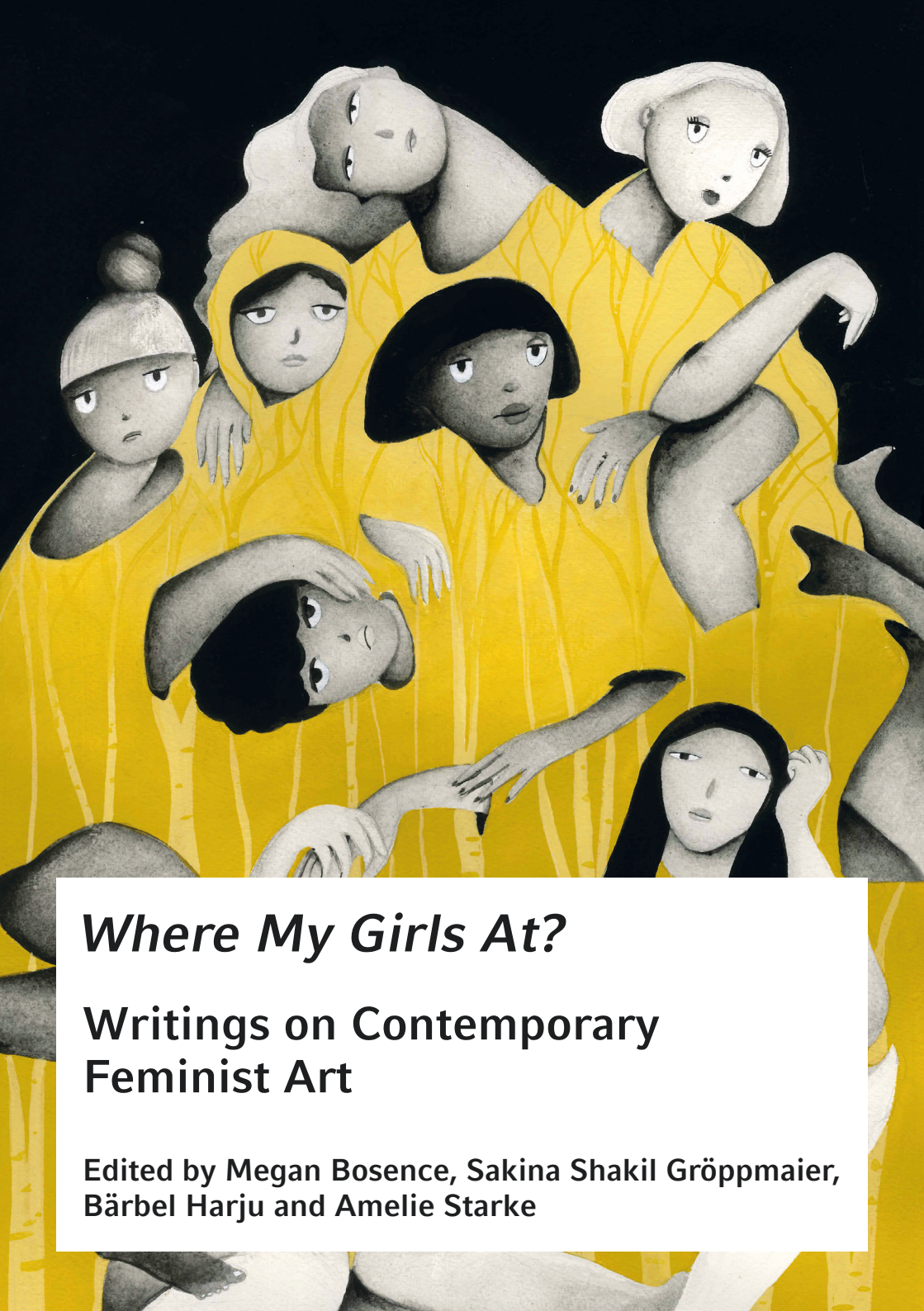


Where My Girls At?

Writings on Contemporary Feminist Art

Edited by Megan Bosence, Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier, Bärbel Harju and Amelie Starke

Edited by Megan Bosence, Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier,
Bärbel Harju and Amelie Starke

Where My Girls At?
Writings on Contemporary Feminist Art

Where My Girls At?
Writings on Contemporary Feminist Art

Editors:
Megan Bosence
Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier
Bärbel Harju
Amelie Starke

Published by
University Library of Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität
Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1
80539 München

Sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (grant no 01PL17016). Any opinions expressed here are those of the author.

„Programm für bessere Studienbedingungen und mehr Qualität in der Lehre“

Cover art by TL Papa
Website: www.tlpapa.com
Instagram: @tlpapa
© Terri-Lynn Papagiannis

© All texts and illustrations are subject to the copyright of the respective artist 2021

Bibliographic information of the German National Library
The German National Library lists the title in the German National Bibliography; to view detailed bibliographic information, visit http://dnb.dnb.de

Produced by:
readbox unipress
at readbox publishing GmbH
Rheinische Str. 171
44147 Dortmund
http://unipress.readbox.net

To read for free, open access version of this book online, visit
http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:19-epub-74046-1

978-3-95925-174-7 (Print version)
978-3-95925-175-4 (Online version)

Contents

Introduction

Megan Bosence, Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier, Bärbel Harju, Amelie Starke

The academic essays, interviews, and various artistic contributions collected in this edited volume are the result of a conference held at LMU Munich's *Amerika-Institut* in July 2020. The conference "Where My Girls At? Contemporary Feminist Art" was organized by then MA student Amelie Starke, doctoral candidate Megan Bosence, and post-doctoral researcher Bärbel Harju. Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier hosted one of the conference's panels, passionately participated throughout the conference, and then joined the editorial team for this collection. The conference set out to bring together scholars of American Studies at different stages of their career who are interested in contemporary feminist art: B.A. and M.A. students, PhD candidates, post-docs, and more established scholars. In addition, we wanted to include activists, artivists, and local artists in our conference. We were thrilled by the number of fascinating abstracts we received from various disciplines and backgrounds in response to our call for papers, both from scholars and practitioners of feminist art. The art historians, literary scholars, artists, activists, and, of course, students and scholars of American Studies, who agreed to showcase their work and share their ideas at the conference made for a truly stimulating program. For this reason, and because we felt the papers and performances were highly relevant during a moment of crisis, we decided to switch to an online conference when restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic rendered in-person meetings impossible. After months of social distancing and isolation at home, it was truly inspiring to come together with like-minded people from different corners of the world to learn about new perspectives and ideas, to exchange thoughts, and to truly feel a sense of community and connection through our screens.

A key theme that emerged throughout our discussions at the conference was the many forms feminism can take. To put it briefly, while

feminism today is flourishing, it is also undeniably splintered. From charges alleging "the death of feminism" (Reger, *Everywhere and Nowhere: Contemporary Feminism in the United States* 5) to "generational disputes […] characterized by a reactive temperament" (Johnson 46) and criticism regarding the ongoing challenges of inclusion and intersectionality (Reger, "Contemporary Feminism and Beyond" 2), feminist movements are far from cohesive. Like feminism, feminist art defies a clear definition. From its inception during second wave feminism up to today, a broad range of subject matters, artistic practices, and philosophies have been described as feminist art. Many artists, though, prefer to reject the 'feminist artist' label altogether. This raises important questions: Who gets to label art as feminist and to what ends? How does this label function, depending on who does the naming – art critics, art historians, activists, or the artists themselves? When is the qualifier 'feminist' a tool for empowerment and an act of solidarity? When does it serve to pigeonhole certain artists and their artistic practices? These questions are discussed in more detail throughout several contributions in this volume: Our interview with Angelique Szymanek, the keynote speaker at our conference, explores the "inherent violence" (this volume 10) present in the act of naming and its potential to be both "an act of solidarity and a colonizing gesture" (this volume 11). Two more interviews explore this issue from an artist's perspectives. Amelie Starke's interview with Sophia Süßmilch, a Munich-based artist, investigates the nuances of Süßmilch's ambivalent relationship with the 'feminist artist' label, while Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier's interview with Nimra and Manahil Bandukwala, two Pakistani-Canadian artists, discusses power dynamics of mainstream feminism and the problematic marginalizations that often go hand in hand with it, while emphasizing the need for allyship and genuine intersectionality. The complicated history of the label 'feminism' is also at the heart of Dannie Snyder's poetic collage "WOMXN".

Broader issues connected to the representation of women in the arts are also still necessary to consider. The year 2021 marks the 50th anniversary of Linda Nochlin's seminal essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", published in Artnews in 1971. Nochlin's writing ushered in a "new paradigm of historiographical and curatorial

practice" (Arakistain 7). Half a century later, the work to achieve true equality – in the art world and beyond – is far from done. We contend that art history is desolate without feminism. Feminist perspectives unearth histories, voices, and visuals that enrich the so-called 'canon': they challenge conventional ways of looking at art and they provide us with a fuller artistic representation of our diverse experiences and viewpoints. And there is reason to be optimistic: feminist art still flourishes and is more inclusive and diverse than ever. The current social and cultural climate, as Tate director Maria Balshaw notes, allows for a tentative hopefulness: "art and social mores are moving in nonbinary directions and […] we see an ever more plural feminist art practice meeting an engaged activism that seeks to shape an intersectional world view beyond gender and other hierarchies" (Balshaw 6). Today, artists and artivists continue to explore contemporary feminist issues and practices from multiple perspectives and through a variety of mediums. Scholars of various disciplines continue to add to the conversation by taking different approaches and perspectives on feminism(s), both historical and contemporary.

This anthology seeks to do just that. Against the background of the #MeToo movement and fourth wave feminism, this edited volume examines art and artivism and its capacity to inspire change, reformulate feminist ideas, and reimagine feminist aesthetics. The essays, artistic pieces, and interviews we gathered aim to explore the role of art and visual culture in contemporary feminist movements as well as artistic practices by feminist artists. In the tradition of Hilary Robinson's and Maria Buszek's 2019 *Companion to Feminist Art,* we want to explore feminist art not as a rigid classification of a certain type of art, but as "the space where feminist politics and the domain of art-making intersect" (1). By including a range of essays, interviews, and artistic contributions, this volume probes various perspectives. Many contributions highlight the role of intersectionality in feminist art and address the ongoing challenges of inclusivity and diversity in feminist movements. In bringing together the diverse strands of thought and practice that contemporary feminist art and culture embrace, we hope to contribute to ongoing discussions at the intersection of art and feminist politics.

This collection does not follow a strict order or thematic progression. The free arrangement of academic essays, interviews, activist pieces, and artistic contributions will, we hope, allow readers to draw their own conclusions, to make connections, and to discover new ideas beyond prescribed frameworks.

The editors' interview with Angelique Szymanek opens the collection. As a professor of art and architecture with a strong scholarly interest in feminist art and histories of sexual violence, Szymanek delivered a fantastic keynote at the conference. In lieu of a more formal paper, we asked Angelique Szymanek to explore some of her ideas in the form of an interview with us. The interview raises key questions and concerns that many of the following pieces will explore in more detail, such as the relationship between the impact of social media on the dynamics of sharing and viewing art – and especially images of sexual violence –, the inherent conflict between the aesthetic value of an art piece and its political agenda, and the connection between feminist movements and feminist art.

The next essay takes us to second wave feminist interventions. With her concept of the 'messy archive,' Sophie Anna Holzberger takes a unique approach to the clash of political struggles evident in feminist movements of the 1970s. Holzberger's analysis of the 1968 film *Up Against the Wall, Miss America* brings to light the contradictions and tensions that often become manifest in protest movements and the necessity of media activism when it comes to legacy.

Hanna Sophia Hörl's "Guerilla Girls Artivism: The Mixed Blessing of 'MASK-ulinity' and the Death of the Artist" takes a closer look at the famous feminist collective, the Guerilla Girls. Hörl critically assesses the collective's use of anonymity: Do the infamous gorilla masks question and subvert the idea of white male authorship? Or might they also conceal the [lack of] diversity and individualism present amongst female artists? In her essay, Hörl acknowledges the Guerilla Girls tremendous success but raises important questions with regard to the effectiveness of strategies of 'mask-ulinity'.

In the interview "Blurring Nipples on Instagram: Sophia Süßmilch on Navigating Today's Art World", Sophia Süßmilch provides insights into her approach to art as well as into contemporary devel-

opments within the art scene in which she has grown as an artist. The conversation between Amelie Starke and Süßmilch highlights the ongoing struggle of female artists against dominant hegemonic structures and the internal conflicts that can arise from having to operate within them.

Mark Olival-Bartley's "Ekphrasis" is an original poem written exclusively for this collection and inspired, in part, by Süßmilch's art. "Ekphrasis" evokes lush imagery and creates a dialogue between Gustave Courbet's controversial 1866 painting *The Origin of the World* and Sophia Süßmilch's 2018 painting *Der Ursprung der Welt (the female gaze)*.

The next contribution is by Tamar Beruchashvili, a multi-media artist based in Munich. In her photographic and video art, Beruchashvili explores the unstable boundaries between digital and analog spaces, and between the self and the other. The works she has contributed to this anthology invite the viewer to look at current feminist issues through her perspective as an emerging young artist.

Rupali Naik's open letter "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised, But It Will Be Livestreamed" explores the surge of social media activism in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. Against the background of her own interests in feminist theory and her experience as an Instagram activist, Naik weighs the advantages and shortcomings of online activism, ultimately stressing social media's potential to inspire meaningful change.

Xinrui Jiang's essay "Appropriation and Subversion: Black Humor in the Photo-Text Artworks of Carrie Mae Weems and Lorna Simpson" explores differences and similarities between the two artists' employment of humor. Her analysis also takes a deeper look at how these two artists use humor in their works to appropriate harmful stereotypes of Black women and, in doing so, subvert those stereotypes and redirect hostility.

Melina Haberl explores the intersections between racial stereotypes and female bodies. Her analysis of Kara Walker's 2014 sculpture "A Subtlety" demonstrates how art can be a powerful tool to challenge both racial stereotypes and normative beauty ideals. Haberl effectively demonstrates that politicizing the stereotypes and tropes that are

applied to women who do not adhere to broad and detrimental beauty ideals can be a powerful tool in challenging and countering such ideals.

Joyce Osagie delves into the significance of Black hair and notions of 'going natural' in her essay through her analysis of Nakeya Brown's photography. By focusing on Black hair and its role in Black womanhood and femininity, Osagie reveals important insights into the Black female experience as well as the need to disrupt longstanding aesthetic norms that can prove harmful in their incitements to conform.

"On Community, Intersectionality, and Forging One's Space in the Art World" is the title of Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier's interview with Nimra and Manahil Bandukwala. In the interview, the two Pakistani-Canadian artists, writers, and educators discuss their lives as young artists, the importance of intersectionality, and how they navigate patriarchal and hegemonic structures in the art world and beyond.

Next is "WOMXN" a poetic collage that artivist Dannie Snyder created for this anthology. Snyder's collage is a unique exploration of the contribution of women poets to feminism in the United States. Snyder combines the visual and the textual to traverse questions on the label of 'feminism' and provoke a rethinking of the use of the term. Her collage, in essence, is a compelling provocation that encourages us to re-examine our own notions of feminist thought.

"a *veiled* ci|vil war" and "Mammillaria" are the titles of Penelope Kemekenidou's artivist contributions to this collection. Accompanied by a brief biographical introduction, Kemekenidou delivers two powerfully personal pieces that reflect on her cultural identity as a child of Greek migrants in Germany as well as her socialist activism. Her poetic exploration of early childhood memories depicts her experiences of alienation and her struggle to find solidarity and community, despite shared experiences of oppression and histories lost.

Next is an essay by art historian Tonia Andresen entitled "Spaces of Power: The Video *Borderhole* by Amber Bemak and Nadia Granados as a Queer-Feminist Critique of the U.S.-Mexico Border, Gendered Violence and the Media." In her essay, Andresen explores how media artists Amber Bemak and Nadia Granados artistically engage with the U.S. Mexico Border space through their video *Borderhole*. In a fascinat-

ing analysis, Andresen interrogates the role of gender, race, class, and queerness with regard to questions of territory and the female body. In "#ApsáalookeFeminist: Space and Representation in the Art of Wendy Red Star," Melissa Schlecht highlights the important roles of Native American women artists against their erasure from art history through her analysis of Wendy Red Star's photographic work. Focusing on questions of space and representation, Schlecht shows how Red Star exposes the racist and sexist nature of the white male gaze and how the Crow artist creates digital feminist spaces – like the hashtag #ApsáalookeFeminist – to empower Indigenous women artists.

The last essay of this anthology is Laura Purdy's "Come on, Barbie, Let's Go Dismantle the Patriarchy: A Radical Feminist Critique of Barbie's YouTube Vlogs." Purdy critically examines the online presence of Barbie as a neo-liberal feminist with post-feminist sentiments. By assessing Barbie's YouTube vlogs from a radical feminist perspective, she extracts the critical aspects of Barbie's increasing politicization and online presence today.

Our closer is a powerful piece of songwriting by Joanna King. King's song takes inspiration from notable feminist artists, both visual and literary. Entitled *"Georgia's Bloom,"* a direct reference to Georgia O'Keefe, King weaves together her personal experiences of adolescence with allusions to feminist learnings that are undeniably relevant today.

We would like to thank *Lehre@LMU* for generously funding both the conference and this volume. We would also like to extend a special thank you to all the scholars, students, artists, and activists for making the conference such a memorable event. We sincerely and profoundly thank all our contributors; we truly appreciate the amount of work, effort, and heart you have put into these compelling pieces for this collection, all while operating under strict deadlines. For creating the wonderful artwork for both the conference and the cover of this book, we would like to thank the artist TL Papa. Last but not least, an enormous thank you to Stephanie Berens for her immense support throughout the proofreading process.

Works Cited

Arakistain, Xabier. Foreword. *The Art of Feminism. Images that Shaped the Fight for Equality, 1857-2017,* by Helena Reckitt, Chronicle Books, 2018, p. 7.

Balshaw, Maria. Preface. *The Art of Feminism. Images that Shaped the Fight for Equality, 1857-2017,* by Helena Reckitt, Chronicle Books, 2018, p. 6.

Johnson, Pauline. "Normative Tensions of Contemporary Feminism." *Thesis Eleven,* no. 101, May 2010, pp. 44-52.

Reger, Jo. *Everywhere and Nowhere: Contemporary Feminism in the United States.* Oxford University Press, 2012.

—. "Contemporary Feminism and Beyond." *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women's Social Movement Activism,* vol. 101, no. 1, pp. 44-52.

Robinson, Hilary, Maria Elena Buszek, Dana Arnold, editors. A Companion to Feminist Art. Wiley-Blackwell, 2019.

"Disrupting Patterns": An Interview with Angelique Szymanek

Megan Bosence, Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier, Bärbel Harju, Amelie Starke

Dr. Angelique Szymanek is an art historian at Hobart & William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. Since she is an expert on feminist art and has researched histories of sexual violence and the representation of the female body in art, we invited Dr. Szymanek to give the keynote address at the conference "Where My Girls At? Contemporary Feminist Art" and were thrilled when she agreed to come to Munich in July 2020. Unfortunately, the Corona pandemic cut short her Fulbright stay in Scotland and she returned to the United States in early 2020. We decided to move our conference online so that Dr. Szymanek could deliver the keynote through an online video conference tool. In her opening keynote, entitled "Whose Feminism?", Dr. Szymanek insightfully set the stage for our conference and raised many urgent questions that we continued to come back to over the course of the conference. In her analysis of Joy Poe's Rape Performance (1979) as a vital – yet marginalized – contribution to feminist art in the 1970s, she sketched the [lingering] limits of "what was, and what remains, image-able when it comes to sexual violence."[1]

This interview, conducted via email by the editors of this collection, provides further insight into Dr. Szymanek's research interests. On behalf of all participants, we would like to hereby thank Dr. Angelique Szymanek for her outstanding contribution to the conference and this collection of essays.

1 Cf. the conference program: https://www.amerikanistik.uni-muenchen.de/aktuelles/veranstaltungen/cfp-contemporary-feminist-art/conference-program-ext.pdf

The editors: Can you tell us a bit about yourself, your academic background, and your interests in contemporary art and feminism?

Angelique Szymanek: I graduated with a Master's in Art History from the State University at Buffalo in New York in 2009 and completed a PhD in Art History from Binghamton University in 2015. My path in the discipline began rather far afield from contemporary feminist art. It began in ancient Greece. In 2008, I participated in an archeological survey on the island of Crete wherein I spent a month hiking through the countryside in search of traces of late Bronze Age habitation, mostly in the form of pottery shards and stone tools. While I relished this experience, I couldn't help but feel like the work was not the right fit for me. Later that year I took a course entitled *Gender and Display* with a person who remains a valued mentor and friend, Dr. Elizabeth Otto. It was in this class that I was able to identify the pieces that were missing from my previous engagements with art history. I was confronted, for the first time in my education, with a close and critical account of the colonial imperatives of the discipline. I came to understand much more clearly the ways that power shapes the histories and narratives that are visible and was called upon to consider the vital role that art has played in either perpetuating or disrupting dominant discourses around cultural production. Feminist art, to my mind, is a disruption. I knew almost instantly that, if I were going to continue in this discipline, this was the kind of work that I wanted to be doing: disrupting.

In your keynote address at our conference, you discussed the "inherent violence of [naming art] 'feminist.'" Could you elaborate on that, also in light of who chooses to name art 'feminist' – critics, art historians, activists, or the artists themselves? Could the qualifier 'feminist' also be considered to be empowering and useful as an analytical tool?

Naming of any kind is a violent act in so far as it is inherently an act of exclusion. It simultaneously, however, can be an act of care, community-building, and a call for visibility. As many BIPOC scholars, artists, and activists have been articulating for years, feminism has a long

history of exclusion and, as such, to evoke it means that one must take this into account. In the North American context, for example, the presumptions of whiteness that anchored much early feminist discourse not only excluded but marginalized or delegitimized the experiences of non-white, non-binary, trans, working class, and immigrant folks, among others. Pointing this out doesn't discount the important work of feminism but it does ask that we call out the blind spots and the violence of these exclusions so that we can do the work better moving forward.

The term feminism is not monolithic. It is evolving and contextually specific. My naming of an artist's work as feminist, therefore, has the potential to be both empowering and dispossessing; an act of solidarity and a colonizing gesture. It is, to my mind, the responsibility of the person doing the naming to recognize the systems of power and privilege that positions themselves and what they name 'feminist' in distinct ways. To name something or someone feminist and to do so in a feminist way are not the same thing.

The consumption of art and the participation of an audience can be a complex phenomenon, particularly in the case of "rape performance." In your keynote address you raised questions about "the ethics of making and viewing images of violence." What can you tell us about the affect involved in this? What would you say about the dynamics between the artist and the spectator in this regard, as well as between spectators in an audience witnessing such a performance?

This is a difficult issue and the mere mention of ethics warrants, of course, an acknowledgement of the highly contextual and subjective understandings of that term. To my mind the ethical conundrum of imaging and viewing violence, sexual violence in particular, lies in the risks of making spectacle of the brutalized body or, as many women artists have been debating fairly hotly since the 1980s, of images being coopted or deployed to ends that may be antithetical to the intentions of the maker. Of course, no artist can control the circulation of their images and their meanings, especially now in this age of the digital. So, one of the risks that any artist attempting to address sexual violence

from a feminist perspective, or from the perspective of the violated, runs is the possibility that the intent will either be distorted by decontextualizing or that it is simply illegible within the broader cultural context in which it is circulating.

This question of the legibility of rape is one in which I am particularly interested. I have addressed this in relationship to Joy Poe's work as well in some writing I have done on artists Ana Mendieta and Emma Sulkowitz. While the potential for images of rape to have damaging or traumatic effects on the viewer is a compelling consideration, I find the presumptions that are made on behalf of the viewer/spectator of violent images to be proscriptive and to highly circumscribe the multiplicity of affective experiences that all images offer and that violent ones provoke perhaps most palpably. The reception of the art works that I have researched, written about, and taught, including Poe's *Rape Performance* (1979), Mendieta's *Untitled* (Rape Piece) (1973), and Sulkowitz's *Ceci N'est Pas Un Viol (*2015), tell us a lot about the expectations laid upon artists daring to take on rape as the content of their work. The relative absence of these works from much art historical discourse illustrates what one might describe as a kind of prohibition of the subject, one that is often made on the grounds that the artist has some kind of moral responsibility to the viewer. While concerns over the potential harmful effects that viewing images of rape can have on a spectator are not to be dismissed, prohibiting work on rape on the grounds of its inevitable traumatizing effects denies the ubiquity of its image elsewhere. I am interested in how one makes rape visible from a feminist perspective within the context of a culture wherein violence is fundamental to the very construction of heteronormative sex relations. The expectation that, as Nancy Forest-Brown's lamented of Joy Poe's *Rape Performance,* "the woman should have won," remains one of the metrics through which art about rape is deemed sufficiently feminist or even viable as art. What this expectation also reveals, of course, is the reality of its inverse (women not winning) as it continues to be experienced by feminized subjects living within the persistent logic of rape culture. These works, in other words, are feminist not because they show us rape – illuminate a hidden reality, provoke empathy, or offer a witness – but because they provide the possibilities for acknowledging

the socio-cultural blindness to rape as something beyond the racist heteronormative misogynist script that has been normalizing, eroticizing, and profiting off of it for centuries.

More and more artists are now sharing their work on social media instead of in traditional settings such as museums and galleries. How does this impact the dynamics of sharing and viewing images of violence as well as the relation between the artist and their audience within this context?

I think that, like the technological modes of viewing that preceded it, social media presents as many opportunities as it does potential pitfalls. This paradox is not exclusive to technologically mediated viewing platforms, but it is one that challenges the historical exclusions of art institutions through the creation of multiple counter-publics who are able to make, share, and view images in more immediate, fluid, and dialogic ways. When it comes to images of violence, however, those very same qualities can perpetuate the saturation and attendant naturalizing of violent content. To return to the question of legibility I noted earlier, my concern relates to how an art work about rape, in particular, can be read outside of, or differently than, the countless images of sexual violence that saturate social media platforms, websites, and digital screening services of all types. Given the rapid and seemingly endless stream of images that constitute a daily Instagram, Snapchat, Tik Tok, or other feed –, how might that intense flow of visual information be paused long enough to consider carefully and critically the content of any one image, let alone one that attempts to address violence from a feminist perspective? I don't have the answer to this question but I do know that, whatever the mode of delivery, art has the potential to disrupt our conditioned patterns of viewing, patterns that are deeply tied to the social conditions in which we live, learn, and look. Art is one of the most powerful tools one can wield in an effort to provoke viewers to see differently.

What do you hope the audience took away from your keynote?

I hope that my talk offered folks some new ways of thinking about what it means to name a work of art feminist. This is something that, as a white scholar, I try to stay mindful of, particularly when the artist whose work I am considering occupies a different relationship to systems of power than my own. I hope that it sparked recognition of the multiplicity of ways into feminism as an artistic practice and as a methodology. The metrics used to gage the "feminism" of a work of art are complex, contextual, exclusionary but, most importantly, multiple. If my talk provided a space to think through how art about violence from a feminist perspective can include engagement with the viewer that doesn't presume empathy or outrage, then it was successful. Beyond the keynote, however, I hope that folks who attended this conference felt empowered and motivated by the work of other like-minded artists, scholars, and students. I know that I certainly took away a renewed sense of belonging in a field that hasn't always warmly welcomed feminist, decolonial, anti-racist, among other critical perspectives. For this, I am so very grateful.

When we call an art work feminist, does that involve a conflict between its aesthetic values and its political agenda? What makes a piece of art 'feminist'?

I find it tricky to determine a criterion for what makes a work of art feminist and I agree that at times an aesthetic or material quality of a work might indicate a very different politic than that which the content or subject of a work of art may suggest. I think, therefore, that it is often more useful to think about this question in relation to methodology. A feminist methodology is one that allows me to read certain practices, materials, and concepts as feminist in relation to the particular conditions of making within which the artist is working and within which I am viewing. It may well be the case, for example, that I am compelled to read an artist's deployment of textile in their work as a feminist mode of making, conditioned as I am to perceive this as a historically gendered, classed, and, therefore, devalued practice. This may well be a misattri-

bution, however, if the artist is making from within a socio-cultural location wherein those histories of devaluing textile arts does not align with the North American space from which I am viewing. I can say broadly, however, that, for me, a feminist work of art is one that calls the viewer's attention to systems of power. A feminist work of art makes marginalized subjectivities visible. A feminist work of art challenges histories of art that empower colonial narratives. Feminist art, to use Sarah Ahmed's phrase, is a "world-making project."

What role do you think today's feminist movements have in connection to feminist art?

I think activism has always played a huge role in the development of art. My dissertation research was centered around the relationship between the anti-rape movement in the U.S. and the development of feminist performance art in the late 1960s and 1970s. Art addressing rape from a feminist perspective, I argue, was made possible in large part due to the discourse around the subject that was opened up by the Anti-Rape Movement and related Civil Rights campaigns of the time. Currently, in the U.S., the Black Lives Matter movement, the Water Protectors actions, and the growing discourses around trans visibility are just a few examples of activist projects that are shifting socio-cultural paradigms in ways that have provoked action from arts institutions prompting exhibition and acquisitions practices that account for the absence of BIPOC artists and images within their collections. Artists have also long been on the front lines of calls for social justice and so the relationship between feminist art and activism is one that is deeply intertwined. Feminist art now, as always, is being both produced by and responding to the feminist actions that are taking place in the streets.

On Messy Archives: Feminist Media Activism and the 1968 Miss America Beauty Pageant

Sophie Anna Holzberger

On September 7, 1968, over a hundred women gathered on the boardwalk in Atlantic City to protest the annual Miss America beauty pageant taking place in the city's largest convention hall. This event has become canonized as a central reference for the public perception of and opinion on North American, if not Western, feminism (Welch). Many of the pitfalls and paradoxes of this carefully planned and staged media event continue to haunt feminism today, especially in reductionist understandings of identity politics. The media coverage of the event successfully turned the protester's demands into a fight between women on the boardwalk and those inside the convention hall, between women who decided to question 'womanhood' and women who decided to embrace 'womanhood.' Major newspapers like the *New York Times* also juxtaposed the Miss Black America protest that took place on the same day to protest the pageant (Curtis and Klemesrud). "In a media landscape saturated with political claims and performances of rebellion, civil rights and feminism competed for recognition. The movements were presented as mutually exclusive, even inimical to each other's aims" (Welch 89). Instead of creating an image of female solidarity against sexist and racist oppression, the reception and accounts of the event constructed oppositions: women against women, white feminists against Black politics. As several feminist historians have reminded us (Welch, Hesford), it is important to keep in mind that this oppositional and exclusive understanding of women's liberation in general (as a white bourgeois movement) and of the Miss America protest in particular (as the protest of white angry middle-class housewives) is not an actual representation of the historical events, but rather a narrative that for many complex reasons came to dominate the discourse on women's liberation.

Pursuing an argument of a problem of legibility rather than an absence of complexity from the historical archive, the six-minute documentary *Up Against the Wall, Miss America* (1968), produced by the two collectives Newsreel and New York Radical Women, allowed me to explore the contradictions and tensions of the protest as well as the centrality of media activism for its legacy. In order to tackle the problem of legibility, I chose a twofold approach that involved studying archival documents and research literature as well as conducting an interview in May 2020 with Bev Grant, one of the main filmmakers of *Up Against the Wall* and a member of both collectives, in order to add a different voice to the discussion. Until today, most of the research on Newsreel, with the exception of Cynthia Young's work, still relies on the interviews Bill Nichols conducted with Newsreel members in the 1970s, and it too often excludes its feminist legacies. The constellation of interview and archival research allowed me to explore feminist history as a history of intersections and coexistences of collectives, media, and activism. In this essay I develop a concept of the 'messy archive' by examining *Up Against the Wall, Miss America's* on and off screen display of conflicting political struggles at the 1968 Miss America pageant that questions its canonized history.

In her study *Feeling Women's Liberation,* Victoria Hesford coined the term 'image memory' to describe the production of the symbolic figure of the white middle-class protester of women's liberation through mass mediated representations.[1] Image memories create a single coherent image out of the "complex, contradictory, heterogeneous mess of any moment or era" (Hesford 12). Bev Grant remembered the public debate as well as the internal discussions of the action at New York Radical Women in the same words: "The older you get, I think the more you realize: there's never perfect solutions, it's always this push and pull and push and pull, *and, it's messy*" (Grant; emphasis added). I developed the idea of a messy archive to affirm this inherent chaos of feminist history and to allow me to think in simultaneities and contradictions instead of trying to tell a linear narrative. My project is akin to John Law's methodological critique of social sciences in *After Method:*

1 For a more detailed elaboration of the significance of Hesford's work, see Welch 79.

Mess in Social Science Research. Law carefully elaborates the methodological paradoxes that arise if we try to bring order to an object that is in itself chaotic: "This is because simple clear descriptions don't work if what they are describing is not itself very coherent. The very attempt to be clear simply increases the mess" (2). The idea of a messy archive is committed to making space for the multitude of voices and interests that arise in collective organizing. Acknowledging messiness as the condition of my research about feminist pasts always challenges me to ask the question eloquently articulated by Hesford:

> How do we keep the knotty achievements, as well as the difficulties and failures, of a movement like women's liberation—a movement that forms part of the conditions of possibility for queer and feminist theory and studies in the present—in critical sight while paying it the kind of loving attention needed to conjure up its complex eventfulness? (14)

Up Against the Wall, Miss America occupies a twofold position in relation to the notion of messiness. The first lies in its production context: it was produced in an ephemeral encounter of two collectives in New York City in 1968, the leftist film collective Newsreel and the feminist group New York Radical Women. Its origin story is already multi-layered, chaotic; the film is itself part of different archives. According to Bev Grant, it is not an original Newsreel film, even though it was distributed by the collective afterwards: "It was accepted as a Newsreel film after we brought in the finished product, but by then, we had collaborated with all those other people who got credited, in some way or another" (Grant). The film stems from a complex entanglement of different desires and interests, and even though it is officially held in the institutional archive of Third World Newsreel – the organization that would grow out of the initial New York Newsreel group between late 1971 and early 1972 –, the documentary film belongs as much to the archive of the women's movement and of civil rights activism (Young 149). This doubled belonging of the film is best described with Ernst van Alphen's distinction between archives as institutions and archives as "agents that shape personal identity and social and cultural memory" (14). The second relation to messiness involves seeing the film itself

as an archive.[2] Even if it can be categorized as one of Newsreel's most successful agitation films for women's liberation, it appears as a more complex document from our contemporary point in history, since next to its empowering rhetoric it also reflects and reveals some of the contradictions and tensions of the movement.

By turning my attention to *Up Against the Wall, Miss America,* I thereby do not claim to rediscover a buried truth, to reinstate an untold story, or to make unheard voices heard; instead, the film allows me to ask different questions, and allows me to speak from a position in between *loving attention* and *critical sight.*

The Messiness of Collective Production

Up Against the Wall, Miss America is one of the earliest feminist productions of New York Newsreel, preceded only by the short documentary *Jeanette Rankin Brigade* (1968). It was followed by longer and more famous feminist films such as *Make Out* (1970), *Janie's Janie* (1971), or *The Woman's Film* (1971). This growing number of feminist productions mirrored an internal struggle at Newsreel and questioned its early self-understanding as an exclusively New Left organization (Renov "Early Newsreel" 201; Mekas 312-313). Newsreel was founded as a leftist documentary collective in response to mainstream media coverage of the March on the Pentagon in October 1967. The New York Newsreel branch was initially dominated and led by white middle-class men with the financial means to produce films. Even though Newsreel set out to be a participatory space, some members noted that it resembled "the illusion of democracy and the illusion of collectivity" (Nichols 109). Women and people of color began to protest this hierarchical set up only months after its founding and eventually gained leadership of the collective in a struggle that lasted more than a year. Newsreel's history is often told in the following sequence: first there was the women's struggle, then there was the class struggle – Newsreel started distinguishing between haves and have-nots – and finally, the

2 I am indebted to film scholar Paula Amad regarding the dialectics of film's relationship to the archive. Amad introduces the term counter-archive for early film's tendency to resist the coherent order of the archive while at the same time pointing out that film is structured by the "archival logic" (17).

'Third World' struggle (Grant), but these transitions were in fact overlapping rather than clear-cut and defined. Between 1971 and 1972, New York Newsreel was renamed "Third World Newsreel," now led mainly by women of color, which is the name under which it still exists today. As much as women's liberation and its critique in the collective served as a catalyst for discussion, its impact was only a brief period of transition. The structure of the collective at New York Newsreel appears as a history of constant transformation, and as Cynthia Young claims, Newsreel cannot be understood as a unified voice that represents 'the movement,' but rather seems to be in constant motion (101-102). Even though Renov still insists on Newsreel's connection to 'the movement,' he also argues for its shifting nature: "Newsreel was never merely a reflection or conduit, that is, *about* Movement tactics and sensibilities; it has always remained *of* the Movement, a palpable index of shifting fortunes and newfound necessities" (Renov, "Newsreel: Old and New" 26). The short period of time between 1968-1970 provides a glimpse of historical simultaneity rather than oppositionality of the New Left, anti-colonial politics, and women's liberation. It sheds light on a moment that, as Young phrases it, "enabled conflicting identities and competing interests to coexist" (102). This sense of coexistence also applies to the larger picture: the boundary between Newsreel and other political collectives was as well porous. I claim that *Up Against the Wall, Miss America* is located precisely at one of these porous boundaries.

Since the women's struggle did not begin inside of Newsreel, it was rather the overlap of some of its members with New York Radical Women's (NYRW) activities that led to its making. This wasn't met with too much enthusiasm, as Bev Grant recalls: "Newsreel kind of patted me on the head and said 'Sure, you and Karen [Mitnick], we'll lend you this' and they didn't really expect anything from us. And when we presented the film, the response I would not say was overwhelming. It was kind of: 'Well, that's kind of nice'" (Grant). Bev Grant, who was part of both collectives alongside Miriam Bokser, with whom she worked together in Liberation News Service, and Karen Mitnick were the driving forces behind the short film; equipped with a Bolex camera and a Nagra recorder that didn't hook up – meaning that they could not film

with sync sound – they documented the Miss America protest in early September (Grant).

It is interesting to note that both collectives underwent inverse developments: as much as Newsreel declared itself a film collective, it would very soon be concerned with feminist politics, and as much as NYRW started out as a feminist activist organization, media was immediately one of their central playing fields. Activism and media are in both cases clearly two sides of the same coin, and researching this collective history involves recognizing the mutual complementarity between both fields. The protest organizing notes in the Robin Morgan Papers Collection at Duke University bear witness to the attention that the NYRW organizers paid to media: they focus on publicity and the performative aspects of the protest, such as the famous freedom trash can in which the activists threw symbols of women's oppression. The list of possible speakers reflects the attempt to reach a broader public by having tried to get famous female and feminist writers to participate, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Doris Lessing, or Susan Sontag. The group also devoted explicit importance to their engagement with reporters. The planning notes already contain a paragraph stating that protesters are going to refuse to be interviewed by male reporters: "We reject patronizing reportage. *Only newswomen will be recognized*" (Morgan).

NYRW held its first meeting in November 1967 in the Lower East Side and mainly consisted of college-educated white women. However, the group was heavily influenced by the civil rights and Black Power movements, and the struggle for Black liberation was central for the group's radicalization and ideology, most prominently visible in the shift in language from women's emancipation to women's liberation.[3] The historian Georgia Paige Welch has traced these intersections in the concrete context of the Miss America protest by pointing out that, for example, the "'ten points' of protest that NYRW announced in their official press release titled 'No More Miss America!' were a direct reference to the Black Panthers' 1966 'Ten-Point Program'" (Welch 86). Welch points out that even the title of the short film *Up Against the Wall* "was

3 Kathie Sarachild made this shift explicit in a roundtable at the Vera List Center, New York, under the title "Art and the Specter of Ideology: Act 2," 22. Feb. 2020.

a revolutionary slogan derived from a poem by Amiri Baraka" (86). The media activism of NYRW heavily relied on metaphors of enslavement and the press release explicitly criticized the racist tradition of the pageant. Welch's overall conclusion is that "even though the action in Atlantic City would come to be remembered as distinctively 'radical feminist,' the women protesting Miss America recycled analyses, forms of protest, and images from the civil rights movement" (85). Similar to Newsreel's multiple influences, NYRW's method of 'recycling' reveals the group's ideology as very much influenced and structured by anti-racist strategies and language. Even though NYRW never saw a great change in membership, its ideological history is underpinned by a similar mode of co-existing struggles. One particular figure presents a concrete manifestation of that intersectional set-up: the African American activist and lawyer Florynce (Flo) Kennedy. Working in both the mostly white women's liberation movement and Black Power organizing, she crossed lines back and forth and actively initiated dialogues between the groups (Randolph). Her appearance evokes this contextual reference to her intersectional activism as much as her concrete presence in the film is in itself a display of intersectional feminist practice.

Title: Florynce (Flo) Kennedy singing on the bus to Atlantic City © Bev Grant Photography 2017

Up Against the Wall, Miss America as a Messy Archive

The film's overall aesthetic can be described as slightly messy: its grainy and shaky images as well as the poor quality of its soundtrack are typical of early Newsreel productions that "were often deliberately crude and amateurish despite the presence of experienced filmmakers" (Young 114). *Up Against the Wall* opens with a panning shot that ends on a close-up of a hand holding a newspaper article titled "Miss America: Delightful or Degrading?" The next shot pans 360 degrees on eye level over a group of women gathering and chatting in front of a bus and the following shot is a close-up of a laughing Florynce Kennedy entering the bus; other women follow. While the viewer is thereby established as part of the crowd of women's protesters boarding the Atlantic City-bound buses at Union Square, the sound consists of two male journalists reporting on the war in Vietnam, secessionist movements in Africa, and the results of a baseball match. A still image of a flyer for the Miss America pageant which reads "Here She Comes" introduces the first images of the pageant in the convention hall, where we see one of the contestants walking down the ramp in a bathing suit. Then the soundtrack shifts to news coverage of the pageant itself and the male reporter announces the breast, waist, and hip measurements of one of the candidates. A close-up of the crying winner of the pageant with her scepter is intercut with women laughing and apparently singing in the bus. On the level of soundtrack, the first sequence of the film places the Miss America beauty pageant amidst the central news of the New Left at that time and in its opening shot it also portrays news as a central platform for the demands of the protesters. Through the contrast of the voices of the three male reporters and the female singing voice, the film also highlights the women's protest against patriarchal domination of media coverage.

Florynce Kennedy is not only the first single close-up of the film, she also establishes spatial continuity for the spectator. She serves as a character that guarantees the continuity of the interior space of the bus: since her face is the first close-up that we see entering the bus and we see her again later singing in the bus, she serves as a point of spatial orientation for the spectator. The beginning of the film thereby explicitly highlights her presence and aligns us with her perspective. She

and Bonnie Allen (Welch speculates that they were probably the only Black women participating in the protest) were also among the women who were chained to the giant Miss America puppet which allowed the protesters to turn the slavery metaphor into a concrete image. Rather than being a simple reproduction of the group's mostly white membership, the film emphasizes intersections of racial and sexist oppression in the context of the pageant protest against the efforts of the "media to effectively segregate Black activism from feminism, and racism from sexism" (Welch 90).

The film actively tackles this segregation and, at the same time, produces other divisions. As I mentioned, two events took place at the same time that day: NYRW was protesting the Miss America pageant while another group of women hosted the first Miss Black America pageant. News coverage, such as the *New York Times* article from September 9, 1968, constructed a "series of oppositions between the pageants and the social movements that put Miss Black America and women's liberation at odds" (Welch 89). The film's active participation in the singularization of the event is a clear sign of the whiteness of its counter-public truth claim – it did not provide a platform for these two groups to meet or engage in a filmic dialogue even though they were probably aware of one another, as the archival material shows (Welch 87).[4] In line with early Newsreel's confrontational style, as well as the radical tonality of New York Radical Women, the film also participated in the dividing impulse between the women in the streets and the women at the pageant: in a very fast-cut associative montage we see the faces of the beauty pageant contestants intercut with the sheep that the protesters crowned as Miss America, as well as the life-size Miss America puppet. This montage clearly associates the contestants with shallow dolls and is thereby part of the troubled legacy of this protest.

4 This is not to say that this is true for the rest of the work done by feminists inside Newsreel. For example, Bev Grant went on to work on the 'Third World' Cadre, co-creating films like *El Pueblo Se Levanta* (1971) and *Break and Enter* (1971) that actively shifted the focus to the organizing and political activism of people of color, like the Young Lords in East Harlem.

Conclusion

This short analysis of the production context and some of the aesthetic strategies of *Up Against the Wall, Miss America* reveals that it is a highly contradictory document. The story it tells (or does not tell) is full of tensions between the struggle for Black liberation, women's liberation, and the question of 'womanhood', all condensed in the context of the protest; its uneasy situatedness between two collectives as well as its improvised technology emphasize this messy history. What the film draws to attention is the need to engage with the messiness of the archive in order to preserve the political complexity of certain moments in feminist history. The film and its production context acknowledge the everlasting chaos of activist organizing and media making while at the same time reminding us that there is not only one story about feminism, since the messy archive offers a space for us to experience the chaotic multitude that ultimately defines and shapes feminist activism and media making.

I want to thank Gabriel Quigley for being a critical voice and an alright reviewer. Bev Grant's voice forms the center of this text and I am incredibly grateful for all her time, her stories and her patience.

Works Cited

Amad, Paula. *Counter-Archive: Film, the Everyday, and Albert Kahn's Archives de La Planète.* Columbia UP, 2010.

Curtis, Charlotte, and Judy Klemesrud. "Along With Miss America, There's Now Miss Black America." *The New York Times*, 9 Sept 1968, idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r31t3h.

Dobbins, Peggy; Grant, Bev and Sarachild, Kathie. "Ideological Tropes of Feminisms versus Capital in the 1960s: New York Radical Women and the Movements of Ideology." *Art and the Specter of Ideology: Act 2*, 22 Feb 2020, Vera List Center for Art and Politics, New York.

Dow, Bonnie J. "Feminism, Miss America, and Media Mythology." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, vol. 6, no. 1, Michigan State UP, 2003, pp. 127–49. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/41939812.

Grant, Bev. Personal interview. 23 May 2020.

Hanisch, Carol. "What Can Be Learned: A Critique of the Miss America Protest." 27 Nov 1968. Box S17. Women's Liberation Movement Print Cultures, Rubenstein Library Duke University, idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r3r701. Accessed 30 Sept 2020.

Hesford, Victoria. *Feeling Women's Liberation.* Duke UP, 2013.

Janie's Janie. Collectively produced by New York Newsreel, Third World Newsreel, 1971.

Jeanette Rankin Brigade. Collectively produced by New York Newsreel, Newsreel #4, Third World Newsreel, 1968.

Law, John. *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research.* Routledge, 2010.

Make-Out. Collectively produced by New York Newsreel, Newsreel #49, Third World Newsreel, 1970.

Mekas, Jonas. "Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971." *Movie Journal,* Columbia UP, 2016.

Morgan, Robin. "No More Miss America! Press Release." *Redstockings,* 22 Aug 1968, www.redstockings.org/index.php/no-more-miss-america. Accessed 30 Sept 2020.

Nichols, Bill. *Newsreel: Film and Revolution.* 1972. UCLA, Master's thesis, billnichols99.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/newsreel-film-and-revolution.pdf.

Randolph, Sherie M. "'Women's Liberation or . . . Black Liberation, You're Fighting the Same Enemies.'" *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical*

Women in the Black Freedom Struggle, edited by Dayo F. Gore et al., NY UP, 2009, pp. 223–47.

Renov, Michael. "Early Newsreel: The Construction of a Political Imaginary for the Left." *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, edited by Grant H. Kester, Duke UP, 1998, pp. 199–214.

—. "Newsreel: Old and New. Towards An Historical Profile." *Film Quarterly,* vol. 41, no. 1, 1987, pp. 20–33. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1212325.

Up Against the Wall, Miss America. Collectively produced by New York Newsreel, Newsreel #22 Third World Newsreel, 1968.

van Alphen, Ernst. *Staging the Archive: Art and Photography in the Age of New Media.* Reaktion Books, 2014.

Welch, Georgia Paige. "'Up Against the Wall Miss America': Women's Liberation and Miss Black America in Atlantic City, 1968." *Feminist Formations,* vol. 27, no. 2, 2015, pp. 70–97. Project Muse, doi:10.1353/ff.2015.0017.

The Woman's Film. Collectively produced by San Francisco Newsreel, Newsreel #55, Third World Newsreel, 1971.

Young, Cynthia A. *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left.* Duke UP, 2006.

Guerrilla Girls Artivism: The Mixed Blessing of "MASK-ulinity" and the Death of the Artist

Hanna Sophia Hörl

> "Our anonymity keeps the focus on the issues, and away from who we might be: we could be anyone and we are everywhere." (guerrillagirls.com)

They wear gorilla masks and give a second coming to deceased female artists and what they stand for, taking on names like Frida Kahlo, Käthe Kollwitz, Gertrude Stein, or simply Guerrilla Girl #1 as pseudonyms in their feminist artivist collective named *Guerrilla Girls*. Frustrated with ingrained inequalities concerning gender, race, and class in the art world, they tackle these problematic issues with the weapon of anonymity – their "mask-ulinity," a term first used by founding member "Käthe Kollwitz" in an interview in 1995, to subvert the concept of white male authorship ("Guerrilla Girls Bare All"). To this day, anonymity has been the driving force of the group since its founding in 1984 in the wake of second-wave feminism and art censorship debates. Yet, the *Guerrilla Girls'* unified alternative identity has turned out to be both a blessing and a curse in their fight against the underrepresentation of female artists and artists of color in a male-dominated art world. While the artivist group's subversion of white male authorship indeed has long shaped the understanding of art in relation to gender, this needs to be critically assessed.

The core questions this paper asks is if "mask-ulinity" and feminist artivism ultimately go together at all, as the collective's anonymity glosses over both the members' individual identities and the collective's membership diversity, and if the *Guerrilla Girls* have indeed successfully incorporated the idea of the "death of the artist." It can be argued that, while challenging the traditional author function by paradoxically making the invisible and excluded visible through their anonymity, the artivist group is not able to fully escape a sense of authorship. Despite

the struggle within the collective and the ambivalent reception they have received, the *Guerrilla Girls* have clearly left their mark on the (inter)national art scene and have become a staple in the contemporary feminist art world. Thus, their success both due to and in spite of their anonymity needs to be critically examined.

Founded as the self-proclaimed "Conscience of the Art World" at the height of the U.S. Culture Wars in SoHo, New York, the center of the international art world at the time, the *Guerrilla Girls* have countered the underrepresentation and exclusion of female artists as well as artists of color from exhibitions and funding right from the start. Additionally, while aligning themselves in the history of anonymous protest and, as they claim, the tradition of (fictional) male masked avengers like Robin Hood or Batman ("Guerrilla Girls Bare All"), the collective's concern has long exceeded the scope of inequalities in the art world. They have never refrained from addressing other uncomfortable realities that women and minorities are faced with. Abortion rights, rape, and, above all, racial equality, have become central issues dealt with in the anonymous guise of the *Guerrilla Girls'* protest art. Neoconservative politicians of the 1980s, such as Republican Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, both fueled debates about anti-abortion laws and, aiming at the restriction of artistic freedom of speech, strongly criticized the public funding of the arts through the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA). Taking this predicament into consideration, open criticism bore the risk of political and public scrutiny accordingly. This is why anonymous protest allowed the *Guerrilla Girls* to criticize political figures like Helms; one example is their 1989 poster print "Relax Senator Helms, The Art World Is Your Kind of Place!" (Guerrilla Girls). In this manner, they also criticize prominent art collectors and fellow male artists alike, calling them by their names with a perceived anonymous distance - without having to deal with any consequences for their personal careers as artists within the very system that they criticize.

Their humorous strategy of easily reproducible stickers or poster prints, such as the one criticizing Senator Helms, plays with and undermines the originality and authenticity of a work of art just as individual authorship guaranteed by copyright. It also embodies the concept of culture jamming as one of their main artistic tools, which consists of

placing their protest art outside the museum space with an entirely new and recognizable artistic style in predominantly text-intensive works. In her recent book *Death of the Artist – Art World Dissidents and their Alternative Identities* (2018), Nicola McCartney describes the *Guerrilla Girls'* technique as follows:

> [They] use language as both a target and a weapon 'through quotation and construction of a simulacrum of the world through the language of statistics.' […] The Guerrilla Girls' borrowed language – use of statistics, bullet points, and headlines – successfully undermines the institutions they critique because they are able to communicate in the same way as their adversaries in order to appear just as authoritative even if only by parody. (310-311)

Considering their impersonal, seemingly authorless unified artistic strategy, 'Käthe Kollwitz' explains the ways in which the *Guerrilla Girls'* anonymous guise of the gorilla masks in combination with their pseudonyms has benefitted the collective's activism, and how "mask-ulinity" helps their cause:

> Sometimes you gotta speak out publicly, but sometimes it works even better to speak out anonymously. This has its disadvantages, like working your whole life without getting any credit, but it has lots of advantages, too. Our anonymity, for example, keeps the focus on the issues, and away from our personalities […]. You won't believe what comes out of your mouth while wearing a gorilla mask. (qtd. in DeLaure 17)

Despite the fact that the group's collective anonymity enables them to symbolically represent a larger group of people with common interests and goals all at once, the *Guerrilla Girls'* anonymity, in turn, glosses over their collective's ever-growing and perpetually changing make up of racial, gender, and social diversity. In their countless artworks that are always presented as a unified whole there seems to be no place for individual artistic facets either. Thus, the question arises whether the group really needs its so-called "mask-ulinity," however ironically the concept may be applied. While the play with the provocative symbol

of the gorilla mask does fuel feminist interests, it also creates various points of tension. Would a different mask, maybe a more outspokenly feminine/feminist one, or overtly playing on their female physicality, have altered or decreased their success, considering that the gorilla mask has come to constitute the trademark "selling point" of the group?

It is a fact that their guise of "mask-ulinity" enabled the *Guerrilla Girls* to successfully keep their real names and those of their supporters a secret over the years. "Gertrude Stein" claims in a 2011 Art Journal statement:

> The closest the Guerrilla Girls came to being inclusive of everyone who was sympathetic to their cause was a 1990 poster, GUERRILLA GIRLS' IDENTITIES EXPOSED!, in which were listed column after column of names (including our real names) of people in the art world who supported our aims. (93)

While the size of the group is about 50 women at a time and members are carefully chosen, the collective's set up changes constantly. And so, even with examples like the aforementioned poster print, no identity is exposed and the idea of authorship is mocked and subverted. Hence, the notion of the "death of the artist" poses an integral point of discussion. The concept as such directly relates to Roland Barthes' literary theory of the "Death of the Author" (1968), in which he argues that "to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text" (44), and to the lecture "What is an author?" (1969) by Michel Foucault, who also challenges the author-function as an exclusive originator of meaning and perceives it as a construct that is constantly in flux. Nicola McCartney thoroughly explores the "Death of the Artist" in her work of the same name in relation to the *Guerrilla Girls,* among other examples. She examines how alternative identity can challenge the art market as an act of political rebellion, compares the notion of collective identity with the concept of the multitude, and, most importantly, highlights the pressing need for the artistic community to construct new ways of reinventing themselves. McCartney argues, "[a]s soon as we become dependent upon the author, we become dependent upon the authenticity of the attribution of that author to the work of art" (58). She emphasizes the

fact that the deeply ingrained concept of, more often than not, white male authorship very much shapes our understanding of art in relation to gender, and that, for this reason, it is rather a "history of artists than a history of art" (30) we look at.

In a 2016 interview with *The Late Show* host Stephen Colbert, who asked whether art can speak for itself or whether it needs to be gender identified, *Guerilla Girls* co-founder 'Frida Kahlo' explains why an alternative history of authorship together with the "death of the artist" is so pivotal to challenge and subvert the art world:

> Every aesthetic decision has a value behind it and if all the decisions are being made by the same people, then art will never look like the whole of culture. Right now, the art world is run by billionaire art collectors who buy art that appeals to their values. We say, art should look like the rest of our culture. Unless all the voices of our culture are in the history of art, it's not really a history of art. It's a history of power. ("Guerrilla Girls Talk the History of Art vs. The History of Power")

What adds to this subversion is not only the *Guerrilla Girls*' anonymity, but also their idea of copyright, as McCartney claims (308), which again plays with the idea of authorship when countering the notion of the originality of an artwork attributed to a singular artist. Yet, interestingly enough, the *Guerrilla Girls,* and especially their most prominent founding members 'Frida Kahlo' and 'Käthe Kollwitz,' have all the same seized the moment to enjoy a sense of authorship and recognition for their work tied to the group's success, along with a sense of stardom. Thus, they are not fully able to escape the "death of the artist" altogether, and while their individual names remain unknown, they have made a trademark of themselves as © *Guerrilla Girls*. Additionally, using the names of deceased female artists as pseudonyms also contributes to this playful treatment of authorship, and again underlines the collective's sense of female artistry and common alliance that spans over history. So, the group illustrates that authorship is a malleable concept which they treat with strategic juxtaposition. However, the *Guerrilla Girls* play with and bend the concept of the "death of the artist" rather than fully implementing it.

This eventually points to the controversial side effect of internal hierarchies that the Guerrilla Girls are facing, as both 'Käthe Kollwitz' and 'Frida Kahlo' are often understood as heads of the collective. As former *Guerrilla Girl* 'Gertrude Stein' puts it, "[w]hen years ago, we sardonically said that 'one of the advantages of being a women artist is seeing your work live on in the work of others,' we never imagined that two women among us would exploit our efforts and misrepresent them as their own" (101). They are also said to have made use of the term "quality" to disregard new projects and ideas they disapproved of. Ironically, "quality" is a term commonly employed by the predominant white art dealers that dictate what kind of art makes it into the museum or not (97); such dealers have often been a target of the collective's criticism.

Taking the *Guerrilla Girls'* ambivalent reception and criticisms from within and outside of the group into account, it appears that "mask-ulinity" is indeed a mixed blessing. The collective has been accused of essentialism, for instance, which means that the aforementioned founding members of the group in particular "[are] convinced that womanhood is a set of fixed qualities, shared between every member of this sex" (Maniak 89). Beyond this, the group is also confronted with the issue of tokenism or faux-membership, as the articles "Guerrilla Girls and Guerrilla Girls BroadBand: Inside Story" (2011) by 'Gertrude Stein' et alia, or Katarzyna Maniak's "Guerrilla Girls: Invisible Sex in the Field of Art" (2018) elucidate. This particularly concerns the struggle of African American members of the *Guerrilla Girls*, who felt uncomfortable, to say the least, especially in relation to the unmistakably counterproductive, derogatory, and animalistic connotations that the gorilla mask evokes. In this context, McCartney comments on the case of *Guerrilla Girl* 'Alma Thomas,' who became known for her Tokenism Campaign in the late 1990s and fueled the group's further sensitization to diversity:

> "Alma Thomas" felt uneasy about masking an identity that had so long been fought for and that, as in other feminist groups, it became a point of tension for Guerrilla Girls of color whose historical and personal experiences of oppression could not be explained by the singular difference of gender or rectified by the promise of a 'sisterhood'. (342-343)

Reminiscences of Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poem "We Wear the Mask" (1896), which tells a completely different story of the mask that people of color wear and that they should eventually be liberated from, may arise in this context:

> We wear the mask that grins and lies,
> It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
> This debt we pay to human guile;
> With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
> And mouth with myriad subtleties.
>
> Why should the world be over-wise,
> In counting all our tears and sighs?
> Nay, let them only see us, while
> We wear the mask. . . .

In this context, W.E.B. DuBois' ideas of the "veil" and "double consciousness" come to mind, which he first referred to in *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, and which epitomize the painful internal conflict of black people in a predominantly white society, the masquerade that African Americans have always had to grapple with. So, it is only understandable that the *Guerrilla Girls'* guise in form of a gorilla mask causes a point of tension that certainly justifies both internal criticism and an ambivalent reception from without. It does not come as a surprise that, at the beginning of the 21st century, new sister organizations like *Guerrilla Girls Broadband or Guerrilla Girls on Tour!* developed, whose projects primarily focus on issues of racial equality and discrimination today.

Ultimately, it remains open whether anonymity and feminist artivism need to go together at all. There is an increasing number of female artists and activists these days who overtly exhibit their female physicality and use it as a tool, such as the members of FEMEN. And there are those who identify with the *Guerrilla Girls*' cause in the art world, and to whom masking one's true identity seems admittedly paradoxical but highly effective at the same time. It should be acknowledged that there were more pressing reasons for anonymous protest during the

U.S. culture war in the late 1980s, when the *Guerrilla Girls* came into being. But especially in the face of today's outspoken Black Lives Matter movement or platforms like *the Feminist Art Coalition* – wouldn't unmasked feminist artivism that openly incorporates the individual artists' backgrounds, facets, and creativity in order to stand up against gender and racial inequalities, be a more appropriate and impactful strategy altogether? Either way, there is no doubt that the *Guerrilla Girls'* success, both because of and despite their anonymity, is one viable option out of many, but obviously successful enough to make the group a staple in the feminist art world. The anonymous collective still reaches an enormous and diverse public. In the end, the *Guerrilla Girls'* mantra "we could be anyone and we are everywhere," which was meant to be an answer to traditional ideas of male authorship and authenticity in the first place, has adopted a whole new meaning in times of social media and the world wide web.

Works Cited

Barthes, Roland. "Roland Barthes – The Death of the Author 1968." *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art,* edited by Claire Bishop, Whitechapel, 2006, pp. 41–45.

DeLaure, Marilyn, and Moritz Fink. *Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance.* New York University Press, 2017. www.nytimes.com/2015/08/09/Arts/Design/the-Guerrilla-Girls-after-3-Decades-Still-Rattling-Art-World-Cages.html. Accessed 15 Aug 2020.

DuBois, William Edward Burghardt. *The Souls of Black Folk; Essays and Sketches.* Fawcett, 1961.

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. "We Wear the Mask by Paul Laurence Dunbar." *Poetry Foundation,* www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44203/we-wear-the-mask. Accessed 15 Aug 2020.

Feminist Art Coalition, 2019, feministartcoalition.org.

Foucault, Michel. 'What is an Author?' in *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas, e*dited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, Blackwell, 2003, pp. 949–53.

"An Interview from our First Book, Confessions of the Guerilla Girls." *Guerilla Girls,* 1995, www.guerrillagirls.com/confessions_interview. Accessed 15 Aug 2020.

Guerrilla Girls, Inc. "Guerrilla Girls Bare All." *Archive.org,* Guerrilla Girls, 1995, www.web.archive.org/web/20140113012650/www.guerrillagirls.com/interview/index.shtml. Accessed 15 Aug 2020.

Guerrilla Girls. "Relax Senator Helms, The Art World Is Your Kind of Place." *Guerrilla Girls,* 1989, www.guerrillagirls.com/19891990-projects/1989guerillagirls-senatorhelms. Accessed 15 Aug 2020.

"Guerrilla Girls Talk the History of Art vs. The History of Power." *YouTube: The Late Show with Stephen Colbert,* 14 Jan 2016, youtu.be/FxBQB2fUl_g. Accessed 15 Aug 2020.

"About." *Guerrilla Girls BroadBand,* 2015, guerrillagirlsbroadband.com/about. Accessed 15 Aug 2020.

Maniak, Katarzyna. "Guerrilla Girls: Invisible Sex in the Field of Art." *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis: Studia de Arte et Educatione,* vol. 13, 2018, pp. 87–95. doi:10.24917/20813325.13.8.

McCartney, Nicola. *Death of the Artist: Art World Dissidents and Their Alternative Identities.* Bloombury Visual Arts, 2019.

"Posters, Stickers, Billboards, Videos, Actions: 1985-2019." *Guerrilla Girls,* www.guerrillagirls.com/projects. Accessed 15 Aug 2020.

"Stein, Gertrude". "Guerrilla Girls and Guerrilla Girls BroadBand: Inside Story." *Art Journal*, vol. 70, no. 2, 2011, pp. 88–101. https://doi.org/doi:10.1080/00043249.2011.10791003.

Blurring Nipples on Instagram: Sophia Süßmilch on Navigating Today's Art World – An Interview

Amelie Starke

Sophia Süßmilch is a prominent face in the contemporary art scene in Germany, Austria and beyond. With her unique style, she has earned her reputation as a successful and influential female artist today and was even awarded the Bavarian Art Sponsorship Prize in 2018. She studied both sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich with Stephan Huber and contextual painting with Ashley Hans Scheirl at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Sophia works with and in several media, paints in oil, and often displays her body in her photography and video work. Her artworks generally oscillate between ironic distance and aggressive proximity, which, as she asserts, match her personality very well. At the 2020 student conference Where My Girls At? Contemporary Feminist Art *at* LMU *Munich, Sophia gave a performance followed by an artist's talk. At the conference, she provided insights into her perspectives on her art as well as into contemporary developments within the art scene in which she has grown as an artist. I sat down with her again for an interview to discuss some of the issues she raised at the conference in more detail.*

Amelie Starke: Sophia, I know you are currently on the road a lot and have several exhibitions and projects at the same time, so thank you so much for doing this interview with me today. To get started with my questions right away: how would you describe yourself as an artist? Who is Sophia Süßmilch?

Sophia Süßmilch: Ohhh (laughing). This is a tough question. I recently had to write an artist's statement for a competition I was suggested for and it had to be like one or two pages, and it was really hard for me to do. The main reason why I do things like I do them is because I'm very impatient and I'm very under pressure as a human being in general,

and I try to calm myself down with painting. I take my photographs because I have a lot of peace in me after taking them. I kind of have an urge to do art because it is the only thing that makes sense to me in the world, but that's something you can't write in an artist's statement for a competition because people always want you to define yourself within certain parameters that also sound elaborate or sophisticated. You know what I mean?

Yes, I think as an artist especially, but also as a person in general, it's difficult to define oneself within specific parameters that characterize who you are, what you do, why you do it, etc. In this context, I remember that during our group discussion at the conference, when some of us referred to you as a feminist artist, you said that you don't really like the term 'feminist artist' for yourself. Maybe you can elaborate a bit on that? Why don't you like the term?

It's not that I don't like the term. It ignores a lot of the things I do and I was only called a feminist artist when feminism came into fashion and was hip again. And it scares me because it sounds like I'm doing something hip now, and then I'll be forgotten in 20 years. That's one thing. And the other thing is that I'm a feminist with all my heart, as a political being, and I don't believe that you can do anything in art or in general that is not political, so everything is political. I'm a woman. I'm a white middle-class woman… whatever. That's what I am and that is the modus operandi in which I do things. But being a feminist artist ignores many things and I don't do the things I do, like the photographs and performances, out of a political intent. So, I see everything you do as political and therefore what I do as feminist, but it's not my main intention when I do something. Like when I undress. I once posted on Facebook "I don't undress myself out of political reasons but because I like to be naked," which of course isn't completely true because it is still connected to myself and other things on a very personal level, like personal body issues, etc. However, I can't say I'm not a feminist artist because I don't want to betray my political ideas but still, it is too small of a narrative, I think.

I understand the struggle. As you just said, feminism is such a hip and popular topic today, and I also think that feminist artists receive so much more attention because of that. It's something that women in art history used to have little or no opportunity to do in the past. Is it perhaps the case today that a lot of female artists are being pushed to take on the identity 'feminist artist' to meet the demands of today's society and thus are somehow reduced to being 'just' feminist artists?

Maybe that's part of why I don't like the term, and well, I think the attention women artists get today is well deserved and it's important that, for example, museums begin to take a closer look at their artists. Some say we want 50/50 women and men and also more people of color and things like that. I think that's been an important change. However, I think that artists are very subjective – like, there are not necessarily fixed parameters anymore in which artists operate and then do things. So, I work subjectively and that's why I do things like I do them. And then in 2017 I got politicized as a feminist artist. Of course, I do things differently today than I did then or 10 years ago. When I studied and I did photographs naked, everybody was like, "Why do you always have to be naked?" And now suddenly it's, "Oh, she deals with body issues, et cetera." And it's very weird for me to see how much this has changed within a decade or so. During my studies, a professor even made fun of me because I was naked in my photographs. He said, "Wow, you have big tits," and was laughing with the whole class about it. Back then, what I do seemed so weird and today it empowers me that I can do it and that there is a platform and a lot of cool women and sometimes men I have behind me. But it is weird to see it change like that. First, I had to explain myself all the time and I had the feeling I was doing something wrong and now it is hip and I'm just waiting for it to turn again and I don't know… it scares me.

Okay, so drawing from your own experiences, you see this development for artists like you, who are categorized as 'feminist artists,' as both positive and negative.

Yes, kind of.

I see where you're coming from. In a way, feminism creates a collective that empowers you and other female artists to do their own thing and be seen. But I also understand why that's a scary thing, because feminism is so hyped today, so it's scary to be reduced to that when you think of the possibility that things could turn around again. What is very interesting in this context is that your artworks today all seem to carry a certain irony or sarcasm in them, which often makes one smile when looking at them. It seems to be a recurring characteristic in your art. Why do you like to use this as a creative stylistic element? How do these ironic or sarcastic elements support your art and your message?

I don't really have a message, you know, only in the sense that I often have these titles I work with. I'm giving my art pieces titles which are very specific, so I'm naming them and maybe that's the message then, but I don't know. Most things I like have this light humorous note to them. Like David Shrigley's art, for example. He is so tragic and funny at the same time and that's what I like. And I think you can draw people into something serious as well when they laugh about it, then they want to think about it. And of course, there are also other stories about that. Like, I had these t-shirts with long saggy breasts on them and they have hair on them because women have hair on their breasts, and there were also some old white men laughing about them. And I think they're funny as well, but I don't laugh about the shirt for the same reasons as these white men do. There is a difference in how to understand the irony in such things.[…] Do you know Stefanie Sargnagel, the author? She's a feminist and also part of the feminist group "Burschenschaft Hysteria." She says, if she was a man, she would only be 'funny,' but she is a 'feminist author.' But that's kind of the thing, you know.

Yes, it's different. And, as you just said, it's a different kind of humor. Of course, somehow laughable, but there are different laughs, different meanings behind these 'jokes.' Since you're also very active on social media, why do you like posting your work there and how

do you experience the reactions there? Very positive or does it come with some negative aspects as well?

So, the positive aspects are that you have a tool for yourself you can work with to present what you're doing, but more in a career sense, and I like to interact with people there sometimes. The negative things are… I mean, I had this shitstorm because of this one photograph of me – it's called "Self-portrait as Penis Emoji" and it's with a lot of eggplants. I did it when I was on holiday and it went viral, on Reddit and Tumblr and like everywhere, and somebody tagged me and then they found out that it's me and then they started to harass me and wrote very hateful messages to me. I mean, that was really scary. When there are not only five people who say, "That's not art, you're not an artist" or "You're a shitty artist," but there are thousands of comments on that, it really gets scary and it really feels hopeless that people can be so mean because in the end, it's just a photograph. Why do you bother? They just think you're an idiot and they can write to you. Whatever. So that's a big contra. It was like a year ago, more or less. I switched my Instagram and Facebook to private. I recently opened it up again, but it was really scary. But the pros are, and cons as well, that you are able to bring culture into an online space and that it's free. People consume what I do for free.

Did these harsh comments you received at the time have any influence on how you continued with your art? Has your art, or how you make it, changed through this experience?

No, not really, I mean, in the end, I got more confident, maybe. If you're having people say really mean stuff to you, it makes you – I mean, I'm showing them all of my body parts. I already show them all of me so they can't hurt me anymore, that's how I see it. I was just really scared that some crazy idiot might find out where I live because I have had stalkers in the past and it's a really scary thing. But I don't know. By now I can laugh about it, but I wasn't doing very well mentally back then, I was feeling depressed and then you're in a very different position to deal with stuff like this.

This sounds like a very tough experience. In general, all the stories you just told me show quite obviously that in order to make your art the way you want it to be, you've always faced and still face obstacles of various kinds. In regard to your photographs and videos you post online, especially on Instagram, since they have these strict guidelines regarding nudity – and your profile entails a lot of nudes –, are you censored a lot?

Yes! Yes, of course. In the photographs I'm naked almost all the time because it makes sense to me to be naked, and I can't post this. I can't post a lot of my video works because I don't know how to blur the nipples and my vulva, but I do it in photographs and it's annoying and… I don't know. I mean, I don't see the reason why? Men's nipples can be there.

How do you deal with censorship online compared to how you work with galleries? For example, are you also being censored like this in the real-life, non-digital art-scene?

I'm not being censored or something like that, but when I'm asked to develop something, I look at the circumstances I'm working in. And with some galleries it's hard, too. I mean, not all of them understand what I'm doing with my photographs and performances, but other galleries really let me do what I want. So, no, I'm not being censored – I mean, just on Facebook and Instagram, which is, of course, censorship. They have established themselves as a new platform for art, as a presentation room, and my career started again in 2017 because of Instagram. So, it is a very important tool for artists, especially when they don't work with galleries yet. I see it as a promotion tool and when they censor what I do… I mean, you know on Facebook I have to be really, really careful with what I post because I'm really threatened to get blocked forever, and on Instagram I have these hordes of people who are following me just to report me all the time.

You raise an interesting point here, because Instagram and all the other online platforms are capitalist platforms, which is why they are actually very contrary to your art and the feminist content your

art contains. Nevertheless, they have great power over the success and visibility of your work. Maybe you can elaborate a bit on that dichotomy between your rather anti-capitalist and feminist art and these capitalist-oriented platforms that also have great influence on the art scene. How do you deal with that?

I once posted on Facebook, "Capitalism and wanting to be rich is like the yin and yang of an artist," which is a contradiction in itself, but I can't really find a way out of it because, I mean, I don't want to be rich, but of course I am stuck in capitalism and I want success and I want the freedom from capitalism which you can only have when you have money. But that's what capitalism tells us, right? If you're rich, you're out of all these structures. And sometimes I think if I would be more real with myself, I should fight more in real life for a more inclusive feminism. I'm stuck within my art and of course I'm trying to do my own thing, which sometimes feels a bit cowardly. Other people can't afford it, to not fight for change in their real life and I'm hoping, of course, that I'm changing something as well in my own way, but I don't find an escape from the contradiction of wanting these two things. I'm a feminist, and of course I want justice for everybody and to be inclusive, but then I'm also stuck in this art world where there are a lot of power dynamics, I think maybe even worse than somewhere else or maybe I'm just thinking this. There is a lot of money involved, and whenever there is a lot of money involved, there is a lot of power involved, and a lot of old structures which you can't escape from so easily.

I like how openly you speak about this, because I think everyone can somehow identify with the fact that even if you try to break through these capitalist structures, you can never completely escape them. However, do you see yourself as part of a feminist movement taking place at the moment?

Yes, of course. I do, because otherwise you wouldn't be sitting here. I feel empowered and I feel much safer than I used to feel with what I do, because there are a lot of women who have a lot of energy and I like to be a part of that. I mean, you have a lot of energy when you're a lot of people, and that empowers me.

Ekphrasis

Mark Olival-Bartley

The echoed shapes our wont to film our gaze
beyond Courbet's decapitated quim,
whose fleshiness intones the shadow plays
of Quéniaux's thester, which, once warm, now limn
the water's shapes, reverberating praise
by us who wield the rods of seraphim,
and dowse the undying draw of this malaise,
its tang of sweet and salt, of her and him.

Sophia Süßmilch's *Der Ursprung der Welt*
flatly delights in what cartoons we are
amid the effluence of love's wellsprings—
a torrent where our impotence is felt—
enrapturing a neatly anal star
and frankly celebrating gravid things.

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *L'Origine du monde (The Origin of the World),* 1866, oil on canvas, 46 cm x 55 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. © culture-images/fai

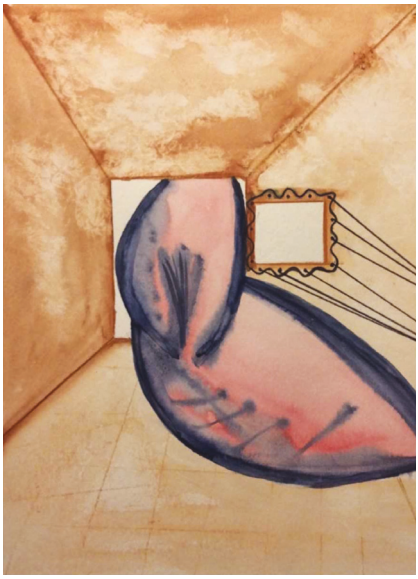
Sophia Süßmilch (-1983), *Der Ursprung der Welt (the female gaze),* 2018, oil on canvas, 60 cm x 80 cm. © Sophia Süßmilch

Disappearing Boundaries

Tamar Beruchashvili

The boundaries between art and science are disappearing, and the boundaries between digital and analogue embodiments are no longer recognizable. We see our analogue world – urban space – no longer. Instead, we see it as a means of transit and, therefore, lose the details that make up our empathy. This empathy and the search for the "invisible" move me. I observe and examine my social worlds and myself deeply. This creative game takes place on Instagram, because we all see each other through the stabilizing character of the Panopticon. Could I "destroy" the "norms" made by my "questioning" to make the invisible visible? To convey this, I use my own body as a material and explore its limits in creative games. The superimposed human and animal meat (rhizomes) should not be "beautiful" and "filtered," but as naked as it would be without "doing." Can I combine "unconditional love" with care work through my work? Could I ask questions again visually through my work, through my performances, but never answer them? My conceptual works are by no means the answers and recipes to social questions, but they are questions to the questions. These iterative re-questions are intended to confuse and upset observing people. I do not give any interpretation in advance, I only open up space for observing people, and everyone should interpret my works based on their own experience. In conclusion, the academic artistic practices that are currently taking place want to deal with our social challenges through visual practices. I do it the other way around! I want to get the visual practices out of myself and my social environment through our social challenges.

@ https://www.instagram.com/tamarberuchashvili/



Watercolors. Untitled. 30X40. 2020 © Tamar Beruchashvili

Photo Art. Untitled. 2020 © Tamar Beruchashvili

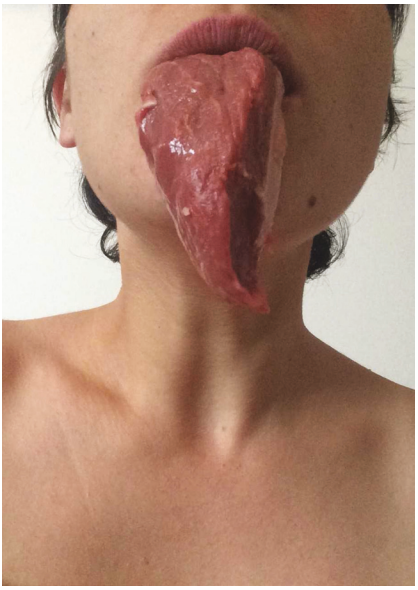


Photo Art. Selfie. 2019 © Tamar Beruchashvili

Watercolors. Untitled. 30X40. 2020 © Tamar Beruchashvili

An Open Letter: "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised, but It Will Be Streamed Live"

Rupali Naik

> "The revolution will not be televised but it will be streamed live / In 1080p, on your pea brain head in the face ass mobile device, alright!" – Anderson. Paak et al.,"6 Summers" (2018).

Dear reader,

COVID-19 has affected the world in many varying ways, some of which we still have yet to see. It has shown us some of the kindest acts of humanity as well as the most heart-breaking. Insofar, one of the most integral ways it has affected human life is its impact on social media. I am writing this, as a feminist and activist, in hopes to prove to you how effective social media can be – if we so choose it to be. My letter is grounded in the recent resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), the work of Lianna Pisani, and my experience of growing up alongside social media. It has been hard placing my thoughts into words and paragraphs. I nearly turned my back on writing this altogether had it not been for the documentary *The Social Dilemma* (2020), which uncovers the most damaging, but also the potentially positive qualities of social media. All of these variables have left me with an urge to write about how social media is a powerful weapon. Though, I must make it clear, I am not urging you to use social media *more*. Instead, I hope this letter leaves you motivated to be *more mindful* and vulnerable online. To be open to others' opinions, to open meaningful dialogue, and to revise your relationship with the online world. In 2020, the personal has become even more political, and the political has become even more personal.

First and foremost, the foundations of this piece lie in Lianna Pisani's 2015 article "Women and Selfie Culture: The Selfie as a Feminist Communication Tool." For a long time, I have pondered the worth of being online: *What is the use? Is there any great change or good we can make for the world with it? Or are we simply mindlessly scrolling and escaping from the horrors of the world by numbly adding to a series of perhaps meaningless photos?* And though now I feel I have some answers, truthfully, I still feel uncertain. I read Pisani's work in May 2020, before the murder of George Floyd and the resurgence of BLM. Pisani is a keen writer of social media and internet culture and has an undergraduate degree in English Rhetoric & Media and Italian, as well as a Master's degree in Communications (Pisani, "About"). In her article, she presents ways in which social media *can* operate as a feminist tool, the first being its incredible ability to connect millions of people across the globe (Pisani, "Women and Selfie Culture"). Pisani refers to several 2014 online feminist interventions that made use of the selfie, such as the body hair trend and the stretch mark appreciation trend. During the same year, at fifteen, I chose to stop removing my own hair and to begin accepting my own stretch marks due to this trend. Upon reading the article, I was stunned to learn that the body hair trend was originally from China

Fig. 1.

and had spread all the way to the United States. Had I not seen other women embracing their natural sides and showing solidarity online, I doubt I would have the courage and acceptance for my body that I have today. At seventeen, I felt comfortable to share my body hair with Instagram in honor of International Women's Day (see fig. 1). Returning to Pisani, I both experienced and engaged with feminist interventions online, which have shaped me as an activist and feminist today.

Pisani's second point in favor of social media's capabilities for feminist interventions concerns the mechanics of hashtag use. She elaborates on this by describing its visuality and physicality as "[allowing] multiple participants to insert their photos into the same photo album, so to speak, by tagging them with the same hashtag" (Pisani, "Women and Selfie Culture"). In 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement adopted the use of the hashtag due to the advantages these collective "photo albums" present (M. Anderson). Similarly, in an essay included in Jesmyn Ward's *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race,* Emily Raboteau discusses the value of phones in her essay "Know Your Rights!" (169). She highlights how the "phone is […] a weapon for

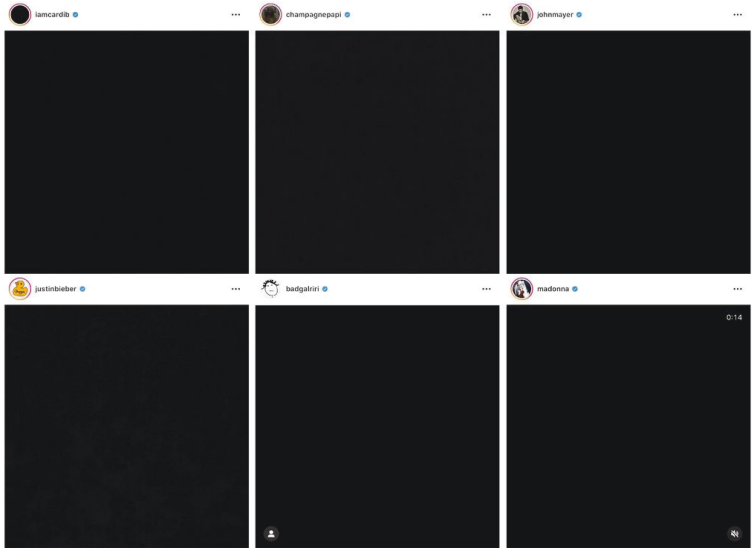


Fig. 2

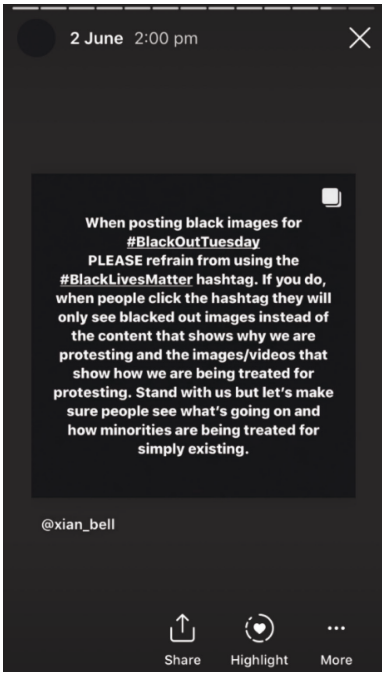
social change" and a can serve to protect minorities through documenting, sharing, and communicating events (169).[1] Pisani and Raboteau's arguments intersect when thinking about the hashtag #BLM, as it is a source for important current affairs and information that is often not widely shared on news outlets.

Another Black Lives Matter hashtag that epitomizes Pisani's argument is #blackouttuesday, which was an orchestrated feminist intervention by Jamila Thomas and Brianna Agyemang, two Black women working in the music industry (Sanchez). The digital demonstration entailed social media users to post an all-black photo with the hashtag to honor Black artists who are continually exploited in creative industries (see fig. 2).

When I opened Instagram on the morning of #blackouttuesday, I had no prior knowledge of this social media intervention, but found it remarkable. It was moving to see my feed all gathered under one political banner for a day, interrupting the usual daily broadcasting for something more meaningful. And then I imagined how this would affect those who were disinterested or apathetic to the cause, wondering if their feelings had either changed or if they were simply irked. However, while the day marked some success in terms of visibility, there were also drawbacks. Some were using the main Black Lives Matter hashtag for this demonstration, which ironically led to a white-washing of both the #blm and #blacklivesmatter collective photo albums. This was because integral information about protests and current events that were not being shown on news media were quickly buried below a spam of the all-black posts. While perhaps many social media users were unaware of the consequences their posting entailed, many were also using this opportunity to virtue-signal – thereby white-washing the hashtag since their performative care was more important to them than the information shared by and for Black people in the album. This shows how white privilege can be present in social media activism. The incident also demonstrates how and to what ends social media is used by different

1 It is worth mentioning that although documentation is a valuable part of hard evidence to the abuse and violation of Black, non-white, and non-CIS life, we are still life, we are still seeing the lack of consequence, persecution, or justice against perpetrators (see fig. 4).

actors. And though this was disheartening, it was deeply refreshing to have people critique #blackouttuesday and bring this issue to the light of day (see fig. 3) – a point that I would like to return to.



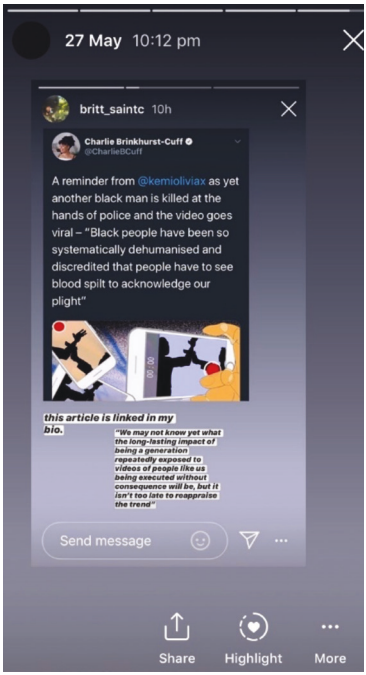


Fig. 3 and 4.

Applying Pisani's other point of social media's global reach, it almost goes without saying that the Black Lives Matter protests, both online and offline, went viral and were highly visible during the summer of 2020. Angela Davis, a legendary African American political activist, philosopher, academic, and author, called this period "a possibility of change we have never before seen in this country" (Channel 4 News 0:01-0:13). Online activism was used more than ever during the COVID-19 crisis and it enabled those fearing for their health to still be a part of the fight. Moreover, COVID-19 has illuminated the oppressive and violent ways it affects the most vulnerable members of society. They are viewed as dispensable, their jobs and health not safeguarded by either

forcing them to work throughout the pandemic or cutting them from their work altogether. And often, those economically vulnerable *are* members of Black communities, which is due to a long history of systemic and oppressive racism.[2] Noel Miller, an American director, comedian, and writer, spoke openly on an impromptu live-stream about the George Floyd protests: "The quarantine has removed that distraction of the machine […], so you have a lot of the country faced with this issue, and the only thing they got is the internet" (Noel Miller 15:57-16:30). "This issue" *is* systemic racism; it is the subtle to extreme ways in which racism still runs through society. Miller echoes Davis' assessment of the uniqueness of today's protest movements: "This is the first time that something like this has really been documented by as many people, talked about by as many people because we're all looking at it" (Noel Miller 16:31-16:45).

During the Civil Rights movement, James Baldwin warned us: "No more water, the fire next time!", which prophesied that the next racial upheaval will be much stronger and much more difficult to ignore (Baldwin 89). And he was right. BLM activism has spread like wildfire, not just nationally, but globally. And though the fire is still burning and will continue to burn until the globe is purged of its racist systems and ideas, the revolution will not be televised, but it will continue to be streamed live across the world.

Pisani's argument regarding the empowering feminist potential of social media still holds true five years later, though things have also changed due to new technology, new internal software mechanics, and the type of content that is currently shared. Nevertheless, before delving deeper into the activism online for BLM as proof of using social media for greater political change, it is worth taking a look at the serious downsides social media has when we are not mindful with it. Social media influencers have reigned supreme, disseminating edited images of themselves, promoting brands for capital gain, and displaying their wealth. Social media now thrives on selling our online information to

2 From selective housng – pushing the vulnerable closer to food swamps and food desert – to education and healthcare, the system has had a long history of stripping Black life of welfare and access to high standards of living.

third parties so they can tailor the best advertisements for us to spend money. From issues of body dysmorphia to career envy, social media feeds off damaging notions rooted in capitalism, consumerism, and narcissism. As a feminist and activist, I am often revisiting and reviewing my online presence. *How can we use something for good that is built by systems that continually seek to manipulate us?* Many friends of mine have denounced the need for social media altogether, but I do believe good can come from social media. The first move is to unfollow anyone that makes you feel negative about yourself and then to post what is loving to you and to others (see fig 5).

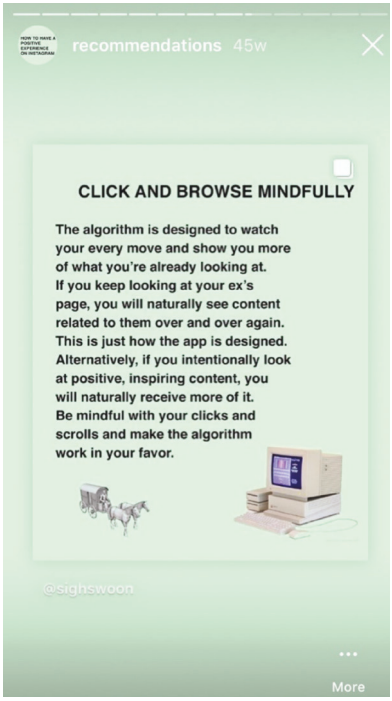


Fig. 5.

In 2017, Instagram implemented a new feature called "stories," which copied Snapchat's key format of a twenty-four-hour post. To return to my questions of positive impact online, I often use my story feature to share political, feminist, and intimate information. Specifically, I like to discuss and share my journey with my menstrual cup to my audience, which used to predominantly be made up of friends until I modelled for *Lazy Oaf,* a London clothing brand with 952k followers. A menstrual cup is a reusable silicone cup used for menstrual collection and is an eco-friendly alternative to tampons and period pads. By utilizing the story feature on Instagram, my audience, who is often unable to see my posts due to the introduction of a strong algorithm in July 2016 (Barnhart), can directly interact with me. By using this feature, I have helped seven women familiarize themselves with their new menstrual cups in the past year (see fig. 6 and 7).

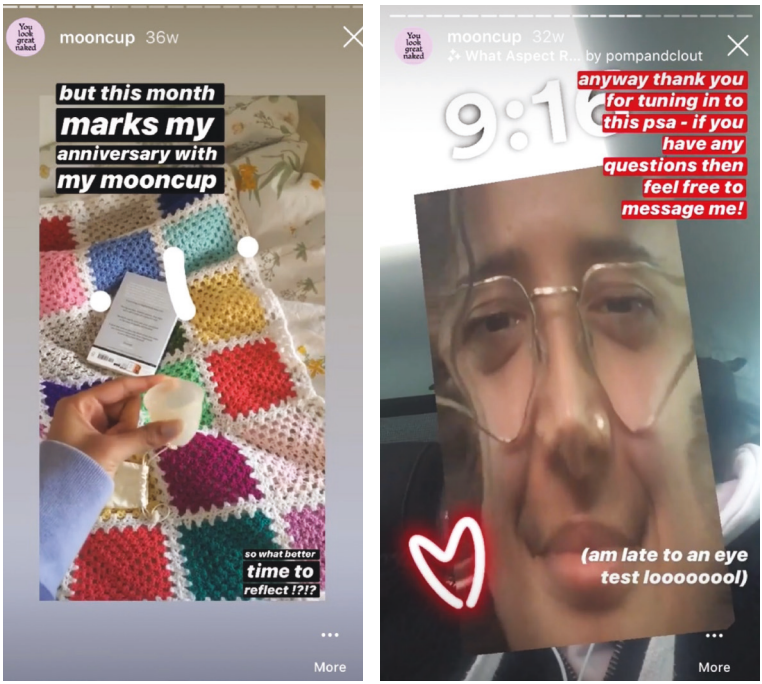


Fig. 6 and 7.

So, the story feature is highly effective in disseminating information, and it was used in copious amounts during the resurgence of BLM and in the protests against the murder of George Floyd. Throughout the summer, my story feed was full of recommended readings, historical sources, and calls to defund the police (see fig. 11). Of course, posting on social media is not enough on its own, but it serves as one of the tools we should use to better the world. As previously mentioned, though #blackouttuesday was intended for Black appreciation and recognition, there were still issues of whitewashing. What was most refreshing about the whole experience of being online during this summer was how people called out such mistakes. There was no room for complacency, and the message of being actively "anti-racist," as Angela Davis put it, spread (Mosley). Black or People of Color (POC) users were sharing the message that white people should be self-educating. There was an unearthing of old clips of feminists and activists, like Davis and Bald-

win, that were being used to shape and ground calls for change, as well as demonstrate that these calls have been around for decades (see fig. 9 and 10). To rely on those who experience racism to educate you on racism is lazy and pathetic. The emphasis on sharing further readings online was tied closely to the idea that these sources have been readily available for years. So now is no longer the time to cry ignorance. Posts even went further and called out white fragility (see fig. 8). The whole experience was so invigorating, I had not seen such critiquing of Whiteness outside of my subaltern and post-colonial academic studies. And though while this is intense and hard-hitting, there was a deep sense of love and patience for those willing to learn (see fig. 12 and 13).

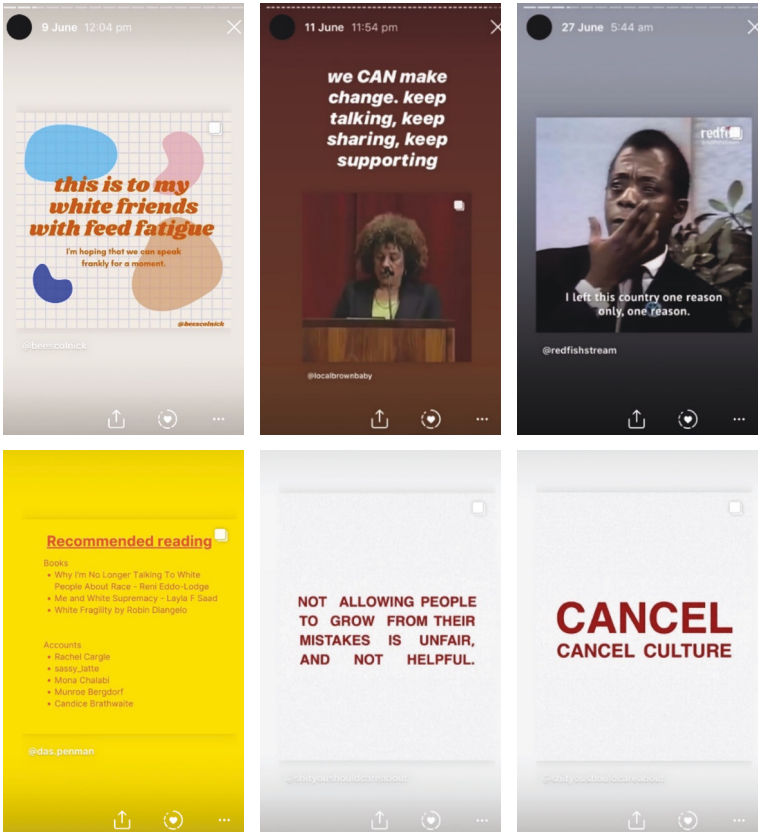


Fig. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13.

COVID-19 has undeniably acted as a catalyst for the intensified global activism online for BLM, and, in a wider sense, it has also intensified public interest in other areas of politics. While writing this piece, I have found it difficult placing my thoughts and findings into words that both hold true but carry a level of formality. During my grappling with this essay, I watched *The Social Dilemma* (2020), which aided me in understanding how to write this, and better yet, *why* I need to write this. Nominated for the 2020 Impact Film Award at the Boulder International Film Festival, the docu-drama bluntly shows the viewer the current dystopia we are living in ("The Social Dilemma: Awards"). The film features interviews with a series of ex-engineers, executives, and employees of media-giant companies such as Google, Facebook, and Instagram. The informants each carry a degree of guilt for what they have created. It is a shocking and unsettling documentary that seeks to alert the viewer to the risks and horrors of social media, capitalism, and consumer culture. It highlights a series of facts – like how fake news is six times more likely to be shared online than real news – which adds to our understanding of why and how we have become more politically polarized than ever. Ex-director of monetization at Facebook, Tim Kendall, was asked what he feared most, and he replied: "civil war" (*The Social Dilemma* 1:20:11-1:20:25)

After 40 minutes of alarming recounts from some of the former top executives and engineers, the documentary concludes with a glimmer of faith. It emphasizes a series of practices that we can all adopt to better our online experiences: reducing the amount of notifications from applications that are not timely or important in the current moment, beginning these open conversations about social media now for the sake of the future, always avoiding recommendations made by an algorithm, and fact-checking. One of the main pieces of advice that I found to be helpful, at least in my experience, was made by data scientist Cathy O'Neil, who said: "Make sure that you get lots of different kinds of information in your own life. I follow people on Twitter that I disagree with, because I want to be exposed to different points of view" (*The Social Dilemma* 1:31:32-1:31:44). Too often have I seen friends of mine, for example during political elections in England, post on their social media outlets telling their audience to unfollow or unfriend them if they have a certain political view. This is a loss. You are thereby removing

yourself from the conversation and further polarizing the political field. Alternatively, whenever I post anything political, I urge my audience to message me if they think otherwise. I have had fruitful and civil conversations that by no means sought to "win" an argument. We are doing ourselves, as a society, an injustice in seeking to either distance ourselves or shout at each other.

To summarize, there have been updates to old mechanics and implementations of new mechanics into various social media applications since the publication of Pisani's essay, which have led to new ways of feminist and political intervention. Instagram has become one of the most used platforms in the last decade, and created, like other applications, an influx in the way people posted and how much people posted during the surge of BLM this summer. While I urge you to be more mindful, open, and vulnerable online, I equally urge you to take breaks, turn off notifications, and be present in your physical world. And although you should keep people who have alternative political views in your life, do unfollow accounts that make you feel bad about yourself. And do watch *The Social Dilemma*. Overall, however, social media has become a powerful and weaponizing tool within the last decade. A tool that sits neatly in our pockets.

Drawing to a conclusion, I hope this has been a fruitful read for you and that you go on to revisit your relationship with the online world: who you follow; what you choose to post; why you are online altogether. We have power in our choices. What has been made evident is how intense the online world truly is today, how Pisani's argument still holds true in some ways, and how Baldwin's prophetic fire is burning online – and offline. Most of all, I hope what is clearest to you is that social media is a tool that can be used for good – it just depends on the individual who wields it to use it in such a way. Go forth and open dialogue, see what people think, stay offline as much as possible, but make your online time meaningful. I, myself, am not sure what the future holds; in truth, I fear what is to come. But I hope in writing this I have tried to put to rest some of my own questions, to make some good, and to spread the word. Thank you for taking the time to read this, and all the best.

Yours truly,
Rupali Naik

List of Figures

Fig. 10: Screenshot from story highlight archive, Rupali Naik, ru.pa.li, 27 Jun 2020. Redfishsteram. "James Baldwin explains why racism forced him to leave the US." *Instagram.* Jun 26, 2020. https://www.instagram.com/p/CB6RRUkAxtI/.

Fig. 11: Screenshot from story highlight archive, Rupali Naik, ru.pa.li, 29 May 2020. Das.penman. "George Floyd: How can I help from the UK? Resources and suggestions for white UK residents." *Instagram.* 28 May 2020. https://www.instagram.com/p/CAu_buhH5lD/.

Fig. 12: Screenshot from story highlight archive, Rupali Naik, ru.pa.li, 29 Jun 2020. Shityoushouldcareabout. "This is the best post I've seen on cancel culture." *Instagram.* June 25, 2020. https://www.instagram.com/p/CB1piV_Af6m/.

Fig. 13: Screenshot from story highlight archive, Rupali Naik, ru.pa.li, 29 Jun 2020. Shtiyoushouldcareabout. "This is the best post I've seen on cancel culture." *Instagram*. 25 Jun 2020. https://www.instagram.com/p/CB1piV_Af6m/.

Works Cited

Anderson, Paak. "6 Summers." *Oxnard,* Aftermath Entertainment, 2018.

Anderson, Monica. "The Hashtag #BlackLivesMatter Emerges: Social Activism on Twitter." *Pew Research Center,* 15 Aug 2016, www.pewresearch.org/internet/2016/08/15/the-hashtag-blacklivesmatter-emerges-social-activism-on-twitter. Accessed: 30 Sept 2020.

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time.* Penguin Random House UK, 2017.

Barnhart, Brent. "How To Survive (and Outsmart) the Instagram Algorithm in 2020." *Sprout Social,* 7 Aug 2020, www.sproutsocial.com/insights/instagram-algorithm. Accessed: 30 Sept 2020.

Channel 4 News. "Angela Davis: This Moment Holds Possibilities For Change We Have Never Before Experienced." *YouTube*, 10 Jun 2020, https://youtu.be/i3TU3QaarQE. Accessed: 30 Sept 2020.

Coscarelli, Joe. "#BlackoutTuesday: A Music Industry Protest Becomes a Social Media Moment." *New York Times,* 2 Jun 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/arts/music/what-blackout-tuesday.html. Accessed: 30 Sept 2020.

Miller, Noel. "Noel's Take on the George Floyd Protests." *YouTube,* uploaded by Tmgknees, 2 Jun 2020, https://youtu.be/3NLXcLSIkyw. Accessed: 30 Sept 2020.

Mosley, Tonya. "'An Extraordinary Moment': Angela Davis Says Protests Recognize Long Overdue Anti-Racist Work". *WBUR,* 19 Jun 2020. https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2020/06/19/angela-davis-protests-anti-racism. Accessed: 23 Oct 2020.

Pisani, Lianna. "About." *Lianna Pisani*, www.liannapisani.ca/about. Accessed: 30 Sept 2020.

Pisani, Lianni. "Women and Selfie Culture: The Selfie as a Feminist Communication Tool." *Journalism Interest Group* CAA, 17 Dec 2015, cca.kingsjournalism.com/?p=332. Accessed 30 Sept 2020.

Raboteau, Emily. "Know Your Rights!" *The Fire This Time,* edited by Jesmyn Ward, Bloomsbury, 2019, pp. 157-177.

Sanchez, Chelsey. "What Is #BlackoutTuesday? Here's Everything You Need To Know." *Harper's Bazaar,* 2 Jun 2020, https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/politics/a32742358/blackout-tuesday-hashtag-instagram-facts/. Accessed: 30 Sept 2020.

The Social Dilemma. Directed by Jeff Orlowski, Exposure Labs, 2020. *Netflix*, https://www.netflix.com/title/81254224.

"The Social Dilemma: Awards." *IMDb,* www.imdb.com/title/tt11464826/awards. Accessed: 30 Sept 2020.

Appropriation and Subversion: Black Humor in the Photo-Text Artworks of Carrie Mae Weems and Lorna Simpson

Xinrui Jiang

Suffering from centuries of oppression, marginalization, and misrepresentation in a society with systematic racism, African Americans have long established a tradition of using humor as both a balm to provide relief and a weapon to confront injustice (Carpio). From jokes whispered during slavery to Black comedy thriving at present, African American humor or Black humor has received increasing attention in recent years.[1] However, the humor of Black women, especially Black female visual artists, is still largely ignored.[2] Humor is a significant "representational strategy" for Black female artists because it enables them to "spotlight deeply embedded historical narratives that rationalize structural inequalities" (Finley 236). This paper analyzes humor in Black feminist art by focusing on the photo-text artworks of two prominent Black female artists—Carrie Mae Weems's *Black Woman with Chicken* (1987-88) and Lorna Simpson's 1986 artwork *Twenty Questions (A Sampler)*. This study explores the following key questions: How does humor function and what purpose does it serve in the two artworks? What are the similarities and differ-

1 The term Black humor refers to Black American humor exclusively. Yet, it is noteworthy that it shares some similarities with the term black/dark humor in terms of confronting absurdity. As to recent scholarship on Black humor, the article "Black Humor: Reflections on an American Tradition" co-authored by Gerald Early, Glenda Rossanna Carpio and Werner Sollors is significant.

2 There are some notable exceptions, including Glenda R. Carpio's analysis of Kara Walker's black-paper silhouettes and Suzan-Lori Parks's early plays in *Laughing Fit to Kill: Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery* (2008), Rebecca Wanzo's "Precarious-Girl Comedy: Issa Rae, Lena Dunham, and Abjection Aesthetics" (2016), and Jessyka Nicole Finley's dissertation "Firespitters: Performance, Power, and Payoff in African American Women's Humor, 1968-Present" (2013).

ences between the two works in terms of humor? The analysis builds on the incongruity theory of humor, which claims that humor arises from "the perception of something incongruous—something that violates […] expectations" (Morreall). I argue that Weems and Simpson employ humor in their works to appropriate harmful stereotypes of Black women and, in doing so, subvert those stereotypes and redirect hostility.

Black Humor in *Black Woman with Chicken* (1987-88) by Carrie Mae Weems

© Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Carrie Mae Weems's photo-text work *Black Woman with Chicken* is a gelatin silver print photograph with printed text (overall 35.6 × 27.9 cm). It is part of the *Ain't Jokin'* series of six black and white photographs with text. Weems's photographic artworks are usually "hung at about head-height," so looking at them is like "coming face to face with her subjects" (Davis). The viewer's gaze is drawn in not only by the photos with text but also by the finely textured gelatin silver prints. In *Black Woman with Chicken,* a young African American woman sits at a table, her right hand holding a fried chicken leg and her left hand partially covering her mouth. She gazes at the viewer unflinchingly. The text under the photo reads: "BLACK WOMAN WITH CHICKEN." Viewers who are familiar with the racially charged cultural context will immediately recognize that this work alludes to the stereotype of Black people loving chicken, which dates back to the postcards and prints in the 19th and early 20th century that depict poor rural Blacks chasing chickens or eating chicken. The stigmatized images of Black people indulging in chicken continue to degrade Black Americans until today, which is illustrated by online representations of the stereotype in recent years.[3]

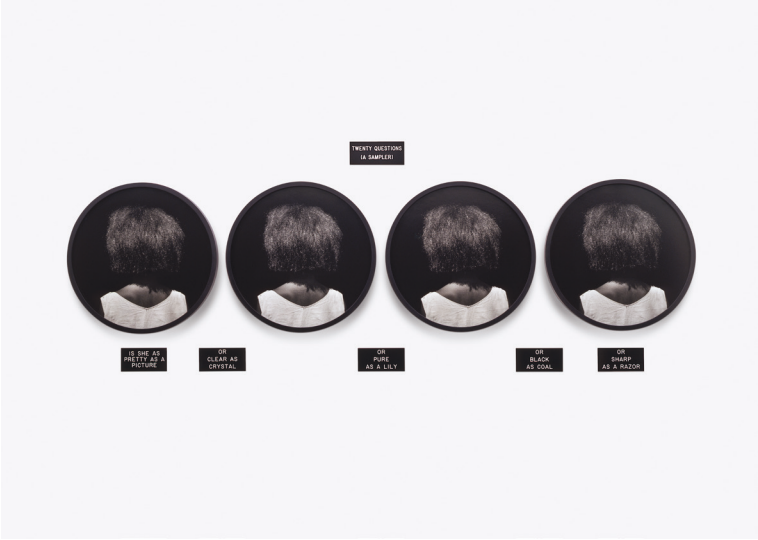
However, attentive viewers will find that there are some incongruities between Weems's work and stereotypical images, which violate their expectation and thus produce a humorous effect. In all the stereotypical images ranging from rural Black people chasing chickens in a yard to Barack Obama holding up a chicken leg, Black people are represented with exaggerated facial expressions, which is intended to convince viewers of their incivility. However, the racism-loaded text "BLACK WOMAN WITH CHICKEN" in Weems's artwork mismatches the elegance of the Black woman in the photograph. According to the stereotype, the woman is expected to look at the fried chicken leg wild with joy or eat it in a hurry, but she just holds it in her hand and confronts the viewer with her gaze. Whether she plans to eat it or not is obscured by the hand covering her mouth. Her posture is guarded, and her heavy sweater suggests armor. The calm image of the Black woman renders the potentially explosive text neutral and descriptive, thus deconstructing the racist stereotype embedded in the text.

3 See "The Fried Chicken Stereotype," particularly the images from 2008.

As Patterson asserts, Weems intentionally appropriates the stereotypical image in a nuanced manner in an effort "first to establish a dissonance" and "then to bait and provoke an audience's sense of shock and shame upon recognition of internal, subliminal prejudices" (21). Therefore, the juxtaposition between the self-possessed, watchful Black woman holding the fried chicken and the racist narrative, though humorous at first sight, is definitely and deeply ironic. Weems's ironic representation of the stereotype disturbs and deconstructs the stigmatized association of Black people with chicken.

In an interview with bell hooks, Weems reveals that in the *Ain't Jokin'* series, there is always "a third kind of tension between what you see within the photograph and what you see beneath it, with the text always cutting through" (hooks 82-83). She holds that, for the viewer, there is "a curious pull between what you see and the way this subject has been flipped and undermined by the power of humor" (83). Through the incongruous representation of the stereotype 'Black people loving chicken,' Weems exposes the absurdity of the stereotype through the weapon of humor. As Stuart Hall suggests, the most effective way to counter stereotypes is "not to ignore them or replace them with different representations" but to engage with them directly and expose "their culturally and ideologically constructed nature" (qtd. in Gérin 155). Thus, by confronting a subject matter that is generally considered too painful to discuss, humor serves as a powerful rhetorical tool that can shatter the culturally and ideologically constructed prejudices. It enables Weems to remove herself from "the role of object of the joke," as Isaak describes, and redirect the hostility to the white middle-class viewers by representing the racist joke herself (175). She spurs the viewers, especially the white middle class who come face to face with her works in a gallery or a museum setting, to reexamine the racist jokes that may seem "harmless in a locker room or country club", and engages them in ongoing debates about power and resistance in representation (Delmez 14). Through the strategical use of humor in her negotiation of the persistent effects of stereotyping, Weems challenges and subverts the discriminative discourse forced upon Black people.

Black Humor in *Twenty Questions (A Sampler)* (1986) by Lorna Simpson



© Lorna Simpson. Courtesy of the artist and Lorna Simpson Studio, New York.

Lorna Simpson's photo-text artwork *Twenty Questions (A Sampler)* consists of four framed gelatin silver prints on paper and six engraved text plaques (overall 83.8 x 264.8 x 1 cm). The subject is the same in all four photographs: they depict the head and shoulders of a Black woman in a simple white garment. The woman's identity is concealed because the photographs are taken from behind. The black and white photographs are accompanied by five questions listed below, which read, from left to right, "Is she pretty as a picture," "Or clear as crystal," "Or pure as a lily," "Or black as coal," and "Or sharp as a razor." Yet, it is notable that there are no question marks at the end of the five questions, which creates a space for ambiguity. The juxtaposition between the images of an anonymous Black woman and the five questions inviting the viewer to

categorize her alludes to the stereotypical and prejudiced judgment of Black women in Western culture.[4]

Nevertheless, like Weems's *Black Woman with Chicken,* Simpson's *Twenty Questions (A Sampler)* is by no means a simple representation of the stereotypical categorization of Black women by white people. There are many incongruities in this work, which bring about a humorous effect embedded with subversive power. Simpson employs the features of "nineteenth-century photographic portraiture, including black and white photography and the tondo (circular) format" (Barson). These features, as well as "the economy of the images, their serial arrangement and the device of corporeal fragmentation," also bring to mind "ethnographic or (pseudo-) scientific photography," which is supposed to be used to represent the Black woman in this work (Barson). However, Simpson refuses to represent the Black woman in the traditions of the aforementioned photography styles, which vividly depict the portrait of the subject. Instead, by portraying the Black woman from behind so that the viewer can only see the back of her head and shoulders, Simpson creates what is in effect an anti-portrait. As curator Lauri Firstenberg points out, "the negating gesture of depicting an inaccessible body, pictured in parts, upsets the task of the portrait, which traditionally has been to offer access to personality, or in the case of the archival document, to identify and classify" (317). The incongruity between the traditional form of portrait and Simpson's anti-portrait creates a humorous effect, whose tone is further darkened by the sharp contrast between black and white in the four identical photographs.

Likewise, the plaques mimic the form of museum labeling or classification that are supposed to suggest objectivity; yet, the captions on the plaques are far from neutral. Instead, the five questions are loaded with the sexist and racist judgment of women. According to curator Joan Simon, the questions refer to "the parlour game in which one player thinks of a person, place, or thing, which the other participants try to identify by asking a series of questions" (12). Hence, by mimick-

4 According to the beauty standards in traditional Western culture, Black women's skin color was associated with ugliness and dirtiness. In addition, Black women's characters molded under extreme situations, particularly slavery, were also considered as less feminine than those of white women.

ing the process of categorization in a game, this work represents the stereotypical categorization of Black women in Western culture. The three similes, "pretty as a picture," "clear as crystal," and "pure as a lily," are conventionally used to describe white femininity, which is perhaps most clearly embodied by the fairy tale figure Snow White. On the contrary, the other two similes, "black as coal" and "sharp as a razor," allude to the typical stigmatized description of Black women based on a superficial impression of their skin color and personality. Thus, viewers, especially white people, tend to associate the Black woman in the photographs with "black as coal" and "sharp as a razor" because these negative associations are deeply embedded in Western culture. However, are the similes "black as coal" and "sharp as a razor" the only appropriate descriptors for Black women? Conversely, are Black women not possibly also "pretty as a picture," "clear as crystal," or "pure as a lily"? Unlike declarative sentences that make fixed statements, the five questions could be answered with "No." The ambiguity in this work creates an open space for white viewers to reexamine the deep-rooted, biased similes which appreciate white women and depreciate Black women, and question the stigmatized association between Black women and objects like coal and razors.

Furthermore, the numeral mismatch between the four photographs and the five questions is also intentional, which ironically reveals that even the five questions are unable to adequately describe the four identical images, as all of them convey the stereotypical and biased judgment of women, particularly Black women. Therefore, all the incongruities in Simpson's *Twenty Questions (A Sampler)* work together to make the representation of the stereotype humorous. Nevertheless, like Weems's *Black Woman with Chicken,* this work is more than simply humorous. The sharp contrast between black and white, together with the biting language like "black as coal" and "sharp as a razor," darkens the humor significantly in this work.

Like the humor in Weems's *Black Woman with Chicken,* this humor is also quite subversive. By concealing the Black woman's face, Simpson not only frustrates the voyeuristic gaze that is eager to categorize her but also highlights the universal Black female experience of being discriminated against. The five questions, though they seem like options to

describe the Black woman in the photograph, can also be interpreted as the interrogation of the viewer's unexamined prejudices. Therefore, the humor in this work has the subversive power to expose the mechanism of racist oppression by questioning the stereotypical categorization of Black women in Western culture.

My analysis reveals that there are similarities and differences in the two works in terms of humor, both formally and thematically. In terms of form, the humor in both works is produced by the interplay of photo and text. The humorous effect will immediately disappear if one takes away either the photos or the texts. However, there are also differences in the formal features between the two works, which give their humor different tones. In Weems's *Black Woman with Chicken,* a traditional form of photographic portraiture is employed to represent the subject with distinct individual features, so viewers can easily perceive the humanity and beauty of the Black woman. In contrast, Simpson's *Twenty Questions (A Sampler)* only represents a limited part of a Black female body's back, and the sharp contrast between black and white causes tension and uneasiness. The tone of the work is further darkened by the harsh language, "black as coal" and "sharp as a razor."

With regard to theme, both works use humor to address the stereotypes of Black people, especially Black women. Through the incongruous and ironic representation of those stereotypes with women as the subjects, they not only subvert those stereotypes strategically but also bring Black women into visibility. Apart from the similarities, the differences between the themes of the two works are also significant. In Weems's *Black Woman with Chicken,* a specific stereotypical image is addressed, whereas Simpson's *Twenty Questions (A Sampler)* tackles broader issues. Simpson criticizes the negative categorization of Black women in Western culture through questions alluding to racial and sexist discrimination, exposes the objectification of the Black female body by only depicting certain body parts, and addresses the universal Black female experience of racism and sexism by concealing the face of the subject.

Conclusion

The subversiveness of Black humor empowers the two Black female artists to appropriate and deconstruct the stereotypes of Black women, with its sharpness cutting through and tearing apart racist representation. It enables them to face up to and strike back at racist ridicule by laughing at it strategically. As Daryl Cumber Dance writes in the introduction of *Honey, Hush: An Anthology of African American Women's Humor,* "[h]umor hasn't been for us so much the cute, the whimsical, and the delightfully funny. Humor for us has rather been a means of surviving as we struggled […] We laugh […] to keep from crying. We laugh to keep from dying" (xxi-xxii). Weems and Simpson's laughter signifies the subversive power of Black women's humor, which makes their artworks stand out in both Black art and feminist art. Nevertheless, whether the humor in the two artworks achieves the artist's purpose or not depends not only on the artworks themselves, but also on their reception by viewers. As this paper focuses on a cultural analysis of the artworks, the reception of their humor has not been explored here. To what extent do viewers detect the humor in the two works? Are some Black viewers offended by the appropriation of the stereotypes? What determines the viewer's perception of Black humor in visual art? These fascinating questions call for further research.

Works Cited

"The Fried Chicken Stereotype." *Abagond*, 20 Sep. 2017, www.abagond.wordpress.com/2017/09/20/the-fried-chicken-stereotype/. Accessed 13 Aug. 2020.

Barson, Tanya. "Lorna Simpson Twenty Questions (A Sampler) 1986." *Tate*, Aug. 2013, www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/simpson-twenty-questions-a-sampler-t15291. Accessed 12 Jun. 2020.

Carpio, C. Glenda. *Laughing Fit to Kill: Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery.* Oxford UP, 2008.

Dance, Daryl Cumber. "Introduction." *Honey, Hush: An Anthology of African American Women's Humor,* Norton, 1998, pp. xxi-xxxv.

Davis, Sara. "Ain't Jokin (about Watermelon, among Other Things)." *Scenes of Eating: Reading Food and Consuming Culture,* 10 Dec. 2014, www.scenesofeating.com/2014/12/10/aint-jokin-about-watermelon-among-other-things/. Accessed 12 Jun. 2020.

Delmez, Kathryn E. "Introduction." *Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video,* edited by Kathryn E. Delmez, Yale UP, 2012, pp. 1-10.

Early, Gerald et al. "Black humor: Reflections on an American Tradition." *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences,* vol. 63, no. 4, 2010, pp. 29-41. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41149267.

Finley, Jessyka. "Black Women's Satire as (Black) Postmodern Performance." *Studies in American Humor,* vol. 2, no. 2, 2016, pp. 236-65. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/studamerhumor.2.2.0236.

Firstenberg, Lauri. "Autonomy and the Archive in America: Re-examining the Intersection of Photography and Stereotype." *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self,* edited by Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis, Harry N. Abrams, 2003, pp. 317-19.

Gérin, Annie. "A Second Look at Laughter: Humor in the Visual Arts." *Humor*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2013, pp. 155-76. doi:10.1515/humor-2013-0009.

Hooks, Bell. "Talking with Carrie Mae Weems." *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics,* New Press, 1995, pp. 65-93.

Isaak, Jo Anna. "Mapping the Imaginary." *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter,* Routledge, 2002, pp. 156-81.

Morreall, John. "Philosophy of Humor." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* 28 Sep. 2016, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/humor/. Accessed 12 Jun. 2020.

Patterson, Vivian. "Carrie Mae Weems Serves Up Substance." *Gastronomica*, vol. 1, no. 4, Fall 2001, pp. 21-4. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/gfc.2001.1.4.21.

Simon, Joan. "Easy to Remember, Hard to Forget: Lorna Simpson's Gestures and Reenactments." *Lorna Simpson*, exhibition catalogue, Foundation for the Exhibition of Photography, 2013, pp. 12-13.

Simpson, Lorna. *Twenty Questions (A Sampler)*. 1986, Lorna Simpson Studio, New York.

Weems, Carrie Mae. *Black Woman with Chicken*. 1987-88, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Sugar Baby: the Racialization, Spectacularization & Mammification of the Female Big Black Body

Melina Haberl

In 2019, Lizzo was named *TIME*'s Entertainer of the Year and won three Grammy Awards. Despite more dominant beauty ideals, Lizzo resists both slenderness and Whiteness as the exclusive realms of beauty. In an interview with *Vice,* Lizzo reveals: "My Blackness is my largest assumed 'accessory.' My afro-hair, fat, muscle, bone and melanin are not a punchline—I was born in it, and I will proudly wake up in it every day" (Bennett). And with that comes a fair amount of criticism – almost immediately, social media users created an anti-Black and fatphobic discourse (Shaw 8). After Lizzo had reached the top of the charts with her single "Truth Hurts," Azealia Banks called Lizzo a "fat girl joke" and a "millennial mammy" who is catering to White Americans on Instagram (Price). But one could also argue that Lizzo represents the antithesis to the mammy stereotype that is often cast on fat Black women. She dispels any idea that what she does is a minstrel of sorts. Rather, she puts on a show that obliterates the myths steeped in weight stigma; for example, that one cannot be both fat and active (Cox). Therefore, her musical success as well as the sexuality she fully resonates with have redefined how the big Black woman is seen not only in entertainment, but in American society as a whole.

In this context, I argue that White America is unable to see big Black female bodies to exist outside of the iconography of the mammy. Based on this assumption, this paper will examine the racial origins of fatphobia with a particular emphasis on the creation of the stereotype of the mammy. Analyzing Kara Walker's sugar sculpture, *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant,* I will show how racial stereotypes can be

challenged through art in a society that considers White skin and a slender body the beauty ideal. How does Kara Walker use the female big Black body to point out and invalidate race, class, and gender prejudices? And how does the spectacle of Walker's subversive version of the mammy, work towards uncovering a deeply racist history and its ramification in today's society?

Throughout the nineteenth century, the White majority felt the need to prove their racial superiority (Strings 128). In *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, sociologist Sabrina Strings introduces the idea that fat phobia did not originate from medical findings, but that fatness at its very core is considered evidence of racial inferiority (210). "The racial discourse of fatness as 'coarse,' 'immoral,' 'black,' and 'Other,'" she writes, "not only denigrated black women, it also served as the driver for the creation of slenderness as the proper form of embodiment for elite white Christian women. In other words, the fear of the black body was integral to the creation of the slender aesthetic among fashionable white Americans" (212). At this point in time, fat Black bodies were framed to be immoral due to the alleged excessive amount of food they needed to consume (Cox). White authorities also attached other negative attributes to living in larger bodies, i.e. laziness, ultimately framing weight stigma as it is known today. Along with skin color and hair texture, body size – particularly fatness – was identified as a key element of primitiveness (Cox). On these grounds, the ideal of slenderness was introduced to profess a protestant Anglo-Saxon heritage in the United States (Strings 121). Since then, according to Strings, the image of the fat Black woman as savage and barbarous has been used to both degrade Black women and discipline White women (211). Accordingly, the attribution of moral values to body size redefined just who was considered an American. In the twentieth century, medical researchers found that Black women had among the highest Body Mass Index (BMI) in the country, and hence, their size became evidence of disease, as String illustrates. Yet again, Black women had to fear degradation over the size of their bodies (203). In this way, fatphobia is inextricably linked to anti-Blackness. The contemporary ideal of slenderness is therefore essentially racialized and racist (124).

The main controlling image applied to African American women is that of the mammy, the faithful, obedient domestic servant (Shaw 19).[1] Created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves, the mammy image represents the normative indicator used to evaluate all Black women's behavior as well as restrict them to domestic service (19). The deliberate attempt to desexualize the female slaves in the household and to de-eroticize their bodies was meant to eradicate any suspicion that the man of the household could be physically attracted to them (Van den Bergh 5). In film, the big Black woman was literally a mammy, in which film producers wanted their audience to believe that uneducated, sassy, but dutiful servants were all that Black women could or should aspire to be (Van den Bergh 5). In 2020, Quaker Oats announced that they would change the name and image of their pancake brand, *Aunt Jemima*, after protests surrounding the death of George Floyd (Hsu). Aunt Jemima emerged out of the Old South plantation nostalgia grounded in the idea of the mammy. Finally, the company acknowledged that the name was based on a racial stereotype (Hsu). These portrayals were indeed intentional. They catered to a White audience while sending a message to Black customers. To White people, the image of Aunt Jemima was that of a loving Black servant, whereas to Black people the message was clear – their only future would be as a domestic servant.

The artist Kara Walker has challenged these stereotypes throughout her entire career. Her art often implements stereotypes and racist imagery and frequently depicts scenes of violence and sex that are uncomfortably alluring and provocative (Thompson). Her work *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant* is a 2014 piece of installation art at the Domino Sugar Refinery in Williamsburg, New York. Partly in response to the U.S. Senate approval of a monument honoring the faithful slave mammies of the South in 1923, Kara Walker created a sugar-coated sphinx

1 Other stereotypes that have shaped the image of the big Black woman today include the 'Jezebel' who was framed to be seductive and exotic and whose sensuality was seen as the antithesis of the innocent White woman, or the 'Sapphire,' the angry Black woman, as she is often popularized in movies (Mitchell 17).

that is a hybrid of two distinct stereotypes of the Black female (Gopnik). The installation was open to the public from May to July 2014, after which the venue was demolished and the sculpture dissembled while only its hand was stored in an archive in New Jersey (Kensinger). *A Subtlety* refers to sugar sculptures that adorned European banquets in the Middle Ages, when sugar was solely a luxury commodity. These subtleties were admired and then eaten by the guests (Thompson). The display also exhibits fifteen small sculptures reminiscent of contemporary blackamoors in China that introduce another level of contrast between light and dark and the rawness of sugar (Smith).

Sugar Baby has the head of a kerchief-wearing Black woman referencing the mythology of the mammy. Her body, in contrast, is a caricature of the overly sexualized Black woman with noticeable breasts, a massive backside, and a protruding vulva (Thompson). The hybrid of the two stereotypes is mirrored in the mythical body of the sphinx as the figure is a hybrid in itself – between human and animal (Van den Bergh 6). Upon completion, the sculpture was 75 feet long and 35 feet tall and was constructed from 330 blocks of styrofoam. Domino Sugar donated eighty tons of sugar for the skin of the sphinx. These dimensions visualize the enormity of this installment (Smith). *Sugar Baby's* all-white body represents White supremacist power and the marginalization of Blackness. The sculpture reveals the connection between the pleasure taken at the expense of others and the sexual degradation and objectification of enslaved women, whose labor has produced the wealth of the American and European empires (Carpio 553). *Sugar Baby's* sex is exposed as she is lifted up in an offering position while she is on all fours. This speaks to the availability, the sexual enslavement, and animalization of the Black woman's body. Her prominent vulva signals the availability for White slaveholders. Her closed eyes also put the visitor in the position of the voyeur. Her large breasts are available for the observer to seize, similar to the way enslaved women's breasts were available to nurse the enslavers' babies (Loichot). In her left paw, the thumb is tucked between her index and middle fingers into the figa sign, a gesture symbolizing fertility (Carpio 552).

Yet, Walker also made her almost blindingly White. In blending signifiers of Blackness with the Whiteness of refined sugar, Walker's

sculpture points to another history of exploitation – the production of Whiteness precisely through visual constructions of Blackness (Saal). In an interview, Walker stated that through this installation, she wanted to address "the sugar trade, the slave trade, the various meanings that are put upon sugar, as an industry, and then the by-products of the industry, like the molasses – by-products not just of the industry but of slavery" (Van den Bergh 3). It is important to remember that the sugar industry brought approximately 11 million slaves into the New World, making it the "single largest slave occupation" (6). The higher the demand for sugar, the higher was the need to seize new colonies for the British empire, establish new plantations, and import new slaves. The conditions under which sugar was produced made it "a murderous commodity" (Carpio 564). Moreover, the majority of slaves on sugar plantations were women. Northern Americans largely tried to overlook the origins of their refined sugar and, implicitly, the dark-skinned bodies that produced it (564). Sugar and its production are therefore intrinsically linked to female slavery and the destruction of the Black female body (Van den Bergh 6). Rather than hide her Blackness, Walker made obvious how Whiteness as an identity, a set of ideologies, constructs distorted notions of Blackness. And how, like sugar, the production of Whiteness is incisively addictive (Carpio 566). The incorporation of the mammy stereotype and the choice of sugar as material then suggests that the sphinx indeed sits patiently waiting to be consumed by her spectators. Hence, Walker's sphinx made the role of sugar as a murderous and addictive commodity hyper-visible (4). Walker also indicates the illusion of White supremacy through the employment of her construction materials of styrofoam blocks, seeing that the figure is not entirely made out of sugar (Keyser 143).

As the title suggests, Walker's work is about sugar. The viewer is confronted with the big body imprisoned in sugar and is led to ask questions about its nature, its substance, and its sexualization. Similar to the big White plantation house, the sugar bears a hidden history filled with psychological, physical, and sexual violence (Del Guadalupe Davidson 34). The Domino Sugar Refinery is an integral part of this story. Built in 1856, by 1870 it was refining more than half of the sugar in the United States. The walls of the factory are coated in thick molasses; the sweet

smell of sugar still hangs heavily in the air (Thompson). In fact, the rich but problematic history of the building – evident in its connection to the slave trade and the exploitation of Black female bodies – contributes to the meanings of the exhibition and very directly links the content of the building with society outside (Van den Bergh 7). By monumentalizing the space through art, Walker reverses the amnesia about industrial exploitation and its racist past enabled by the conscious demolition of the Domino Sugar Factory (Keyser 145).

Kara Walker faced heavy criticism by the Black Lives Matter movement as well as feminist activists for allegedly recreating the stereotypes she claims to discredit – along with attracting a mostly White audience (Powers). A gigantic sculpture exposing female sexuality carried big risks, the most critical of which was that audiences would only see the spectacle and not its true meaning, i.e., the hypersexualized Black female and not the sphinx (Carpio 568). However, there is another element to the exhibition. While visitors were invited to upload selfies using the hashtag #karawalkerdomino, they were unknowingly filmed by the artist. In the selfies the visitors took, they sexualized the sphinx; for example, by posing with the figure's breasts and genitals. The aftermovie titled *An Audience* revealed the audience's reactions to the stereotypical and sexualized imagery (Van den Bergh 1). Walker confronts visitors with the violence implicit in historical stereotypes by linking history with contemporary popular culture; thus, processes of challenging these stereotypes could be initiated (6). Therefore, the stereotypes incorporated into this exhibition are challenged and countered by Walker's representation of the audience's diverse responses. The visitors' reactions remind us that this exhibition does not simply repeat the historical stereotypes; instead, it offers a critical dimension that demonstrates their implicit violence (9). Instead of replicating the stereotype of the mammy, I argue that Kara Walker has taken a cultural construct that is deeply rooted in American culture and politicized it.

A Subtlety is an exhibition which subverts the historical stereotypes that have been linked to African American women. The gigantic and short-term installation speaks of power, race, class, gender, sexuality, slavery, sugar, and industrialization – all of which use the human body to get what they need no matter what the cost may be. Returning to

the question of how the female big Black body is used to invalidate the harmful constructions of race, class, and gender – the hybridity of Kara Walker's sugar sculpture, the ambivalent reactions of its spectators, as well as Walker's negotiation with the problematic context of sugar production and consumption produce a complex and thought-provoking comment on historical and contemporary stereotypes and inequalities that goes beyond one-dimensional interpretations of her work as a mammification or spectacularization of the big Black female body.

Works Cited

Bennett, Kim T. "'My Blackness Is My Largest Assumed 'Accessory": Lizzo Breaks Down Her Video for 'My Skin.'" *Vice,* 1 Dec 2015, www.vice.com/en_us/article/rmjxzq/lizzo-goes-in-with-her-video-for-skin. Accessed 2 Sept 2020.

Carpio, Glenda R. "On the Whiteness of Kara Walker's Marvelous Sugar Baby." *ASAP/Journal,* vol. 2, no. 3, 2017, pp. 551-78. *Project Muse,* doi:10.1353/asa.2017.0047.

Cox, Joy. "Truth Hurts: Lizzo, Black Women & Weight Stigma." *Center for Discovery,* 22 Oct 2019, www.centerfordiscovery.com/blog/truth-hurts-lizzo-black-women-weight-stigma/. Accessed 10 Apr 2020.

Del Guadalupe Davidson, Maria. "Black Silhouettes on White Walls: Kara Walker's Magic Lantern." *Body Aesthetics,* edited by Sherri Irvin, Oxford UP, 2016, pp. 15-36.

Gopnik, Blake. "Rarely One for Sugarcoating." *New York Times,* 25 Apr 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/arts/design/kara-walker-creates-a-confection-at-the-domino-refinery.html. Accessed 20 May 2020.

Hsu, Tiffany. "Aunt Jemima Brand to Change Name and Image Over 'Racial Stereotype.'" *New York Times,* 17 Jun 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/17/business/media/aunt-jemima-racial-stereotype.html. Accessed 17 June 2020.

Kensinger, Nathan. "Artist Kara Walker Says Farewell to the Domino Sugar Refinery." *Curbed NY,* 23 May 2014, www.ny.curbed.com/2014/5/23/10096010/artist-kara-walker-says-farewell-to-the-domino-sugar-refinery. Accessed 6 Sept 2020.

Keyser, Catherine. "The Sweet Tooth of Slavery." *Transition,* no. 115, 2014, pp. 143 53. *JSTOR,* doi:10.2979/transition.115.143.

Loichot, Valérie. "Kara Walker's Blood Sugar: A Subtlety or the Marvelous SugarBaby." *Southern Spaces,* 8 Jul 2014, https://southernspaces.org/2014/kara-walkers-blood-sugar-subtlety-or-marvelous-sugar-baby. Accessed 20 May 2020.

Mitchell, Roland W. "Beyond Mammy, Jezebel, & Sapphire: Reclaiming Images of Black Women." *Beyond Mammy, Jezebel, & Sapphire,* edited by Heidi R. Lewis and Roland Mitchell, Jordan Schnitzer

Family Foundation, 2016, pp. 17-19. LSU, https://www.lsu.edu/chse/news/BeyondMammy.pdf. Accessed 4 Sept 2020.

Powers, Nicholas. "Why I Yelled at the Kara Walker Exhibit." *Indypendent,* 30 Jun 2014, www.indypendent.org/2014/06/why-i-yelled-at-the-kara-walker-exhibit/. Accessed 6 Aug 2020.

Price, Joe. "Azealia Banks Thinks Lizzo Is 'Making a Fool of Herself for a White American Public.'" *Complex,* 4 Sept 2019, www.complex.com/music/2019/09/azealia-banks-lizzo-making-fool-of-herself-white-american-public. Accessed 2 Sept 2020.

Saal, Ilka. "The Taste for Whiteness: Kara Walker's Marvelous Sugar Baby." *Food, Fatness and Fitness,* 28 Apr 2015, www.foodfatnessfitness.com/2015/04/27/the-taste-for-whiteness-kara-walkers-marvelous-sugar-baby-2014/. Accessed 17 Jun 2020.

Shaw, Andrea E. *The Embodiment of Disobedience: Fat Black Women's Unruly Political Bodies.* Lexington Books, 2006.

Smith, Roberta. "Sugar? Sure, but Salted with Meaning." *New York Times,* 12 May 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/05/12/arts/design/a-subtlety-or-the-marvelous-sugar-baby-at-the-domino-plant.html. Accessed 30 May 2020.

Strings, Sabrina. *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia.* NY UP, 2019.

Thompson, Nato. "Curatorial Statement – Kara Walker." *Creative Time.* www.creativetime.org/projects/karawalker/curatorial-statement/. Accessed 27 May 2020.

Van den Bergh, Laura. "Exhibitions of the Stereotype in Kara Walker's A Subtlety." *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change,* vol. 3, no. 2, 2018, pp. 1-11. *Lectito,* https://doi.org/10.20897/jcasc/3989.

"I Got Good Hair, I Got African in My Family": The Black Female Experience of 'Going Natural' in Nakeya Brown's Photography

Joyce O. Osagie

At the 2020 Oscars, *Hair Love* by Matthew A. Cherry won an Oscar in the category Best Animated Short Film. Telling the story of an African American father struggling to do his daughter's natural hair, the film expresses the message: embrace and love your natural hair. It also hints at the idea of community in the natural hair movement, expressing love for self, love for Black people, and love for Black culture. The idea of self-love in close connection to Black hair is likewise portrayed in the art of photographer Nakeya Brown, whose work has been featured nationally in various solo exhibitions as well as media outlets such as *New York Magazine* and other prominent publications. The subject of the artist's work, however, goes well beyond the notion of love for Black Hair. Nakeya Brown's photography series *The Refutation of "Good" Hair* and *Hair Stories Untold* challenge the stereotypical representation of Black women's hair as bad, ugly, untamed, and unmanageable.

With her photos, Brown manages to process and thematize significant concepts of the natural hair movement that are particularly important in the discourse of Black feminism today. This essay will examine the significance of natural hair in Black womanhood against the background of the concept of 'going natural' in Brown's work. How exactly does Brown address the natural hair movement in her work? How does the artist connect the art of natural hair to Black Feminism? The idea of 'going natural' and its significance is often not recognized (Johnson 7), but I will address how the artist has managed to demonstrate the significance of 'going natural.' Analyzing Brown's work, I will further show how natural hair shapes the Black female experience and will highlight the important role of the young Black female generation using social signs and symbols of natural hair to reinvent their shared

experience of femininity. My analysis refutes connotations of Black hair as 'bad' hair and frames 'going natural' as an essential everyday practice of contemporary Black feminism.

To fully comprehend the essence of the concept of 'going natural,' the problematic categorizations of 'good' and 'bad' hair need to be addressed. Kinky and tightly curled hair textures as pain, burden, ugly, and 'bad' hair are some of the several negative connotations linked to Black hair. Hair valuations in particular, such as definitions of 'good' and 'bad' hair have been working against Black women in the U.S. As a legacy from the times of slavery, these hair valuations reflect racially motivated beauty standards that place a particular burden on Black women whose naturally curly and kinky hair textures are low on beauty continuums (Robinson 360). Beyond that, these valuations elevate White beauty standards and devalue hair textures common among Black women, which usually rank between Type 3B and 4C hair on the hair pattern scale (Type 1A - Type 4C). To challenge these hair valuations, it is significant to comprehend the general idea of 'good' hair. A simplistic definition of 'good' hair is as follows: "Bad hair needs straightening, good hair does not" (Robinson 373). This concept of good hair stems from and reinforces a very Eurocentric notion of beauty. Hence, any Black woman who does not straighten or cover her hair is simply not only seen as unkempt but as ugly (Craig 3).

When looking into Black feminism, hair and beauty have been historically important. Not only has Black hair served as a means of protest and empowerment, it has also provided a platform of learning about one's African-rooted hair. This previously described singularity in beauty standards that has been exclusionary towards Black women has been facing resistance since the 1960's and 1970's, when men and women began choosing to grow out their hair in Afros, rejecting past beauty standards and emphasizing a return to their African heritage (Jansen 3).[1] Since then, a new and contemporary defined notion of Black

1 Historically, hair culture for Black women across the Diaspora has evolved. It involves values, ideas, customs, and a system of representation that has its roots in Africa and also became important during slavery. In the 1900s, for instance, hair culturalists became popular promoting the straightening of Black hair. This suggests that through different periods, different ideals of Black hair were seen as beautiful or ugly. The birth of the Black Power

female beauty has developed in the natural hair movement,[2] as illustrated in the works of Nakeya Brown. What does 'going natural' really mean and what place does it hold in Black womanhood? By choosing to stop chemically straightening their hair, Black women choose to no longer conform to White beauty standards, but embrace their natural hair texture and hairstyles. Moreover, the concept of 'going natural' represents an autonomous hair choice for Black women, which is considered a self-directed and honest choice (Johnson 2). It is grounded in the historical causes and effects of Black women's hair as political, making it more than just hair. Black women's hair, further, has been a site of resistance and cultural controversy that engages economic, social, and most important, political issues (Jansen 5), some of which are portrayed in Nakeya Brown's work.

The series *Refutation of "Good" Hair* was published in 2012 and was born out of the artist's personal journey to let her hair grow into its natural state, avoiding any chemical processing or straightening tools. At the same time, Brown was becoming a mother to a little girl. This is important since 'going natural' is a personal and intimate activity within the boundaries of family and home, a shared experience of female bonding – a woman starting to learn about her hair and how to nurture it. It is a very unique and private experience that can differ from the natural hair process one's daughter, sister, or friend undergoes and reveals the complexity of black hair. Hair becomes the space between personal identity and larger racial politics of resisting natural hair discrimination (Rooks 1). In the 2014 series *Hair Stories, Untold* Nakeya Brown explores the relationship between self-care and pain, more specifically, the experience of Black female pain, both physically and emotionally. The idea of Black female pain, caused by hair, can be traced back to racial stereotypes associated with African Americans because of their kinky hair.

Movement encouraged Black women to value their natural beauty regardless of dominant cultural beauty standards and led to a resurgence of Black feminism during 1960s and 1970s (Johnson 8).

2 The natural hair movement is focused on encouraging women with African ancestry to celebrate and enjoy the natural characteristics of their kinky, curly hair texture. The movement mainly consists of younger Black women that provide encouragement, advice, product reviews, hairstyle tutorials, and much more to other women that are interested in 'going natural' (Kenneth).

Brown's images depict the beauty tools and processes that made an impact on her personal journey from girlhood to womanhood, and the process from treated hair to the natural state of the hair (Brown). Within the scope of Brown's photographs, Black women's hair and hair journeys operate as sites for resistance. Even when trying to ignore the political aspects of the concept of 'going natural,' the history of Black – and especially Black female – bodies and hair and their close connection to political struggle cannot be ignored. Nakeya Brown's series reveal hair memories, rituals, and shared experiences amongst Black women through six short vignettes each.[3] A striking aspect that initially penetrates the viewer's space when analyzing the images is the fact that Brown's photographs position Black women in the foreground and assert them as tellers of their own story, which is central to Black Feminism. The agency of Black women has never been a given. So, whether a woman is choosing to grow her hair to reject Eurocentric beauty standards or just simply embracing her natural beauty and heritage, there is an agency in connecting one's body to one's protest (Davison 81). Hair as part of the Black female body, therefore, has to be a central object in these pictures as well. Borrowing a collective expression of the contemporary natural hair movement – 'rocking the curls/coils' – to describe Brown's images is acknowledging the burden of Black hair at the same time as it is refuting the notion of 'bad' hair. The weave and sew-ins[4] are being deliberately neglected by Black women in the photos. Yet, they are still accepted as legitimate hairstyles, both in the Black community and in the images at hand. Against the belief that a Black woman has to conform to a singular ideal of femininity, this interpretation shows how much power the dominant white society has been wielding over Black women. This dominance is robbing Black women of their time and of their self-love. Demanding agency and acknowledging that self-definition is key to empowerment for women with curly and kinky hair is one crucial step of many to take when demonstrating a Black woman's power and agency.

3 The link to the pictures by Nakeya Brown can be found on the Works Cited page.
4 Straight hair or loosely curled hair that is literally sewed on to one's natural hair in cornrows.

Nakeya Brown explores beauty and hair politics in the discourse of the 'back to natural' movement. True to the idea behind the claim 'We are African,'[5] she manages to untangle Black women's roots and highlights the African heritage in one's hair. On the one hand, this is portrayed in hair texture — women nowadays deliberately wear their curly, kinky, and coily natural hair as an everyday practice to make a statement on beauty and politics. On the other hand, Brown highlights the tools and the products that shape an African American woman's hair as an expression of political freedom as well as political struggle. By focusing on the natural state of curly and kinky hair, Brown acknowledges what led to this state and which tools and stages Black women went through daily to get there — in both a literal and emotional sense. Especially the African rooted hair practices like perming and braiding, for instance, are key in understanding the roots of Black hair and with it the struggles of beauty, emancipation, and self-love. By solely including the tools that have enabled Black women to straighten their hair but not incorporating their use on the hair in the images, the artist deliberately distances herself from these identity-vanishing processes as an empowered woman who is no longer rejecting her African heritage. At the same time, she discloses what women of color have gone through on a daily basis. This emancipatory approach of acceptance, resulting from a place of struggle, operates as a dynamic process that allows Black women to neglect the notion of 'bad' hair since accepting this definition would mean to surrender to the values of the dominant Eurocentric culture (Rooks 3). Brown evokes a feeling of shared experiences, thus focusing on inclusivity. Projecting this onto the discourse of feminism, the artist urges feminists and women, in general, to "think about how women, [in particular Black women], are complex and occupy different identities" (Genova). It can begin with hair (textures, practices, etc.), but it goes way beyond hair. The complex set of discourses and practices regarding Black hair reflect the complexities of Black womanhood. Nevertheless, when looking at Black female hair, the different layers become evident.

5 Natural hair supporters argue that natural hair is a nod to being a 'real' African or acknowledging their African heritage. The natural hair community generally refutes the idea of European attributes, including straight hair, as being superior (Roberts).

Brown recognizes the cultural and social value of hair in the scope of her work (Genova).

The straightening tools and pastel and loud color palette the artist uses can be considered common elements in contemporary feminist photography (Genova). According to Brown, however, there are different connotations tied to them. The colors used by Brown stem from a palette often used for permed kids, beauty products, books, and magazine covers (Crowder). Further, it is a color palette closely associated with Black beauty markets and product designs. Thereby, Brown manages to demonstrate the idea that hair, as well as colors, can become a socialized and interconnected concept. The beauty markers, hot comb, rollers, and lighters used to burn ends of braids to seal them, are wrapped in pastel colors. This allows the viewer a positive or rather soft association with the subject of Black female hair culture. Moreover, the color palette automatically evokes the idea of gender since it reveals colors that are often linked to femininity.[6] Simultaneously, the color palette allows a confrontation with ways in which we visualize group identity. As Brown stated in an interview, she used this color palette "to create a [certain] mood" (Crowder) that is intended to call upon the group identity of the natural hair moment in its entirety, which is key to the concept of 'going natural' (Crowder). Through womanhood, through different processes, rituals, and the practice of doing one's hair, Black women create a collective memory and group identity. They are writing their hair stories in unique ways the same way they handle and confront their natural hair in unique ways. There is no ideal or perfect way of 'going natural'. Every woman's personal natural hair journey can look entirely different from the next one. Yet, African American women still find community and shared experiences in the process of 'going natural'. In the entire African Diaspora, and in the U.S. in particular, there is a tendency towards the natural hair movement (Genova).

This idea of community and shared experiences led to the rise of natural hair care products, beauty blogs, YouTube instructional videos,

6 This essay acknowledges the existence of various gender identifications and uses this term with the utmost caution. It is not this work's intention to offend anyone's dignity, pride, or self-identification.

support groups, and hashtags on social media. Most of them have been created by Black women as a tool to support and nurture women as they take the journey of 'going natural'. Black female hair, thereby, conveys important political, economic, cultural, and social meanings, especially concerning group identity surrounding the shared Black experience of femininity. Social networking creates unified voices and a sense of community, especially given that it is predominantly the younger generations of Black women who engage in this movement. Again, taking into account the women depicted in Brown's photos, the artist illustrates how young women are at the forefront of social signs, symbols, and spaces of the natural hair movement.

To conclude, Brown's photo series construct an experience of community within contemporary Black feminism. The concept of 'going natural' is a key aspect of the natural hair movement. Paying attention to design, color, and the message of the photos, the artist connects the politics of natural hair to personal identity politics. Nakeya Brown's work emphasizes the agency, power, and community of the concept of 'going natural'. Everyday Black women participate in the feminist practice of simply – and yet not so simply – doing their natural hair.

Works Cited

Brown, Nakeya. *"Nakeya Brown Photography."* Nakeya Brown Photography, www.nakeyab.com. Accessed 14 Aug 2020.

Craig, Maxine. "The Decline and Fall of the Conk: or, How to Read a Process." *Fashion Theory*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1997, pp. 399-419.

Crowder, Nicole. "Telling 'Untold' Stories of Womanhood and the Politics of Black Hair." *The Washington Post,* 12 May 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-sight/wp/2015/05/12/telling-untold-stories-of-womanhood-and-the-politics-of-black-hair/. Accessed 13 Aug 2020.

Genova, Alexandra. "When Hair Becomes a Site of Resistance." *Time,* 26 Apr 2017, www.time.com/4751380/nakeya-brown. Accessed 13 Aug 2020.

Hair Love. Directed by Matthew A. Cherry and Karen Rupert Toliver. Sony Pictures Animated, 2019.

Jansen, Jessie. "Oppression at the Roots: Feminism, Hair, and Alice Walker." Dickinson College.

Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 5 Dec 2014, www.dickinson.edu/download/downloads/id/7539/fys_2014_jansen.pdf. Accessed 31 Oct 2020.

Johnson, Elizabeth. *Resistance and Empowerment in Black Women's Hairy Styling.* Ashgate, 2016.

Kenneth. "The Natural Hair Movement: A Historical Perspective." *Curl Centric,* www.curlcentric.com/natural-hair-movement. Accessed 10 Sept 2020.

Roberts, Kuli. "Being African: What does hair have to do with it?" *BBC News,* 21 Jul 2015. www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33525254. Accessed 5 Sept 2020.

Robinson, Cynthia L. "Hair as Race: Why 'Good Hair' May Be Bad for Black Females." *Howard Journal of Communications,* vol. 22, no. 4, 2011, pp. 358-376.

Rooks, Noliwe M. *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women.* Rutgers UP, 1996.

On Community, Intersectionality, and Forging One's Space in the Art World: An Interview with Nimra and Manahil Bandukwala

Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier

Nimra and Manahil Bandukwala are powerhouses – artists, writers, educators, and innovators are just a few ways to describe them. As individuals, they create in both the visual and literary arts, and as partners they work towards interdisciplinary modes of production. Their current project Reth aur Reghistan, *funded by the* Canada Council for the Arts *(amongst other arts funders), interprets Pakistani folklore through miniature sculpture to bring these stories to a broader audience where language presents no barrier. The Pakistani-Canadian sisters have also worked together on* Backyard Worlds, *using found object art to create miniature worlds. Individually, Nimra is a painter, using oil and watercolor as mediums to bring her visions to life. Manahil is a poet, artist, and editor; her second chapbook* Paper Doll *was published in 2019 and she also serves on the editorial team of the feminist literary magazine* Canthius. *I sat down with them for an interview to discuss their work, and what emerged was an enlightening and thought-provoking conversation on what experiences have shaped their creative modes, their perspectives, and their lives as young artists in a world not yet ready for powerful subversive voices.*

Sakina: Thank you so much for joining me today for this interview. I wanted to start by giving you the chance to talk about yourself. So, in your own words, how would you describe yourselves?

Nimra: I'm an artist, an educator, and community facilitator. I find those are the most accurate terms to describe what I do. I work on a number of creative projects and one of my most recent projects is *Reth aur Reghistan* – it looks at folklore from Pakistan through a number of different lenses. I also collaborate with other artists and work on com-

missions. I also work with kids with autism and I have run community workshops for kids and adults with disabilities.

Manahil: I'm a writer, artist, and editor. I work with a couple of poetry magazines. For me, that process of writing is very much tied to editorial and community work. I work in a lot of different forms. I feel like I'm always experimenting and moving on and moving between different ways of creating, whether it's with writing or with art.

Sakina: Both of you mentioned the community aspect of it. Nimra, part of your professional life is working within these very community-driven environments, and Manahil, you mentioned that that's a big source of inspiration as well as a foundation in terms of creating and participating in this artistic environment. Can you elaborate on that?

Nimra: I think for me art is inherently tied to community. I always grew up doing art, both by myself and with Manahil. We were always making things together. When I lived in Montreal I was involved in the *Art Hive* movement which are essentially community art studios that have supplies and are open for anyone, any age, any background, to come drop in and make art. They also offer a lot of workshops, not only in Montreal but across Canada. I found these spaces very inspiring and a wonderful way for me to practice my art in a community setting. I've continued to use this model with Muslim adults with disabilities and children with autism and developmental challenges. It's very integral to how I see art. I'm not as associated with art in a gallery that is viewed by a public audience. I think more about art as a way to bring people together and empower people through that art-making.

Manahil: Nimra mentioned the visual arts part of it. For me, when I started with poetry, I was volunteering with a literary magazine at my university and the two kind of went hand in hand. I was also helping run a reading series where I would invite writers to share their work; there were open mics, and I was sharing my own work at open mics. That support that I was getting really early on, in a welcoming space,

when sharing work that wasn't necessarily polished or publishable or necessarily "good"—whatever that means—was foundational to where I am as a writer today.

Sakina: You also both work in very diverse mediums — painting, poetry, and the project *Reth aur Reghistan,* **which is very sculpture driven. What drives your creative process and what ideas do you seek to manifest in your work but also through these very different mediums? What kind of perspectives do you think might manifest themselves subconsciously? Is that something you've ever thought about? Is it something others have discussed with you?**

Nimra: With me, as a visual artist, I've worked in oil painting and watercolors, acrylic and clay, and most recently found object sculptures. Painting is the traditional medium that I've been trained in, but with found object art it's interesting, because it's about finding what you have and working from there rather than starting with a canvas and paint, so it's a bit of a different process. Just to give a bit of background: it initially started when Manahil and I wanted to use some of the materials we found on hikes or just materials lying around the house that we had saved to make things, to tell stories, and to make these miniature worlds. We got a lot of great feedback and I think that encouraged us to do more of those. For example, we made the rendering of the Shire in a cut-out book. We also made a depiction of –

Manahil: A Pakistani lullaby.

Nimra: And that inspired the project *Reth aur Reghistan,* to interpret Pakistani folklore through sculpture and share these stories through this medium. That's a big part of our project right now.

Manahil: For me, I start a lot with the outer world, which is a contrast to what Nimra says about the inner world. But then, also just thinking about how these big picture things are connected to interpersonal relationships like politics, ecology, or the environment. I think a lot of the broader issues are all interconnected.

Sakina: Have you ever gotten feedback on any of your pieces that has surprised you?

Nimra: You know, it's just interesting to see how people label the art. I never called myself or thought of myself as a surreal painter, believe it or not, but that's what people started saying: "your art is so surreal." I'm just doing what feels right to me. I'm not trying to mix elements so that they're surreal – I'm doing it because that's how it makes sense in my head. So that's just been interesting to see… the artistic categories that people try to place you in. Sometimes I get "Oh, your work reminds me of Frida Kahlo" or "Dali," and it's not where I'm coming from. It's great though – it's just wonderful to see how they're interacting with art.

Manahil: I think recently with my writing, I've just been getting comments about how it feels sensual and that's not actively how I would think about my writing. But that was interesting and surprised me.

Sakina: I suppose this is the spectrum of subjectivity that we all should be aware of. I sometimes get reactions to my writing where I couldn't have predicted that it could be interpreted that way, but it's very interesting.

Nimra: And valid.

Sakina: Yes, absolutely. I guess since we're on this topic of categorization and labeling… As you know, this publication came out of a conference on contemporary feminist art. So, as contemporary artists, how do you identify with this "feminist" label or the categories of feminism as a movement?

Nimra: For me, feminist is not necessarily… I find the label to be a very superficial word. For me, it's more about how people carry themselves and how they navigate their world – how they act, how they react, how they respond, and so much of it is about being open to learning more and having your assumptions challenged; unlearning the ways in which we have been conditioned to behave. With every wave or step of the movement we're just learning more about what it means to be women

Kinetic Thought – Watercolour & Pen on Paper / Animated for Experimental Film *Suspiro Nocturno* 2018. © Nimra Bandukwala

and navigate in a world that is not really made for us, but that we're claiming. I also think that it's very important for both me as a feminist and for feminism to be intersectional – that includes being anti-racist, anti-ableist, anti-capitalist. In North America, women of color and women who are disabled have mostly been excluded from feminism. Unless these movements encompass those women as well, they can only go so far. There's a lot of power in this approach to feminism – as something that's morphing and as something that we're learning more about as opposed to just a label that's static.

Manahil: It's really important for feminism to be orientated on community and have space for compassion and care. Also, we have to think about how it's different in different contexts. For example, with *Reth aur Reghistan,* when we were doing interviews in Pakistan as two young women, one of the things we had to do was invite male friends along. They weren't doing anything apart from just being there, but as women working in the arts, that was something we had to do there… Working within this context of the art world that, as Nimra said, has excluded us, and learning how to find our way into that space and how to maintain that space.

Sakina: You brought up a really interesting experience of having a male with you as a way to mediate male-dominated spaces where a woman is not necessarily seen as belonging. I've also experienced this while travelling as well as in certain spaces in the West – in Germany and in Canada. Can you tell me a little bit about this throughout your experiences as artists? Of course, you have this very interesting project that you're working on together, but just generally about this experience as a woman in the arts in Canada versus in Pakistan.

Manahil: A lot of the art that I've done in a professional sense has been in Canada. Working on *Reth aur Reghistan* was the first experience of working in Pakistan as an artist. There, it was about entering the space as a woman. Here in Canada, you can enter the space but that doesn't

mean that people are going to listen to you. It's the same issue in the sense that it's still fighting against this male-dominated…

Nimra: Patriarchy.

Manahil: Yeah, patriarchy. And in this case, it's a white patriarchy. All of those issues are still present. They're just present in different ways and the way that you fight against them and navigate them – it's a joint effort. I think that's one similarity. For example, the guys we invited along – it was for them to be that support without interjecting themselves into the work we were doing.

Nimra: Just to bounce off of that, it was something we're definitely debating. We could have still gone by ourselves, traveling in interior Sindh – we have heard of other women who've done that. But we just realized that there are certain rules in the system and we can challenge them but we need to do it based on the context there and not based on the North American context that we're coming from. In the Pakistani context, even for the men there, they weren't comfortable with us being in their space alone because of the position it puts them in. The ones we interviewed were very respectful, open, and accommodating, but at the same time, we have to meet them where they're at by, again, having someone accompany us as our interactions unfolded. So it was a different frame of reference to consider over there as opposed to here. But as Manahil said, I also haven't had any professional experience there besides this, and it was only a month and a half.

Manahil: For artists who are living and working there, how they would fight against these systems would be very different.

Sakina: I think also there is definitely a tendency to universalize the Western perspective, which can be kind of hard to resist when it comes to feminism or women's roles, but it's a tendency that should often be resisted.

Anarkali

Lahore is a love story my sister paints.
Anarkali and Jahangir sit on mosque roof.

Beneath the minaret
rows of people
lower then rise with imam's call.
Young boys fly kites
for basant. Orange fills the sky.

In history this place is unlittered,
tranquil, a shaded haven for strays.
Painted figures buy flower petals
and a chance at romance.

I know Anarkali from scrapped syllabus.
I know Lahore as stopover
for visa trips. Dadi's home exists beyond
four sides of canvas.

School moves forward. A girl must leave
eventually, before she ends up
buried between two walls.
Her lover doesn't hear her screams.

Retreat into the alleyway
visit sabzi mandi with chin down,
hair covered
black wisps peeking out.

"Anarkali." *Paper Doll* by Manahil Bandukwala. Anstruther Press, 2019.

Manahil: We also didn't just want to just go there and impose the framework which we are with working here.

Nimra: It is a belief system in a way, or it's a set of values instead of standards. Despite the fact that we are Pakistani, we have been trained in Canada to think critically about the world. Us going in with this just wouldn't have been effective and true to ourselves; we needed to adapt to the framework over there.

Sakina: We've talked a lot about your experience in Pakistan, but you both said from the outset that the majority of your experience as artists is actually in Canada. What can you tell me about that in the context of the "feminist" label or working as a woman in the arts?

Manahil: Mentorship for women has been one of the key things for me. I don't want to say that I'm an established writer in the literary scene, but I definitely have more experience than a few years ago when I started. Mentorship, whether formal or informal, from more experienced women in the community was really key in navigating male-dominated spaces, especially from women of color. Partly in person but also online. Through Twitter, I connected with a lot of women-of-color artists working across Canada. One of the writers who I collaborated with recently, I met online. The capacity to have that is how you maintain that space for yourself.

Nimra: Initially, I did want to go the traditional fine art route of going to art school, exhibiting in galleries and doing other projects – working as a full-time artist. But what I found was… the structure of the arts is very patriarchal, if that makes sense, and capitalist. There's a lot of value around perfection, around fitting into certain criteria, checking boxes, as opposed to exploration, experimentation, care, and community, which is what I'm more interested in. I very quickly realized that this traditional route is not for me because it was so dominated by those values. For example, the Art Gallery of Mississauga or the Art Gallery of Toronto function and operate with a lot of these values. Even though they do have artists of color and they have a lot of women working, it's the core values – the way that the board and higher-up structures are set

up. It's still very limiting to women of color and people from different backgrounds and abilities. I personally haven't had these experiences there, but I know others. There are a number of people that have had negative experiences in these communities because they questioned the practices and the governance in these spaces and that has not been welcomed. So it's like, "Great! You're a person of color and you can work here and you can do your art, but it has to be under our rules because you're under our roof. If you don't follow them, you're not welcome here and you have to leave." I think this is something that is quite widespread in gallery culture.

Sakina: I have also had these experiences, both in my time as a journalist but also in the broader academic world to an extent, and I would say there is a parallel between academia and the art world in that the spaces to practice or to sustain a livelihood are quite limited. How do you navigate this when there are these fundamental structural issues that are very difficult or nearly impossible to adapt to considering there might be such a big discrepancy in values or value systems?

Nimra: The space that I'm thinking of in particular, it was a lot about coming together as a community; people that have been harmed over time getting together in solidarity, and that's what being online allows us to do. People don't forget the experiences they've had, even if they've moved on to other things or other communities. Holding people, holding the structures and the governance accountable for their actions – it's not a process that's going to cause change overnight. It's very long term. Each person that is harmed will join the movement and that will bring more people. The hope is that eventually that structure will dismantle and build something that is based more on values – the values of the community, rather than just the governance deciding what the community wants or needs. So I think with the arts, with all other areas, that's really where the change will come from and it will be very slow. But even just more recently, we are seeing that more and more people are speaking out and holding these structures accountable. And not just structures, but also the people behind them, who are usually white and usually male. What was the original question?

Sakina: I was saying that I could imagine for an artist, particularly as an emerging artist, when you have to stick to things like the borders of a country or the borders of a place-based community, for example, there are limited spaces for you to work in. So you kind of have to work within a structure where the value systems can be fundamentally different from the values that you yourself hold.

Nimra: I guess my response was very long term. Maybe Manahil has some ideas. If you're in a situation and you don't want to leave but you also want to be true to yourself and your values, how do you navigate that?

Manahil: I've found that staying in that system while being true to your values is two very different things and very difficult to reconcile. I don't know that I have an ideal solution. On a much smaller scale, one example would be people in Ottawa starting spaces for artists of color. Starting them with the idea that you would be compensating, paying, artists for their work – that's one small idea. A bigger structure, like a city art gallery, that would be more difficult to tackle.

Sakina: What about allyship?

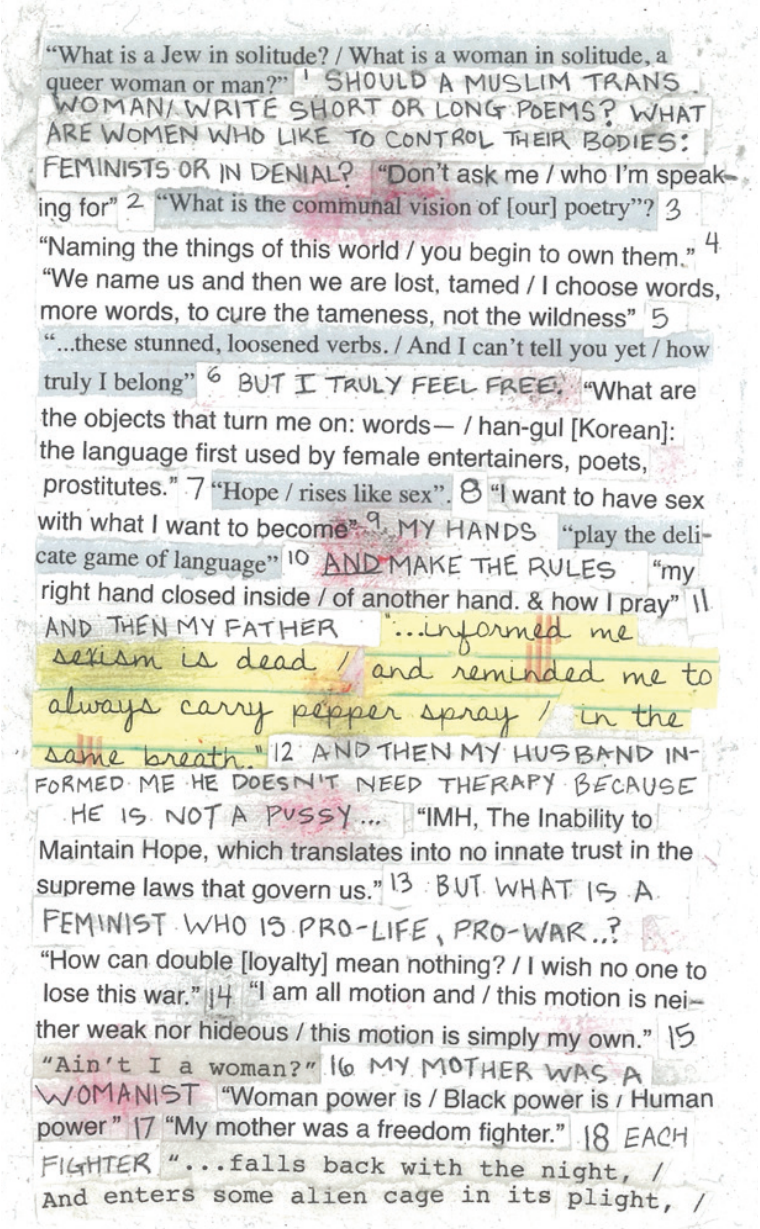
Nimra: Finding those allies has so many benefits. You realize you're not alone, that you're not crazy in terms of the microaggressions or the structural limitations you may experience as an artist of color. It isn't something that you're making up, which is very important. Artists collaborate on projects, but if you're collaborating on an issue that's popping up or prevalent in a space, it's much easier to overcome… it's still very challenging, but it makes you want to work through the stressors that come up. Allies, community… and they are also incredibly important to celebrate the victories together.

Visit www.sculpturalstorytelling.com for more information on Reth aur Reghistan. *Nimra's portfolio can be viewed at www.nimrabandukwala.carbonmade.com and Manahil's chapbook can be purchased at www.anstrutherpress.com/new-products/paper-doll-by-manahil-bandukwala.*

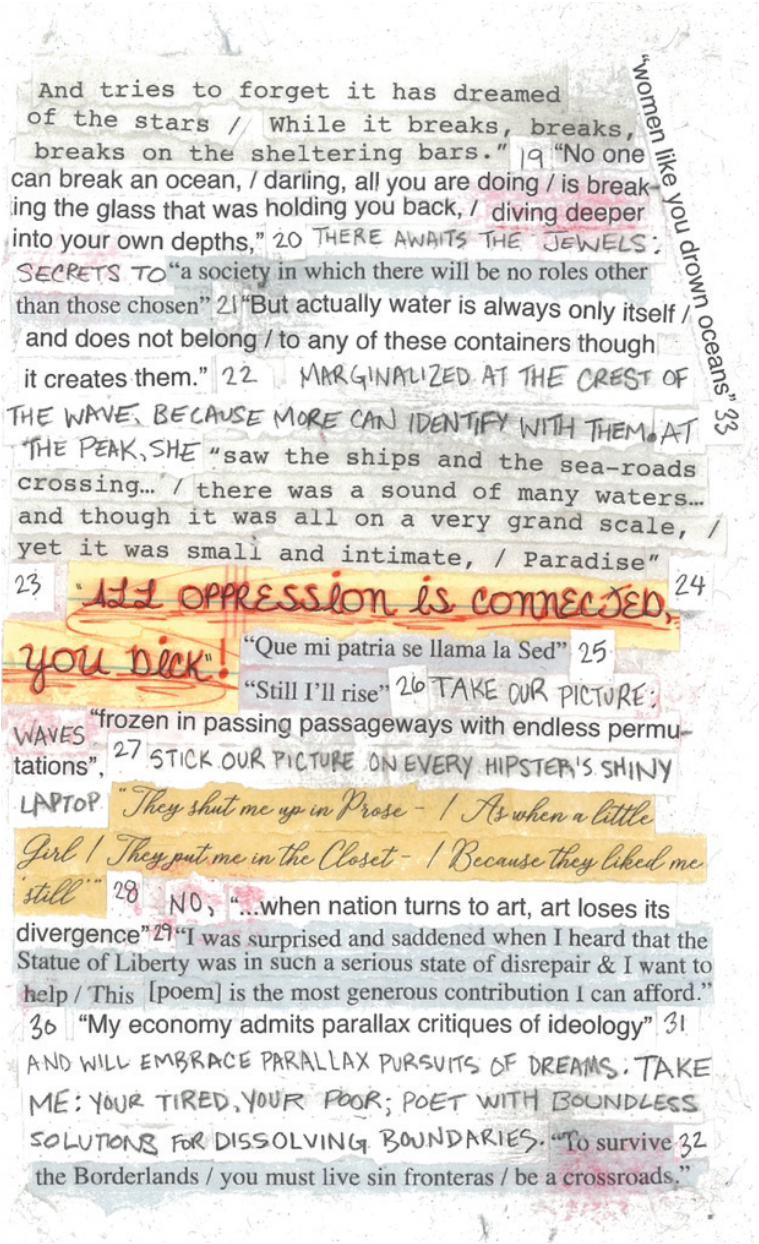
WOMXN
A Poetic Collage on Feminism

Dannie Snyder

All of the poets quoted in this collage have arguably contributed to feminism in America, whether or not they dared call themselves feminists. This collage assumes their contributions. Meaning, rather than arguing how they inspired readers/listeners to fight for women's rights, my intention was to show how they complicated the term "feminism." My initial research questions were: How is the term "feminism," over a century after being coined, still highly problematic and how is it still used/useful today? This project began as an exploration of how female poets have identified *themselves* as feminists, i.e. how they defined/redefined feminism, or how they have responded to literary critics' measurements/categorizations of their work within feminism studies. Over time, this project became an exploration of society's greater dilemma with using labels like "feminist" as tools of oppression versus tools of empowerment. It became a greater story of Intersectionality, of the crossroads of labels, where the crash sites of sexism are not necessarily focused on the roles of men but more so on the roles of linguistics, vocabulary and etymology as weapons or as elixirs *(keeping in mind that language is highly masculine).* Hundreds of poets were researched for this project. There were some poets who I devoured and some who I, admittedly, barely sunk my teeth into. For the final piece, some poets are A-listers and some are self-published. Some are from the first wave of feminism or earlier but most are from my mother's generation and after. You might notice a piece here or there that is more commonly known as a "speech," "written by a poet," but they are indeed poems spoken for mass demonstrations. It was my challenge both as a scholar and as a fan of poetry to narrow down my piece to just two pages of voices. Therefore, this piece is a crude representation of poetry's role in shaping our present-day, general understanding of what it means to be a feminist or, for example, a womanist. It barely scrapes the surface in answering how we should continue to reclaim, invent, transcend, or abandon the term "feminism" as well as in uncovering the jewels of intersectionality.



"What is a Jew in solitude? / What is a woman in solitude, a queer woman or man?" 1 SHOULD A MUSLIM TRANS WOMAN/ WRITE SHORT OR LONG POEMS? WHAT ARE WOMEN WHO LIKE TO CONTROL THEIR BODIES: FEMINISTS OR IN DENIAL? "Don't ask me / who I'm speaking for" 2 "What is the communal vision of [our] poetry"? 3 "Naming the things of this world / you begin to own them." 4 "We name us and then we are lost, tamed / I choose words, more words, to cure the tameness, not the wildness" 5 "...these stunned, loosened verbs. / And I can't tell you yet / how truly I belong" 6 BUT I TRULY FEEL FREE. "What are the objects that turn me on: words— / han-gul [Korean]: the language first used by female entertainers, poets, prostitutes." 7 "Hope / rises like sex". 8 "I want to have sex with what I want to become". 9 MY HANDS "play the delicate game of language" 10 AND MAKE THE RULES "my right hand closed inside / of another hand. & how I pray" 11 AND THEN MY FATHER "...informed me sexism is dead / and reminded me to always carry pepper spray / in the same breath." 12 AND THEN MY HUSBAND INFORMED ME HE DOESN'T NEED THERAPY BECAUSE HE IS NOT A PUSSY ... "IMH, The Inability to Maintain Hope, which translates into no innate trust in the supreme laws that govern us." 13 BUT WHAT IS A FEMINIST WHO IS PRO-LIFE, PRO-WAR..? "How can double [loyalty] mean nothing? / I wish no one to lose this war." 14 "I am all motion and / this motion is neither weak nor hideous / this motion is simply my own." 15 "Ain't I a woman?" 16 MY MOTHER WAS A WOMANIST "Woman power is / Black power is / Human power" 17 "My mother was a freedom fighter." 18 EACH FIGHTER "...falls back with the night, / And enters some alien cage in its plight, /


And tries to forget it has dreamed
of the stars / While it breaks, breaks,
breaks on the sheltering bars." 19 "No one
can break an ocean, / darling, all you are doing / is break-
ing the glass that was holding you back, / diving deeper
into your own depths," 20 THERE AWAITS THE JEWELS:
SECRETS TO "a society in which there will be no roles other
than those chosen" 21 "But actually water is always only itself /
and does not belong / to any of these containers though
it creates them." 22 MARGINALIZED AT THE CREST OF
THE WAVE, BECAUSE MORE CAN IDENTIFY WITH THEM. AT
THE PEAK, SHE "saw the ships and the sea-roads
crossing... / there was a sound of many waters...
and though it was all on a very grand scale, /
yet it was small and intimate, / Paradise"
23 "ALL OPPRESSION IS CONNECTED, 24
YOU DICK!"
"Que mi patria se llama la Sed" 25
"Still I'll rise" 26 TAKE OUR PICTURE;
WAVES "frozen in passing passageways with endless permu-
tations", 27 STICK OUR PICTURE ON EVERY HIPSTER'S SHINY
LAPTOP "They shut me up in Prose - / As when a little
Girl / They put me in the Closet - / Because they liked me
still" 28 NO; "...when nation turns to art, art loses its
divergence" 29 "I was surprised and saddened when I heard that the
Statue of Liberty was in such a serious state of disrepair & I want to
help / This [poem] is the most generous contribution I can afford."
30 "My economy admits parallax critiques of ideology" 31
AND WILL EMBRACE PARALLAX PURSUITS OF DREAMS: TAKE
ME: YOUR TIRED, YOUR POOR; POET WITH BOUNDLESS
SOLUTIONS FOR DISSOLVING BOUNDARIES. "To survive 32
the Borderlands / you must live sin fronteras / be a crossroads."
"women like you drown oceans" 33

Notes

1. Rich, Adrienne. "Yom Kippur 1984." *Collected Poems 1950-2012,* W. W. Norton & Company, 2016.
2. Cortez, Jayne. "Don't Ask/1980." *On the Imperial Highway: New and Selected Poems,* Hanging Loose Press, 2009.
3. Howe, Susan. *My Emily Dickinson,* New Directions, 2007.
4. Kaufman, Shirley. "Drifting." *Rivers of Salt: Poetry,* Copper Canyon Press, 1993.
5. Notley, Alice. "I'm Just Rigid Enough." *Mysteries of Small Houses: Poems,* Penguin Books, 1998.
6. Erdrich, Louise. "New Vows." *Jacklight: Poems,* Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984.
7. Hong, Cathay Park. "All the Aphrodisiacs." *Translating Mo'um,* Hanging Loose Press, 2002.
8. Chasin, Helen. "Andalusia." *Poetry,* vol. 113, no. 6, 1969, pp. 387–388. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20598858.
9. Kapil, Bhanu. "Handwritten Preface to Reverse the Book." *Incubation: A Space for Monsters,* Leon Works, 2006.
10. Waldman, Anne. "Philosophia Perennis." *Helping the Dreamer: Selected Poems*, 1966-1988, Coffee House Press, 1989.
11. Girmay, Aracelis. "Consider the Hands that Write this Letter." *Teeth,* Curbstone Books, 2007.
12. Baird, Blythe. "Pocket-Sized Feminism." *YouTube,* uploaded by Button Poetry, 16 Feb 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vT74LHoW8ig.
13. Rankine, Claudia. "Cornel West makes the point…" *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric,* Graywolf Press, 2004.
14. Yamada, Mitsuye. "The Question of Loyalty." *Camp Notes and Other Writings,* Rutgers UP, 1998.
15. Bartlett, Jennifer. *Autobiography/Anti-Autobiography.* Theenk Books, 2014.
16. Truth, Sojourner. "Ain't I a Woman?" (1851 speech). *The Sojourner Truth Project,* www.thesojournertruthproject.com. Accessed 9 Sept 2020.
17. Lorde, Audre. "Now." *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

18. Monet, Aja. "My Mother Was a Freedom Fighter." *My Mother Was a Freedom Fighter,* Haymarket Books, 2017.
19. Johnson, Georgia Douglas. "Heart of a Woman." *The Heart of a Woman and Other Poems,* Forgotten Books, 2017.
20. Gill, Nikita. "The Ocean You." *Instagram,* 29 Jul 2018, www.instagram.com/p/BloKsZvnxZM/?hl=en. Accessed 9 Sept 2020.
21. Steinem, Gloria. "Address to the Women of America" (1971). *Great Speeches of the 20th Century,* Rhino, 2006.
22. Walker, Alice. "When You See Water." Alice Walker Poetry, www.alicewalkerpoetry.weebly.com/poetry.html. Accessed 9 Sept 2020.
23. Doolittle, Hilda. "The Flowering of the Rod." Oxford UP, 1946.
24. Chin, Staceyann: "All Oppression Is Connected." *YouTube,* uploaded by Rape Outcry, 12 Jul 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XfvZPG32-g. Accessed 9 Sept 2020.
25. Mistral, Gabriela. "Nocturno de la consumación." *Tala,* Losada, 2003.
26. Angelou, Maya. "Still I Rise." *And Still I Rise: A Book of Poems,* Random House, 1978.
27. Edwards, Kari. "[the day shifts . . .]" *Bharat jiva,* Litmus Press / Belladonna, 2009.
28. Dickinson, Emily. "They Shut Me Up in Prose." *Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson,* edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson, Little, Brown, and Co., 1935.
29. Spahr, Juliana. "Responding." *Response* (New American Poetry), Sun & Moon Press, 2000.
30. Mayer, Bernadette. "The Tragic Condition of the Statue of Liberty." *American Poetry Since 1970: Up Late,* Thunder's Mouth Press, 1990.
31. Torre, Monica de la. "$6.82." *Public Domain,* Roof Books, 2008.
32. Anzaldúa, Gloria. "To Live in the Borderlands." *Borderlands-La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
33. Kaur, Rupi. "Being Strong." *Milk and Honey,* Andrews McMeel, 2014.

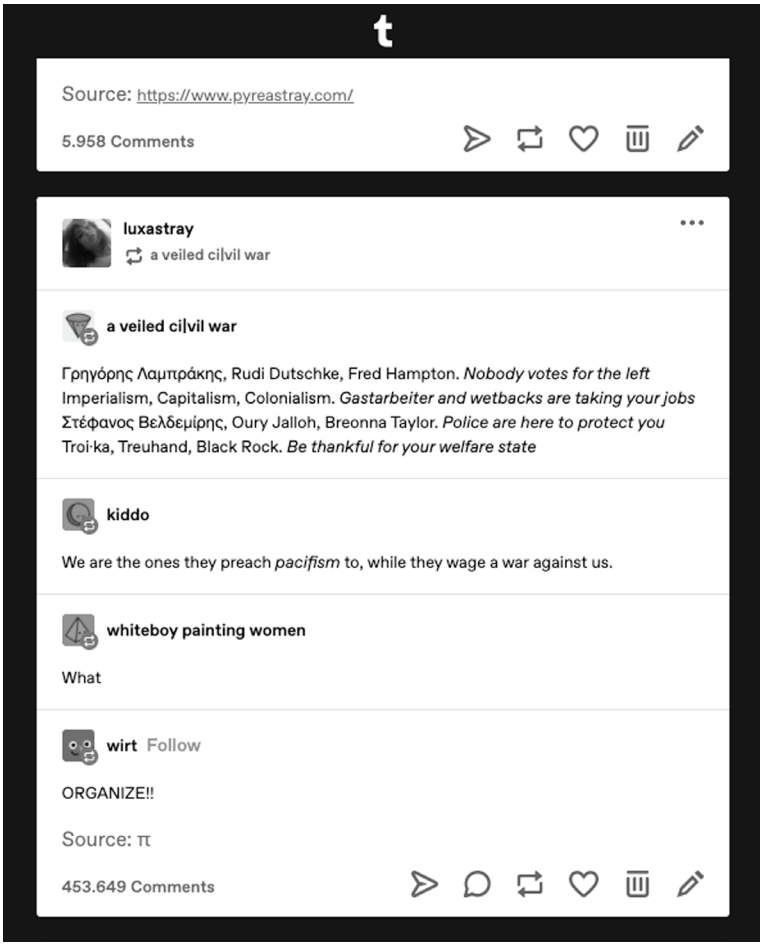
a *veiled* ci|vil war & Mammillaria

Penelope Kemekenidou

I am the child of Greek migrants. My parents came to Germany as teenagers, my mother with her family, my father alone, looking for work and of all things money, which, I was taught, was the only thing that could protect you. Become a doctor or a lawyer, take care of your family, because they are the only ones who will take care of you in return. On Saturdays there was a Greek school in Munich, where we were taught "history": A potpourri of Greek legends, plus a washed out version of the "Great No" against Mussolini. At the Greek and German school we were told fairy tales about democracy, instead of how the Greek bourgeoisie, together with the CIA, systematically murdered leftist resistance fighters, leaving Greece in the hands of a few collaborators who are among the most influential politicians and entrepreneurs of the country until today. German, Turkish, Greek children, we were taught to fear and distrust each other, rather than that our only chance to survive lies in organizing as the one working class that we are. My story is far from unique. Migrant children in a foreign society, alienated from their own past, where I am still not sure which one of the adults withheld it from us by choice, and who did not know it themselves, given that many of our parents arrived here at a young age, too, as children of the first "guest workers," like my mother. I am a socialist because my grandmother and my mother would have deserved a better life, and my sister does deserve a better future.

a *veiled* ci|vil war

Penelope Kemekenidou



Mammillaria

Penelope Kemekenidou

The cactus becomes soft, pale, needleless in a confined room. It continues to grow, seemingly without a concept, not knowing what to do with its energy, when there is enough water, enough warmth, but nothing else. An inedible, ever growing weed, alienated from sun, earth and purpose. The smell of the softened linoleum floor in the gymnasium is inseparably mixed with the sour smell of child sweat, a panic-stricken note soaked in obedience. The light accumulates at the top of the ceiling in the tilted, longitudinal windows. Sunbeams mixed with dust tell of an *outside* that you can't reach, just as you can't reach the rocker arms of the windows to open them. At school, the outside is imagined, no more real than the sun on the juice cartons, that all German children carry around with them. The cartons are stacked up in hundreds in the supermarkets, but unreal to me, *we don't buy this sugar slug,* it's not an option. I am an extra, the imitated life, they are the stage decor you don't pick up in a scene. "I want to be a veterinarian" says a girl, taking a sip out of the carton sun, her straight shiny hair caresses her shoulders like in the advertisements. My hair is coarse, dark and fuzzy, washed in the wrong water, dried in the wrong air. What's my future. They don't know I don't ask. I am standing mutely next to the juice boxes. The inventory is not dreaming, it is just standing there.

Spaces of Power: The Video Borderhole by Amber Bemak and Nadia Granados as a Queer-Feminist Critique of the U.S.-Mexico Border, Gendered Violence and the Media

Tonia Andresen

The following paper was developed in the course of the Where My Girls At Conference.[1] *Part of the research derives from my master's thesis titled "Globalisation and Gender: Border Spaces between the U.S. and Mexico in the films by Amber Bemak, Nadia Granados and Mika Rottenberg" (University of Hamburg 2020). I owe new insights into the topic to the Feminist No Borders Summer School (2020) organized by* FAC-*Feminist Autonomous Centre for Research, Athens.*

(Re)Presenting Border Spaces

My interest in the topic of border spaces as a *white*[2] European scholar in the field of art history is bound to my experiences working in Bolivia experiencing my own privileges as a *white* woman with a German passport while at the same time being burdened by the gender disparities produced by the patriarchal societies we live in. Speaking from this position, my interest was drawn to works that explicitly focus on the

1 Thank you to Megan Bosence, Bärbel Harju, and Amelie Starke for organizing the conference and putting together such a great and diverse program.

2 *white* is written in lower case and italics, following theorist and filmmaker Natasha A. Kelly, to refer to the privileged position. In contrast, Black is capitalized and used as an expression of a self-chosen socio-political positioning: "Black is always written with a capital 'B' (...), in order to break with the biologizing idea of (skin) colour and to express the social reality" (Kelly, *Afrokultur,* footnote p. 7; translation by Tonia Andresen). These are not descriptions of a phenotype, but inscriptions within the system of racism. Consequently, "Brown" is also written in capital letters. I use this term in reference to Granados, to make a distinction between her and the *white* body of Amber Bemak. The categories are to be understood as relational and describe the social position of the respective persons.

structural inequalities between the so-called global North and global South, the underlying power dynamics that structure and reproduce these relations, and how the border space, functioning as reinforcer and instigator of difference, is bound to the broader political and social contexts we live in. This paper focuses on the question of the artistical strategies used by the artists Amber Bemak and Nadia Granados to visualize such abstract dimensions and what these imply for a feminist art practice. The greatest thing about art is that it shows us that there are no simple answers but rather questions that lead to new questions which broaden our horizons.

The video *Borderhole* (2017, 14') is the result of a collaboration between the Colombian performance artist Nadia Granados and the U.S. filmmaker Amber Bemak. *Borderhole* does not provide a stringent narrative; scenes are put together fragmentarily, whereby certain places, such as the beach and the sea, occur repeatedly. Bemak and Granados integrate found footage, a shot from U.S. television, and sequences they filmed themselves. The protagonists are the two artists, but Granados' body is shown significantly more frequently than the *white* body of Bemak. It is the third collaboration between the artists, who began working together in 2013 with the short film *Airplane Dance* and continued in 2015 with *Tell Me When You Die.* The artists use a pictorial language that can be linked to aesthetics of the internet, above all YouTube-Clips and self-made videos that have become more and more influential concerning (re)presentation and the consumption of information in the last 15 years. Through the inclusion of this aesthetic, *Borderhole* visualizes one of today's dialectical relationships that can be interpreted as an effect of globalisation: the reinforcement of borders and the nation-state, which has become extremely obvious in the rise of right-wing parties, combined with the usage of new media which creates the feeling of a borderless world. *Borderhole* works with fragmented pictures that the viewers have to assemble on their own to generate meaning. This strategy counteracts a contemplative spectator attitude and calls for an in-depth analysis of the images shown. As *Borderhole* deals with the discursive and political aspects of the U.S.-Mexican border, an intensive examination of the video leads to an understanding of this complex situation.

The representation of the border between Mexico and the United States in *Borderhole* runs counter to common visualization strategies, which usually show the border fence, stage it monumentally, or—with reference to Claire F. Fox' analyses (1995)—depict the region of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo. In contrast, Bemak and Granados construct a fictitious border space between Colombia and the U.S., but use the image of the U.S.-Mexico border. The 'real border' is only shown for a short second and in the form of a photograph, depicting the border as a yellow line that cuts through the landscape. Meanwhile the border between Colombia and the U.S. appears as a *green border,* a forest area equipped with sensors and surveillance cameras. The representation of the border as fictitious in combination with the reference to its real existence illustrates a specific understanding of border spaces. In this context, the border functions not only as a physical barrier, but also as a complex and discursive apparatus of political decisions, international laws and internal conflicts, kept alive by border controls and the construction of walls. Its fictitious moment does not mean that it does not have tangible effects on a population but refers to 'fiction' in the sense of a discursive process of production, which works on a cultural level and manifests itself concretely in the surveillance and armament of spaces. The border in *Borderhole* consists of sensors and surveillance cameras and thus constructs a border region on a piece of forest that at first glance seems rather unspectacular. The supervising and punishing authorities are invisible, the subjects *hypervisible* – a panoptical arrangement in Foucauldian terms. This is made tangible through the usage of different camera angles that depict the scene: the surveillance camera perspective (fig. 1) is intercut with scenes filmed from an 'objective' perspective, which means that the scene is shown from the observer's point of view. Another layer is added through the incorporation of media, such as the voice of ex-judge Janine Pirro from a commentary on *Fox News* referring to the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015) while Granados tries to reach the top of a huge rock. Her statements recall a friend-enemy discourse, producing differentiations between 'them' (the terrorists) and 'us' (the defenders of the nation), leaving no space for anything in between: "They are either with us or against us" (qtd. in Nelson). Detached from

its original context, the statement leads to a recontextualization, revealing the political power of discourse.

Fig. 1 *Borderhole* 2017 © Amber Bemak & Nadia Granados

Borderhole does not stage the border as an overpowering entity, but rather extends it to several places. French philosopher Étienne Balibar speaks of "inner" or "invisible borders" (78). These inner or invisible borders can always be traced back to the physical border; both are mutually dependent. They do not disappear at the moment of crossing, but extend far into the interior of a country. By only briefly depicting the U.S.-Mexico border once and in the form of an aerial photograph, Bemak and Granados allow the border to recede in its massive physical reality. At the same time, this makes the spectators all the more aware of it as an inner or invisible border whose real political effects are fragmentarily put together. The border appears as an expandable and constructed power space that structures and influences the relations of the entire population. The border region not only affects the countries directly involved – the U.S. and Mexico – but the whole of the Americas, especially North and Central America, and becomes clear in its "*world configuring* function" (Balibar 79), as an instigator of difference between the Western world and the global South.

Gender, the Media and Institutionalized Violence

An image that repeatedly appears in *Borderhole* and is already named in the title of the video: the hole. We see the artists digging holes on the beach or in the forest. The word 'hole' can be used to describe an unsightly or unpleasant dark and dirty place. It is also used in a

derogatory manner for vagina. The first scene in *Borderhole* generates an impressive image: Granados and Bemak stand on a beach in two large, empty metal trash cans (fig. 2). Around them are other garbage cans filled with rubbish. The spectator sees the artists from behind. When the artists bend forward, their backsides and pubic area become visible, only covered by transparent tights. They wear golden high heels; otherwise they are naked. Since the title *Borderhole* appears in the moment when the view of Granados' and Bemak's genitals becomes clear, the meaning of 'hole' as the sex organ becomes particularly obvious. Here, the skin can be read as the body's boundary, the sex organ as the 'entrance' that makes the crossing possible. The title establishes a connection between border, body, and gender on several levels.

Fig. 2 *Borderhole* 2017 © Amber Bemak & Nadia Granados

Throughout the video, the bodies of the artists play an important role. The nudity underlines the body's defencelessness and vulnerability while simultaneously emphasizing its sexual aspects. Furthermore, the transparent tights and the golden high heels are both garments that can be interpreted as 'traditional' signs of femininity and arouse associations of women working in the entertainment, adult, or service industry. Scene 2 follows, in which Granados lies under a black plastic bag amidst the garbage on the beach (fig. 3). This presentation evokes associations with violence against migrant women, the murder cases in Ciudad Juárez, or crimes in the context of drug cartels. In most cases, these persons remain invisible as individuals and are only remembered as bodies, as a number of statistics publicly communicated through the media. By becoming a pure body, emptied of all subjectivity, sexualized, naked and vulnerable, women lose all value in a patriarchal society.

Fig. 3 *Borderhole* 2017 © Amber Bemak & Nadia Granados

It is noteworthy that in all the scenes in which the body is exposed to a threat or appears as dead, Granados assumes the pose. We see her running naked from a car barefoot on a big street, trying to climb a rock, in a demolished building, and dying in the end scene with a plastic strap on her neck while she's being pushed under water. As there are hardly any individual traits of her figure, she can be read as embodying the migrant and Brown female body. In contrast, Amber Bemak's body functions as an example of the social position of a *white* body that possesses privileges. Both women are exposed to the objectifying gazes of the spectators – this becomes especially visible in the scenes in which Granados and Bemak dance together in front of a webcam – both are linked to sexuality and the animal because of their physicality. The displayed objectification, sexualization and association of the female body with nature connects the two women in their oppression and implies the female body's difference to the male subject. This 'character of difference' is metaphorically brought into the picture by the nudity of the two artists. But *Borderhole* also makes it very clear that the border has different effects on the women's bodies: it is the racialized body that is persecuted and must fear for its life.

Fig. 4 *Borderhole* 2017 © Amber Bemak & Nadia Granados

Another layer is added through the implication of a romantic relationship between the artists: the spectators see them kissing or caressing each other. While Granados and Bemak dance and present themselves to an imaginary audience in the webcam scene, their queerness is linked to violence and associations of violence in two other scenes. The bodies released for consumption and presented in front of the camera/webcam play a role assigned to them in the logic of the patriarchal structure and do not have to fear for their safety. The moment the female homosexuality answers the gaze by asking "Do you want to see us now?" (Fig. 4) and no longer presents itself as a pure object of consumption, in its private form, it negates the order that sets heteronormativity as the basis of social coexistence. The border space is a symbol for the exercise of state power and the nation that is to be defended and protected. It materializes itself not only in economic and political processes, but also in the production of specific subject constitutions. Heterosexuality becomes a decisive factor for obtaining citizenship. Homosexuality was considered a legitimate reason for rejection at the U.S. border until the passing of the *Immigration Act of 1990*. Appearance and language became the most important indicators whether a person was inspected on suspicion of homosexuality or allowed to cross the border. This process is linked to specific visual codes that construct and define homosexual subjectivities and at the same time reproduce traditional images of masculinity and femininity (Luibheid 106-133). Queer identities and citizenship are closely linked – both statuses are established and legitimized by the state. Through the mode of governance, gender becomes the core of modern subjectivity as a dichotomous structure whose 'true signs' are

the female or male body, hence its genitals. This applies as well to the categories of race and class, which are also bound to certain aspects of physical constitution. Granados and Bemak negotiate the "cultural weight of the genitals" (Hoenes 103), especially that of the vulva in relation to processes of citizenship and the construction of affiliations. The devaluation and violence to which Granados is subjected reflects the differences between *white* women and women of colour. Appearance is shown as the most important distinguishing feature and symbol of belonging, connected to processes of subjectivation and the influence of the state on them. The elimination and/or exclusion of certain groups of people play a decisive role in the construction of citizenship. Access to the latter goes hand in hand with gendering processes in which heterosexuality and the reproduction of the nation become a fundamental requirement.

Questions of Representation and Objectification

There are various scenes in *Borderhole* where Granados' body is objectified through the mode of filming. In particular, the images of her lying on the beach under the black trash bag and running from a car or being pushed under water can be read as playing out the stereotype of the defenceless migrant woman who is solely defined through her status as a victim. Putting themselves into a trash can, bending forward and becoming a pure body, generates strong images that have shocking effects on the viewers. Through the incorporation of media images and the different camera angles that resemble the webcam, the security camera, and the movie camera, the spectators find themselves constantly in a voyeuristic position. By referring to a collective pictorial consciousness formed through media, Bemak and Granados question the underlying power structures that lead to the objectification of marginalized and female bodies. The images are not a simplistic repetition or appropriation but rather a recontextualization of photographs and pictures that the spectators know from newspapers, videos, and television. Furthermore, the bodies do not refer to an individual person; the faces of Bemak and Granados are rarely seen, but, as I argued in the previous section, can be interpreted as resembling social positions in a society built on *white* supremacy, heteronormativity, capitalism, and other

hegemonic paradigms. Linking them to the political and economic relations between Colombia and the U.S. draws attention to the question of which role the objectification and the usage of a friend-enemy discourse plays in the creation of subjectivities that become excluded in the logic of state power and the sake of the 'to be defended' nation.

The stillness of Granados' body is reminiscent of former ethnographic regimes, the *white* gaze on the colonized body, and brings a whole history of oppression into the picture. Artworks have played an especially important role in (re)producing objectifying gazes concerning female bodies, transforming the *white* female nude into an image of ideal beauty while the Black female nude was mainly used to distinguish it from the *white* one or depict it as a servant/sexualized Other (Lavallee 77-97). Who has the power to (re)present whom? To strip someone of their right to representation transforms them into a screen of projection, revealing more about the gazing entity than the actual person shown. Visibility does not equal power; rather the 'over-visibility' of the naked, sexualized and racialized woman codifies her as object to be looked at, deprived of her own subjectivity. To underscore this status, Bemak and Granados use aesthetics of women working in the adult and/or sex industry. The connection between sex work and female objectification evokes critical concerns from the standpoint of the individuals carrying out this form of work. Turning to the structural conditions that push sex work to the margins of societal acceptance, the sex worker can also be read as "the conjunction between the sexual (Freudian) and the economic (Marxist) fetish, as well as the condensation of commodity and spectacle" (Bryan-Wilson 87). She is the "ur-form of wage labourer, selling herself in order to survive" (Buck-Morss 184), while constantly being negated in her status as worker by society. It seems as if depicting the aesthetics of sex work hints more towards the topic of female labour and its constant devaluation. This can be seen in the case of maquiladora workers in Ciudad Juárez. Mainly single women from Mexican rural sites migrate to the city in order to survive economically and/or support their families back home. While El Paso, Ciudad Juárez' sister city on the U.S. side, is a rather calm city with low homicide rates, Ciudad Juárez unfortunately became famous for its high numbers of femicides. Melissa W. Wright connects the murders to the economic

and social status of the Mexican maquila worker, who exemplifies stereotypes and role expectations of 'the' Mexican woman: "In the tale of turnover told by maquila administrators, the Mexican woman assumes the form of variable capital whose worth fluctuates from a status of value to one of waste" (185). In the logic of capital, the worker has only value in so far as her labor creates added value for the company or factory. The murdered women who, similar to Granados, are buried in the desert, the outskirts of town, or disposed of in rubbish bins, are only to be understood in the context of a general devaluation. Like the dead migrants who tried to reach the U.S. through the desert, they are rarely identified and their cases are rarely properly investigated. They only become visible as a number – as statistics rather than by their individual stories.

Final Remarks

Through the appropriation of an aesthetic that resembles media images, Bemak and Granados intervene and disrupt their normality, demasking their entanglement in the production of hierarchies and stereotypes of racialized and female bodies. 'Order' literally becomes subverted through the scenes that do not form a stringent narrative; rather, they can be described as rhizomatic. Thought further, this also counteracts views of history as a linear process (of 'progress'). Referring to the internet, which is alluded to in the webcam scenes, Bemak and Granados connect popular media to the construction of gendered and racialized identities and its upholding of certain image-regimes that then form a collective pictorial consciousness in the spectators/consumers. Here, the artists question the role the media plays in the construction of knowledge, especially through the repetitive usage of images. Furthermore, Bemak and Granados make it clear that a feminist intervention concerning border spaces needs to address gender from an intersectional framework that considers categories such as race, class, sexual orientation, and locality to grasp the functioning of the border space as an instigator of difference and power. In this context, gender must be used as a fundamental category of analysis in order to adequately address the topics depicted by the artists. The construction of gendered identities is shown as connected to the wider political frameworks we

live in. The queer-feminist potential lies not only in the topics that the video deals with but also in the appropriation and subversion of images, that can be also be read as an attempt to fail the gender performance by producing gaps in the cis-heteronormative image-regime. The act of questioning images and the underlying power structures that are stabilized through them appears as a feminist artistic strategy to visualize and critique hegemonic structures. Bemak and Granados show that a queer-feminist intervention is not only about gendered bodies but one that unfolds all the connected and intertwined systems of oppression that we live in.

Works Cited

Balibar, Étienne. *Politics and the Other Scene.* Verso, 2002.

Bryan-Wilson, Julia. "Dirty Commerce: Art Work and Sex Work since the 1970s." *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies,* vol. 23, no. 2, 2012, pp. 70-112.

Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project.* MIT Press, 1989.

Fox, Claire F. "The Fence and the River: Representations of the US-Mexico Border in Art and Video." *Discourse,* vol. 18, no. 1, 1995, pp. 54-83.

Hoenes, Josch. "Das kulturelle Gewicht der Genitalien. Streifzüge durch die TransGenital Landscapes von Del LaGrace Volcano." *Queer as...: Kritische Heteronormativitätsforschung aus interdisziplinärer Perspektive,* edited by Barbara Paul and Lüder Tietz, Transcript, 2016, pp. 103-126.

Kelly, Natasha A. *Afrokultur.* Unrast Verlag, 2016.

Lavallee, Zoey. "What's Wrong with the (White) Female Nude?" *The Polish Journal of Aesthetics,* vol. 41, no. 2, 2016, pp. 77-97.

Luibheid, Eithne. "'Looking Like a Lesbian': The Organization of Sexual Monitoring at the United States-Mexican Border." *Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands,* edited by Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella, Duke UP, 2007, pp. 106-133.

Sara C. Nelson. "Fox News Host Jeanine Pirro: Muslims 'Need To Kill All Radical Islamists.'" *Huffington Post UK*, 13 Jan 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/01/13/fox-news-host-jeanine-pirro-islamic-terror-rant-we-need-to-kill-them_n_6461328.html. Accessed 7 Oct 2020.

Wright, Melissa W. "The Dialectics of Still Life: Murder, Women, and Maquiladoras." *Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*, edited by Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella, Duke UP, 2007, pp. 184-202.

#ApsáalookeFeminist: Space and Representation in the Art of Wendy Red Star

Melissa Schlecht

In 2019, the Minneapolis Institute of Art presented the first major thematic exhibition of female Indigenous[1] artists in the United States. Titled *Hearts of Our People*, it explored the significant role of Indigenous women artists who have long been misrepresented by patriarchal Eurocentric art histories and criticism. Although a significant amount of Indigenous North American art has been created by women, their work was overlooked due to their status as "untrained" artisans (Ahlberg Yohe 15). While the names of many Indigenous male artists are recognized and often valorized for their sacred and individualistic pieces, the word "anonymous" has tended to signify 'woman' in Indigenous art history (Berlo and Philipps 49). Nowadays, a new generation of Indigenous women artists work toward a discursive shift away from the taxonomic approach of generalizing Indigenous art objects by women as a quotidian craft and toward a new acknowledgement of the female artistic self. A prominent member of this generation is Wendy Red Star, an Apsáalooke artist who challenges art history's predominantly male, white gaze in her photography – a genre which, historically, contributed to the trivialization and debasement of the Indigenous woman as a fetishized object. The artist uses the medium of photography as a counter-hegemonic means of subverting the construction of Indigenous American stereotypes in the imagery of the Western[2] world.

1 In this paper, the term "Indigenous" is deployed as a reference to the descendants of first inhabitants of the Americas. Moreover, individual persons and groups will be referred to by their tribal ethnic identity. As Michael Yellow Bird suggests, the term "Indigenous Peoples" will be capitalized to signify the political sovereignty and cultural heterogeneity of these groups (2).

2 As Kerstin Knopf points out, the term 'Western' is highly controversial due to its connection to European classical culture, Christianity, modern Enlightenment, and liberal democracy that shaped European civilizations and settler colonialism (179). In this paper,

Hence, this paper examines Red Star's photographic oeuvre from her early art pieces to one of her recent works, *Apsáalooke Feminist* (2016), in which she confronts the observers with their own gaze and reflects upon various constructions of Indigenous and female spaces.

In the decades following the American Civil War, photography became a new medium to deliver impressions from the frontier and to produce stereotypical images of Indigenous Americans. Photographers on geographic expeditions, adventurers and scientists were agents through which the world could discover unknown territory, with a significant impact on the portrayal of Indigenous Peoples (Bell 86). Many of the familiar tropes of "the" Indigenous American are grounded in those early images and continue to perpetuate generalizations today. Photographs have always been treated as visual evidence, generating a "mythical aura of neutrality" (Sekula 87) which is at the core of the hegemonic production of common Indigenous American tropes and the creation of the colonial 'Other.' The medium did not only serve as a means to identify, classify and control Indigenous communities, but also to emphasize their lack of technological achievements in relation to Western notions of progress, thereby depicting them as a vanishing race (Bell 88). The camera as a sign of progress became "a sublimation of the gun," which, according to Susan Sontag, "turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed […], to photograph someone is a subliminal murder" (14).

Among the photographs that were of particular interest for the non-Indigenous society were depictions of Indigenous women. In many of those works, women were portrayed as seminudes in postures reminiscent of academic painting, and, as Aleta Ringlero has shown, of European pornographic photography (188). Conservative attitudes towards profanity in the United States resulted in the Customs Act of 1842, a law against the import of erotica from Europe. Since early American photography was not perceived as art, but as a medium of science and knowledge, photographic images of uncovered women allowed a double legitimization – as a form of knowledge, and as science, without

this term will be used as a designation of Eurocentric cultural, intellectual and political paradigms and practices.

the impression of pornography (191). Created in the guise of scientific interest, these images are evidence of the exploitation and epistemic violence Indigenous American women have endured since first contact.

While the medium of photography significantly contributed to the stereotyping of Indigenous cultures, Indigenous Americans began to use the camera themselves at the end of the 19th century, aiming at correcting these stereotypical images constructed by the Western world. Female Indigenous photographers have specifically sought to regain 'visual sovereignty' over their portrayal, a term coined by the Tuscacora scholar and artist Jolene Rickard (51), in order to re-imagine Indigenous spaces. This topic has also pervaded the work of Wendy Red Star since the beginning of her career in 2006. For example, the series *Four Seasons* (2006) was inspired by the artist's frequent visits to the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County as a way of dealing with her homesickness, as she explained in an interview with Ian Berry and Rebecca McNamara: "And I know that sounds messed up, and it is messed up, but I knew the one place that I could find anything of my community would be in the Natural History Museum" (Berry and McNamara 49). Wendy Red Star grew up on the Apsáalooke reservation in Montana, but left her home to study at Montana State University, Bozeman, and at UCLA, where she received an MFA in sculpture. At the Natural History Museum, she was confronted with the irritating curatorial decision to present the Indigenous galleries right after the paleo-anthropological department, conveying the impression of a sequence of extinction. The exhibition presented Indigenous life as frozen actions in dioramas, not only perpetuating the trope of the vanishing race, but embodying discursive constructions of "the Other" (Zittlau 177).

Four single images show Red Star sitting in front of photographic panoramas of the Western landscape, commercially produced in the 1970s. During her visits to the museum, she observed that the dioramas' spaces were reminiscent of the landscapes in Montana, but again presented Indigenous life as situated in the past. In *Four Seasons,* the outdated imagery of Red Star's backgrounds points at the inaccuracy and superannuated design of museum dioramas as remnants of a long obsolete curatorial practice. As in her piece *Spring,* the artificial character of the backgrounds is intensified through the super-saturation

color, and the use of cardboard stand-ups and inflatable animals. Red Star is surrounded by plastic flowers and Astroturf and wears a traditional elk-tooth dress, an important status symbol among Apsáalooke women. According to the artist, this dress is of great importance for her artworks since it specifically symbolizes Crow womanhood and Red Star's connection to her female ancestors (Red Star, "The Elk-Tooth Dress" 141). The Apsáalooke are a matrilineal culture, which means that Apsáalooke women do not only receive their clan affiliation from their mother, but occupy a more powerful position in their families than men (Medicine Crow 5). For Wendy Red Star, whose mother is of Irish American descent, her paternal grandmother Amy Bright Wings Red Star – an accomplished seamstress of Crow regalia – is her personal link to the Apsáalooke (Mentzer 8). The elk-tooth dress serves as a constant reminder of her ancestors' rich material culture and as a representation of the continuous female artistic power among Apsáalooke women. By dressing herself in her grandmother's way, Wendy Red Star not only accentuates the transgenerational perspectives of female Indigenous art, but also functions as the only living and authentic Indigenous component within the photographic dioramas of *Four Seasons.* Thereby, the series elaborates on the system of cultural hierarchy inherent in the exhibition of Indigenous life. One culture's gaze at the other reveals a hegemonic system which defines and limits Indigenous spaces as situated in the past. The glassed-in character of dioramas does not only enable the viewer to gaze at an Indigenous subject, but allows the Indigenous subject to stare back – confined to the inaccurate construction of their culture by the dominant society. The title *Four Seasons* is a clear reference to one of European art history's most recognizable motifs, which thematizes the relationship between humans and the natural world. Red Star plays with the romanticized idea of Indigenous Americans being one with nature by using exaggeration, irony, and humor as stylistic means – a strategy she identifies as deeply Apsáalooke (Red Star, "Essay" 372).

This approach is also perceptible in Wendy Red Star's work *The Last Thanks,* created in 2006, whose title and composition are a further reference to one of Western art history's most famous works: Leonardo da Vinci's Renaissance mural *The Last Supper* (1495–98). It shows an iconic

scene of betrayal and thereby provides the basis for Red Star's reflection upon the first Thanksgiving and the legacy of conquest. The artist positions herself behind a picnic table in the center of her photograph, imitating the exact posture of Leonardo's Jesus. As in *Four Seasons,* Red Star is wearing her elk-tooth dress and a traditional feathered Apsáalooke headdress – the artist's regalia serves as a strong contrast to the fake headgear of the skeletons on either side of her, representing the cultural loss suffered by generations of Indigenous Peoples.

Some of the skeletons cover their eyes and mouth as a reaction to what they see on the picnic table and beyond: highly processed food such as Wonder Bread and canned green beans, which are cheap and easy to swallow. In an interview with Chuck Thompson, Red Star explains that this food was everything she ate as a child at her Apsáalooke grandmother's house, pointing to the financial hardship of Apsáalooke families living on the reservation (Thompson). To Red Star's heraldic right side, we see a scattered pile of cigarette boxes, *American Spirits,* with the misappropriated emblem of a smoking Indigenous American. Behind her, a grotesque, inflatable turkey with a pilgrim's hat sits at the table, a popular party decoration for Thanksgiving – literally full of hot air. The objects and products surrounding the artist emphasize the ongoing Euro-American practices of appropriation and the commercialization of Indigenous cultures: powerful forms of cultural imperialism, which actively exploit and oppress Indigenous Peoples. Red Star's answer to this persistent threat lies in her use of composition and space in *The Last Thanks* as she occupies the central position of the savior as a female Indigenous artist.

Moreover, Red Star consciously deploys spatial strategies of early modern women artists and Indigenous photographers to comment on the cultural construction of colonial spaces. In *The Last Thanks,* this becomes evident in the position of the table. While in Leonardo's work the table is fully visible, Red Star's table occupies the whole lower image space, and thus creates a border between the artist and the viewer. This approach is strongly reminiscent of Mary Cassatt (1844–1926) and Berthe Morisot's (1841–1895) use of objects to define spaces of femininity, thoroughly exemplified by Griselda Pollock. In Cassatt's and Morisot's work, furniture, fences and balustrades emphasize the female con-

finement to the private realm, shielded from the outside world (Pollock 62). In Red Star's work, I interpret the border as a reflection upon its double function: on the one hand, it represents the limitations of Indigenous spaces, as already discussed in *Four Seasons;* on the other hand, it protects the Indigenous space from any outside intruder – in this case the viewer. Red Star thereby confronts the non-Indigenous observers with their own privileged position – and their role in the maintenance of a discriminatory system. This dynamic certainly changes for Indigenous viewers who do not identify with the role of the intruder, but who may find themselves participating in Red Star's dinner. Again, the spatial strategies perform a double function, depending on who is looking. For the Indigenous observers, the table cut off on both sides conveys the impression of a limited field of view, similar to the perspective of someone sitting at a large table.

Red Star's use of spatial strategies of early modern women artists, like the deconstruction of art-historical traditions of geometric perspective, is also apparent in one of her more recent works, *Apsáalooke Feminist,* created in 2016. In this series, the artist portrays herself with her daughter Beatrice, both dressed in traditional Apsáalooke garments, emphasizing again the transgenerational aspect of her work. Mother and daughter are sitting on a couch in varying postures, in front of a psychedelic wallpaper. In all of the four single images of the series, Red Star and Beatrice stare at a shared focal point outside the pictorial sphere – the viewer. Their elevated position, as well as the location of the couch, reveal the observer's position in an imaginary television outside the image sphere. This inversion of traditional perceptions of the art-historical gaze exemplifies a reversal of power dynamics: the observer becomes the observed and experiences the unpleasant feeling of being reduced to a medium, of literally being looked down upon.

A similar strategy can be found in Mary Cassatt's *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* (1878). Here, the viewpoint from which the scene has been painted is also very low, which lets the chairs appear larger. It seems as if the viewer observes the scene from the perspective of another child, surrounded by upholstered obstacles (Pollock 65). Cassatt's painting is celebrated for its reflection upon the social constraints of a child in an adult world, but also for its informal depiction of girlhood – the

child lingering on the sofa, unobserved by adults. In *Apsáalooke Feminist,* Red Star portrays her daughter Beatrice as a smiling, playful child, unaware yet of her marginalized status as a female Indigenous person. This contrast can be seen in her mother's facial expression: her stern, focused gaze upon the recipient. This series is not only a negation of the colonial, but also the male gaze Indigenous women have to endure. Moreover, the artwork is connected to a hashtag Wendy Red Star created: #ApsáalookeFeminist, which raises awareness for Indigenous women in the digital space and within the feminist movement. As Red Star states in an article with Morgan Mentzer, Indigenous Peoples have "to deal with some of the same dilemmas that other women are experiencing as well. There's sexism – women are limited to certain things" (Mentzer 8).

Therefore, Wendy Red Star's approach to space, evocative of paintings by early Euro-American women artists, is not surprising, considering her constant play with the Eurocentric art-historical canon. After all, she treats those artworks with the same disrespect Indigenous cultures experienced over centuries: she uses the Western canon whenever she needs it and is not reluctant to manipulate and ridicule its most iconic tropes and motifs in order to subvert colonial power structures and decolonize Indigenous visual spaces. Cassatt and Morisot were certainly not the only women artists who used spatial strategies to thematize space and representation in their work. Among them is also the Cherokee photographer Jenny Ross Cobb (1881–1959) who is considered the earliest known female Indigenous photographer in the United States (Meredith 115). She was a student of the Cherokee Female Seminary, one of the first institutions of higher learning exclusively for Indigenous women. Even though Cobb was an amateur photographer, she employed unusual compositions of receding and limited space in her images, as America Meredith observes (115). This becomes evident in her photograph *Cherokee Female Seminary Graduating Class* of 1902, portraying a group of young women standing in front of their Alma Mater. By arranging the young women on the left side of the picture, Cobb uses a post to create distance between the viewer and the subject. Dressed in fashionable clothing and proud of their achievements, ready to start a new phase of their lives, these female students appear as a

living resistance against the contemporary notions of Indigenous Peoples as a vanishing race. Cobb supports this impression by using a barbwire fence to draw the viewer's gaze to the Cherokee Female Seminary – and its revolutionary role for the education of young Indigenous women.

In her photographs, Wendy Red Star draws inspiration from powerful sources of female artistic creation, both from her Apsáalooke heritage as well as from works by women artists and photographers, to generate forms of counter-hegemonic practice. Since only parts of Red Star's photographic oeuvre could be analyzed within the scope of this paper, there is a wide array of research questions concerning the artist's work that still need to be examined. Especially the use of space in her recent multimedia artworks and installations is of great interest to learn more about Wendy Red Star's approach to intersectional feminist criticism, as an exploration of concurrent patterns of oppression against Indigenous women. In this context, the artist's use of social media constitutes a further field of investigation. Next to her hashtag #ApsáalookeFeminist, Red Star uses Instagram as a visual resource to gather historically and culturally specific information on Apsáalooke women, both as a source of education for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Instagram users. In late August 2020, Red Star created a collaborative Instagram-account, itchick_baatchaachik, to present and discuss numerous sources of Apsáalooke knowledge in the digital realm. Thereby, she occupies and constructs a positive space of Indigenous representation in a relatively new medium, allowing Indigenous voices to be heard on a larger scale (Beck). Not only her work as an artist, but also as a curator of several contemporary Indigenous art exhibitions, among others at the Missoula Art Museum in 2017, offers further insights into her strategies to support Indigenous positions in the contemporary art world and to highlight the challenges of Indigenous women both from historical and contemporary perspectives.

Works Cited

Ahlberg Yohe, Jill. "Introduction." *Hearts of our People: Native Women Artists,* edited by Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Teri Greeves, U of Washington P, 2019, pp. 12-27.

Beck, Abaki. "Decolonizing Photography: A Conversation with Wendy Red Star." *Aperture,* 14 Dec. 2016, www.aperture.org/blog/wendy-red-star/. Accessed 13 Jul 2020.

Bell, Morgan F. "Some Thoughts on 'Taking' Pictures: Imaging 'Indians' and the Counter- Narratives of Visual Sovereignty." *Great Plains Quarterly,* vol. 31, no. 2, 2011, pp. 85-104.

Berlo, Janet C. and Ruth B. Philipps. "'Encircles Everything': A Transformative History of Native Women's Art." *Hearts of our People: Native Women Artists,* edited by Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Teri Greeves, U of Washington P, 2019, pp. 43-73.

Berry, Ian and McNamara, Rebecca. "Wendy Red Star on Dioramas and Representations of Native Culture." *Accelerate: Access & Inclusion at The Tang Teaching Museum,* no.2, edited by Ian Berry and Rebecca McNamara, The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2018, pp. 48-52.

Bird, Michael Yellow. "What We Want to Be Called: Indigenous Peoples' Perspectives on Racial and Ethnic Identity Labels." *American Indian Quarterly,* vol. 23, no. 2, 1999, pp. 1-21.

Knopf, Kerstin. "The Turn Toward the Indigenous: Knowledge Systems and Practices in the Academy." *Amerikastudien / American Studies,* vol. 60, no. 2/3, 2015, pp. 179-200.

Medicine Crow, Joseph. *From the Heart of the Crow Country: The Crow Indians Own Story.* Crown, 1992.

Mentzer, Morgan. "Wendy Red Star. Owning Your Power." *NEA Arts Magazine,* no. 1, 2018, pp. 7-10, www.arts.gov/*NEARTS*/2018v1-women-arts-galvanizing encouraginginspiring/wendy-red-star. Accessed 15 Jul 2020.

Meredith, America. "Jennie Ross Cobb: Cherokee Female Seminary Graduating Class, 1902." *Hearts of our People: Native Women Artists,* edited by Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Teri Greeves, U of Washington P, 2019, pp. 114-15.

Pollock, Griselda. *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art.* Routledge, 1988.

Red Star, Wendy. "Essay." *The Artist as Culture Producer: Living and Sustaining a Creative Life,* edited by Sharon Louden, Intellect, 2017, pp. 368-75.

Red Star, Wendy. "The Elk-Tooth Dress". *Hearts of our People: Native Women Artist,* edited by Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Teri Greeves, U of Washington P, 2019, pp. 140-41.

Rickard, Jolene, et al. "Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand." *Aperture,* no. 139, 1995, pp 50-9.

Ringlero, Aleta M. "Prairie Pinups: Reconsidering Historic Portraits of American Indian Women." *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self,* edited by Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis, Abrams, 2003, pp. 182-97.

Sekula, Allan. "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning." *Thinking Photography,* edited by Victor Burgin, Palgrave MacMillan, 1982, pp. 84-109.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. Penguin Books, 1979.

Thompson, Chuck. "Wendy Red Star and the Indigenous Voice." *Cowboys and Indians*, 25 Jan 2018, www.cowboysindians.com/2018/01/wendy-red-star and-the-indigenous-voice/. Accessed 18 Jul 2020.

Zittlau, Andrea. "Dreamlands of Culture: Ethnographic Dioramas and their Prospects." *Embodiments of Cultural Contact,* edited by Sebastian Jobs and Gesa Mackenthun. Waxmann, 2011, pp. 161-79.

Come on, Barbie, Let's Go Dismantle the Patriarchy! A Radical Feminist Critique of Barbie's YouTube Vlogs

Laura Purdy

Think of feminist activists. Barbie is certainly not the trailblazer who first springs to mind. The impact of Barbie on the individual may vary from generation to generation. Experiences may include solidifying body expectations, doll-play based on career and lifestyle aspirations, or simply a form of entertainment. As digital natives, the current generation of young people are experiencing Barbie in a unique way which relies heavily on digitalization and online platforms. Nowadays, Barbie has more power than ever to influence her own narrative. Instead of individuals having authorship over their Barbie dolls' personalities and ideals, Barbie's digital presence gives her a platform to propel a narrative of her own, which seems to be that of a liberal feminist. This article will discuss how Barbie has come to represent neo-liberal feminism with post-feminist sentiments.[1] I will be focusing on Barbie's digital presence through her YouTube vlogs and assessing them through a radical feminist perspective. I will do this by contextualizing Barbie's involvement, or lack thereof, with social justice causes throughout her metamorphosis from brand to figure to concept. This is necessary for understanding the motives for Barbie's politicization and increased online presence. My findings demonstrate how Barbie's vlogs are more useful in maintaining the status quo than they are in dismantling the patriarchy. My conclusion, though, will offer a speculative analysis of how the vlogs' interpretation could be progressive in the long run if met with other variables.

1 By post-feminism I am referring to the idea that all gender equality issues have been resolved and that success or failure is a consequence of an individual's actions, not the product of systematic barriers.

Patriarchy, capitalism, and whiteness play central and interdependent roles in upholding U.S society. These three structures have been likened to the Chimera, a fearful three-headed beast in Greek mythology: the Chimera's lion, horned goat, and dragon heads are interpreted as symbols for patriarchy, capitalism, and whiteness (Montoya 873). Barbie is simultaneously a product of capitalism and facilitator of its continuance, encouraging children (and subsequently adults) to consume directly within the realm of Barbie but also in the real world. Marilyn Ferris Motz claims that Barbie teaches her owner that happiness is a consequence of looking a certain way and owning certain items (128). Further, by encouraging consumers to look a certain way, Barbie serves to perpetuate whiteness by coding beauty and success as white. Although advocates for the doll may claim that later 'multicultural' versions of Barbie eradicate this coded whiteness, the unrelenting sameness of these dolls "are at once a symbol of what multiculturalism has become at the hands of contemporary commodity culture: an easy and immensely profitable way off the hook of Eurocentrism that gives us the face of cultural diversity without the particulars of racial difference" (duCille 269).

After over sixty years of damaging ramifications derivative from Barbie's sphere of influence, it is difficult to imagine positive initiatives involving Barbie that aim to critique the gender norms and expectations she embodies. However, despite Mattel Inc.'s multiple lawsuits against those who appropriate the Barbie image, from artists, to Nissan (Reuters), to the band Aqua (Mattel, Inc. v. MCA Records, Inc.), the most radical and personal transformations of Barbie continue to exist outside of the official Mattel Inc. Barbie discourse. For instance, the documentary style film *Barbie Nation* depicts doll owners adapting their Barbies to fulfil their imaginary visions of doll-play; middle-school workshops moderate children's and adults' engagements with Barbie (Collins 102); and artists and activists use Barbie for social justice causes (Harold 198). One of the most recent feminist uses of Barbie positions her as a supplementary prop to existing works in galleries. In 2016, Sarah Williams created the *Feminist Museum Hack* as "an aesthetic pedagogy of possibility that encourages visual literacy in the form of oppositional seeing, thinking and acting against the backdrop

of patriarchal narratives in art galleries and museums" (144). The *Hack* engaged with institutions through the independent thought of students as visitors in galleries and museums. The *Hack* evolved from sticky notes to Barbie dolls with mini-protest signs placed next to problematic works. Since COVID-19 restrictions on museums and galleries, Sarah Williams has moved her activism online to a twitter account named ArtActivistBarbie. ArtActivistBarbie encourages critical engagement with institutions, demonstrating how activists can use online spaces to create positive momentum for social justice. In this sense, Barbie vlogs have the potential to be radicalizing by utilizing the internet and its reach. Though unlike ArtActivistBarbie, in reality the vlogs do very little to critique social norms.

The differences between the appropriations of Barbie lie in the aims of their owners. In some cases, the owner alters Barbie for personal doll-play, some use Barbie as a direct attack on the stereotypes and gender norms Barbie encourages, and in other instances, Barbie is just collateral damage of an apolitical ad campaign or song. However, what happens when Barbie becomes a puppet for a liberal feminist agenda, with Mattel Inc. pulling the strings? That is exactly what is currently happening in Barbie's YouTube vlogs. As of July 2020, Barbie's channel has 9.21 million subscribers, not to mention the additional hundreds of thousands subscribing to the twelve accounts operating in languages other than English. Lisa McKnight, the senior vice head of Barbie, states that the channel aims to harness the platform Barbie has established in order to create relatable vlogs that feature "teachable moments" (McKnight). The issue at hand is whether these "teachable moments" are going to have positive effects on the perspectives of viewers, or, in other words, are they going to make a difference to how children understand the world and feminism?

The main issue with Barbie Vlogs lies in Mattel Inc.'s motives. Ever since her creation, the assertions of radical artists challenging Barbie as a problematic role model for children have been largely ignored by Mattel, especially in respect to her aesthetic. The reimagination of Barbie's physical features and dimensions is still in its early stages in 2020 (Dockterman). At the same time, Mattel Inc. is enthusiastically using creative animation to modernize Barbie into a liberal feminist. It is impossible

to truly assess whether feminist Barbie is an effort to increase her relevance in today's society in order to make marginal returns, or because Mattel Inc. is genuinely invested in reforming the message Barbie sends to children. In publicized interviews with those behind Barbie's physical and virtual reimagination, it is explicitly claimed that a decline in profit is a driving factor in their remarketing (Dockterman, McKnight). What is certain is that radical artivists such as the Barbie Liberation Organization (BLO) have been challenging the gender roles of Barbie since 1993 without support from Mattel Inc., which poses the question: why now? When the BLO swapped the voice boxes in Barbie and G.I Joe, their operation was described as a "terrorist act against children" and as "kind of ridiculous" (Firestone). Yet, as children gravitate towards video games and the internet, Mattel Inc. is now fervently echoing the voices of its gender liberating predecessors through Barbie's YouTube channel. With many competitors on the market such as Bratz dolls and Disney princesses, Barbie in her physical form is slowly becoming less relevant to children. Parents and guardians still have the power to choose their children's toys, ultimately because they are paying. Conversely, YouTube is free and more challenging for parents to regulate than a physical toy box. YouTube therefore acts as an ideal medium for Barbie to engage with children, whilst bypassing parents and conventional spaces as well as capitalizing on the growth of children's digital proficiency.

Visual animation is an art form, though art more often engages in the criticism of capitalism than the reverse. Andy Warhol is an example of how complicated the relationship between art, business, and capitalism can be. In the case of Barbie, it is impossible to distinguish the unknown artist from the capitalist American dream the brand serves to represent. Barbie was business before art business, which is an important distinction between the forces behind Barbie's animation art and artivists. This raises the issue of how Barbie vlogs can simultaneously act as feminist animation, and a mechanism as well as a product of capitalism. I would claim that Barbie's narratives are so subtle that they could only loosely be termed feminist. That said, it is clear that her recent videos echo neo-liberal feminist issues, which are often connected to or synony-

mous with white feminism.[2] Barbie frequently walks viewers through ways to handle various gender issues, but not in the most radical way. For instance, the vlogs "Dare to Fly: ESA Astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti," "What's the Dream Gap," and "Dream Gap" discuss the potential career paths for women, with a particular emphasis on STEM related careers. Additionally, the "Sorry Reflex" vlog highlights the over-usage of the word sorry as a learned reflex which degrades self-confidence, and the "Finding Your Voice" episode walks viewers through ways to amplify your voice in instances where a gender bias may be present.

In the vlog titled "Finding Your Voice," Barbie recounts a scene where her ideas were only appreciated when they were repeated by a man, in this case the imaginary character Ken. The situation described is set at a volunteering event, though it is not dissimilar to the classic trope of men being dismissive of women in the workplace. This toxic workplace gender dynamic has been recreated in popular culture time and time again; the 2001 movie *Legally Blonde* serves as just one example. Whilst workplaces which are dominated by men and their ideas are a concern for feminists, the solution Barbie proposes is one of a neo-liberal instead of a radical feminist. The first issue here is that Barbie's solution is aimed at someone who is already in a space where they can speak, even if their words are subsequently ignored. Usually these spaces are further up the corporate ladder, and therefore this logic does not serve those in low-paid jobs where they are unlikely to have any say in the day-to-day operations of their employment. Towards the conclusion of this short vlog entry, Barbie recaps ways in which women can support each other, one of which is "staying in the conversation." This statement is particularly puzzling as it assumes that everyone is already involved in the conversation, which seems to ignore the whole concern of intersectionality. Intersectionality emphasizes the dangers of isolating separate systems of oppression, and how in doing so those who are affected by overlapping and interdependent systems of subordination

2 A potential exception is the 2020 "Barbie and Nikki Discuss Racism" vlog, which addresses Nikki's experiences with racism. Overall, this vlog has been received well in the media, though questions regarding its nature as an example of profit driven performative allyship still stand.

are neglected (Crenshaw; Carastathis; Berger; Guidroz). In the same sense, the use of the term 'staying' suggests that feminist work is done, and we are now in a position where maintenance is the task at hand. This logic supports a postfeminist rationale, which simply is not applicable for the majority of women.

From a radical feminist perspective, the underlying messages of the Barbie vlogs are problematic, but there are additional issues with the aesthetics in their inferring of a postfeminist sensibility. Terry Eagleton argues that the aesthetic barely concerns art and is better defined as a "program of social, psychical and political reconstruction on the part of the early European bourgeoisie" (327). This definition of aesthetic best suits the nature of the Barbie vlog titled "To Our Dads," in which Barbie's friend Harper is wearing a graphic T-shirt which reads "Girl Power." Eagleton's 1988 assessment of the aesthetic hints towards the present-day concept of "femvertising," which we can see most explicitly in this Barbie vlog featuring a supposedly empowering slogan. Femvertising, short for female empowerment advertising (Castillo; Iqbal), involves the use of a liberal faux feminism to promote a product or brand to women by creating the idea that the product or brand equates to empowerment, and that empowerment equates to the aim of feminism.[3] Often, the product or brand is not feminist at its core. An example of this may be a company which sells sanitary products using femvertising, yet neglects to address period poverty worldwide. Undoubtably, consumers of today will encounter products and slogans which use femvertising, perhaps on Instagram as a graphic or GIF, or on a T-Shirt sold at H&M or Primark. Examples which spring to mind from my own experiences with high-street retailers and social media include phrases such as "Feminist af," "The Future is Female," "Empowerment," "Equality" or even simply "Feminist." We have been exposed to this "faux feminism" for so long that the meaning of these messages has become skewed. Sociologist and feminist culture theorist Rosalind Gill points out how these slogans fail to explore the meaning of feminism

3 Femvertising can act as faux (or fake) feminism. Marketing consultant and activist Katie Martell writes that all femvertising campaigns fall somewhere on a spectrum between faux feminism, which exploits the feminist narrative without encouraging changes, and legitimate activism.

and therefore reduce feminism to a cheer word devoid of substance: it has become a word that comes across as deeply corporate and comfortable with capitalism instead of one which recognizes capitalisms complicity in maintaining the patriarchy (623).

The relationship between femvertising and capitalism is clearly one of danger if we reflect back on the image of the Chimera. Buzzwords like "empowerment" have nothing to do with the core values of feminism and emphasize the role of the individual instead of challenging patriarchal structures. Neo-liberal feminists view the self as a vehicle to remedy problems stemming from the patriarchy, whereas radicals like Lola Olufemi gravitate more towards the idea of changing the system as a whole rather than the singular intricate mechanisms of power within them. Rosa Crepax, scholar of fashion aesthetics, culture and communication, argues that this neo-liberal focus on the individual intersects with fashion and aesthetics to posit feminism "within a series of middle-class, consumeristic and strikingly postfeminist narratives in which women's strength is an asset to attract men, and confidence the natural result of good looks" (76). Even if the personal gains of individuals have had positive effects on feminist work, the idea of self-improvement as benefitting feminism buys into the idea of the elevator effect. Focusing on the individual completely ignores issues surrounding toxic masculinity and capitalism, which play large roles in maintaining the patriarchy. Overall, femvertising will never benefit feminism as long as it is orchestrated by capitalists. At best, it will serve to maintain splintered feminist identities.

As an adult who has been exposed to academic papers addressing the history of feminism and its relevance today, it is natural for me to criticize Barbie – especially because I grew up with her as an unachievable emblem of normative expectations for women. However, these vlogs are clearly aimed at children; this is not explicitly said within the videos, but the disabling of comments and video-saving features tells us that children are the audience – children who presumably have not had much exposure to feminist ideas. In the introduction to *Feminism Interrupted*, Lola Olufemi writes, "if this book makes you pick up another book, or watch a documentary, search the archive, reach for a poetry book – if it sparks of reignites your interest in feminism, then

it has served its purpose" (1). Taking on Olufemi's attitude, Barbie may not be a trailblazer for radical feminism, but the vlogs do gently introduce children to feminist concerns, however neo-liberal they might be. If a child watches the vlog on raising your voice, and then subsequently experiences something similar in the classroom, then maybe that child might identify issues with the classroom environment as a whole, or with their classmates. Either way, the child is more likely to start asking questions about schooling under capitalism and toxic masculinity, which is better than simply accepting that they will not be heard. My point here is that the Barbie vlogs alone might not be revolutionary for children, but if they lead to other engagements which challenge the patriarchy, capitalism, and whiteness then they have some positive effects. I do not agree with Mattel's motives or messages, but I do believe that radical perspectives are formed through personal experiences and engagements, and are not simply taught in school. However, the education system clearly operates under the same capitalist agenda as Mattel, so if these vlogs encourage even the smallest critical thought, then children may be better off than if they continue to play with toy guns and mini kitchens. Until then, it is necessary for us to think critically about the content we are exposed to online. If Barbie is now taking on an educative role in a social sphere, and her teachings support neo-liberal ideals, then without some level of regulation her message serves to further entrench capitalist values in our social lives and subconscious. Therefore, it is necessary to direct efforts to creating multiple role models for children and adults, rather than amplifying a problematic role model's reach.

Works Cited

Barbie Nation: An Unauthorized Tour. Directed by Susan Stern, New Day Films, 1998. "Barbie and Nikki Discuss Racism." *YouTube,* uploaded by Barbie, 7 Oct 2020, https://youtu.be/RCzwoMDgF_I. Accessed 8 Oct 2020.

Berger, Michele T., and Kathleen Guidroz. *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class, and Gender.* U of North Carolina P, 2009.

Carastathis, Anna. "The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory." *Philosophy Compass,* vol. 9, no. 3, 2014, pp. 304-14. Castillo, Michelle. "These Stats Prove Femvertising Works." 10 Oct 2014, www.adweek.com/news/technology/these-stats-prove-femvertising-works-160704. Accessed 16 Jul 2020.

Clover, Darlene E., and Sarah Williamson. "The Feminist Museum Hack as an Aesthetic Practice of Possibility." *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults,* vol. 10, no. 2, 2019, pp. 143–59.

Collins, Louise, et al. "We're Not Barbie Girls: Tweens Transform a Feminine Icon." *Feminist Formations,* vol. 24, no. 1, 2012, pp. 102–26.

Couldry, Nick, and Ulises A. Mejias. "Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data's Relation to the Contemporary Subject." *Television & New Media,* vol. 20, no. 4, 2019, pp. 336-49.

Crepax, Rosa. "The Aestheticisation of Feminism: A Case Study of Feminist Instagram Aesthetics." *ZoneModa Journal,* vol. 10, no. 15, 2020, pp. 71-81.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *Feminist Legal Theory,* 1989, pp. 57–80.

"Dare to Fly: ESA Astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti." *YouTube,* uploaded by Barbie, 12 Jul 2019, https://youtu.be/wo9XvKLRD40. Accessed 8 Jul 2020.

Dockterman, Eliana. "Barbie's Got A New Body." *Time,* 28 Jan 2016, www.time.com/barbie-new-body-cover-story. Accessed 15 Jul 2020.

Dream Gap." *YouTube,* uploaded by Barbie, 16 Nov 2018, https://youtu.be/4fXlEVdc_CQ. Accessed 10 Jul 2020.

duCille, Ann. "Dyes and Dolls: Multicultural Barbie and the Merchandising of Difference." *The Black Studies Reader,* edited by Jacqueline Bobo et al., Routledge, 2004.

Eagleton, Terry. "The Ideology of the Aesthetic." *Poetics Today,* vol. 9, no. 2, 1988, pp. 327-38.

"Finding Your Voice." *YouTube,* uploaded by Barbie, 7 Mar 2019, https://youtu.be/Vr8XIFrl9eM. Accessed 10 Jul 2020.

Firestone, David. "While Barbie Talks Tough, G.I Joe Goes Shopping." *New York Times*, 31 Dec 1993, https://nyti.ms/29e4YHx. Accessed 15 Jul 2020.

Gill, Rosalind. "Post-Postfeminism? New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times." *Feminist Media Studies,* vol. 16, no. 4, 2016, pp. 610–30.

Harold, Christine. "Pranking Rhetoric: 'Culture Jamming' as Media Activism." *Critical Studies in Media Communication,* vol. 21, no. 3, 2007, pp.189-211.

Iqbal, Nosheen. "Femvertising: How Brands Are Selling #Empowerment to Women." 12 Oct 2015, www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/oct/12/femvertising-branded-feminism. Accessed 18 Jul 2020.

Legally Blonde. Directed by Robert Luketic, MGM Distribution, 2001.

Martell, Katie. "Feminism in Marketing to Women." *Faux Feminism*, www.fauxfeminism.com. Accessed 18 Jul 2020.

McKnight, Lisa. "Mattel @ IAB NewsFront West." *YouTube,* uploaded by Interactive Advertising Bureau, 17 Sept 2019, youtu.be/gHX_CTBSF8Y. Accessed 20 Jul 2020.

Montoya, Roberto, et al. "American Chimera: The Ever-Present Domination of Whiteness, Patriarchy, and Capitalism." *Educational Philosophy and Theory,* vol. 48, no. 9, 2016, pp. 872–83.

Motz, Marilyn Ferris. "'I Want to Be a Barbie Doll When I Grow Up': The Cultural Significance of the Barbie Doll." *The Popular Culture Reader,* edited by Christopher D. Geist and John G. Nachbar, Bowling Green U Popular P, 1983, pp.122-36.

Olufemi, Lola. *Feminism, Interrupted: Disrupting Power.* Pluto Press, 2020.

Reuters. "Mattel Sues Nissan Over TV Commercial." *New York Times,* 20 Sept 1997, https://nytimes.com/1997/09/20/business/mattel-sues-nissan-overtv-commercial.html. Accessed 27 Jul 2020.

Ringrose, Jessica. *Postfeminist Education? Girls and the Sexual Politics of Schooling.* Routledge, 2013.

"Sorry Reflex." *YouTube,* uploaded by Barbie, 1 Jun 2018, https://youtu.be/g9ahiHpM3yQ. Accessed 8 Jul 2020.

Toffoletti, Kim. *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body.* Bloomsbury Academic, 2007.

"To Our Dads." *YouTube,* uploaded by Barbie, 27 Jan 2017, https://youtu.be/ogIciDm8-58. Accessed 8 Jul 2020.

United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, *Mattel, Inc. v. MCA Records, Inc., 296 F.3d 894*, 2002, 900–02.

"What's the Dream Gap." *YouTube,* uploaded by Barbie, 11 Oct 2018, https://youtu.be/3UN0IWKN0A0. Accessed 8 Jul 2020.

Williamson, Sarah. "Meet ArtActivistBarbie, The Fearless Funny Feminist Taking on a White Male Art World." 14 May 2020, tiny.cc/tu62qz. Accessed 18 Jul. 2020.

Georgia's Blooms

Joanna King

Brother shut me down on a holiday
Put a mirror with twelve eyes to my face
But a preteen I knew
I was strong, but as delicate as Georgia's blooms

Georgia,
Won't go like Sylvia
Won't go like Ann
René, you had your day
I feel, therefore I am

He transposed the piano
At our high school variety show
Paralyzed I couldn't find my note
Sixteen, competition is cut throat

Georgia,
Won't go like Sylvia
Won't go like Ann
René, you had your day
I feel, therefore…

I can pull the corners of my mouth to Mars
And drop crocodile tears to the depths of hell
Make you feel things you never felt

I once was punched by a boy in school
In a place that held shame, I'd learned in Sunday school
What that can do to you

Georgia, Won't go like Sylvia
Won't go like Ann
René, he had his day
I feel, therefore I am

This song speaks to four women artists who accompanied me throughout my twenties after having left my small Bible Belt town in the United States.

I was introduced to the poets Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton as a young, impressionable college student. Although both hail from a different time period than my own, Plath and Sexton's writing resonated with some of my own grapplings with the societal expectations of womanhood I had experienced growing up but yet knew how to articulate. In particular, Sexton's work, Transformations, helped me re-envision the social narratives that dominated ways in which I perceived myself as a woman.

"Georgia" speaks to Georgia O'Keeffe, whose bold flower paintings continue to move me and make me feel proud and beautiful in my body.

All three artists suffered nervous breakdowns throughout their lives. However, in contrast to Plath and Sexton whose young lives ended in suicide, O'Keeffe continued to paint flowers, enjoy friendship, and bask in the beauty of the desert into old age.

The mantra of this song is a phrase I first heard from the feminist playwright, Eve Ensler, who suffered sexual abuse as a young girl. "I feel, therefore I am" is her adaptation of René Descarte's famous statement, "*Cogito, ergo sum*" or "I think, therefore I am," which dramatically influenced the western world's understanding of being human.

"I feel, therefore I am" reconnects us with our bodies and frees the shame we often hold there.

You can listen to my song here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YtIdDwMG4A

List of Contributors

Tonia Andresen studied art history, education and gender at the University of Hamburg. Her research focuses on contemporary artistic practices that address gender, work, migration, activist strategies and global inequalities. Recently she finished her M.A. thesis with the title "Globalization and gender: Border spaces between Mexico and the U. S. in the films by Amber Bemak, Nadia Granados and Mika Rottenberg." She is working as a research assistant in the international research group "SVAC – Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict" at the Hamburg Institute of Social Research and currently pursuing her PhD about global work relations in contemporary art practices since the 1990s.

Tamar Beruchashvili was born in in Tbilisi (Georgia) in 1985. Her childhood was very much influenced by post-Soviet events (political and economic). She studied Oriental Studies in Georgia. She has been living in Munich since 2008 and studied Management of Social Innovations (Munich University of Applied Sciences, Bachelor), Design Thinking (SCE, additional studies), Sociology and Gender Studies (LMU, Master of Arts). Tamar worked as a research assistant in a sub-project of ForGenderCare, which turned her theoretical perspective on gender studies very much into practice. She is currently trying to gain a foothold in the art scene in Germany and Georgia (mentor Gia Edzgveradze, Kunstakademie Düsseldorf) and works as an innovation manager at TUM and at Caritasverband. She participated in the group show 'Nine Lipped Goddess' in Gallery Artbeat in Tbilisi, Georgia (25.09.2020-8.11.2020).

Megan Bosence is a PhD Candidate in American Cultural History at the Amerika-Institut and Graduate School of Language and Literature at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU). In 2019, she received her MA degree in American History, Culture and Society at the LMU Amerika-Institut and earned her BA degree with Honours in Art History and a Minor in History from the University of Victoria in Canada in 2015. Megan has also volunteered and continues to build her career within the museum and gallery settings alongside and

in-between her studies. Her research interests include Canadian and U.S. Indigenous histories, cultural history, museology, art history and memory culture.

Melina Haberl received her B.A. in North American Studies from the University of Munich in 2019 and is currently enrolled in the M.A. Program American History, Culture and Society in Munich. During her studies, Melina has focused on African American Studies, in particular on racial relations in the United States, police brutality, and racial injustice. In 2021 she is planning to attend a PhD program in which she will further explore the intersectionality of gender and race.

Bärbel Harju is an assistant to the president at LMU Munich and the founding director of the Writing Center at LMU Munich. She has held research and teaching positions in the department of American Studies from 2011 until 2020 and was a principal investigator in the Collaborative Research Center "Cultures of Vigilance" at LMU Munich. She holds a PhD in American Cultural History (LMU, 2011). Her research interests include popular culture, music, and the history of protest movements.

Sophie Anna Holzberger studied Comparative Literature and Art History at University of Munich (LMU) and King's College London and is currently enrolled in her Master's in Film Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. She was a visiting student at NYU's Department of German for the academic year 2019/2020. She has worked at film festivals, in film production and as an editorial assistant for the edition 17 on feminism and film of the magazine *Nach dem Film*. Since 2018 she has been working as a student assistant for Professor Sabine Nessel (Film Studies, Freie Universität Berlin). In June 2019, she co-organized the "Kino-Kon", a student-led conference on feminist approaches to the cinematic dispositif and is currently part of an organizing collective for the second edition of the conference.

Sophia Hörl received her B.A. in North American Studies at LMU Munich in 2018. In her B.A. thesis, she explored the phenomenon of "racial passing" in American literature, which also relates to the notion

of masking one's true identity. Sophia is currently enrolled in the Environmental Studies Certificate Program of the Rachel Carson Center and in the Master's Program "American History, Society and Culture" at LMU, where she particularly focuses on art censorship during the U.S. Culture War of the 1980s, the history of protest art and artivism in the visual arts, and Modernist photography, architecture, and literature. In her Master's thesis Sophia is exploring the possibilities of creative resistance and the role of the public space as opposed to the museum space in African-American artivism.

Xinrui Jiang received a B.A. in English from Zhengzhou University and an M.A. in English Language and Literature from Wuhan University in China. She then volunteered as a Chinese teacher at a middle school in Jakarta, Indonesia for two years. Currently, she has finished the master's program "American History, Culture and Society" at the American Institute of LMU Munich and will soon obtain an M.A. Her major research interests are African American literature and culture, gender studies, and transnational migration literature.

Penelope Kemekenidou is a socialist activist. She received her M.A. in American History, Culture and Society at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich. Her M.A. focused on the "Ersatzdiskurs" of pedophilia in U.S. American media and politics. She has taught on black feminism and artivism and has published on empathic hyperconnectivity in social media networks. She is co-founder of Gender Equality Media e.V., an organization which fights sexist media coverage in Germany. The group is primarily known for its #unfollowpatriarchy campaign.

Joanna King was born and raised in rural Kansas, USA. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Oregon, in Eugene, Oregon, and completed her Master's degree in American History Culture and Society at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, Germany. Joanna grew up singing in churches, musical theater, and jazz bands and began writing music at age 18. Her first album, *Open Skies and Stormy Nights,* was recorded in 2011 in Eugene, Oregon. You

can occasionally find her singing in bars and cafés in her current city, Munich, Germany.

Rupali Naik is currently in her final year of her bachelor's degree in art history & visual culture and history at Exeter University. First and foremost, Naik has sought to learn about British-Indian colonial history in an effort to understand more about her own diasporic world. Naik was also fortunate to study at Ludwig-Maximillian Universität in Munich for a year. Her experience of growing up alongside social media and being an activist pushed her to write about her thoughts on the recent BLM activity online.

Mark Olival-Bartley is a doctoral student in the Department of English and American Studies at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, where he teaches composition, creative writing, and American literature. He is also resident poet of EcoHealth Alliance, where his pandemic-themed verse is regularly featured in *EcoHealth.* With Amy Mohr, he co-edited *New Interpretations of Harper Lee's* To Kill a Mockingbird and Go Set a Watchman (Cambridge Scholars, 2019).

Joyce Osagie received her BA in American Studies from the University of Munich in 2018. During her studies, Joyce has been focusing on African American Studies, in particular on the Black experience of racism, police brutality, and activism. Her BA thesis explored the similarities and differences of the Black Panthers and the Black Lives Matter Movement. Currently, she is enrolled in the American Studies Master program at the LMU. Further, Joyce is planning on writing her Masters' thesis on issues of the criminal justice system in the discourse of race as well as the issues of black and white multiracial identities.

Laura Purdy lives in England and is a final year B. A. History student at the University of Leeds, where she is currently studying the Harlem Renaissance and American consumer society. From 2019 to 2020, Laura studied at the Amerika-Institut at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München on an exchange, where she concentrated on digital activism, contemporary art and film, food histories, and ecology. Laura's interests

lie in digitalization, visual cultures, and vernacular, queer, and feminist histories, which she hopes to incorporate in her bachelor's thesis.

Melissa Schlecht studied Art History, Literary Studies and Literary and Cultural Theory at the Universities of Stuttgart and Tübingen. After receiving her M.A., she worked as a research associate at a museum for Outsider Art. She joined the Department of American Literature and Culture at the University of Stuttgart in 2017. In her own teaching and research, her interests lie in visual cultures, intermediality and multi-ethnic literatures. Her PhD project investigates the role of social and cultural mobility in U.S.- American artist narratives.

Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier is a research associate at LMU Munich and a doctoral student at the ERC-funded ArtsAutonomy research project. She has taught courses in North American studies at the Amerika-Institut at LMU Munich and given talks at the University of Lausanne, the German-American Institute in Nürnberg, Gustav Stresemann Institut in Niedersachsen, and elsewhere. Before returning to academia, she worked as a journalist and an editor. Her research interests include public discourses, transnational studies, media studies, and contemporary and conceptual history.

Dannie Snyder is an artivist as well as an educator in the arts and humanities. She earned her Master's in American Studies (Culture, History and Society) from the American Institute at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, Germany. She recently self-published her Master's thesis titled ARTIVISM OF RETURNING CITIZENS: Artist Activists of the Nation's Capital Impacting the Prison Abolition Movement. Beyond issues within feminism and prison abolition – which includes abolishing immigration detention centers – she is also passionate about access to medicine, having recently joined the global campaign "Free the Vaccine for COVID-19" with the Center for Artistic Activism.

Amelie Starke received her M.A in American History, Culture and Society at LMU Munich in 2020. In her M.A thesis, she critically assessed the connection between neoliberalism and feminism since the 1960s,

examining in particular the influence of neoliberal ideology on feminist movements from then to now. Since October 2020, she has been a PhD student at the America Institute at LMU. Her research interests include feminist studies, popular media, cultural and social studies, the history of protest movements and African-American studies.

Angelique Szymanek is Assistant Professor in the Department of Art and Architecture at Hobart & William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York. Her research on feminist art and histories of sexual violence has been published in Art Journal, Signs: A Journal of Feminist Scholarship, Women's Art Journal, and The Journal of Feminist Scholarship. She also is co-editor of the forthcoming anthology Transnational Perspectives on Feminism and Art, 1965-1985. Angelique has twice been named a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute Scholar (2016 & 2017) and was a Helena Rubenstein fellow at the Whitney Museum for American Art Independent Study Program (2012-2013). She has recently been awarded a Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award (2019-2020) to conduct research on feminist art production in Scotland.

The essays, artistic pieces, and interviews gathered in this anthology explore both the role of art and visual culture as well as artistic practices in contemporary feminist movements. The art historians, literary scholars, artists, activists, and students and scholars of American Studies included in this collection examine contemporary art and artivism and its capacity to inspire change, reformulate feminist ideas, and reimagine feminist aesthetics. With contributions by young scholars, students, activists, and artists, the collection seeks to display a broad range of perspectives. Recurring themes are the ambivalent labeling of art and artistic or activist practices as 'feminist' as well as the role of intersectionality in feminism and art. This edited volume brings together the diverse strands of thought and practice that contemporary feminist art and culture embrace and hopes to contribute to ongoing discussions at the intersection of art and feminist politics.

18,90 €
ISBN 978-3-95925-174-7