych evokes the specific activities that we may imagine in these spaces (a hernia exam, a dental procedure, and a blowjob) while the equanimity of the presentation asks us to consider these practices with impossible detachment. The technical motivations of the spaces' designers are juxtaposed with those of the marginal figure who adapts the bathroom stall for sexual purposes and who, from the hegemonic vantage point, is labeled a vandal and a pervert. Furthermore, there is a pun contained in the "professional" status of the health worker contrasted with that of the sex worker (the oldest profession). Through its humor, the work both acknowledges the prevailing distinctions between these social roles and satirically pokes at their validity.

In a Foucauldian gesture, the title highlights the activities that complement these spaces rather than the bodies that inhabit them. An exam table signals a patient where to sit, just as a stool places a medic in the scene. Likewise, a glory hole is an architectural intervention and an instruction. Nominally, public restroom partitions provide privacy to conceal people's actual proximity and vulnerability, whereas the glory hole reflects a mirror image of the partition as it provides anonymity while simultaneously exhorting exposure and contact. For observers, the architecture is a lens that draws these practices into focus, but for an imagined

patient who moves through these situations, the architecture is a refractive medium that presents semiotic geometries of resistance and free flow.

* * *

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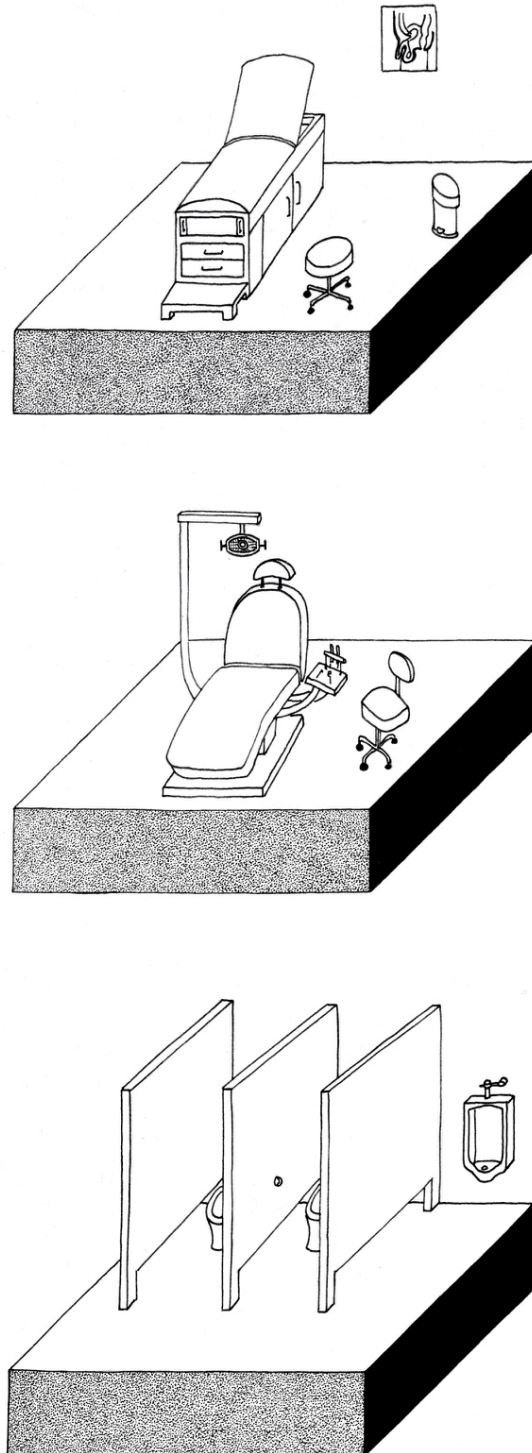
Figure 1 Mark Augustine and Joseph Carr, Cough, Spit, Swallow, 2018. Image courtesy the artists.

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"Tool of Enlightenment": The Dreamachine's Effects for Individual Autonomy

Katie Oates

> In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message.
>
> — Marshall McLuhan

Brion Gysin (1916-1986) was an artist, poet, lyricist, linguist, musician, and performer, but first and foremost he was an experimenter and innovator. Spanning 1935 to 1986, his oeuvre illuminates his extreme interdisciplinarity, a quality that has granted him cult status in New York, Paris, and Tangier subcultures, such as the Beats. Though Gysin's work has been exhibited worldwide, he is best known for inventing the Dreamachine—an apparatus that uses the flicker effect to produce visual hallucinations in the minds of its observers.[1] He conceived of the machine after what he later discovered was the natural flicker effect from the sun. This occurred in 1958 while he was travelling by bus from Paris to the Mediterranean. As the setting sun shone through the branches and leaves of a tree-lined avenue, the fragmented rays of light, combined with the precise speed of the vehicle, produced flashes of light before him. He described the effect this created as: "An overwhelming flood of intensely bright patterns and supernatural colours

exploded behind my eyelids: a multi-dimensional kaleidoscope whirling out through space. I was swept out of time."[2] The brief phenomenon that ended as abruptly as it began—as soon as the bus passed the line of trees—spawned Gysin's determination to develop a machine that could reproduce the natural phenomenon "at the flick of a switch."[3]

The resulting device is a cylinder (usually black, silver, or white) approximately a meter in height and incised with systematically positioned slots that are shaped like tulip buds surrounding a 100-watt lightbulb, which emanates through the metal exterior. The device rotates on a finely calibrated gramophone turntable between 33 and 78 revolutions per minute. The light passing through the spinning cylinder creates rhythmic pulses of light at a rate of eight to thirteen per second—or what is known as the flicker effect. Gysin was the first person to conceive of a device that could immediately reproduce the illusory effects of flicker. The Dreamachine, however, was intended as more than just a device with hallucinogenic properties. Gysin claimed that it had medicinal and artistic applications, with his ultimate goal being for the machine to liberate the mind from rational thought in order to produce new thought patterns.[4] It was to escape from what he believed was the pervasive control of culture.

Using media theorist Marshall McLuhan and philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin, this paper explores the multi-sensory dimension of the Dreamachine to elucidate how it operates within McLuhan's concept of hot and cold media, vacillating in the tension between them, as a device that evokes psychological and corporeal sensations. Within this framework, the Dreamachine is an illumination of McLuhan's famous argument, "the medium is the message." By extending viewers' senses, the machine relies upon their participation for the production of meaning. This paper aligns the Dreamachine with other 1960s technological media and artistic uses of stroboscopic light effects that make porous the boundary between mass technological media and the art world, while ultimately proposing a new perspective on the Dreamachine that questions the subjective perception of how it was used: for its effect is something that is not seen, but rather, perceived in the minds, and felt through the bodies, of those who use it. Its value is similarly hinged upon its participatory dimension. Through viewers' engagement with the machine, it therefore becomes an extension of themselves, and their "sense lives."[5] This paper accordingly argues that the Dreamachine was an endeavour to evade control mechanisms of society and ultimately regain the individual autonomy that was lost in the automation of modern-day life.

The Artist and the Dreamachine

Following his natural restlessness and curiosity, Gysin spent the majority of his life continuously passing through various cities and time zones. His sense of place and identity were markedly shaped by his early experiences travelling and by his interdisciplinary studies. Gysin was born in England to Canadian parents, growing up in Edmonton, Alberta, and moving to Paris to study painting in 1934.[6] He was drafted into the Canadian Army during World War II, where he studied the Japanese language and later produced a series of calligraphy drawings and paintings that reflected his preoccupation with control mechanisms of society.[7] It was his serendipitous encounter with writer and friend Paul Bowles in Paris in 1950 that left the greatest impact on his subsequent work. What began as a visit to Bowles's villa in Tangiers resulted in Gysin taking up residence in the Maghreb nation for over twenty years. Here, Gysin met writer and visual artist William Burroughs, who would become his closest comrade and collaborator.

Burroughs and Gysin were reacquainted in Paris in 1958, residing at 9 rue Gît-le-Coeur's Hôtel Racou—now informally known as The Beat Hotel because it housed key figures from the literary movement at different times throughout the 1950s.[8] Here, and within the Beat literary circle, Gysin and Burroughs produced their most prolific work between 1958 and 1965, finding equivalent world-views and artistic expression in each other, and through their collaborative experiments. The most radical of these are the cut-up poems and novels and the Dreamachine, which share an underlying impetus: to supersede rational thought through material processes.[9] Gysin incidentally (re)discovered the cut-up method while clipping newspaper articles on his worktable and observing the juxtaposition of words and phrases as the fragmented pieces randomly mixed together before him, revealing new, surprising meanings. Upon this revelation, Gysin and Burroughs began intentionally cutting up newspaper clippings and randomly rearranging them with the belief that new insights would be revealed by implementing this new mode of expression and generating new texts.[10] They created cut-ups with the aim to liberate words and images from their cultural meanings, rupturing conventional structures of representation, and thus producing new meanings. The physical cutting-up and reconfiguring of linear narratives reflected a psychological reconfiguration that disavowed conventional experiences of reality. As articulated by Danish cultural studies scholar Kasper Opstrup Frederiksen:

> Since the word is the limit of thought, the way we have been conditioned to read and react to words ultimately controls our behaviours and our possibilities for thinking the radical new. The

cut-ups are techniques to create new memories and new myths out
of the cultural debris surrounding us.[11]

As such, the goal for the cut-ups, and later the Dreamachine, was to allow
the practitioner to intervene in the world by reaching beyond the conscious mind,
breaking linear narratives and representations, to reveal new experiences of reality
and thus new insights.

The Dreamachine was designed with similar, yet more radical, intent. As
noted above, Gysin's determination for the machine's invention stemmed from
experiencing a natural flicker effect from the sun's rays and the fragmented trees,
upon which he immediately wrote to Burroughs detailing his account. In
partnership with their friend and Cambridge University mathematics student Ian
Sommerville, Gysin and Burroughs spent an intensive period of time conducting
scientific investigations before creating the first prototype in 1960 at the Beat
Hotel. The following year, Gysin took out a patent for a "procedure and apparatus
for the production of artistic visual sensations," which reads as following:

> The invention which has artistic and medical application, is
> remarkable in that perceptible results are obtained when one
> approaches one's eyes either opened or closed, to the outer
> cylinder slotted with regularly spaced openings revolving at a
> determined speed.[12]

As articulated by executive director of The Drawing Center in New York,
Laura Hoptman, Gysin dreamed that the machine would "supersede the controlled
words and images of the conscious world."[13] By generating shifts in consciousness,
the machine could undo the bounds of social control and ultimately liberate the
mind from ailments—albeit, temporarily.

History of Stroboscopic Light Research

While the Dreamachine was arguably Gysin's most ambitious endeavour, multi-
sensory experiences induced by stroboscopic light had long been documented.
John Geiger notes that flicker's origins and its relation to visionary experiences are
ancient, for "the necessary conditions for flicker can occur spontaneously in
everyday life." [14] Such effects have been traced over 200 years. Bohemian
physiology professor Jan E. Purkinje was the first experimental physiologist to
report on the subjective effects of flicker, describing the natural phenomena that

would occur from the movement of fingers over, and applying pressure to, closed eyes in 1823.[15] Many scientists soon built upon this research with explanations and theorizations about perceived mental images. For example, German scientist and philosopher Hermann von Helmholtz observed that "flicker produced a rosette surrounded by irregular spots, while pressure on the eyeball produced a weaving, maze-like pattern."[16] In 1886, physiologist L. Wolffberg reported on the illusory effects resulting from similar experiments, as did scientist E. Thompson in 1919. Several optical toys emerged in the nineteenth century as early experiments in motion and perception that were also used for entertainment. For example, Charles E. Benham's Artificial Spectrum Top, which was the first man-made flicker object for consumers; the Magic Lantern of the seventeenth century; as well as the Kinesiskop; Stroboscope; and Zoetrope. Beyond producing optical phenomena, these toys helped incite investigations into the deeper potential of the brain's flicker response.

The most important research, particularly for Burroughs, Sommerville, and Gysin, was the work of Dr. William Grey Walter. Head of physiology at the Burden Neurological Institute in Bristol in 1946, his was the most important work to come out of this field, for he was the first to introduce electronic stroboscope to psychophysical experimentation.[17] His work is particularly significant for recognizing that the necessary conditions for photic stimulation could randomly occur in everyday life, drawing the conclusion that "individual differences in brain wave patterns discerned differences in visual imagination."[18] Walter subsequently presented the first systematic study of flicker, determining five categories of experience based on his subjects' inventory of mental experiences. Altering the regular mode of consciousness, the flashing light was found to evoke not just visual stimulus, but kinetic and emotional as well. His subjects reported abstract and representational imagery; cutaneous sensations such as numbness or pricking; emotions such as pleasure, fatigue, or anger; feelings of vertigo, swaying, jumping, or the displacement of time; and rarely, epileptic seizures.[19]

The Dreamachine: Hot, Cold, Effect

Burroughs, Sommerville, and Gysin had all familiarized themselves with Walter's research by the time they designed and made the first Dreamachine. While the 1950-60s saw a rise in neurological research among scientific communities, this period is also commonly known in popular culture as The Golden Age of Television. The Dreamachine can therefore be situated within the context of television broadcasting. Creative Writing scholar Tan Lin identifies the criterion

for distinguishing television from art objects such as paintings or photographs using Friedrich Kittler's tripartite concept of media, which he divides between storage, transmission, and computation. Lin writes:

> For Kittler, certain media, photography and painting most obviously, embody storage, capturing imagery and retaining it, more or less permanently, in emulsion or pigment. In contrast, TV is a broadcast medium—that is, engaged in transmitting or distributing information.[20]

The Dreamachine can be connected to the television for two primary reasons. First, both objects fit Lin's condition for being "transitory," as neither are "susceptible to storage."[21] This means, rather than storing and emitting pre-recorded visualizations for viewers to observe, the machine emits rapid rhythmic flashes of light at the precise speed for which the brain's alpha rhythms become stimulated and induce hallucinatory illusions in the minds of viewers. Second, Gysin was the first to equate the Dreamachine with the television by regarding it as the "logical successor to the television" for supplying viewers with the tool to "create their own programming" of illusions.[22] He hoped that it would "replace television as the ultimate home leisure component, unleashing visions and changing consciousness."[23] Rather than the pre-programmed content of television broadcast, Gysin predicted that with the aid of the Dreamachine people would encounter permutations of multi-sensory experiences. Using the language of television, Gysin articulated a conception of the machine that would equip people with a tool to experience their own unique sense of reality each time they used it.

Despite Gysin's ambitious prediction and his failed attempts to commercialize an invention to supplant television, the Dreamachine can nevertheless be positioned in the tension between McLuhan's concepts of hot and cold media, illuminating particular tendencies of each.[24] McLuhan writes: "A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in 'high definition.' High definition is the state of being well filled with data."[25] Low definition, by contrast, simply provides minimal visual information.[26] McLuhan uses the examples of film and television to distinguish hot and cold, and to address the participatory dimensions of each, as they relate to information conveyed by media in the "new electric structuring and reconfiguring of life" in which he was writing.[27] Within this reconfiguration, film and television are becoming mass consumed for the first time. Hot media such as film allow for less participation than that of cool media, since the visual data in film is presented to the audience in completion and therefore does not require their active participation to contribute to, or fill in, the

missing information. Accordingly, a hot medium is better suited to the "passive consumer," who can mindlessly absorb its visual properties.[28] Conversely, a cool medium like television has incomplete, or fragmentary, visual data, akin to mosaic.[29] McLuhan explains that, "because the low definition of TV ensures a high degree of audience involvement, the most effective programs are those that present situations which consist of some process to be completed."[30] Viewers therefore become a necessary component for filling in the visual information under "TV conditions," sustaining an intimate connection between the medium and the viewer; a connection that is absent from hot media.[31]

Applying McLuhan's theory to the Dreamachine, then, can illuminate the device as "hot" for the profusion of illusions appearing in viewers' minds, opposed to the decreased amount of images communicated through cool. A hot medium's predication on extending one "single sense," however, lends the machine a "cool" tendency. As documented in Gysin's experience and in the above noted scientific research, participants often experienced "hallucinations involving more than one sense, perceived changes in body shape, and even the displacement of time."[32] Since the machine has been shown to simultaneously extend multiple senses, this aspect of McLuhan's definition creates tension in the machine's placement between hot and cold. Though the participatory dimension is crucial for activating the Dreamachine's effects, minimal participation is required. A mere two to three minutes of sustained attention in close proximity to it is enough to forge a diametrical relation between audience and machine, thereby prompting the machine to act upon the brain. And while this participation is essential, it is not necessarily the sustained attention that Walter Benjamin contends is required for contemplating "high," or "pure" art, versus watching low art of cinema.[33] Similar to hot media, cinema for Benjamin demands only a detached state of attention from audiences, therefore requiring low participatory engagement from its viewers. Audiences remain distracted yet alert enough to absorb the visual stimuli on the screen, retaining this mental state as they exit the cinema and enter into the fast-paced world of modern life.[34]

Tensions between the loss of the "aura" in the age of mechanical reproduction—that is, the originality and authenticity of a work of art—and the new shifts in perception in the wake of film and photography's advent, had altered the way Benjamin and his contemporaries viewed and experienced the visual world.[35] Ambivalent about such transformations, he examines the organization of the mode of "human sense perceptions" in relation to their historical circumstances.[36] In the age of moving images, subjects are no longer attentive to contemplate the older, analogue mediums of art, such as painting. They became the object of contemplation through their submission to film's restructuring of

perception. Benjamin writes: "Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise."[37] Subjectivity is consequently implicated as symptomatic of this modern way of life, leaving Benjamin to interrogate how to reflect on human behavior after having engaged with, and being absorbed by, these now "inauthentic" images.[38]

Benjamin's discussion of attention can also be related to McLuhan's articulation of comfort as a means to distinguish between hot and cold, further pulling at the Dreamachine's tenuous position between hot and cold. He writes:

> 'Comfort' consists in abandoning a visual arrangement in favor of one that permits casual participation of the senses, a state that is excluded when any one sense, but especially the visual sense, is hotted up to the point of dominant command of a situation.[39]

Similar to Benjamin's detached state of attention, McLuhan's "casual participation" privileges the visual. Viewers need not grant cinema, or the Dreamachine, anything more than a few minutes of focus. And while viewers are documented to have often felt shifts in perception, emotion, and sensation, these experiences are subjective and not necessarily guaranteed to occur. As evidenced by Dr. William Grey Walter, John R. Smythies, and previously mentioned scientists, the visual system of the human body is the dominant site of research in stroboscopic light. Patterns, shapes, and colors were all strategically categorized in theorizations regarding the phenomenon of stroboscopic illusions. Privileging the Dreamachine's visual effects on viewers thus "hots up" its cooler tendencies.

Conversely, in McLuhan's debate between hot and cold he pushes the discussion of comfort further to consider its reverse—fury. He writes: "in experiments in which all outer sensation is withdrawn, the subject begins a furious fill-in or completion of senses that is sheer hallucination."[40] Much like the cool medium of television, which is predicated on viewers' visual filling-in for completion, the Dreamachine induces such hallucinations when attention is focused on its flickering light. This is particularly true since the brightly emanating light encourages most to engage with it through closed eyes. In accordance with McLuhan then, "the hotting-up of one sense tends to effect [sic] hypnosis, and the cooling of all senses tends to result in hallucination."[41] As such, the disengagement of oneself from their exterior environment and the detached state of attention required by the machine provides a "cooling off" of its hotter tendencies.

McLuhan's famous argument, "the medium is the message" is similarly hinged upon human engagement with machines.[42] For McLuhan, the term media

encompasses all cultural objects: the mechanical machine, electrical light, film, television, literature, music—anything that extends, alters, or enhances the human senses.[43] The medium itself is what shapes and commands the scale to which human association and action takes form each time we allow a technology to extend our senses.[44] Therefore, it is not the content of media that makes it valuable, and thus qualifiable, but that they have become extensions of ourselves, no matter how they are used.[45] Equivalent to McLuhan's example of electric light, the Dreamachine, as a cultural object, is, as he writes: "pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name. This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the 'content' of any medium is always another medium."[46] The "simple flicker machine," as Sommerville labelled it, does not have a message, or meaning, unless it has a viewer, or participant, to receive it.[47] Once a diametrical relationship is forged between participant and machine, the device becomes an "*extension* of [their] sense lives."[48] The Dreamachine adheres to McLuhan's principles with the potential for extending, altering, and enhancing all human senses, inducing, as Gysin deemed it, an "extra-sensory" experience.[49] Participants become the necessary condition for the production of meaning, thereby making the machine reliant upon their engagement with its flickering light. They are the source of content (thereby another media), which is the corporeal and psychological experience it evokes; and the meaning, or the message, is the machine's ability to reveal new insights and experiences of reality.

To account for such extra-sensory evocations, this article now turns to the cornerstone of McLuhan's theory. While he argues that the significance of any cultural object resides in *how* it is used, it is the *"effect"* of this use that generates the "psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns" of human processes.[50] McLuhan writes: "Concern with *effect* rather than *meaning* is a basic change of our electric time, for effect involves the total situation, and not a single level of information movement."[51] To examine the Dreamachine's effects then is to consider not just the visual hallucinations produced in the mind—which can range from icons and symbols to entire landscapes—but to consider the entire scale of its evocations. That is, its capacity for "expanding consciousness and increasing awareness," and the ways in which its inventors endeavored to harness this faculty.[52] It is worth noting in full Sommerville's report about his first test and Gysin's new invention for capturing this reality:

> Visions start with a kaleidoscope of colors on a plane in front of
> the eyes and gradually become more complex and beautiful,
> breaking like a surf on a shore until whole patterns of color are

pounding to get in. After awhile the visions were permanently behind my eyes and I was in the middle of a whole scene with limitless patterns being generated around me. There was an almost unbearable feeling of spatial movement for a while, but it was well worth getting through for I found that when I stopped I was high above the earth in a universal blaze of glory. Afterward I found that my perception of the world around me had increased very notably.[53]

Sommerville articulates an experience that engages with the corporeal and the psychological, rather than a single level or single sense. To focus on the total situation, or the whole scene, is to move beyond the "single level of information." Gysin illuminates this point further in a 1962 essay entitled "The Dream Machine," in which he argues that the device makes obsolete previous answers to now outmoded questions about what art, color, and vision actually are.[54] Describing the optical illusions the machine evokes, Gysin writes: "the elements seen in endless repetition, looping out through numbers beyond number and back, show themselves thereby a part of the whole."[55] As suggested by Sommerville's and Gysin's claims, participants are purported to envision entire vistas of illusions and experience multi-sensory permutations in continuous sequential motion without rupture, creating an all-encompassing experience of multiplying inner visual fields and sensations.

Returning to McLuhan's discussion of cinema in relation to effect then, connects the concept of multi- or extra-sensory experiences with Burroughs and Gysin's intention for the Dreamachine to generate new insights and experiences of reality, while effectively repudiating what they perceived had become natural control mechanisms of society. McLuhan writes: "The movie, by sheer speeding up of the mechanical, carried us from the world of sequence and connections into the world of creative configuration and construction," generating an arrival of opportunities for "growth and organic interrelation."[56] His conception of the movie as the transition from lineal connections to whole configurations is reflected in Burroughs and Gysin's vision for the cut-ups and Dreamachine to reconfigure singular, linear structures to reveal new psychic vistas. If indeed, as McLuhan writes: "In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control," then the ultimate impetus for Dreamachine aligns it precisely with McLuhan's theory, as an instrument to evade human automation and retain individual autonomy.[57]

Cultural Context

A final key element to this article's examination of the Dreamachine, and of McLuhan's concept of effect, is a consideration of the context in which the machine was made public, and how other artists and filmmakers harnessed the potential of the flicker effect. Following from McLuhan: "the latest approach to media study considers not only the 'content' but the medium and the cultural matrix within which the particular medium operates."[58] While Gysin's dream of mass producing the machine was never fulfilled to the extent he had dreamed, it did however enter the public realm at a time of heightened social interest in psychedelic devices and events. Writer and editor Leila Hadley, who was also one of Gysin's biggest supporters for the commercialization of the Dreamachine, describes the social climate the first time she met Gysin and experienced the machine:

> Psychedelic events were happening all around New York at the time. Kaleidoscope machines whirred and flickered and projected colored slides across ceilings of bars and clubs, as well as changing patterns of colored light on the walls of discothèques, but there was nothing, nowhere, nonesuch that came close to the fascination of the Dream Machine.[59]

Invented in the early 1960s when cutting-edge technology propelled telecommunications infrastructure, including economic, cultural, and political globalization, new media systems seemed unprecedented compared to slower, analogue systems. New media technologies, such as kaleidoscope machines, strobe lights, and the cathode ray tube (CRT) incited a proliferation of medial devices in homes, nightclubs, music stages, and art galleries by mid-decade. The Dreamachine was first exhibited in 1962 in a group exhibition among neo-dada objects at the Antagonismes Salon in Paris. It was then at the Louvre's Muses des Arts Decoratifs and Galerie Iris Clert, also in Paris; as well as the Galleria Trastevere in Rome. In 1964, it was shown at a small gallery in Tangier, Morocco; in 1979 at Galerie von Bartha in Basel; and most recently, it was revived at the New Museum in New York in 2010. Gysin's goal for the machine's display was to create a "chapel of extreme experience" in the gallery space.[60] He sought to bombard the senses with multi-media installations, including recordings of electronically accelerated or repeated poems and floor to ceiling paintings.[61] Attracting considerable attention, the Dreamachine was met with positive reviews and public reception. They earned laudatory reviews in *Art International* and the

Herald Tribune after opening receptions; and while displayed, visitors were drawn to the whirling, flashing cylinder, entranced by its mystical, visionary capacity. They often walked away giddy or simply immersed in a smiling daze.[62]

Gysin and his collaborators were not the only ones to experiment with flicker's potential. By the mid-1960s, artists and filmmakers were captivated by stroboscopic light and began to seize it as a medium.[63] Filmmaker Tony Conrad was familiar with Walter's discoveries when he started experimenting with the flicker effect as an "exploration of possible compound harmonic structures in flicker perception."[64] He had taken an elective course in neurophysiology at Harvard in 1959, where Walter's studies were discussed; and although he had never met Gysin, he had heard of the Dreamachine. Conrad undertook his first film, *The Flicker,* in 1965 with the intention of evoking the flicker response within his viewers through the use of cinematic tools. Operating under the same premise as the Dreamachine*, The Flicker's* audience at the New York Filmmakers Cinematheque in 1966 similarly reported "unusual side effects."[65] As reported by Conrad: "Some people saw insects and birds. Letters or numbers. Many people saw concentric circles—the most was coloured, jiggling mandala-type figures."[66]

Andy Warhol similarly captured the possibilities for flicker in his later practice. Employing the medial devices of cathode ray tube (CRT) and strobe, works such as *The Chelsea Girls* (1966), *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* (1966-67), and his *Shadows* series (1978) used flicker to expand the visual field, or environment, for viewers.[67] *EPI* in particular incorporated television, film, music, and strobe to generate an expansive "intermedia environment" in a series of live performance experiments.[68] Bridging the underground music and film communities, these events were, as editor Gary Needham reflected in 2014, "about the audience."[69] The intersection of artists, objects, and audience forged a participatory dimension, much like the Dreamachine*,* in which all were encouraged to engage with their surroundings. Through the simultaneity of multi-dimensional media, Warhol produced an immersive "electronic environment" that demanded a level of attention that was unlike the slower, analog medium of painting that fostered Warhol's iconic images.[70] The active audience participation required by Conrad's and Warhol's works further aligns them with the Dreamachine*,* as the media's dependency on viewership forges a reciprocal relationship wherein effect becomes activated. These works also show the extent to which artists used the flicker effect to create a collaborative, multi-media experience for their audiences. Artists, filmmakers, and musicians used flicker to engage audiences and create expanded fields of multi-sensory experiences, while evolving their own practices. These works by Conrad and Warhol are only a few examples that elucidate the rapid expansion of technological media incorporated into artistic practices following

from the Dreamachine's invention. They evidence an evolution of the boundary between mass technological culture and the art world, wherein it increasingly became porous and subject to manipulation and experimentation.

Conclusion

For Gysin, the immediacy with which the Dreamachine evoked its effects made it a revolutionary apparatus. And while McLuhan and Benjamin were primarily concerned with the negative social consequences that are simultaneously introduced with new technologies, Gysin envisioned the possibilities of harnessing the psychological extension of humans to machines for what he perceived was a pathway to new insight. By extending ourselves to the Dreamachine, he believed we could radically alter ourselves through shifting states of consciousness, coming to realization as autonomous individuals who would be liberated from the constraints of social control. Rather than acting as threat, or what Benjamin deemed, "psychic immunization" against the dangers of potential fantasies and delusions, Gysin and Burroughs saw their technological innovation as an enhancement for the mind.[71] The contemporary moments when Benjamin and McLuhan were writing, and when the Dreamachine was invented, are separated by over half a century, however the technological shifts that each saw are correlative.

The age of mechanical reproduction and the age of electronics incited revolutionary alterations in human association and processes, and in our involvement with media. Shifts from mechanical technologies to those of automation were conceived by McLuhan as shifts affecting alterations in depths of involvement with technology, whereby media became extensions of human associations. New patterns involving integrations of humans with machines thus enacted automation and eliminated manual, and thus controlled, operations. The social implications engendered by tensions between the loss of "aura," or authenticity, and new modes of perception prompted Benjamin's and McLuhan's hesitation regarding such newly accelerated modes of living and perceiving the world, which Dreamachine's tenuous position between hot and cold reflects. Burroughs and Gysin, however, saw revolutionary potential in new modes of perception. For them, the effects of mass technological advancement meant opportunities to supersede the control mechanisms of society through psychological reconfigurations of reality using such processes and devices as the cut ups and the Dreamachine; rather than internalizing and subscribing to regulative systems of capitalism and structures of conformity. By heightening sensory awareness, regaining control eliminated by the automation of modern life,

and effectively aiding in the reclamation of individual autonomy, the Dreamachine became a "tool of enlightenment."[72]

* * *

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Notes

[1] Originally deemed "Dream Machine," the term was later changed for marketing purposes.

[2] John Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience: A Short History of Stroboscopic Light and the Dream Machine* (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2003), 10-11.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Laura Hoptman, "Disappearing Act: The Art of Brion Gysin," in *Brion Gysin: Dream Machine*, ed. Laura Hoptman (New York: Merrell, 2010), 120.

[5] Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 19.

[6] Gysin spent time with the Surrealist group in France until the following year, at age nineteen, when André Breton had his painting removed from the group exhibition at Galerie Quatre Chemins in Paris, prompting his expulsion from the group. Gysin believed this time had cursed his career, leading him to blame subsequent setbacks on it. This experience is frequently cited in detailed accounts of Gysin's life, such as John Geiger's *Nothing is True Everything is Permitted: The Life of Brion Gysin* (New York: Disinformation, 2005).

[7] Guy Brett expands upon the significance of Japanese on Gysin's practice, which also relates to the ideas behind the later cut-ups and Dreamachine: "Calligraphy performs an interrelation between the personal fantasy and idiosyncrasy of the

writer/painter and the impersonal, universal energy which he or she invites to flow through them into the brush." Guy Brett, "Gysin Known and Unknown: The Calligraphic Paintings," in *Brion Gysin: Tuning in to the Multimedia Age*, ed. José Férez Kuri (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 61.

[8]. Today the hotel is named Relais Hotel du Vieux Paris, though they market themselves as The Beat Hotel.

[9] The term "novel" is used loosely here. While these books have become categorized within this genre, they do not seamlessly fit its qualifications because their disjunctive narratives are not intended to be read cover to cover and are often semi-autobiographical. Other collaborations include the books of cut-ups, *Minutes to Go* (1960, also with Beat poets Gregory Corso and Sinclair Beiles) and *Exterminator!* (1960), as well as their scrapbook-style text *The Third Mind*, which was originally completed in 1965 and contained instructions for various forms of cut-ups. The book was published in 1977, though not in its original form. Gysin also wrote an early script for the filmic versions of *Naked Lunch* and edited several novels for Burroughs. Burroughs continued making cut-ups post-Dreamachine when it supplanted Gysin's interest in them. These include the *Nova* trilogy, consisting of *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), and *Nova Express* (1964).

[10] Versions of the cut-up method date back to Dada poetry and Surrealist language experiments.

[11] Kasper Opstrup Frederikson, "The Way Out Invisible Insurrections and Radical Imaginaries in the UK underground 1961-1991," Doctoral Dissertation, University of London, 2014, 174.

[12] Geiger in Hoptman, "Disappearing Act," 120.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Purkinje published his findings in *Observations and Experiments Investigating the Physiology of Senses* (1823) and *New Subjective Reports about Vision* (1825).

[16] Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*, 13.

[17] Walter authored 170 scientific publications, including two books: *The Living Brain* (1953) and *Further Outlook* (1956).

[18] Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*, 17.

[19] Published in the journal *Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology* in 1949. It is also important to note, research by Walter and John R. Smythies shows that three to four percent of people experienced adverse reactions in

stroboscopic light experiments. Although uncommon, flicker could induce epileptic seizures in those not normally suffering from this disorder.

[20] Tan Lin, "Disco, Cybernetics, and the Migration of Warhol's Shadows into Computation," *Criticism* 56, No. 3 (Summer 2014): 484.

[21] Ibid.

[22] John Geiger, "'A Great Something Else': A Summary of Brion Gysin's Life," in *Brion Gysin: Dream Machine*, ed. Laura Hoptman (New York: Merrell, 2010), 20.

[23] Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*, 91.

[24] Beginning in 1964, Gysin exerted great effort over the following 20 years in his attempt to secure investors and manufacturers to mass produce the Dreamachine, which was inevitably hindered by lack of funds. He did, however, gain limited success in 1979 when Basel-based publisher Carlo Levi produced a limited-edition series of Dreamachines for exhibition at Galerie von Bartha. Hoptman, "Disappearing Act," 122. In 2016, Soleilmoon Recordings also launched a production of Dreamachines, which is still featured online for a hefty £600.00, although unavailable for purchase. Most recently, Apple purchased the official website, *Dreamachine.co*, launching a "DreaMachine" app, and advertising it as "The Key to Creativity."

[25] Marshall McLuhan, "Media Hot and Cold," in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 22.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid. McLuhan's text was originally published 30 years prior to the 1994 edition.

[28] Ibid, 31.

[29] McLuhan describes TV programming as a "mosaic image" in "Television," in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 335.

[30] Ibid., 319.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*, 10.

[33] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version" in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 24.

[34] Ibid., 42.

[35] Ibid., 23.

[36] Ibid., 315.

[37] Ibid., 240-241.

[38] Versus what Benjamin writes is the "unique value of the 'authentic' work of art," which is the "quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it. Since the historical testimony is founded on the physical duration, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction, in which the physical duration plays no part." Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 22.

[39] McLuhan, "Media Hot and Cold," 32.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 33.

[43] Ibid., 9.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 7. This concept is reminiscent of the concepts in Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1995).

[46] Ibid., 8.

[47] Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*, 49.

[48] McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," 19.

[49] Laura Hoptman, "Disappearing Act," 120.

[50] McLuhan, "Media Hot and Cold," 26; McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," 8.

[51] McLuhan, "Media Hot and Cold," 26.

[52] Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*, 47.

[53] Ibid., 49.

[54] Published in *Olympia* no. 2 with Sommerville's essay, "Flicker," alongside DIY instructions for constructing at-home Dreamachines.

[55] Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*, 62.

[56] McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," 12.

[57] Ibid., 7.

[58] Ibid., 11.

[59] John Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*, 5.

[60] For a spiritual analysis of the Dreamachine see Mojeanne Sarah Behzadi, "Iridescent Spirituality: Early Experiments in Expanded Cinema," thesis, Master of Arts (Art History), Montreal, Quebec, 2017.

[61] Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*, 63.

[62] Ibid., 64.

[63] The Dreamachine was used extensively by musicians as well, such as The Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney, Kurt Cobain, David Bowie, Marilyn Manson, Iggy Pop, DJ Spooky, The Mars Volta, Paul Bowles, John Giorno, Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, Ira Cohen, and many others.

[64] Tony Conrad, "Is This Penny Ante or a High Stakes Game? An Interventionist Approach to Experimental Filmmaking," *Millennium Film Journal* 43/44 (Summer 2005): 101.

[65] Geiger, *Chapel of Extreme Experience*, 75.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Tan Lin, "Disco, Cybernetics, and the Migration of Warhol's Shadows into Computation," *Criticism* 56, No. 3 (Summer 2014): 511.

[68] Ibid., 483.

[69] Needham was co-editor of *Warhol in Ten Takes with Glyn Davis* (London: BFI, 2013); Mike Pinnington, "What is Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable?," *Tate*, Nov. 27, 2014, accessed April 2, 2017, http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/andy-warhol-exploding-plastic-inevitable.

[70] Victor Bockris and Gerard Malanga, *Up-Tight: The Velvet Underground Story* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2003), 91; Images of slower, analog medium of painting include such series as *Marilyn, Campbell's Soup, Elvis, Banana, Mickey Mouse* to name a few.

[71] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version", 38; B.C. Ter Meulen, D. Taby, B.C. Jacobs, "From Stroboscope to Dream Machine: A History of Flicker-Induced Hallucinations," *European Neurology* 62, no. 5 (2009): 318.

[72] Ibid.

Linguistic Spatial Violence: The Muslim Cameleers in the Australian Outback

Joshua Nash

The Temporal, or an Absence of Violence?

This piece is proffered as a reconciliation. I intend it as an appeasement across the disciplines of language documentation, linguistics, architectural history, and, to a smaller extent, Australian colonial and cultural history. Further, the creative license I take in my writing style and the topics with which I grapple mean that I hope to reach new understandings of a story about the history of the exploration of the Australian interior now becoming more broadly known: the cultural and physical history associated with the presence of the Afghan cameleers in Australia. While this empirical and artefactual history has been documented and presented, and its associated architectural history and cultural-citizenry research is underway, the role of language in the story of the cameleers remains largely undocumented. [1] Through looking for and considering the role of placenames and language artefacts, I piece together a story of language meeting architecture. I document and ruminate on these names and their implications to see whether their being made explicit and recorded can provide a reconciliation of the crossover between the language and architectural experience the cameleers experienced. Here I use my own travel, movement, and pilgrimage event with colleagues from different disciplines through outback South Australia as a means to resolve some threads that relate cultural history, architectural (non)remnants, language and placenames (toponyms), and how time-space can remove objects and even memories in a fashion which can be *spatially violent*. And because my implication involves language, *linguistic spatial violence* is the expression I use throughout to make sense of my striving for harmony.

My use of *violence* is analogical. I link violence to that which has been

removed, destroyed, forgotten, is no longer. My definition contrasts with typical uses of violence: behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something. My violence is synonymous with absence; that which is forgotten, disremembered. Architectural presents (gifts) can endure as architecturally present(s) (built remains), like linguistic currents (waves, movements) can persist as linguistically current(s) (language still spoken). Just as time is implicated in my posing and the temporal is my delineating instrument dividing void and incumbent-cum-occupied space, the distinction between adjective–adverb and definite–indefinite article renders my description sensible. The spatial syntax of space is cast upon the syntax of spatially linguistic relics; the built in names and the honorifics of the assembled. A duel of dualities.

I use the mediation of presence and absence to advance an argument concerning (linguistic and architectural) spatial violence. The study of what I moot is a neglected and deficient architectural register layered against a landscape of language in place and a relative surfeit of realised monikers (there are relatively many names compared to the small amount of extant architecture). A couple of the names: Afghan Hill and Afghan Well (more later). A bipartite launching: architecture and language, the built and the names, the realised and un(der)realised, the theoretical and the practical, the violent and the gentle. The study: the architecture of the Muslim cameleers in outback (South) Australia. The method: linguistic architecture–writing, spatial (linguistic) writing, (languaged) site writing, or any apt amalgam. I contrast the missing and unavailable architectural residua of the explorer–drovers in the inland of Australia with a neo–representation and recognition that they are extant, if nothing, in language seen through toponyms (placenames). For me violence resembles the strength of material(ity) and vocables, that which can span and be recounted across time–space and which continues to exist where it wants. This schema is situated against the inherence of our study, those nomadics (not necessarily a cameleer, possibly me, not only because I am travelling this land in 2014, but because I am a South Australian) who are constantly at odds in keeping their hold against the violent potency of this time–space. Time has the last (violent and virulent) laugh with both architecture and language; it decides whether something stays or goes.

Architecture, like language, can be considered to be composed and comprised of a grammar. A crucial component to any architecture and any language, and particularly when aspects of the built and the spoken are few and even absent, is how the user uses these. I purposefully pose the user as absent in order to eliminate the restraints of utility and focus entirely on form and its almost formless possibilities. Architecture and language are as much concrete and definite experiences as abstract and removed realities. A building or a language no longer present, but which might have once been there yet has been

removed through time or other harsh means, are as relevant to my discussion as those which are prominent and stated.

Some background.[2] It was the late 1850s. Camels were deemed by prospectors and governmental officials to provide the best and most efficient means of exploring inland Australia and transporting goods and provisions into the country's heartland. Entrepreneurs saw transportation as a vector and means of opening. Horse and bullock teams could not cope with the sandy deserts, extreme heat, and lack of water. European cameleers were not unknown nor untrained, but the Muslim cameleers were recognised as the best and most efficient. For them the camel was more than a beast of burden. The Koran tells it is a blessed animal.

The Afghan camel drivers, the cameleers who steered their ships of the desert, ventured to Australia primarily for economic reasons. At least 2000 cameleers and 20,000 camels arrived in Australia during the period from 1850 to 1920. This epoch was a burgeoning time for migration to Australia and for the expanding of industry in (mainly) coastal centres. By this time, what inland Australia had to offer in terms of resourcefulness and potential financial probing remained largely unexplored. The 1893 gold discoveries at Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie in Western Australia greatly increased demand for camels by traders to move gold to other Australian trading posts. A vast network of camel routes spread across the inland. Most cameleers arrived in Australia as young men, in their 20s or 30s. They mostly arrived from the arid hills and plains of Baluchistan, Afghanistan, and the north-west of what was then British India, today's Pakistan. They assisted the exploratory expeditions of explorers like Thomas Elder and Ernest Giles, such as the laying of the overland telegraph line from Adelaide to Darwin, and contributed to the development of the physical infrastructure of the Australian outback. Many left wives and families at home, returning to them after their employment contracts with European employers in Australia were over. Others stayed on in Australia, and some formed unions with European and Aboriginal women. Today, their descendants retain marked links with this distinctive heritage. They acknowledge they are descendants of the cameleers; they have a definite skin colour unlike Europeans or Aboriginal people. Some people I spoke with in Marree, one of the main camel stations in South Australia, consider themselves *grey fellas*. Not black, not white, but in between. The cameleers' offspring maintain links to their ancestry through mind and heart and with events and acknowledgement in a more recent place of Muslim worship in Marree. The memory and sensation of the camel and their foot soldiers still adorn the outback.

The cameleers belonged to four main ethnic groups: Pashtun, Baluchi, Punjabi, and Sindhi. Despite cultural and linguistic differences, the cameleers shared ancient skills. In their homelands many led semi-nomadic lives, carrying

goods by camel string along centuries-old trade routes through arid and harsh regions of Central Asia. Our operators shared faith in Muhammed the Prophet, with more than a few being of the Sikh denomination. Many would pray as they travelled through the barren line of their journey. In their communities, small iron or earth-walled mosques provided a focus for daily prayer, religious festivals, and sociability.

The cameleers spoke a mix of languages, reflecting the landscapes from which they came. Pashto, Dari (Persian), Baluchi, Punjabi, Sindhi, and Urdu were likely heard in the streets of Kalgoorlie (Western Australian), Bourke (New South Wales), and Marree (South Australia). Some cameleers were literate, while others relied upon oral tradition, reciting poems or folk-tales at evening campfires and celebrations. Although the language of the Koran was not widely spoken in Central Asia, the cameleers would have uttered most of their prayers in Arabic.

The reader may note a significant absence of Aboriginal presence and marginalisation in my treatise. To talk of the Australian colonial story and the occupation of land without mention of such a central aspect, no matter the specific methods and writing practices adopted, may be perceived as again rendering a crucial player absent. Still, the focus here is on the cameleers and their architectural (non)integration, and not the contestation of the consideration of Indigenous relationships with and ownership of land and place. The Indigenous Aboriginal attendance in historical and ongoing political, cultural, and linguistic geographies of the colonisation in Australia cannot be denied. It is simply not my prerogative to characterise these. The interested reader is referred to any number of publications dealing with such matters. I need not list them.

It is July 2014. I have driven north from Adelaide with a small posse of colleagues employed on an Australian Research Council project entitled "The Architecture of Australia's Muslim Pioneers." It is with knowledge of the cameleers and what they built that I have departed. My workmates have their different foci; mine hover somewhere in inbetween spaces, straddling finding built remains and understanding the linguistics of concrete forms and dusted architectural landscapes. My position as driver, passenger, and generalist researcher in a four-wheel drive in the outback leads to emotional connectedness to the project and to the land (Figure 1).

After Port Augusta, I traverse the same path the cameleers took, north into the centre. I consider it a pilgrimage path. It is necessary to show where they were, at what times, and those European explorers with whom they associated (Figure 2). While on the so-called Ghan track leading north from Port Augusta, I search for the remains of these peripatetic pioneers. The remnants are both architectural (fewer) and linguistic-toponymic (more, though still few), the methods I use are as scientific as emotional. What I

Figure 1 The Australian outback in a four wheeled drive near Port Augusta, South Australia, 2014. Image courtesy the author.

experience on this desert mission is expressed through the emotions, experiences, and senses of self I seek. While these emotions are mine and not necessarily in any way those of the cameleers, I believe such sentiments can offer special insight into the relation between the Afghans and the places they lived and worked. From buildings through signs, spatial(ly violent) behaviour, and architectural pilgrimage, I notice a connectedness worth measuring. I want to write as much about architecture (strong in the sense that it is present, you can touch it, it is hard) and that which is gentle yet weak (namely the dusty remains of architecture no longer), as much about strength as the violence of time and what it confiscates from our vision. That is, I want to know and experience how time can forcefully remove previously strong artefacts like buildings and appropriate their physical memory.

The cameleers used their dromedarian creatures as their ships of the desert and their toil as their mark on the land. This time our animal is a grunty four-wheel drive, not a four-legged beast. We use an accelerator, automatic transmission, and raise much dust during our journeying. Our travels take us far north, beyond Goyder's Line.[3] Some of their sites can be visited—there are some remains. Still, despite their labours, their travail in the red dust, there exist few linguistic relics or objects in the landscape. A few gravestones oriented in the correct direction facing Mecca are incident, some unmasking obvious monikers and proper noun vestiges: Bejah, Khan, Muhammed. The toponymist (placenaming researcher) in me searches what I quickly realise is in vain: the desire to partake in placenames which may be more than the nondescript.
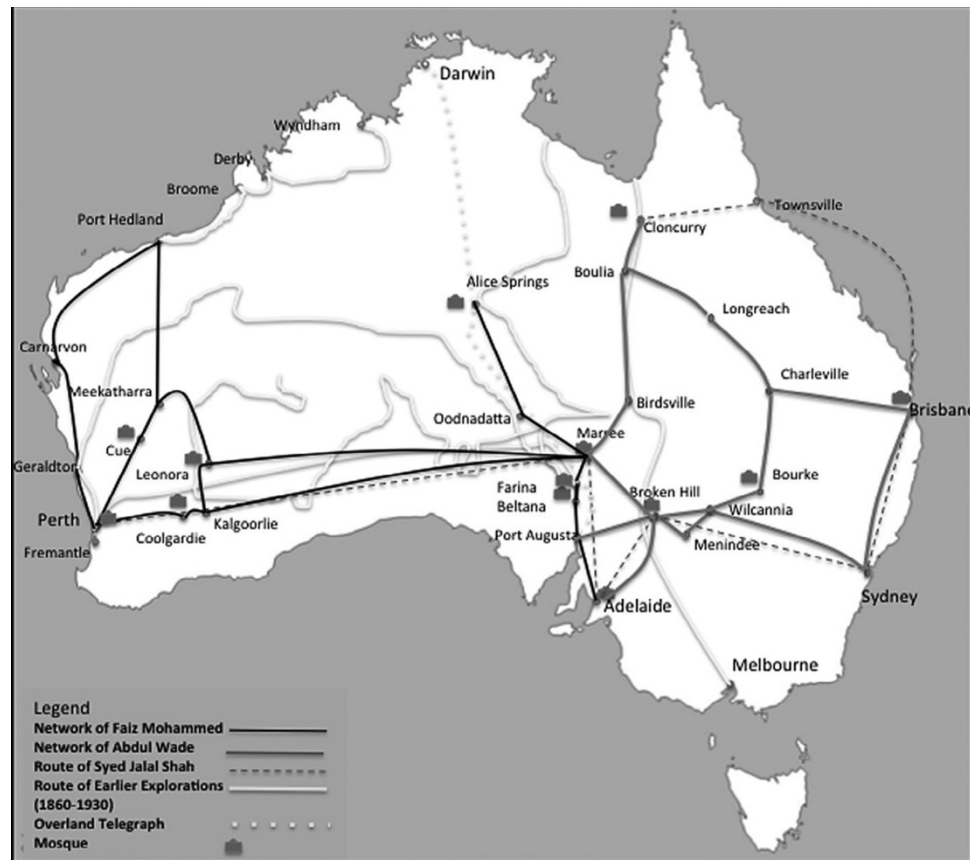
Figure 2 Map of early Australian inland exploring expeditions involving camels, 2016. Image courtesy of Md. Mizanur Rashid and Md. Noorizhar Ismail.

I am looking for as many placenames as possible, as much language in landscape as imaginable, and as many hints as to how language influenced the now-available-to-the-eye built remains of the cameleers. How can I document language data when there appears such a dearth? What is at stake here is how architectural language and vernaculars may crumble yet provide the possibility to salvage language documentation and how language might be collected in such granular environments.

I seek out something personal, epithets beyond the descriptive placenames of Afghan Hill, Afghan Well, and Camel Well of Beltana and the Afghan Quarter of Marree. Sure, these placenames were by and large created by other people referring to Afghans, not by the Afghans themselves. And indeed, the personal names were recorded in English scripts and mostly by English spellers. I can only give a few because so few remain. Nonetheless, these are my toponymic reference points. I have lucked out. Other than these, and other than a few architectural and archaeological remains, there is little to go on. Still, the (writing architecture) show must go on.

I begin by constructing an emotional standpoint of my feelings on this fieldwork around an architecture of atmosphere. When I travel through spaces, I am exposed to a character and tone, a time-space I have to experience and to

be exposed to in order to grasp and appreciate it from where I stand.[4] Within (an) architectural space(s), any experience is driven by the subjective, my mood, my emotional state, my sense of perception, and its connection to the world. This archaeology of atmosphere combined with the idea of the embodied experience as (a) pilgrimage situates my writing practice architecturally and linguistically.[5]

I employ the rather pliable and adaptable methodology of spatial writing (or "writing architecture") within architectural theory and extend it to an innovative and experimental rendering of the linguistics and architecture on this journey. By integrating spatial writing in this undertaking, I draw significantly on the ease of writing critically about space, intersections, and interstices offered by Jane Rendell, something she calls "site-writing," Hélène Frichot's steps towards writing as a means of theoretical enquiry and as a process of "imagining new forms of life into existence," and Karen Burns' application of extracted spatial tropes from philosophy through architecture to writing.[6] The resultant consequence is an outcome of the very travel I am engaged in combined in consonance with an introspective posthoc practice of writing up results and findings.

My application of writing as spatial practice aims at being sensuous scholarship, and I develop an emotional situatedness about my place within an architecture of architecture-writing.[7] This movement through space, on a specific linear path, is spatially driven and by nature violent. There is a piercing of the natural body of nature (read: transportation both vehicular and corporeal), an impaling of an old(er) narrative in terms of my own ends (read: linguistic highjacking), and my own ambition to (re)tell another's story based in an individual choosing of what I want to read (see: selective attention).

(The) Unbuilt of the Weak, or the Linguistics of Concrete and Dust

The cameleers' architectural influence may be notable, but it is humble. The Marree Mosque (Figure 3), for example, is an exceptional specimen of this humility. It is small yet distinct, respectful yet tame. It is one of the most well-known outback housings of the cameleers' worship. Without the camel drovers, little discovery, exploration, and settlement of Australia's vast desert interior in the nineteenth century would have been possible. Quietly but indelibly, these peripatetic Muslim pioneers also constructed their own places and dwelling spaces within this harsh landscape and made it (their) home. Along with their cultural settling, one would also expect a degree of linguistic housing to have occurred. That is, a certain amount of language residue is expected in signs (several gravesites contain Arabic writing) and in written

Figure 3 One of the earliest documented mosques in Australia, Hergott Springs (officially renamed Marree in 1883), South Australia, 1884. Image courtesy State Library of South Australia (Article B15321).

documentation (Australian linguist Jane Simpson lists some of these records), but there is much less than I expected.

As a trained toponymist, I would specifically expect language to be made explicit in landscape through placenaming practices. While the cameleers' concrete remains are scant and few, my assignment is to uncover a little more regarding that which is absent, and what this (architectural and linguistic) absence discloses: the previously organised dust I discover in the course of my walkabout. I want to know the severity of these leftovers, and how they were (mal)treated. Not by humans necessarily, but by being exposed to the elements and time across mobile epochs. Beyond standard and expected names like Afghan Well and Camel Well, personal names like Baloosh and Hafiz pepper the cemetery landscapes of Hawker and Marree. Still, I was hoping for more. The former cameleers, and their grey fella descendants, are not as visible as I had expected.

This writing of architecture, the project made flesh and made emotional, is represented as a/the deconstructed built, and a search for the built–unbuilt within the linguistics of concrete and dust. I perceive some messiness and jumble among this arrangement, yet I also find a striving for reconciliation from the violence of the spatial arrangements that I measure and adjudge. The strong, built architectural remains fashioned in the late 1800s by the cameleers are as much in my view as the weak, absent residua of the unbuilt they never fabricated. By documenting names, (in)definite articles, and spatial doings, I search the thought remnants of these explorer–builders, hoping to uncover something more than (the) concrete lees of primitive construction left after makeshift mosques and rural settlements had been deserted or rendered

defunct. The tangible frames prompt deliberation on the relationships of (the) language of the weak, the linguistics of concrete(ness), the grammar of architecture, and the definite versus the indefinite.

The Marree Mosque (Figure 3), a single structure since demolished yet rebuilt in a commemorative fashion to remember the influence and presence of the cameleers in Marree from the mid 1800s, was built primarily of mud, wood, and thatch. Although a small configuration, its presence would have been imposing on the otherwise inert outback landscape. The striking presence of such a piece of architecture in this remote place would almost have seemed bizarre for anyone except the cameleers themselves. So remote, so un-outback-like, so expansive in comparison to the flatness of its surroundings. The memories of the mental and physical heritage of this rustic place of worship and other spots of peripheral encampments in country South Australia are obvious, apparent, lucid. I collect images, experience contact and proximity, feel the grit of dust beneath my fingernails. This landscape must have been tough to build in, so difficult to even leave a trace. The unbuilt is concurrently more distant, abstracted, a language type unseen and actually unwritten. The punctuation between these dichotomies is where I sit and attempt reconciliation. The threshold of the seen (naked) expressed in the absent (clothed). One of my tools for penetrating and reconciling this weak–strong divide: language as (the) article.

Articles emerge definitely, indefinitely, or absently. The nexus of articulation produces the mortar and sticky stuff marrying the parts: definitiveness specifies, indefinitiveness makes vague, an absent or zero morph forges annulled space–place. Within this tripartite complex(ity)—a weak system—lies an intrinsic enfeeblement: the forfeiture of the unidealised, the unconcrete (subjected)-unconcretised (predicated), the forgotten. The definite–indefinite, built–unbuilt, materiality–thought, strong–weak, architecture–language contrarieties are the methods I use to arrange my project. Still, I know my object lies somewhere between any vantage point into any said divergent portal.

The cameleers constructed and were scaffolded by their new homeland, stationed among the exotic and esoteric placenames adorning pastoral Outback rural towns—Marree (Figure 3), Beltana, Farina, Oodnadatta. To me on my Australian desert crusade, the toponyms and places I traverse are as linguistic as they are architectural, as disassembled as entrancing. The landscape is strong, robust, fierce, the persuasion about what I see punchy, terse, laconic. The spaces this architecture has lost through violence want to be documented. I want to talk about it but find few remarks. Against what epitomises architectural and formal strength and brevity, I identify a linguistic verbosity, a frailty and casual weakness.

The weak, the soft, and the voluptuous of my systems of malleable and

apologetic thoughts, my language, and the articulation of articles and of (place)names are distinguished from the puissance of the actuality of the built architecture that I behold. The memories of the men and their animals are supple, the red soil possibly workable, the wind desiccating. They worked here, transported goods through notional thoroughfares, opened up colonial Australia. This country would not be the same without them. Theirs is an aspect of colonial (architectural and linguistic) history that is largely omitted. Strong forgetfulness, weakened potency of their posting within alien territory. I am attempting a remembrance.

The cameleers were situated on several (weak) edges, obvious verges. Linguistically marginalised, they spoke Hindi, Urdu, Baluchi, Pashto, Farsi. Financially limited because of their short-term contracts, they never occupied nuclei of outposts but would convene their forced dispersal in makeshift and improvised fringe bivouacs—Ghantowns—on the rim. Bijou hubs, cosy nooks that sympathised and had rapport with the Afghans' earlier housed and worded yarn. These abbreviated architectural librettos and jargonistic travails tell much. They were left out on the edge, rarely welcomed onto the "right side of the tracks." Through their contact with the colonial lingua franca, a developing Australian English idiom-cum-cant, their languages were also pressured to the brink, the linguistic perimeter. Pidginised and conceivably creolised medleys evolved, forming parallelled linguistic and architectural parlance, hybridised states, creolisation. Some more personal names of the Afghan cameleers— Abdullah and Shah—endure amid the contradiction separating the grounded dust fated relics (the now unbuilt, the thought, the linguistic) and architectural realis (it is there, I know it because I can see it) in amalgamated linguistic terrain and architectural reach. I acquiesced to thinking of these micro colonies the cameleers occupied in this non-urban land. I attempt to harmonise what appears as the violence of unfamiliar systems of building, talking, and naming with their campaign to prevail with their dromedaries (dromedary: from Old French *dromedaire* or late Latin *dromedarius (camelus) 'swift camel'*).

Weak(er) pidgins and creoles (contact languages), interspersed and even disrupted with/out articles, utter something much less humorous yet still real: fusion, adjustment, crusading for staying and belonging. A search for meaning in the lack of a defined medium or definite article, some significance in the broken and the feeble. Few rules govern this rural tribality, a sort of sectarian architectonic anatomy. No code meant no bureaucracy, a desolate democratocracy made flesh. Motile and itinerant, yes. Static and unstained, no. Peripatetic, nomadic, wandering, roving. A bygone migratory coupling noted now through form (secure) and word (flimsy).

Processes: the Grammatical and the Assembled

The search is directed at buildings, that which is built, and that which has since receded from view—that which has become dust-like. What we can no longer see competes with the present, a kind of architectural and archaeological loss. Nowhere is this as apparent as in language. Here it is not only language but also the archetype of the camel as a semiotic, fleshy representation of the linguistic, cultural, rhizomic, and symbiotic connectivity that fastens our memory to those who drove the beasts through such bleak and spartan terrain. Camels were and are still vectors, Outback conveyors. As the linguist Jane Simpson has shown, they even moved their language(s), they were carriers (of) pidgins. I believe assuredly there must be a story in the paucity and insufficiency of palpable and substantial pointers. This deficiency (in)forms and makes oblique the basis of my writing.

In the linguistic sense, the definite article "the" exudes force because it establishes and specifies a noun; in the architectural sense, definiteness and specificity inculcates the ability to touch, to be documented, an implied historicity of material and emplacement. This ganging up of definiteness renders the weak even weaker through an imposition of ideals: if you cannot be felt, be made definite, or be concretised, you are easy prey, painlessly acquiesced and removed. You are more likely to be colonised, marginalised, and potentially forgotten. And here we have the main (spatial) violence committed and imposed on the cameleers and their building(s): one can (almost) not find anything, to the point where we might conclude they were never there.

The toponymist searches for more, something less battered, less brutalised by the elements, more defended, safer. My fellow pilgrims (academic colleagues) are from different disciplines: history, architecture, and planning. They seek evidence in historical truth and evidence-based comprehension, a way of carnally documenting the spatial violence that has taken place here. Maybe I am lazy. I look for an easier way. I simply look around, take in the view. There are (almost) names everywhere. On the gravestones in the graveyards, in the few toponyms attached to the action of cameleering, and in the memories of people who remember these men.[8] When one walks into a graveyard, one heads west. That is where all the Muslim graves are. There is usually rusted metal around and some text, which is often barely readable, on a headstone (Figure 4). I want these names and their absence of the articular now to see if their articulation can lead us anywhere away from or towards some reconciliation of the spatial violence the cameleers experienced.

Figure 4 Cross depicting J. Khan, Port Augusta Cemetery, South Australia, 2014. Image courtesy the author.

The Articular and the Vehement

Articles are strange animals. They exist as an ephemeral aspect of grammar, unclear in their usage, pointed in their appearance. They punctuate space, render the corporeal abstract, the distant close. How and when to employ the definite, the indefinite, or the zero morph (Ø) even alludes native speakers of articular languages, while many languages do not possess lexemes that can be considered article-derived or article-representative. The article comprises a stratum of grammatical "bits," clitics, which fall under a higher order category: determiners. With possessive pronouns (my, our), demonstratives (this, that), and "no-things" (zero morphs, implicit and absent lexemes) articles begin noun phrases. These clitics, particles with no semantic value of and on their own, modify, alter, and affect that which they precede (proclitic) or come after (enclitic). "We're going to school" and "we're going to the school" entail differing degrees of definiteness and specificity, the habitual and non-habitual, physical and psychological space through knowledge of the present and past. Apropos the current, articles concretise and deconcretise distant and close spaces. The absence-presence of an article may de/concretise a place, just as the presence-absence of concrete can de-elaborate an article's presence-absence.

"To articulate" an idea means to make it clearer. "To cliticise" means to put a grammatical lexeme before (pro-) or after (en-) that which is being referred to. "To concretise" culminates the process of articulating

procliticisation. Objects of/as materiality (concrete, bricks, glass, the built) are "languaged" into analysable ephemera whereas the linguistic (indefinite and definite articles, clitics, grammatical lexemes) is rendered flesh through our knowing and not-knowing. Foregrounding and reducing a language's or an architecture's nexus of concreteness or unconcreteness must then be mediated through acts of processing, temporal-spatial engagement, and levels and degrees of inertia-action. This is what I have attempted with our current example of the cameleers and their built and spoken-named.

One aspect of the active process of *pilgrimage* (contact, movement, touch, viscerality, employment, assuredness) contrasts with an aspect of the inertia-directed process *introversion* (thought, distance, separation, speculation, quietude). At these edges, vicissitudes, and entrance points there is striving, an ambition to live and deploy (e)motions, thoughts. However, it is in pilgrimage that an active and concretised amalgam occurs involving world (in this case concrete), human (here "the article" as language), and reconciliation (a resultant equilibrium between thing and no-thing). This crossover as pacification has led us to believe that it is in names where architecture can live on, where it can avoid the brunt of a spatial violence gone wrong. The cameleers consecrated new architectural form—whether concrete or not—and made definite their linguistic imprint on the Australian landscape. The Marree Mosque (Figure 3) is our prime example. It is these consecrations, these in/definite, de/concretised memories and forms that are worth travelling to, at least in thought, in order to realise the schism between the definite-indefiniteness of their relationships to land, self, language, and architecture. I hope our adventure has soothed even the most sceptical, appeased the most violent of individual, clime, and time.

Peroration

Through time and positioning, a group's participation in foreign physical habitus has not only been forgotten but even impeached. In the search for legitimisation of my silent and unvoiced victors, I have insisted it is a dispute of and over linguistic form and content as much as built configuration and substance where a speculative retort exists as regards a possibly abstracted architecture of non-violence and its meek linguistic parallels. Where much literature focuses on the naturalisation of fact and masking of others in political violence associated with architecture, I have presented a softer and less explicit effectuation of (linguistic) spatial violence.

The worded and (un)built reorganising I thumbnailed precedes acts of neglect and ignorance and methods through which members choose to recollect. Where the cameleer architects were not exactly architects—they were

camel drovers, remember—and while the makeshift mosques in, for example, Marree and the Afghan establishments in Beltana, Farina, and Oodnadatta were not really built to endure much by way of time and climactic compromise, the events which did take place on the physical and cultural minority of the space-places they inhabited and their undermined architectural work do offer means through which to make observations. Like elsewhere in the Muslim world, the pool by the Marree Mosque (Figure 3) ensured worshippers entered the structure with clean feet. The mosque's open, earth-walled construction derives from the cameleers' homeland.

In the case of the cameleers, these architectural acts of violence were not necessarily physical or explicit. That is, it is not (necessarily) true that higher order decisions were given about where and how they could build and what architectural languages they would use, but that their work was continually under the duress of some higher, non-cultural regimen. The buildings fell, the materials vanished, and now there are only photos and other forms of documentation. Such natural phenomena caused their work to be made spatially violent. Still, and this has been my main contention, it has been through linguistic and toponymic means and media that the cameleers' made-spatially-violent architecture has been liberated and perpetuated. This has not occurred in obvious safeguarding and defending of the original structures themselves—they are all but gone—but in the toponymic representation and retaining of names within landscape and hence their spatial (and linguistic) behaviours.

Through nominal means, and through acknowledging the architectural unbuilt, a putative prevention and recovery from a lost and spatially divorced architecture removed from the colonial history of Australia has been retrieved. Architecture has thus played a role in the resisting of violence-through-forgetfulness. Whether or not I believe this to be a noble cause worthy of further architectural and linguistic research does in no way detract from the efforts such investigations and documentations make toward assuaging the fissures spatial violence itself creates.

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Notes

[1] The interested reader is referred to several volumes that document the extant empirical history of the cameleers: Philip Jones and Anna Kenny, *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland, 1860s-1930s (*Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 2010), originally published 2007; Christine Stevens, *Tin Mosques and Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), originally published 1989; Peter Scriver, "Mosques, Ghantowns and Cameleers in the Settlement History of Colonial Australia," *Fabrications* 13, no.1 (2004): 19-41. Several recent works relating to architectural and cultural history of the cameleers are Katharine Bartsch, Mizanur Rashid, Peter Scriver, Izhar Ismail, and Philip Jones, "Golden threads: Understanding the Transnational Significance of the Perth Mosque (1905)," in *Australia ICOMOS Conference, Adelaide, Australia*; Peter Scriver, Katharine Bartsch, and Md. Mizanur Rashid, "The Space of Citizenship: Drifting and Dwelling in "Imperial" Australia," *Fabrications* 26, no. 2 (2016): 133-157; and Katharine Bartsch, Peter Scriver, and Md. Mizanur Rashid, "Does Not the Glorious East Seem to be Transported to our Shores? Perth's Golden Mosque (1905)", in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 33, Gold*, eds. AnnMarie Brennan and Philip Goad (Melbourne: SAHANZ, 2016): 22-32. Jane Simpson's chapter "Camels as Pidgin-carriers: Afghan Cameleers as a Vector for the Spread of Features of Australian Aboriginal Pidgins and Creoles," in *Processes of Language Contact: Studies from Australia and the South Pacific*, ed. Jeff Siegel (Saint-Laurent, Quebec: Fides, 2000), 195-244, gives an excellent summary of the movement of the cameleers and how this was reflected in language change among communities in outback Australia the cameleers where peripheral to or an integral part of. Simpson's chapter is the only published work of significance that has dealt with the technical details of the cameleers' language, its movement through the vector of the camel, and of the cultural significance of the language used by these people.
[2] Much of this content is derived from Philip Jones and Anna Kenny, *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland, 1860s-1930s* (Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 2010), originally published 2007.
[3] Goyder's Line is a boundary line across northern South Australia

corresponding to a rainfall boundary believed to indicate the edge of the area suitable for agriculture. North of this line, rainfall is scant, and land is generally not suitable for cropping, only grazing. It was named in 1865 by surveyor George Goyder.

⁴ Gernot Böhme, *Architektur und Atmosphäre (*München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006).

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002); Tim Flohr Sørensen, "More Than a Feeling: Towards an Archaeology of Atmosphere," *Emotion, Space and Society*, 15 (2015): 64-73; Larry Russell "A Road Less Traveled: Vocation, Sex, and Religion," *Emotion, Space and Society* 11 (2014): 23-27.

⁶ Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (London: IB Tauris, 2010); Hélène Frichot, "Following Hélène Cixous' Steps Towards a Writing Architecture," *Architectural Theory Review* 15, no. 3 (2010): 323; Karen Burns, "Becomings: Architecture, Feminism, Deleuze—Before and After the fold," in *Deleuze and Architecture*, eds. Helene Frichot and Stephen Loo (*Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 15–39.

⁷ Paul Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Hélène Frichot, "Following Hélène Cixous' Steps Towards A Writing Architecture," *Architectural Theory Review* 15, no.3 (2010): 312-323. Regarding theoretical work on architecture writing and spatial writing, see special issue of *Architectural Theory Review* 15, no. 3 (2010). The introduction to this issue (pp. 233-241) provides ample references, methodological insight, and a practical summary of work into spatial writing and architecture-writing.

⁸ While the male cameleers did beget children, many of whom were female, there were no female cameleers who came from Asia to Australia. Camel droving was and is still largely a male dominated occupation.

Am I a Generalist or a Linguist? Or, How Relevant Are Emotions and Refracting Methodologies to the Academy? An interview with Joshua Nash

Joshua Nash, Leslie McShane Lodwick, and Maggie Wander

In his piece "Linguistic Spatial Violence: The Case of the Muslim Cameleers in the Australian Outback" (this volume), Joshua Nash utilizes innovative methodological approaches, spatial writing, and sensuous scholarship to explore the architectural and linguistic traces of Muslim cameleers crossing the Australian desert in the late 19th and early 20th century. *Refract*'s editorial board saw a unique opportunity to highlight interdisciplinary methodologies and diverse approaches to scholarship through an interview with Nash, who is currently Associate Professor at Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies in Denmark. Editorial board members Leslie McShane Lodwick and Maggie Wander interviewed Nash in August 2018 to learn more about the methods he employed to write his contribution to this issue. The following is the result of the email exchanges between Nash, Lodwick, and Wander.

What drives your unique interest in the cameleers of Australia? What has been missing from the study of cameleers that you address through this text, and potentially others? Your own biography seems very important to the reading of your scholarship. How are you thinking about your own history and experiences in the *telling* of this history?

My background as a linguist educated in psychology, environmental studies, and Indian eco-spirituality brings a distinct depth and focus to my work. I am a South Australian. In my childhood, I saw *The Ghan* leave Adelaide north toward Alice Springs and beyond countless times. This passenger train commemorates the

route, role, and personage of the Muslim cameleers in exploring the inland of Australia.[1]

My interest in the Muslim cameleers of Australia is founded in my teaching of architectural history and theory at the University of Adelaide. In 2014, I was invited by my colleague and friend Peter Scriver to participate in an Australian Research Council project documenting the architectural, settlement, and cultural history of the cameleers in the Australian outback. I transferred my background in linguistics and environmental studies to architecture and cultural history and in so doing sketched a self-mandated experimental and speculative course. The exploration of the built environment and its relationship to natural, cultural, and linguistic landscapes is a logical extension of my educational training and personal interests.

I felt there was a large gap in how the story of the cameleers, especially in South Australia where I was born, could be represented in a creative and hyper-personal manner. This is summed up in a single line in my piece: *I simply look around, take in the view*. I wanted to package an aesthetic thought pilgrimage within the corporeal and literal four-wheeled drive journeying I undertook in 2014 with my colleagues.

I have written about the aesthetic ardour of the fieldwork enterprise. I have brought sexuality, embodiment, fear, and humour to bear in my scientific probings. I have lived in India, Denmark, Australia, and the South Pacific. I have wanted to share these stories for a long time with whomsoever wants to listen and interact. It is both satisfying and humbling to have an active audience, any audience.

What is spatial writing and how do you engage with it in your work?

Spatial writing is not exactly well-established in architectural history or architectural critique. And bringing in a linguistic and placenaming dimension to spatial-site-creative architectural writing is certainly not commonplace either. Very few linguists have ever drawn in meaningful ways on the fertile-enough methodological and theoretical offerings of architectural history. This puts me in a novel position as a theorist and writer: I am a trained linguist-cum-ethnographer dipping into the benefactions of the micro-field of spatial writing and its placement within architectural research more generally.

While the spatial writing of Burns, Frichot, Rendell, and Stead largely advance a feminist critique of the built/person-in-place, I engage this form of writing with a desire to meld the strictures of scholarly composition with the wildness and personalised nature of freeform creation. The results emphasise my

own self-set requirement of individualising research and unleashing an entertaining story.

I feel the constraints of the academic industry often muffle and stifle the potentially lush voices of storytelling inherent in our chosen research projects. I definitely advise scholars, especially those starting out, to take risks and allow themselves to become unshackled from their own disciplinary constraints, while simultaneously using and honouring the fundamental tools these very disciplines have provided. The products might not necessarily lead to employment-friendly outcomes, but they will hopefully be welcome additions to the expanding thought archives of adventurous scholars.

Please elaborate on how emotion figures into your method. You refer to Paul Stoller's "sensuous scholarship"— could you explain how this helps you to think about the history of the cameleers?

I have conducted a lot of linguistic, ethnographic, and environmental fieldwork in Australia, the Pacific, and India. Fieldwork within these disciplines means interacting with real people in real places and real time. And interacting with people means emotional involvement. Any written production, which comes out of the emotional involvement of fieldwork, is by definition *sensuous scholarship*. Emotion means contact. Contact is sensuous.

My work is emotional in the way that I document other people's and my own nexuses and bonds of emotional attachment and connection formed around, by, and within language, place, time, history, nostalgia, and stories. For me and from where I stood in outback South Australia in July 2014, the story of the cameleers in which I partook was one of linguistic and architectural silence, absence, and passive violence, where I generally use *violence* as a metaphor of *time is the remover*, imbued with charged meaning. When I looked out over the sparse, desert setting, I felt the emotion of the narrative working through me, wanting to come out. I wrote what I felt.

I wish more emotion were put into *sensualising our scholarship*. The line "never let the truth get in the way of a good story" is key in unpacking and writing about the relevant and driving emotions of theoretical crafting. While A->B type writing, of course, has its place in scientific and even creative formulation, the oftentimes muddiness and loose clauses afforded by employing feeling and describing atmosphere in a spatialization of words is an exciting venture.

Parentheticals seem to be a productive way to work through the limits of language in capturing the complexities and nuances of the topic at hand. We are curious to know more about this. For instance, why do you say "spatial(ly violent) behaviour" rather than "spatially violent behaviour?" What *work* are the parentheses doing in this and other instances?

> When we talk to others we use hand gestures and body language. Written language can be both more or less restricted. My use of parentheticals seeks to unmoor the written from the impediment of disallowing plural meanings. "Spatial behaviour," with my implied meaning set on alluding to built architecture rather than human presence, is significantly different in its position than the meaning of "spatially violent behaviour," which I intend as an allusion to time-space-movement as being brutal by nature.
>
> I use parentheticals, purposeful bracketing, and punctuation as a way to unpack the experience of the duality of reading-writing. Through reading my work, I invite the reader into a dialogue, into the often-jumbled edge-edgy spaces and cracks between the components of the writing. This method is a crucial element in my emotional take on spatial writing; it further spatialises the physical page or screen on which the writing exists.

Please elaborate on your use of the relationship between grammar and architecture. That is, this piece suggests there is a link between the components of language (articles, modifiers, etc) and the components of architecture. What is the cultural significance between language and the built environment?

> Linking language and grammar with architecture is nothing new. My position is that few linguists, if any, have looked to architecture for disciplinary assistance (several architectural theorists have drawn directly on linguistics for aid, e.g. Jencks and Preziosi). I feel that the *architecture is grammar* metaphor is commonly employed in a weak way because those who use it are not aware of what the tools of morphology, syntax, semantics, and phonology within the study of grammar and linguistics can actually do. That is, scholars have used the *architecture is language* and *architecture is grammar* metaphors primarily in nominal ways rather than in ways effective to the actual analysis of architecture through the possibilities linguistics offers and vice versa.
>
> Indeed, articles (a, an, the), modifiers (most commonly adjectives), and the syntax of sentences can and have been likened to the order required when building and for creating stable buildings. Structure is necessary for anything to be built,

and linguistics assumes that it can measure or quantify what it deems are structural aspects of spoken and written language(s). It is important to remember that the idea of the existence of separate languages, which can be spoken of in terms of (a) distinct grammar(s) is problematic. The built is there, sure. Or maybe it is made absent due to its passively violent removal through time. And the spoken, written, and signed are there, too. Time eventually gets the better of these no matter what.

Using the technical tools I have inherited, and which sit fast in my methodological and theoretical tool belt, I strive in this piece and several of my other works to investigate creatively the linked cultural significance between built and spoken-signed instead of insisting on establishing empirical, literal, and scientific facts. Again, *I simply look around, take in the view.*

We wonder if you think about the article (as a linguistic device) and an article (a piece of writing) in similar ways? They both make things concrete and material, they "language" the world. Do you view your own work as a similar way of making things concrete?

These are excellent questions and exciting ways to speculate about melding language with linguistics and architecture. The definite article—the—can make the nominal—nouns: people, places, and things—definite, distinct, and less ambiguous. An article of writing can achieve the same with the wording of abstract thoughts into the concrete currency of the page.

I enjoy making world-concrete the fringey ideas, which might otherwise be lost in the packaging of scientific articular, that is, the oftentimes uncreative pursuit of formulating writing for peer review. It has been a luxury that I have been fortunate in being able to share with my readership in substantial form many of my peripheral academic escapades.

You call yourself a "generalist" rather than a linguist, anthropologist, historian, etc. Part of *Refract*'s mission is to break down disciplinary boundaries. Please speak more about that and how it matters in your research and writing.

The clarion call of the day is multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinarity. There are even sections in grant applications I have completed, which query whether the research for which I am seeking funding is interdisciplinary or not. I have never sought to be purposefully interdisciplinary, to bounce between disciplines, or to create my own fields and research gaps and then to fill them myself. This is just what

happened during times of thinking, feeling, and immersion in the adventure of research, travel, and exploration.

I am definitely a generalist, and have published in many fields including anthropology, island studies, language ecology, Pacific history, and placenaming. Claiming to be a generalist is a double-edged sword; it can be a way of embracing many specialties of study. It can simultaneously be a way to avoid sticking to my own discipline of origin, linguistics, and really going deep and making a vast contribution there rather than spreading myself around and doing as *Refract* has made as its mission: to break down disciplinary boundaries.

Demarcations exist for a reason; they help us make sense of where we stand and where we are going academically and personally. I suspect I may have in the past thrown out the deep-rooted and philosophically strong disciplinary baby with the bathwater of striving to be different, non-conformist, and even quirky. I believe there needs to be a balance between being staunchly interdisciplinary and remaining steadfastly loyal to our roots. I wish the editors and authors of *Refract* all the best wishes and luck with their journal and writings, respectively. I have no doubt their search will arrive at, at least, a work in progress position of this middle ground, a dynamic space, which lies between being a generalist disciple and a disciplinary devotee.

* * *

Notes

[1] The interested reader is referred to several volumes that document the extant empirical history of the cameleers: Philip Jones and Anna Kenny, *Australia's Muslim Cameleers: Pioneers of the Inland, 1860s-1930s*, rev. ed. (Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 2010); Christine Stevens, *Tin Mosques and Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Camel Drivers in Australia,* rev. ed., (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002); Peter Scriver, "Mosques, Ghantowns and Cameleers in the Settlement History of Colonial Australia," *Fabrications* 13, no.1 (May 2004): 19-41.

Endangered Data

Zachary Norman
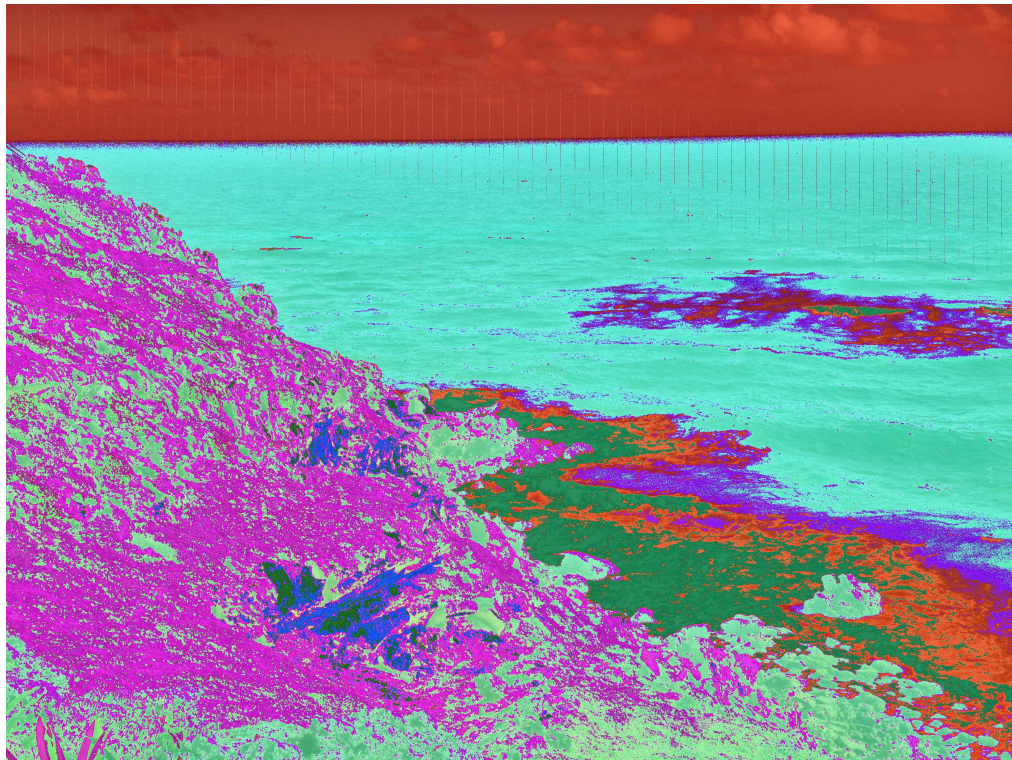
Zachary Norman, Endangered Data (still), 2018, 1 minute 48 seconds.[1]

Endangered Data

Following the 2016 election, information scientists, librarians, and laypeople began to backup or mirror publicly-available government datasets from institutions such as the EPA, NOAA, and NASA onto private servers and personal computers. This was done in response to the growing concern that data confirming the reality of anthropogenic global warming might be subject to manipulation, repression, or erasure by the current administration.

Endangered Data represents an algorithm that can be used to preserve and transmit this vulnerable data by storing it within the pixels of digital images using an encryption method known as steganography.[2] Encrypting the data within the pixels of images protects against attempts at manipulation or erasure. Because the data is hidden within images, it can also be transmitted surreptitiously and retrieved using a decryption algorithm. Lastly, the steganography algorithm can be adjusted; the user has control over which pixels the data is stored within and how much the color of the pixels shifts. Inverting the premise of obscuring data, the user instead helps visualize the potentially catastrophic outcomes implied by the data itself, creating both metaphor and meaning through the image.

Within each frame of the video seen here, I have stored select data from the Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center FTP Archive. The CDIAC contains data sets relevant to studies of greenhouse gases and global warming. The data I've chosen for this video were collected at five globally distributed measurement stations: Ragged Point Barbados (13.17°N, 59.43°W); Trinidad Head, California (41.05°N, 124.15°W); Mace Head, Ireland (53.33°N, 9.9°W); Cape Matatula, Samoa (14.23°S, 170.56°W); and Cape Grim, Tasmania (40.68°S, 144.69°E). These stations measure quantities of greenhouse gas species in the Earth's atmosphere including, but not limited to: Methane, Nitrous Oxide, CFC-12, Methyl Chloroform, Carbon Tetrachloride, and Carbon Monoxide.

The first frame in each of the sequences in this video is a photograph of or near the respective measurement station. Within the pixels of that frame is stored a year's worth of measurement data from the respective station. The data was collected between the years 1993 and 2016. Each of the 23 frames per site represents a single year's worth of measurement data. The discolorations owe their appearance to the steganography script used to store the data. The script dictates that each character in a particular data file should be stored in a correspondent pixel in a given image. The ASCII value of that character is converted to a decimal value and this value shifts the color of the correspondent pixel by that amount. For example, if a pixel has a red channel value of 100 and its correspondent data file character is the letter "R," which has a decimal value of 082, then the pixel will

shift by 82 bits changing its red channel RGB value from 100 to 180. For example, as the average amount of Methane in the atmosphere increases each year, the number of pixels used to store data also increases, proportionate to the increase in Methane; thus, the images become increasingly discolored as the sequence progresses.

<p align="center">* * *</p>

Zachary Norman is a multi-disciplinary artist and educator interested in the production and role of images in contemporary culture. He is the co-founder of the art collective EIC, whose work has been exhibited and published extensively. In 2016, their publication, DELIBERATE OPERATIONS 3, was included in the Museum of Modern Art Library. He is the co-recipient of a New Frontiers Grant from Indiana University for his research on computational photography. Recent exhibitions of his work include Present Company (NYC), Chicago Expo (Chicago, IL), Aperture Foundation (NYC), Webber Gallery Space (London, UK) and Steinsland Berliner Gallery (Stockholm, Sweden).

Notes

[1] *Endangered Data* (2018) is available for viewing at *Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal* on eScholarship. https://escholarship.org/uc/refract.
[2] Datasets used in this project are obtained from the Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center (CDIAC) FTP Archive, which contains information on greenhouse gas measurements taken from various sites across the globe.

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Glitching the State: The Mechanics of Resistance in Ricardo Piglia's *La Ciudad Ausente*

Henry Osman

> La tortura es la culminación de esa aspiración al saber, el grado máximo de la inteligencia institucional.
>
> —Ricardo Piglia, *La Ciudad Ausente*

Introduction

Torture is a storytelling device in that it attempts to (re)narrate and extricate the lives of others, often in the name of a potentially fallacious official memory. In the torture chamber, violence is posited as a search for knowledge whose veracity is not always necessary. States around the world have used torture to extract information and reaffirm their own narrative; due to this legacy of state violence, many post-trauma works aim to reveal the extent of the practice and the damage it causes as a form of resistance. This is particularly relevant to contemporary Argentina, where the legacy of state violence, particularly forced disappearances and torture during the military junta's Dirty War (1976-1983), is still being dealt with in the public sphere and in institutions such as the Supreme Court, which last year controversially allowed the early release of hundreds of convicted human rights abuses.[1]

Ricardo Piglia's 1992 novel *La ciudad ausente* uses science fiction to mine

this legacy and examine the after-effects of social trauma in the decades after the end of the junta.[2] In *La ciudad ausente*, Piglia posits torture as the ultimate form of discursive violence and aims to fight torture, and its effects, on a linguistic playing field. The work is set in a dystopic Buenos Aires still under the junta's control, which Piglia uses to examine collective amnesia and reflect upon the language of war and the language of resistance.[3] He does not focus on stories of the dictatorship and the reader does not bear witness to the physical atrocities of the junta; Piglia is working parallel to the *testimonio*, interrogating the broader social effects of torture rather than individual cases.[4] The central narrative of the novel follows Junior, a reporter who is investigating Elena, a cyborg narration machine created by her husband, a fictionalized version of twentieth century Argentine author Macedonio Fernandez. Elena was sent to a psychiatric clinic by the state and then placed inside a museum in an attempt to regulate her; her nature as a narration machine means that she might be able to reveal the truths of state violence to the general public. Interspersed throughout Junior's search for Elena are the small fictions and narratives that Elena produces and, towards the end, an aside about an island where the inhabitant's language is always changing, the only constant being a copy of *Finnegan's Wake*. What unites the various asides are the errors and mistranslations that Elena introduces; the error that I will be focusing on is when she changes the name of the main character in Poe's "William Wilson" to Stephen Stevensen.

Much of the scholarly engagement on *La ciudad ausente* focuses on Elena. Critics such as J. Andrew Brown focus on the cyborg and neobaroque elements of novel while Eva-Lynn Jagoe uses Donna Haraway's classic essay, "The Cyborg Manifesto," to expand upon but also problematize the petrified, frozen, and inorganic femininity of Piglia's women-machines.[5] Others, like Idelber Avelar, use the transformation of Elena into a utopian machine by her husband, Macedonio Fernández, to explore the politics of mourning in the novel.[6] Finally, many have analyzed the novel through the work of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychotherapist Félix Guattari. Eunice Rojas looks at how the "schizophrenic machine" and the schizophrenic narratives it produces subvert the collective amnesia gripping Piglia's Buenos Aires while Ignacio Sánchez Prado looks at the "máquina de narrar" through the Deleuzian war machine.[7]

The central crux of the critical work on Elena, as outlined above, highlights her cyborg nature while glossing over the errors she introduces. Some, like Joanna Page, in "Writing as Resistance in Ricardo Piglia's *La ciudad ausente*," do discuss tactics of resistance in the novel. Page says that resistance is decentralized, amorphous, and undefined.[8] Arguing that writing is the primary act of resistance, Page looks at the role of fiction in the novel and how fictional works order and

define reality. Her focus is on Elena as a literary machine but not as an actual machine. Instead of analyzing Elena's errors and mistranslations, Page isolates how fiction itself troubles reality. Page's explanations of how writing in the novel is an act of resistance are helpful but overlook Elena's own interventions.

In this paper, I will propose a new reading of *La ciudad ausente* through the glitch, a reading that I hope will help explain the peculiarly powerful tactics Elena uses to resist the state. I will focus my analysis on Elena and how her mistranslations of different stories, particularly of "William Wilson" by Edgar Allan Poe, are a critical site of resistance. I argue that these chance errors and malfunctions can be read as a non-agentic political practice. As a starting point, I will recast these errors and mistranslations as glitches in Elena's processing. The glitch reveals the farce of state memory and opens up a space where that memory can be challenged.

After exploring the ways that Piglia deploys the glitch I will begin to theorize what a politics founded in Elena's mistranslations and errors would look like and how such a politics might offer new insight into other post-trauma Argentine works. What makes Elena's mode of resistance unique is that it lacks causality. Elena does not try to err or mistranslate (many of the works she translates and retells are originally in English). She has no specific plan or goal and does not commit these acts with an intent at disrupting the amnesia the population of the fictional Buenos Aires is suffering from.[9]

A History of the Glitch

Before directly examining the role glitches play in Piglia's text, I will review the history of the word itself. The term glitch is fairly new, a creation of the twentieth century that only entered the English lexicon in the mid-1960s through NASA and the space race. It was originally defined as a small, unforeseen computer error that could still derail a flight. One of the earliest recorded uses of the term glitch was in the 1962 book *Into Orbit,* in which the seven participants in the first human flight into space recount their experiences. John Glenn, one of the astronauts, said that, "Literally, a glitch is a spike or change in voltage in an electrical current."[10] Glenn highlights the transient nature of glitches. In this use it is a moment, not a visible effect, lasting for an almost unnoticeable microsecond. Materiality comes to the forefront when a glitch occurs; it makes us aware of the physicality of technology when it shatters our perception of technology's infallibility. When normal and quotidian objects glitch, we see them in new and often critical ways and transition from being passive viewers to being active in material processes.

Many sources indicate that the word was likely introduced to the English language through the Yiddish *glitch* or *glitsh*, meaning a small slip.[11] Its origin as a physical slip is telling. One could have a *glitsh* on ice, on a staircase, or on a recently washed floor. Slips are also usually chance accidents. One can be tripped but not be slipped. Therefore, we surrender to *glitsh* without knowing exactly what is to come after. This is magnified by how glitches occur but cannot be caused; they are never deliberate.

Over the past few decades, the logic and language of computers has infiltrated our vocabulary and so, in turn, has the word glitch. It can now refer to different types of hardware and software malfunctions, like frozen browsers, unresponsive touchscreens, or sudden computer crashes. At any moment, an error can emerge; glitches mark the ends of our technological capacities. A computer crashes, a webpage does not load, and we wait for our desires to be completed. Yet there is more to the word than a forced wait; one only needs to remember Y2K, when the anticipation of a glitch, the anticipation of *being forced to anticipate,* caused widespread fear. The threat of a glitch can be as powerful as a glitch itself.

New theoretical uses of the word glitch have evolved as the word has become more widely used. While there are few applications of the glitch in literary theory, the glitch is an important motif in contemporary art and especially new media art. Glitch art, which primarily emerged in the 2000s, consists of artistic practices that aestheticize glitches and technological failings. Artists such as JODI, Mishka Henner, Jon Rafman and Antonio Roberts interrogate the glitch in all of its manifestations and primarily work in digital media.[12] They make videos, edit photos, use hypertext and other media that can suffer a glitch, unlike printed paper. The perhaps unique way that glitch art critiques new technologies is summed up by theorist and artist Manon and Temkin who argue that "Glitch art does not 'dirty up' a text, but instead undermines its basic structure. Glitch damage is integral, even when its effects manifest at the surface."[13] The glitch troubles formal aesthetics by attacking the structure and not just the outcome. Works of glitch art have to reflect this troubling. It is not enough to engage with digital aesthetics; one must actively subvert their logic.

There are also many theoretical misgivings surrounding the use of the term glitch in contemporary art. For example, the glitch can become "domesticated" when artistic intent overwhelms the originally random nature of the phenomenon.[14] Similarly, there is the issue of how to represent the glitch. Glitches usually manifest in the binary code and not the physical hardware of a computer, so glitch art is the "realization of immateriality as physicality." Further, in glitch art, "the glitch ceases to be rupture and becomes instead the *signifier of rupture*, and with this transposition to signification [recoding] is a regeneration of the 'norm'—

[Theodor] Adorno's 'bourgeois functionalization.'"[15] As media theorist Michael Betancourt says, a fundamental issue of glitch art is that in rupturing the previous system, a new formalist aesthetic is constructed around the glitch and co-opts its potential. The challenges that a literary theory of the glitch may face are different, but similar issues emerge especially in how machinic glitches are rendered into linguistic errors in the novel. One of the few texts that works towards a more critical theory of the glitch outside of contemporary art is "Elsewhere, After the flood: Glitch Feminism and the Genesis of Glitch Body Politic" by Legacy Russell in *Rhizome*.[16]

In "Elsewhere, After the Flood," Russell looks at the glitch as a means of creating more fluid forms of identity. She bases her analysis in Gender Studies and looks at the glitch as a new mode of identity construction, one that is more specific to our increasingly digital reality: "the glitch encourages a slipping across, beyond, and through the stereotypical materiality of the corpus, extending beyond a coping mechanism in its offering of new transfigurations of corporeal sensuality."[17] Her glitch focuses on how computers mediate sensuality and encourage slippage between genders and identities, especially those constructed online in chatrooms, messages, and social media. Russell focuses on "slipping across, beyond and through," but does not offer a distinct mechanism or an explanation of how this effect is produced.

What Russell does offer is a comparison to queer theory. She posits glitching as queering of the virtual body: "'Glitch' as a term within technocultures is also often placed within a similar category, steeped in negative connotations. The reclamation of *queer* is to material body politic as *glitch* is to digital corporeality."[18] Nevertheless, the glitch is much more than a form of digital queering and has its own distinct formal aspects, particularly that it occurs in spite of human efforts at creating a foolproof program or machine. One can queer but not glitch something; what happens instead is a reproduction of the effects of the glitch but not the event of the glitch.

Russell continues her analysis of the glitch by arguing that the glitch allows us to reconsider and remake our social systems by embracing the "causality of 'error'" but then states that the glitch "may not, in fact, be an error at all, but rather a much-needed erratum. This glitch is a correction to the 'machine,' and, in turn, a positive departure."[19] An erratum is a correction to a written text. In this case, it seems that Russell is trying to characterize the erratum as the consciousness derived from the glitch rather than a glitch itself, further broadening the terms definition.[20] But an error cannot correct another error, although it can make a system's failure more visible. Embracing the erratum is an embrace of causality because an erratum is a planned action. If the glitch is an unforeseen error or a tiny

slip, its power comes from chance. When a human actor "glitches" something they are simply subverting it. I cannot make something glitch—all I can do is magnify it, exacerbate the errors that it reveals and embrace its chaos.

Glitching the State

I return to Elena to answer the questions of how the confusion caused by the glitch can become a mode of resistance. As previously stated, the Buenos Aires of the novel exists in a state of collective amnesia and its citizens are oblivious to the crimes of the dictatorship. Elena was designed by Macedonio Fernández to counter state control, functioning as a "female defense machine" against a state that "conoce todas las historias de todos los ciudadanos y retraduce esas historias en nuevas historias que narran el presidente de la República y sus ministro."[21] Elena is an imperfect *máquina de narra*, but it is precisely her imperfection that challenges the state's attempt to subordinate all other histories to its own official one. Instead of straightforwardly narrating and recounting stories, she errs and disrupts seemingly objective and official truths. These errors are unconscious and naturally formed; following my earlier analysis, they are glitches.

Before I delve into my full analysis of what Elena does I want to look at precisely what Elena is. Her cyborg identity is what, in a certain sense, allows her to "glitch." Piglia describes her as post-human: "'¿La máquina es una mujer?' *'Era una mujer.'*"[22] Elena has moved beyond being a "woman" to being something more. In the "Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway defines the cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction."[23] Haraway looks at the cyborg as a creature of social reality and as a creature of fiction. The distinction between these two concepts is important. While social reality may not be far from fiction and they may be co-determinate fields, it is important to look at the cyborg as a function of our lived reality while also seeing how there is a certain fictional, and maybe even utopic, quality to cyborg identities. Elena is fictional not only because she is part of a novel but because she is a machine of fiction that creates new identities and plots. Elena's radical potential emerges when she is understood as a creature of fiction, social reality, and language rather than as just a human-machine.

The resonances between cyborgs and storytelling become even stronger when Haraway discusses Chicana poet Cherríe Moraga and her hybridization of Spanish and English. Moraga explores "the themes of identity when one never possessed the original language" and was "never told the original story."[24] In her poetry she splices Spanish and English, undermining both tongues and causing

their syntaxes to slip. She does not aim to return to an original language nor an Edenic existence; her project is rather to make new languages for a radical new future. Piglia, like Moraga, troubles syntax. This slippage is visible in the last section, "La isla," an island where language is dynamic, changeable, and everyday a new tongue may be spoken. The only constant is a copy of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake,* "que todos consideran un libro sagrado, porque siempre pueden leerlo, sea cual duere el estado de la lengua en que se encuentren."[25]

Suturing two languages or troubling syntax are not traditional types of glitches. However, Haraway's reading of Moraga isolates how cyborg identities are intimately connected to written language. Haraway furthers this point by stating that:

> Writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs, etched surfaces of the late twentieth century. Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine.[26]

Elena exemplifies these characteristics because she prevents "perfect communication" and pollutes the state's circulation of knowledge about the dictatorship and torture. Significantly, she does not struggle for a language but rather for the possibility of other languages through the glitch.

Piglia himself never uses the word "glitch" to refer to the machinic errors that are at the center of the novel. Nevertheless, they are glitches due to their lack of direct causality—Elena does not plan to cause them—and Elena being a machine. Elena's errors are alluded to throughout *La ciudad ausente* but are rarely shown. One of the few examples in the novel is how Elena (mis)translates a story by Edgar Allan Poe:

> Junior empezaba a entender. Al principio la máquina se equivoca. El error es el primer principio. La máquina disgrega <<espontáneamente>> los elementos del cuento de Poe y los transforma en núcleos potenciales de la ficción. Así había surgido la trama inicial. El mito de origen. Todas las historias venían de ahí. El sentido futuro de lo que estaba pasando dependía de ese relato sobre el otro y el porvenir. Lo real estaba definido siempre por lo posible (y no por el ser).[27]

The Spanish verb *disgregar* means to scatter, disperse and break up. In this instance, Elena is spontaneously breaking up Poe's story without putting it back together. Each fragment of the story is then a "potential nucleus of fiction" that is partly freed from the original plot of the story. The fact that she does so spontaneously, without a plan or desire to do so, shows exactly how this is a glitch that undermines attempts to order (to plot) stories. Piglia is at the same time mythologizing these actions as if they were the first act of a cyborgian bible. But instead of a deity deciding to create the world, Elena glitches. The repercussions of these actions are similarly biblical, where Piglia hints at the power of these glitches at shaping "lo real."

The most visible change in Poe's story is that "William Wilson" is now "Stephen Stevensen." Poe's story may just be a short story, but Elena's chance renaming of the protagonist is a highly consequential act. It implies that Elena might be incidentally renaming other files and confusing official memory. If files and stories begin with different letters they are archived in different places and effectively lost. And if the state is unable to track its citizens because their names and basic information are always changing, it loses its ability to control them. Finally, if even names and basic information has been glitched, how can the veracity of government statements on torture, or the economy, or the Falkland war, be trusted? What other titles are wrong? On a deeper level, it shows that text and histories can be rewritten. In the novel, this initial error is described as containing the building blocks of "una ficción virtual."[28]

Moreover, the choice of "William Wilson" out of all of Poe's oeuvre is revealing. "William Wilson" is a tense study of a man who is so embarrassed by his plain name that even in the story he goes by a pseudonym, William Wilson.[29] This palpable sense of shame increases when another boy with the same name enters his school. He is chased by his doppelgänger for years and in multiple countries until he tries to kill his double and ends up stabbing himself. By mistranslating the foundational element of Poe's tale, Elena reveals the malleability of identity. Piglia states that the machine "fabrica réplicas micrópicas, dobles virtuales, William Wilson, Stephen Stevensen. Era otra vez el punto de partida, un anillo en el centro del relato."[30] Stephen Stevensen is the double of a double, the point of departure for a new world. A perfect "núcleo potencial de la ficción."

Elena as machine and Elena as translator, or Elena as a literal cyborg and Elena as a practitioner of cyborg language, are both necessary elements of the glitch because she unites the computer or machinic glitch, where a "0" can replace a "1" and change the output, and the linguistic error and mistranslation. Language is the medium of Elena's resistance and the network through which these

narratives travel. In the novel's mythology, all languages share a single root and are connected by a series of what Piglia calls white nodes:

> Existen zonas de condensación, nudos blancos, es posible desatarlos, abrirlos. Son como mitos—dijo—, que definen la gramática de la experiencia. Todo lo que los lingüisticos nos han enseñado sobre el lenguaje está también en el corazón del materia viviente. El código genético y el código verbal presentan las mismas características. A eso lo llamamos los nudos blancos.[31]

Los nudos blancos are "myths" that unite the world on a biological and physical level, claims Piglia. He goes even further, stating that the rules of language apply to the "heart of living matter," allowing stories, in the novel at least, to have the ability to physically shift and perhaps infect the physical world. In translation, the *nudos* lose some of their complexity. In Spanish, *nudo* can mean node but it can also signify knot, implying that they are problems to be solved and untied and also that they are vital points of connection that bind together the world. Further, a knot, unlike a node, can be tied and untied, a subtle transience that may be lost in the English translation. Further, the modernist interludes throughout the novel are where Piglia more fully experiments with language. In one, Elena tells a story about a town where every day a new language is spoken and the only constant is a copy of *Finnegan's Wake*, which is rife with multilingual puns. Is Piglia arguing that Joyce's works are white nodes? That modernism can connect disparate languages and hints towards a more universal grammar? These questions are left open; what is certain is that Piglia uses these asides to further question the perceived stability of (government) language.

Elena's glitches do not create new histories. Rather, they are starting points or potential nuclei, to use Piglia's vocabulary, for a life outside of the bounds of official memory:

> Claro que ahora, después de tantos años y años de tortura sistemática, de campos de concentración destinados a hacer trabajar a los arrepentidos en tareas de información, han triunfado en todos lados y nadie se los va a infiltrar, sólo es posible crear un nudo blanco y empezar de nuevo.[32]

There is a certain sense of hopelessness in this statement in that it is grounded in the impossibility of challenging the state and implies that the only future is by escaping rather than fighting against it. At the same time, it opens up space for

Elena and figures like her, that do not seek to overthrow the state or rebel against it but rather seek to undermine its certainties and demonstrate the possibility that there is another way to live.

There is one final question necessary to understand what Elena is: why was she made? She was not produced to err but her creators did have specific intents. Before I continue, it is important to note that, as other readers of the novel like Jagoe point out, there is ample room here for a feminist critique of Piglia. Elena is controlled and programmed by her husband. She is trapped, lacks agency and is continuously used by men, including Macedonio, Junior, and even Piglia himself. Does she have agency or is she simply a tool? If the glitch is something that happens without control, and without her own input as an agent, then Elena is also trapped by her own mechanism of resistance.

As previously stated, the Buenos Aires of the novel exists in a form of amnesia or willed ignorance of the past. Due to the state's control of knowledge, many are unaware of the government's past crimes. There are two kinds of violence at play here. In the past, the state enacted violence upon its populace. The current violence is discursive because the state has almost total control over the narratives and discourses that define the city and its population. These two forms of violence, though different, intersect most clearly in the torture chamber. Piglia straightforwardly describes the mechanisms of state intelligence towards the end of the novel:

> La inteligencia del estado es básicamente un mecanismo técnico destinado a alterar el criterio de realidad" with "aparatos electrónicos y personalidades electrónicas y ficciones electrónicas y en todos los estados del mundo hay un cerebro japonés que da las órdenes.[33]

Notwithstanding Piglia's reliance on essentializing and orientalizing tropes of Japan, this passage highlights how fiction and narrative are the ultimate elements of control for the centralized modern state. Knowledge is controlled and society is made legible by the state's central "brain." Piglia's description of state control is especially poignant in light of recent worries over big data and government surveillance. The state itself is described as a cyborg entity with electronic apparatuses and brain. Perhaps the chimeric nature of the state (with a male pronoun in Spanish) requires the creation of a chimeric cyborg machine (with a female pronoun, though perhaps if it were published today it would use the neutral "ellx").

Piglia establishes further connections between torture and the telling of

stories when he describes them as being opposite poles on a single spectrum: "[L]a tortura es la culminación de esa aspiración al saber, el grado máximo de la inteligencia institucional."[34] Torture is meant to produce knowledge from people or at least pull it out of them. It searches knowledge but at the same time may lead to false information. However, glitches may prevent this knowledge from being gained and block the state's "aspiración al saber." Glitches do this by warping bodies, obfuscating the state's ability to classify and control them, and by distorting stories themselves. The book is itself a *maquina de narrar* or a *maquina de defensa* because it brings to light weapons of state control.

Accordingly, we must look at what it means to be a defense machine. An offensive tactic would be to directly attack the state by protesting and spreading propaganda. Defense is different because it counteracts the effects of the state without directly attacking it. We see this in how Elena endangers the projects of the state instead of the state itself. Elena *translates* instead of writing and *glitches* instead of creating. The glitch gains its potency precisely because of its defensive characteristics. If Elena produced a counter narrative she would be reproducing the imperative discourse of the state.

Conclusion

As we trace the myriad definitions of the glitch and its manifestations in Piglia's novel, we see the transformation of the glitch from a mistake into a political act. Originating as a slip in the cog of a machine, a broken piece of metal, or a frozen mechanical element, the glitch has transformed as technology has. I use Piglia's work to create a literary theory of the glitch that arises from the text itself. Elena, as a machine of translation, bridges the divide between the virtual and the machinic glitch because she is a cyborg site of narrative production. With every story and glitch she undermines the dominant narratives and memories of the state. If we think of stories and the written language as intermingled with memory and state power, glitches in language and the written word become glitches in memory, attacks on memory and manipulations of memory. When memory is glitched, new subjectivities arise. The glitch allows people to reflect on how memory is formed and influenced by politics and makes memory, as the medium of experience, visible. The chisel marks of the state can then be seen.

Just as narratives and official histories exist to drive and dominate national conversations, they also exist to be disrupted and in this case glitched. *La ciudad ausente* is an early manifestation of the glitch in mainstream cultural production. It focuses on the glitch in the aftermath of trauma and uses it to reevaluate past

events and how they influence the present. Reading *La ciudad ausente* as a theoretical text, I see the glitch as being a unifying but also divisive mode of resistance. The glitch, at least as it stands in this reading, is a small unforeseen slippage or error in a computer or networked system. It does not have a distinct ideology or politics. The glitch is not an offensive tactic in that it does not propose a new or alternative political system. Instead, it reveals that the state's truth is not exactly true and that other potential narratives and stories exist. There is a danger to a single story, and it must not be forgotten that, "un relato es no otra cosa que la reproducción del orden del mundo en una escala puramente verbal." [35] Following classical definitions, the glitch makes one aware of the computer processes themselves, remembering that it composed of software and hardware. The material is exposed. In a similar manner, the glitch exposes the violence, terror, and torture at the heart of the state and opens up space for narrative self-determination.

A similar ethos can be found in other works from the era, such as the 1998 film *La sonámbula* by director Fernando Spiner and the work of art movements like the Errorist International. In the former, which was co-written by the director and Piglia, a young woman, Eva Rey, has lost her identity due to a leak of a new government chemical.[36] She is taken to a center with other amnesiac victims, but then released as the government hopes she will lead them to a rebel leader. Eva is surveilled by the State and is plugged in to a computer so that even her dreams can be monitored. It comes to pass that she is having dreams of the future, which in turn infect the State's computers. The latter group, the Errorist International, forwarded a politics of error and chance that emerged when a member mistyped "terrorism" and wrote "errorism," which spell check didn't recognize.[37] The Erorrist International's practice extended this tension through a series of performances, writings, and urban interventions in the early 2000s. These works make me wonder about how the glitch might help us look at post-junta cultural production in a new light, as well as the ways the glitch could be applied outside of Argentina, especially as an increasingly connected world now faces new campaigns of misinformation.

* * *

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Notes

[1] Werner Pertot, "La plaza del no a vuelta de la impunidad," *Pagina/12,* May 10, 2017, https://www.pagina12.com.ar/36779-la-plaza-del-no-a-la-vuelta-de-la-impunidad.

[2] In 1987 the Law of Due Obedience was passed, which said that officers and officials could not be held accountable for their actions during the junta because they were following orders. These laws were overthrown in 2003. Peter Greste, "Argentina Overturns Amnesty Laws," *BBC News,* August 13, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3146379.stm.

[3] Piglia references the government's campaign to support soldiers in the Falkland Islands when in fact the war had already been lost, as well as a lack of discussion of torture and state violence throughout the novel.

[4] Authors such as Alicia Kozameh, Alicia Partnoy, and Horacio Verbtisky are known for their use of the *testimonio*. Some works consist of interviews, some are fictionalized accounts while others are more purely autobiographical. John Beverley's *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* is perhaps the seminal work on the genre.

[5] J. Andrew Brown, "Cyborgs, Post-Punk, and the Neobaroque: Ricardo Piglia's La Ciudad Ausente," *Comparative Literature* 61.3 (2001): 316-26. Web. Accessed March 2018; Eva-Lynn Jagoe. "The Disembodied Machine: Matter, Femininity, and the Nation in Ricardo Piglia's "La ciudad ausente," *Latin American Literary Review* 23.45(1995): 5-17.

[6] Fernández was a well-known Argentine writer and mentor of Jorge Luis Borges. His fictional counterpart is a minor character in the novel. Elena is also the name of the Fernández's real wife, who also died young. However, both are heavily fictionalized in Piglia's text.

[7] Rojas, Eunice, "Ricardo Piglia's Schizophrenc Machine: The Madness of Resistance in *La ciudad ausente*," *Hispanet Journal* 6 (2013). Accessed online, February 2018; Ignacio Sánchez Prado, "Reapropriar *La ciudad ausente*: Consideraciones sobre la 'Máquina de Narrar.'" *Colorado Review of Hispanic Studies* (2004), 187-200.

[8] Joanna Page, "Writing as Resistance in Ricardo Piglia's *La ciudad ausente*," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 81.3 (2004):343-360.

[9] Piglia discusses how, although Argentina had lost the war to the British, the general population does not know this and continues to send food and blankets to the soldiers (74).

[10] "Glitch," *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 5th ed., 2014. Accessed online February 2018.

[11] William Safire, "On Language: Skewing Metaphors Glitch Query," *The New York Times* 3 March 1980.

[12] Prominent artists who make work about glitches and glitching include Mishka Henner, Jodi, Rosa Menkman, Jon Rafman, and Mathieu St-Pierre, among others.

[13] Hugh S. Manon and Daniel Temkin, "Notes on Glitch," *World Picture, WRONG,* 6 (2011).

[14] Rosa Menkman, "Glitch Studies Manifesto," in *Video Vortex Reader II: Moving Images Beyond Youtube*, Geert Lovink and Rachel Somers, eds. (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011).

[15] Michael Betancourt, "Critical Glitches and Glitch Art," Accessed October 2018. http://www.hz-journal.org/n19/betancourt.html, *Hz* 19, 2004.

[16] Legacy Russell, "Elsewhere After the Flood: Glitch Feminism and the Glitch Body Politic." *Rhizome,* 2013. Accessed February 2018. http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/mar/12/glitch-body-politic/

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Russell, in the same paragraph, claims that the glitch is a "correction" to "economic, racial, social, sexual, and cultural stratification," which she claims is the real error in the world, expanding the definition of the term.

[21] "Nosotros tratamos de construir una réplica microscópica, una máquina de defensa femenina, contra las experiencias y los experimentos y las mentiras del estado." (Piglia, 144); "The State knows all the stories of all the citizens, and retranslates them into new stories that are then told by the president of the republic and his ministers." (Piglia, 143).

[22] ""The machine is a woman?' 'It *was* a woman.'" (Piglia, 28)

[23] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149.

[24] Ibid., 175.

[25] "Which everyone considers a sacred text, because they can always read it, regardless of the state of language in which they find themselves." (Piglia 118)

[26] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 176.

[27] "Junior started to understand. At first the machine would get it wrong. Errors are the first beginning. The machine 'spontaneously' breaks up the elements of

Poe's story and transforms them into potential nuclei of fiction. That is how the initial plot emerged. The myth of origin. All the stories came from there. The future meaning of what was occurring depended on that story about the other and what is to come. Reality was defined by the possible (and not by what was)." (Piglia, 83)

[28] "A virtual reality" (42).

[29] Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson." *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings: Poems, Tales, Essays and Reviews* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), 110-130.

[30] "It builds microscopic replicas, virtual doubles, William Wilson, Stephen Stevensen. Once again, this same point of departure, a ring at the center of the story." (Piglia, 88)

[31] "'There are areas of condensation, white nodes, which can be untied, opened up. They are like myths,' he said; 'they define the grammar of experience. Everything the linguists have taught us about language also applies to the heart of living matter. The genetic code and the verbal code present us with the same characteristics. This is what we call the white nodes.'" (Piglia, 62)

[32] "Of course, now, after years and years of systematic torture, of concentration camps designed to make those who have repented perform informational duties, they have won everywhere and can no longer be infiltrated, and the only thing that can be done is to create a white node and start over again." (Piglia, 144)

[33] "The state intelligence is essentially a technical mechanism designed to alter the criteria of reality," with "electronic devices and electronic personalities and electronic fictions and in every State of the world there is a Japanese brain giving orders." (Piglia, 133).

[34] "Torture is the culmination of that desire to know, the maximum degree of institutional intelligence," (Piglia, 144).

[35] "A story is nothing more than a reproduction of the order of the world on a purely verbal scale," (Piglia, 139).

[36] *La sonámbula*, dir. Fernando Spiner, 1998.

[37] Santiago García Navarro, "Interview with Loreto Garín and Fedeico Zukerfeld," *LatinArt.com: An Online Journal of Art and Culture*, January 7, 2006. Accessed February 2015 http://www.latinart.com/aiview.cfm?id=425

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Happy Bullish 2011!!!: Olek's *Project B*

Ingrid Asplund

Project B and the *Charging Bull*

Arturo Di Modica's *Charging Bull* is imposing in scale. It is a model of muscular machismo and a popular tourist spot. It stands taller than most people in the middle of a very busy part of Manhattan, usually gleaming in the sun like a trophy of capitalist masculinity. Its scale is met with detail, as the *Charging Bull* features expressive eyes and eyebrows, a stance that exudes motion and energy, and a detailed musculature, from ribs to thighs. Very early Christmas morning (about three o'clock) in 2010, the artist Olek escaped from any potential sugar-plum fantasies and stole down to Wall Street to leave a Christmas gift for New York City.[1] Olek had crocheted, by hand and without assistance, a covering for the *Charging Bull*, perhaps a sweater or a sort of "bull cozy" and installed it in the dead of night so as to avoid the authorities. She would later entitle this piece *Project B (Wall Street Bull)*.[2]

The finished product was, like the object that it covered, imposing, even intimidating, but *Project B* contrasted *Charging Bull* with the comforting, warm, and cozy associations of yarn. The piece's execution is impressive in several ways: the yarn suit fits the *Charging Bull* precisely from horn to tail with no room for slacking or sagging, and the viewer can see every curve, bulging belly and thighs included. It is not formed in one seamless piece, but rather by means of several blocks of crocheted yarn stitched together with thick seams. The yarn is created to fit snugly over the horns of the *Charging Bull*, has a swirling pattern where its nostrils would be, and encases the tail, legs, and feet tightly as well as the rest of the body. The yarn is crocheted tightly enough that someone viewing the yarn-encased sculpture would not see the color of the metal, but loose enough that the stitches are visible

Figure 1 Olek, Project B (Wall Street Bull), 2011. Image courtesy of Jonathan Levine Gallery.

from a short distance. It is crocheted in a macro camouflage pattern throughout and the pattern does not quite match up at the thick crocheted seams. At first glance the piece appears to be bright pink, and after the initial shock of such an intense color, notes of purple, black, turquoise, and even gray emerge. The stitches in the camouflage make it appear to be pixelated, which is a surprising feature for the postmodern or digitally-native viewer because the virtual connotations of a pixelated image contrast with the tactile quality of yarn.

In *Project B*, Olek represents a whole list of hierarchical, seemingly incongruous categories and binaries together. She does so in a way that unravels the constructions by which these categories are made to be not only separate, but greater or lesser than each other. She loops and knots genres together, creating a piece that incorporates street art, domestic fiber art, performance art, installation, and guerilla art to create a form that cannot be pinned down in one essential medium. *Project B* also knots up the gender binary. Olek does this by layering the feminine signifiers of the color pink, which was firmly established as a symbol for girlhood during the 1950s and the medium of yarn with masculine signifiers such as the site of Wall Street and the camouflage pattern, which is associated with the traditionally masculine realm of the military.[3] She disrupts a hierarchy of work by putting the domestic, concrete work of crochet on the site of the abstract, lofty, male-dominated work that happens on Wall Street. The world of finance is masculine-coded in numbers, in corporate culture, and in cultural imagination. A

2012 New York Times article by Luisita López Torregrosa regarding gender on Wall Street clarifies all of these aspects of Wall Street hypermasculinity, explaining that, "On Wall Street […] the scarcity of women in top positions has become a bitter symbol of the low status women hold in U.S. corporate life."[4] This symbolism is not based on mere stereotypes. López Torregrosa quotes statistics from the research and consulting nonprofit Catalyst, which find that women make up around half of the finance industry workforce but only hold executive positions at fewer than three percent of U.S. financial companies.[5] Finally, this imbalance reflects on and is encouraged by a hypermasculine culture and work environment on Wall Street. López Torregrosa goes on to quote an interview with Catalyst president and chief executive Ilene H. Lang, who explained,

> The Wall Street culture is characterized by what you might call really macho kinds of behavior. So what's looked up to on Wall Street are people who swagger, people who will do the deal at any cost, people who will work day and night, hour and hour, for lots and lots of money and they don't care about anything else. Those are characteristics that you think about when asked to talk about what the Wall Street culture is. That's a very masculine, macho culture.[6]

The masculinity of Wall Street that *Project B* defies is not just a matter of numbers, rather it is a stereotype based on the reality of the people and characteristics that are given privilege in Wall Street culture. Although Olek is not an expert in the gender dynamics of Wall Street, it is widely understood to be a place with few women in power and a highly macho culture.

Because *Project B* addresses so many different kinds of categories, on another level it also entangles them. How do categories of medium such as paint or yarn exist in a hierarchy within the art world? Can we really witness patriarchy distinct from capitalism? *Project B* is a work of paradox, disorientation, and disruption of categories that are socially constructed to appear solid and inevitable but which Olek reveals in their fragility as mutually exclusive binaries. This piece produces anxiety and glee in equal measures, offering the equally terrifying and appealing vision of deconstructed binaries, boundaries, and hierarchies.

Project B was created less than a year before Occupy Wall Street began, and there seems to be a significant, if not intentional, link between these two events. This link is especially strong in light of the extent to which *Charging Bull* represents Wall Street and the controversy that surrounded high finance in the United States at the time. Olek's concrete, maternal gesture seems to imply that the socially

constructed, abstract systems that Wall Street is home to are precarious and fragile, in need of a warm blanket. Taking care of, so to speak, a massively powerful institution such as Wall Street's stock markets has a disarming, and even emasculating, effect and calls to mind the United States government's bailouts of important banks just a few years prior that are and were key players on Wall Street. Covering in a comforting manner exposes a vulnerability in the systems that appear to be omnipotent, but which needed "bailing out" soon before *Project B* was made.

Multimedia Viewings

Project B was short-lived and ephemeral in nature, and barely saw the sunlight before it was cut down within a few hours.[7] Like many temporary installations, the work is also tricky to pin down as having an "essential" form. While *Project B* did exist as an object occupying physical space, this is not how most of its viewers, myself included, have experienced it. It has primarily been disseminated through photographs and videos, which are necessarily part of the work as they are part of how it is presented. The photographs are often taken from below the *Charging Bull* and this perspective makes even the fuzzy, colorful iteration of the *Charging Bull* appear large and intimidating. The angle tends to be a semi-close-up that distorts the *Charging Bull* such that its head appears unusually large and the sculpture appears somehow taller than the buildings around it. The angles common to widely distributed photographs of *Project B* also emphasize the motion of the *Charging Bull*. The fact that the sculpture appears to be moving in photographs is not only an effect of the photography, but also of *Project B*'s colors and pattern.

Another key method of distribution for *Project B* was a YouTube video posted by Olek that chronicled in two minutes and forty-three seconds her process of installing *Project B* over the *Charging Bull* beginning with her arrival on Wall Street: duffel bags of crocheted yarn, hooks, and videographer at hand.[8] The video begins with a few tracking shots of Wall Street, such as a street sign and the New York Stock Exchange building, emblazoned with several American flags. The video then cuts to a shot of Olek walking taken from about 20 feet behind. She carries a stepladder covered in colorful camouflage crochet, similarly to how we will see the *Charging Bull* covered. The video as a whole lacks any diegetic noise or music, and instead Manuel Panella's "El Gato Montes (Espagne)" plays in the background. The music, which comes from a lively Spanish opera, brings to mind cinematic scenes of bullfighting, and brings an energetic tone to the video. At the beginning and in a few moments throughout the video, narration of a bull fight overtakes the background noise. This offers a sense of occasion. The lighting is dim and appears

nonprofessional, contributing a DIY aesthetic and a sense of sneakiness to the video. Another contributor to this covert, DIY mood is its slightly out-of-focus appearance. The footage's lack of focus suggests that it was created quickly, under stress, and by a small or less professional team.

When we see the *Charging Bull,* it is adorned with a seasonally appropriate wreath that flutters in the wind. A caption identifies the time as two o'clock in the morning and the temperature as 20 degrees Fahrenheit. We then see Olek in the throes of installation. She struggles at first to get the bulk of the yarn over the top of the bull (it takes her a few tries), yet ultimately succeeds with impressive nimbleness and dexterity. Olek's appearance coordinates with the pattern of *Project B* as she wears a hat and legwarmers made of the same pattern of crocheted yarn as the bull cozy she is installing. This coordination emphasizes the role of performance in this piece by highlighting her physical presence and her personal relationship with the art. She has an air of playfulness, particularly considering that she is committing an illegal activity in the middle of a very cold night. There are a few shots of Olek waving at and interacting with the few tourists wandering through Wall Street in the wee hours of Christmas morning, but these are contrasted with several shots of the artist looking over her shoulder nervously, presumably in case of being caught by police officers.

One of the most compelling aspects of the video is the relationship that develops between Olek and the *Charging Bull.* Her playful demeanor extends to how she relates to the sculpture. To some degree, watching her cover the *Charging Bull* recalls an adult dressing a child, rather than the serious intensity that an important work of art and artifact of masculinity might usually elicit. Olek treats it with affection, patting the yarn-covered snout of the *Charging Bull* and then the uncovered backside. She does this somewhat absentmindedly in both cases, as if the *Charging Bull* is a pet or a lover and patting them on the nose or backside is second nature. This intimate, casual, and maternal relationship toward the *Charging Bull* is significant because it departs from the idea that handling art is a grave process due to the sanctity of the art object.[9] Toward the end of the video Olek finishes stitching it all together. She jumps off the curb and does a short victory dance and then returns to the bull and embraces its head and horns as the shot freezes and pans out.

About Olek

Olek created *Project B* a few years after developing her yarn arts practice. Olek was born in Poland and graduated with a degree in cultural studies from Adam

Mickiewicz University in 2000. She later moved to Brooklyn and began exhibiting her yarn pieces for the first time in 2003 as part of the Williamsburg Arts and Historical Society Surrealist Fashion show.[10] *Project B* was created several months before her first solo exhibition, *Knitting is for Pus*****. *Knitting is for Pus***** was originally shown in the Christopher Henry Gallery and was also recreated for the *40 Under 40: Craft Futures* show at the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian. *Knitting is for Pus***** is a study in excess and includes an entire room covered in crocheted yarn in various bright, eclectic colors crocheted in her signature camouflage pattern as well as photographs on the wall of some of her past installations and performances.[11]

Olek also exhibited previously at the 2005 Venice Biennale with an international group of artists in their piece *Waterways*. Additionally, she is known for her staged performances, which include performers donning "wearable sculptures" and going about in public as they normally would (such as in her 2009 piece *Thank You for Your Visit, Have a Nice Day)*.[12] She has staged such performances in several contexts, including at the 2009 DUMBO Arts Festival.[13] Olek has a rich oeuvre that is generally oriented toward crochet; this paper will focus primarily on *Project B* while keeping in mind its context within her artistic past and present.

Since *Project B* was created, Olek has gained further notoriety and worked prolifically with a variety of themes and methods, although almost always using crocheted yarn as her medium. Olek has created soft sculptures thematizing reproduction (especially including pregnant women and phallic imagery), covered other art objects such as Tony Rosenthal's *Astor Place Cube* or *Alamo,* and in the past year Olek and a few other women who call themselves "Team Olek" have participated in a project entitled *Love Across the USA*.[14] According to the official website, "*Love Across the USA* project is a series of community-based public murals in cities across the U.S. that depict inspiring women from history."[15] The project began with a billboard covered in a crocheted portrait of Hillary Clinton and the commonly-used hashtag "#i'mwithher." After the 2016 presidential election, the project continued in cities such as Auburn, NY with a crocheted mural of abolitionist and political activist Harriet Tubman and Philadelphia, PA with a mural of singer and civil rights activist Marian Anderson. The murals also feature quotations by the women depicted in them, emphasizing each person's voice along with their image. *Love Across the USA* also has a strong community aspect, and Team Olek invites people from the community to join workshops where they can learn to crochet and contribute to the murals.[16] In addition to having a medium in common, all of these projects bear similarity to *Project B* in various ways. Her project with the *Astor Place Cube* follows a template of covering art objects in yarn,

her soft sculptures continue with her gender-related imagery, and *Love Across the USA* is political and has a specifically feminist message to an even greater extent than *Project B.*

The Great Artists Steal: Peers, Influences, and Genealogy

Yarn bombing

Project B was not made in a vacuum, and indeed Olek's art has clear similarities to a larger artistic movement that is commonly referred to as yarn bombing. Yarn bombing is said to have been founded in 2006 by Magda Sayeg and has since become widespread in cities around the world, gaining popularity among many viewers at widely varying levels of "legitimacy" in the art world.[17] While there are several male yarn bombers of repute (HotTea, Moneyless, and Spidertag come to mind) yarn bombing is very much a women's art movement in terms of numbers as well as in terms of the perception of the medium of yarn.[18] In its most basic and common form, yarn bombing encases items such as trees or telephone poles in yarn while in other cases it may involve covering large and elaborate objects such as buses, cars, and in one case, a tank.[19] Many yarn bombers are strictly hobbyists, whereas others work professionally and may work as artists in other media. Due to its collaborative capacity for co-constructing pieces, yarn bombing also lends itself quite well to collectives, such as Houston-based Knitta Please or Knit the City in London.

Yarn bombing is exciting because of its unapologetic femininity, especially in medium. In her article "Yarn Bombing: Claiming Rhetorical Citizenship in Public Spaces," Maureen Daly Goggins describes how yarn bombing "seeks to validate traditional female activities" by participating in knitting and crocheting "while challenging their stereotypical and hegemonic characterizations."[20] Through yarn bombing we see women artists seeking community and networking with one another to a degree that parallels women's art collectives of the 1960s and '70s.[21] Of course yarn bombing isn't exclusively created by women, and there are several male street artists who work with yarn. Men certainly number among the many anonymous yarn bombers around the world and participate in the many yarn bombing collectives worldwide that knit and crochet in the street. Yarn bombing can nonetheless be considered a primarily women's art movement without being an all-women's art movement because the medium of yarn has become so heavily gendered.

Yarn bombing brings a highly private or domestic medium, one that is associated with blankets, babies, doilies, and other aspects associated with intimate home and family life, to the public sphere. The act of leaving yarn outside is unusual and surprising to most as yarn is often seen as a domestic material to be enjoyed by a cozy hearth. Yarn bombing is an act that destabilizes the dichotomy between public and private, thereby destabilizing the dichotomy between masculine and feminine.[22]

Yarn bombing and the conversation around it seemed to reach a pinnacle not long after *Project B.* The art movement enjoyed success and praise as well as much derision, due to the large number of female artists who work with the medium, as well as the large number of outsider artists involved. One blog post in particular seems to exemplify the negative feelings toward yarn bombing that came from within the world of street art. In 2012, Caroline Caldwell wrote a post on the blog *Vandalog* entitled "Yarn Bombing: You Can't Sit With Us." The post is critical, offering the suggestion that yarn bombers can improve their art by being "more creative" but is also dismissive of the genre with such phrases as "I hate yarn bombing" and "[Olek] would be cool if yarn bombing were something that were cool."[23] There is a great deal to deconstruct and unpack within this article, especially because the article and the robust conversation in the comments serve as a useful artifact of the sentiments toward yarn bombing.[24] For the purposes of this paper, what is most significant is the exception Caldwell makes for Olek, which stands out because it resonates with how Olek seems to perceive herself as an artist. Caldwell says of Olek,

> Olek had always been one of these artists whom I'd come across frequently but always skimmed over with a sort of neutral reaction, like 'That might be cool if yarn bombing were something that was cool.' Then the other day Jonathan LeVine Gallery sent me this video compilation of Olek's work over the past year. Through the entire video, I was trying to reconcile why I still hate yarn bombing but why Olek was starting to feel like an exception. The reason is that she has moved beyond many of the drawbacks of typical yarn bombing. She has a relatively large body of work and it is not built solely on sweatering trees in different cities. The sheer size of some of her pieces are enough to make even biased observers do a double-take. Olek's work does not last longer or decay prettier, but like Hot Tea, Moneyless and Spidertag, her personal style is identifiable. Unlike usual yarn bombs which don't seem to be communicating anything specific, Olek's work is often blatantly

addressing the greater art community. Naturally, I don't like everything but the versatility in Olek's work proves that there is colossal room for creativity in this genre.[25]

Caldwell identified a distinction between Olek and the yarnbombing movement. As several commenters pointed out, Olek has chosen to distance herself from the movement and is known for becoming offended when her work is put in the category of yarn bombing. The following excerpt from a *New York Times* article reads:

> 'I don't yarn bomb, I make art,' said Agata Oleksiak, 33, an artist in New York who has been enshrouding humans, bicycles and swimming pools in neon-colored crochet since 2003. Last Christmas Eve, Olek, as she prefers to be called, blanketed the 'Charging Bull' statue near Wall Street in a pink and purple cozy, and uploaded a video of it to YouTube. 'If someone calls my bull a yarn bomb, I get really upset,' she added.
>
> Olek, whose work has been shown in museums and galleries worldwide, considers yarn bombing to be the trite work of amateurs and exhibitionists.
>
> 'Lots of people have aunts or grandmas who paint,' she said. 'Do you want to see that work in the galleries? No. The street is an extension of the gallery. Not everyone's work deserves to be in public.'[26]

Here Olek is both complicit and critical of the hierarchies of the art world that fail to give legitimacy to women artists, outsider artists, and fiber artists. In the case of Caldwell's article, she is successful in distinguishing herself, however Jessie Hemmons, the Philadelphia yarn bomber also known as "Ishknits," contributed several comments to the conversation around the article. While Caldwell expresses appreciation for the way Olek seems to transcend the genre of yarn bombing, Hemmons strongly opposes her stance. Hemmons says, "Olek is a hack. When she talks about 'not everyone having a right to show their work in the street' it is the antithesis of a street artist, so I would hope no street artist would support her."[27] Olek is an artist who also works with and is represented by galleries; she is not exclusively a street artist, therefore she may not share the attitude

common among street artists that everyone does have the right to show their work, as Hemmons says.

The fact that Olek both works within an art world that will not give her any more legitimacy than she demands and also distances herself from a movement that is so often othered and not given credit within the art world may be an ultimately beneficial career move. Olek also resists the very real and challenging false equivalency made between female artists and women who may create crafts or art but do not identify as artists and do not have a need to be making their living by showing in galleries and finding a place in a strongly misogynist art world. This false equivalency not only has the potential to discredit her extensive training and qualification but can also have very real impacts on her ability to show her art and find commissions. Although it is difficult to guess what Olek's career would be without these factors, the state of her notoriety is that she has been extremely prolific and experienced success, but at the same time there is relatively little serious scholarship about her and the prices for her work are comparatively low (some of her sculptures sell for under $1,000).[28] There may also be something subversive in her strict refusal to be grouped with other women who do not work as artist because of her gender and medium.

With due recognition given to the context in which she may have felt the need to avoid being classified as a yarn bomber, Olek's statement ultimately perpetuates elitist and misogynist art world hierarchies in several ways. First of all, she suggests that yarn bombing and art are mutually exclusive categories, which does not support artists who work primarily as yarn bombers. Magda Sayeg is often considered the mother of yarn bombing and in many ways has gained hegemonic approval in the same way Olek has.[29] Like Olek, Sayeg's work with yarn is her full-time career and her workload is such that she has several assistants and works with a loom rather than knitting by hand. Hemmons is another artist who has gained "credibility" in the art world. The Philadelphia Museum of Art commissioned her to create an installation for the facade of their Perleman building for the 2012 *Craft Spoken Here* show.[30] Clearly Olek's distinction between art and yarnbombing misunderstands the experiences and careers of self-identified yarn bombers who are also artists.

Olek's statement also reinforces a dichotomy between "real" artists and nonprofessional crafters that groups nonprofessional or outsider artists and perhaps even professional crafters in the same category. These categories are challenging to approach from a feminist perspective because on one hand, clearly Olek is in a different category from knitters who casually cover a tree or lamppost and she does have a need to establish herself as having professional credentials. On the other hand, suggesting that yarn bombing is not real art plays into the same

misogynist hierarchy that places male artists above female artists and paint above yarn. It seems that the model that equates Olek to someone who does not identify as an artist but who does make yarn bombs is flawed, as well as a model that supports a false dichotomy of yarn bombing vs. art. It is my hope that the many yarn bombers and other female fiber artists who are working right now will be able to build a path toward finding a more equitable way of defining their own work.

Finally, although my perspective is that the distinction Olek makes between herself and other yarn bombers ultimately does not reflect the reality of her work, out of respect to her identity as an artist I refrain from labelling Olek's work "yarn bombing" in this paper.

The Context of Street Art

Olek's oeuvre, and *Project B* in general, can be understood within the history of street art. Although she grew up in Poland and has worked extensively internationally, Olek has also situated herself as a New York artist by living and working there for most of her career. *Project B* exists in dialogue with much of New York's street art, and has a strong, site-specific association with the city—and with Wall Street in particular.[31] Site-specificity is vital to street art and the medium of crochet, with its intersecting loops, seems to resonate with New York's urban grid. While nearly every significant street artist has some relationship with New York, Olek has declared it her chosen home, perhaps due in part to the profusion of resources and community available to street artists there.

In considering Olek's role in creating street art, the male-dominated setting of street art culture feels like a significant factor in how we understand her work. This is especially the case when Olek's context within a somewhat androcentric art community intersects with her choosing to encounter a masculine symbol in an especially male-dominated part of town.[32] The reality of street art is male-dominated, and the perception of street art further privileges men. The reality—the actual demographics of who creates street art and who becomes successful in making street art—is skewed toward men, according to articles by sociologist Tristan Bridges and writer Chelsea Iversen.[33] In considering why this disparity exists, both Bridges and Iversen suggest that it is because the public space of the street is more accessible and safer for men than it is for women. Iversen interviewed Caldwell for her article, and wrote,

> Of course, to be a muralist or a street artist, you have to endure
> these things: being in public spaces for long periods of time, often

alone and at night. And for male street artists, it's different. They're less vulnerable. 'Men are far less likely to be followed, harassed, assaulted, etc., when doing basic stuff like walking home from work,' Caldwell continued. Because men generally don't face the same vulnerabilities as women on the street do, male artists are able to spend more time comfortably honing their craft. '[Men] will have more practice time and advance faster,' said Caldwell. This could explain why women have been slower to gain prominence in the street-art world.[34]

In addition to the safety implications named by Caldwell, the perception of the street and street art as being masculine impacts the representation of street art and street artists. Cultural Studies scholar Vittorio Parisi created a study that examines three major books compiling the works of street artists and observes their gender ratio. Parisi writes,

> Let us consider, for instance, three major publications having the explicit purpose of serving as world indexes or anthologies of street and graffiti artists. The first is 'Graffiti World: Street Art from the Five Continents' by Nicholas Ganz (2004). Only 11 out of 114 artists taken into account by the book are women, i.e. 7.6%. 'From Style Writing to Art' (2011), the anthology curated by French gallerist Magda Danysz, does not show any substantial change: 4 women out of 46 artists, i.e., 8.7%. Nor does most recent 'World Atlas of Street Art and Graffiti' (2013), by Rafael Schacter and John Fekner: 3 artists out of 97 are women, with a share of 3.1%.[35]

Parisi goes on to conduct a survey where people are asked to guess the gender of various artists based on images of their work, concluding that the statistics 'confirm the general trend of seeing urban art as a predominantly male activity.'[36] *Project B* is significant not merely because Olek is a woman making street art, but because she chooses to make street art with a distinctly feminine appearance due to its pink color and traditionally domestic medium.

Although Di Modica is not a typical street artist working with paint, wheat paste, or stickers, *Charging Bull* was originally an act of guerilla art. In 1989, Di Modica and some of his friends loaded *Charging Bull* into a truck and installed it without permission outside the New York Stock Exchange.[37] The sculpture was removed later that day despite a positive response from the general public because

it was obstructing a busy thoroughfare, although it was later reinstalled with the city's approval.[38] Although *Charging Bull* was initially installed as a work of guerilla art, it was not created with the spirit of protest or criticism, but rather in support of the United States and its financial systems. Di Modica expressed that it was to be a "Yuletide symbol of the 'strength and power of the American people.'"[39] Di Modica, an immigrant from Italy, seemed to be expressing his feelings of patriotism as well as encouragement toward Wall Street. A *New York Times* article from the day after its introduction effectively captures the reception of *Charging Bull* and its author explains that Di Modica "created the black-patina bull of bronze and stainless steel in his studio at 54 Crosby Street over the last two years in response to the market crash in 1987."[40] Then quoted Di Modica's assistant, Kim Stippa, who explained, "He wanted to encourage everybody to realize America's power."[41] According to this account, *Charging Bull* seems to have been created completely in good faith.

Olek has since described her installation as an homage to Di Modica.[42] *Charging Bull* has been adopted as a symbol of Wall Street's hegemonic systems. Olek's act of covering bears an interesting relationship to Di Modica because she claims to be paying homage to him, yet also seems to be adopting a critical approach to his work and the statement he was making. Project B's surprising formal qualities and the artist's assertion that it is an homage to Di Modica lends the project a mix of sincerity, playful irony, and subversiveness. The act of covering *Charging Bull* gave Di Modica recognition and showed Olek's desire to be associated with him. At the same time, *Project B* suggested an incompleteness to Di Modica's sculpture by adding to it and even visually blocking some aspects of the original piece, such as the color and sheen of the original bronze. It is also noteworthy that *Charging Bull* and *Project B* were both created in response to market crashes. *Project B*'s slightly more transgressive attitude speaks to a tension in the air that would later be expressed in the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Stitches in Alliance: Project B's *Occupation*

In this work, the world of street art is not the only male-dominated space Olek is occupying. Olek also performs a preemptive "occupation" of Wall Street's hypermasculine culture and systems. In doing so, Olek juxtaposes the female-dominated tradition of fiber arts with the male-dominated world of Wall Street and in particular juxtaposes the abstract nature of the macroeconomic systems orchestrated on Wall Street with the concrete work of the domestic sphere. Olek calls into question the relationship between the tangible and the virtual through her subtle use of pixelated imagery. Because her work is often so fleeting, she relies

on social media to spread it. Most people saw *Project B* as an image on the internet, and it is possible to imagine that some people may have seen a slightly pixelated image of this piece. Perhaps in this case, the viewer would not be able to know whether the pixilation was part of the piece due to looking at a low-resolution image. In addition to connoting the social media presence that is important to Olek's practice, the pixelation also brings to mind the abstract, virtual nature of the work that happens on Wall Street, where pixels and virtual information can represent, in massively removed and indirect ways, impossible amounts of physical, material goods. Olek's physical act of crochet is such a contrast to the way commodities are represented on Wall Street that it points out how overwhelming it is to consider the scale on which high finance operates, shifting almost unthinkably large amounts of money around every day.

The site specific implications of *Project B* contrast handcraft with the nature of finance, which is far removed from the physical goods and services that are represented by money, which is then represented abstractly in the stock market. The placement of Olek's work on Wall Street gives her language of gender politics another message. Although she does not explicitly embroider an appeal for a specific legislative change, putting her art on Wall Street suggests a political response to the recession and bank bailouts at that time, as well as its gendered implications. The finance industry that Wall Street is home to has a strong gender bias and this bias extends to impact the site of Wall Street itself, creating a gendered site. In a paper detailing the history of women on Wall Street, Melissa Suzanne Fisher describes the underlying reality of "Downtown Manhattan as a gendered space," explaining that "even its landscape" bears cultural and gendered significance.[43] To this end Fisher draws on ethnographic scholarship about Wall Street, noting that "Ethnographers have understood the formal sites of finance [...] to be spaces in which men perform hyper-competitive performances of masculinities, and have understood these performances to be part of the male drama of capital that construct women as inferior, 'other' and/or 'invisible.'"[44] However, it is not only the formal sites of finance that become gendered, but this masculinity also leaks out into the city. Fisher notes that "financiers have used the urban landscape beyond these sites," and concludes, "multiple and overlapping gendered enactments constitute the domain of finance and the city itself."[45] If the hypermasculinity of the formal sites of finance comes to color the city itself as Fisher suggests, Olek defies the "male drama of capital" that renders women invisible by asserting a physical and explicitly female or feminine presence through her art.[46]

Project B was created mere months before the Occupy movement started. While Olek has no official association with Occupy, *Project B*'s placement connotes

the same political charge that fueled the Occupy Wall Street movement. Occupy was strongly corporeal in its imagery and messaging. As a movement it focused on the physical presence of human bodies in the space of Wall Street. Much of what *Project B* pushes in its assertion of concrete work and tangible quality within a space dominated by abstract, removed work is present in Occupy's assertion of the body. In an essay entitled *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street*, Judith Butler writes,

> For politics to take place, the body must appear. I appear to others, and they appear to me, which means that some space between us allows each to appear. We are not simply visual phenomena for each other—our voices must be registered, and so we must be heard; rather, who we are, bodily, is already a way of being 'for' the other, appearing in ways that we cannot see, being a body for another in a way that I cannot be for myself, and so dispossessed, perspectivally, by our very sociality. I must appear to others in ways for which I cannot give an account, and in this way my body establishes a perspective that I cannot inhabit. This is an important point because it is not the case that the body only establishes my own perspective; it is also that which displaces that perspective, and makes that displacement into a necessity. This happens most clearly when we think about bodies that act together. No one body establishes the space of appearance, but this action, this performative exercise happens only 'between' bodies, in a space that constitutes the gap between my own body and another's. In this way, my body does not act alone, when it acts politically. Indeed, the action emerged from the 'between.'[47]

Project B is a kind of Occupation that does and does not have the presence of the body that Butler here presses as being the site of politics. In a literal sense, Olek's body appears in the capacity that her piece serves as performance art. She records her body in its appearance with a video camera. Olek also asserts what could be seen as proxy bodies. For example, she leaves a physical trace of her presence in the landscape in the form of yarn. She also uses her yarn for a sort of transfiguration, bringing the *Charging Bull* to life in a way by giving it a sort of clothing. She places crocheted yarn over the bull in what appears to be an act of warming, but warming the sculpture through insulation implies that it generates heat, as if it is alive. In this way, she asserts her body on Wall Street in a way that bears important similarities to Occupy Wall Street. Art and activism here blend

together, informing one another and doing similar projects from completely different points of view.

Olek's use of yarn in a masculine setting exposes the frailty of a gender binary. In its exposure of Wall Street's precarity, this piece also calls into question exactly why or where these systems are precarious. *Project B* was made during a time of unemployment and housing crisis on Wall Street. That is, the failings of precarious, socially constructed, and abstract financial systems that Wall Street is home to have concrete, physical manifestations. While *Project B* suggests that the stock market and capitalist systems possess a certain frailty that needs comfort, it also brings to mind the people who are most negatively affected by these systems. *Project B* is striking because it brings what looks like a domestic crocheted item, perhaps a blanket, into a public space and perhaps the only other similar sight is that of a homeless person who has no access to domestic space but who must be covered by a blanket for warmth. Olek's cozy, domestic aesthetic draws attention to the fact that while macroeconomic solutions to issues of unemployment and housing were being drafted, there were immediate physical needs among the general public that weren't being addressed and that were made urgent by the financial crisis associated with Wall Street. Olek uses the language of yarn bombing to reveal the precarity of both financial systems on Wall Street and those affected by the failings of those systems.

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Notes

[1] olek olek, "OLEK WALL STREET WEB," YouTube video, 2:43, December 30, 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zT0HhNvDFRQ.

[2] See Figure 1. I will refer to this piece primarily as *Project B* for clarity.

[3] Anna Broadway, "Pink Wasn't Always Girly," *The Atlantic*, August 15, 2013, accessed August 14, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/08/pink-wasnt-always-girly/278535/.

[4] Luisita López Torregrosa, "On Wall St., Gender Bias Runs Deep," *The New York Time*s, July 24, 2012, accessed August 17, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/25/us/25iht-letter25.html.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Happy Famous Artists, "ab fab: merry f*ing xmass wall street!," *Happy Famous Artists* (blog), December 27, 2010, http://happyfamousartists.com/blog/2010/12/ab-fab-merry-fing-xmass-wall-street/.

[8] olek olek, "OLEK WALL STREET WEB," YouTube video, 2:43, December 30, 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zT0HhNvDFRQ.

[9] For more theoretical grounding on this concept see Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (1967).

[10] Claudia Cukrov, "Crochet Work by Olek," *PFSK*, May 9, 2009, http://www.psfk.com/2009/05/crochet-work-by-olek.html.

[11] Nicholas R. Bell, *40 under 40: Craft Futures* (Washington, DC: Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2012).

[12] These sculptures represent a fusion between such artists as Nick Cave, traditional performance artists, and yarn bombing. Time Out editors, "Art in Odd Places 2009," *Time Out New York*, August 25, 2009, http://www.timeout.com/newyork/things-to-do/art-in-odd-places-2009.

[13] Jowy Romano, "The World of Olek," *Subway Art Blog*(blog), October 20, 2010. http://subwayartblog.com/2010/10/20/the-world-of-olek/. See-ming Lee, "Agata Olek/13th Annual DUMBO Art Under the Bridge Festival NYC 2009: Part 8 / Art Artists," *Brooklyn Art Project*, October 16, 2009, accessed July 24, 2018, http://www.brooklynartproject.com/profiles/blogs/agata-olek-13th-annual-dumbo.

[14] "Olek: 26 Artworks, Bio & Shows on Artsy," *Artsy*, accessed July 28, 2018, https://www.artsy.net/artist/olek?page=1&sort=-partner_updated_at. Alex Maeland, "Astor Place Cube by Olek," *HYPEBEAST (*blog)*, October 13, 2011, accessed July 31, 2018, https://hypebeast.com/2011/10/astor-place-cube-by-olek.

[15] "Love Across the USA," Love Across the USA, accessed July 29, 2018, http://www.loveacrosstheusa.com/.

[16] Ibid.

[17] By "legitimacy" I mean that many of these artists have shown in galleries or work as full-time artists while many others knit and crochet strictly as hobbyists.

[18] For a more in-depth read on the relationship between yarn bombing as a movement and feminism, see Alla Myzelev, "Creating Digital Materiality: Third Wave Feminism, PublicArt, and Yarn Bombing," *Material Culture* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2015).

[19] Maureen Daly Goggin, "Yarn Bombing: Claiming Rhetorical Citizenship in Public Spaces," in *Contemporary Rhetorical Citizenship*, eds. Christian Kock and Lisa Villadsen (Leiden, Netherlands: Leiden University Press, 2014).

[20] Maureen Daly Goggin, "Yarn Bombing: Claiming Rhetorical Citizenship in Public Spaces," in Contemporary Rhetorical Citizenship, ed. Christian Kock and Lisa Villadsen (Leiden, NED: Leiden University Press, 2014).

[21] Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

[22] Griselda Pollock writes about the way that the public space has become designated as a masculine space while the private space has become designated as the feminine realm, especially in art. See Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art*, (London: Routledge, 1988), 62.

[23] Caroline Caldwell, "Yarn Bombing: You Can't Sit with Us," *Vandalog A Street Art Blog*, November 13, 2012, accessed July 31, 2018, https://blog.vandalog.com/2012/11/yarn-bombing-you-cant-sit-with-us/.

[24] For example, it is concerning that Caldwell's three positive examples of yarn bombing aside from Olek are three of the only male artists working in this medium: Spidertag, Moneyless, and Hottea.

[25] Caroline Caldwell, "Yarn Bombing: You Can't Sit with Us."

[26] Malia Woolan, "Graffiti's Cozy, Feminine Side," *The New York Times,* May 18, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/19/fashion/creating-graffiti-with-yarn.html.

[27] Comment by Jessie Hemmons. Caroline Caldwell, "Yarn Bombing: You Can't Sit with Us."

[28] "Olek: 26 Artworks, Bio & Shows on Artsy," *Artsy.*

[29] NPR/TED Staff, "Magda Sayeg: What's The Emotional Power Behind 'Yarn Bombing'?" *NPR*, November 10, 2017, accessed July 31, 2018,

https://www.npr.org/2017/11/10/562881943/magda-sayeg-whats-the-emotional-power-behind-yarn-bombing.

[30] Although this does represent Olek's assimilation and acceptance into the world of high art, her work is still grouped with and named as "craft."

[31] Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

[32] Di Modica's bull bears many "masculine" features: the visible maleness of the horns and its prominent testicles, its bronze-cast musculature, and its aggressive, "charging" stance all fit traditionally masculine ideals. Patrick McGeehan, "Discrimination on Wall St.? The Numbers Tell the Story," *The New York Times*, July 14, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/14/business/market-place-discrimination-on-wall-st-the numbers-tell-the-.

[33] "Writing Gender on the Walls—Women and Graffiti Art—Feminist Reflections," *The Society Pages*, January 14, 2016, accessed July 31, 2018, https://thesocietypages.org/feminist/2016/01/14/filler-writing-gender-on-the-walls-women-and-graffiti-art/. Chelsea Iversen, "Women Street Artists Explain Why Street Art Is So Male Dominated," *The Bold Italic*, November 29, 2016, accessed July 31, 2018, https://thebolditalic.com/women-street-artists-explain-why-street-art-is-so-male-dominated-5e475b276686.

[34] Chelsea Iversen, "Women Street Artists Explain Why Street Art Is So Male Dominated."

[35] Vittorio Parisi, "The Sex of Graffiti: Urban Art, Women, and 'Gender Perception': Testing Biases in the Eye of the Observer," *SAUC Journal* 1, no. 1 (November 2015), https://www.urbancreativity.org/uploads/1/0/7/2/10727553/parisi_journal2015_v1_n1.pdf.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Robert D. McFadden, "SoHo Gift to Wall St.: A 3 ½-Ton Bronze Bull," *The New York Times*, December 16, 1989, accessed April 3, 2014, www.nytimes.com/1989/12/16/nyregion/soho-gift-to-wall-st-a-3-1-2-ton-bronze-bull.html.

[38] The Associated Press, "Wall St.'s Bronze Bull Moves 2 Blocks South," *The New York Times*, December 20, 1989, accessed August 17, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/12/20/nyregion/wall-st-s-bronze-bull-moves-2-blocks-south.html.

[39] Robert D. McFadden, "SoHo Gift to Wall St.: A 3 1/2-Ton Bronze Bull," *The New York Times*, December 16, 1989, accessed August 17, 2018,

https://www.nytimes.com/1989/12/16/nyregion/soho-gift-to-wall-st-a-3-1-2-ton-bronze-bull.html.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Malia Woolan, "Graffiti's Cozy, Feminine Side."

[43] Melissa S. Fisher, "Wall Street Women," *City & Society* 22, no. 2 (2012), DOI:10.1215/9780822395799-001.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, September 2011, accessed May 1, 2014 http://eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en.

Harun Farocki, *Serious Games III (Immersion)* (Review)

Natasha Eves

Immersion is the third of four documentaries by Harun Farocki that explores the use of video games in the U.S. military.[1] The first film demonstrates training software in which a young soldier called Watson is killed; the second, a live action role play training exercise; the third, virtual reality (VR) immersion therapy; and the final film compares these pre- and post-war simulated environments side by side.

The demonstration of the virtual reality software *Virtual Iraq* employed in Farocki's film *Immersion* will be reviewed here. *Virtual Iraq* is a software designed to facilitate and strengthen immersion in traumatic memory, intended to assist patients with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to therapeutically repeat, retell, and relive key experiences.[2] This peripheral engagement with the *Virtual Iraq* software opens a line of enquiry into the role and function of therapeutic softwares in relation to the processes of subjectification in military training and the subsequent demands for "recovery."

In the film, plainclothes civilian therapists deliver a workshop to their camouflaged army peers at Fort Lewis in Washington. Reflecting on the project, Farocki found himself frustrated by his cinematic conditioning and the lacklustre performances from the military therapists:

> On our first trip to Fort Lewis we filmed a lot. But most of the material was useless—mainly because the therapists were acting half-heartedly, incapable of using their own personal experiences. Some were chewing gum. I haven't seen a single film in which people are chewing gum during a therapy session.[3]

When considering technologies used in the military, it is difficult to not be nostalgic from the start. The technologies and drama in these films—

documentary or cinema—are to be assumed to have been fabricated, abandoned by researchers, or remodelled for ongoing or even future conflicts.

The film has three key sections, opening with a civilian therapist demonstrating the new features and audio capabilities of the *Virtual Iraq* software. Then the army therapists trial the software, one wearing the headset whilst another sits at the computer controlling environmental triggers. Each barks out a recollection, creating their own compositions of sandbox and progression gaming, collaborating with a colleague via voice, vision, and screen. Some do indeed chew gum.

Virtual Iraq produces images that never actually occurred. As an artefact it is fully imaginative and intentional, demonstrating the potential for an affective externalisation of traumatic memory. This digital synthesis offers an atypical perspective into the virtual sites of memory—non-human, algorithmic perspective(s) as empathic mimicry. These technologies are utilised to centre and subsequently neutralise specifically North American trauma, disregarding other affected bodies in the conflict.

Images "born digital" such as these tend to be perceived as "inherently duplicitous, and the signifier of a deeper pollution of the public sphere by the state,"[4] to use Jonathan Kahana's words. Unlike photographic media, digital media produces a lack of closure, with an identity that film philosopher D.N. Rodowick explains is "inherently multiple and open to virus-like mutations into ever-renewable series."[5] The potential contained within the self-refreshing, algorithmic-revision structure of the digital screen opens possibilities for trauma to transform rather than exhaust. However, the smaller budget for the therapeutic software in comparison to the training software demonstrates what the military prioritises: training over recovery.

Therapy is lucrative, if publicly underfunded. The limitations of the software become apparent in the film's final demonstration, where Kevin, a civilian therapist, speaks of his "first assignment" with Jones. The VR falters, the tracking goes awry—either staring at the ground or spinning into the sky. In spite of this, the therapist's performance never falters, delivering what is assumed to be a personal experience.[6]

Kevin hijacks this technical, political, and commercial document as a carrier for his own intense process, or performance, as traumatised soldier. His performance may not be false but, Rodowick writes, "the absence of the event is redoubled, for in the end Farocki reveals that we have all along been watching an actor simulating reactions to a simulation."[7] Through entertaining the notion of being a soldier traumatised by war, as demanded by his job, the full utility of this corporate warriorship is realised—the fantasy inspires his performance, his full investment in his investors.

Military training is designed to adapt the soldier to act calmly and methodologically in disturbing situations regardless of the psychological

impact. In contrast, the training of the therapist enables him to perform psychological distress in a contained manner. Kevin's closing jest that "some of the nausea was real" relates only to the faulty tracking and not to the recollected experience.

Precision operations are a smokescreen. Treatments are limited and developed based on statistical correlations towards improvement. For example, there are only two locations in *Virtual Iraq,* yet the virtual sites of the patient's memory must operate within its territories. Rodowick writes that this is to "make every contingency predictable and manageable—another way of holding injury and death at a distance in or through a picture,"[8] attempting to provide an easily digestible, homogenised image of war with imperceptible collateral.[9] The space of *Virtual Iraq* is engineered to be prescriptive, for example the entrenched racism wherein the game's "enemies" are clear racialised stereotypes. The plastic materiality of its generated surfaces bound by such inclusions and exclusions.

En route to filming at Fort Lewis in Washington*,* Farocki comments:

> We were looking for signs of the current crisis, but in residential neighbourhoods not a single house was for sale. Nothing here indicated that America was waging two wars, with the war in Afghanistan in its eighth year.[10]

This is an "American stylisation" that increasingly appears to involve war at a distance. *Virtual Iraq* offers domestic, controlled environments in contrast to the original sites of trauma. The actual space beyond control becomes a virtual space of absolute control, both characterised by an exploded sense of potential.

This simulation demands that the war be fought on other grounds, away from U.S. soil, away from their buildings and actual-geographic spaces—instead into the virtual areas of the imagination, (soft/wet)ware, and the distant spaces which are little more than a memory or a barely surfaced news story.

VR software, even when used in a rehearsed role play exercise, doesn't have to make good on cinematic expectations inherited from typical linear films.[11] Instead, what is envisioned is always being amended, whether by mouth, by algorithm or media; adding details, diversions and aversions, which refresh and revise these intentional, generated landscapes of warfare and (self-)investment.

These transformations become coercive and habitual, a performance to be repeated by therapists selling a software. It intends to habituate military personnel to life after war, yet these are therapeutic tools funded by the same powers that helped create this trauma. It is important to reduce the stigma around mental health for those already broken by the constraints and violence that acts upon them. However privatised therapeutic imaginaries—the idea

being that all problems can be solved between a patient and therapist[12]—mean that debilitated life is extremely profitable, creating dependence through the demand to recover.[13]

The stakes here are not necessarily the elision between video games and military software, but rather the socioeconomic and geopolitical inequalities they demonstrate, and subsequently how it operates on the level of collective imagination as well as mental health. *Virtual Iraq* is an afterimage of geopolitical conflict that hopes to dismantle the social and psychic forces such conflict helped create. Throughout *Immersion*, Farocki immerses the viewer in the meta-narratives of capital and military processes of subjectification, laying bare their contradictory operations as well as the multiple functions of the poorly falsified and the fictional.

To close, a definition of SUDS appears on-screen: "Subjective Units of Disturbance Scale." The film then tracks our vision forward through the screaming NPCs[14] following a reverberating IED[15] explosion. The synthetic sirens, screams, and gunfire imprint a lingering affect. Image and sound fade to black. The demonstration ends.

<center>* * *</center>

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Notes

[1] Harun Farocki, *Serious Games III (Immersion)*, 2009, 2-channel video installation, 20min.

[2] This is known as immersion therapy.

[3] Harun Farocki, "Serious Games," in *Visibility Machines: Harun Farocki and Trevor Paglen*, ed. Niels Van Tomme (Maryland: University of Maryland Baltimore County, 2015), 120.

[4] Jonathan Kahana, "Evidence of What? Harun Farocki and Trevor Paglen Picture Homeland Insecurity," in *Visibility Machines: Harun Farocki and Trevor*

Paglen, ed. Niels Van Tomme (Maryland: University of Maryland Baltimore County, 2015), 78.

[5] D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 169.

[6] Farocki writes that "even the press officer who [permitted the shoot] believed that the 'patient' was describing a personal experience." See: Farocki, 'Serious Games,' 116.

[7] D.N. Rodowick, "Eye Machines: The Art of Harun Farocki," *Artforum*, February 2015, 197.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Unlike a dead western civilian body, psychosis is invisible and therefore preferable. Grégoire Chamayou writes about drone pilots in a psychotic conflict as combatant-at-a-distance; "They epitomize the contradiction of societies at war outside but living inside as though they are at peace. Only they are in both worlds exactly at the hinge of contradiction. [They suffer from] a psychotic inability to connect actions with their results." See Grégoire Chamayou, *Drone Theory* (UK: Penguin Books, 2015), 121.

[10] Farocki, "Serious Games," 115.

[11] See: Elisabeth Ainsley Sutherland, "Staged Empathy: Empathy and Visual Perception in Virtual Reality Systems" (Master's Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Comparative Media Studies, 2015)*,* 61.

[12] See: Mark Fisher, "The End of Emo-Politics," *Manchester Spring,* February 23, 2016. Accessed April 6, 2016. Original link broken: http://www.manchesterspring.org.uk/2016/02/23/the-end-of-emo-politics/. Alternatively accessible at:
http://freshnewanxieties.tumblr.com/post/141052796945/mark-fisher-the-end-of-emo-politics.

[13] See: Jasbir K. Puar, "The Cost of Getting Better: Ability and Debility," in *The Disability Studies Reader,* 4th ed., ed. Lennard J. Davis (London: Routledge, 2013), 177-184.

[14] Non-Player Characters (NPCs) are typically characters controlled by the computer via predetermined or responsive behaviour.

[15] Improvised Explosive Device (IED).

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From a Native Daughter: Seeking Home and Ancestral Lines through a Dashboard Hula Girl

A. Mārata Ketekiri Tamaira

Nānā i ke kumu. *Look to the source.*

— Hawaiian ʻōlelo noʻeau (proverb)

In the Hawaiian language the term *ʻae kai* refers to the place where land and sea meet, the water's edge or shoreline, the beach. It is, as Pacific historian Greg Dening has written, an "in-between space…an unresolved space where things can happen, where things can be made to happen. It is a space of transformation. It is a space of crossings."[1] This expanded definition of ʻae kai serves as a cogent touchstone for examining Adrienne Keahi Pao's and Robin Lasser's most recent installation work *Dashboard Hula Girl: In Search of Aunty Keahi*, which featured in the Smithsonian's Culture Lab exhibition *ʻAe Kai: A Culture Lab on Convergence* in Honolulu, July 7–9, 2017. In the following writing, I invoke a sort of ʻae kai of my own in which I merge scholarly analysis with visceral first-hand experience of *Dashboard Hula Girl.* The result, I hope, is a richly textured exposé that simulates in written form the enigmatic domain that comprises the convergence zone—that is, the ʻae kai—of intellectual understanding and felt encounter.

San Francisco-based artists Pao and Lasser have been combining their creative energies for well over a decade to produce their enigmatic "Dress Tent" installation and photographic series.[2] The dress tents, which manifest as large-scale interactive "garments" that are erected on site-specific landscapes and worn by female subjects, are in equal measure whimsically playful and incisively political. In what amounts to a fusion of architecture, sculpture, fashion, the body, and the land, the tents function as discrete spaces for addressing a wide range of contemporary issues, including identity, gender

(*Picnic Dress Tent* [2005]), U.S. immigration policy (*Ms. Homeland Security: Illegal Entry Dress Tent* [2005]), and the most pressing environmental crisis of our time, global warming *Ice Queen: Glacial Retreat Dress Tent* [2008]). In terms of identifying the broader rationale of their work, Lasser states that the goal is to inspire people to think reflexively about "their own bodies in relation to place, and their own sense of identity and social justice."[3] In this way the dress tents constitute potent activation sites that provoke critical engagement and self-reflection.

As the most recent iteration of the "Dress Tent" series, *Dashboard Hula Girl* was significant in that it explored the particularities of Pao's own personal journey to seek out and reclaim elements of her own identity as a diasporic Native Hawaiian, a theme that has emerged as a key point of focus in the artist's work over the last several years.[4] Pao chose the dashboard hula girl as a seemingly unlikely creative influence to inform her search. Replete with wiggling spring-action hips, bobbing head, faux grass skirt, and coconut bra—the dashboard hula girl has long been perceived as a trope of corporate tourism in the Islands and is linked to what many Hawaiians consider to be the predatory appropriation and commodification of their culture. More broadly, the dashboard hula girl is seen to promote the gendering of Hawai'i under the sign of "she," "the Western image of the Native 'female' in her magical allure."[5] As an artifact of tourism and, in a deeper way for many, a symbol of the ongoing U.S. colonial project, the "Little Brown Gal" with her gyrating hips would seem to fit squarely with what Hawaiian activist and scholar Haunani-Kay Trask lambasted as the prostitution of Hawaiian culture.[6] But rather than disavowing this paragon of kitsch, in *Dashboard Hula Girl* Pao—in collaboration with Lasser—instead embraces her as kinswoman and grafts her into a personal narrative of place, belonging, and genealogical connection.

Standing at an imposing height of ten feet and extending fourteen feet in diameter, *Dashboard Hula Girl* exuded a larger-than-life presence in the gallery (Figures 1 and 2).[7] The external structure of the piece was covered with a thick layer of tan-colored raffia, the purpose of which was to emulate both a traditional Hawaiian grass hut and a grass hula skirt. At the apex of the installation was an opening through which different female performance artists emerged over the course of the *'Ae Kai* exhibition by climbing a ladder that was concealed within the structure of the piece. As each woman materialized from the faux-grass form, they transformed into a living, breathing, animated representation of the dashboard hula girl. Crowds of people gathered to watch the unfolding drama as each woman offered her own interpretation of the dashboard maiden muse. In the background, a large-scale video projection cast

Figure 1 Wide shot of Dashboard Hula Girl: In Search of Aunty Keahi, 2017. Image courtesy of Adrienne Keahi Pao and Robin Lasser.

images of a hula girl figurine erected on a car dashboard. A montage of scenes showed the view of the dashboard hula girl as she was transported across two geographies, California and Hawai'i—Pao's birth home and her ancestral home, respectively. While in the California scenes the dashboard hula girl's gaze was toward the driver, on the Hawai'i drive her focus was trained on the unfolding landscape before her. The conceptual premise here was that with her attention on the scene in front—a visual feast of lush Hawaiian foliage as it flashed by in a blur of verdant green—the dashboard hula girl, as a proxy for Pao herself, was effectively "reclaiming her gaze" of home.[8]

I watch in rapt silence as the woman begins to move her body in slow, choreographed motion, the muscles of her torso synched taut as her sinewy arms and agile hips perform a slow-motion hula. Each movement she makes comprises the space of a single breath, each breath she exhales bears the genesis of the next moment. She is impervious to my attentive gaze or, for that matter, the curious stares of the crowd that has gathered to witness the spectacle. Her dexterous frame is enclosed by the edifice she inhabits, a hybrid dome that functions as both grass hut and grass skirt. The dashboard hula girl carries both her house and the accoutrements of her profession on her body—she has everything she needs. She surveys the onlookers below, unsmiling, her lovely hula hands flowing to the tune of a song we cannot hear. Moving pictures flicker on a large white screen in the near distance. They show the dashboard hula girl in motion, traveling along routes that she has traveled many times between the two worlds she calls home.

Figure 2 Midshot of Dashboard Hula Girl: In Search of Aunty Keahi, 2017. Image courtesy of Adrienne Keahi Pao and Robin Lasser, 2017.

As a diasporic Hawaiian, Pao inhabits the "space-between-worlds" of being and belonging that *Dashboard Hula Girl* represented. Although born and raised in Oakland, California, during the course of her lifetime the artist has returned frequently to her father's homeland of Hawai'i to reconnect with place and kin. In this regard, she has made many crossings between birth home and ancestral hearth. But as an "off-Island" Hawaiian, Pao's experience echoes that of many others who must negotiate their insider/outsider status. These people exist within the liminal realm that is the 'ae kai of the diasporic experience. States Pao, "Everything for me is always the experience of insider and outsider at the same time."[9] Hawaiian scholar Kēhaulani Kauanui has written extensively about Hawaiians who are born and raised away from the Islands, noting that for many the process is often one of alienation and uprooting.[10] In this regard, *Dashboard Hula Girl* is significant in the way Pao uses the work to *re*root herself and thus reaffirm—indeed, proclaim—her genealogical and physical connection to Hawai'i.

If the exterior of *Dashboard Hula Girl* was a site of staged spectacle depicting the transformation of Hawaiian culture—specifically hula—into touristic commodity, the interior of the installation offered a more private and introspective space for contemplating the lived reality of hula that lies concealed beneath the cliché. To do this, Pao drew upon the wellspring of stories that emanate from her own family concerning the relationship between three noteworthy women: acclaimed kumu hula(hula teacher) and dancer

Figure 3 Young girl tracing with her fingers the stitched narrative of Dashboard Hula Girl's interior, 2017.. Image courtesy of Adrienne Keahi Pao and Robin Lasser.

Keahi Luahine and two of the women she taught, Dinah Gomes Sylvester Pao— the artist's tutu (grandmother) on her father's side—and ʻIolani Luahine, who became a celebrated kumu hula and dancer in her own right.

As the second part of the installation's title *In Search of Aunty Keahi* implies, Keahi Luahine served as a central touchstone for the artist in helping her trace not only the connections between the three women but as well *her* connection to *them*. Importantly, although Pao is not genealogically related to Keahi, she nevertheless is linked relationally to her through her tutu Dinah Pao and by the salient fact that at birth she was bestowed with Keahi's name. Inside the installation—which simultaneously felt like the interior of a hale hula (place where hula is taught) or the protective domain of a womb—the story of ancestral connections was told through an immersive environment of visuals and soundscape. Lining the entire space was a layer of white gauze, which was embroidered with black text that relayed in written form the intertwined history of the three women (Figure 3). One line read, "Aunty Keahi helped raise Tutu and trained her in hula. Keahi was also the primary kumu of her hanai [adopted] daughter, renouned dancer ʻIolani Luahine." Another line read: "In search of Aunty Keahi Luahine 1877–1937 was told in a dream. Keep her ancestral line of Kanuena hula from Kauaʻi alive." The invocation of names, dates, and places stitched meticulously onto the material read like an ʻoli hula

Figure 4 Tī leaf with a chant written on the surfaces, 2017. Image courtesy of Adrienne Keahi Pao and Robin Lasser.

(hula chant) or a pule (prayer) that seemed to echo across temporal zones, connecting the past with the present and, in turn, connecting Pao directly to the women.[11] Resonating in the space the voice of Keahi Luahine could be heard chanting "'Eia o Ka Lani Ka Manomano" ("Here is the Chief, the Great One"). The chant came from a rare recording of Keahi that was made in the 1930s. Pao's father had found it in the Smithsonian's archival audio files during his own search for her years previously. The artist transcribed the chant into English and wrote the words on tī leaf—a plant used by Hawaiians to make hula skirts and which has powerful healing properties—which Pao and Lasser arranged on the floor in front of the entrance like a ritual offering for guests to read (Figure 4). The interior, with its soft lighting, was imbued with a sense of calm and quietude. It felt like a pu'uhonua (sanctuary).

I sit alone on the lauhala mat immersing myself in the mana (power) of a space that is at once feminine womb and sacred santuary—a place of birthing and safety. Here ancestral lines are protected and kept alive by the telling of stories that return the Seeker to the source. The voice of a woman crosses the threshold of time to commemorate the Great One: "'O ka lani ka hiapo kama kapu, ka hānau mua iā Hawai'i. The chief who is eldest sacred child, the firstborn to Hawai'i." As she chants two young women dance in unison; they are joined not by blood but by ancient tradition and a shared connection to their kumu (source, teacher). Their movements are precise and fluid, just as they were taught. The woman's words rise like a prayer and escape through an opening in the roof. They are released. The light casts shadow-words on the walls, which leap out and fall around my shoulders like a lei of memories interlinked; they are not my own but those of the Seeker and those who descend from the

origin of those memories. I do not sense time passing. The dance ends and it is time for me to leave. The women do not see me depart.

Dashboard Hula Girl: In Search of Aunty Keahi was at once a work of art and a site of embodied ancestral connection and ritual encounter. As a Native daughter born and raised away from the Islands, Pao conveyed meaningful insight into the complexities and struggles of what it is to exist in the in-between space of the diasporic experience. It is within this dynamic set of conditions that Pao launched her search for Aunty Keahi and, in so doing, cast her eyes to the source—as the above epigraph attests—of her cultural heritage. It remains to be seen what new works will emerge from Pao's ongoing quest. It will no doubt involve many crossings between birthplace and ancestral piko (center). And self. Mostly self.

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Notes

[1] Greg Dening, "Performing on the Beaches of the Mind: An Essay," *History and Theory* 41 (2002): 1–24.
[2] Over the course of their ten year collaboration on the Dress Tent series, Pao and Lasser have worked with a number of other artists, including: Kovid Kapoor and Akshit Bhardwaj (Dress Tent skirt design and fabrication), Christy Chow (interior installation fabric design), and Kernen Dibble (arduino and dress form "wiggle" element). Other resources that were drawn upon in the conceptualization and creation of *Dashboard Hula Girl* were: Sam 'Ohu Gon III, Leilani Mokihana Pao, the Pao Family, Smithsonian APAC, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. For more of Pao's and Lasser's work, go to: www.dresstents.com, www.adrienne pao.com, and www.robinlasser.com.
[3] Cited in Megan Miller, "The Bizarre Wearable Architecture of the Tented Ladies," *Co.Design*, 9 September 2016, https://www.fastcodesign.com/3063551/ the-bizarre-wearble-architecture-of-the-tented-ladies
[4] See, for instance, the "Hawaiian Cover-up" series at https://www.adriennepao .com/hawaiian-cover-ups/
[5] Haunani-Kay Trask, "'Lovely Hula Hands': Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture," In *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty* (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 136–137.

[6] Ibid., 136–147.

[7] The gallery space was a defunct supermarket located in the Ala Moana Mall in Honolulu and was filled with works by over fifty other artists and practitioners from Hawaiʻi and abroad.

[8] Robin Lasser and Adrienne Keahi Pao, *ʻAe Kai: A Culture Lab on Convergence* exhibition proposal, author's personal files.

[9] Quoted in Laura Kina, "Hawaiian Cover-Ups: An Interview with Adrienne Pao" In *War Baby/Love Child: Mixed Race Asian American Art*, edited by Laura Kina and Wei Ming Dariotis (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 125.

[10] See Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Diasporic Deracination and 'Off-Island' Hawaiians," *The Contemporary Pacific* 19 (1): 137–160.

[11] The interior installation fabric design was done by Hong Kong based artist Christy Chow. To see her work, go to https://www.christy-chow.com/.

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