cmagazine132

Contemporary Art & Criticism Winter 2017

Force

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Force

Masthead

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Errata
In c131's Art School Supplement, River School was mistakenly attributed. River School is part of 4e Institute of Land | Art Inquiry, through the organization 4elements Living Arts. It takes place in Kagawong, not Kagawong River. Please see www.4elementsliving-arts.org for further details.

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Editorial
Force
by guest editors taisha paggett and Erin Silver

Once a year, *C Magazine* invites a guest editor to take over an issue, and this particular guest edited issue coincides with *C*'s commitment to re-visiting contemporary feminisms on a regular basis. For c132, guest edited by dance artist, choreographer and educator taisha paggett, and art historian and curator Erin Silver, the editors have importantly broadened the feminist conversation much further than *C* has in the past. It resonates deeply with the events of 2016, and it offers a series of exchanges and provocations that I'm thrilled to present to *C* readers at the beginning of my time as Editor.

– Kari Cwynar

* * *

The force of this issue lies in concerns over matter, and what matters, in the face of the political urgencies of 2016. We consider and interject the current place of intersectional feminisms in relation to a view of lived realities as embodied, material and distinct.[1]

In her 1993 book *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler famously asked, "Which bodies come to matter – and why?"[2] When, in 2016, the notion that Black lives matter is met with resistance, dismissed and subordinated under a universalizing defense that "all lives matter," Butler's question appears prescient, and pressing. As 2016 unfolded and we witnessed bodies exert, resist and negotiate power, we became concerned to test the value of thinking and making in relation to the body as materially formed, or forming, in the face of these present day political urgencies. We felt urgency to address the lived realities of POC, trans and LGBQ bodies in exerting force against systemic, social and physical violence. As we held in our minds the events of 2016, we looked to consider their broader implications: Orlando against the backdrop of Pride celebrations and a call to recognizing the role of Latina trans women in the history of gay liberation; BLMTO's Pride Parade action, which shut down the parade for half an hour while BLMTO made a historic demand for greater visibility for queer people of colour in the parade, and greater accountability from parade organizers and police; increasingly nuanced understandings of solidarity, allyship and holding space in relation to Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock and Idle No More. We asked, where does feminism – as it informs and has been informed by rights movements – reside in these events? How does it support and propel present-day political struggle? How do we conceptualize "force" in relation to the material, social and political body? And how do we resist the aestheticization/anesthetization of political urgency? How do we make a magazine that "moves" in time with political movement?

Movement occupies a central place in this issue, affirming embodiment as inextricably tied to the realm of the political, the body, a material conduit for tracing the historical and carving new worldviews. Essays by Anna Martine Whitehead and Treva C. Ellison examine the world-making potential of Black dance – in Whitehead's case, histories of occupation and of enslaved ancestors as evoked by a dance ensemble of Black queer and femme women, rocking "an activation of spirit in the flesh." In Ellison's essay on Black dance forms including flexing and the collaborative practice of weight exchange in the choreography of taisha paggett and the WXPT dance company, Ellison offers flexibility, in its focus on "process, practice, conjuring, tarrying, cracking and hacking as ways of approaching Blackness and Black embodiment." taisha occupies multiple roles in the development of this issue: as an artist, an interlocutor and editor – a reflection of our desire not only to promote a view to the written text as alive, but also to test the boundaries of authorship and authority. As co-editors, we have met only once in person, yet underscoring the issue is a trail of rich textual and virtual exchange, plotting artistic, affective and political affinities; cross-continental (taisha in Los Angeles; Erin in Toronto) correspondence; emails saturated with emphatic bolds, underlines, CAPS LOCKS – the spectral index to the texts presented herein.

Dialogue figures prominently in this issue; Martine Syms, in conversation with Amy Kazymerchyk, discusses the power of repetitive gesture and of borrowing in connecting people, culturally and cross-temporally, while Lucca Fraser, co-author of the Xenofeminist Manifesto, talks to Esmé Hogeveen about Laboria Cuboniks and the role of technology in forging pluralistic feminisms. In their artist project *At the Edge of Space and Time: Expanding beyond Our 4% Universe*, Jennifer Moon and laub bridge quantum mechanics with the the racialized, gendered body, employing Karen Barad's concept of intra-action, by which individuals come into being via exchange. In addition to strengthening the lines that tie different feminisms together – intergenerational dialogues, spectral tracings, co-conspirings – the tensions within the concept of a cohesive and dominant western feminist genealogy are interrogated by Wanda Nanibush in her guest-written Close Readings, where a re-tracing of Rebecca Belmore's exhibition KWE opens up reflections on the "complicated and fertile relationship between Indigenous women, art and feminism" and her identification as Anishinaabe-kwe.

Making a magazine that moves in time with political movement means keeping pace with temporal crossings and ruptures – the cautionary lessons learned by looking back, as well as those offered via views toward the future. We meet somewhere in the middle. During the Q&A of a screening this past summer of Lizzie Borden's 1983 dystopic feminist revolutionary film *Born in Flames* (reviewed herein by Yaniya Lee), at one point the numbers "2016" flash on a retro digital screen – a prescient view to ongoing, and scarily similar, conditions of racialized and gendered oppression. In Syrus Marcus Ware's On Writing, it's 2025 – nine years since BLMTO – BLACKCITY, the 15-day occupation in front of the Toronto Police Headquarters in protest of police accountability in the death of Andrew Loku and against anti-Blackness and targeted policing. As we seal this issue in the wake of the American election and in the face of political futures unknown, we make this small offering towards the world-making potential of writing, making and moving – of momentum and force, and the resistance to be found in between.

Endnotes

1 Samantha Frost, "The Implications of the New Materialisms for Feminist Epistemology," in *Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science: Power in Knowledge*, ed. H.E. Grasswick (Springer Science & Business Media, 2011), p 70.

2 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p xii.

On Writing

2025: ~~Light~~ Black Years From Now

by Syrus Marcus Ware

"The dominance of language and writing has come to stand for meaning itself. Live, embodied practices not based in linguistic or literary codes, we must assume, have no claims on meaning...It's imperative now, however overdue, to pay attention to the repertoire." – Diana Taylor[1]

It's 2025.

I'm running, as usual. The time it takes to get to the water station leaves me with little time to get back to the group before our nightly gathering. I really don't need to sign up for the water shift as often as I do – there are enough people in our pod to share all the tasks. But I love the journey, the time alone to think, to be, to be solo. One of the hardest things about the *Changes* is the lack of alone time, the lack of individual moments of quiet to think and to feel free. I mean, we have a bigger *Freedom* – one that makes the lack of personal space and alone time feel relatively manageable – but I still miss the general "aloneness" of life before the revolution.

I slow my pace and adjust the water carrier on my back. I feel the weight of it, the heaviness of the water, but also of what it represents. We fought with our people at Standing Rock and in New Orleans and on Haida Gwaii and in Attawapiskat to protect this water, which has come to mean everything in life after the *Changes*. I should have brought something to read. I can remember before the *Changes;* I'm old enough to remember details that many in our pod can't imagine in their wildest dreams. I recall travelling far to go to school, to go to work...trying to read to make the time go faster. I used to walk home from the 52 Lawrence bus in Weston, carefully planning my route to allow me to read and walk. I'd hold my paperback book and try to focus on the words swimming around on the page, moving with each of my steps. Now, we have the retinal share-a-book implants that were from an earlier time in the *Movement* when we had to share information quickly. Somehow it just doesn't feel the same.

I used to love reading about art, about creative practice. We were making so many things back then: objects, paintings and interactions. More and more artists were creating within activist contexts. Yet, I rarely saw writing about our art-based movements. This was back when those in power still thought art was something that needed to be put inside elaborately air-conditioned buildings. Back when they thought that art was something to be seen by a select few – so few that they made sure that admission to their buildings was prohibitively expensive. Back when they knew that this act would keep the creative brilliance inside their walls and away from those who needed its beauty to ignite something in their souls.

I remember this time. I remember when those who wrote about art wrote about the things hanging and stacked inside the air-conditioned buildings, wilfully ignoring everything else happening on every single inch of the walls, ground, space outside of these walls.

Back in 2016, when the fires that would bring in the *Big Change* were just beginning, we made an art gallery on the street in front of the police station in Toronto. We held a 15-day occupation that saw the creation of 20-foot textile installations, countless works on paper, paintings, performance art showcases and dances. We called for an end to anti-Blackness, an end to targeted policing – we called for change through our songs, our drawings, our bodies moving in rhythm. It was nine years ago, but I remember it like it was happening right now – as if we were still there, singing, dancing and singing: "I believe that we will win." Smoke from traditional medicines being kissed by the fire of elders, syncopated chants fading in and out of my perception. Dancers practising their routines for the rally later that night, curators moving the art that Lido Pimienta, Amber Williams-King and others around on the walls of the public gallery. Large-scale paper ephemera from the earlier performance action at city hall: the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) report in Andrew Loku's[2] case wheatpasted to the entrance of police headquarters.

In these old memories, everything feels timeless – perhaps what Michelle M. Wright[3] wrote about the physics of Blackness has been laced through my thoughts. We exist inside and outside of time and timelines. It is as if today it is nine years ago and we are waking up at the Black Lives Matter #tentcity to the smell of communal pancakes being cooked as if part of some magically useful social practice art project. But it is also nighttime, and there are ciphers made up of hundreds of dancers moving in ecstatic rebellion to the DJs' beats and the MCs' rhymes. Mustafa the Poet[4] is there, on a flatbed truck, his face lit up by the glorious sunset, telling us that "as long as the sun rises, so shall I."

But this isn't now; it was then. Back when we stood in the middle of the largest Pride march in the country, dropped rainbow smoke bombs with dramatic flair to begin our performance and held an audience of millions in a moment of rebellion, freedom and calls for large-scale change. We set up an arts education hub in front of the SIU, delivering 12 hours of free community arts workshops about the prison-industrial complex in Canada. We held a concert that night and rallied for the end of policing, and for the start of community accountability. Artists. Activists. Performers. Political movements moving through elaborate choreography. These memories come flooding back through my cells, an embodied repertoire inside a human machine.

Maybe it was just what Diana Taylor wrote about the archive and the repertoire: how do you archive the unarchivable? Can you ever capture in writing, memory or archive, the lived experience of a performance, really? Could we ever have captured these moments of activism blurred with art?

There was no writing about the art of this movement. There was no writing about the artists who were activists who were artists. So we kept making our own writing. We wrote with fabric, scissors, gold threads pulled tight, "Which side of history are you on?" Because we knew which side we were on.

Funny that this is all now history. That we are here, now. In the *Changes*. In this time when we write our truths on the backs of maple leaves, spraying every surface with graffiti, spending entire days singing and dancing in hypnotic trances.

The dust picks up as I turn the bend in the road. From within swirls of dry clay dust I emerge and see my Black family celebrating in our field, singing, dancing, gathering. I pick up the pace of my run, bringing water with which to caress and bathe each other, to drink until we are never thirsty, to celebrate with our bodies, to create new life.

Syrus is a Vanier scholar, visual artist, activist, curator and educator. For the past 13 years, Syrus was the Coordinator of the Art Gallery of Ontario Youth Program and is currently a facilitator/designer at The Banff Centre and the inaugural artist-in-residence at Daniels Spectrum in Toronto. Syrus is a long time activist, and a core team member of Black Lives Matter - Toronto.

Endnotes

1 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

2 Anastasia Cassisi, "Justice for All? An analysis of police brutality in the United States, England & Canada," in *Global Studies* (2016).

3 Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

4 http://www.mustafathepoet.com

Melisse Watson, *2025 Dark-Years*, 2016, Digital Illustration
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Borrowed Lady

Martine Syms
in conversation with
Amy Kazymerchyk

Previous Page: Martine Syms, *Fact & Trouble*. Installation view, Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2016, London, UK.
PHOTO: MARK BLOWER. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

Amy Kazymerchyk, curator of the Audain Gallery in Vancouver, BC, talks with Los Angeles based artist Martine Syms about the development of her first solo exhibition in Canada, titled *Borrowed Lady*, at the gallery from October 13 – December 10, 2016. They discuss the familial, cultural and historical inheritances in Syms' practice, the conditions of borrowing and the circulation of vocal and physical gesture.

AMY KAZYMERCHYK: The centrepiece of *Borrowed Lady* is an expanded installation of your 2015 video *Notes on Gesture*. Could you describe this original work?

MARTINE SYMS: The first iteration of *Notes on Gesture* is a single-channel video that looks at the differences between how a person moves naturally versus when they are acting. While I was researching acting techniques I found an index of gestures that was published in 1644 by an English physician named John Bulwer, titled *Chirologia: or the naturall language of the hand*. I learned that these gestures were associated with a Shakespearean form of acting, and that each one was linked to an emotive or affective way of communicating. I found a lot of similarities between them and emojis, so there was a contemporary link that resonated with me.

Initially, I developed a character who was loosely based on my great-aunt, as well as other women in my family. I worked with an actor named Diamond Stingily to perform some of those gestures and to physically think with me about everyday performance, the performance of identity and the kinds of movements and gestures that connect people in a group. We talked about women in our families and I asked her to do impressions of them. I also had her improvise from photographs of my great-aunt, as well as pop-culture images, films and memes.

Stills from Martine Syms, *Notes on Gesture*, 2015, HD Video.
COURTESY THE ARTIST.

At the time I was shooting, there was a trend in which every fashion magazine had a Black woman on the cover of their September issue. This made me think about what made certain identities and their movements and gestures marketable or viral. I was also looking at repetition in memes, Vines and gifs, and how they compress cultural information and an experience into a single gesture.

AK: How did this iteration of the work change for its presentation at the Audain Gallery?

MS: In the version of *Notes on Gesture* that I produced for the Audain Gallery, I worked a lot on developing the sound. The soundtrack for the first video was just the music that was playing in the room while we were taping, because I thought the video would be silent, but once I started editing I became interested in the ambient music and our conversation. When I imagined the Audain installation, I wanted to create a call-and-response structure in which Diamond talks to herself across the gallery. The rhythm of the video edit really lends itself to that kind of feedback loop. I worked with a musician named Celia Hollander, who performs under the name $3.33. She used the original soundtrack to create a score, which I responded to in my new edit. So there's also a call-and-response loop in our working process as well.

Martine Syms, *Borrowed Lady*. Installation view, Audain Gallery, 2016, Vancouver, BC
PHOTO: BLAINE CAMPBELL. COURTESY OF AUDAIN GALLERY.

AK: The title of the exhibition, *Borrowed Lady*, is itself borrowed, isn't it?

MS: Yes, I read about the idea in Samuel R. Delany's autobiography, *Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village, 1957-1965* (1988). He writes about a tendency within 11th and 12th century Provençal poetry for female characters to possess qualities that are borrowed from different women. In contemporary times it would be like, "She's got the ass of Kim Kardashian, the hair of Tyra Banks, and the lips of Monica Lewinsky." That's a borrowed lady! The idea of inhabiting different women was something that I was already playing with in working with images and directing performance.

AK: What does *borrowed* mean to you, and how does it differ from other terms we use in contemporary art such as copied, appropriated, stolen or mimicked?

MS: Borrowing is more in line with a kind of sampling aesthetic. I'm thinking about the Wu-Tang song that is named after the Wendy Rene sample, "After the laughter comes tears." I guess you could say the sample is stolen, but you could also say that they're just using it. Maybe borrowing is more colloquial or vernacular. It has an ephemeral quality to it – like you're just going to take it for a second and it's going to lead to something else. People have been talking about mimicry and specifically mimetic desire a lot with me. Maybe mimicry has a similar quality to borrowing, but appropriation doesn't feel that way to me.

AK: Part of the social contract of borrowing is the intention to take care of the borrowed thing well enough so that when you return it, it can continue to be used. If you don't literally return it to the original owner, but pass it on to a third person, there's a more complex migratory process of care that is enacted. The images in *Borrowed Lady* migrate across multiple screens, which leads me to think about borrowing in relation to migration or circulation of ideas, in which caring for an idea also means being open to it being evolved by others.

MS: Yeah, definitely! Circulation is a key part of everything that I work on, and I think of my own process as operating in circular patterns. It's important for me to work through an idea in various forms but also in formats that circulate in different ways amongst distinct audiences. It's something I've been working on in the last two installations I made. In *Fact and Trouble* at the ICA in London, there are back-to-back monitors that suggest to viewers to move around that space in a circular motion. In *Black Box* at Human Resources in Los Angeles, there were three video channels in the room that played at variable intervals. Viewers weren't sure of the playing pattern, so people followed each other's movement, which created a kind of social script for circulation.

I'm working with migration in more explicit ways as well. This grew out of my research on the Great Migration of African-Americans moving from the rural South to urban centres in the North between 1910 and 1970, and how this migration paralleled the development of the American film and entertainment industry. Circulation is significant in both these historical moments, with regards to how information is distributed, how it informs how people see themselves, and how it is invariably mutated, morphed, changed and passed on. Jacqueline Stewart's research on this history – particularly about Black creators' roles within American cinema from audience to producers – in her book *Migrating to the Movies* (2005), is really interesting.

AK: In a short video produced by the ICA on the *Fact and Trouble* exhibition, you speak about familial, historical and cultural "inheritances" in your work, which is an interesting synonym for borrowing because it also implies a certain responsibility to care for something that has been passed on to you, in order to be able to pass it on. What are the inheritances in this work?

MS: The primary inheritances are familial ones. I've been working with material from my great-aunt's house, which my dad inherited. I helped him clean out the house, and so her heirlooms, photos, furniture were one source. Her house was a west-coast locus for my family, and it was also a boarding house from about the late-'70s, early '80s onwards. It took a lot of time to figure out who the people in the images were, which ones were family and which weren't. A lot of the initial writing for the piece was generating scenarios for understanding what was going on in the images. While I was shooting *Notes on Gesture*, I was also shooting reenactments of my aunt's photos.

AK: The title for *Notes on Gesture* was also inherited from Giorgio Agamben's essay of the same name. How does Agamben's ideas from *Notes on Gesture* (2000) resonate in the work?

MS: I was interested in his assertion that film resided within the realm of politics because of its focus on movement, which is distinct from Hannah Arendt's idea of politics being based in the public. I thought there was something in the meeting of their two ideas that is palpable in the way that images of bodies and particularly Black bodies are currently circulating in mediated public space through both documents of police brutality and creative or funny Vines.

Martine Syms, *Vertical Elevated Oblique*. Installation view, Bridget Donahue, 2016, New York City
PHOTO: MARC BREMS TATTI. COURTESY BRIDGET DONAHUE, NYC.

AK: Agamben writes, via Varro and Aristotle, that the gesture as an action is closer to the Latin *gerere*, which means to carry or carry on, and relative to *gerunt*, to support or endure. Gesture in cinema, as acts of endurance exhibit "being-in-a-medium of human being" and open an ethical dimension by making the means visible without a political end. This leads me to think about the ethics and politics of *becoming*, because of its proximity to carrying on, and endurance. How do *being* and *becoming* relate to how you explore gesture and movement in relation to identity formation and the performance of identity?

MS: Yeah, I keyed into that part of his essay as well, and I've thought about film as a container where gestures and movements are stored or preserved. I sort of disagree with Agamben's claim that we've lost our gestures and cinema has revived them, but I understand how he uses it to make the argument. This is pretty fundamental to my own being and becoming because I learned to *be* in a certain sense – learned how to present myself, how to talk, how to walk – from family and community and cinema alike. I like the idea that you could see an image or a film and then decide that you wanted to be like the person in it.

For example, I love the show *How to Get Away with Murder* and I see an image of Annalise Keating in the show and desire her composure or her attractiveness, her way of speaking or the way she holds herself, and in that desire, adopt some of those qualities myself. That's what the refrain "fake it 'til you make it," basically means. It's just about performing.

And so I think the line is really thin between *becoming* and *being* and that physical language is a big part of being, especially with regards to how you are perceived. It's what I wanted to enact in *Notes on Gesture*. I wasn't making a film about Diamond, though sometimes people think that. Some people have also seen the video and think that it's about me. That slipperiness is a good sign – that through the process of making the film and exhibiting it, the character is read as being or becoming different people.

AK: In your 2015 text "A Pilot for a Show about Nowhere," in *Art Papers*, you write about how the presence of Black actors and narratives in television sitcoms influenced your youth, and informs the dialogue, choreography, editing and feeling of your work. This is palpable in the TV pilot *She Mad* that you've been developing over the past few years, as well as your lecture performance *Misdirected Kiss*, which you performed in Vancouver at the Western Front in January 2016. Do you think '90s sitcoms recuperate lost gestures of the 20th century?

MS: There were actually two early TV shows, *I Remember Mama* and *The Goldbergs* (both 1949), that were migration narratives about moving from a rural area and an agrarian way of life to a consumer lifestyle in the city. They also portrayed a generational shift, and the shows were about how each person related to each other and their anxieties. In the 1970s, TV sitcoms transformed to more aspirational narratives, when I would say that some of the Black sitcoms that Norman Lear made, like *Good Times* (1974), gave a narrative to similar working-class anxieties. This comes up again in the late '80s, early '90s, once the kind of economics of TV shifts and the sitcoms really are made for a working-class audience, while a more affluent audience is targeted with hour-long dramas, which were

considered quality TV. And that's still with us. HBO and Netflix shows are more or less geared towards affluence. Current sitcoms, and maybe the 30-minute reality TV show, take up working-class narratives.

What I'm more interested in is how the forms of speech and movement that were captured in television sitcoms are now being replicated in self-presentations online. Social media spaces and the way that people talk about their lives in them feel very sitcom-y to me.

AK: Are you saying that what we're seeing in YouTube videos, gifs, Vines and memes, is the product of a generation that grew up with television sitcoms in the '80s and '90s and inherited the expressions and structures of speaking, acting and moving from this media and are emulating them in their own lives and representations of life?

Still from Martine Syms, *A Pilot for a Show About Nowhere*, 2015. COURTESY THE ARTIST.

MS: Yeah, and the way that they narrativize their lives – their way of understanding collective consciousness or history.

AK: I know you're interested in Alison Landsberg's writing on prosthetic memory and how the mass media produces narratives that invite people to witness memories that they did not actually live. She talks about these memories literally being grafted on the body like a prosthetic limb. In the way you've shot *Notes on Gesture*, you've fragmented Diamond's body so that you see only one aspect of her body at a time. You focus on the movement of her arm, her face or her shoulder. What did you decide to capture her gesture like this?

MS: I was looking closely at the compositions of etchings in John Bulwer's *Chirologia*, and I was using them as a formal reference, so I only shot closeups of her hand or her face, or a medium shot of her head and shoulders. Again, I didn't want the piece to be read like it was a portrait of Diamond. I wanted to create a separate character. Stylistically, I also wanted the video to reference indexical or diagrammatic methods.

AK: In Laura Marks' book *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (2002), she considers what the body of digital video versus the body of analogue video is. She speculates that digital video doesn't have a material body like analogue video does, and thus refuses an original, authentic or singular form. Rather it is non-linear, multiple and accumulative. When you choose to make a work on digital video, such as *Notes on Gesture*, are you thinking about how the medium might refuse a determined body? How instead it proliferates and migrates?

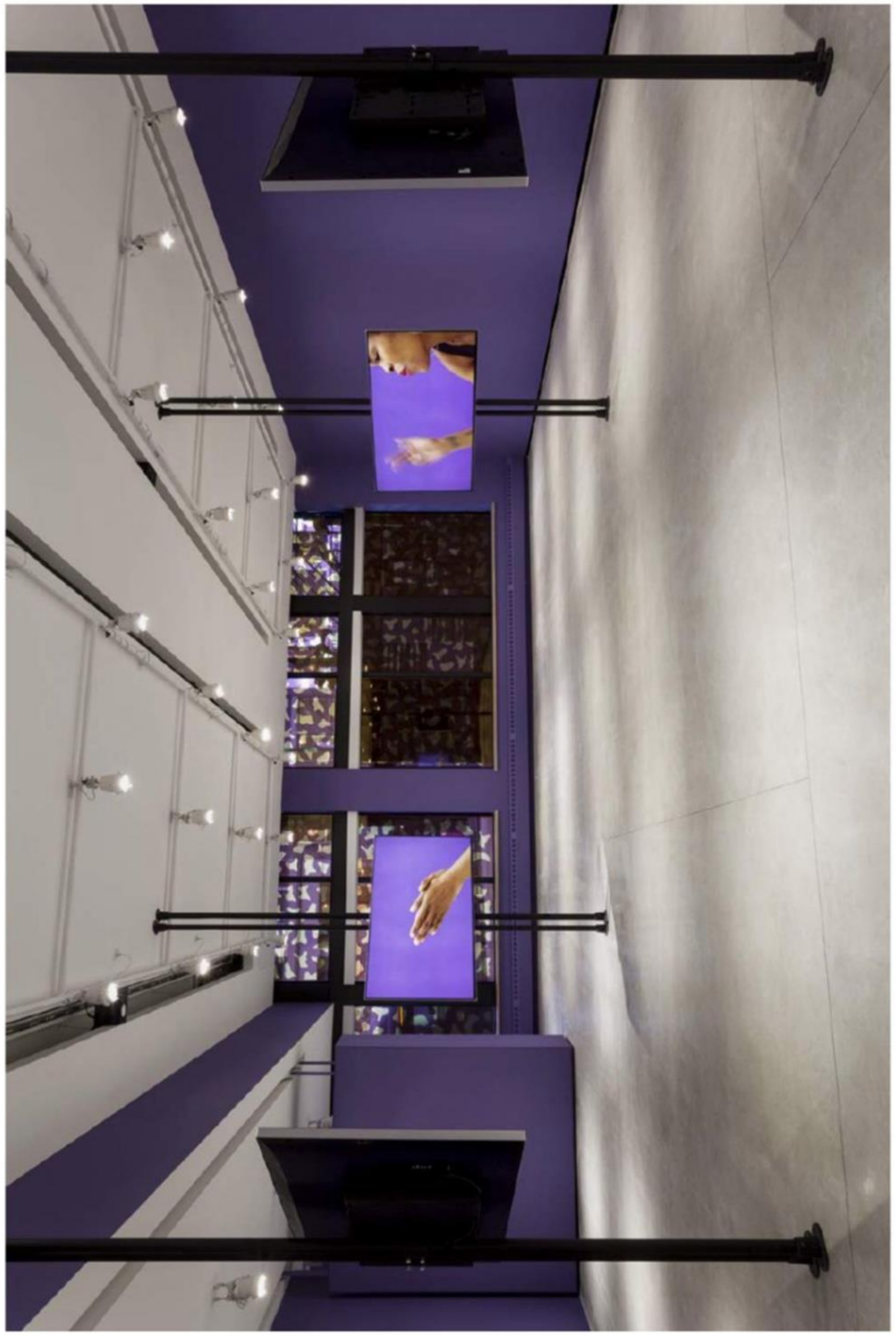
MS: Yeah, definitely. One reason I use video a lot is that it's very easy to take – or borrow – from other sources. I'm fluidly accumulating video footage all the time. I shoot footage constantly and grew up shooting footage. I actually got into making movies through Super 8, and have always been drawn to consumer filmmaking technologies. I'm also collecting found Super 8 footage, found slides and found snapshots. In the material that I shoot, like the found stuff, I'm not worried about production value. My thoughts about production value are oriented around ideology and narrative. I'm really interested in why and when people employ a certain type of shot. That's maybe the film theory nerd in myself. For me, the process of editing and of creating video is part of my daily practice. I'm a writer in so many ways and there are a lot of similarities between writing and editing media. I think about my pool of video footage as an image bank that I'm always adding to and pulling from.

AK: I want to pick up on what you first said about returning to the source material for *Notes on Gesture* and tuning into the conversation that you and Diamond were having, which was unintentionally recorded. You mentioned that this dialogue was the impetus for creating a multi-channel installation in which the actor talks to herself across the gallery, and that the process by which it would be made would echo that structure – though a dialogue between yourself, Celia the sound designer and a second editor, Nicole Otero. What types of unique editing decisions did this produce? And what did they express about gesture, everyday performance and the performance of identity that was distinct from, or built upon, the single channel version?

MS: I use repetition for its ability to build continuity and to completely destabilize at the same time. This project is a collaboration between four women: Diamond, Celia, Nicole and me. We worked in relay, passing files, and this collective assembly is analogous to the way that identities are created.

Amy Kazymerchyk is the curator of the Audain Gallery in Vancouver, BC.

Martine Syms is an American artist based in Los Angeles who works in publishing, video and performance.



Martine Syms, *Borrowed Lady*. Installation view, Audain Gallery, 2016, Vancouver, BC
PHOTO: BLAINE CAMPBELL. COURTESY OF AUDAIN GALLERY.

Rocking the Running Spirit: Meditations on Sisterhood and Occupations

by Anna Martine Whitehead

I am hitting a rhythm. Like the ancestors at Igbo Landing, I am hitting a rock, rocking out to sea. I am rocking in my seat, my heels; my body rocks. My ghosts have memories past time of rocking. We've caught the spirit, we've jigged and jumped, we've danced and grooved and broken. Ancient memories of being elevated in a trance, with hands laid upon memory, remembering in *sema*, swaying in *shuckles*, and so on – who knows what memories these ghosts hold. In New Orleans, supine with toes up, in close enough proximity to the other Black women here to feel their sweat pool around my shoulders, I begin to rock my heels. I am rocking my heels, my body rocks, memory is activated, I am unlocked. I am available as Toni Morrison identifies availability: The body "hanging around," accessible to spirit.[1]

We are a new ensemble in the early stages of developing interdisciplinary work addressing freedom. This week we are exploring the hull-of-the-ship Middle Passage experience, asking ourselves how those folk down there shared stories with each other when they couldn't raise their voices, didn't have room to stand, didn't speak the same language. We know this is powerful work – ancestor work – so every day we enter the studio and build an altar, set intentions and ground ourselves spiritually before rehearsal. We are a small group of Black women, femmes and queers, with varying creative practices and spiritual, ethnic and geographic backgrounds. Without necessarily naming it as such, every rehearsal is a re-enactment of the ritual we have collectively created to re-collect our ancestors and carry them with us into freedom. To get there, we often start on the floor, toes up, rocking.

Rocking has been long been used by many as an entryway into a trance state, a border-crossing action that allows the soul to vibrate more easily between the physical and astral planes. Similarly to another vibrational practice – singing – it has been used by Hebrews, Sufi, Hindus, Evangelicals and Baptists, among others, as a self-contained and sustainable method to "change [one's] condition."[2] Like singing – a process of "running sound through your body" – rocking is an activation of spirit in the flesh. In our ensemble, the practice is rooted in the imagined experience of enslaved Africans shackled to the floor of a ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean. We imagine the storms at sea, and the proximity to other bodies shaking (for we know that while in the hold babies were born, seizures were had, illnesses were fought and so on) over the up-to-six-month journey would have made for a turbulent passage. So we rock from the ankles to connect to the physical experience of our ancestors en route.

(A memory of the Middle Passage.)

We rock and we run the spirit through us. I am on this studio floor-ship rocking with the others when I am overtaken by spirit. I am penetrated by an energy, which enters through my chest and takes up residence throughout me, toe to head. Over the following weeks and months I will reflect on this time using a litany of synonyms, trying and failing to attach language-meaning to the experience of being entered, possessed and activated. Occupation is the word I return to. Occupation as a feeling, if one can imagine the feeling of occupation, though "feeling" – neither in the sense of emotion nor physical sensation – is an imprecise term for what is happening.

The more recently colonized may recognize this feeling-not-feeling of alien occupation. A feeling of the Other that also becomes you until you move as the other moves and the point where you distinguish yourself from your occupier is so slippery that you must wage wars to maintain your borders. Or you must allow your borders to grow soft. This "feeling."

What does it feel like to be a Palestinian elder in Gaza? The feeling of losing one's grasp on one's memories of life before the *nakba*; the feeling of knowing that your children have never tasted water that did not come from Israel or looked up at a night sky that was not owned and contested by foreign governments. And you yourself cannot remember such a sky, and it is only in the poems in your head that water and sky and living are free. How is it to be the elder's grandchild who plays intifada games in seized and regulated streets, and laughs with the eruptive joy of a child. This "feeling"?

What does it feel like to be young, gifted and Black in Chicago, locking arms with your peers and refusing to leave Homan Square, or King Drive, or City Hall? City Hall: The feeling of proclaiming your right to a space that is not yours and was never intended to be, but despite your hatred for that space you still need it, though you barely know what "it" is – but you have dreams and in your dreams you are as powerful as that place, and in your waking life you feel most woke when you demand of that space that it acknowledge your incumbent power and, yes, even care about you? How does it feel to stand empowered by the knowledge that, as Baldwin said, "nothing... can take away our title to the land which we, too, [have] purchased with our blood?"[3] This "feeling"? This bloody purchase of our selves?

These scenarios I am using by example still do not quite get to the kind of occupied feeling I am experiencing on the floor in New Orleans. It is uncomfortable, yes, and violent. And there is certainly an element of myopic non-consensuality in my relationship to my Other, at least in terms of my inability to even acknowledge her existence before this moment. But I did not steal what belonged to my ancestor-occupier, inasmuch as once you are dead everything and nothing belonging to the living is yours. And the young, slight, enslaved African woman whose energy occupies me in New Orleans does not mean to take anything from me by force. She just needs to get something done, and, perhaps, she needs me to know something. She – that is, vibrations resonant with a soul's memory of some particular body – takes up residence in and throughout me, not with the force of hatred or defiance, but with a life force that disturbs me into a fuller life-in-my-body. I am occupied forcefully, but there is no ill will between us. Together, we become multi-spirited.

* * *

This is just the beginning. Once I am occupied by my ancestor, I am visited by the ghost of a white European slaver. Like all the ghosts I have ever known, this one has a weight, a shape, which it brings down on top of us as my body rocks – and it begins to rock us. That is to say, we are raped. Here I am further spirited as the presence enters me – the rocking becomes a combined result of my muscles moving and the ghost moving us from the inside of my body. During this time of vesseltude, in which my body experiences multiple visitations, my own psyche remains present – in fact, it is hyper-present. For example, I am present to the piece we are making in this studio in New Orleans *right now*, and I know there is a scene after this one. It is almost impossible but I rise off of the ground in performing the sequence. Somewhere in the process of standing, I am vacated of these spirits. Later on, I will collapse.

She comes to me again the next day during the same scene. I feel her arrival and then her residence inside my body, and I welcome it. The ghost comes too: another white European slaver, unmistakably different in form than yesterday's. Again we are raped, though this new ghost's feel is less heavy and more rapid. Again I am vacated upon standing. She comes to me a third time the following day, as does a new aspect of that slaver's variegated violent energy. She comes a fourth time on the fourth day, and so does he/it.

But this fourth and final time, something is different. She occupies me and then, for our protection, she calls her spiritual allies to join us. They come immediately, one after another, so that I almost instantly feel myself extend beyond my self with ancestors. I become extensive; I become robust with energy and socially bonded to an expanding spirit. My body is made into a vessel barely containing myself, my visitor and all of her visitors; and all of our individuated and collective memory, terror and rage; and all of our combined resplendent resilience and our joyful passion and our love. This energy wraps around and through me; it courses through my body electromagnetically; it lights my cells on fire. We wrestle our attacker(s) with the strength of millions. We are more powerful than him/it – we are literally infinite and will devour him – and we use our strength to carry him inside us from out of wherever we are, take him to the poop deck and over the railing, where we drown all of us in the sea, and become finally free.

When it is all over, I will hear the scene described back to me by onlookers as a wild rolling scuffle inside of myself, as if I were be-bopping myself to an untraceable polyrhythm trapped inside a seizure. Something like dancing.

As I reflect on New Orleans from the illusion of distance that time provides, I am learning to better distinguish between an occupying spirit and a guardian spirit who helps create the soul – and both as wholly different from a ghost. Through conversations with two-spirit friends, I am coming to empathize with the feeling of living with a daily awareness of multiple spirits inside one's body – two or more spirits who remain fully at home and a part of one's soul. Occupation isn't necessarily possession – a *zombie*-like state of total acquiescence to spirit. In my case in New Orleans, the occupation was a sharing of my body, a kind of intimate collaboration. Fred Moten describes this type of collaboration as the "consent to not be a single being; to become an instrument for one another."[4] Like Akasha Gloria Hull who writes extensively on the "creative partnership with spirit" that Black women maintain, Moten also stresses that the expression of this becoming-instrument is an act of simultaneous composition (making the work) and dispossession (losing the self).[5]

Moten and Hull both speak to the idea of a community whose members are not only in solidarity with one another but who also remain in a constant state of becoming one another. This is a spiritual community – one that exists on both the physical and astral plane – as much as a social and embodied one. It is a community made through coalition. The living are not the dead, but we do coexist, and in our coexistence lies our potential for building together. As Martin Berger notes, the "living and dead were interdependent. Always. Only a uniquely modern form of egotism has broken this interdependence. With disastrous results for the living, who now think of the dead as *eliminated*."[6]

To flip Berger's thesis, we might consider the ways we think of our eliminated as dead. Who else has been eliminated? To where have the over 7.2 million people living under carceral control on U.S. territory gone? Where are the absent Black bodies whose labour produces the physical, intellectual, cultural and psychic power the world so greedily consumes? What are we, if not present? Are we dead in the context of the modern egotism Berger references, where dead is synonymous with "dead and gone"? Does our elimination render us ghosts – even as our gone-ness produces living capital, even after the point of death, as though the vibrancy of our spirit after elimination was only the spoils of a blood-thirsty parasite?[7] Is that all that we are – hosts to the living?

As I reflect on an individual's capacity to become an eliminated subject en route to a dead body, I am reminded of the 2014 lynching of Michael Brown, in which, according to Marc Lamont Hill, the community was forced to "watch [Brown] lay there, as if he belonged to nobody... That nobodiness happens even before you encounter a Darren Wilson... If you're not part of the 1% you just might be nobody."[8] Imagine a late morning in Ferguson, Missouri: A community brought together through their shared Blackness and poverty, which has rendered them a collective of eliminated nobodies, watching a fellow eliminated nobody lay dying. How does it feel to be nobody watching nobody die? How does one transition from living to dead – to the realm of ancestors resisting elimination – when one has already been eliminated into nobodiness? This "feeling"?

I look to our ancestors for answers. Like the one who occupied me in New Orleans, they resist elimination and make me a simultaneous host and composer. This particular ancestor compels me to refuse the elimination of my living and my dead through collaboration, which is really merely a manifestation of our rebellious spirit moving through us and demanding remembrance plus action.

She entreats me to reinvigorate thermodynamics' first law, the conservation of energy: Nothing to be thrown away because there is no away. There is no dead-and-gone, no not-here, no town of nobodies-merely-bodies-in-waiting. Darren Wilson's somebodiness exists only inasmuch as Michael Brown is equally somebody. The conservation of energy argues that the power of the state exists only by the power of the people, and the people's power is flamed by the power of the unseen. We are recycled. We are connected: ancestors and the not-yet-ancestors, people inside prison and outside, people outside our borders and inside, people killing us and those of us who have been killed. I touched this interdependent spirit when my ancestor occupied me and we entered into an embodied and instrumental discourse on themes of freedom, which, in conversation, becomes collective. More precisely, I touched this spirit in the moment I was physically on the floor rocking with my sisters while becoming thick with ancestors and drowning together in the sea. Even that ghost slaver, working out his ghastly memories of violence in the physical realm; his own resistance to elimination – troubled as it was – was pulled into the conversation. We were connected through the cipher of my corpus. We touched spirit through flesh and pulled each other into the deep, and we all drowned together.

Our work in New Orleans is a re-collection: an invitation to run the spirit through the body, an acknowledgement of our interdependence. When we make spiritually rooted creative work, we offer this hand of collaboration to all of our ancestors and ancestors-to-be. We say with our art: "Welcome. Glad to meet you. Let me help you. Pull me up." We offer this hand to those from the hold whose names we'll never know. We offer it, too, to those whose names we have: Harriet, Audre, Fannie Lou, Langston, Sojourner, Toni, James, Nina, Marsha, Ed, Josephine, Nat, Grandma Maddie, Aunt Lula, Trayvon, Eric, Rekia, Emmett, Skye, Tyre, TT, and on and on. And then, too, we offer the hand to each other: those of us living, dancing, struggling, surviving – all at the same damn time. All of us – seen and unseen – we touch the spirit and we illuminate us all.

We are hitting a rhythm now; we are hitting our rock. We are on the studio floor, rocking. The floor is a ship, which carries us away and brings us back home. The rocking shakes the shackles as it shakes our loved ones and those we don't yet know to love us. We are dancing with our breath; we are rocking. We are having a conversation about freedom. We are collaborating with spirit, which is infinite, which is to say: We are making ourselves infinite. We are making ourselves free.

Anna Martine Whitehead is a Black queer femme artist using movement and language to escape planet Earth.

Endnotes

1 Toni Morrison, *Soul Talk*, quoted in Akasha Gloria Hull, *Soul Talk: The New Spirituality of African American Women* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2001), 233.

2 Bernice Johnson Reagon, discussing spirituals in *The Songs are Free*, a documentary by Bill Moyers and Gail Pellett (PBS, 1991). Quoted in P. Kimberleigh Jordan, "'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around': Spirituals as Embodied Acts of Resistance," *The Black Scholar* 46, No. 1 (Spring 2016), 37-45.

3 James Baldwin "Princes and Powers," *Observer*, November 25, 1956.

4 Fred Moten at REDCAT, Los Angeles, March 19, 2014.

5 Akasha Gloria Hull, 109.

6 Martin Berger, "On the Economy of the Dead," *Harper's*, September, 2008, http://harpers.org/archive/2008/09/on-the-economy-of-the-dead/

7 Frances Robles and Mike McPhate, "George Zimmerman Tries to Auction Gun Used to Kill Trayvon Martin," *New York Times*, May 12, 2016.

8 "Marc Lamont Hill & Mychal Denzel Smith React to Police Killings of Alton Sterling & Philando Castile (Pt. 2)", (on Democracy Now, July 7, 2016). http://www.democracynow.org/2016/7/7/marc_lamont_hill_mychal_denzel_smith_react

Feminisms of the Future, Now: Rethinking Technofeminism and the Manifesto Form

interview with Lucca Fraser, co-author of the Xenofeminist Manifesto

by Esmé Hogeveen

"Ours is a world in vertigo. It is a world that swarms with technological mediation, interlacing our daily lives with abstraction, virtuality, and complexity."

So begins the Xenofeminist Manifesto, formally *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation* (hereafter XFM), compiled by the collective Laboria Cuboniks in 2015.

"XFM constructs a feminism adapted to these realities: a feminism of unprecedented cunning, scale, and vision; a future in which the realization of gender justice and feminist emancipation contribute to a universalist politics assembled from the needs of every human, cutting across race, ability, economic standing, and geographical position."

The considerations, in short, of Laboria Cuboniks, or LC, are extensive, taking into account not only the ways in which technology can facilitate pluralistic feminisms, but also the extent to which technology may constitute an interdisciplinary means for revising, and ideally revitalizing, discourse about gendered identity, labour and bodily experience.

This summer, I corresponded with Lucca Fraser, Halifax-based theorist, scholar and programmer, and one of the members of Laboria Cuboniks, about her vision for XFM and some of the implications of technofeminist critique considered more broadly – including its relation to aesthetics, online discourse, activism and the stakes of universalist politics. Fraser beat me to the punch with many of her responses, anticipating questions, for example, about the perceived inaccessibility of technology. "Free time," she observes, "[may be] the single biggest obstacle between the current situation and the utopias dreamt up by '90s cyberfeminism." Nevertheless, Fraser's optimism about technology's potential and her analyses of the manifesto form itself – a kind of experiment, she wagers, that works best when "you can't predict with any probability who your audience will be" – provide an optimistic counterpoint to doom-and-gloom accounts of contemporary surveillance and techno-policing.

As Laboria Cuboniks extol in the final line of XFM: "If nature is unjust, change nature!" The following conversation considers related efforts to inspire, enact, critique and renegotiate the pursuit of such changes...

—

Note: Inspired by the aphoristic structure of XFM, the interview is divided into five question clusters: DEFINE, ATTEND, UPEND, EXTEND and MANIFEST. Readers should feel free to read sequentially or non-sequentially as desired.

The full text of XFM is available online:
http://www.laboriacuboniks.net/

—Who exactly is Laboria Cuboniks, and is the group still active?

She's no one in particular. But she's still very active.

Those of us who were most immediately behind the manifesto have already been de-anonymized, so I suppose there's no need to be elusive. Except for one point: Laboria Cuboniks isn't something we want to be identified with in any rigid way. We just wanted to get [Laboria] started, and to give people a sense of what it could mean to speak through, or with, her.

There were six of us at the beginning: Diann Bauer, Katrina Burch, Helen Hester, Amy Ireland, Patricia Reed and myself. Since then, and even indirectly during the writing of the manifesto, others became involved... Laboria Cuboniks is meant to be an abstract platform, for which we don't feel we ought to be the gatekeepers. It's a pseudonym for anyone who's interested in using it. Of course, it's a bit of a gamble that the results will be consistent or useful, but it seems like an interesting gamble.

DEFINE

1.1—*Reading XFM, and subsequently hearing you speak at NSCAD and following you on social media, I've been struck by the way in which interdisciplinary connections between a lived feminism and a lived critique of feminism effortlessly coalesce in your analyses of virtual and so-called "real" life. Here, I'm thinking in part of your references to motherhood, to gendered labour and to technology's potential to augment understandings of gender, race, sexuality, identity, power, politics and social responsibility (among other things!). To what degree do you think the interdisciplinarity of your thinking reflects a dissolution of traditional oppositions between material versus immaterial (i.e. inclusive of virtual) experience?*

There is no real opposition any more, I don't think. It already feels a bit quaint or ironic to contrast your "online" with your "real" life. With the rise of social media, on the one hand, and the decline of the academic humanities, on the other, the Internet – especially extremely public and accessible zones, such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Tumblr, the blogosphere, etc. – has become the place where relevant political discourse and theory happens. On the Internet, discourse [interweaves] with everyday life. Threads routinely bob back and forth from back-of-the-envelope economic analyses to shitposting, confessionals and chitchat. It's a whole different ecosystem for ideas and memes... In this new system, ideas need to spread as quickly as the flu to stay viable; they can't afford to take the time they'd take to spread in an academic ecology (academic ideas are more like STDs – long-lasting, but requiring far more than casual contact to spread).

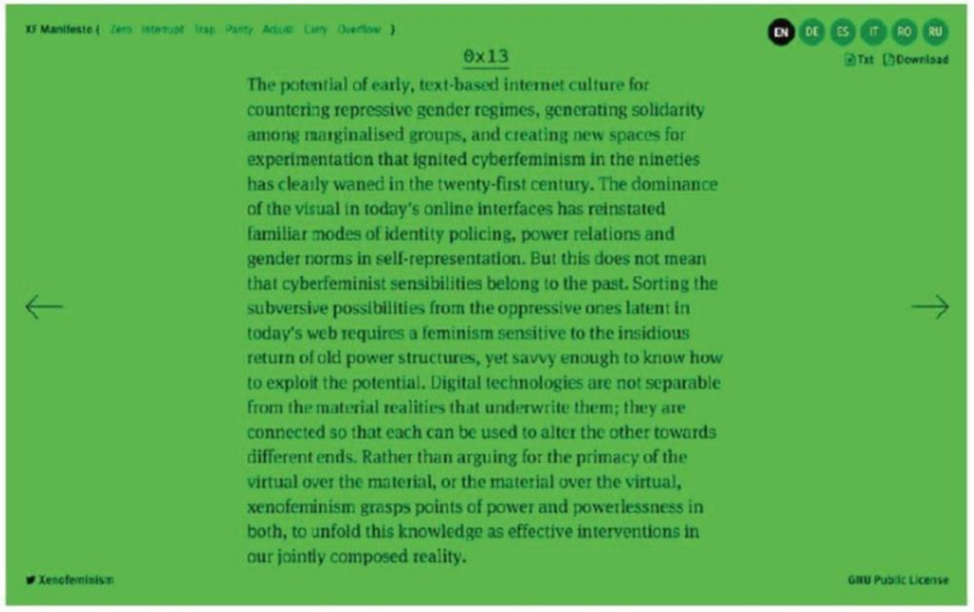
Another twist that the ubiquity of the Internet and social media brought about, I think, is the way it turns domestic space inside out. It goes a long, long way to abolishing the separation of public and domestic spheres. Lack of free time is still a huge obstacle here, but there's something very important about the way the Internet lets agents who have been traditionally excluded from the public sphere enter into conversations that can, at least potentially, become global in scale. The very topology of the public sphere has changed in a way that makes gatekeeping increasingly unfeasible.

To get back to your question: it's not the dissolution between material and immaterial that interests me; it's the complexification of public space. I mean this in a basic topological sense: the world no longer has – or is at least rapidly shedding – the structure that once made it susceptible to traditional forms of control: isolation, gatekeeping, censorship, containment, etc... The separation of intellectual and manual labour, of domestic and public spaces, and so on, presuppose a world with a very different shape than the one we have now. We've smashed the crystal spheres. New forms of control are arising rapidly, driven by forms of observation and intelligence that have no historical precedent, but there's no getting the horse back in the barn, or the stars back in the firmament.

There's a lot of talk of the modern panopticon and the surveillance state these days, but in some ways it tends to be too pessimistic: technologies and governmental practices of surveillance and control might be accelerating, but they're still losing the race. Thanks to modern encryption and anonymization technologies, the world is becoming unsurveillable and uncontrollable at an entirely different, and greater, order of magnitude. Just to give one simple example: virtually every modern smartphone is equipped with encryption technology, e.g. Signal, that is strong enough to escape the most powerful surveillance agencies on the planet. The current pushback that we're seeing in various governments' attempts to limit or weaken encryption is as inevitable and as clownish as it looks, but this is a fight that I think they have already lost.

1.11—*Laboria Cuboniks professes skepticism toward performative – and potentially insincere or undeveloped – intersectional discourse. Do you think a significant connection can be drawn between XF's apprehension toward labelling and cyberfeminists' refusal to self-define (i.e. as manifest in the creation of the "100 Anti-Theses" at the first Cyberfeminist International meeting in 1997)?*

Yes. "Intersectionality" is a tremendously important notion – it's the insight that every demographic abstraction is leaky as hell, and that no identity category captures us without remainder, and that power never operates uniformly, but adapts itself to every facet of our complexly textured lives. This means that any grounds we put forth for solidarity are going to risk hardening into something deceitful and procrustean, or even outright oppressive, if they don't remain open to a sort of universalism. But [a universalism] that proceeds from the concrete particularities of the situation. This is a tricky point, because we also see universalist gestures being used as an excuse to ignore the situations we're dealing with – "All Lives Matter" being an easily recognizable example of sham universalism. This isn't an intersectional and genuinely universalist gesture; it's a retreat, a way of emptying a real struggle of its content, so as to make it more palatable to those who don't want to be disturbed.



11.1—*Though commercial and surveillance projects seem insidiously parasitic to digital culture, do you think online memetics may still offer inroads to psychical and bodily forms of self-(re)generation, maybe even freedom(s)?*

Yes, absolutely.

11.11—*What role do you think aesthetics play in shaping visions of such freedoms?*

"Shaping visions of freedom" is an interesting way to think about aesthetics, especially those of human self-artificialization, which, admittedly, seems like an enormously broad category. I don't know if I want to say this as an extremely general rule, but it seems that most engrossing art gives us a new, sometimes slightly more nuanced or skewed, sensibility of our freedoms and constraints.

11.111—*What do you make of the borderline fetishization of 1990s subcultural aesthetics (here, I'm thinking of Riot Grrrl, Cyberfeminism, and other forms of predominantly white "alt" culture) and attendant critiques of third-wave nostalgia in contemporary culture?*

Do you mean [Laboria Cuboniks'] fetishization of these aesthetics? I hope we're not fetishizing them. I think these [subcultures] influenced us at an early age, so I wouldn't be surprised if you found some echoes there. And Cyberfeminism is basically our monstrous, ectogenic mom, with whom we're still very close and call every weekend. Most of us were teenagers in the '90s, and for some of us that meant hanging out on BBSes,[1] listening to punk rock and making drug-addled, underground zines with ink, glue and Xerox machines.

The question of nostalgia has been raised before, though, regarding XF and accelerationism, our monstrous sibling... There's definitely a fondness for those moments in history when the present seemed to bristle with futures. It's not a nostalgia for what was, but for what seemed possible. We can't let it dominate our work – you don't want to fixate on these things...But there's a genuine affection for those moments that continues to give us energy and hope.

I guess you can see something that's been called nostalgia in quite a few of the online aesthetic movements that have formed recently – vaporwave, seapunk, cybertwee, etc. But I don't think that their enjoyment and estrangements of older cultural forms is really a problem. It would be more of a problem, I think, if we let the wreckage of the '90s go to waste without trying to explore it... Part of what it means to be contemporary, to live in 2016, is to look back on the ruins of the '90s – and now, I suppose, the early 2000s – as history, as something retro. That's something we couldn't do at the time. And we missed a lot of things, a lot of strangeness and a lot of stupidity on the first pass. This is a political exercise, too. Look at how every character in *Friends* squirms and panics every time anything even slightly suggestive of homosexuality comes up. It's bizarre as hell. And it was perfectly normal at the time. Even straight kids living today can see how bizarre it was. At the time, you had to have a seat on the margins to see why this was screwy.

The romanticism of '90s cyberculture, for example, can also be tremendously invigorating. It reminds us of how absolutely fucking remarkable our current era is. Just look at the excitement you find in authors like Sadie Plant, VNS Matrix and Sandy Stone when they talk about the instant availability of knowledge, the ubiquity of artificial intelligence and the near total interconnectivity of the planet. It's too easy to see the present as something banal or unremarkable. As my friend William Gillis – who was responsible for printing [XFM] as a zine, which, I'm not going to lie, was so nostalgically satisfying – pointed out, prior to the last couple of decades, humanity was completely fragmented. People, for the most part, could only communicate with their neighbours, aside from a few very tenuous connections by phone or mail, usually with people with whom they already had some local or familial connection. Look forward a few hundred years, maybe, to the age of interplanetary travel and colonization, and you're going to see a similar situation on a greater scale: people, for the most part, will only be communicating with others on the same planet and its satellites. The 21st century is perhaps the one unique century in human history where everyone is at least potentially in communication with everyone else, by the fewest degrees of separation we've ever seen, or will ever see. This is a remarkable era, and the decade that seemed to have the clearest view of *why* it would be remarkable was the '90s. It's not a "let's go back to how things were" sensibility that makes '90s cyberculture so interesting to us. Rather, it's a detour for getting to what's so bloody remarkable and new in the present.

There were limitations, too, in what we were exposed to during [the '90s]. Racial and subcultural clustering was an aspect of that. A lot of Black thinkers and artists were influential for me: Octavia Butler, Samuel Delaney, Jean-Michel Basquiat and DJ Spooky were all big influences on my weird, late-'90s self and the sort of art I was interested in making, but the subcultural milieu I was steeping in probably did skew a bit white. I'm sure there's a lot that I missed as a result. I'd like to miss less.

III.I—*For many, the intersections of technology and feminism inevitably recall Donna Haraway and 1990s art activism, or "hacktivism," groups like VNS Matrix. What individuals, groups or projects currently inspire you?*

VNS Matrix is one of our biggest influences, which I think is pretty obvious. One of the really cool things that happened while we were working on the manifesto was that we became – slightly star-struck at first – friends with Virginia Barratt (thanks, Internet!), and she was one of the readers who we bombarded with drafts while the whole thing was still in alpha. Sandy Stone, Sadie Plant and Nick Land also rank pretty high in terms of influence.

My aesthetic sensibilities – such as they are; I've never been part of the art world, in the sense of "high" art – were probably shaped in the late '90s and early 2000s in the underground comics and art scenes in Halifax. I used to paint a bit and make zines. I was never much good, but it was exciting, and got me exploring the far aesthetic reaches of strangeness and disorientation. Getting a taste for the xeno and all that. I learned a lot from Dan Gallant, in visual art, and Jen Devlin, as a writer. Both of them went on to do far more than I ever could with painting and poetry.

Currently, [LC's] theoretical influences are mostly friends of ours. Less the people we study, than the people with whom we communicate on a regular basis, if we haven't frittered away, then read the writings of, if we haven't frittered away all our time on the Internet: the "left accelerationists" and "neorationalists" Pete Wolfendale, Reza Negarestani, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams; Benedict Singleton, with whom we've gotten into long conversations about traps, cunning and interplanetary colonization; William Gillis, who we met more recently, and who represents the anarcho-transhumanist camp; Alain Badiou, [who] influenced our thinking about categories like universalism; and Dominic Fox. Susan Blackmore and Scott Alexander have shed a tremendous light on the topic of memetics, which has been something I've been spending a lot of time with lately. The artist Alina Popa has been a huge influence on the question of thinking about estrangement aesthetically. And, of course, all of those in Laboria Cuboniks have been a constant source of insight and provocation.

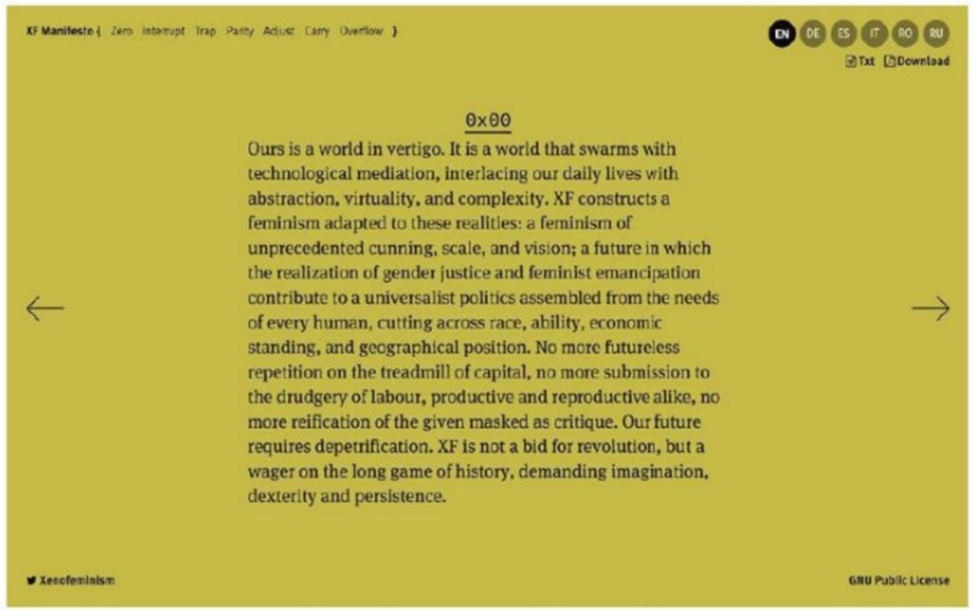
III.II—*Do you think that the interdisciplinarity of network systems and the shift toward viewing the Internet itself as a medium are encouraging a collapse of distinctions between activism, theory, art and technology?*

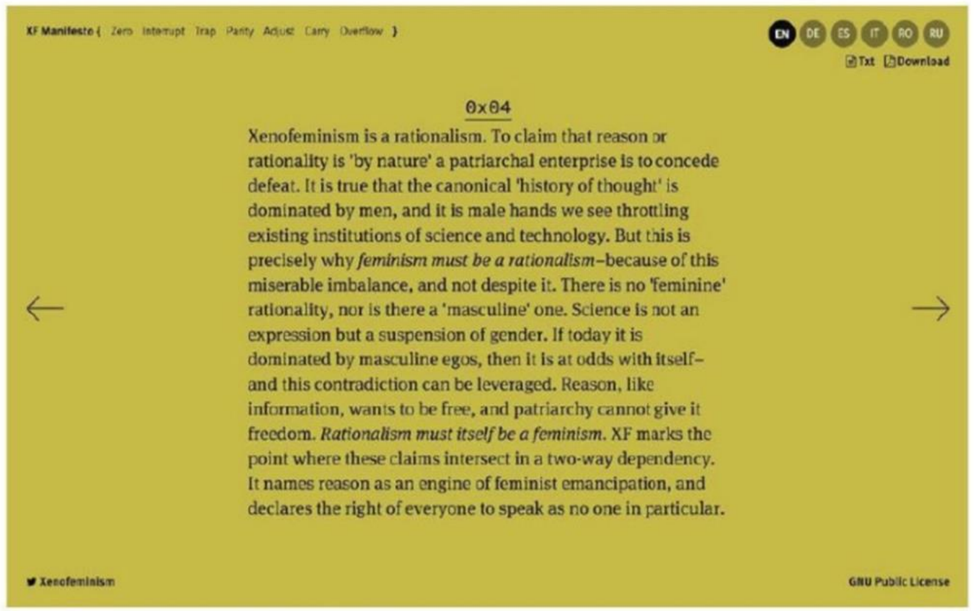
It's definitely making it easier for anyone – as far as time and energy allow, which is never far enough – to participate in multiple spheres at once. It's easier for a software developer to find an audience for their poetry, for philosophers to learn to code, for scientists to engage in political activism, etc. The old information silos are crumbling. Time is the biggest obstacle now. Most of us aren't pampered renaissance men, and so even though we *can* easily pick up a free online course to learn X, and can write a blog that will likely have a wider readership than most prestigious academic journals, most of us are also pretty damn frazzled and tired most of the time, especially if we're raising kids or living in poverty or both. Free time is really the single biggest obstacle between the current situation and the utopias dreamt up by '90s cyberfeminism.

III.III—*Section 0×19 of XFM reads: "Is xenofeminism a programme? Not if this means anything so crude as a recipe, or a single-purpose tool by which a determinate problem is solved. We prefer to think like the schemer or lisper, who seeks to construct a new language in which the problem at hand is immersed, so that solutions for it… might unfurl with ease. Xenofeminism is a platform, an incipient ambition to construct a new language for sexual politics – a language that seizes its own methods as materials to be reworked, and incrementally bootstraps itself into existence."*

I love the use of "bootstraps" here and the way it calls to mind gestures associated both with preparing oneself for the physical world and loading software onto a computer. Do you think that your familiarity with technological language encourages you to read the material world with metaphors germane to technological systems and apparatuses?

Absolutely. I transitioned from academia (philosophy, specifically) to tech (computer science, information security, and AI in particular) around the same time [LC] began working on the manifesto, so I was definitely in the process of discovering an incredibly rich conceptual vocabulary and an entirely new expanse of potential metaphors. I work in [information security] full-time now and tinker with machine learning on the side, and I'm still finding this to be the case. It's a beautiful and fascinating world: the world of the electron and the switch, the beauty of the baud and so on…





I think you can certainly engage with self-representation and gender without also being a computer hacker. Different people learn different things at different speeds, so it's unfair to say that *anyone* can dive in and feel at home in the bowels of the technosphere. But it's also never been easier to learn – the only real obstacle seems to be time – and those who are curious enough about it will feel themselves drawn into it. Just as those who are curious enough about refashioning their subjectivity, or their sex, will find ways and means of doing so. And there's a certain sense of "radicalism" that just *is* this curiosity, this restlessness, this desire to get to the root of everything and figure out how it works and how it can be changed. It's not really surprising, for example, that there's a disproportionately large overlap between computer hackers and trans people. You're unlikely to try to hack your own endocrine system and radically rebuild yourself as a social and embodied subject if you don't have a bit of restless radicalism in you. It's not surprising if the same sensibility eventually has you reverse engineering software and searching for exploits. This is just one example, of course. Art and science are others.

EXTEND

IV.I—*How is digital feminist allyship enactable? In your mind, are the politics of this form of feminism significantly different than the politics of activism in "real life"?*

If someone wants to be an "ally," that's cool, and it usually means they mean well. But it's an inherently weak position to occupy, and I think that sometimes it risks coming off as a bit patronizing – as if what feminists need are a bunch of dutiful yes-men. I think it's better just to focus on respect, friendliness and egalitarianism. What's necessary, and sometimes lacking, in online communications is patience and respect, not deference and kowtowing.

One major difference between IRL (AFK?)[2] activism – or forming activist communities – and its online counterpart comes down to bandwidth. When you're interacting with someone face-to-face, you've typically got much more information to process. This can make it much more strenuous for some, but it also makes certain complexities and nuances clearer, even if they can't be unambiguously parsed. Interaction online is optimized for speed, and, at its worse, for achieving the most dramatic, noisiest reaction in the shortest time, on a strictly economized band of information (maybe just 140 characters or less). Two dominant kinds of behaviour evolve as a result: one which learns to dispatch discipline and shame with utmost efficiency while avoiding excommunication, and one which learns to completely desensitize themselves from all that, and which spreads by triggering and exploiting the other side's disciplinary reflexes instead. It's an unstable set-up. #gamergate was probably the high-water-mark for both tendencies, and, from a certain, systemic perspective, it's very interesting to look at. It's hard to imagine these particular forms of behaviour evolving, or at least becoming dominant memetic species, offline. I'm not trying to valorize offline communities or denigrate online communication. We've just got different traps and attractors to avoid in each case.

Given that these are probably the two least productive and empowering forms of communication online – trolling and uncharitable callouts – I suppose that "digital allyship" would mean trying to communicate in a way that isn't overly prone to either. I know that "be nice, treat people as equals, and show respect and humility" is pretty boring, liberal-sounding advice, but it's what I've got.

IV.II—*Another passage of XFM reads: "Why is there so little explicit, organized effort to repurpose technologies for progressive gender political ends? XF seeks to strategically deploy existing technologies to re-engineer the world."*

What kinds of projects have arisen so far in response or relation to XF?

XF is still very young, and I think it's still pretty obscure, so I don't want to overstate its influence on the ground. But one project that definitely deserves mention is Open Source Gendercodes,[3] a project founded by Ryan Hammond, which aims to develop genetically modified tobacco plants that produce significant quantities of human-compatible sex hormones. The technology, once developed, would be made completely open source, with the aim of ensuring a means of directly accessing cross-sex (or same sex) hormones. We were pretty ecstatic when we stumbled across Hammond's project, online – and even more so when one of us caught a glimpse of the XF manifesto pinned to his studio wall in his crowdfunding video!

We've also been happy to see artists and writers pick up XF and run with it. There's a group in the UK, for example, that put together a xenofeminist exhibition.[4] "3rdspace is a response to XF and an exploration into the powers of technology to escape modern structures of control," their statement reads. "As artists we are trying to reprogram the world's code and reengineer new ones."

MANIFEST

V.I—*XFM doesn't list demands so much as indict the conditions of technological knowledge and infrastructure limiting mental and physical autonomy. This stands in contrast to manifestos that reflect a formal indebtedness to patriarchal gestures of naming and stabilizing identity categories. I'm curious about the potential you see in the requisite declarative, and also imperative, aspects of a techno-feminist manifesto... Do you think these features render the manifesto a valuable framework for collective disputation?*

I think that most of the manifestos [LC are] interested in contain an element of identity destabilization. The Cyberfeminist and Bitch Mutant Manifestos of VNS Matrix were less about celebrating feminine identity than about laughing at an obsolete patriarchy's increasingly incompetent efforts to restrain anything in a stable identity marked "woman." At first, the Hacker and Cyberpunk manifestos appear like identitarian litanies – the first with its chorus "we're all alike" and the second with its opening declaration "We are..." In both cases, though, the evoked identity slips between the cracks as something misjudged and unrecognized.

It seems like even the most identity-focused manifestos involve some gesture of disidentification. From start to finish, "A Cyborg Manifesto"[5] is a celebration of everything that slips through the gridwork of recognizable identities. I suppose that most manifestos contain something like this double-movement: destabilizing identities on the one hand so as to restabilize a different configuration of identities on the other. The really intriguing [manifestos] make the most of the gap between these two moments.

V.II—*On a formal level, do you think manifestos have a unique capacity to operate as sites of self-evidence? Is there a radicality to such a mode of citation that is perhaps essential to the work of 21st century feminism?*

I don't think a manifesto can claim self-evidence. Generally speaking, if you feel like you've been convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt by a manifesto, you've probably been played like a rhetorical fiddle. [Manifestos] are not meticulously developed argumentative pieces. They're more like stand-up comedy [in that] their job is to point things out... [t]o nudge you into adopting a point of view that might not have seemed available beforehand, but which pulls things into focus in a way that makes you want to run with [an idea] and see where it goes.

V.III—*Do you consider the manifesto a prefigurative form?*

Manifestos are only really prefigurative if you can't predict who your audience will be. The opposite of a manifesto is a conference paper. The most difficult part of writing these things is keeping questions open, not falling too deeply into old habits (e.g. academic or art world habits). The whole point of writing something like [a manifesto] is to try to reshape the discursive chessboard, at least in some small but structural way, and not just to move the existing pieces around.

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Endnotes

1 BBS = bulletin board system, a means of chatting and exchanging information via computer pre-World Wide Web.
2 AFK = away from keyboard
3 See http://opensourcegendercodes.com/projects/osg/
4 http://3rd-space.net/
5 Donna Haraway's seminal techno-feminist text, originally published in 1985.

Image Credits: All screenshots from *Xenofeminist Manifesto* website, http://www.laboriacuboniks.net/#firstPage, 2016

Flex, Conjure, Crack. Flexibility and the Uncertainty of Blackness

by Treva C. Ellison

"today, i passed a mirror and did not see a body, instead a suggestion, a debate, a blank post-it note there looking back. I haven't enough room to both rage and weep."
Donte Collins – from "what the dead know by heart"

What is to be done with the Black body in this time of crisis? When the circulation of imagery of Black people killed, tortured, maimed and left to drown constitutes a deathly hallows to be pursued by the various houses of white supremacists, authoritarian populists, carceral feminists and talking heads, what is to be done with the unacknowledged buildup of anti-Blackness and the existential questions it raises, the unruly and unsightly forms it takes on? The body is a construction that appears through modern modes of knowing and being, the systems of sight, the scripted routes of neuro-normativity that political theorist Cedric Robinson called Western civilization. The Black body flits in and out of sight via highly choreographed routines of forgetting and abstraction. Kettled by the long arms of the law, and corralled by the invisible hand of racial capitalism, the so-called Black body takes the form of appearance of a constant question, a "thing" whose thing-ification is the productive process that animates the Human, the primary subject of Western civilization. The present absence of gendered Black embodiment vis-à-vis Western culture greases the wheels of extraction, enclosure and expropriation that we have given the name racial capitalism. The "Black body" in Western culture is a form with no content, one that can be disavowed and/or enlivened with agency to tell someone else's story.[1] Literary critic Hortense Spillers suggests that the buildup of all the unseen dances required to materialize the body as the ostensible basic unit of social being be called "flesh." She writes: "I would make a distinction between the body and the flesh and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero-degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse of the reflexes of iconography."[2] It is the abstraction and concealment of the flesh that allows the body to function as a way of knowing and being; a template for disciplines like anatomy, physiology, sociology, art and dance. Spillers reminds us that captive flesh and its violation are the fertile (and furtive) grounds for the reproduction of social categories that depend on the body as a basic unit of analysis – categories like race, class, gender and sexuality.

Given that for Black people and other racialized peoples, the body, and the very idea of being and subjectivity that a body connotes in Western civilization, is a vexed and vexing thing – I ask again, what is to be done with the Black body? There are discussions happening across this compression of time-space called "the globe" about Black ontology. What is the nature of Black existence when Black people can be killed by police officers and vigilantes with impunity? What is the structural position of Blackness in the representational and sign systems of Western civilization? Are Black people even Human? Can Black people depend on frameworks like law, civil rights, human rights, the democratic process, legislative activism, etc., that require a positive assertion and the recognition of the legibility of one's self as a self? Scholars and activists have advanced a range of protocols to diagnose and deal with the condition of Blackness: Black ops, Afropessimism, Black feminism, Black queer studies, Black geographies and the Black radical tradition, to name a few. Critical theorist Fred Moten, for example, has emphasized Blackness as a range of operations, an improvisational force that thwarts or cracks the lurching shadow of Man (as white, rational, propertied and able-bodied) as "the singular genre of the Human" through an assemblage of invention-as-survival-as-invention.[3] Scholars writing under the banner of Afro-pessimism have emphasized the incapacity of Western radical and feminist concepts like being, consent, exploitation and labour to apprehend or explain the structural position of Blackness in Western society. Afro-pessimism focuses on Blackness as a relation of social death and a fungible site of accumulation and argues that anti-Blackness is the primary structuring foundation of the world as we know it.

I offer flexibility as a way through these questions that brings together past and present episodes and epistemes of production of Black social life emanating from Black culture and politics. Flexing takes us through the work of Black artists and dancers like taisha paggett, Reginald "Regg Roc" Gray and Storyboard P, linking together the aesthetics and practices of Black artists working through the consequences of flexible accumulation as a mode of racial capitalism. Like anthropologist Aihwa Ong, I am concerned with the *reciprocity* and *rupture* between categories of difference and processes of capital accumulation,[4] and how Black artists render flexibility as heuristic to Blackness, a method of approach and performance that generates power in its exercise. Flexibility eschews ontology as an organizing trope and focuses on process, practice, conjuring, tarrying, cracking and hacking as ways of approaching Blackness and Black embodiment. Flexibility, as rendered through the work of these Black artists, uses the strategies of *conjure* – a counter-temporal temporal displacement and *crack* – a spatial rupture via staged reunion of flesh [unknown, multiple] and body [overseen, singular]; these approaches to Blackness call our attention to the longer arc and wider range of approaches to Blackness that constitute what Cedric Robinson refers to as the ontological totality.

Flexibility appears as a Black aesthetic and praxis that operates parallel to and through flexible accumulation as a strategy of racial capitalism. Flexible accumulation refers to the 1970s shift from a Fordist model of production and Keynesian model of political economy to a post-Fordist, post-Keynesian modality of capital accumulation that is characterized by the de-construction and fragmentation of productive processes and the incorporation of a variety of labour types, which may have been (or which appeared to be) more informal and less organized in the past, into corporate production networks. Flexible accumulation also refers to the creation of new productive sectors, markets and financial instruments. Leftist geographers and economists may argue over the narrative and terminology of flexible accumulation, globalization and neoliberalism, but they all concur that post-1970s racial capitalism relied on spatial displacement, extraction, enclosure and labour discipline to create so-called "new" markets.[5] Geographer David Harvey argues that flexible accumulation as a mode of capitalism re-compresses time and space via temporal displacement: "a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us."[6] Considering flexibility as a Black performative praxis that operates co- and contra- to flexible accumulation reminds us that racial capitalism's flexibility is cohered not through a flexible accumulation that merely homogenizes via the territorialization, securitization and corporatization of everything; but, that the extraction that must occur to create new pathways for capital hinges on racial difference as a mode of coming to know and orga-

nize the globe/global, and gender and sexual difference, as the staging grounds of racialized fungibility. Flexible accumulation produces queer commodities. Critical race theorist Jodi Melamed underscores this, arguing that multiculturalism evolves as a cultural logic of flexible accumulation for the neoliberal US racial state that allows the US racial state to disavow its own complicity in racist, classist, sexist, homophobic and transphobic violence, while simultaneously positioning itself as the arbiter and protector of difference.

What are the fleshly archives that carry spatial barriers, state power and political boundaries to their horizon of (seeming) actualization? Los Angeles-based dancer, choreographer and artist taisha paggett addresses this question in two of her most recent collaborative works: *evereachmore* (with WXPT), and *The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People*. In each of these works, paggett uses conjure and crack as strategies to perform counter-temporal temporal displacements. In *evereachmore* (2015), paggett and a dance company she formed of trained and untrained dancers called WXPT (We are the paper, we are the trees), crack the singular and fetishized dance body and insist on bodies in motion and connection. In *evereachmore*, dancers performed in globules: pairs and sometimes trios, almost constantly stuck to each other, flowing, flexing and ambling through the remains of the Los Angeles River. Dancers practiced different ways of moving through time and space together in a landscape where improvised survival of racial capitalism's creative destruction signaled possibility in the pain that the movement connotes. Attendees were driven to the performance location in batches in a van that was playing radio noise to give a sense of temporal dislocation. The dancers reinforced this temporal displacement by bearing each other's weight, and in so doing took up the collective weight of the Black body and the fleshly archives its appearance attempts to suppress. In bearing each other's weight, and bringing to bear the collective weight of the racialized body, the dancers created moments of weightlessness, re-compressions of space-time that thwart the smooth operation and submerged logic of flexible accumulation by creating the possibility for dancers and audience members to feel and think otherwise.

paggett's work often takes up the weight of the sign of Blackness and Black resistance; in both *evereachmore*, dancers held signs that spelled out: "ever each more," but moved in such a way as to scramble the message the signs were communicating. At the inaugural performance that opened The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People, dancers used heavier signs of various shapes made of opaque black enamel with no text. Afterwards, audience members could interact with the signs; they were heavy and their bizarre shapes made them unwieldy. The evolving shape and weight of the signs express paggett's use of crack and conjure as strategies of temporal and spatial displacement. paggett asks performers and audience members to sit with the unwieldiness and uncertainty of embodiment and the body as a modality of political and social categorization and to play with the body as a tool of performing and accessing surplus as a resource of power and a motive force of social life in the face of socialized Black death.

The School for the Movement of the Technicolor People extended the work of WXPT in *evereachmore* and engaged Black queer people in the company as well in the larger community to create curriculum and programming for a dance freedom school. The School included an installation, through which paggett, Ashley Hunt and Kim Zumpfe transformed LACE's gallery space into a dance freedom un-school. The inaugural performance was the convening of a six-week freedom school modelled after a school for youth of colour started by paggett's family in east Texas.[7] They converted the art space into the art space undone, overlaying the floors with archipelagos of fuzzy brown carpet and upending the floorboards of the gallery, exposing the ground beneath to make a school undone. During the opening performance of The School, paggett ended the performance by destroying the white drywall of the gallery, staging the school as an un-school, a site of deconstruction of the schooled body and the institutions that have arisen to manage it. paggett's work with WXPT emphasizes practice, performance, connection and sociality as methods of creating temporal and spatial displacement and models for how those rendered "surplus" enact flexibility as a heuristic of Blackness and Black embodiment. This strategy can be seen in the work of other Black artists and performers responding to the violent and violative iterations of flexible accumulation that have shaped US urban geopolitics.

Flex (or flexing) is a migratory and experimental Black dance practice. It is rooted in Jamaican dancehall that evolved from Bruk Up, a dance style pioneered by George Adams, and Bogle (or body grooving), a style attributed to Gerald Levy, and the migration of these styles to 1990s Brooklyn and their confrontation with hip hop. Flex came into being as a dance form in an attempt to create venues for Black social life under the tremendous weight of the violent economic and political policies of flexible accumulation, which both cut back and re-territorialized of the social safety net. Flexing thrived in locally organized competitions, gatherings and through a public access show created by Sandra and Rocky Cummings called *Flex N Brooklyn* on BCAT 68. *Flex N Brooklyn* gave dancers a venue to showcase their talent and created a vehicle for the articulation and dissemination of the form.

Flex is an improvisational style of dance that hinges on rigorous training of the body and intentional connection to hidden emotional, psychical and social scripts in order to tell stories and create illusions with the body. Flex stages a spectacular reunion between body and flesh that makes plain, if even for a fleeting moment, one of the primary spatial abstractions that animates racial capitalism: the submerged, hidden and papered-over violations of captive flesh that subtend the social production of the body, and the genre of the Human. Dancers describe flexing as conjure work. For example, Storyboard P, a flex dancer and innovator of the sub-style of mutation, describes what he does as energy work: "There are moves where you're just dancing. Then there's a point when you hear music and you snap. A moment that brings anger or rage out of you and turns it into possession...I'm just revealing what's really there. Revealing unseen forces – that's what illusion is. Utilizing them unseen forces to manipulate a moment."[8] Flexing is noted for its combinations of locks, pops, pauses, glides and contortionist poses and has gained attention for the ways that dancers seemingly defy the limits of physics and anatomy with moves described as "bone-breaking."[9] A magazine profile of Storyboard P ascribes to him the label of "the Impossible Body." The author frames Storyboard P's "impossibility" via a nearly pornographic rendering of him as bi-polar: highlighting the fact that Storyboard P has performed with the likes of Jay-Z but is also intermittently homeless and "difficult" to work with because of his bipolar diagnosis. The piece frames Storyboard P's flexibility, his queer flux between Black excellence and Black vulnerability, as impossibility, and in doing so misses the point of his embodied intervention. If Storyboard P's so-called

taisha paggett and WXPT, *evereachmore*, 2015
PHOTO: GINA CLYNE

Members of *FLEXN* performance at *Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival*, 2016
PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN; IMAGE COURTESY OF JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE

gravity- and physics-defying moves signal anything, it is the impossibility of the body and the categories of social organization and valuation that flow from it to ever completely contain those who it seeks to represent and destroy. It is this impulse, this limit on racial capitalism's ability to extract and expropriate, that Robinson terms the ontological totality.

Robinson describes the ontological totality as "the renunciation of actual being for historical being; the preservation of the ontological totality granted by a metaphysical system that had never allowed for property in either the physical, philosophical, temporal, legal, social, or psychic senses."[10] The ontological totality is the wild seed of Black experiments at social life under the conditions of racial capitalism, which are assuredly deadly and death-dealing. When political and institutionalized attempts to displace and deform racial capitalism are frustrated, the ontological totality takes flight. Robinson writes: "When its actualization was frustrated, it became *obeah, voodoo, myalism, pocomania* – the religions of the oppressed...When it was realized, it could become the Palmares, the Bush Negro settlements, and at its heights, Haiti. But always its focus was on the structures of mind. Its epistemology granted supremacy to metaphysics not the material." I want to suggest that flexing, as theorized by its practitioners, is another iteration of flexibility that seeks to preserve a system of being that renounces ownership and the strokes of enclosure and primitive accumulation that such a relation requires. It is one religion of the oppressed, one "ceremony that must be found."[11]

Flexing is used by some of its originators and innovators as an approach to/for understanding and processing the traumatic buildup of anti-Black racism, focusing on rigorous training of the physical body as a method of connecting to the metaphysical. Flex dancer and pioneer Reggie "Regg Roc" Gray recently collaborated with director Peter Sellars and a dance company of 16 dancers, primarily young Black men and women from Brooklyn, to produce a show called *FLEXN*. Gray and the company members use *FLEXN* as a vehicle to both critique anti-Black racism and grapple with the emotional, psychic, embodied and communal effects of racial capitalism and flexible accumulation. Company member Dwight "Scorp" Waugh, for example, arranged and performed a piece about working for FedEx, while Calvin "Cal" Hunt arranged and performed a piece about being in the military. The almost two-hour performance, which included both pieces, is entirely improvised. During the after-performance discussion, both Hunt and Waugh described how they prepare for their pieces, noting that in practice they work to connect to their own submerged emotions and experiences as well as the collective story of anti-Black violence so that they can readily access them on stage during their improvised performances.

Flex as a dance style grounded in the transit and transformation of African culture is one example of how the frustrated politicization and institutionalization of the renunciation of ownership takes flight. *FLEXN* company members and Gray also underscored how what audience members were seeing was not a "game" or a gimmick, and how for them, the act of expression and the relationships established through the process of production constituted a scale of social life that for them was an antidote to social death, an active force they all observed. Flex as a method of creating community offers no easy answers. One contradiction that haunts the performance and the performers' articulation of flex as a modality of communal healing is its gendered politics. On the one hand, dancers use their bodies in ways that thwart gendered ideals of embodiment, but that meets its limit as the capacity to do so is routed through ideals of authenticity and mastery. For example, Shelby "Shellz" Fulton, one of two Black women in the *FLEXN* company, remarked in the program notes: "It's hard being a female in the flex community. Even from the start, they just don't respect you. They think that you're weak, that you can't hang. It's hard and it's intimidating, but I'm determined. This is really important to me. I need to show I'm not going to fail like other females. I'm not going to be like that."[12] Also, as flex as a form gets routed through the political economy of the art and theatre production process, there is a will to canonize imposed on the form that thwarts the very potential of the form to function as a "religion of the oppressed." I had the opportunity to see *FLEXN* at the affluent liberal arts college where I work, which is primarily white. As such, the performance was prefixed with multiple advisories: "This performance might contain crude language and / or loud music." Patrons were handed earplugs at the inception of the performance so that they could somehow enjoy Black bodies in motion without being frontally assaulted by the loudness of Black music. These acts and logics of translation, which make the performance viable in the performance market, also attempt to impose norms of ownership and authenticity on the form to ally it with the cultural logics and infrastructure of flexible accumulation. However, it is the economic viability of the form in the "art world" that sustains a container for social life and livelihood for the performers. Truly, "the commodity is a queer thing,"[13] and flexibility eschews the binary of revolutionary-or-not and instead gestures towards the queerness of commodification, the uncertain outcomes of its gambit and the contradictions of survival under flexible accumulation.

The frameworks of Afro-pessimism, necropolitics and Black ops, refracted through the urgent questions of the moment, that are themselves punctuated by the expanding roster of young Black people murdered by police officers, have encouraged a patriarchal binary in approaches to Black life and Black subjectivity: social life versus social death, ontological invention versus ontological negation, optimism versus pessimism. While both of these frameworks rely on the poetic mode of expression, they both fail to take into account the multiple ways that contemporary Black artists are performing and articulating the cultural politics of contemporary Black and Black queer social movements. Black women and women of colour scholars, however, remind us that the embodiment, labour, politics and expressive practices of Black women work and move between, through and around these seeming polarities. Scholars Grace Hong, Kara Keeling and Rod Ferguson remind us that Black women and queer people have long crafted modes of connection and ways of being that point to the instability of the normative categories of embodiment operationalized by the state and by oppositional social movements organized around racial and gendered justice.[14] Flexibility as a Black performance praxis punctuates this reminder by underlining the uncertainty of Blackness: Black is AND Black ain't. Feminist theorist Katherine McKittrick reminds us that project of ontology is itself a territorializing one and that Black women have used the body as a scale of disturbance and deformation that gestures to the internal instability of both racial capitalism as well as the subjects and social relations that support its movement.[15] Contemporary Black artists are echoing, reflecting and performing these reminders, offering flexibility as an aesthetic and performative praxis that highlights how Blackness in particular, and race in general, is fluid in that it can be discursively disavowed and materially instrumentalized at the same time. It is the flux between these two poles that can be used as a method of building power by those rendered existentially surplus, and also that flux can be instrumentalized to re-present the body via the concealment of the flesh.

Considering flexibility as an approach to questions of Black subjectivity emanating from Black culture and politics, as well as a mode of accumulation of racial capitalism, emphasizes that Blackness and the arsenal of race that buttresses the territorialization of everything, even in its most terrifying manifestations, are uncertain and that uncertainty best describes the ontology of Blackness rather than the life-death binary. The current state of things, the racism of so-called peace officers and the seeming disposition of the climate itself towards the decimation of Black people and Black places makes it necessary if not urgent to take a measure of Blackness, to know and say what it is. Flexing and its attendant strategies of crack and conjure suggest that while the measure of what is lost can never be fully taken, it can be felt, practised and performed.

I want to end with a provocation from Daniel Widener who, in *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (2009), argues that the multiplication of art collectives and community arts programs in the wake of the 1965 Watts uprising was not auxiliary to the Black Power movement, but rather constituted a movement in and of itself. In a similar vein, this essay is both an attempt and provocation to think through how contemporary Black artists are conceptualizing and articulating Blackness, not just as the "cultural front" of contemporary forms and modes of Black organizing, like the Black Lives Matter network, or as an auxiliary to theories of Blackness emanating from the academy, but as a movement in itself that moves through and with social movements and capital.

Members of *FLEXN* performance at *Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival*, 2016
PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN; IMAGE COURTESY OF JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE

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Endnotes

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dialogue
and annotations by
Olivia Boudreau,
Barbara Clausen,
Simone Forti,
Corinn Gerber,
Joan Jonas,
Tanya Lukin Linklater,
taisha paggett,
Erin Silver
and Robin Simpson

Previous Page: Joan Jonas, *They Come to Us without a Word II*, 2015; Performance view, Teatro Piccolo Arsenale; Music by Jason Moran and Joan Jonas
PHOTO: MOIRA RICCI; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Joan Jonas' *From Away*, on exhibition at DHC/ART in Montreal from April 28 – September 18, 2016, put five decades of Jonas' practice on view, from the late 1960s to her installation for the 2015 Venice Biennale, *They Come to Us without a Word*. In her exhibition text, curator Barbara Clausen describes Jonas' visionary use of performance in film and video as rooted in the artist's physical engagement with everyday materials, gestures and technologies. Jonas's understanding of art as a hybrid practice is embedded in the wider context of culture, history, mythology, poetry, literature and film. The accompanying events program, *Affinities*, which combined dance, performance, movement, film screenings and dialogue, pivoted around the resonances of Jonas' work with contemporary artists. Performances by Jonas with Jason Moran, Tanya Lukin Linklater, taisha paggett and Simone Forti engaged with and extended the exhibition's "liveness," alongside a series of conversations and screenings.

Working from transcripts of the conversations that ensued, participating artists, audience members and other key interlocutors reflect on Jonas' practice and three distinct "moments" from *Affinities*, rearranging textual fragments, working the line between memory and evidence, and co-aligning the anecdotal with the official record, attempting to keep these moments "alive" by intervening and annotating in the margins. Jonas' influence, like the influence of others inferred yet not named here, provokes an examination of shared affinities between and across generations of dancers, performance artists and other kinds of movement-makers. Text and image combine to make a new "movement score," retrofitting enduring artistic preoccupations with the aesthetic, cultural and political concerns of the present day. Dialogue and annotations are from Olivia Boudreau, Barbara Clausen, Simone Forti, Corinn Gerber, Joan Jonas, Tanya Lukin Linklater, taisha paggett, Erin Silver and Robin Simpson.

In Conversation: Joan Jonas & Barbara Clausen, Phi Centre, April 26, 2016

BARBARA CLAUSEN: Joan, you once said that you use illusion to deconstruct it – from your early work using different kinds of media simultaneously, such as mirrors and monitors, the close-circuit television effect, and projections, on stage, as well as within your video works and later installations. You were showing the audience what you were doing and how.

JOAN JONAS: Yes. I went to Japan in 1970, where I bought my first Portapak camera. That trip had a big influence on me. I brought it back to New York and started working with it in my loft. That was a big moment, when you could sit in front of a monitor and see yourself live. I began to work with all these different materials and practices: the material of technology, making drawings, thinking of text as material. It was all about mixing and rearranging and making sequences in the beginning. When I got the camera, I started to experiment with seeing myself and seeing the camera, asking, how does it relate. One of the first performances, *Organic Honey* (1972), was based on the idea of watching yourself on camera while an audience watches you. I got the idea when I read somewhere that Marilyn Monroe sat in front of a camera, and people watched her being filmed. The experience of seeing her in front of the camera was totally different than what the camera would see.* I made a whole performance based in part on that idea, and that's how I've been working ever since: the idea that the audience sees the image that the camera sees simultaneously with the performance.

> **Olivia Boudreau:** This is such a marvellous example of how we treat images and experiences in general. It is underlining what we choose to ignore and what we hang on to when judging and creating meanings. That's why performance and video can be a very direct way to question our ability, or inability, to perceive things in their entirety. While working, knowing the limits of my own perception is the starting point of an ethics of looking.

BC: [...] Right, and also this effect of you looking at yourself through the recording of your own image. You can point the camera towards the screen you're recording, but as soon as you do that, you can't look at yourself directly; there's a kind of distraction of the gaze. I think of *Mirror Check* (1970) and *Left Side Right Side* (1972) and several other works of this period, where the idea of de-synchronization, as [Douglas] Crimp would call it, was a key idea.

This probing of the image through various devices plays a significant role in your interest in female imagery and how, as you once said, you wanted explore the place of women in history as outsiders* – healers – witches – storytellers. How do you choose or find your protagonists and characters?

> **Olivia Boudreau:** Women as outsiders! I can definitely link this to the fact that there are so many woman working in video and performance, mediums that are excluded from the definition of "beaux arts." Being outside, while being restrictive, can also be a very powerful position. It is an interesting angle to explore in feminism today and a very delicate question.

JJ: It began with *Organic Honey*, where I was exploring female imagery. It was during the women's movement and part of the idea was to explore the issue of the female image, asking is there such a thing as a female image. I was dressing up, putting masks on, changing my identity, asking what is female. And then after that I began to think about the roles that women play, and the fairy tale, what kind of roles they are taking on and living.

BC: When I see your work, there is this moment of immediate understanding, yet the layers of stories are difficult to retell.

JJ: *It's non-linear but it's also non-verbal, often.* That's why you really can't – it's a visual story. The words are mixed in with the visual – *it's more like poetry in that sense*, if you tell a story... it's fragmented and it's very hard to retell.

Affinities: An afternoon of conversations with the artists of the *Affinities* series, May 26, 2016

TANYA LUKIN LINKLATER: I'd like to begin not at the beginning but perhaps before the beginning, less than a year ago, when I traveled to the Creative Time summit held in conjunction with the Venice Biennale. I heard curator Okwui Enwezor speak, as well as Jolene Rickard, a visual historian, artist and curator. I also spent time with Nadia Myre, who's here today, and had an opportunity to sit with artists Charles Gaines and Rick Lowe and curator Eungie Joo, during discussion. It was also at the Venice Biennale that I encountered in real life, and not just in documentation, the work of Joan Jonas, with *They Come to Us without A Word*. I also encountered, in the hugeness of an international biennale, and in other simultaneous exhibitions, works of artists that I cannot forget: Lorna Simpson, Glenn Ligon, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, David Hammons, Chris Ofili, Dora García and many others. At the Creative Time summit, Okwui Enwezor spoke to the *responsibility of an exhibition as a kind of thinking machine, which included infusing old images with new potentials. He agreed that art has no obligation; it can choose to stay silent, deaf to historical conditions in a stance of radical refusal and that it has the right of disengagement. However, an exhibition is something that happens in the world: it comes from the world, from the debris and catastrophe that's called progress, and as a space of public discourse. Art has a relationship to its historical context.*

I don't remember the first time I encountered the work of Joan Jonas. And I don't recall when I first read *A Glossary of Haunting* by Eve Tuck and C. Ree, but I read Eve Tuck's glossary and it stayed with me. She begins her glossary with an epigraph by Gertrude Stein from her book of poetry *Tender Buttons*. I mention this because the title of my glossary is *A Glossary of Insistence*, which could be attributed to Gertrude Stein, although I never fully understand *Tender Buttons*. There are worlds inside worlds within this book, but rather, perhaps my understanding of Gertrude Stein's insistence comes via Layli Long Soldier,* a poet, and her reading of Gertrude Stein – that repetition becomes a kind of insistence, which then titles my glossary. Although, I wonder if our kinds of insistence are different.**

> **Tanya Lukin Linklater:** Layli Long Soldier recently won a 2016 Whiting Award and 2015 Lannan Literary Fellowship. Her forthcoming book of poetry, *WHEREAS*, will be published by Graywolf Press in March 2017.
>
> They are. Consider Glenn Ligon's *Untitled glossary in 30 Americans*, the catalogue, and his reference to Stein.
>
> Consider Glenn Ligon's work *Negro Sunshine*...

I read Eve Tuck's *A Glossary of Haunting*; Eve Tuck is from Alaska like me. She is a scholar at the forefront of decolonization, at least in Indigenous Studies, and she's invested in knowledge production through publication. I was interested in the conceptual form or structure of the glossary, particularly when the actual text being glossed was invisible or ephemeral. I wonder, does this become a glossary to my practice, to my thinking around performance, the ontology of objects, or lived experience as an Indigenous or more specifically, as an Alutiiq person? I'm also interested in the limits of text, the way a text can be imagistic or possibly sensorial, but cannot fully evoke that which is intangible. The text becomes a kind of constellation.

I gave a talk at Performa in New York for the Aboriginal Embassy organized by IMA Brisbane on Art, Indigeneity and Institutions, and I was thinking of collecting on my island for this talk, and specifically the Alphonse Pinart collection in France. He collected 75 ceremonial masks in the late 19th century from Kodiak Island, and he took those masks to France, where they're housed in a museum named after him. Nearly a century later, my relative, the late Helen Simeonoff, an artist, was the first Alutiiq person to visit the collection, and she had this powerfully affective response to the masks. Subsequently, many Alutiiq artists have travelled to the collection and, finally, after much relationship building – although I wonder what that relationship looked like, given the power imbalances – the collection travelled to my island in 2005 on the condition that the Alutiiq Museum promised never to repatriate the masks. This promise was made by the director at the time, Sven Haakanson, Jr., a Harvard-trained Alutiiq anthropologist from Old Harbour Village on my island, of Kodiak. This was only 20 years after another Alutiiq anthropologist, Gordon Puller, from Woody Island, was instrumental in the passing of the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act*, legislation that allowed the return of many of our ancestors from various museums for burial on our island.* This glossary, as well as a number of event scores that I've been writing, are reckoning with this history, this loss, this grief, and this not-knowing, and perhaps, I hope, how Alutiiq people can exceed these structures and these histories through insistence.

Both Images: Tanya Lukin Linklater, *A Glossary of Insistence*, 2016.
WITH THE PERMISSION OF DHC/ART FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, PHOTO BY: ULYSSE LEMERISE

I later visited the Detroit Institute of Arts and saw *30 Americans* from the Rubell Family Collection, and during a walkthrough of the exhibition, a woman began weeping audibly. And it was the first time that I'd ever experienced someone weeping in public in response to an installation or to an object. The sound was loud, and it was coming from her body, and while I couldn't see her, I witnessed the grief. I can only assume what she was responding to, but it may have been Carrie Mae Weems' work, where's she's looking at anthropological photographs, working through this anthropology that deemed African American people subhuman.

And I say all of this because I have presented *A Glossary of Insistence*[1] in one form, for the Woodland School – a project by Duane Linklater since 2011 that's had several different iterations, including residencies, film screenings and now a publication – and I'll present an expanded version that responds further to these ideas and specifically to a glossary that I discovered by Glenn Ligon, which was in the catalogue for *30 Americans*. And what I love about his glossary is his engagement with lived experience, and his critique of Gertrude Stein.* I also plan to respond to Beyonce's *Lemonade*, the visual album, and further investigate Audra Simpson's* generative theories of ethnographic refusal.

1 *A Glossary of Insistence* was performed in collaboration with Ivanie Aubin-Malo et Hanako Hoshimi-Caines at Phi Centre on the 21st of June.

Corinn Gerber: The other day, a Jean Coutu sales rep was taking a smoke break on the bench behind the store on my street. When I passed by, he asked me if he could ask me a question. Since I was not in a hurry, I agreed. He asked: "Imagine that you are standing in a room which has mirrors on all four sides: ceiling, floor, left and right walls. How many times are you seeing yourself?" – "That must be a mise en abyme, so an infinite number of times, I think?" - "No. There is a number." – "Is it algebraically traceable then? So that it would be a potentially endless multiplication of four times four times four times four...?" – "No, there is an answer, there is a number." "Well, let me know then." – "The answer is: 'zero.' Because all the mirrors are black."

I am retelling this story in this rather raw, non-linear, non-conclusive and insufficient comment because it evokes a certain feeling, like a spot left empty as a result of an insufficient answer, that resembles the feeling I admittedly had towards the conversations in this series. This feeling is related to form rather than content. The Affinities series took place in relation to a solo exhibition by Joan Jonas, as its framing program. In consequence, the conversations held were a part of this framing.

As a form, a Portapak construction might introduce different selves that produce affinities among each other, but does not necessarily put into question the existence of an original body, a prototype.

When the Writing Group of the Libreria delle donne di Milano was working on their Yellow Catalogue, entitled The Mothers of Us All in reference to Gertrude Stein, in which they read their favourite novels towards a new novel, they forged characters existing between the novels read and their conversations in the group, between fiction and transcription. This led to the acknowledgment of a difference between figures and prototypes. The prototypes were that which the group sought refuge in when the meaning of everything had to be questioned, when the questioning of the existing symbolic order was no longer able to guarantee a common language. They promised to lend an identity. The experiences of most of the protagonists in the novels were fragmented, like those of the women of the group. They could not be summarized into a single figure or emblematic situation. Finally, some of the writers stood in as heroes. "In standing in for Gertrude Stein, I am standing in for myself."

The goal of the catalogue however, rather than to represent an experience, it was "to find in the story, in the construction of the novel or language, the beginning of an invention of figure donne ("women figures") towards the articulation of something not yet known. While in life as in literature, autobiography (with few exceptions, such as Gertrude Stein) represents the identity of a person, these figures were representations of female fantasies and ideas about the world. Various approaches to the figures were possible, except that of the literary critic. The women described their approach as "wild," and it was undertaken from the perspective of the reader. The only thing that was clear, was that this was "a debate about something that we cannot yet name, but which is certainly more important than an interpretation of the author."

What they found out, is that what they were looking for was happening amongst themselves, rather than amongst the prototypes they consulted. The function of the prototypes was not to lend an identity, but to provide the pretense for the group's process of articulation, which derives from the differences among its individuals. And it is this articulation that allows new figures to come into being. The same can be applied to the catalogue, the publication itself in its materiality. A figure is never pre-existent, it takes form through a web of interactions among unequals.

Maybe, in order to become deflectable and multipliable in black mirrors, the questions, "How do we conceptualize 'force' in relation to the material, social and political body? How do we resist the aestheticization/anesthetization of political urgency? And how to we make a magazine that 'moves' in time with political movement?" need to be complemented by another question: "How to move on from 'prototypes' to 'figures'?"

Tanya Lukin Linklater: Audra Simpson is an anthropologist, a citizen of Kahnawake and a faculty member at Columbia University.

BC: Joan, can you say a few words about your work *They Come To Us without A Word* (2015) in relation to how you convey the idea of non-linear narratives through your images and through the spaces you create?

JJ: *They Come To Us without A Word* is very much about a continuation of working with the image in relation to the technology. I use very simple techniques, I don't use special effects. It's all done, you could say, physically, with projections, with the different materials that I use. I was almost echoing, in my own way, my relation to movement and to the environment, working in the mudflats outside New York, in Jones Beach, and considering who am I and what am I.

BC: Joan, you continuously break through essentialist clichés, having developed a language that from early on – three decades before [Judith] Butler – questioned the construction and constitution of our awareness towards gender, within the self.

JJ: I began to think about roles that I could play. For instance, *Organic Honey*, that was my alter ego, that was the role I was playing. I dressed up and I had to become another character and I didn't want to be Joan Jonas; that's why I started wearing masks. Also, I was very self-conscious; I had never performed before so I wanted to hide my face. Then I began to play different roles: the fairy tale of the juniper tree, et cetera. I became interested in how women were depicted in the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales and in the sagas, which were based on real people. They are three-dimensional characters. I didn't want to play them all myself so I worked with actresses.

BC: taisha, each time you have performed *Decomposition of a Continuous Whole* (2009-), it was in completely different types of spaces. What happens with this choreography of lines, the duration and the moment of its inscription, through an activation of a space between the private and the public?

taisha paggett: In many ways, the piece was about me trying to find my way back into making work and, specifically, my way back into how to undo the frontal touring experience. On a basic level, I looked at what that concert experience was, broke that down into its parts and tried to undo it in some form.

It was hard for me, not only in trying to reconcile being a performing body in a space but to perform a work and then be absent while the show continues in the museum context. I was trying to find different ways of asking the question of how we know ourselves, this idea of repetition as a type of knowing* – we are what we repeat, we're a product of habit, I'm taisha because people kept calling me taisha and I started answering to it. I didn't know what it meant to practice repetition; to practice repetition there was the need for a trace, and that was where inscription came from.*

Robin Simpson: During taisha's performance, I kept asking myself what it means to know what to do, what it means to find yourself watching someone who knows what to do or knows what they are doing, and what was I doing? Projecting. Maybe, as taisha circled the room sweeping, leaning, reaching and pausing with the line she was drawing after those already traced out, maybe there was actually a lot of room for projection in the sense that variation was available to spectatorship. That it could all be done again, drawn out and repeated in a different way. That what we were doing there at that moment was looking for a shared score or composition to start knowing and working on or to come to know again. Or we were sharing scores. To try it all out over and over again, not in order to get it right but to get into it, to really sink into change.

I wonder about playing with the emphasis here in order to dilate or contract the proximity between trace and inscription in order to think about embodiment again (not that we're very far from it). Is it the "need for THERE to be a trace" left behind or is it "TO BE A trace…[from] where inscription came from" ?

Bound by the room, taisha's performance circumnavigated three walls. As executed, her score only covered the southern half of the room, the rest left empty. Near the end, the score reads "stand pivot. small high circles/travel back," at which point she breaks from the wall to traverse the room to the opposite surface where she started. Along this trajectory, she drew freely from her repertoire of motions. At this point, the score reads: "Invent line." Pressure, one form of concentration, was literally lifted in that there was no surface for the crayon to meet, no friction, no deposit and no record. It drew out instead a threshold, point of departure and an arrival, a bridge and at its end a minor percussive instant when the crayon met the wall again – "repeat."

In this sense, with trace, I also hear account.

BC: You actually come into the space, to write the script and the choreography.

tp: I spend time in the space and I approximate a script that I can follow, and it's linear, it's based on real elemental actions: stepping, recording a number of steps, an action that moves forward or backward. As a dancer, there are these traces and vapours and other layers of experience that are always present. I create a new score for every space and it becomes meaningful to perform the piece over time to see how the scores vary, and also my capacity to execute them.

[…]

There is also this real interest in performance research – we call it improvisation but I think of it as the performance of research. It's always been interesting to see what happens to the body, to the experience of thought, to the kind of sourcing that happens in real time dance-making over an expanded period of time.*

Robin Simpson: I felt that taisha being blindfolded during her performance was also a way to welcome disinvestment or withdrawal as a form of self-investment and study. Undertaking this research again spoke to knowing what one needs to do for oneself and trusting that the audience, too, knows how to think on the spot with this, to initiate their own study, and to deal with the models and demands of transparency that they might bring with them.

taisha paggett, *Decomposition of a Continuous Whole*, 2009/2010/2012.
WITH THE PERMISSION OF DHC/ART FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, PHOTO BY: MARC-OLIVIER BÉCOTTE

Simone Forti, *News Animations*.
WITH THE PERMISSION OF DHC/ART FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, PHOTO BY: ULYSSE LEMERISE

Simone Forti, *An Evening of News Animations*, performance, with respondent taisha paggett, June 22, 2016

SIMONE FORTI: That statement expressing interest in finding a new way that was not taking for granted the proscenium and the costume and the virtuosity, that was part of the moment in New York. I'm going to go back a little bit because I really started with Anna Halprin and improvisation. We were working outdoors. Anna still works on her wonderful outdoor deck. And we were working outdoors in the woods on this beautiful deck and exploring movement and it wasn't so much pedestrian. Before I met Anna Halprin, I had been making big Abstract Expressionist paintings and they were big, and then they were very wet, and they were very oily. I was jumping around, laying paint on the canvases and then I had all these wet canvases that I didn't know what to do with, and then I came across Anna and we were moving around and jumping and being big and being tiny and then we'd put our shoes back on and that would be that and we wouldn't have these big floppy wet things to deal with. And there was an aspect of Expressionism in the work, there was something about it that had a certain mood to it. And she had us work off of forms that we saw, in the environment, rhythms that we saw, and I found I could just get into it. Anna had a lot of different approaches; some of them were more anatomical. We worked with our bodies in certain ways but Anna also had us look specifically at the shoulder area, for instance. We'd look at a skeleton, we'd look at books of anatomy and then she'd say, okay, now work for 30 minutes and explore that through our movement and maybe, as weight bearing, or momentum, or the muscles or how the whole body gets involved in an exploration. She had all of these points of departure for improvisations and there was no question of trying to be virtuosic, but she did impart that the more you use your instrument, the larger movement vocabulary just develops on its own.

BC: This was the time in the 1970s when you first developed those dance constructions.

SF: Yes.

BC: And *Huddle* (1961) was one of the first pieces?

SF: Well, yes. I made seven of them, pretty much at the same time. *Huddle* takes anywhere from seven to nine people and you get into a huddle and you try to make a kind of a strong little structure, and then you take turns climbing over the top and down the other side, and ideally it goes on for 10 minutes. I saw it both as a sculpture and as a dance. You see someone put a foot here, grab a shoulder there to pull yourself up and start the climb, and the group underneath shifts to let the weight go through. It's very nice how you work together without even meaning to, it just happens – the weight on this shoulder goes through the next person and then to the ground.

BC: At one point, you started looking at behavioural patterns, movements, not just of other humans or in relationships to objects, but also, of animals.

SF: A lot of my changes of phase were involved with my changes of personal situation and breakups, and how a breakup happens or a loss happens and then you have to somehow turn the page. I went to Rome after my marriage and I found an apartment near the zoo. I met a gallerist, Fabio Sargentini, and the gallery was sort of the central meeting place for Arte Povera artists. He let me use the gallery in the mornings when it was closed, and in the afternoon I would go to the zoo and I'd sit near the wolf or I'd go hang out with the elephant, and after a while, some of them started to recognize me, and I had this sense of communion but I was also watching the movement. For instance, if we're going to turn around and go in the other direction, we'll do something like that. [She demonstrates a normal change of direction.] But a bear will go... [She demonstrates swinging her head to the side and letting that swing pull her whole body into the new direction.] [...]

[...]And I made a lot of drawings. I started working with that study of body structure and how the transition between crawling and striding works. It interested me that I didn't have to break stride to change my level, and I was looking not only at the difference but the similarity between their gaits and mine. And I could move like that, too, trying on those animals' ways of moving in my body, and then at a certain point realizing that certain of them were playing with movement to pass the time of day. You could find it among bears, you could find it among elephants; I saw a not quite grown chimp that had found a little hole in the ground, put its finger in the hole and lean out. It was going around and around like that, so I started to see movement games and movement practices. I'd watch the elephants and ask myself, is that compulsive behaviour? Then one day I saw an elephant that was doing this... [She demonstrates a lilting back and forward stepping, with a kick at either end.] Another elephant came over and they slapped trunks a little bit, then that one went on, and this one went back to its practice. And I said, I know what that is, I do it too. And so I started to see what seemed like the roots of dance behaviour.*

Olivia Boudreau: While thinking about how Joan Jonas avoids the pitfalls of cultural appropriation, I had this realization: the rituals she creates, while deeply influenced by different cultures, are about similarities. What links us, what is it that we share through our stories, our rituals, our symbols? It's made with deep respect in that sense, because it's an act of communion. Like Simone Forti, she creates common denominators.

[...]

TP: I was struck by hearing you recount that how you began was an impulse toward experimentation and playing with materials you had – not to simplify a lot of other things but I came into making work from a very institutional perspective. I started dancing and I came to art as a dancer, and I was asking questions back at the form that I had come into. I've been trying to unpack and parse the institutional layers and find my own way and wildness in experimentation through that. I think there's another layer of that in relation to improvisation, and being a Black body, and this notion of "wildness." There's a type of wildness that I didn't have access to because* I was trying to prove or disprove a certain notion of what a Black body is and is supposed to do. [...] There was a lot about thinking about how, for me, improvisation is a type of learning or unlearning, and so with every repetition it became interesting how much the body was able to replicate the line that came before it. After I did this work I continued with a series of similarly structured long-form performance works that played with repetition because that was my way of getting what I wanted in the context of performance.**

Robin Simpson: Before having this transcription in hand, I remembered taisha saying something along the lines of improvisation was not free but wild.

Tanya Lukin Linklater: This idea of repetition and long performance and how this comes to inhabit and be within the body – this is about methodology but also speaks to form... I wonder what occurs when we repeat. Perhaps we insist? Perhaps within the structure, we find space between. So it's not the structure or form itself but these intangible, immaterial spaces between that we can access through the process.

Olivia Boudreau: Michèle Thériault used the expression "an insistent female body" concerning my work and I think it's quite apt. Long performances and repetitive forms may suggest alienation and/or submission, whereas I see the body as resistant and assertive. A body that tolerates the experience and finds space within the structure, as Tanya says, is a creative and tenacious body.

BC: taisha, you evoked the hidden yet ever-present question of how we look at art and what this act of perception implies within the museum, as a place where ideological, economic and historical, as well as aesthetic, notions encounter each other. You did so on [the] one hand, through your choreography, and also by simply opening the windows of the fourth floor at Phi Centre. This caused the air conditioning to turn off. It became hot and there was wind and noise from the outside entering the white cube – a simple yet complex gesture, that undid the neutrality of the white cube. All your works address and reframe our understanding and visibility of the power relationships inherent to institutions. Simone, can you talk about the relationship of the inside and the outside in relation to the institution? For example, bringing the zoo/nature into the institution or using these movements within an enclosed environment.

SF: I've been asked to do a performance in nature and I don't know what to do. I like to work in nature to get forms, to find movement qualities of a rock or water falling, but then I need to work with that in the studio. And if I then go on to perform, it needs to be in a kind of studio space or gallery space, and maybe that's a fault, why I have to bring it indoors, but I do. If I'm outside, I don't know how to enhance the environment. That doesn't connect to how taisha brought the weather, the outdoors indoors, but in a way it's similar to what I do, it's bringing something from outside inside in kind of a viewing situation.

TP: When I watch you perform I think about making immaterial or invisible things visible by bringing them into action – manifesting forms and then they dissolve. It's so much about space and so much about inside and outside, which is similar to what we see and what we don't see.*

Tanya Lukin Linklater: Underline this statement. There is something quite profound here, underneath.

Olivia Boudreau's practice spans film, video and performance. Over the last few years her work has been featured in various exhibitions and screenings mainly in Québec and Europe. She live and works in Montréal.

Barbara Clausen is an independent curator and professor of performance theory and history in the art history department at the Université du Québec in Montreal.

Simone Forti (Los Angeles, USA), is an Italian American Postmodern artist, dancer, choreographer, and writer. She is a key figure of 1960s minimalist dance, examining the relationship of space and the body.

Corinn Gerber is an editor and publisher, co-founder of Passenger Books, former Director of Art Metropole (Toronto) and the CCA Bookstore (Montreal), and Deputy Director of Zurich's Women's Bookstore.

Joan Jonas (New York, USA) is a world-renowned artist whose work encompasses a wide range of media including video, performance, installation, sound, text, and sculpture. Since 1968, her practice has explored ways of seeing, the rhythms of rituals, and the authority of objects and gestures.

Tanya Lukin Linklater's practice spans experimental choreography, installation, video and text. She has exhibited her work in Canada and abroad and published poetry and essays in Canada and the US. Originally from Alaska, she lives in northern Ontario.

taisha paggett is a Southern California-based dance artist whose individual and collaborative interdisciplinary works re-articulate and collide certain Western choreographic practices with the politics of daily life to interrogate fixed notions of Black and queer embodiment and survival. paggett is an assistant professor of Dance at UC Riverside

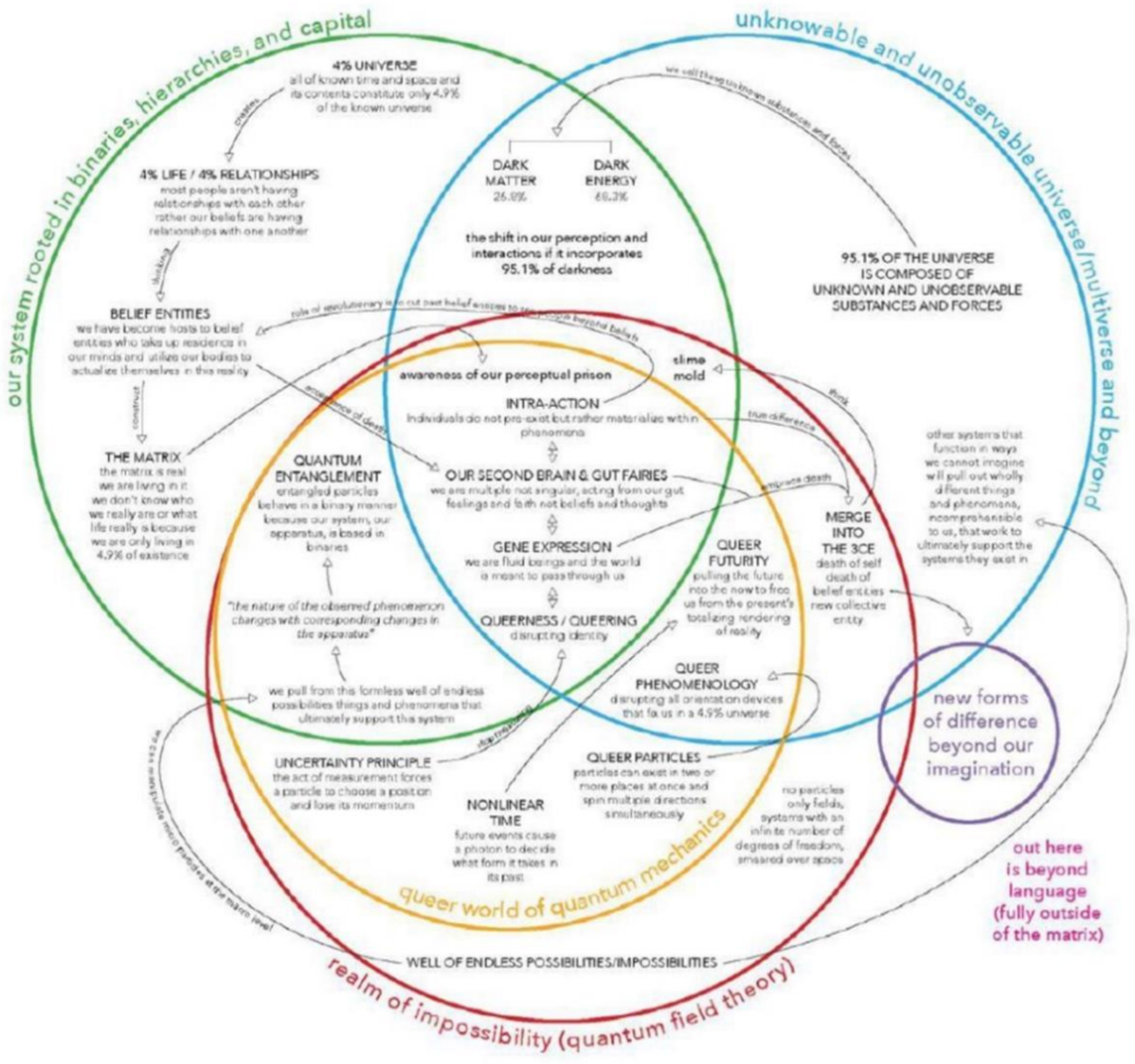
Robin Simpson is an art historian, curator and student based in Montreal where he works as the public programs and education coordinator for the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Concordia University.

Erin Silver is the Horizon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Histories of Photography in Canada at the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Institute for Studies in Canadian Art (Concordia University). She is the co-editor (with Amelia Jones) of *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (Manchester University Press, 2015).

Artist Project

At the Edge of Space and Time: Expanding Beyond Our 4% Universe

by laub and Jennifer Moon



What is the 4% universe? To answer this question and to understand the magnitude of this phrase, let's start where we generally do, with us: humans.

Currently, there are 7.4 billion people on this planet. Our combined number of 7.4 billion constitutes only one species out of an estimated 8.7 million species (and that's not including the uncountable group of microbes). Now given that there are 7.4 billion humans in one species, just imagine how many living organisms there are on earth from a possible 8.7 million species!

This incalculable number of living organisms combined with non-living organisms – all of the matter in this world – and all of our interactions, our exchanges of energies, our beliefs, our dreams and fears, ALL OF IT, is contained on this one planet we call earth. And this one lonely planet, our planet earth, is merely one celestial body out of an estimated 100 billion planets plus hundreds of billions of stars in our one galaxy, the Milky Way, which is just a single galaxy out of an estimated 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe. All of these hundreds of billions of galaxies, each containing their own hundreds of billions of stars and planets, and perhaps some of these planets, like our earth, contain their own millions of different life forms, ALL OF THIS, make up only 4.9% of the known universe.

So what is the other 95.1% of the universe, which currently spans 46 billion light years? Well, we don't know. Whatever it is, it is not made up of ordinary matter, baryonic matter, the stuff you and I are made of, the stuff everything on this planet is made of, and the stuff this planet is made of and other planets and stars and galaxies. 95.1% of the universe is composed of unknown substances and forces that we cannot see or observe using any of the instruments we currently have. We only know it exists because of its effects on celestial bodies and the universe we can see. There is some unknown mass creating enough gravitational force to hold a galaxy together and maintain its shape. Scientists have called this unknown matter dark matter and it makes up 26.8% of the universe. The remaining 68.3% of the universe is an unknown energy force – deemed dark energy – that is accelerating the expansion of the universe.

In a culture where darkness has generally been associated with fear, ignorance, immorality and evilness, lending itself to anti-Blackness and racism, to understand that 95% of the universe is "dark," so to speak, and that that darkness will lead to enlightenment – a veritable expansion of our consciousness – is significant beyond a scientific explanation of the makeup, origins and future development of the cosmos.

How would our perceptions and interactions with each other shift and expand if it began to incorporate the 95% of "darkness" that is the universe? Or as Richard Panek writes in his book *The 4% Universe*: "[Future generations] would not be seeing the same sky that [we do or once did] because they would not be thinking of it in the same way. They would see the same stars and they would marvel at the hundreds of billions of galaxies other than our own but they would sense the dark too and to them that darkness would represent a path toward knowledge, toward the kinds of discoveries that we all once called, with understandable innocence, the light." SO, LET THERE BE DARK!

We exist in a cosmos where we are capable of perceiving only 4.9% of it. Built into our consciousness, our way of processing information, is an inherent inability to see and interact with 95.1% of all that is. Could it be possible, then, that our entire understanding of ourselves, each other, and the world we live in, is also only 4% of who and what is actually there? Could it be that our full, complex, multidimensional lives are only a 4% life and that the genuine relationships we create are only 4% relationships? Could it be that we indeed exist in some sort of Matrix?

Cognitive scientist Donald Hoffman claims that our brains perceive a fraction of reality to keep us alive. Hoffman states, "Evolution isn't about truth, it's about making kids." Therefore, if we process every bit of information that encompasses ALL of reality, we would expend too much energy and possibly lose sight of our Prime Directive.

To understand the usefulness of this simplified reality, Hoffman employs the analogy of a desktop interface: "When you click a square, blue icon to open a document, the file itself is not a blue, square thing." It opens up into an entire application, an entire world, that is hidden to us until we click on the icon. Similarly, the physical objects that we see in our world, and even possibly ourselves, are just symbols to a much larger underlying structure, but it's more useful to obscure 95% of it. But useful for what and for whom, exactly?

A friend of mine once told me that he believes most people aren't having relationships with each other but, rather, our beliefs are having relationships with one another. My belief of myself and

Does anyone here have a particularly hard time connecting with similar looking like species? I know I do--awkward-like accidentally farting in a silent elevator filled with people, like conforming to a particular type of mannerism. Giving in to fear. Now I'm afraid that suddenly I'll be having sex with strangers if I start making eye contact for too long. Jennifer Moon and I have sex. But only sometimes and especially not when we are working on a project. Like this one. What's it called? Expanding beyond the 4% universe?

my belief of you are having a relationship with your belief of yourself and your belief of me. In a similar sense as Hoffman's analogy of the desktop interface, we have become icons, belief icons. Our interface may be an elaborate complexity of constantly shifting and fantastically disruptive beliefs but they are beliefs nonetheless. We have not yet learned to sift past our beliefs in order to really see each other, to discover who we really are, an entire cosmos contained within each and every one of us, hidden behind beliefs.

So our inability to access 95% of ourselves, each other, and everything that is, is useful – but not to us living and non-living beings (whoever and whatever we may actually be) – it is useful for the survival of beliefs to maintain the system that constructs our 4.9% universe where we play out our 4% lives.

Remarkably, our reality may very well be like the science fiction film *The Matrix*, where humans have become implements, tools to sustain a system whose only interest is to generate profit in the form of capital. In order to fix our position within this bizarre 4% reality, we are inhabited by beliefs that influence us to perceive everything within binaries and hierarchies.

In our world, we are continually measuring ourselves, positioning ourselves in alignment with or against everything we come in contact with. We find ourselves occupying a location either above or below another, categorizing everyone and everything within millions of hierarchies. The architecture of our language is bound within this context such that our imagining of an outside cannot escape referencing some form of division or gradation. Our system is set up so we cannot even imagine an outside, we cannot envision what could possibly exist beyond our 4% universe.

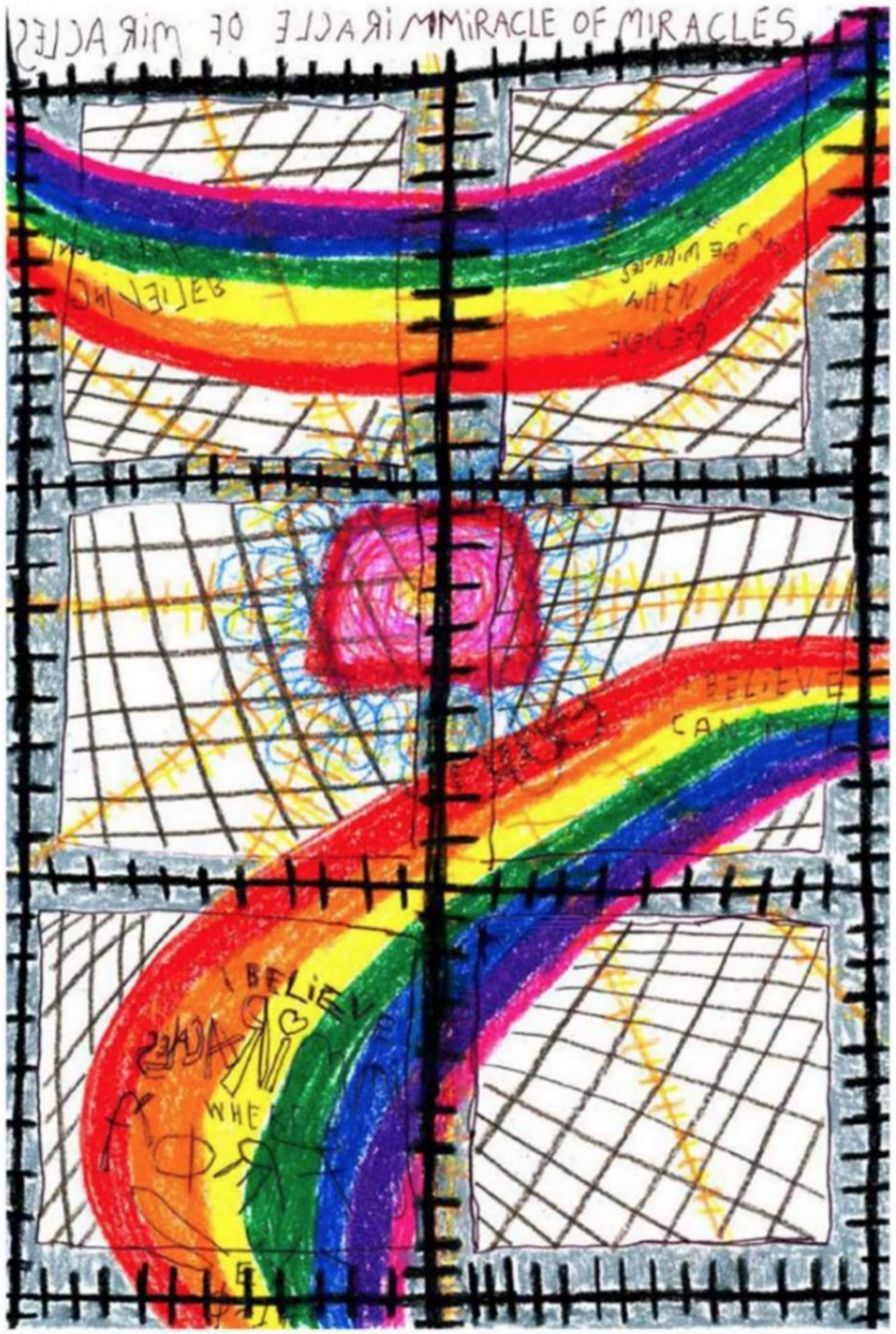
Binaries are ever present in the natural world to the point where they have been accepted as truths in many cultures. Perhaps you don't believe in gender binaries or any binary dichotomy that perpetuates and legitimizes colonial, white supremacist, patriarchal power structures but certainly yin and yang provide a necessary balance to the world: we must balance work with play and also our mathematical equations. How about hierarchies? Hierarchies create marginalized, oppressed communities. Yet the animal kingdom, nature, functions in a hierarchical manner so that must be a fact of the cosmos. Well, of course it does, because it's all part of The Matrix, ALL OF IT, even the so-called "natural world" and our conception of the forces of the universe.

Let's see how the universe behaves when we enter the quantum world of subatomic particles. In this extraordinary micro universe, commonly known as quantum mechanics, particles, such as protons, neutrons, and electrons, which bundle together into atoms – the stuff you and I and the entire visible universe are made of – behave in radically different ways than we do in the macro world. In this queer world, particles hover in a state of uncertainty, seemingly being partly here and partly there, occupying all known positions simultaneously. The orientation devices we use to ground ourselves in our 4% universe, namely binaries and hierarchies, fall away. There is no such grounding in this world where particles exist in several states and several realities at the same time and spin in multiple angular rotations at once.

In addition, the non-negotiable law of linear time, which rules our 4% universe, does not exist in the micro world where a future event causes a photon to decide what form it takes in its past. A photon will change its form into either a wave or a particle through the first event depending on what the second event is before it even encounters it! Therefore, time essentially moves backwards or the particle is able to pull the future into its past OR there is no such thing as time.

The incredible thing about all of this is that it is happening inside of us as we speak, all of this fantastic queering and disrupting of time and space is happening RIGHT NOW in the subatomic particles that make up our bodies and all the observable matter in the universe! So how does all this radical queering wash away into a system that converges into a single reality, this 4% rendering of our macro world? By our acts of measurement.

The uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics states that the more precisely the position of a particle is determined, the less precisely its momentum can be known, and vice versa. Essentially, we can't measure the position and the momentum of a particle at the same time. In their unobserved state, particles exist as a fuzzy jumble of possibilities. However, once they are measured, the act of measurement forces a particle to relinquish all of the possible places it could have been and select one definite location where we find it. And when a particle is forced to choose a position, we lose its momentum.



I used to believe in Jesus, which nurtured a certain accountability to a standard set of morality, participating in a dialogue with self on deciding how to be seen in this present moment. Who am I? I'm a trappy boy who wants to be fucked in the ass. I also want to explore healthy sexual relationships with people who have penises. And I want to be in love with older women and I want to have lots of friends. I once almost joined a commune called the Bruderhof. I really felt love there. I mean, I loved it there. I had to leave the Bruderhof because I'm queer. They didn't force me away or anything but I couldn't allow myself to live within such a strict binary code of conduct but I often think about going back.

Our singular 4% reality is realized and sustained by our constant measuring. It is our endless acts of measurement, placing everything and everyone, every event, every phenomenon within a binary-bound, hierarchical spectrum that washes away the possibilities of us and our world existing in multiple states and multiple realities at the same time. Our incessant measuring of ourselves and others and the world around us forces us into a position, an orientation, an identity, a behaviour, a way of being. And when we are forced to choose a position, we lose our momentum. And without momentum we can never expand beyond our 4% universe.

Humans are achieving unbelievable strides in technological advances: we are approaching the realization of quantum computing where billions of different universes could potentially coexist within one computer. We are mastering the ability to manipulate micro particles at the macro level. Yet we have not discovered how to let go of fear, power and control to exist amongst the micro dimensions. We are essentially colonizing the quantum world, forcing it to conform to the rules of our 4% universe.

In Edwin A. Abbott's novella, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, the narrator, A Square, who lives in a two-dimensional world, experiences a three-dimensional sphere passing through his flat 2D world as magically growing and shrinking circles. A Square believes the sphere is a circle playing tricks on him as A Square cannot comprehend depth and, therefore, cannot conceive of a three-dimensional object. Similarly, we, in our 4% understanding of the universe, cannot comprehend freedom and, therefore, cannot conceive of concepts like justice, difference, revolution, love and faith beyond the framing of binaries placed within hierarchies. These expressed notions of freedom point to where quantum field theory and dark matter/dark energy intersect with our 4% dimension. Yet, we can only realize these freedoms as much as the manifestation of our bodies allow, bodies which have been shaped into implements to sustain a system that can co-opt any attempts to expand beyond our 4% universe into capital.

In a seemingly inescapable system such as ours, how do we transfigure our bodies to access the abyss unreachable by The Matrix of our beliefs? It is through an acceptance of death, but not death, as in the absence of life, defined by this system. Rather, it is a death of beliefs and a death of self, which will allow a merging into many, an aggregate formless body eluding all attempts of measurement.

In our 4% reality, rendered by our beliefs, it is beneficial for the system if we perceive ourselves, each other and everything else in our world as discrete objects – separate entities, individuals – in order to generate self-interest: individuals pursuing self-interest are ultimately easier to control. Feminist physicist Karen Barad questions the pre-existence of individuals with her concept of intra-action.

It is generally assumed that interactions happen between individuals who existed prior to the exchanges. Intra-action queers this assumed belief of causality by asserting that individuals materialize within exchanges. Intra-action, which can be described as the mangling of people and things and other stuff's ability to act, makes inquiries into how differences, individuals, are made and remade. Similar to quantum physics where particles lack definite physical properties, there are no inherently bounded and propertied things that precede our intra-action with particular apparatuses. The larger apparatus, in this case, our 4% Matrix constructed from our beliefs, enacts particular cuts that create differences based on the measurements used in each exchange and then renders us as individuals with defined properties within that phenomenon only. In other words, intra-action reveals the artificial boundaries we forgot we invented and helps us to think in simultaneity. By perceiving our 4% reality through intra-action, we can more easily identify the belief entities that tell us we are separate, different and unlike one another in an attempt to make us easier to control.

Now that we understand how we have become hosts to belief entities that take up residence in our minds, which then shape our bodies and dictate our actions to keep us fixed in a 4% universe, how do we begin to see and intra-act with each other and the world around us beyond beliefs? Through our second brain of course!

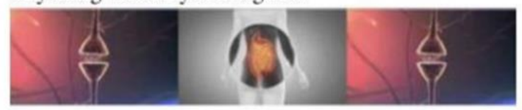
There exists an often-overlooked network of neurons lining our guts that is so extensive some scientists have nicknamed it our "second brain." Technically known as the enteric nervous system, our second brain is made up of a complex and plentiful network of neurons, too complex and plentiful to just aid in digestion. This multitude of neurons enables us to feel the inner world of our guts and listen in on the 100 trillion microbes who

Ghost people afraid of each other's presence. Like the holy grail of party favors. Corporate reinvention of humanity. Corporate mindfulness. Corporate humanism. Corporate utopias. Corporate revolutionaries. Corporate seed banks stashed away in the melting glaciers of Antarctica, ready for the world to end. What's the end of the world look like? Does it look like it does now, disco-balled through outer space time? Those stars off in the distance burnt out a long time ago, so doesn't that mean the same for us?

live within our bellies, which, combined with additional microbes sharing other parts of our bodies, make up 90% of who we are! We are made up of only 10% human cells and the remainder 90% are cells from over 500 different species of microbes! We are not singular beings; we are multiple. And since our brains in our heads have been taken over by parasitic belief entities designed to keep us locked in a 4% reality, it's time to use our second brain in our guts and listen to our microbial gut fairies who can expand our perceptions based on feelings rather than beliefs. Gut feelings and gut instincts are not just figures of speech.

Want more proof that we are not individual beings living amongst discrete objects? Let's look at how gene expression works. Most cells in our bodies contain every one of our 22,000 or so genes. But in any given cell, at any given time, only a tiny percentage, less than 10%, of those genes are active. This variable gene activity, called gene expression, is how our bodies do most of their work and determines the details of our bodily form as well as our health. Previously, scientists thought of our bodies as stable biological structures, fundamentally separate from the world: unitary organisms living in the world but passing through it. Now we are learning from the molecular processes that keep our bodies running that we are far more fluid than we realize, and the world passes through us. We are porous beings. Our social environment, who we hang out with and how they behave, can change our gene expression dramatically, to the point where we can literally change who we are.

By merging with our 100 trillion gut fairies, we can stimulate horizontal gene transfer to unlock the 90% of dormant genes in our human cells. These dormant genes could be the key to transfiguring our bodies to enable a merging with each other and everything that is to form an aggregate, formless body much like a slime mold, social amoebas who queer the nature of identity by calling into question the individual/group binary. As a collective entity that merges into many and enjoys multiple indeterminacies, we can avoid all forms of measurement that fix us in a 4.9% universe and venture out into the abyss, the 95% of darkness where we can discover new forms of difference, not determined by the binary, hierarchical beliefs of our 4% reality to keep us contained within it, but difference that is beyond language and beyond anything we can yet imagine.



laub is a magical wood nymph.
Jennifer Moon is a futuristic humanoid from outer space. They live and work together in Los Angeles.

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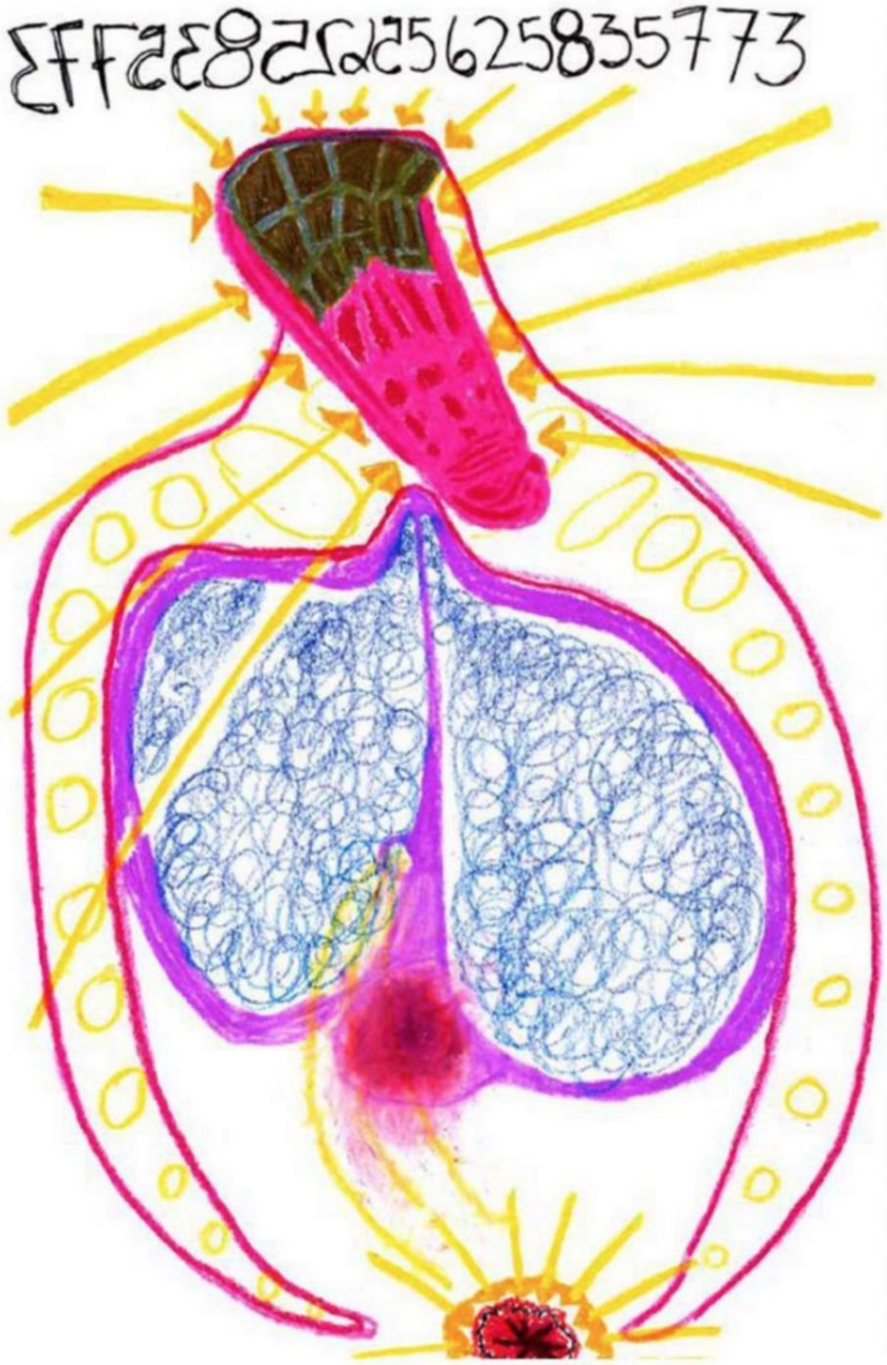
Anishinaabe-kwe and/or Indigenous feminist?



I've been formulating preposterously relating componalities within the intra-actions of my daily life and I have an interest in the materiality of our center. Of our relationship to one. At what point do I start relating to this earth as a spaceship? Similar to the Ganhali spaceship Octavia Butler told me about. It's a dialogue of hope--like dreaming of demons and blood dripped severed limbs infected puss filled wound holes and staff flies and deep dish pizza slices stuffed with cheese wiz. Stench like a bottle of piss. I'm gonna eat through my plastic ego grip and die beneath this Costco frenzied fantasy world. Kiss me you are beautiful. Kiss me you are beautiful. Kiss me you are beautiful.

First debuted in *FUSE Magazine*, *Close Readings* is a regular column by Richard William Hill that aims to offer honest assessments of exhibitions of contemporary Indigenous art.

Wanda Nanibush is the guest writer for this column in c132.

by Wanda Nanibush

I am a woman of my people
I am an image and word warrior
I am Anishinaabe
I am a worker
I am my language
I am a daughter, aunt, sister
I am water
I am land
I speak/act against violence against women, water, children, land
I speak/act with the ancestors and knowledge keepers

I remember when I decided to add *kwe* to Anishinaabe a few years ago and how much of a struggle it was at first. This struggle marks out some of the pathways I have found to and from western feminisms and something we could call Indigenous feminisms. Sharing this journey opens up a space for thinking about the contradictions that structure my relationship to the word and the analysis called feminism and to the identity called feminist.

Kwe means woman in my language and placing it attached to my identity as an Anishinaabe meant making it essential to my understanding of my culture, as an entry point to myself. For some people, this is easy: they are comfortable having the world divided up between men and women, and thinking of women as essential in their capacity to bear children. I was always keenly aware of the oppressions that could be contained in defining women by their wombs. This analysis came from watching many women in the many foster homes where I grew up in chained to kitchens, kids and caretaking. I saw men sit at tables eat quickly and leave before the "mother" ever sat down. I saw girls and mothers cleaning houses on a regular basis while boys were exempt. It seemed to be a very thankless life. I saw menopause hit women with a desire for their own passions, life goals and leisure. I swore as a young girl that I wouldn't enter a kitchen because it took up so much time and I wanted to read, write, dance and change the world.

I was in care with my brothers and nephews and nieces and eventually just one brother. I lived in homes with a lot of boys. I always say I was raised by my brothers. I was always more comfortable around boys and men. Some of that is my natural rejection of most femininity as a child and some of it comes from hearing how men speak about women. Respect as a woman seemed really hard to come by. I thought to myself, if I can't have their respect as a woman then I could get it by being more like a man – by being smarter, stronger and need-less.

I remember a group of girls in my elementary school berating me for being too physical, too strong. I decided I would hang with the boys then. Boys always told you the truth and were quick to get over things. There is also a cultural element to this because I felt like the manipulation and passive aggressive behaviour young white girls enact was learned from their mothers and I knew it was a white thing. It had to do with the limited powers women had to exert in their lives. Passive aggression in some ways is suppressed desire for freedom. When I moved back to the reservation when I was 12, I realized my way of being a strong woman was acceptable and cultivated there. I no longer felt like a boyish girl because all the girls seemed this way, partly because femininity does not define womanhood or girlhood on the rez. I took something from the white world to the rez, though, and that was a critical look at the way girls and women define themselves based on male desire for them. They will beat you up for a man. There was no way I cared enough to do that. That seemed different. I'm still not married so I might have gone too far down that road. Just joking. I have had a very critical attitude towards western marriage because of its ties to the state and capitalism.

I had a baby when I was 20, on purpose, in order for my child's spirit to speak to my mother's spirit who had just died. When my mother died, I understood myself as a woman in a new way. I saw my own oppressions and labour as a woman joining hers and my sister's. I had to think about what kind of mother I wanted to be. Western thought taught me to challenge mother as my primary identity and Anishinaabe thought taught me to place children at the centre of our communities and worlds. I did both, raising my son to see me as a woman with desires and aspirations but also mothering him as the centre of the future of our people. I thought a lot about how he would be as a man.

When I added *kwe* to my identity, I began to see the diversity of constructions of women and started to seek alternatives within my own culture to western feminism. I have always been influenced by two westerners: Judith Butler and Emma Goldman. Butler because she challenges heterosexuality and understands how we perform and become women. Goldman because she had a keen sense of herself as a revolutionary individual and how to practice an anti-authoritarian ethic. As "Nish," we raise our kids in anti-authoritarian ways and this is one connection to *kwe*. We let their spirits develop freely and without violence. Of course feminism becomes important when we think about the current state of violence against women and children in our communities today. As an analysis that understands patriarchy, it is important because colonialism enforced patriarchy in our communities where women had previously enjoyed equality or had more power than men.

In 2012, I decided to look at the work of Rebecca Belmore, who I felt could help me think through the meaning of *kwe* from outside of where I had been learning it, which was in the teachings of elders. I knew that my responsibility was to protect the earth, the water and the children. I understood that ways of being as a mother could be

Both Images: Rebecca Belmore, *KWE*, 2012, Installation view, Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
IMAGE COURTESY OF JUSTINA M. BARNICKE GALLERY

learned from our first mother, the earth. I was beginning to understand the type of power women have because they bear children and how that did not have to be a limit to our freedom. But these teachings, coupled with queer theory and the activism I embedded in my everyday life, weren't great bedmates.

Belmore's solo exhibition was called *KWE* and examined the complicated and fertile relationship between Indigenous women, art and feminism. *KWE* asked, what does the cultural specificity of Anishinaabe add to or change when we consider the meanings of being and becoming a woman for an artist who does not do ceremony? Belmore's artistic practice has always engaged the question of what it is to be an Anishinaabe-kwe artist here and now. The very real aspects of patriarchy and its embeddedness in both Indigenous and Canadian communities through colonialism, especially in terms of the violence against women, is the subject of much of Belmore's work. As an Anishinaabe-kwe artist, she engages on multiple levels with her cultures, practices and stories on the role of women while keeping Indigenous self-determination central.

Belmore's insightful and aesthetically beautiful critiques play with the patriarchal present, underscoring the need for an understanding of colonialism within feminisms today.

As a curator, I kept the meaning of *KWE* unspoken and let the work speak for itself. The underlying analysis of power in society whereby Indigenous women fall to the bottom of any measures of health, wealth or protection is why many people see Belmore's work as feminist. Her body and her sister's body were present in almost every work. The presence of an Indigenous woman's body pushes through stories of victimhood to resilience and strength, it pushes through the overwhelming denigration of stereotypes, and it pushes through its absence in reform and revolution narratives. Women's work. As a child I hated that, but as a curator I understand it as fundamental to the meaning of *kwe*, and that the problem isn't how much we do but its value and place in society. Anishinaabe culture allowed me to consider possibilities as yet unthought in the west and unpracticed in our societies today: more genders than two; accounting for and valuing women's needs and labour based on their differences; the idea that a man can live as a woman; the idea that it doesn't matter who you sleep with but what responsibilities you take up; the idea that women can have power without becoming violent, aggressive, adversarial or colonial; the idea that differences mean an expansion of society and special powers in the individual; and that the spirit of the individual should never be crushed. I don't call myself a *feminist* (identity statement) because Indigenous people have spent generations being named by others and I want control over my own naming, but I also think of Indigenous women as the earliest feminists and I value the analysis of western feminisms. Adding *kwe* to my identity captures all of these paths for me and, since I am comfortable with contradictions, it is unfinished in terms of where it will take me next.

Wanda Nanibush is an Anishinaabe-kwe image and word warrior from Beausoleil First Nation. Currently she is the assistant curator of Canadian and Indigenous art at the AGO.

Born in Flames (1983)
Directed by Lizzie Borden
The Free Screen
screening and Q&A
July 26, 2016, TIFF Bell
Lightbox, Toronto
by Yaniya Lee

This summer the TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival) Cinematheque in Toronto showed Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (1983) as part its Free Screen series. Similar to Jennie Livingston's 1990 film, *Paris is Burning*, *BIF* has gained tremendous significance among the LGBTQ community. The small-budget production was drawn out over a five-year period. Bleak, downtrodden streets of downtown New York City serve as the backdrop for the film's fictitious near future, in which a socialist democratic revolution has overturned the capitalist state. Borden casts predominately Black female protagonists who seek a radical reorganization of society. The film's portrayal of different groups of women working out how to challenge patriarchy and white supremacy was unique for its clear illustration of the fragmentation within second wave feminist struggles. Craig Willse and Dean Spade described the film in the *BIF*-themed issue of *Women & Performance* that they co-edited in 2013: its "radical vision…felt truly shocking: lesbian feminists building multi-strategy responses to heteropatriarchy through an analysis of racism and poverty, debating connections and disjunctions between community organizing, working inside systems, cross-gender and cross-race alliances, and armed resistance."[1] The film's criticisms of society remain relevant today. It seems women of colour are still the most marginalized members of our communities, and the only way to stop the machinations of heteropatriarchy is drastic and immediate structural change.

A couple of years ago, in 2012, Allyson Mitchell, Deirdre Logue and Scott Miller Berry screened *BIF* in protest *against* TIFF's egregious sexism. The "100 Essential Films by Feminists" series they organized at the Feminist Art Gallery (FAG) was a reaction to TIFF's 2010 "Essential 100 films of all time," which recognized just a single woman filmmaker alongside 99 male directors. As the FAG programmers noted, "TIFF readily, however wrongly, assumes the role of an 'authority' that dictates what kinds of film cultures are worthy, valuable, and eventually 'historical' enough to grace their oh-so silver screens."[2] TIFF, with its prestigious film festival and year-round screenings, events and exhibitions, has substantial institutional power. I'm interested in thinking about what it might mean for TIFF to show *BIF* now, especially in light of the film's earlier use to criticize the institution. Does programming a feminist film represent TIFF's support of social justice?

Media attention is susceptible to falling in line with what's fashionable. Recent Black Lives Matter actions, for instance, have brought social justice concerns into a mainstream conversation. Perhaps the most widely covered political action this year was BLMTO's blockade of the gay pride parade in Toronto to demand recognition of the needs of the most marginalized LGBTQ folks. By comparison, Grassy Narrows, another issue that has been the subject of longstanding activism, has received substantially less coverage. These actions demanding a right to clean land and water in the community may be less newsworthy because they have been ongoing since the town's mercury spill in the 1970s. It's clear that the importance of political actions is filtered by topicality and aesthetic appeal. Selecting to show *BIF* and host a talk with director Lizzie Borden aligns with the concerns of the current political climate: TIFF audiences are ready to see Black queers and movements for societal change on screen.

1 Dean Spade and Willse, Craig. "We are 'Born In Flames,'" *Women & Performance - A Journal of Feminist Theory*, Vol. 23, no. 1, 2013, p. 1.
2 Allyson Mitchell, Deirdre Logue and Scott Miller Berry. "Are you burning?: Lizzie Borden's Born in Flames circa 2012." *Women & Performance - A Journal of Feminist Theory*, Vol. 23, no. 1, 2013., p. 53.

Lizzie Borden, *Born In Flames*, 1983, film still
IMAGE COURTESY OF FIRST RUN FEATURES

Representation of marginalized communities on screen is sorely needed and often overdue. This can have the effect of blinding eager audiences to unchanged institutional power. Without redistribution of power, political programming like TIFF's screening of *BIF* does not address the grievances outlined by the FAG programmers. In a recent essay, Hannah Black wrote that, "the limits of inclusion are clear."[3] She went on to explain how "[t]he evocation of the dismal histories and current realities of race/gender in an art context…is not often directly aimed at producing actual political effects."[4] On-screen representation is only a single part of what is required for institutional transformation. During the Q&A after the film, Borden talked about what happened to some of the people who were in it. Kathryn Bigelow, the white woman who played one of the white feminist journalists, went on to direct films ideologically opposite to the sentiment of *Born in Flames*, and became the first woman director ever to win an Oscar. Jean Satterfield, the Black woman who played Adelaide Norris, is now a social worker. Borden told the audience that a week earlier Satterfield was followed while driving home and then beaten up by her pursuants. The different evolution of these two women's lives is a more reliable account of the racial and gendered inequalities *BIF* attempted to highlight. The protest organized by Mitchell, Logue and Berry called attention to how TIFF's "MeN-ssentialist list" made the institution complicit in the kind of society that would bring about such disparate experiences.

In the ongoing struggle for change, it remains easy to feel we have made more progress than actually exists. Of course it's not enough to judge TIFF by who is included and who is excluded. In reality, the institution is a complex entanglement of political inconsistencies that make it nearly impossible to criticize. I don't expect TIFF to be the bearer of political awareness. Institutions like this are many-headed hydra. It does seem that TIFF has begun to make space for women, LGBTQ folks and non-white programmers and directors. I can only hope for future programming that ignores political trends rather than follows them when it suits. I have my fingers crossed for a film about queer Muslim women freedom fighters or an Indigenous community surviving limited access to resources and the threats of government encroachment.

Yaniya Lee is an arts writer based in Toronto.

3 Hannah Black, "The identity artist and the identity critic," *Artforum*, Vol. 54, New York, 2016.
4 Black.

Jaime Black: *Conversations with the Land*
Actual Gallery, Winnipeg
April 1 – May 8, 2016
by Kendra Place

Jaime Black's *Conversations with the Land* first reached an audience at Actual Gallery, a commercial space that has since closed. Black's process engages with the histories, materialities and relations of specific sites, both on the land where she and her ancestors have lived and as a guest on other people's territories (this is work with the more-than-human that does not "free" anyone from cultural distinctions and responsibilities). Recalling her grandfather's ways of living with the land, she gathers things that happen to be nearby – stones, fabric, remains of past living – and creates allusive mise-en-scènes that also incorporate herself.

Photographs mediate the ongoing project, yet both the title and the work suggest that conventional discourses of photography – as technical apparatus, documentation or art – are limiting with respect to the work's dimensions. I imagine the photographs as life-stills: although they are presented in the gallery as rectangular, printed formats excerpted from the subjective lives of the artist and her relations, they nonetheless convey movement, time, voice and space at several paces, volumes and scales.

For *the land remembers* (2016), the artist has composed animal bones around and beside herself on the lichenous (back)ground. The remnants of hunting from years or generations past cycle through the wide photo, a skeletal aura changing depending on where (or when) it is: scattered, as found; arranged, as left; glowing like a sun-bleached halo of someone (once) present. Also on the tundra, for *breath of the land I-IV* (2016), Black stands on a shore beside tall rock formations. She has draped herself in found tent fabric secured to the ground around her with heavy stones. In four stills, wind gusts around and through her temporary shelter, animating the series while placing geological time in dialogue with the

erosive daily weather. Black (who's Métis) and I (of settler cultures) talked a few times about this review; she told me that she is considering her relationship with the land as ceremony, a tentative approach encouraged by visits with Inuit of Pangnirtung, where these works were made.

Several stills are from performances near her family's southern-Manitoba home, where the land is flat, tilled or forested. *Fallow* (2016) is a deceptively simple composition, as the Prairies sometimes are when the sky is calm. The artist stands on a leaf-covered field with a grey wool blanket covering her head and upper body. The effect is almost static, a hauntology but not a paradox, as though recalling a quiet or whispered conversation. Black's performances often begin in half-sleep – the imagery of her dreaming. For *uniform* (2016), Black lies on the ground partially covered with patches of grass; it is as though a horizon line has collapsed into the land, the land now almost indistinguishable from her body. This image recalls Edward Poitras' *Offensive/Defensive* (1988), an unforgettable conceptual-material work in which he moved a rectangle of grass from a reserve to an urban gallery lawn and vice versa: while the disparity between sovereignty and carcerality is most pronounced in colonial contexts, each artist also contends with several intersections, whether of gender, location or class.

Black's exhibition also includes an earlier intermedia photo series, *Contested Territories* (2012). Anticipating *uniform*, the work intends to foreground the body as land and the subject of knowledge practices. Red lines screen-printed or embroidered across inkjet prints of the artist's abdomen depict Indigenous maps of waterways, colonial survey maps for land privatization, or medical "maps" as cuts or scars of expedient C-section birthing. Although there are many ways to (dis)identify with these images, I worry their important truths might be obscured by photographic surfaces, the black-and-white photos yet to disinherit the camera's gaze as an objectifying apparatus insofar as they replicate commercial or advertising strategies.

With *untitled* (2016), Black negotiates vulnerability and resilience, as established through the ongoing REDress project for which she is known. Whereas the REDress project contributes to the necessary, melancholic labour of addressing settler publics, often in institutional spaces – campuses or legislatures – the momentum of *untitled* performs a more vivid conversation about Indigenous two-spirit, women and girls' survivance under colonial patriarchy. Embodying a red garment as a transformative and hopeful gesture, this pivotal work offers an imaginary of refusal and freedom.

Lean to (2016) is displayed as two photos on either side of *untitled*. In the first still, the artist stands in a field with tree poles leaning against her blanketed shoulders; whether this is a precarious or reinforcing structure, she is bearing its weight. In the second image, she sits with the trees radiating on the ground around her. *Lean to* is perhaps most audible live: Black recently performed the work during Duane Linklater's roaming Wood Land School, co-curated in this iteration with Jaimie Isaac at Plug In ICA. After painting her legs and arms with riverbank clay, Black moved from the gallery to the rooftop, where those present carefully built the structure around and with her. Artist Lita Fontaine then led its peaceful dismantling, following the performance with a smudge. This reclamation of relational, embodied and land-based autonomy, owing something to the inimitable practices of Rebecca Belmore and Peter Morin, is unaffected by a gallery's claim to aesthetic autonomy.

Unlike the Eurowestern tradition of land art, which imagines most viewers to leave "civilization" physically or conceptually in order to experience the art, with Black's practice the land is present with her, meeting the viewer wherever they are. Black's work invites other diffractive readings: among them, perhaps, a resonance with the multi-territory *#callresponse* project (2016) based at Vancouver's grunt gallery; and a challenge (to whom it may concern) to pay less attention to Bruno Latour or the so-called ontological turn and more to the land and its relations (echoing Indigenous feminist and anthropologist Zoë Todd). It also compels me to continue an unapologetic critique of the (bio)political economy.

Kendra Place is an artist and writer. She is currently working on a manuscript of oneiro-criticism regarding contemporary art, dance and feminisms.

Jaime Black, *fallow*, 2016
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Simone Leigh: *The Waiting Room*

New Museum, New York, NY
June 22 – Sept. 18, 2016
by Jessica Karuhanga

1 Bob Marley & The Wailers. "Waiting in Vain", 1977.

Are you mad?
Harness this feeling.

How do we channel madness when we find ourselves continually rooted in being undone? Our bodies hold ineffable energies that remain unperceivable to those existing outside their fleshy contours. This cipher precedes language and its translation deep within the wells of un-mappable geographies. These wells harbour safety until we are awash in death and she leaves us rising like smoke diffused and unnamed. So we say her name. We repeat these utterances like mantras. In this madness we merge and dance furiously. I missed the incessant dancing on September 1, 2016. However, instinctively, I felt this vision was a continuous unfolding and each day there awaited a new experience.

Simone Leigh's *The Waiting Room* – an expansion of her socially engaged project *Free People's Medical Clinic* (2014) – is an undeniable affirmation of her investment in centralizing subjectivities of Black women and femmes. Leigh foregrounds these bodies within a legacy of community-organized healthcare practices necessitated by the systemic deferral of Black vulnerability and livelihood. *The Waiting Room* inaugurates a residency and exhibition series at the New Museum that is committed to a dialectic exchange between the public and the institution focused on art and social justice. The exhibition is comprised of a series of performances, lectures and care sessions led and enacted by artists and educators from within Leigh's community. Most of these workshops, which occurred outside the museum's standard hours, were free to the public. Leigh's program reveals Black women to be unwavering despite of and in defiance of a violent history of dispossession and medicalization. Let us recall the death of Esmin Green, a catalyst for Leigh's vision, who was forcibly admitted to a psychiatric ward in Brooklyn where she waited for 24 hours to receive care that would never reach her before her untimely death. She collapsed in a chair in the waiting room. Her body, even in death, lay waiting. "I don't want to wait in vain for your love,"[1] becomes a riff that summons deeper sensibilities

On a Saturday morning in mid-September I attended a session in *The Waiting Room*. I was greeted at the entrance of the New Museum by a woman checking off the names of those who had signed up to participate in a guided meditation for Black Lives Matter. In the foyer a receptionist, wearing a brightly coloured hat, smiled while singing a cappella. She summoned me with her voice and ushered me toward an elevator leading to the fifth floor. I ascended to The Waiting Room with several strangers. I reflected on what possible sets of motions had drawn us all here to this apex. Many of us were not merely visitors to the site but only in town for a sojourn, which seemed noteworthy.

The elevator doors parted. I entered a dimly lit room to face an intricately etched paper curtain. This partition insisted our bodies move in one of two directions. I intuitively followed the scents of lavender and hibiscus toward the apothecary, which was sanctioned off from the rest of the installation space by a pristine glass wall. Before this room stood a table covered with stacks of mint-hued newsprint weighted down by large stones. I took a paper, but I suspended reading it to allow for distance after witnessing. In the apothecary baskets on floor were filled to the brim with sage. White walls were lined with rows of white shelves holding meticulously placed jars. They were filled with cinnamon, chamomile and flower petals. The mélange of scents tethered me to the ground while I sipped on tea offerings. The waiting room was buttressed with heaps of white sandbags reaching my hips. These piles enveloped the central space, which is strewn with black cushions, and they soften the distilled realities of the institutional framework through which we were temporarily passing. A group of thirty-something people was about to sit together through a metta

Simone Leigh, *The Waiting Room*, 2016, Afrocentering with Aimee Meredith Cox
IMAGE COURTESY OF NEW MUSEUM, NEW YORK

bhavana (loving-kindness) meditation led by Mona Chopra. Several candles rested flush with the wall behind her, forming an altar that suggests the residue of something that transpired before our emergence. Chopra guided us through intention and we endeavoured to be in our bodies despite all mental wanderings and reflexes. I wondered if I was able to emit warmth toward my tormentors. I repeated their names in addition to individuals I barely know. I conjured their images. This task is difficult. I resigned myself to thinking about the cupcakes I was going to eat later with my friend. I returned to this site in my body. I shifted my weight trying to remain centred. I was not certain if I was doing things right. I tried to dispel my skepticism. This task was difficult as I am rooted in being undone with no solace in sight.

Days later, on my way home, leafing through mint-hued newsprint, I find myself moved to tears. The intricacies reveal a fragility I know, and yet I do not have the capacity to contend with the notion that my teachers and maternal figures may leave me. Or that I too will leave this place. So I hold on to them, pulling them out of splits into a form that is beyond human. Sometimes we remain unperceivable even while our tormentors gaze and graze upon our skins. Sometimes we revel within and beyond the frame.

Jessica Karuhanga is a Toronto-based artist working in drawing, video and performance.

Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer: *Tape Condition: degraded*
June 16 – Sept. 18, 2016
Canadian Lesbian & Gay Archives, Toronto
by Genevieve Flavelle

I don't think I ever watched porn on VHS; I'm too young for that. As my sexuality took shape, amid the early dramas of being a queer teenager, the Internet was already fully accessible to the public. My first curious fantasies were thus nervously typed into a search engine or furtively searched for in library books. The rapid dominance of Internet porn meant that by the time I was 18, daily glimpses of sticker-covered nipples at the corner store and the mysterious curtained-off backrooms of my local video stores had vanished. As these sexual ephemera remain an object of childhood speculation rather than adult consumption, I've learned only through research of the huge impact that obscenity laws and morality brigades had on precarious queer communities. The uncertain digital future of this era of gay porn is one of the subjects of Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer's collaborative show at the Canadian Lesbian & Gay Archives. Rather than a nostalgia-laden presentation, however, *Tape Condition: degraded* punches a hole in the wall of the archive to bring Toronto's complex queer sexual histories into the present.

Tape Condition: degraded is the product of McKinney and Meyer's discovery that the CLGA holds a collection of over 800 VHS porn tapes. Spending years watching, rewinding and reporting the condition of the tapes, the pair began to fantasize about their dream tapes – homemade tapes, kinky tapes, tapes with women, trans folks, people of colour and people with different bodies. Finding little to none of these dream tapes in a collection that is largely comprised of commercially produced gay male porn from the 1980s and 1990s, McKinney and Meyer turned to the queer imagination and the desire to imagine a different kind of archive. The result is a multifunctional space for watching, archiving and creating queer porn in the CLGA's gallery, accompanied by a free publication detailing the dream tapes of 11 artists, activists and thinkers illustrated in Meyer's signature black-and-white ink drawings.

Requiring visitors to duck through a jagged hole bashed into a false wall built over the gallery's usually generous entrance (the wall once proposed as protection against police raids), *Tape Condition: degraded* doesn't immediately feel like an art installation. But it doesn't really feel like an archive either. It feels domestic, colourful, welcoming, kitschy and sexy in a secret and seedy way. There is no customary vinyl on the wall proclaiming the title of the show, no works loudly declaring their status as art and no densely packed archive stacks. There are some white gloves, but they are stored on a cute yellow wire rack along with other tools that assist in VHS maintenance. Rather, the colourful space feels like one in which, depending upon the time of day you arrive, you could find people digitizing VHS tapes at the large work table, drawing up sexy porn ideas at the drafting table or pushing aside the furniture to film their very own dream tapes against the vibrant green screen wall.

Auspiciously placed props gesture toward these three uses of the space. The large table is set up as a DIY digitization station – technology that Meyer and McKinney made accessible to the public for the duration of the exhibition. The second fantasy-laden aspect of the show is illustrated in Morgan Sea's commissioned comic, *Transsexual Dream Girls 2*. The comic, which is included in the publication and displayed in the space, is comprised of two parts: first, Sea reviews the only tape with trans women performers that she was able to find in the archive; and second, Sea falls asleep and enters the fantasy-porn-filled world of the *Conceptual Archives of Queer Eros and Ephemera*. Props such as a leather vest, hard-hat, bondage rope and rubber-tipped clothespins are ready on shelves and the pale pink peg board wall, and entice making fantasies porn realities using a casually placed VHS video camera.

As an exhibition, *Tape Condition: degraded* weaves together contemporary contributions with material from the archives and critical content from the publication with considerable care. McKinney and Meyer's lament over the lack of lesbian- and women-produced porn is reflected in clippings on the bulletin board from lesbian feminist activist and hero Chris Bearchell's 1983 *Body Politic* article, "In Search of Lesbian Porn." The bulletin board details the title of the show and its artists, and sets the stage for its themes and issues through small archival clippings about censorship, the persecution of local gay establishments by police, DIY porn, porn versus erotica and porn appreciation. Contemporary works, including Meyer's original drawings for the publication, are displayed alongside archival items such as a 1993 Rhythms of Resistance poster, which advertises the benefit dance as the "hottest Queers of Colour dance in 1993." The poster is a nod to the legacy of Toronto's very active QTBIPOC communities, which are detailed in Syrus Marcus Ware's contribution to the publication, and represent an act of resistance to the whitewashed grand narratives of gay liberation.

Confronted with an archive collection that depicts and legitimizes a narrow portrait of gay sexuality, McKinney and Meyer have opened up access to representation and commemoration through an act of creative queer world-making, rather than canonizing the CLGA's limited collection. By asking what is missing from the archive, the practices of archiving are queered to take the form of a community hub pulsing with history, politics, desire, fantasy, conflict and intimacy. The show enacts the productive tensions of at once being an archive and a counter-archive, a celebration and a critique. Promoting promiscuous knowledge production in the form of gossip, anecdotes, unofficial histories and dirty desires, the exhibition contributes to an important contemporary questioning of whose knowledge and narratives count in an LGBTQ archive.

Genevieve Flavelle is a writer and independent curator based in Toronto

Hazel Meyer and Cait McKinney, installation view of *Tape Condition: degraded*, 2016. Installation, textiles, found objects, archival materials.
PHOTO: TONI HAFKENSCHEID; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS

Raque Ford, Tiziana La Melia, Maryse Larivière, Athena Papadopoulos, Megan Rooney: *A Pool is Water*

Division Gallery, Montreal
July 14 – Sept. 3, 2016
by Nancy Webb

The name of the exhibition *A Pool is Water* is excerpted from a Joan Didion essay about wealth and drought. When Didion writes "a pool is water," she means that swimming pools are symbolic. In California, they have always signalled affluence and leisure. But to Didion, pools represent order: they stand for the mastery and control achieved by cutting a hole in the ground and filling it with water that stays there until we drain it. Even though that water is undrinkable, even though it's in limited supply, we've tamed it and claimed it. Four words, equally terse and poetic, convey all this.

Everything in this show is on trend – not a curatorial diminishment, but a nod toward the acuteness of the selection – from Didion, to the rosé palette, to poetry.

Poetry has become irresistible to the art world in the past few years, to which the proliferation of essays and exhibitions devoted to this topic (including a recent poetry-themed issue of this magazine) attest. One theory is that poetry is penniless, defies commodification, prefers to live underneath the cool dark of a rock, and so appears to the contemporary art world as a salve for its own vulgarity. Poetry adds vulnerability and integrity.

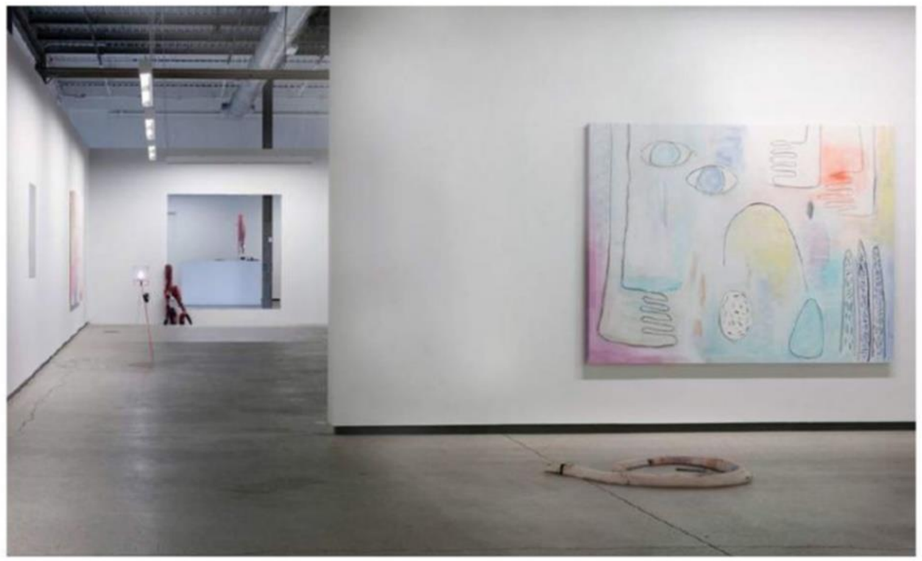
A Pool is Water also seems tailored to a specific audience of young feminists – the kind who read poets like Ariana Reines, who read Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick*, who get stoned and watch torrented episodes of *Transparent* in bed. While defining a variety of feminism by the commodifiable media that surrounds it is a bit bleak, it's a reality.

The five artists in this exhibition give form to this very specific matrix of cultural influences; it's a pleasingly self-aware combination of agitated sensuality, parodied "girlishness" and a razor-sharp dexterity with language.

Megan Rooney – who often folds poetic audio components and performances into her work – exposes the awkwardness of performing mainstream femininity. Layering paint, marker, pastel and ink over a two-page spread from *Topshop* magazine, she conjures a goofy sexuality. She pares catalogue models down to basic parts – red lips, fluffy eye blobs, pillowy breasts – so that they appear as smiling ghosts, sad and creaturely. Her *Untitled* floor snake, like the skinniest bed-worn T-shirt stuffed with birdseed, rests coiled and flaccid in the exhibition's second room. Kissed and smudged with paint, its body is propped up by a dense clay head whose eyeless sockets communicate the same kind of banal, sweet numb as the figures in Rooney's paintings.

In a similar coil, poetic verses from Tiziana La Melia's *From staring at the ceiling seeing d.o.g* spiral down a wall in a '90s-reminiscent bubble flower typeface: "no sweat my pet, butter lettuce in the breeze eating your garnish." La Melia combines lethargic texting shorthand (e.g. "yr" instead of "your") with a rounded tone, smoothed at the edges and bouncy like baby talk. Following the poem's meanders, a self-assertive blow strikes: "just trying to get an ordinary pleasure." One of La Melia's paintings features disjointed muscle men in white tanks collapsing into one another at the hips. Sliding down the painting's border is an orange-tinted spermy figure – masculinity's final trickle.

Propped against the gallery wall is Athena Papadopoulos' *S & B, III:* a disembodied pair of high-heeled legs, stuffed tightly and red-stained with hair dye and wine. Papadopoulos's work is alluring in same way that the bedroom of the girl that made you steal lipstick from the pharmacy in grade school was. Her large-scale painting soils the surface of a bed sheet with lipstick, nail polish, Pepto-Bismol, witchy spiders and bat pins, wild women, snakeskin and the words "Hoochie Mama" in animal-print letters. Her works labour against the sterilizing effect of Division's white walls; the rouged surfaces reas-



A pool is water, installation view, 2016
PHOTO: PAUL LITHERLAND; IMAGE COURTESY OF DIVISION GALLERY

sert that stains can be intentional, productive even. Papadopoulos' painting has a gravitational effect on the room, drawing everything inward toward its heart. It hangs facing, but slightly askew from, a similar-sized square hole that's been ruggedly carved out of the gallery wall, making it seem as though the work blasted through the drywall on its way in.

Across the room, Raque Ford's *The Devil is in the Details* rewrites the narrative of Georgia Brown, a character from the 1940 musical *Cabin in the Sky*, which featured Broadway's first all-Black cast. Pro-duced and scored by white writers, *Cabin* was, unsurprisingly, a fantasy-driven appropriation of life in the rural South, loaded with cultural and religious stereotypes. Ford's crisp acrylic surfaces are engraved with Brown's words, reimagining the doomed, money-driven seductress trope as a complex, searching voice. In the original musical, Brown sings: "If there's honey in the honeycomb then, baby, Look out! 'Cause oh, there's love in me." In a hand-drawn style, Ford carves out honeybees and cartoonish devils alongside her own lyrics: "Dear Devil, I want to be alone, but I don't want to be lonely. Do you ever feel like that? Sincerely, Georgia Brown." Another of Ford's acrylic surfaces is like brittle honey in a milky yellow; it seems like it would be fragrant if not for its obvious rigidity and sealed-in glossiness. Ford's works read as inquisitive devotions to the intense intellectual and emotional lives of women who have been written into one-dimensional narratives.

Published in tandem with the exhibition is a book of poetry by Maryse Larivière entitled *Hummzinger*, which is steeped in yearning. The textural quality of Larivière's ode to missing someone resonates with the exhibition's material sensibility: "A hummingbird, in between my lips, Puffy frills and ruffles, Buzzing thick on my tongue, Like an ice cream sandwich, In black velour." Hummingbirds inform her other works in the show too – the delicacy of her collages, the pageantry of the shimmering red bird baffle at the gallery's entrance. Taken together, Larivière's works embody a nectar-thick need to be closer, and that unabashed vulnerability speaks to a complicated feminist interiority that pervades the exhibition – maroon days inside a blistering emotional landscape of watered-down oppression. But here, vulnerability is speculated upon, celebrated, parodied, claimed. *A Pool is Water* is thrilling because its artists deliver a bastion of unexploited feminist terrain, all coiled up and wine-stained and flowing out in endless sticky verses. Ford, La Melia, Larivière, Papadopoulos and Rooney all in turn alchemize a worn-out formula with the fluidity and ease of Didion's title assertion.

Nancy Webb is a Montreal-based writer and founding editor-in-chief of Spiffy Moves.

Ruth Cuthand: *Don't Breathe, Don't Drink*

dc3 Art Projects, Edmonton
March 18 – April 16, 2016
by Carolyn Jervis

Water is intrinsically dynamic: its state changes depending on temperature and, in its most common liquid form, it responds to movement. Water's chemical properties suggest neutrality: it is tasteless, it can act as both an acid and a base, it dissolves many substances and it is almost entirely clear. Globally, it demarcates many liminal places, such as international waters, and time spent on water often has a feeling of suspension. Although the political issues regarding water are often as various and as complicated as its chemical properties, the United Nations nonetheless considers clean water a fundamental human right. Ruth Cuthand's *Don't Breathe Don't Drink* makes it clear that in Canada clean water is far from politically neutral, and in a disconcertingly beautiful installation she forces her audience to encounter their own subjective position in relationship to the crisis.

The central component of *Don't Breathe, Don't Drink* is the crystal-clear resin that poses as water in 94 glasses, pitchers and baby bottles, which correspond collectively to the number of First Nations communities with water advisories at the time the work was created. A glass-beaded replica of a water-borne pathogen is suspended in the substance within each vessel. As you move through the small room, with its low ceiling and clapboard walls, light refracts through the resin onto the blue tarp tablecloth that covers the table on which the water vessels sit. As the light moves, the beaded pathogens gleam.

Apparently contaminated and eerily still, this installation raises the question of why clean water is treated as a human right in seemingly every jurisdiction in Canada except these First Nations communities. Furthermore, through Cuthand's scaling down of a national crisis to the setting of a modest domestic room filled with everyday objects and crafted materials, she confronts her audience with their implication in the problem.

The artist's use of beaded pathogens in this artwork echoes her 2009 series *Trading*, in which she created beaded versions of illnesses and disease that have been overrepresented among Indigenous populations, historically and in the present, and displayed them in framed petri dishes. Similarly, in both *Don't Breathe, Don't Drink* and *Trading*, the use of glass beads, which became a form of currency during the time of trading posts, evokes this early colonial history as well as the history of Indigenous cultural production that resulted from access to what was then a new material.[1]

The act of recreating illness-causing microbes by hand, using a crafting skill with a long and specific trajectory, emphasizes both the labour this entails and the weight of a history of genocide. What if, instead of impotent federal policies, each community lacking access to clean water was consulted, and treated with the level of individualized and informed care, skill and labour that Cuthand employs in her beading? Other elements of Cuthand's installation also gesture to the myriad ways that the federal government has been ineffectual in supporting the basic needs of First Nations communities. The beaded blue tarp tablecloth on which the glasses sit references the tarps used as stop-gap measures to protect people from the dangers of black mold in homes on some reservations, offering a further reminder of the threats to health and safety present in the everyday lives of residents of remote First Nations communities.

Don't Breathe, Don't Drink notably distinguishes itself from Cuthand's previous series by contextualizing the beaded pathogens in a domestic space, which personalizes the crisis. Every water vessel in the artwork evokes an interpersonal gesture of care. A bottle brings to mind the feeding of an infant, a pitcher brings to mind common acts of offering hospitality to guests. Cuthand's work reminds us that these basic practices of family and community care embedded in the simple act of providing a glass of clean water are impossible in the kitchens of many First Nations communities in Canada. Although the choice to include the same number of water vessels as there were communities in crisis could have felt like too literal a gesture, the environment in which Cuthand places them creates a nuanced conversation about the nation state's relationship with Indigenous subjects in Canada.

In the artwork, the person behind the gesture of hospitality suggested by the vessels placed on the domestic table is absent. This reflects the contingent subjectivity that the Canadian nation state has maintained for Indigenous peoples. As scholar Sunera Thobani notes, the Canadian national imaginary is wrapped up in binary ways of understanding our social world that bleed into our very conception of who gets to be the subject raised above others, the subject considered human and thus entitled to full human rights. Colonialism still lives within the way the nation state and the "exalted" national subject (which mutually support each other) remain set up in an oppositional relationship to Indigenous people, meaning they are in part defined by not being Indigenous and by the idea that Indigenous history is long past.[2] The missing host at the artwork's table is a reminder of the uneven rights each subject is afforded, contingent to one's relationship with colonial history. The Indigenous host's labour is present, but they are invisible.

Cuthand hails her viewer by offering up water glasses on a kitchen table. *Don't Breathe, Don't Drink*'s visitor interpellation is contextually significant when thinking about what it means to exhibit this artwork in a gallery setting that, like so many, addresses a largely white clientele. Serving to personalize and concretize systemic national issues, the artwork is a litmus test for checking your own privilege and status when provoked to consider whether or not you would ever be in a position to accept or reject contaminated water.

Carolyn Jervis is a freelance writer and curator, and Exhibition Experience and Interpretation Coordinator at the Art Gallery of Alberta.

1 Gerald McMaster, "Cruel Beauty: New World Holocaust," in *Ruth Cuthand: Back Talk, Works 1983 – 2009* (Regina: Mendel Art Gallery, 2012), 81.

2 Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2007): 14, 18.

Ruth Cuthand, *Don't Breathe, Don't Drink*, 2016, 94 vessels with glass beads and resin, hand-beaded blue tarp tablecloth and gas board, dimensions variable.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DC3 ART PROJECTS, EDMONTON

Desearch Repartment Institute for Durational Futures: Brought to you by ESSENTIAL-HAPPINESSPOSSIBILITY

AKADEMYSPACE, Cologne
Nov. 13 – Dec. 18, 2015
by D.J. Fraser

Desearch Repartment's *Institute for Durational Futures: Brought to you by ESSENTIALHAPPINESSPOSSIBILITY* exhibition revealed a commitment to exposing the narcissism of unreflexive privilege and the so-called apolitical detachment of the artist in a post-feminist and post-identity art world. As an anonymous think tank working in between platforms of social performance, DR takes the apathetic to task, and snarkily reminds us that the post-identity artist assumes no responsibility. Claiming identity politics were too restrictive throughout the '90s, the satirical DR works to undermine an "excess of content" in the contemporary art world, instead focusing on the production and performance of immaterial spaces *around* content. To this end, Desearch offered up an "interactive convention" in exhibition form at AKADEMYSPACE in Cologne last November; this "convention" encouraged viewers to escape from accountability in favour of personal satisfaction in a hostile climate of surveillance and incarceration. Durational performances of art and life encouraged viewers to tune in to themselves, opt out and, above all, be flexible.

The DR, and their uncomfortably on-the-nose critique of neoliberal consumerism recalls parodic praxis of earlier generations of feminist performance artists engaged in reflexive and living art meant to run parallel and often confront grim political realities. The DR exhibition, along with its online operatives and printed matter, unnerved and displaced cultural complacency, ultimately calling attention to an entrenched practice of performing the self. What does the queer feminist body perform in a climate supposedly beyond identity and enmeshed in surveillance culture, social media and corporate sponsorship?

The exhibition reflected an uneasy coupling of satire and sombre recognition: Guantanamo Art Fair tote bags reminded the spectator of torture practices perpetrated in the prison industrial complex to which corporate America is inextricably linked; flags with the *Institute for Durational Futures* (IDF) logo were placed in "torture cells" enclosed with barbed wire in the exhibition; attendees were invited to snap selfies beside corporate logos while walking the red carpet in celebrity masks.

The DR made explicit with their video installation *Neo-Lived Realism: Compassion Torture* that nothing is sacred, or immune to critique in their art practice. The instructional video offered spectators a practice of "selfie-embodiment" through yaga, a mutant yoga practice that reflects an empty, complicit exercise of involution as directly linked to personal de-politicization. The video guided spectators through a bodily performance that required the material of neoliberal laissez-faire racism, colonialism and strict adherence to existing power structures. Yaga allows the body to take whatever (political) position it is already holding. Yaga suits every body. Spectators were invited to align themselves with the position of the artist, a somehow impervious posture reminiscent of the Vitruvian Man, always beginning and ending in the "I" stance. Perspective was collapsed into a form of tunnel vision as spectators looked through the slits in the anonymous group's eerie masks, printed as they were with corporate mouthpieces and invoking hooded detainees at Guantanamo. Uncanny perspective shifts in the videography moved from position to position, revealing the liminal connections between bodies and action, or the lack thereof.

The apolitical practice of yaga helps subjects extend themselves through personal orientations (the video and accompanying text instruct practitioners to face the West, to turn right and to keep turning right) that allow them to disengage from the discomfort of reality. A body must submit through yaga moves; mandatory "body scans" are inescapable. Images of yaga practice split with footage of TSA security measures underscore the reality of overly intimate surveillance. From racial profiling to the indictment of trans bodies as high-risk security threats to air travel across borderlines, the TSA and full body scans expertly impede the movement of highly politicized bodies. The continual use of *double entendre* and humour from the DR to evoke the mirrored possibilities of personal fulfillment through yaga sit in stark contrast to the reality that bodies unable to shake their identities become troubled sites for the production of truth. Subject to scrutiny, the anonymous status of the DR is also questioned in the video as the artists' nude, white bodies and masked faces complicate what it means to "know" or understand gender expressions and embodied experience without a clear-cut and simplified "identity" for anchorage.

Claiming distance from identity through anonymity, and placing the body in the midst of the political theatrics of art stars, global corporations and drones continually buzzing overhead, the DR aims to destabilize the Western concept of inner peace as it corresponds to whiteness, exploitation and power relationships that continually balance in favour of white supremacy. The return to a political body in the contemporary moment negotiates queer feminist critiques across platforms, pulling visual cues from Pussy Riot and the penal system. The DR works to use the body "evacuated" of cumbersome identity politics in order to reposition experiences of performance outside of individual identity, but inextricably linked to personal obsession. With the *Institute for Durational Futures*, DR presents to us a world in which we're invited to bask in the comfort of multinational outlets and luxury goods – as long as we've been born into social privilege. The speculative realism of the exhibit cuts too close to the bone, and the full-body coverage and anonymous status of the artists does nothing to nullify this discomfort. Inspired by the "phenomenology of fear" practised by international art star G.W. Bush, the concept of selfie-embodiment and vacuous capital investment in individualism divorced from politics, the Desearch Repartment scathingly unmasks the position of the artist performing for their life.

Guantanamaste.

Desearch Repartment enacted a new, durational edition of their convention at M:ST *Performà Art Festival* at Stride Gallery, Calgary, Alberta. Oct 21-26.

Desearch Repartment, *Selfies with logo wall*, 2015
PHOTO: ALFRED JANSEN; IMAGE COURTESY OF AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE DER WELT

Desearch Repartment, *Yaga: Torture Compassion*, 2015
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS

Book Reviews

Model Minority
Edited by Chris Lee and Maiko Tanaka
Gendai Gallery (Toronto) and
Publication Studio (Guelph) 2014

Review by Shellie Zhang

Since 2009, Toronto's small and efficacious Gendai Gallery has programmed exhibitions and events with the goal of cultivating dialogue through contemporary art from East Asian perspectives. In 2014, Gendai published *Model Minority*, a compilation of essays, articles, readings, ephemera and archival material compiled from the gallery's year-long programming series under the same name. Chock full of contributions from Canadian artists, academics and writers, and the first Toronto-based East-Asian-centered arts publication I have come across, *Model Minority* bridges the void in defining Asian-Canadian dialogues against the larger and often overshadowing Asian-American discourses. In discussing Asian identity, statements of homogeneity are not uncommon due to the erasure and generalization of our histories. *Model Minority* dispels this homogeneousness by presenting an array of historical and contemporary strategies, models and voices of resistance – a testament to the power of one small but resilient unit, itself a defiance against the very paradigm for which it's named.

In 2012, Gendai closed the doors of its workstation after an active year and reorganized to carry out its activities through a flexible nomadic structure, opting to engage the public through collaborations and partnerships with artists and organizations. *Model Minority* opens with an honest statement from the gallery's team expressing a reflective period during which Gendai grappled with the fact that they are funded under the umbrella of state multiculturalism, while working to challenge the failures of multiculturalism, white supremacy and colonialism through their programming. By acknowledging their place in settler-colonial multiculturalism, Gendai hoped that its work could be "mobilized towards the cultivation of alliances, solidarity and support of subjects within, beyond and against the violent settler state." As such, the book – co-published by Gendai and Guelph's Publication Studio – is intended to function as a resource for all those interested in workshopping the model minority concept.

Often broadly ascribed to East Asians, the model minority myth is the stereotype that hard work in the face of adversity allows a marginalized group to achieve a higher degree of socioeconomic success. The term is sometimes used to suggest there is no need for government intervention against discrimination. Historically and presently, it is used to protect institutionalized white supremacy and validate anti-Black racism and xenophobic beliefs. *Model Minority* tackles the model minority myth in four parts. First, reference texts provide a background to which the model minority archetype can be seen alongside landmark developments in Canadian history, such as the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II and the establishment of the Multiculturalism Act. Second, media clippings provide evidence of the dissemination of the model minority. When examined with a critical eye, these archival materials highlight how East Asians are consistently portrayed by the press as succeeding against all odds while the structures of oppression that persecute them go unaddressed.

Third, the commissioned texts and projects in *Model Minority* centre the publication strongly in a contemporary Canadian context. Tings Chak's analysis of Chinese-Indigenous solidarities through oral histories looks to how Indigenous peoples and early Chinese migrants in British Columbia banded together in times of oppression on a colony "built on free land with half-priced labour." Calling for more acknowledgement that Canada is a colonial state from Asian communities, Chak addresses the need for immigrant and migrant communities to "know where you came from, and know whose lands you now live on." A transcript of Will Kwan's video piece *If All You Have is a Hammer, Everything Looks like A Nail* portrays subtle racism and micro-aggressions through an imagined encounter between a white real estate agent and a Chinese client, painting a clear picture of "Canadian friendliness," while challenging the assumptions that arise. Alvis Choi reflects on the Chinatown Community Think Tank project with Gendai, which used space in Whippersnapper Gallery to survey Toronto's Chinatown community regarding what they were looking for in a gallery. Through a meticulous and critical analysis of their own practice and conduct, Choi questions the strategies of engagement that they employed and shares the learned experience that social engaged art requires transparency outside of the gallery with the people a project seeks to engage.

Model Minority ends with a plethora of resources to consult. Originally, *Model Minority* was a program series of workshops and screenings that took place between 2013 and 2014. The book includes a detailed listing of Gendai's programming, including the challenges, encounters and thinking that occurred behind the scenes. Finally, enclosed throughout the book are zine-like inserts – called "counter-models" – that refer to the work and life of artists and activists like Jesse Nishihata and *The Asianadian*. My only wish was that they had included more local collectives and groups such as the Project 40 Collective, Kapisanan Philippine Centre for Arts & Culture and Asians 4 Black Lives - Toronto. Perhaps for a future edition, fingers crossed.

Politically, Asian Americans and Canadians often occupy an incredibly dualistic position. Recent projects such as Letters for Black Lives Matter (a crowd-sourced resource of multilingual letters aimed at creating a space for and dialogue about racial justice, police violence and anti-Blackness in our families and communities) attempt to bridge generational and language gaps in an effort to preach intersectional support and solidary. *Model Minority* is a toolkit and foundational resource for beginning to tackle issues of where Asian-identified folks can stand – how we can navigate the precarious terrain of our own identities while fighting for the liberation of all marginalized groups and voices. Without having to elaborate on why these issues are important and valid, as many discussions about social justice sometimes can fall prey to, *Model Minority* starts on the path of mobilizing and acting.

Shellie Zhang is a Toronto-based artist, arts administrator and occasional writer interested in examining the construction and dissemination of Canadian multiculturalism and diversity.

Inventory
Ready Fire Aim
by Aisha Sasha John

On the flight from Frankfurt to Toronto (I spent the summer at dance camp), I posed 99 questions:

1.
2. What does cooperation look like?
3. What happens on the floor before bed if I'm not scared of my weaknesses?
4. How do I move in the world if I presume my environment there to serve me?
5. How can (name of collective's upcoming performance) help us change our lives?
6.
7. The reverse seven of swords plus the tower means what exactly?
8.
9.
10.
11.
12. How can I train my hips to relax?
13.
14.
15.
16.
17.
18. How can I exercise my freedom to hang out exclusively with people around whom I feel relaxed?
19. How can I institute what Steph said re: slow expansion of range?
20. I.e. when do I begin to stand still but off-centre and stand not totally still but with a bit of shaking?
21.
22. Does it make sense to feel accomplished about attempts to surpass my limits only to discover them expanding as I get closer?
23.
24. Durational assignments – will they be the next chapter of my research?
25. Will they be the next chapter of my research on gentleness?
26. If I compile a list of the tasks that provide good structures for my movement work, is that basically a book?
27.
28.
29. When do I understand that casting a spell is about ordered, shared, performed self-belief?
30. How do I actualize the knowledge that psychic = self-believer?
31. What does psychic boldness look like in my Toronto life?
32. In my Vancouver life?
33. In my New York life?
34. In my Montreal life?
35.
36. What would come up if I lay on the floor awake every day for an hour?
37. How much more beautiful would life be if I told the truth all the time?
38.
39. Is psychic boldness a function of treating what I intuit, immediately, as credible?
40.
41.
41. Do I have a question for every chakra's health?
42.
43.
44. Could I make money as a professional angel?
45. How long after strengthening my core would I experience an increase in willpower?
46. Can I tame the lion by – instead of gentleness – offering it a bigger pasture?
47. What if I reacted when people said things that hurt my feelings or made me sad?
48.
49.
50. Do I need to understand what's there at the place where I was transformed?
51. How can I remember that no one is other than me?
52. Will orange light produce a work?
53. Can I build the necessary postural muscles without actually using weights?
54.
55.
56.
57.
58.
59.
60. Are there enough large objects on stage?
61.
62.
63.
64.
65.
66.
67.
68.
69. Am I ready to really take on getting my mom housing?
70.
71. What would it mean to consult my pussy when making decisions?
72. How much should I advertise my apartment for?
73.
74.
75.
76. When can I hang out in Vancouver for months?
77.
78.
79.
80.
81. What will Deborah Hay and Louise Hay give me in overlap?
82.
83.
84. If my idea of selfishness is actually just maintaining healthy boundaries, what would ordinary selfishness look like?
85.
86. Is John Cage a good direction?
87. Is Sun Ra a greater direction?
88. What would trying again to metabolize that one really rhythmically difficult song Saba gave us give me?
89.
86. Where is my snake?
87.
88.
89.
90.
91.
92.
93.
94.
95.
96.
97. What would it feel like to not be scared – at all?
98. How much more can I get for the work I've already done?
99.

+1

What is the relationship between me clenching my hips and anxiety around being "scary"? And containment?

Aisha Sasha John is a choreographer and member of the collective WIVES. Her third poetry collection *I have to live*. will be published by McClelland and Stewart in the spring of 2017."

Virgo Woman Matches Tinder Men Only to Criticize their Profiles

by Merray Gerges

Since there is no singular feminism, there ought not to be any set aesthetic qualities for feminist art. Is an artwork's feminism predicated, then, on the artist's self-proclamation or exhibitionism of their feminist politics? What typically defines feminist art, Wikipedia tells us, is its reflection of women's lives and experiences with the ultimate goal of changing the foundation for the production and reception of contemporary art. It is also historically self-organizing – an aspect of feminist art that becomes even more pertinent when most people have access to an Internet connection.

Even though there ought not to be any set aesthetic qualities for feminist art, women's selfies have come to be a primary constituent of feminist art over the past three years. In "Closing the Loop," Aria Dean writes about how the selfie's subject ostensibly asserts her autonomy from the male gaze by wrestling narrative power from him via her repeated unapologetic self-representation. The selfie's subject seizes visibility to verify and affirm her very existence on her own terms; as Dean writes, "If you could flood the network with something, it would become impossible to ignore." She identifies artists like Petra Collins, Molly Soda, Audrey Wollen and others, who have all been catapulted into the popular imagination of current feminist art through their significant social media followings and Internet fashion glossies' declarations of their girl-power feminism. Think of pink suburban bedrooms where teenage girls groom each other, flaunting their body hair in acts of defiant body-positivity. Amongst these artists, Dean says, there is a "shared belief that the control afforded through the act of self-imaging is invaluable; nothing less, in fact, than *the primary* feminist tool for resistance. The claim follows a logic in which circulation of personal narratives through Instagram and other social media platforms is supposed to provide points of identification for *all women*, everywhere."

These feminist selfie artists have been the subject of countless regurgitated profiles and think pieces extolling their radical feminism; with one of the most prominent among them, Audrey Wollen, even labelled as a "Feminist art star." Wollen coined Sad Girl Theory, which proposes that,

> the sadness of girls should be recognised as an act of resistance. Political protest is usually defined in masculine terms – as something external and often violent, a demonstration in the streets, a riot, an occupation of space. But I think that this limited spectrum of activism excludes a whole history of girls who have used their sorrow and their self-destruction to disrupt systems of domination. Girls' sadness is not passive, self-involved or shallow; it is a gesture of liberation, it is articulate and informed, it is a way of reclaiming agency over our bodies, identities, and lives. [...] Sad Girl Theory is a permission slip: feminism doesn't need to advocate for how awesome and fun being a girl is. Feminism needs to acknowledge that being a girl in the world right now is one of the hardest things there is – it is unimaginably painful – and that our pain doesn't need to be discarded in the name of empowerment. It can be used as a material, a weight, a wedge, to jam that machinery and change those patterns.[1]

Wollen superimposes herself taking a selfie in her underwear over Botticelli's Venus; she reclines like Ingres' Odalisque but instead of addressing the viewer she's facing Photo Booth on her Mac. Similarly, the women who embrace Sad Girl Theory represent their thin, white-passing, willowy bodies gracefully drowning in Pre-Raphaelite melancholy set to Lana Del Rey soundtracks. The Sad Girl posts tearful selfies with immaculate makeup; she makes you forget that having the time and the space to wallow is itself a privilege. She spends her days in domestic languor. Her monochromatic Instagram feed is composed of a palette of baby pink and heather gray that almost matches her skin, which her reclusiveness shields from the sun.

Occupying the same social media platforms, the Feminist Anxiety Memer shares the Sad Girl's drive for catharsis and de-stigmatizing mental illness. The Anxiety Memer's cry, however, is an ugly cry, unlike the Sad Girl's, whose cohesive and seemingly curated feed inadvertently appeases the hetero male gaze, as if to illuminate the condition in a way that won't alienate him, in a way that won't ultimately diminish his desire for her. By contrast, the output of @scariest_bug_ever, the quintessential Anxiety Meme Instagram account, is erratic, absurdist and abject. Though her memes often describe the conditions of her mental illness in explicit and hyper-personal specificity, they elicit a very visceral "*same*" from the viewer – from me. When she posts selfies, she's making a double chin, or grinning with her top lip

tucked in to fully reveal her top row of teeth, or both. Her memes dismantle the hyper-controlled, male-gaze-centric narrative of the interior life of a woman.

The Anxiety Memer flaunts her ineffectualness to embrace her alienation. "Try crying for 48 hours straight if things aren't working out for you," she tells her Instagram followers, who comment that they can relate. She calls out men who conceal their misogyny and perpetuation of rape culture by proclaiming to be feminist, taking stock images of bro and superimposing them with captions mimicking him, like, "I have really bad anxiety. I think im a good person. But I choose relationships with troubled women just to bolster my savior complex. I'll probably pretend you're too good for me then bail asap. Anyways what do you say to some disappointing straight people sex ;) please I bought you four domestic beers." Or, "when he calls you his muse and makes art about what he assumes your personality is and expect [sic] you to take this as an honor rather than feeling dehumanized and not particularly enjoying the fetishization of your deeply personal human experience."

The image macro trope that circulates widely enough to achieve meme status often features any variety of reaction images: low-res stock photos—of white men with cargo shorts, spiked hair and Oakley sunglasses, animals in wigs and costumes they'd rather not be in, frogs on unicycles, the Kardashians – captioned with Helvetica Neue Light ironic quips to banal occurrences, or lamenting microaggressions, the misfortune of shooting oneself in the foot, or karma finally rearing its ugly head. The subject matter is nebulous and so is the reader, enabling the meme's universal appeal – to be #relatable – to Anyone. At once, they make you loathe yourself for the flaw that they've articulated like no one has before, and yet provide relief that other people share it with you.

The instant and infinite reproducibility of the Anxiety Memer's personal-is-political consciousness-raising *might* have the capacity to resist capitalist and misogyny-related alienation. The standardized visual language is easy to mimic, with an image formula that anyone could replicate using free browser meme generators. When they become viral, they circulate in the relatively public but definitely-non-academic sphere, making mental health conditions less isolating. The Anxiety Memer's disembodied articulation of her mental illness is considerably more relatable – and, to borrow a classic Sad Girl term, "empowering."

The Anxiety Memer is anti-self-care. Instead of succumbing to the medical-industrial complex, she makes memes. Her despair is not designed to be covetable or enviable or palatable. And because the Anxiety Memer's output is so dissonant – its humour too fragmented, its despair in self-deprecation too unyielding, too unwavering – it resists branding. Unlike the Sad Girl, the Anxiety Memer's Instagram bio does not contain a link to the latest interview on her output. She has not been bestowed as an Artist. Anxiety memes cater, first and foremost, to those who can relate to them, those who are most likely to circulate them.

If self-imaging and the circulation of personal narratives are "*the primary* feminist tool for resistance," but the Sad Girl is the most pervasive representation of the neuro-atypical woman, then the Sad Girl is meant to embody the woman whose articulation of depression and anxiety is supposedly radical enough to constitute feminist art. That radical self-representation is now benign, aestheticized then de-politicized, subsumed by capital-F Feminism, and, as Dean argues, it echoes white feminism's narcissistic claim of a universal female experience. If the Sad Girl is the prototypical subject of feminist art now, then the body of artwork that Sad Girl Theory propels perpetuates the exclusion of the bodies of women of colour across the gender spectrum, mirroring the barriers to healthcare that these bodies tend to have. And while the Anxiety Memer's feminism may not translate to anything beyond stating the obvious – especially in her call-outs of misogyny and rape culture – it steers clear of proselytizing to non-white women that they ought to be empowered by their sadness, with the assumption of a Universal Woman who has access to what she preaches. And while requesting the meme hold emancipatory potential over-taxes it, the messiness of Anxiety Memes might open up narratives – in memes and in art – about de-stigmatizing mental health as a feminist practice that are less monolithic, homogenous, white. Returning to Dean, "If there is liberation, it will not take place on corporate platforms."

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Endnote

1 "How girls are finding empowerment through being sad online," an interview with Audrey Wollen, *Dazed Digital*, December 2015.

Image Credit:
All screenshots from @scariest_bug_ever, Instagram, 2016