

Dissonant Integrations

Z Art Space, March 5 – April 2, 2016

: Ifeoma U. Anyaeji	1-3
: Victor Arroyo	
: Pansee Atta	4-6
: Minhee Bae	7-8
: Richenda Grazette	9-11
: Fanny Latreille Beaumont	12-13
: kimura byol nathalie lemoine ..	14-15
: Eva-Loan Ponton Pham	16-18
: Shay (Shawn M. & Ayse B.) ..	19-21
: Team Sagittarius	22-24
: Alisi Telengut	25-27
: Karen White	28-30

EXHIBITION ESSAYS

Ethnocultural Art Histories Research (EAHR) is pleased to present *Dissonant Integrations*, a group exhibition and video program investigating disruption as a tool to challenge dominant representations of race, ethnicity and other forms of fixed identities. Featuring twelve artists and collectives based in Canada and the United States, *Dissonant Integrations* seeks to expand our understanding of diversity through artworks that disrupt ethnic and/or racial stereotypes, and redress essentialist narratives of cultural identities and representations. From photography and video to sculpture, the selected artists work in a range of media and draw on various creative practices, such as upcycling, auto-ethnography and appropriation. Exploring themes of displacement, immigration and diaspora, the artists use irony, humor and experimentation to navigate between public and self-representation, national and global identity, the familiar and the unfamiliar. By unraveling the everyday challenges faced by ethnocultural communities, these artists engage with pressing social-political issues that continually fuel and challenge contemporary art discourse.

Dissonant Integrations marks the fifth year anniversary of Ethnocultural Art Histories Research Group (EAHR) since its founding in 2011 and demonstrates EAHR's ongoing pursuit to facilitate opportunities for exchange and creation in the examination of issues of ethnic and cultural representation within the visual arts in Canada. EAHR is a community of students and researchers from across Canada, including Concordia University, McGill University and University of Montreal.

This curatorial project is the first collaboration between Z Art Space Gallery, the Ethnocultural Art Histories Research Group (EAHR) and twelve undergraduate students-essay authors in Dr. Alice Ming Wai Jim's winter 2016 course *ARTH 379 Postcolonial Theory in Art History, special topic: Migration and Mobility in Contemporary Art* - Marysa Antonakakis, Kathleen Ballantyne, Stephanie Barclay, Abigail Borja Calonga, Melinda Pierre-Paul Cardinal, Sara Graorac, Valérie Hénault, Gabrielle Montpetit, Katherine Nugent, Paige Sabourin, Pauline Soumet, and Eli-Bella Wood, under the mentorship of twelve EAHR graduate student members, with editorial contributions by Alice Ming Wai Jim, Tiffany Lee, Alyssa Hauer, and Tianmo Zhang.

: Ifeoma Anyaeji

Queen Eliza: Reflection on Nigerian Hybrid Identity

Pauline Soumet

Ifeoma Anyaeji makes vivid, labour-intensive life-size sculptures. The prolific artist makes it all by hand, most of the time on her own. The textured artworks are organic forms full of movement, color, patterns and varied textures. Anyaeji uses a near obsolete Nigerian hair-braiding technique to shape the medium, by wrapping yarn around it, called threading. Her choice of objects to be incorporated in the piece is peculiar, as they only consist of second-hand items. These choices are telling about the work's examination of locality, history and crafting a global future. Through a postcolonial studies lens, the following considers the impact of colonialism on self-esteem in a discussion of the hair braiding technique and explores how the choice of media with their interlaced meanings, speak to the fluidity of identity.

Although life-size, *Queen Eliza* (2015) is the smallest but maybe one of the most particular works by Anyaeji. The sculpture installation is composed of three main elements. The first most obvious element is the giant organic sphere made of solid thread, which sits on a transparent pedestal. Inside and next to the plinth are strategically placed bright shoes from the 1980s and 1990s. Because of this arrangement, the work takes an anthropomorphic form.

Using her signature hair braiding technique, the artist created the main structure by hand through threading. The threading is a very local hair styling specialty in South Nigeria where the artist is from,¹ and which she practiced on her siblings' heads. This technique is pushed to the extreme, in terms of dimensions and amount, in the artist's signature works. The reiteration of the tradition can be first seen as a way to claim one's culture. Hair is known for representing one's identity, through social status, preferred aesthetics and also by a specific location.²

Here the artist appropriates a technique from Nigeria in her art, while giving it the name of the monarch of the colonial power subjecting the country for almost two centuries³, until 1960, thus making a strong statement and juxtaposition of colonizer and colonized. In "The Politics of Hair in Martinique and Elsewhere: A Cultural Discussion", a conference paper on the impact of French colonization on the island of Martinique in the Caribbean, Sybil Jackson Carter argues there was a tendency for Black women and men to be forced to conform to the White French colonizer, and to let aside their own culture, including their fashion.⁴ For instance, Martinique women's hair as permed, thus not natural, was a way to make the women disappear in the twentieth century, comply and be discreet, and not push back against the French culture imposed as an ideal. The action of keeping a low profile was also observed in literature and art of the island, by its absence of Black female cultural producers.⁵ There was a clear belittling of the colonized and an elevation and legitimization of the colonizer's white supremacy. This postcolonial idea of self-(lack of)development under colonial pressure was presented by the artist herself, when talking about the title as being a remembrance of the model of elegance the Queen Elizabeth II was considered to be in some families.⁶ The colonial expectations weigh on bodies and the Western looks get unconsciously integrated into the physical appearance of the ones oppressed. Threading aims to claim one's origin and pride for their culture⁷, but also to enable the conservation of the Igbo⁸ group's culture. The influence of the colonizer on the body-image of the population, especially women, is thus underscored by the piece. Even today, the imperialist view on beauty is still very present. It has changed the self-esteem of Nigerians and the body expectations for women,

³ Femi Okiremuete Shaka, "The Colonial Legacy: History and its Impact on the Development of Modern Culture in Nigeria," *Third Text* 19, no. 3 (May 2005): 297.

⁴ Sybil Jackson Carter, "The Politics of Hair in Martinique and Elsewhere: A Cultural Discussion," *NAAAS & Affiliates Conference Monographs* (January 2010): 102.

⁵ Carter, "The Politics of Hair in Martinique and Elsewhere: A Cultural Discussion," 103.

⁶ Ifeoma Anyaeji, Interview by author, Tape recording, Montreal, February 16, 2016.

⁷ Uduma Kalu, "Nigerian Fashion: Through the Years."

⁸ Igbo is one of the numerous groups composing Nigeria's population. "There is a clichéd saying that Nigeria is made up of three main groups: Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba. But in addition to these, the country is also home to more than three hundred and fifty smaller-sized ethnic nationalities and numerous minority groups whose total population is more than that of the three main groups combined." Femi Okiremuete Shaka, "The Colonial Legacy," 297-8.

¹ Uduma Kalu, "Nigerian Fashion: Through the Years," *African Heritage*, Web, 23 Mar. 2016.

² Ibid.

following the mainstream skinny White young body, which was not a norm beforehand.⁹

However, the artist is using the hair braiding technique away from the body, making it an object itself, standing on its own, and invading the space. The threading is not an ornament but a new entity. The technique is elevated, as high art, in a canonical bust shape. One can nonetheless wonder if by naming the piece by the leader colonial power, and giving it a Western canonical shape, there is an interest in denouncing that forced conversion to be legible to the West, or by having a high art, made of the cultural components of Nigeria, given all the credit to the British settler, that would extort all merits of the Nigerian culture as being its own. Although that part is pretty speculative, it is indisputable that interestingly, these kinds of handmade fiber-related works are always strong, and has a lot to say politically: "The moment you start thinking about your creative production as more than just a hobby or 'women's work,' and instead as something that has cultural, historical and social value, craft becomes something stronger than a fad or trend."¹⁰ Fiber works and techniques make room for disruption to happen effectively, in a sort of soft way; it is "inextricably linked to gender, space, and history, thus challenges not only the hegemonic forms of domination but also the hegemonic forms of opposition and antagonism."¹¹

Once again, the sculpture also makes an exception, as it is removed from any sense of community-building regarding the process as the artist produces the work on her own, since it is not directly linked to people, as it used to be when it was the hair styling process. Still, there is a strong sense of reviving an obsolete technique, and showing it to the world with pride, by abstracting it and making it huge, colorful, powerful and memorable. Would thus the title be ironic, as if the Queen could have her name but never own it? The shoes are here to represent a time frame, after the independence of the country, and embody the Western culture as well, responding to the title or even illustrating it.

Pinkie Mekgwe argues that post-colonialism in Africa needs to be reconsidered generally. Although colonization is a traumatic experience, it now needs to be understood as one component of the nation's

identity, but not the last.¹² That same identity is still moving, and the cultural studies to do so as well, as "the recognition that culture necessarily evolves requires that theorists on postcolonial Africa re-evaluate the prevailing notion of Africa as a negative construct to the West."¹³ In other words, simply studying contemporary Nigerian art, for instance, through the lens of the repercussions of the colonialist invasions does not make justice to all the unique art and innovation now happening there. Colonialism should be of course considered but not limiting.

The artist uses two things that have lost their values, and that are not in the right place: Threading and the medium-plastic bags and old carpets threads. It is with genius that they are put together. The use of plastic bags symbolizes Nigeria, as it is a country relying on its oil exportation, while also being found anywhere else on earth, including in North America, where the piece was created. This obsession with the plastic bag, a by-product of the petroleum industry, started when the artist was living in Nigeria where they were easy to get because of a lack of infrastructure to recycle them. The bags are used as the main thread to be wrapped around without undergoing any transformation. In this way, the piece addresses the future. Plastic bags are a very symbolic medium to use as they can "not only [be] taken as a threat to the environment, but also as a sign of an individualistic, insensitive, and hedonistic consumer society."¹⁴

Using existing materials, the upcycling method, offers an alternative to over-consumption because it "counters the argument that an object is dead once it is disposed of."¹⁵ The artist addresses this urgent environmental topic, while also putting forward the question of value, in commodities, which is described as a cycle in "Trashion: The Return of the Disposed".¹⁶ Objects considered to be trash can "disturb orderings and classifications," and return to having more value, thanks to the Anyaeji's process, for instance, thus also echoing the return of traditions. The artwork represents a world issue, consumer society, through the plastic bags that are endlessly produced in Nigeria and elsewhere, and suggests the piece as a solution. Everything is re-useable, and art can be made of pre-existing objects, that actually adds on layers of meaning to the sculpture. By mashing everything up together, the artist created a hybrid

⁹ Lawrence O Amazue, "The Contributions of Media, Body Image Concerns and Locality to the Perceived Self-esteem of Female Nigerian Adolescents," *Gender & Behaviour* 12, no. 3 (June 2014): 6122.

¹⁰ Jack Z. Bratitch and Heidi M. Brush, "Fabricating Activism: Craft-work, Popular Culture, Gender," *Utopian Studies* 22, no. 2 (2011): 248.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹² Pinkie Mekgwe, "Post Africa(n) Feminism?," *Third Text* 24, no. 2 (March 2010): 189-194.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁴ Bahar Emgin, "Trashion: The Return of the Disposed," *Design Issues* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 64.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

form, embodying an hybrid culture. Nigerian culture and its handcrafted traditions have been deeply influenced by colonization and later on by globalization, and are embodied in Queen Eliza.

Queen Eliza, one of the many vivid works typical of Anyaeji's practice, is impressive by its presence. The artist wants to be considered an artist first, before even talking about being a woman, an African woman and lastly a Nigerian woman. Personally, I find that the origin of the artist permits, here, a rich reading of the piece. Although her work seems to be echoing lots of local events, it can be easily transposed to the more global and human experience, through culture, as an entity that is influenced, sometimes forcefully, by others. The idea of conversion, to adapt to one's idea of what a culture should be, or to adapt to new world challenges, is everywhere in the piece.

Queen Eliza plays with binaries, such as the past and present, the old and the new, and opens up a dialogue to raise awareness regarding the hierarchy in history, in nations, in globalization and in art. The artwork is built on two discarded elements, the technique and the medium, that are repurposed to create a whole that embodies the hybridisation of the Nigerian culture, produced in a North American context.

EHR Mentor: Kanwal Syed

Bibliography

Amazue, Lawrence O. "The Contributions of Media, Body Image Concerns and Locality to the Perceived Self-esteem of Female Nigerian Adolescents." *Gender & Behaviour* 12, no. 3 (June 2014): 6113-6124.

Anyaeji, Ifeoma. Interview by author. Tape recording. Montreal, February 16, 2016.

Bratich, Jack Z. and Heidi M. Brush. "Fabricating Activism: Craft-work, Popular Culture, Gender." *Utopian Studies* 22, no. 2 (2011): 233-60.

Carter, Sybil Jackson. "The Politics of Hair in Martinique and Elsewhere: A Cultural Discussion." *NAAAS & Affiliates Conference Monographs* (January 2010): 98-127.

Emgin, Bahar. "Trashion: The Return of the Disposed." *Design Issues* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 63-71.

Kalu, Uduma. "Nigerian Fashion: Through the Years." *African Heritage*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2016. <https://africanheritage.wordpress.com/2007/01/12/nigerian-fashion-through-the-years/>

Mekgwe, Pinkie. "Post Africa(n) Feminism?." *Third Text* 24, no. 2 (March 2010): 189-194.

Shaka, Femi Okiremuete. "The Colonial Legacy: History and its Impact on the Development of Modern Culture in Nigeria." *Third Text* 19, no. 3 (May 2005): 297-305.

: Pansee Atta

Myth Marks

Valérie Hénault

As a part of her MA thesis “Curating Resistance, Resisting Curation: The Possibilities and Limitations of Objects in Institutions,” which examines how art museums perpetuate a racist ideology, Pansee Atta included her personal response to this matter which took the form of a media artwork entitled *Myth Marks*. The resulting GIF animations can be interpreted in the wider context of Canadian society post 9/11, bringing under consideration two seemingly separate sectors – security borders and art institutions, under the unifying themes of state control, nationality, and racism. While unveiling the role of art institutions in perpetuating the widespread perception of “us” and “them,” Atta’s series *Myth Marks* offers a critique of white supremacy in border zones such as airports that are commonly thought of as neutral spaces. Specifically, the series brings attention to how government-run border systems control minority groups through the propagation of a racist ideology among the majority population. *Myth Marks* raises awareness of the different strategies employed by Canadian politics as well as cultural institutions to maintain their (colonial) power over migrants, this control being seen as crucial for the preservation of our “nation.”

Before delving into the state’s strategies to maintain control over “Others,” it is necessary to define Canadian contemporary conceptions of the nation in the post 9/11 era. Amidst the fear of terrorism, national security took on a primary position and “nation” increasingly came to be associated with ideas of cultural purity and homeland. Cultural purity’s logical outcome is an antipathy towards anything foreign and thus a “new intolerance for refugees” and other migrants.¹⁷ According to this idea of being bound to a homeland, a gradation of who is worthy of inclusion in the nation and who is not has developed according to the length of time spent on this land. White people, according to this way of thinking, are more rooted in the nation than newly-arrived refugees and even second-generation

immigrants.¹⁸ Christina Slade calls this gradation “nativism” or “political nativism”: “the view that established inhabitants of a political entity should have a favoured status when compared to more recent entrants.”¹⁹ However, national purity is challenged when one thinks of the colonial era as a period of extensive mobility of goods, people, and cultures. Our postcolonial world is filled with culturally-hybrid individuals.²⁰ Definite boundaries between cultures thus become futile, inconsistent with our multicultural reality.²¹

This close association between ethnicity and nationality however sets the stage for the exclusion of minority groups in Canada. Migrants have difficulties developing any sense of belonging because of this important gap between majority and minority, this constructed difference, this absence of communication.²² Indeed, many immigrants feel alienated from their new country because of the mistrust of foreigners that has exploded since the terrorist attacks of 2001.

Frances Henry and Carol Tator argue that racial ideology is perpetuated by the state through legislation, security measures, and major institutions.²³ Atta comments on the experience of being viewed as the “Other” through her series *Myth Marks*. One place where this experience reaches its climax is in the border zone where surveillance is to a great extent based on racial profiling, especially since the 9/11 attacks.²⁴ There, white superiority over minority groups is asserted through repeated questionings and body searches. Since 2001, these behaviors are legally justifiable because of the Canadian Anti-Terrorism Bill.²⁵ Security agents have the mandate to detect any threat to the country as well as extensive discretion to dispose of the people crossing the borders, sometimes infringing on the crossers’ rights. As a result of this common adherence

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Christina Slade, *Watching Arabic Television in Europe: From Diaspora to Hybrid Citizens* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 24-25.

²⁰ Tariq Jazeel, “Postcolonial Spaces and Identities,” *Geography* 97, no. 2 (2012): 60. See also Aida Kaouk, ed., and Dominique Bourque, coll., *The Lands Within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin* (Gatineau, Québec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2003), 9.

²¹ Iain Chambers et al. *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History* (Farnham: Routledge, 2014).

²² Christina Slade, *Watching Arabic television in Europe: From Diaspora to Hybrid Citizens* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 97.

²³ Frances Henry and Carol Tator, *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society*, third edition (Toronto: Nelson, 2006), 282.

²⁴ Lisa Parks, “Points of Departure: The Culture of US Airport Screening,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 6:2 (August 2007): 185.

²⁵ Henry and Tator, *The Colour of Democracy*, 290.

¹⁷ Marusya Bociurkiw, “Homeland (In)Security: Roots and Displacement, from New York, to Toronto, to Salt Lake City,” *Reconstruction* 3:3 (Summer 2003), accessed March 22, 2016, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/033/bociurkiw.htm>.

to ethnonationality and a growing fear of terrorism, racialized bodies, particularly Arabs, are highly likely to be considered a threat. Arabs are thus subject to undue surveillance and, when crossing the borders, they can be detained many hours for questioning.²⁶ Atta's GIF *Hair Lines* denounces this unreasonable search for danger, highlighting the experience of being stripped of "those articles of clothing that mark your difference" and being seen "right through your skin, your organs, down to your bones."²⁷ In *Hair Lines*, a nude, racialized male passing through the scanner seems to know the inevitability of his situation—the minority groups' means of resistance to racial profiling at the borders are limited—while the figure on the right wants to refuse, rebel, resist racial discrimination. The post 9/11 Anti-Terrorism Act deprives minorities of their political agency; they cannot act against the discrimination operated against them.²⁸ Moreover, as Muslim contemporary situations are largely associated with terrorism in the West, anything tied to "Arabness," such as wearing "exotic" clothes or a hijab, or having an Arabic-sounding name, is likely to make an individual the subject of discrimination at the border. In *Signatories*, Atta signs her name over and over again, as if a repeated exposition to "Arabness" may change people's perception of Muslims as different and threatening. The hope of Atta's repeated act is to succeed in reclaiming her name (and identity) as "a name that's yours, that you own, that contains your own history."²⁹ The targeting of Arabs in zones of surveillance operates within and reinforces the dichotomy between "us" and the "Others" and is yet another strategy to assert white, colonial domination over minority groups.³⁰

The complicit role of art institutions in the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and racial discrimination is without question. The uniformity of the methods of display among art institutions makes the visitors unaware of the need to decode these representational devices. Since minorities are represented through the same stereotypical images in most art institutions, their authority is taken for granted by the audience, which passively receives the messages embedded in the power relations at play and conveyed through the exhibits.³¹ Atta's *Myth Marks* animations act against this passivity by using text

along with images – a combination that forces viewers to make links between the representational and the textual devices and become active participants in the formation of meaning.

Many museum displays contribute to a stereotypical view of racial communities as homogenous and static. An example of this, whether inadvertently or not, is the use of cultural appropriation where artists or curators use objects from other cultures for their own exhibition.³² This controversial method occasions a filtering of the cultural objects and forms by the dominant groups, which erases and decontextualizes many cultural aspects of these communities.³³ At the same time as it conveys the dominant group's ideology, it perpetuates stereotypes about the (mis)represented cultures. The adoption of a "formalist approach" to representation is another problematic strategy of display largely employed in art institutions.³⁴ To exhibit objects according to their aesthetic quality instead of their meaning undermines their very importance for the culture and fosters the imagination of an exotic, backward non-Western world.³⁵ Moreover, museums tend to present racial communities as homogenous, erasing the complexity of their beliefs systems and lived experiences.

Still, the institutions' representations of minorities are never fully inaccurate. As Homi Bhabha explains, the colonial subject is never fully represented, but is still partially recognizable.³⁶ This is a point that Atta felt compelled to react against in many of her GIFs, especially in *Afterglow*. When she first saw the historical painting—the one she included in her animation—she felt something familiar; she knew the woman represented was Egyptian. However, after a while, she realized the alienating conditions in which it was created. While she saw herself and her culture in the painting, she realized that the painters "didn't even see a person. They barely even saw an animal. [She] had looked into a mirror of sorts and had [her] reflection inverted into something monstrous."³⁷

The fact that racial communities are represented "through the lens of the dominant culture" is crucial in the power relations at play in museum spaces.³⁸

²⁶ Ibid., 291.

²⁷ Pansee Atta, "Curating Resistance, Resisting Curation: The Possibilities and Limitations of Objects in Institutions" (MA Thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, 2015), 51. See also Parks, "Points of Departure," 187.

²⁸ Chambers, *The Postcolonial Museum*.

²⁹ Atta, "Curating Resistance, Resisting Curation," 19.

³⁰ Chambers, *The Postcolonial Museum*.

³¹ Bociurkiw, "Homeland (In)Security."

³² Henry and Tator, *The Colour of Democracy*, 231.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Chambers, *The Postcolonial Museum*.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28, Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis (Spring 1984): 127.

³⁷ Atta, "Curating Resistance, Resisting Curation," 13.

³⁸ John P. Rangel, "Moving Beyond the Expected: Representation and Presence in a Contemporary Native Arts Museum," *Wicazo Sa*

Atta's animations subvert this lack of representation since they represent her own *personal* experience of being misrepresented as a woman of Arab and Egyptian background. Through such works, one does not simply grasp a sense of "Arabness" but is offered the personal experience of an Arab, which allows for a dialogue between cultures instead of perpetuating stereotypical assumptions.³⁹

Atta's GIF animations series *Myth Marks* is a response to the discrimination against minority groups at play in cultural institutions, a reaction that can also be extended to the Canadian governmental system. In the post 9/11 age, ethnicity is an integral part of our conception of "nation," which encourages national security agents to apply methods of racial profiling in border zones. The GIF animations reclaim minority groups' political and cultural agency by denouncing the alienating measures of both governmental and cultural institutions.

EAHR Mentor: Julie Alary-Lavallée

Bibliography

Atta, Pansee. "Curating Resistance, Resisting Curation: The Possibilities and Limitations of Objects in Institutions." Master's Thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, 2015.

Bhabha, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October* 28, Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis (Spring 1984): 125-133.

Bociurkiw, Marusya. "Homeland (In)Security: Roots and Displacement, from New York, to Toronto, to Salt Lake City." *Reconstruction* 3:3, Special Issue: Solutions/Fixations. Ed. Bennett Huffman (Summer 2003). Accessed March 22nd, 2016. <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/033/bociurkiw.htm>.

Chambers, Iain et al. *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History*. Farnham: Routledge, 2014.

Henry, Frances, and Carol Tator. *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society*. Third Edition. Toronto: Nelson, a division of Thomson Canada Limited, 2006.

Jazeel, Tariq. "Postcolonial Spaces and Identities." *Geography* 97, No. 2 (2012): 60-67.

Kaouk, Aïda, ed., and Dominique Bourque, coll. *The Lands Within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin*. Gatineau, Québec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2003.

Parks, Lisa. "Points of Departure: The Culture of US Airport Screening." *Journal of Visual Culture* 6:2 (August 2007): 183-200.

Rangel, John P. "Moving Beyond the Expected: Representation and Presence in a Contemporary Native Arts Museum." *Wicazo Sa Review* 27, No. 1, Special Issue: American Indian Curatorial Practice (2012): 31-46.

Slade, Christina. *Watching Arabic television in Europe: From Diaspora to Hybrid Citizens*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Review 27:1, Special Issue: American Indian Curatorial Practice (2012): 31.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

: Minhee Bae

Angel Baby Hoodie

Sara Graorac

Millennials can be a dynamic force in the art world as we have experienced life during an acute technological and digital evolution. Millennials not only directly encountered some of the first handheld technologies, but have also been privy to a fast access to knowledge and complex sources of information through the internet. With these technological tools come an inevitable new creative process, and a new social lens of reference. It must be acknowledged, however, that to discuss technology being used in this way is to make generalizations based on its use in developed nations. In many places globally, the Internet is a privilege; it is not a tool or artistic medium that is readily accessible by everyone. Yet still, the Internet does have a wide reach, and has been a tool to connect people to other people and information which they may not have been able to find. In this way, the Internet is can be used by artists in two main ways: first, as a new type of institution from which to draw on its particular aesthetics, social media networks, and access to popular culture; second, by taking advantage of the wealth of information accessible through the Internet to integrate an internet specific culture with their own, to discover or connect with their own history in new ways. These can overlap in many ways, and that overlap can often result in many artists using the Internet as a tool to both explore and re-appropriate their Otherness and assert their agency over their identity. Artist Minhee Bae has found a sweet spot: the point of intersection between American youth-centred internet culture, and the traditions of her Korean heritage.

In an effort to respond to themes of constructed identity, globalization and displacement, Bae introduces us to *Angel Baby Hoodie*, an art work that merges North American youth-centred Internet culture with traditional Korean culture. Mixing these two cultures together, Bae makes a hoodie reminiscent of early millennium athletic and streetwear fashion, a ubiquitous gender neutral article of clothing. Upon further investigation one can understand that there are several layers of meaning present in Bae's *Angel Baby Hoodie*. Bae replaces the common fleece cotton associated with hoodies with

colorful silk organza. These colours reference the brightly coloured garments of traditional Korean *Hanbok* dress worn by children. Historically, the cultural tradition of *Hanbok* is rooted in classism and the gender binary. Specific colours and shades were used for the *Hanbok* of men, women and children. Though a more dramatic contrast can be seen through the class divide; common folk were prohibited to dress in bright colours, and mainly wore white and dull shades to avoid penalty. Brightness and saturation was reserved for the Imperial class.

With this, one can see that Bae not only references youth cultures of both North America and traditional Korea, but also mixes the common hoodie with the elevated status of a colourful *Hanbok*. As a first generation Korean American, Bae could be said to reference and connect with her Korean heritage by seamlessly integrating this with cultural references she grew up knowing as a millennial American. *Angel Baby Hoodie* may also remind one of works and concepts by acclaimed Korean-American artist, Yong Soon Min, especially her 1994 installation, *Dwelling*. Like Bae, Min used the transparent, politically-charged *Hanbok* to question cultural liminality and comment on constructed ideas of gender, class and Western beauty standards.⁴⁰ A refreshing comparison although a substantial generational gap, Bae and Min tackle analogous topics with a similar form.

Bae's family name emblazoned on the back of the garment functions both as homage to Americana and varsity sports as well as a clarification that this garment is meant for the artist. This work can therefore be read as a self-portrait. Through the work's title, Bae explores the double meaning of her last name. Bae is not only the artist's last name but is also a term of endearment derived from youth-centred social media. In these spaces Bae's name becomes an acronym for "before anyone else," and is used as a stand in for affectionate names like baby. The double-meaning present in this homage to varsity sports, however, is not exclusively derived from North American youth culture. Below Bae's name, the number "1004" could be mistaken for an arbitrary jersey number appliqué, often found in sportswear styles. However, Bae carefully selected this number as a Korean homophone to the word "Angel." Here we get the name *Angel Baby Hoodie*, which also references the words commonly found as design elements in early millennium streetwear.

In her earlier work, *Emoji Bojagi*, Bai explored the "Emoji," a new brand of the dated "Emoticon." A keyboard of images that range from smiley faces to

⁴⁰ Diana Burgess Fuller and Daniela Salvioni, *Art, Women, California 1950-2000: Parallels and Intersections* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002), 87.

cute representations of foods and other symbols, Emoji's are found primarily in smartphones, and it is interesting to acknowledge that they are best displayed in the interface of the iPhone via iMessage, a rather privileged viewing capacity. Bae appropriates the Emoji by presenting the icons in a series of *bojagi* structures. *Bojagi* is an old Korean wrapping method made from leftover scraps of *Hanbok* garments, and they are traditionally auspicious items, believed to carry good fortune.⁴¹ *Angel Baby Hoodie*, much like *Emoji Bojagi*, seeks to interconnect contemporary icons of popular American social media and the traditional Korean culture from which Bae has been displaced. The complex layers of Bae's textile works prompt audiences to question prevalent ethnocentrism in mainstream commodities, like art and fashion.

By inserting herself into her creative practice, Bae creates a substantially personal body of work which subsequently dismantles tropes of the dual cultural identifier of Korean-American. In her work, Bae is confronting an Orientalist Western gaze and its construction of displaced identity. Exploring the phenomenon of globalization through the circulation of images, Hito Steyerl writes: "It is no coincidence either that many of the historical methods of artistic research are tied to social or revolutionary movements, or to moments of crisis and reform. In this perspective, the outline of a global network of struggles is revealed, which spans almost the whole 20th century, which is transversal, relational, and (in many, though far from all cases) emancipatory."⁴² *Angel Baby Hoodie* intersects these themes of global circulation by drawing from social media and ubiquitous cultural forms in both Korea and North America. In this statement Steyerl also indirectly describes Bae's emancipation as a more solid expression of creativity, found mainly through research and critical thought.

Ultimately, Bae's work has an attractive quality of a nostalgic innocence, and desire for connection. Her attention to semiotics and tangible detail are strong elements of her practice. She utilizes the Internet as a tool of resistance, connection, and exchange. To Bae, creativity is a response to exploring the relationships between multiple constructed identities. Whether one has been through the process of migration or other pressures to assimilate, there appears a desire to push against one's perceived Otherness, and assert agency over one's identity. This search for the self can create a

vulnerable body of work, which can provoke connection between those who feel disconnected.

Bibliography

Fuller, Diana Burgess, and Daniela Salvioni. *Art, Women, California 1950-2000: Parallels and Intersections*. Berkeley: University of California, 2002.

Jeong, Sarah H. "Hanbok, Korean Traditional Dress: A Selected Annotated Bibliography." *Journal of East Asian Libraries* 138 (2006): 9-16.

Steyerl, Hito. "Aesthetics of Resistance?" *Eipcp* (2010), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0311/steyerl/en/>. Accessed 28 February 2016.

⁴¹ Sarah H. Jeong, "Hanbok, Korean Traditional Dress: A Selected Annotated Bibliography," *Journal of East Asian Libraries* 138 (2006), 14.

⁴² Hito Steyerl, "Aesthetics of Resistance?" [need citation check – editor aj].

: Richenda Grazette

Controlling the Gaze: Black Female Subjectivity in Richenda Grazette's Postcard Art

Gabrielle Montpetit

In a dominantly-visual culture, images carry a political power as they contribute to the construction of social and cultural ideologies, such as one's very identity. Many visual representations of Black women in North America since the nineteenth century have been directly impacted by a history of slavery and colonialism. These representations have further been integrated into strategies of commodification and entertainment with fictitious figures such as Aunt Jemima – the “mammy” mascot for a line of food products. These images have been disseminated and normalized through mass media, including newspapers, magazines, and other image mediums such as postcards. The mobility and purpose of postcards have helped to propagate these images, along with their inherent social ideologies, across continents, especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reinforcing the oppressive colonial agenda.

Inspired by Métis (Cree/English) artist Rosalie Favell's art practice, Richenda Grazette literally places herself directly into oppressive frameworks and narratives transmitted through early twentieth century minstrel imagery postcards. Grazette's photo-manipulations question the structures surrounding the creation of these dehumanizing and oppressive representations of Black women and disrupt them using her own body. By playing with the various implicit meanings of the postcards, Grazette uses their nature to her advantage. What once was a tool to disseminate oppressive images of Black women now can be used to expose and communicate a new humanized postcolonial vision.

The nineteenth century minstrel show, with its cruel and absurd humour, featured performers equating Blackness with laziness and stupidity while wearing blackface makeup to highlight stereotypical facial features. This form of entertainment was grounded in imitation as well as a combination of fear

and attraction to Blackness.⁴³ The stereotypes created by these performances were aimed ultimately at affirming Black inferiority by visually emphasizing physical and cultural differences.⁴⁴ The publication of these images continued through popular media, such as magazines, comics, and postcards like those used in Grazette's work well into the twentieth century.

The Antebellum (1812-1862), post-Civil War (after 1865), and Jim Crow (1890-1965) periods of American history have been infamous for the surge and propagation of racially stereotypical representations of Black Americans. These eras are notable due to the institutionalized segregation that was used as a tool to restore Black subjugation to white control surrounding the abolition of slavery in America.⁴⁵ Black women not only suffered from the stereotypes grounded in race, but also from those grounded in gender.⁴⁶

In Grazette's piece *White As Snow* (2015), a recreation of a postcard from the 1930s, Grazette's body replaces that of the small Black child seen in the original. A mammy figure is shown washing Grazette's body, accompanied by the text “*Shut yo' mouth and mammy will have you white as snow in a minute!*” The mammy character is an older, overweight, and de-sexualized Black woman that emerged from the minstrel show as the symbol and personification of the Black cook, servant, and nanny.⁴⁷ This character soon became commercialized and commodified under the popular breakfast brand Aunt Jemima in 1889. The mammy and aunt Jemima figures were convenient in the post-Civil War and Jim Crow periods, as they reinforced the stereotypes of the faithful female servant/slave and romanticized the servitude by Black women in the South of the US.⁴⁸ The mammy fabrication bolstered white patriarchal authority over both white and Black women, while disguising the taboo white male sexual desires for Black women within the mammy's inherent asexuality and ridicule of the Black female body.⁴⁹

The theme of purity is also present in this postcard's illustration. The concept of hygiene has long been linked to ideas of racial purity. The

⁴³ Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 63.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Lisa E. Farrington, “Faith Ringgold's *Slave Rape Series*,” in *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*, ed. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 132.

⁴⁶ Farrington, “Faith Ringgold's *Slave Rape Series*,” 132.

⁴⁷ Harris, *Colored Pictures*, 84.

⁴⁸ Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 128.

⁴⁹ Harris, *Colored Pictures*, 90.

dialogue of purity in the United States has drawn upon these racialized associations in order to facilitate the construction of white supremacy and the creation of a white social identity.⁵⁰ In *Two Of A Kind* (2015), Grazette's near naked body replaces that of a mammy figure hanging clothes to dry on a postcard that would have originally circulated in the 1950's. Grazette's naked body resists the role of mammy, who is usually covered from head to toe, further suppressing her individuality and sexuality.⁵¹ Here, the Black body is placed opposite to that of a donkey (or an ass), dehumanizing it through the comparison to an animal. Nineteenth century disciplines, such as phrenology and physiognomy, have exaggerated the differences between African and Europeans through comparison, and linked Africans to animals.⁵² These false comparisons further enforced Black inferiority and generated essentialized representations of Blackness.⁵³ However, in the case of this postcard, the Black woman, in addition to being compared to an animal, is reduced to a physical feature – her rear end – emphasizing her status as an object and drawing the viewers' gaze.

In Grazette's final piece *A Hearty Hello* (2015), a postcard from the 1950s, three young Black girls sitting on a fence by the beach are depicted with their lower halves bare. Grazette takes the place of the center child and gazes back at the viewer. The girls' small braids are characteristic of the derogatory "pickaninny" stereotype assigned to small Black children (Fig. 7).⁵⁴ Pickaninnies were dehumanized caricatures of Black children; depicted with bulging eyes, wide red lips, unkempt hair, and nearly nude. This particular depiction of Black girls also speaks to the normalized sexualization of young Black girls, which simultaneously humiliates them while robbing them of their youth.⁵⁵

The visual symbolism in these three works is reinforced through the accompanying text. Here, the texts act as punchlines to the postcards' racist jokes. Since the nineteenth century, it has been common practice to use language to complement these "comical" images in order to describe the figures portrayed or to represent them through dialogue.⁵⁶ Especially in the case of *White As Snow*, the use of Black dialectical language emphasizes notions of difference and supports racist stereotypes such as illiteracy and poor grammar. On the other hand, the

text written on the flipside of these postcards are personal messages to friends or loved ones, creating a tension between the public and the private nature of these objects. Postcards present a complex duality. They can bring together the personal and the public spheres of influence in a single instance as they can travel anywhere in the world, spreading their images for all to see, while carrying a message for a specific individual.⁵⁷ Racist postcards, whether photographic or illustrative, have been a widespread image-making practice since the nineteenth century, acting as endorsements to colonial expansion.⁵⁸ What remains of these out-dated objects, is a reminder of the systematic oppression of Black women through visual culture.

At the time of these postcards' circulation, their audience would have been predominantly white. Within her works, Grazette turns her eyes towards the viewer, engaging in what bell hooks has called the "oppositional gaze." This critical concept questions dominant power structures and relations, acting as a site of resistance and potential agency.⁵⁹ According to hooks, the gaze of the Black woman can create an analytical space where the binary opposition maintaining women as objects subject to men's gazes is continuously deconstructed.⁶⁰

Black female nudity can also be employed to resist oppressive structures. Although nudity is often associated with vulnerability and abuse, the fearless and open acceptance of Black women's bodies can also be vital for overcoming internalized racism.⁶¹ By using their bodies in acts of self-representation, Black women can reclaim their bodies and images, subvert stereotypes, and demand agency.⁶² Through the use of her own body, Grazette reveals the human being behind the destructive stereotypes of Black women. Utilizing her own insecurities and vulnerability, the artist confronts the viewer, asking them to question the still powerful structures that created these postcards in the first place.

Photo-manipulations of ethnographic and racial postcards is a powerful medium for Black women, whose images have been used to constantly reinforce Western superiority and dominance over Black women's bodies, as well as to emphasize their constructed "otherness." Kanitra Fletcher discusses the agency exercised by some Black female artists,

⁵⁰ Dana Berthold, "Tidy Whiteness: A Genealogy of Race, Purity, and Hygiene," *Ethics and the Environment* 15, no.1 (2010): 1-2.

⁵¹ Harris, *Colored Pictures*, 96.

⁵² Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body*, 2.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Harris, *Colored Pictures*, 96.

⁵⁵ Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body*, 44.

⁵⁶ Harris, *Colored Pictures*, 5.

⁵⁷ Irit Rogoff, "Luggage," in *Terra Infirma Geography's Visual Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 52.

⁵⁸ Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body*, 38.

⁵⁹ bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 116.

⁶⁰ hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," 123.

⁶¹ Farrington, "Faith Ringgold's *Slave Rape Series*," 144-145.

⁶² *Ibid.*

such as Wangechi Mutu and Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle, in manipulating ethnographic postcards, as well as other applications of images of Black women's bodies, in order to "recover postcolonial Black female subjectivities",⁶³ and that "from the layers of media that re-cover figures emerge recovered selves."⁶⁴ By inserting herself within these racially charged postcards, Grazette invites her viewers to question the circumstance behind their creation. Through this intervention, she humanizes these representations, reminding us of their original purpose. Her photo-manipulations also question the structures of these images as circulating objects and information. Grazette's work reads as an act of postcolonial agency, reclaiming the oppressive and reductive representations that have been made of Black women.

Grazette's work in the context of *Dissonant Integrations* acts a space of resistance and agency where a history of dehumanizing and negative constructed images of Black women is continuously being deconstructed. As highly mobile objects, these manipulated postcards have the potential to circulate a new image, challenging the racial caricatures based in oppressive structures. Grazette has started to include a variety of people into her projects in order to have a widespread representation of Blackness – in all sizes, shades, and genders – and continue to demonstrate how stereotypes are mapped and pushed onto all Black bodies in today's persisting oppressive institutional structures.

EAHR Mentor: Tamara Harkness

Bibliography

Berthold, Dana. "Tidy Whiteness: A Genealogy of Race, Purity, and Hygiene." *Ethics and the Environment* 15, no.1 (2010): 1-26.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Post Card: From Socrates To Freud and Beyond*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Farrington, Lisa E. "Faith Ringgold's *Slave Rape Series*." *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*, edited by Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, 128-152. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Fletcher, Kaniira. "Re-covered: Wangechi Mutu, Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle, and the postcolonial potentiality of black women in colonial(ist) photographs." *Social Dynamics* 40:1 (2014): 181-198..

Harris, Michael D. *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*. Chapel Hill; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

hooks, bell. "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators." In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 115-131. Boston: South End Press, 1992.

Rogoff, Irit. "Luggage." *Terra Infirma Geography's Visual Culture*, 36-72. London; New York: Routledge, 2000.

Willis, Deborah, and Carla Williams. *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002.

⁶³ Kaniira Fletcher, "Re-covered: Wangechi Mutu, Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle, and the postcolonial potentiality of black women in colonial(ist) photographs," *Social Dynamics* 40:1 (2014): 181, accessed February 9, 2016, doi: 10.1080/02533952.2014.886868.

⁶⁴ Fletcher, "Re-covered," 197.

: Fanny Latreille-Beaumont

Foirer

Katherine Nugent

Fanny Latreille-Beaumont's short 2011 video work *Foirer* begins with imagery of a theme park. Swinging rides and bright neon light bulbs brighten the night sky as the sound of carnival music plays loudly in the background. At first, there is no indication as to what kind of theme park this is, or that anything be abnormal, until the narrator begins to speak and words fill the screen with bold capitalized text: "JAMES N'AIME PAS LA FOIRE." As the video continues, the screen continues to enumerate reasons why people may not like theme parks, such as "GYPSIES [...] OWN THESE ATTRACTIONS". Meanwhile, we also see images of children floating around in water happily, sitting in large, plastic bubbles, unaware of anything other than the fun that they are having. Their nonchalance is in stark contrast with the central focus of the work: identity and stereotypes.

Identity has always been a key concept in postcolonial studies which analyzes and critiques the impact of colonialism and imperialism. One of the projects of colonialism was to either rid people of their identity or ridicule them for it, hence racial stereotypes and racial slurs. All over Europe, theme parks are often set up by migrant populations, and with migrant populations come the prejudices associated with them. Latreille-Beaumont's work brings attention to the fear that migrants invoke in Europe, and prompts us to question why racial stereotypes, or more precisely migrant stereotypes, exist.

In *Foirer*, Latreille-Beaumont explores not only migrant identities but also European identities like those of Hungarians who are "all racist" or of the British and the Germans who "just get wasted." These complicated and prejudiced ideas of national identity can be "linked to the European crisis, during which self-explanatory identity has come under pressure [...] as a result of increased postcolonial awareness, [...] and the rise of new forms of racism, such as those that emerged in the aftermath of 9/11."⁶⁵ The way she

⁶⁵ Sandra Ponzanesi, "The Non-Places of Migrant Cinema in Europe," *Third Text* 26, no. 6 (November 2012): 675.

juxtaposes these stereotypes with popular images of a theme park refers to how casually these stereotypes are mentioned in conversations, and how normalized these attitudes have become.

Every year, millions of people migrate across the globe for hundreds of reasons and while most populations migrate to a specific place, some, such as the Romany in Europe, are nomadic and constantly in movement. Artists and filmmakers have long been exploring migration and the negative representations that come with this phenomenon. According to Sandra Ponzanesi, postcolonial films are "characterised by the representation of identities beyond national boundaries, collaborative modes of production and the use of alternative distribution channels."⁶⁶ Latreille-Beaumont explains her work and the popular imagery she uses as referencing reality television, a platform upon which identity is scrutinized to the extreme by millions of viewers. In *Foirer*, the normally laden stereotyped epithets used to characterize the identity of certain peoples are seen in Latreille-Beaumont's work as playful rather than derisive slurs. There is a significant difference between an epithet used to characterize a person and an epithet that, while may also be used for characterization, is loaded with oppression.⁶⁷ One comes from a history of cultural oppression and although may be employed casually leads to the perpetuation of varying levels of hate speech. In a 1989 study, Patricia Devine concluded that everyone in society is aware of stereotypes, even if they may not be prejudiced themselves. As a consequence, their use, whether intentional or otherwise cause stereotypes to be "automatically activated upon encountering [target] group members."⁶⁸ Therefore, the consequences of stereotypes and slurs are global, because even people who do not believe in them are aware of them. Films like *Foirer* present new platforms for considering the history and gravity of the existence of different types of marginalizing language, different slurs and stereotypes. .

The main or most harmful racial slur in *Foirer* is the word "gypsy" and the accompanying reductive notion that "gypsies" steal things. Gypsy has long been used to describe the "Roma/Sinti/Gypsies...an itinerant people without a written history of their own," therefore, "historical and anthropological accounts of them have come exclusively from

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Diane Blakemore, "Slurs and expletives: a case against a general account of expressive meaning," *Language Sciences* 52, (November 2015): 23.

⁶⁸ Ernestine H. Gordijn, Willem Koomen, and Diederik A. Stapel, "Level of Prejudice in Relation to Knowledge of Cultural Stereotypes," *Journal Of Experimental Social Psychology* 37, no. 2 (March 2001): 150.

scholars belonging to the dominant non-Gypsy majority”⁶⁹ in Europe. Much of the history we learn in school is dominated by a white, Christian, male, European perspective, rendering what we are taught about cultures like these as filled with prejudice and bias. Because the data about the Roma is so biased and incomplete, they have kept their image “as an isolate within the wider context of the development of European societies.”⁷⁰ Additionally, since most of the attempts to map the migration of the Roma were done by the Nazis, who obviously did not have their interests at heart, and therefore deemed them Other even though there is evidence that proves that they do have European genes.⁷¹ Postcolonial theorists have allowed us to criticize and analyze the ways in which they have been depicted; however the majority of writings on the topic are still inaccurate in many ways. It is this colonial perspective that is what facilitated the negative, racist feelings most people have towards these migrant populations. Much like we now have African American studies or Women’s studies programs in Universities, “Romani studies”⁷² has emerged to study Roma people. However, as with the case of African American and women’s studies, these areas of research are still dominated by their oppressors, because the majority of writing about them is still written by the predominantly white intellectual body.

In light of this discussion of racism and prejudice, it is also important to consider the title of the work. Latreille-Beaumont’s title can be read as an interesting double-entendre. In English, the French word “foirer” means “to mess up,” or “to fail,” and within the word “foirer” is the word “foire” meaning “street fair”. The title and its double-entendre perfectly capture the essence of the work, referring at once to the setting but also to the many failures of those who continue to propagate the stereotypes harming oppressed, othered peoples across the world. The racial slurs minorities face are a mainstay consequence of the colonial project. As Victoria Redclift states, this language and these stereotypes are “embedded in colonial narratives of ‘population’ versus ‘people-nation’ which structure exclusion not only through language and ethnicity, but poverty and social space.”⁷³ Works such as *Foirer* confront us

with this difficult history and encourage us to reflect on the idea of the “‘nation-in-formation’: the shifting landscape of national belonging”⁷⁴ articulated by Redclift, as well as the complicated notion of identity and the importance of engaging with it critically.

EAHR Mentor: Gabrielle Doiron

Bibliography

Blakemore, Diane. “Slurs and expletives: a case against a general account of expressive meaning.” *Language Sciences* 52 (November 2015): 22-35.

Gordijn, Ernestine H., Willem Koomen, and Diederik A. Stapel. “Level of Prejudice in Relation to Knowledge of Cultural Stereotypes.” *Journal Of Experimental Social Psychology* 37, no. 2 (March 2001): 150-157.

Iovițacaron, Radu P., and Theodore G. Schurr. “Reconstructing the Origins and Migrations of Diasporic Populations: The Case of the European Gypsies.” *American Anthropologist* 106, no. 2 (June 2004): 267-281.

Ponzanesi, Sandra. “The Non-Places of Migrant Cinema in Europe.” *Third Text* 26, no. 6 (November 2012): 675-690.

Redclift, Victoria. “Displacement, integration and identity in the postcolonial world.” *Identities* 23, no. 2 (April 2016): 117-135.

⁶⁹ Radu P. Iovițacaron and Theodore G. Schurr, “Reconstructing the Origins and Migrations of Diasporic Populations: The Case of the European Gypsies,” *American Anthropologist* 106, no. 2 (June 2004): 267.

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Victoria Redclift, “Displacement, integration and identity in the postcolonial world,” *Identities* 23, no. 2 (April 2016): 117,

Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed February 26, 2016).

⁷⁴ Ibid

: kimura nathalie byol-lemoine

rire jaune

Paige Sabourin

Every action, if it could be read like a text, would be found to contain within it near-endless layers of meaning. This may seem like a platitude, conveniently all-encompassing, but it is true. Which and how many of these concepts can be accessed is entirely a matter of perspective. For example: three people are sitting on a bench, holding between them an overflowing cornucopia of golden fries. Three tourists are sitting in a public square sharing a snack from a nearby *fritkot*. Two Taiwanese sisters and a French-Korean adoptee are visiting Brussels, and they are eating Belgian fries as fast as they can. Rachel See, Lydia See, and Adele Ksk are eating a whole order of fries in 100 seconds because the artist asked them to participate in a video-performance work called *rire jaune*. This is only the beginning of a series of intricately connected networks of identities, memories, structures, and events that inform the making of this short video by multimedia artist and community activist kimura nathalie byol-lemoine. Intricately connected may be an inaccurate choice of words -- another oversimplification. Here are some alternatives: meanings are enmeshed with each other, dependent on one another, fused, coexisting in a constant state of osmosis and flux. This essay contains a few key pieces of information that help the viewer situate themselves in this matrix.

Belgium does not have an official national food, but if it did, potato fries would be a strong contender. Served fresh, wrapped in paper cones, and smothered in sauce, *fritkot* fries are the quintessential Belgian street food. *Fritkot* are specialized kiosks, a fixture in urban squares. Their ubiquity and convenience are a part of everyday life in Belgium. The free-standing stands give them impression of temporariness. It is their ubiquity not their fixity that makes them such a large part of Belgian food culture which is a jealously guarded part of national identity in the small country so often overshadowed by its larger neighbours. Recently, there has been an increase in Chinese *fritkot* vendors, and the shift has been met with suspicions that are rooted in colonialist stereotypes. These xenophobic fears re-imagine all Asians as interchangeable parts of an inscrutable, disingenuous

hive mind.⁷⁵ In the video *rire jaune*, byol-lemoine uses found interviews and video-performance to spark discussion about who is expected to produce and consume *fritkot* fries, and by extension, the question of Belgian identity and national belonging.

The expression “*rire jaune*” has gone through multiple stages of meaning, but the type of laugh it implies has remained the same. This “yellow laugh” is forced, sarcastic, full of barely-concealed animosity and condescension. In recent years, the phrase has taken on racist connotations, and is often used in conjunction with the spectre of Yellow Peril to frame Asians as greedy and calculating outsiders, poised to usurp Europeans in their local economies. These stereotypes serve to erase the many different lived experiences of Asian peoples in Europe, to frame their desires for stability and belonging as malicious, and by doing so, exclude them from the body of the nation. Different material cultures are regarded as unbridgeable gulfs, absolutist visions that leave no room for adaptation, personal preference or change: “people expect you to eat certain things because of your 'ethnic' look.”⁷⁶ This closed, essentialized vision of Asianness is of course only a projection, which like all stereotypes, “gives knowledge of difference and simultaneously disavows or masks it.”⁷⁷ Disavowal is key here, as it is this that cements the position of Asian people as perpetual outsiders in the minds of racists, ensuring they will never be able to access Belgian-ness no matter how long they live there. This belief in cultural fixity is why Chinese *fritkot* vendors are the subject of news reports and the cause for interrogation and thinly-veiled accusations of greed and conspiracy. The reasons for the shift cannot possibly be individual, or genuine; it must be a calculated trend. The animosity that these vendors face “betrays a determination to objectify, to confine, to imprison, to harden. Phrases such as ‘I know them’, ‘that’s the way they are’, [‘it’s no coincidence’], show this maximum objectification successfully achieved.”⁷⁸ In a voice layered with bitterness, one interviewee speaks of his neighbourhood *fritkot* as having been “taken over” and adds with a sneer that is

⁷⁵ “It matters that Korean is not Chinese, but it also matters that Korean cannot be separated from processes of racialization rooted in the subjection of Asian diasporic peoples. One way of attacking racism’s tendency to generalization has been to insist on specificity. But we must also think through the connections between racialized subjects in order to make visible the relation between the positioning of Asians across histories and geographies.” Lily Cho, “The Turn to Diaspora,” *TOPIA* 17 (Spring 2007): 26.

⁷⁶ kimura nathalie byol-lemoine, email to the author, March 23 2016.

⁷⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The location of culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 77.

⁷⁸ Fanon, Frantz. *Toward the African Revolution* (François Maspero, 1964), 44.

was probably because the business is “very profitable.” He tenders no understanding and rejects shared interest or experience of any kind. By participating in an industry that the Belgian subject deems truly unique to his own culture, Chinese vendors have taken something from the Belgian native, or gotten one over on him. In the end, he is the one with the vicious and hollow laugh - a laugh that echoes through the video - preceding him and lingering even after he is gone.

In this charged environment, performance works like *rire jaune* become acts of public resistance. In the artist's words, eating symbols of Belgian identity publicly, contravening a cultural narrative that regularly denies the many different ways that one can be Belgian, or participate in Belgian-ness, is “an act of visibility... and if visibility is an act of resistance to invisibility... so it is!”⁷⁹ Works like *rire jaune*, and *americaine*, another work by byol-lemoine that tackles many of the same themes present in *rire jaune*, take place in a counterpublic. “A counterpublic is a space of address. It is the creation of a world in which relations to power are always present but always under negotiation.”⁸⁰ In *americaine* (2012), byol-lemoine and Alexandra Kim banter playfully about language, food, and identity, switching easily between speaking three language, pushing against the boundaries of each. The video takes place on the patio of a Berlin cafe, but Alexandra demands Belgian fries in Flemish and says in Korean she is starving. The fluidity of desire, identity and language in the video makes use of the visibility of counterpublic spaces to destabilize narratives of fixed and singular national belonging, to tell the truth of what it means to be from many places at once. As Bhabha says; “[t]o live in the unhomely world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity.”⁸¹ In *rire jaune*, which also takes place in a public space for casual eating, these ambiguities are highlighted by the relationships between the video and the audio, between the artists lived experience as a Korean-Belgian adoptee and the difficulties of inhabiting that identity in a nation that does not have seem to have space for xir. In both videos, byol-lemoine engages in “play with food, gender and identities mixed. To give different layers and levels of understanding or [to get] bites of element[s] of the complexity of identity intersections”⁸² In a world so

marked by diaspora, transnationalism, and ever-increasing human movement through both space and identity, “it is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled”⁸³

It is easy to become lost in the mazes of theory, to abstract work like *rire jaune* into the many frameworks that it finds itself in conversation with. This is not the only way in which this work is potent, and should not be the only lens through which it is viewed. There is also the lens of memory, the artist's personal ties to every part of the work, and relationships which are just as telling as theoretical analysis. For example, the recurrence of works about the difficulty of eating; what to eat, when and where in byol-lemoine's works speak to a flux that is not only structural but personal, as the artist made clear in an email to the author: “Food is very important to me. To have lived in an orphanage, but also in the street and [not] being able to eat when I needed it. To work on that topic, it became a game (for me) and often with humour, I can overcome this feeling of insecurity.”⁸⁴

Acts of performance and art-making can be a way of untangling difficult things, not only on a structural scale but also a personal one. In kimura nathalie byol-lemoine's work the structural and the personal are inextricably linked, as are the artist and the activist, the past and the present. All of these binaries are false partitions, simplifications obscuring the fluidity that defines even the smallest parts of everyday life.

EAHR Mentor: Nima Esmailpour

Bibliography

Bhabha, Homi K. *The location of culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Cho, Lily. *Eating Chinese culture on the menu in small town Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.

Cho, Lily. “The Turn to Diaspora.” *TOPIA* 17. (Spring 2007):0 11-30.

Fanon, Frantz. “Racism and Culture.” *Toward the African Revolution*. François Maspero, 1964.

Lacan, Jacques. *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac, 2004.

: Eva-Loan Ponton-Pham

⁷⁹ byol-lemoine, email to the author. March 23 2016.

⁸⁰ Lily Cho, *Eating Chinese culture on the menu in small town Canada*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010)114

⁸¹ Bhabha. *Location of culture*. 18.

⁸² byol-lemoine, email to the author. March 23 2016.

⁸³ Jacques. Lacan, *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac. 2004), 99.

⁸⁴ byol-lemoine, email to the author. March 23 2016.

The Performative Enactment of Authentic Disney Princesses: Claiming the Colonialist Gaze Through Performativity in *Half N' Half: Is In Between Even Possible?*

Eli-Bella Wood

Eva-Loan Ponton-Pham playfully manipulates media such as projection and photography in her conceptual series of self-portraits entitled: *Half N' Half: Is In Between Even Possible?* Ponton-Pham becomes the Disney Princesses Pocahontas (1995) and Mulan (1998) in her work *Self-Portrait as My Disney's Princess she performs* racial cross-dressing to reveal the problematic cultural constructions and racial categorizations as contributing to almost laughably reduced stereotypes. By inhabiting the racialized feminine body, she reveals the colonial gaze present in Disney films. Ponton-Pham explores the performative nature of mixed-race bodies and identities, being both and neither Vietnamese and Quebecois, and further proves the instability of its images through her body's own interracial "passing"⁸⁵ by claiming Chinese and First Nations identities. Considering Judith Butler's notion of performativity as the naturalized social construction of becoming bodies through perpetuating re-enactments,⁸⁶ Ponton-Pham's *Self-Portraits* acknowledge the mixed-race body as a political site that contradictorily both and neither challenges conservative racial categorization to subvert the colonial gaze and its authority in order to create awareness regarding the reductive dangers of 'happy hybridity'⁸⁷ in an increasingly transnational culture of American neoliberalism come commodity fetishism. Ponton-Pham claims the media technology and its

images by discrediting the authority of the white male gaze.

In her artwork, Ponton-Pham veils herself with projected cultural images like an open rocky uninhabited West Coast bay, the private sphere of the traditional Chinese interior including floor mats and sliding doors, and amid rolling hills of snow dusted pine trees sporting a flannel shirt, a Chinese hanfu hair tied in a traditional bun, and a dress of tanned fringed leather-looking fabric with a long strand of blue stones around her neck and long braided hair, respectively. She manipulates two mediums of media in her artwork, projection and photography, which she uses to dissect and devalue the hierarchal structure of the white male gaze intrinsic to their oppressive functioning. The functioning of patriarchal media as famously coined by Laura Mulvey is the male-centric production of images or in other words visual arts structured from a male perspective for his pleasure.⁸⁸ Her use of projection acts as a metaphor for the uneven relationship between the viewer and the viewed that structure the all-too-familiar images that circulate within and consequently create popular culture infecting films, fashion, and advertising that serve, through orientalist commodity fetishization, to the consumption of racialized bodies thus resulting in its normalization.⁸⁹ Viewers interpret these reductive re-enactments of cultures, cues of cultural fetishization through the framework of Disney's beyond extensive marketing, large commercial infrastructures and their equally expansive reappropriation (offensive Halloween costumes come to mind) that signify them as the familiar spaces of Disney.⁹⁰ Through these projections, Ponton-Pham (re)presents the orientalist desire behind the commodity images that are fertilized in the cosmopolitan-capitalist climate, making hilariously visible the often invisible taken-for-granted colonial male gaze that produces them.⁹¹

Ponton-Pham's use of projection media technology demonstrates racist media's educational impact in the social casting of the body in the same way the white male gaze crafts racist media such as the Disney Princesses Pocahontas and Mulan. Karen Barad's account of the materializing nature of performativity in her essay *Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of How*

⁸⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, New York: Routledge, 1993.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Jacqueline Lo, "'Queer Magic': Performing Mixed-Race on the Australian Stage," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 16, no. 2 (2006): 171-88.

⁸⁸ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* edited by Amelia Jones, London, New York: Routledge, 2003, 47-48.

⁸⁹ Julie Matthews, "Eurasian Persuasions: Mixed Race, Performativity and Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2007), 52.

⁹⁰ Monika Kin Gagnon, *Race-ing Disney: Race and Culture in the Disney Universe*. Burnaby: Simon Fraser University, 1998, 92.

⁹¹ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 52.

Matter Comes to Matter provides an interesting discussion of how media shapes and materializes bodies. Her claim through joining physics and ethics is the wholeness of matter and meaning, signification and materiality and their inseparability, and how bodies come to matter through matter's performativity of meaning.⁹² The signs of media in these terms write and code the body not as mere representation but participate in the creation and stabilization of material boundaries that act upon the body, meaning mattering time and space.⁹³ The body's identity is directly permeable to the culture it inhabits. The projection technology that materializes the images for the white male gaze signifies cultural meaning. Raced bodies are therefore performed through repeated representation, becoming the cultural 'Other' that is made familiar through reductive stereotypes like those of Disney, similar to how media matter is in dialogue with self-performance, bodies also come to matter as identification as cultural 'Other' from the dominant white Western self.

Amina Yaqin discusses the dual nature of racially performed identity constructions of minority groups in the United States by analyzing the contradictory functioning of the Muslim doll Razanne, an alternative role model to Barbie for Muslim girls living in the West.⁹⁴ Yaqin argues that Razanne embodies both the homogenization of transnational Muslim culture, a self-performance of Muslimness in the context of cultural minority that embraces a cultural stereotype created by the Western colonialist culture by leveling herself with Barbie, a performative ultra-feshization of the gendered young white woman, participating in the American transnational consumer culture that Barbie embodies.⁹⁵ Razanne becomes "a stereotype of a stereotype," the counter-image to reductive stereotypes of Muslims in the climate of post 9/11 to "stabilize the meaning of 'Muslim woman' and set it firmly within the functional discourse of Islam."⁹⁶ Demonstrated through her analysis of Razanne is how women's roles, their visualisation, their commodification and subsequent performance affect not only the (mass) individual body, but organize nationalist culture.⁹⁷ While it should not be overstated,

the linguistic hyphenated form of the artist's last name Ponton-Pham that reflects the colonial history of her mixed-race body is interestingly mirrored in the hyphenated structure of the title of her artwork *Self-Portrait* that alludes to the performative nature of mixed-race identity that Yaqin analyzes through Razanne's plastic embodiment of identity in parodic response to hegemonic Barbie. There appears to be equal contribution of *Self* and *Portrait* in Ponton-Pham's artwork that represents that shaping of mixed-race identity, being *Half N' Half*, recognizes her body as a site of political conflict. This state of in-betweenness becomes materialized through the conflicting identification of *Self* as deemed 'Other' that structures race performativity in large part by media representation can be seen as a portrait created and instrumentalized to assure Western dominance that simultaneously undermines it.

The Disney narratives that Ponton-Pham engages with, teaches a depoliticized founding history, trading brutal violence for an idyllic love story, and the story of an Americanized woman-warrior with the help of her dragon (voiced by Eddie Murphy) who battles the depicted archaic China.⁹⁸ Both are narratives that in post-production marketing, claim historical accuracy.⁹⁹ The intertwining of meaning and matter, how racialised meaning materializes as bodily and cultural matter, is explored by Julie Matthews who discusses the commodification of the Eurasian 'look' in transnational cosmopolitan culture as the blooming "poster child of globalization."¹⁰⁰ The Eurasian body becomes the perfect commodity being combination of the allure of the ambiguous exotic and the comfort in the (white) familiar.¹⁰¹ In the context of the transnational cosmopolitan, the mixed-race body as a political site, the product of violent colonialism, becomes the product of a love story. Ponton-Pham intervenes the perpetuating citation of depoliticized 'happy hybridity,' uncovering the colonial rewriting of history through media such as Disney films, prove its colonial controlled inaccuracy.

Ponton-Pham ironically documents this dualistic performance through photography, a medium that cements and fixes the becoming and in flux self and externalized identities, the qualities of the performative, and gives truth to her visualized claims as Chinese and as a First Nations person. The visual claiming in becoming, or performing, *Her Disney's*

⁹² Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801-831.

⁹³ Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 817.

⁹⁴ Amina Yaqin, "Islamic Barbie: The Politics of Gender and Performativity," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 11, no. 2 (2007): 173-88.

⁹⁵ Yaqin, "Islamic Barbie," 174.

⁹⁶ Yaqin, "Islamic Barbie," 184.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁹⁸ Monika Kin Gagnon, *Race-ing Disney: Race and Culture in the Disney Universe*, Burnaby: Simon Fraser University, 1998, 100.

⁹⁹ Gagnon, *Race-ing Disney: Race and Culture in the Disney Universe*, 100.

¹⁰⁰ Julie Matthews, "Eurasian Persuasions: Mixed Race, Performativity and Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2007), 43.

¹⁰¹ Matthews, "Eurasian Persuasions," 43.

Princess as Mulan-- who cross-dresses as a man to become a national hero-- and Native American by becoming Pocahontas. This act of visually claiming a racial or gendered identity that is not your own recalls Butler's 'passing,' which proves gender and race as being socially constructed entities that are unstable.¹⁰² The challenging of identity constructs through interracial 'passing' also questions the authority of photography in its claims to objective truth as well as the assumed authority of the photographer. Torika Bolatagici discusses photography and its long history of providing objective essentialist truth to racist images due to its capability to capture and authorize reality and analyzes its much needed dissection in postmodern postcolonial practice and discourse.¹⁰³ The evolution of the camera's technology, from Renaissance perspective come creation of the camera, takes place in a white European history. People of colour did not have access to a camera for a large portion of the technology's history to document their realities for themselves, which like the projector technology, assumes hierarchal power dominance in the bionic gaze of the camera.¹⁰⁴ However, Ponton-Pham disrupts the colonialist narrative that produce these (and the majority of) visual images by interrupting the gaze hierarchy by presenting herself as both subject and author of the image. She engages with embedded issues of race present in technology and demonstrates photography's perpetuation of racist stereotypes while also engaging with contemporary images of depoliticized bodies and problems of transnational hybridity.

Ponton-Pham acknowledges the female body and its fetishization as the site where culture is reproduced. However, she interrupts multiple discourses of racism that work to reproduce the ever-changing naturalizing cultural stereotypes: the creation of the camera and its photographic representations, the regurgitation of colonialist narratives that popular culture media projects onto screens. Ponton-Pham alters the hierarchal power structures inherent to these technologies by authoring her own image. Ironically, the images she authors and claims to represent her mixed-race identity are incongruous to her cultural heritage as Franco-Vietnamese. She comments on racial stereotypes produced by the reductive images of *Pocahontas* and *Mulan*, embodying them in order to realize these gendered racialized representations to be just as inaccurate as her 'passing' as Chinese and First Nations. Ponton-Pham comedically opens up the

discourse of the material identity of mixed race bodies to challenge the authority of what the casting and consuming colonialist gaze reduces through its performativity in order to change the meaning for the body to matter.

EAHR Mentor: Tiffany Le

Bibliography

Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801-831. Accessed February 26, 2016. JSTOR.

Bolatagici, Torika. "Claiming the (N)either/(N)or of 'Third Space': (Re)presenting Hybrid Identity and the Embodiment of Mixed Race." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 25, no. 1 (2004): 75-85. Accessed February 28, 2016. Taylor & Francis Group.

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

Gagnon, Monika Kin. *Race-ing Disney: Race and Culture in the Disney Universe*. Burnaby: Simon Fraser University, 1998.

Lo, Jacqueline. "'Queer Magic': Performing Mixed-Race on the Australian Stage." *Contemporary Theatre Review* 16, no. 2 (2006): 171-88. Accessed March 21, 2016. Taylor & Francis Group.

Matthews, Julie. "Eurasian Persuasions: Mixed Race, Performativity and Cosmopolitanism." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2007): 41-54. Accessed March 21, 2016. Taylor & Francis Group.

Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* edited by Amelia Jones, 44-52, London, New York: Routledge, 2003.

Yaqin, Amina. "Islamic Barbie: The Politics of Gender and Performativity." *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 11, no. 2 (2007): 173-88. Accessed February 26, 2016.

¹⁰² Butler, "Bodies That Matter," 170.

¹⁰³ Torika Bolatagici, "Claiming the (N)either/(N)or of 'Third Space': (Re)presenting Hybrid Identity and the Embodiment of Mixed Race," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 25, no. 1 (2004), 78.

¹⁰⁴ Bolatagici, "Claiming the (n)either/(n)or of 'Third Space,'" 78.

: Shay

Currency Ethnography 1

Marysa Antonakakis

The media hails science as truly objective, ignoring the highly subjective and hierarchical nature of the funding and research that goes into it.¹⁰⁵ Science is viewed as infallible yet we need only look back to the large influence of pseudosciences such as eugenics to see this is not the case. National currency mirrors the public's perception of science in similar ways. Shay's understanding of form and composition has been heavily shaped by the artist duo's training in architecture, resulting in work that they hope favours the engagement of the viewer. In *Currency Ethnography 1*, the figures from a three different currencies are cut out and placed in plastic test tubes in proximity to each other. The piece is an experiment, dissecting the figures placed on money to disrupt the hierarchies by which national stereotypes are created, legitimized, and disseminated through the creation of national currency.

The use of paper currency in this work follows in footsteps of artists such as Matthieu Laurette and Santiago Sierra whose works analyze and parody economic processes and phenomena.¹⁰⁶ Shay specifically chose images of individuals from currency bills that would be unfamiliar to Canadian audiences. The individuals represented are cut out and placed individually in their own vials. This act forces the viewer to contemplate the individuals of the currency and examine the specific meaning behind these institutional choices, rather than the monetary value of the paper. . These images and the people portrayed on these bills are specifically chosen as representative of the nation's ideal citizen and are employed to communicate specific beliefs or political agendas that the state would like to associate itself with, and upon which, by extension, build the nation's visual canon and mythology. These bills are generally distributed to the point of invisibility. The ubiquitous nature goes beyond pure propagandistic

¹⁰⁵ Ridker, Paul M., and Jose Torres. "Reported Outcomes in Major Cardiovascular Clinical Trials Funded by For-Profit and Not-for-Profit Organizations: 2000-2005." *Jama* 295, no. 19 (2006): 2270. <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=202867>.

¹⁰⁶ Velthuis, Olav. *Imaginary Economics: Contemporary Artists and the World of Big Money*. Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2005.

use. Benedict Anderson likens national currencies to national languages in that they cause fellow citizens to think in common economic "language" that both distinguishes one nation from another while fostering a sense of "horizontal comradeship" within its borders, becoming even more ingrained within society as a construct and identity.¹⁰⁷ How can this hierarchy be highlighted, when the language used has been created by those in power? It becomes incredibly naturalised to the point where it is impossible to unlink identity from the nation. This results in a rigid hierarchy between those creating the message, and those consuming it. Shay's use of the plastic test tubes serves to interrupt this. Placing these bills in these vials and within a gallery setting, isolates and brings attention to these notes, which have been so normalized that they have become completely unnoticeable in our daily lives. This works to disrupt the manner in which these messages have become assumed as fact, rather than social construct. The use of currencies unfamiliar to Canadian audiences further breaks with this assumption. The images lose power because they lack meaning within a Canadian context.

The nationalization of money was a key component of nineteenth and early twentieth century nation building. Historically speaking, the exercise of political authority is closely linked to the production and regulation of money. In the ancient and medieval West, for example, the ability to control the mints determined a monarch's ability to raise revenue to wage military campaigns, therefore maintaining and expanding control over their subjects. National currencies, then, represent a powerful assertion of state power and nationalism. By looking at the currency of nations as they emerged, we come to see the imagery on these bills being used in the same way, highlighting "the issuing authority's attempt to impute value."¹⁰⁸ When states emphasize the visual "they inform and educate their own populations and those beyond about where they are, who they are, and what they are about."¹⁰⁹

Banknotes are used as a medium for constructing and circulating the state's agenda of who and what constitutes the nation and the nation that the state claims to represent, which, in turn, legitimizes its power. "Nationalist iconography provides an

¹⁰⁷ Lauer, Josh. "Money as Mass Communication: U.S. Paper Currency and the Iconography of Nationalism." *The Communication Review* 11, no. 2 (2008): 109-32

¹⁰⁸ Lauer, Josh. "Money as Mass Communication: U.S. Paper Currency and the Iconography of Nationalism." *The Communication Review* 11, no. 2 (2008): 109-32

¹⁰⁹ Penrose, Jan. "Designing the Nation. Banknotes, Banal Nationalism and Alternative Conceptions of the State." *Political Geography* 30, no. 8 (2011): 429-40.

important channel through which the authenticity and legitimacy of national currency is communicated.”¹¹⁰ Since the only legitimate currency is national currency, these images define what are considered “legitimate” images of the nation. This can be seen at play within *Currency Ethnography 1* where we see certain similarities between the individuals within the piece. The chosen figures are dressed conservatively, and are typically all male with strong facial features such as a strong brow and nose. The fact that these images come from different sources brings attention to an underlying stereotype of what sort of people are considered important and powerful as based on physical attributes, and the ways in which states communicate that to their subjects.

Often times, the nation constructing these images are not the community that are represented. Scottish currency is an example of this. These banknotes were in fact designed by English designers who had no first-hand knowledge or experience of Scotland. They instead utilized images that embody “qualities, norms and values commonly ascribed to the Scots,” working, effectively, off of stereotypes.¹¹¹ The Bank of England thus framed, shaped and reflected Scottish identity and, through these processes, becomes co-constitutive of this identity and the nation which it reifies. The Bank produces state effects both materially, in the form of banknotes and institutions, and symbolically, in the form of iconography and identity. This identity, thus further propagates stereotypes. Those who benefit from stereotypes are singularly those who constructed and are unaffected by these stereotypes. Creating a monolith of peoples effectively stamps out any personal agency, maintaining power dynamics that have already been put in place. Shay’s use of size in this piece, as well as the encouragement of the viewer’s interaction with the piece disrupts this dynamic, placing the viewer in a position of literal physical power over the currency. In scientific use, test tubes are used not only to measure, but also to contain and protect the actor from any harmful effects of the object. The test tubes play a similar role here, containing the bills, and all the cultural baggage that goes along with it, allowing the viewer to manipulate it without being affected by it. This runs counter to the usual transfer of information through these bills, which runs from state

to individual. By interrupting this flow, the work disrupts this hierarchy.

The value of this currency in a global context then translates to the power and value of the country itself and its people. The economic power of a country’s dollar is often synonymous with global power and the social standing of the country and its people. This creates a social hierarchy by which certain communities are regarded higher than others. This serves to create a divide within cultural groups, in which some groups of people have access to money and resources, and some do not. *Currency Ethnography 1* uses the demographic of the viewers and the location of the exhibition in order to disrupt this relationship. The vast majority of Canadians that would enter a gallery space are considered well off on a global scale. They generally have access to money and resources. The specimens chosen by the artist within this piece however, come from countries with weaker economic realities for its citizens. Normally, Canadian viewers would have easy access to these bills, since their currency is worth more globally. They could purchase loads of these other currencies without spending much of their own money. Within this piece however, the viewer is cut off from these bills, unable to access them behind these plastic tubes, reversing this hierarchy that is already in place, and challenging the audience to rethink their positioning.

Real world examples of this phenomena can be seen within the Canadian public today, by looking at the recent 100\$ bill, in which the woman represented was deemed by focus groups as looking too Asian to represent Canada.¹¹² The Bank of Canada then replaced the image with that of a woman with European features who was considered more appropriate. It seems that no matter how inconsequential we believe these images to be, once they go against a national ideal, they soon become a national issue, proving that these images are linked to our perceived national identity and that any deviation threatens this identity. States therefore use currency to construct national stereotypes and disseminate them both within and without national borders. Shay’s use of these different currencies in *Currency Ethnography 1* aims to question this hierarchy.

EAHR Mentor: James Bradbury

¹¹⁰ Penrose, Jan. "Designing the Nation. Banknotes, Banal Nationalism and Alternative Conceptions of the State." *Political Geography* 30, no. 8 (2011): 429-40.

¹¹¹ Penrose, Jan, and Craig Cumming. "Money Talks: Banknote Iconography and Symbolic Constructions of Scotland." *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 4 (2011): 821-42.

¹¹² "Asian-looking Woman Scientist Image Rejected for \$100 Bills." *The Canadian Press*, August 17, 2012. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/asian-looking-woman-scientist-image-rejected-for-100-bills-1.1183360>.

Bibliography

Helleiner, E. "National Currencies and National Identities." *American Behavioral Scientist* 41, no. 10 (1998): 1409-436.

Lauer, Josh. "Money as Mass Communication: U.S. Paper Currency and the Iconography of Nationalism." *The Communication Review* 11, no. 2 (2008): 109-32

Müller-Peters, Anke. "The Significance of National Pride and National Identity to the Attitude toward the Single European Currency: A Europe-wide Comparison." *Journal of Economic Psychology* 19, no. 6 (1998): 701-19.

Penrose, Jan. "Designing the Nation. Banknotes, Banal Nationalism and Alternative Conceptions of the State." *Political Geography* 30, no. 8 (2011): 429-40.

Penrose, Jan, and Craig Cumming. "Money Talks: Banknote Iconography and Symbolic Constructions of Scotland." *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 4 (2011): 821-42.

Ridker, Paul M., and Jose Torres. "Reported Outcomes in Major Cardiovascular Clinical Trials Funded by For-Profit and Not-for-Profit Organizations: 2000-2005." *Jama* 295, no. 19 (2006): 2270.
<http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=202867>.

"Asian-looking Woman Scientist Image Rejected for \$100 Bills." *The Canadian Press*, August 17, 2012.
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/asian-looking-woman-scientist-image-rejected-for-100-bills-1.1183360>.

: Team Sagittarius

Empowerment Through Gameplay: Disrupting Ideologies of Discrimination in *We Are Fine, We'll Be Fine*

Kathleen Ballantyne

Team Sagittarius' *We are Fine, We'll be Fine* is a participatory art game based around stories of marginalization told by individuals through an interactive board when players engage with the work. The narratives in the game are concerned with issues of marginalization because of differences in race, gender, sexuality, and mental health. They speak to the profound and traumatic impact that discrimination and stereotypes have on people's lives that often lead to feelings of alienation and shame. In his book *The Location of Culture*, postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha discusses stereotypes, discrimination, and the discourse of colonialism, stating: "An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness."¹¹³ Not only is the stereotype a "false representation of a given reality" and an "arrested ... form of representation," but also, in denying difference, the stereotype, "constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations."¹¹⁴

Moreover, experiences of discrimination are often denied or disrupted in public discourse, maintaining the fixity of stereotypical representations and further alienate those who experience them. By using the format of game play participants are distanced from the systematic ideological functioning of society through establishing rules of play; *We Are Fine, We'll Be Fine* allows individuals to experience these narratives of discrimination in a different framework that establishes stories as the central motif by actively engaging the player in unfolding the narratives, creating an environment of trust and

support through touch. In structuring this engagement with personal histories of marginalization, the game disrupts ideological constructions of identity and difference, and empowers those who have experienced discrimination through sharing and mutual support.

In the space of play, meaning and experience are structured according to the rules and formatting of the game. This new space is what Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, in their discussion of game design and meaningful play, call the "magic circle," which they state "can define a powerful space, investing its authority in the actions of players and creating new and complex meanings that are only possible in the space of play."¹¹⁵ In *We Are Fine, We'll Be Fine*, specific rules shape the experience of the players' encounters with the narratives, enabling active listening and support. Players must hold hands and interact with the game board to reveal the stories of marginalization; contact must be maintained for players to progress and for the stories to be told to completion. In defining the method of this encounter, the game creates a meaningful experience of sharing and support that is not easily found in contemporary society. The structure of the game places the narratives as a central function of the experience, highlighting their importance, and that of listening and sharing.

The ability to narrate traumatic encounters of discrimination is critical to the function of healing from these experiences and altering ideological beliefs surrounding identities of difference. As Bhabha writes: "The force of colonial and postcolonial discourse as a theoretical and cultural intervention in our contemporary moment represents the urgent need to contest singularities of difference and to articulate diverse 'subjects' of differentiation."¹¹⁶ The narratives of *We Are Fine, We'll Be Fine* allow individuals to represent their own experiences of discrimination and the effects they played their lives, diverging from a singular idea of difference and allowing for a plurality of perspectives. At the same time, however, the narratives speak to similar experiences of marginalization, allowing individuals to realize that they are not alone in their trauma, creating a community of mutual support and diminishing feelings of alienation. In her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses Indigenous projects of research that counter colonial discourse, one of which is that of sharing: "Sharing contains views about knowledge being a

¹¹³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 66.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹¹⁵ Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, "Game Design and Meaningful Play," *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, ed. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (Michigan: MIT Press, 2003), 77.

¹¹⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 74.

collective benefit and knowledge being a form of resistance.”¹¹⁷ The narratives of the game offer a resistance not only to the ideological systems of difference, but also by strengthening the individual through the knowledge that they are not alone in these experiences. The game also emphasizes the important role of the listener in the telling of these stories, reminding players that listening is a vital action in sharing.

The game’s construction not only requires players to listen but to actively participate in the stories being told. Team Sagittarius, the artist collective who created the game, write: “We wanted to create a space where players would actively listen by searching and unlocking these stories (through the wooden board and using each other as ‘interfaces’).”¹¹⁸ The interaction required by the work creates a condition where viewers are necessary for it to function; the unfolding of the narratives through active participation promotes a closer relationship to these stories, encouraging reflective listening and empathy. Salen and Zimmerman remark that the magic circle is “remarkably fragile ... requiring constant maintenance to keep it intact...without the proper state of mind, the magic circle could not exist.”¹¹⁹ The importance of player action in the game stresses the role of the audience to not only passively listen to the stories, but also actively engage in the witnessing of them, creating a more profound and involved interaction with the narratives. Byreimagining the role of the spectator in theatre, Jacques Rancière writes that they “must be removed from the position of observer calmly examining the spectacle offered to her. She must be dispossessed of this illusory mastery, drawn into the magic circle of theatrical action where she will exchange the privilege of rational observer for that of the being in possession of all her vital energies.”¹²⁰ For Rancière, the importance of the spectator’s involvement is because they will “learn from as opposed to being seduced by images.”¹²¹ This role of the active and energetic spectator is crucial in provoking the players to empathize, reflect, and relate to the stories being told, rather than calmly observing from an outside position. Active involvement in the game is provided by interacting with the board and maintaining contact with one another to reveal the stories, adding a level of intimacy to the framework of the game.

Throughout the game players must hold hands while listening to the stories. If contact is broken the narratives will be interrupted, placing a vital importance on this intimate touch. According to Team Sagittarius, “We wanted to recreate this feeling of intimacy and support especially when sharing a traumatic story. Through the act of hand holding, the interaction signals a sense of trust.”¹²² Formatting the game to require this intimate touch creates a safe environment, allowing the participants an opportunity to experience this closeness and care in the sharing of traumatic stories that they may not otherwise have access to. The act of supporting one another through these experiences in the game creates a space of empowerment for those who have experienced marginalization. Writing on interactive art, Arjen Mulder states, “Interactive art makes the realization flash up that there is actually no ‘I.’ No one is an island: you are produced by others just as much as you produce them.”¹²³ The encouraging environment that the game creates urges players to recognize that no one is alone in these experiences and that collective sharing allows for a new production of meaning, that of empowerment through mutual support. This approach is one that celebrates each individual’s strength and survival in facing discrimination; celebrating survival is another decolonization program described by Smith: the celebration of survival “is reflected ... sometimes as an event in which artists and storytellers come together to celebrate collectively a sense of life and diversity and connectedness.”¹²⁴ In creating a space to celebrate the strength of marginalized individuals, *We Are Fine, We’ll Be Fine* disrupts the typical view of the victim as alone in their experience, and instead exhibits the agency in collective sharing, reimagining ideologies of difference.

Bhabha writes on the importance of art that “demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.”¹²⁵ The format of the game provides an encounter, which re-writes how these realities of discrimination and difference can be lived. By

¹¹⁷ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1999), 160.

¹¹⁸ Team Sagittarius, email to the author, March 2016.

¹¹⁹ Salen and Zimmerman, “Game Design and Meaningful Play,” 77.

¹²⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. George Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 4.

¹²¹ Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 4.

¹²² Team Sagittarius, *We Are Fine, We’ll Be Fine*, artist statement, 2016.

¹²³ Arjen Mulder, *Interact or Die: There is Drama in the Networks* (Rotterdam: NAI10 Publishers, 2007), 69.

¹²⁴ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 145.

¹²⁵ Homi Bhabha, “In Between Cultures,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 30:4 (2013): 109.

reminding players to listen, reflect, and support, it creates a space for empowerment in these experiences, interrupting present discourse surrounding marginalization and remodeling personal histories, creating new meanings of empowerment for them. Stepping outside of the magic circle, the participants' framework for engaging in traumatic narratives of marginalization is expanded through the experience of sharing and support, a reminder that no one is alone, and that together *we'll be fine*.

EAHR Mentor: Tianmo Zhang

Bibliography

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

-----, "In Between Cultures." *New Perspectives Quarterly* 30:4 (2013) 107-109.

Mulder, Arjen. *Interact or Die: There is Drama in the Networks*. Rotterdam: NAI010 Publishers, 2007.

Salen, Katie, and Zimmerman, Eric. "Game Design and Meaningful Play." *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, edited by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman. Michigan: MIT Press, 2003. 59-79.

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies*. London: Zed Books Ltd., 1999.

Ranci re, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by Gregory Elliott. London: Verso, 2009.

: Alisi Telengut

Exploring Belonging in *Memories of the Kalmyks*

Melinda Cardinal

Our age, with its modern warfare, imperialism and quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers- is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration.¹²⁶

These words by Edward Said invoke the severe socio-political consequences and human wreckage caused by modernism's preoccupation with technological advancements, glorified nationalisms, and utopian political projects.¹²⁷ This widespread presence of diaspora and displacement in a contemporary globalized world emphasizes the critical importance of belonging to those who have been "deterritorialized,"¹²⁸ or exiled from the limits of their homeland's geographical borders. Accordingly, Mongolian artist Alisi Telengut draws upon the diasporic experiences of Kalmyk descendants in her film *Memories of the Kalmyks*. As descendants of Oyrats, Kalmyks originated from West Mongolian nomadic tribes that voluntarily merged with the Russian state in the seventeenth century.¹²⁹ Since then, Kalmyks have suffered great hardship, notably during World War II when they were falsely accused by Stalin of aiding the Nazi invasion of the Volga regions and then collectively deported to Siberia.¹³⁰ Kalmyk people have since migrated to various countries around the world in small diasporic communities. They regained their pre-deportation numbers only decades later and were declared sovereign within the newly formed Federation of Russia as the Republic of Kalmykia until the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹³¹ Due to this politically-charged

¹²⁶ Edward Said, quoted in T. J Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 1.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²⁸ Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 2009), 11.

¹²⁹ "History of Kalmykia," *Republic of Kalmykia: Government of the Republic of Kalmykia*, accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.kalm.ru/en/hist.html>.

¹³⁰ Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, "Editor's Introduction: Kalmyk Connections," *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 53, no. 4 (2015): 4.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

history, many Kalmyk descendants were forced to reside outside of Kalmykia, having established their lives in other countries decades ago.

In recent years, Kalmyk descendants have vocalized the difficulties of forced migration. In this essay, I argue that *Memories of the Kalmyks* provides more plural narratives of belonging that privilege the complex, lived diasporic experiences in a globalized world. This argument is supported through an exploration of the video's representation of cultural hybridity; its use of first-hand Kalmyk accounts; as well as its optimistic tone that has the effect of destabilizing the apparent stereotype of diasporic people as "homeless" or "victimized."

Memories of the Kalmyks is a work in which Kalmyk descendants recall their past, acknowledging a collective history and memory of diaspora. In the video, four Kalmyk descendants converse with each other and Telengut, who conducts the interview. Discussions center on both Kalmyk cultural struggles and positive transcultural experiences that inform their particular perceptions of diasporic change and history. The recording fluctuates between nostalgia for the Kalmyk homeland, and a sense of celebration for the cultural diversity they have gained along the way. Yet at the same time, it underscores the importance of cultural resilience as the speakers communicate the importance placed on remembering the Kalmyk language, Buddhist religion, folklore, and traditions, especially for the younger generations. Regarding the notion of national identity in this work, Telengut asserts: "I think that national identity has the possibility to divide people by geography and politics, but culture and language unite people."¹³² Drawing from the artist's statement, I argue the film attempts to use the possibilities inherent in culture and language to unite peoples who have experienced a shared sense of displacement and alienation. Formally, the work is presented as a black screen with white subtitles devoid of any figuration or colourful visuals. With this intention, Telengut emphasizes the auditory and textual qualities of the film as conversations held in French while traditional Kalmyk songs are exchanged with translated English subtitles. As such, Telengut delivers a lyrical and poetic aesthetic to spoken language where vocalised sentiments take on a heightened importance and viewers are forced to listen attentively without the convenience of visual support.

The representation of cultural hybridity as an inherent aspect of the lives of Kalmyk descendants provides plural understandings regarding the narratives of belonging in *Memories of the Kalmyks*.

¹³² Alisi Telengut, e-mail to the author, February 18, 2016.

Importantly, the Kalmyks' wide range of cultural and geographical lived experiences, as a result of their diasporic history, challenges conventional modes of belonging that are based on fixed nationalities. Consequently, Telengut explores cultural plurality as a means of belonging. In the video, this manifests in the ways Kalmyk descendants speak in French, and reference their Canadian citizenship while singing traditional Kalmyk songs. Likewise, they reference Russian influences on their culture while informing viewers of their Mongolian ancestry. As a result, viewers are faced with a people that have an embodied understanding of living in multiple localities, in what Steven Vertovec calls "multilocality."¹³³ Vertovec argues that an awareness of multilocality in diasporic consciousness can produce "a refusal of fixity often serving as a valuable resource for resisting repressive local or global situations."¹³⁴ This rejection of fixed localities enables transnational identities and offers more inclusive notions of belonging that privileges a plurality of diasporic experiences. As Paul Gilroy argues in *The Black Atlantic*, the essentialist frameworks of national belonging currently in place completely disregard the complex lived experiences of diasporic people that have usually been coerced into their current circumstances.¹³⁵ Similarly, Stuart Hall has argued that transnationalism allows a diaspora to be held together through shared imagination and cultural artefacts.¹³⁶ This advocates a sense of belonging tying people together based on their varied experiences, cultures and languages.

The use of personal accounts also enables more inclusive notions of belonging for Kalmyks under-represented in society; their subjective experiences and self-identifications are crucial in order to avoid an authoritarian retelling of their experiences as well as potential misrepresentations. Telengut offers the Kalmyk descendants a certain amount of autonomy as she captures their own opinions and views on their diasporic memories and on what it means to belong. An artist who usually uses painterly animations in her video works, Telengut started off with animated footage to create this work but quickly abandoned it as she felt that the visuals would distract viewers from the conversations.¹³⁷ She also felt that both spoken language and visual imagery have their own poetry

and that they would simply clash in this work.¹³⁸ The decision to foreground Kalmyk subjective memories emphasized the importance of their first-hand accounts to the artist.

In the film, one of the four Kalmyk descendants speaks of the different countries he has lived in and despite the fact that he has resided in Quebec for several decades, he proudly states "I'm a citizen of the world."¹³⁹ This statement is especially powerful to the embodied experiences of Kalmyk diaspora that are not regarded as a lack of belonging, but rather as an *expansion* of it. Expanded notions of belonging are provided through its levity and humorous moments, countering the stereotypic image of diasporic people as "victims." The film attends to sensitive subject matter such as deportation, anxieties of cultural loss, and a yearning for one's homeland. Despite this, *Memories of the Kalmyks* manages to convey these difficult realities with more ease than is expected as the characters in the film sing, laugh and poke fun at one another – as if to say, despite the difficult memories of diaspora, these Kalmyk descendants have acknowledged and accepted their past while choosing to look towards the future and reflect on how they can preserve certain traditions. At one point in the film, one of the descendants enthusiastically says "as all the people of Central Asia in Russia, we celebrate festivals and drink vodka!" followed by a burst of laughter. In another sequence, one cannot help but smile as they listen to the banter that goes back and forth in the film. "Him! He knows songs. Mainga, sing a song in Kalmyk." "Yeah, but if I sing, you will start singing the song." The result is a touching and eye-opening cultural exchange as the space is made for intimate self-representations that sensitize the viewer. Their ordinary family banter makes their struggles that much more real and their strength all the more impressive. In creating this mirthful environment, Telengut joins people together through laughter and empathy for each other and their experiences.

The expanded diverse understandings of narratives of belonging in *Memories of the Kalmyks* constructs an image of Kalmyk descendants as adopting what curator Achille Bonito Oliva calls "cultural nomadism" by exercising their right to diaspora while comfortably crossing the boundaries of various nations and cultures.¹⁴⁰ Cultural nomadism serves as an apt metaphor for a shifting sense of

¹³³ Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, 6.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³⁵ Tanya Barson, "Introduction: Modernism and the Black Atlantic," *Afro Modern: Journey's Through the Black Atlantic*, ed. Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschluerter (Liverpool, UK: Tate Liverpool, 2010), 2.

¹³⁶ Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, 6.

¹³⁷ Telengut, e-mail to author, February 18, 2016.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ This work is available online. Alisi Telengut, "Work No. 3 with Art Embassy Memories of The Kalmyks," *Vimeo*, accessed February 25, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/149778037>.

¹⁴⁰ Cited in Demos, *The Migrant Image*, 11.

belonging that reconfigures and reinscribes their ancestral roots as West Mongolian nomads while preserving the richness of Kalmyk history, oral traditions, and cultural narratives in transit.

EHR Mentor: Charissa Von Harringa

Bibliography

Balzer, Marjorie Mandelstam. "Editor's Introduction: Kalmyk Connections." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 53, no. 4 (2015): 1-7.

Barson, Tanya. "Introduction: Modernism and the Black Atlantic." *Afro Modern: Journey's Through the Black Atlantic*. Ed. Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlueter. Liverpool, UK: Tate Liverpool, 2010.

Demos, T. J. *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

Elkins, James, Zhivka Valiavicharska, and Alice Kim. *Art and Globalization*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010.

"History of Kalmykia." *Republic of Kalmykia: Government of the Republic of Kalmykia*. Accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.kalm.ru/en/hist.html>.

Nuksunova, A. M. "The Cultural Identity of Today's Kalmyk Young People." *Russian Social Science Review* 50, no. 5 (2009): 63-70.

Rafael, Eliezer Ben, and Yitzak Sternberg. *Transnationalism: Diasporas and the Advent of a New (dis)order*. Boston: Brill, 2009.

Sekimoto, Sachi. "Transnational Asia: Dis/orienting Identity in the Globalized World." *Communication Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2014): 381-98.

Vertovec, Steven. *Transnationalism*. London: Routledge, 2009.

: Karen White

Critical self-portraiture: Rewriting the Black Female Body

Abigail Borja Calonga

Externally defined, Black female bodies were established as bearers of meaning instead of as makers of meaning.¹⁴¹ Karen White's self-portraits defy this narrative by presenting us with a critical and agential Black subject. By turning the camera to herself, White takes ownership of her body that becomes the site from which she tells her story and attempts to reconcile intergenerational traumas associated with being a Black woman. *'Ashaba': No human can look at her directly*, *Patwah*, *Poignés*, and *Chez Nous, We do things like this, here!* function as oppositional discourses in which the postcolonial subject attempts to define herself while denouncing objectification and oppression.

Throughout history, the West has constructed unrealistic images of Black women that responded to their needs and desires. Photographs of Black women and their orientalisng narratives of race and gender not only reflected the dominant values of the times in which they were produced but also informed society's understanding of the "other."¹⁴² As these pictures responded to and were made for the delectation of white males, Black women were doubly objectified – as black, under white supremacy and as women, under patriarchy.¹⁴³ Racialized women were mostly represented nude and following stereotypical scripts: sexualized, neutered, or paired with nature.¹⁴⁴ These images assured colonial domination even after slavery and contributed to the formation of enduring stereotypes of race and gender.

The failure of dominant discourses to represent the complexity of Black experience leads to the

creation of defiant images.¹⁴⁵ Unprecedented in early photography, self-portraits became essential to the construction of a visual account of the new Black subjectivity in the twentieth century. Opposing previous modes of external definition, these self-portraits were often autobiographical. They called attention to the diverse identities and life stories of Black women and allowed them to write their own narratives of race, gender and sexuality. Some of the photographs focused on producing "positive" images of social and personal success, while other highly political works disrupted social imagery and reconstructed the Black female body.¹⁴⁶

White's critical self-portraiture challenges the notion of the Black female as a passive object. Of second-generation Afro-Caribbean descent, the artist explores the relationship between her heritage and her identity in works that take biographical and historical dimensions. In this series of pictures, White embodies the roles imposed upon her ancestors as result of colonial slavery, and the ones she occupies today as a racialized woman in an oppressive postcolonial setting. Her pictures are subversive as they engage with experiences of social repression from the perspective of the colonized. By telling her story through photography, she rejects external definition.

In *Ashaba': No human can look at her directly* and *Patwah, Poignés*, the artist is photographed with household objects that invoke domestic work. Black women during and after slavery were conceived as naturally predisposed to perform affective functions such as raising children, cleaning and providing emotional support.¹⁴⁷ Although domestic work is far from undignified, imposing affective roles upon individuals with certain racial and gender characteristics and reducing their identities to the functions of serfdom can be. . *Patwah, Poignés* presents us with a woman with her hands tied at her back, which suggests domination and possibly physical violence. By incarnating these roles, White renders visible the power of Black women over their body and addresses essentialist narratives of race and gender that continue to oppress this demographic today. Overall, by infiltrating her image in these spaces, White forces the viewer to confront issues that affect the Black female subject.

Strikingly honest, White's self-portraits present a dichotomous interplay between vulnerability and

¹⁴¹ Beryl J. Wright, "Back Talk: Recoding the Body," in *Lorna Simpson: For the Sake of the Viewer* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1992), 12-13.

¹⁴² Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, introduction to *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), XI.

¹⁴³ Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 175.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁴⁵ Sadiya V. Hartman, "Excisions of the Flesh," in *Lorna Simpson: For the Sake of the Viewer* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1992), 55-67.

¹⁴⁶ Willis and Williams, "The Cultural Body" in *The Black Female Body*, 83-138.

¹⁴⁷ Elizabeth McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 165-66.

defiance. While the artist embodies externally imposed roles, she develops strategies to challenge their narratives. The audience is confronted with images that seem to take place before their eyes because of the privileged view and their proximity to White's body. The artist seems to be performing these roles under the objectifying gaze of the white males who have historically defined the representation of the racialized, while rejecting their authority. Her series of photographs can be read as a progression of scenes in which a Black female transitions from restricting access to her face to returning a confrontational gaze.

In *Ashaba'*: *No human can look at her directly* and *Patwah, Poignés*, White's body appears both accessible and inaccessible to the viewer. In the former, the sitter facing us is nude and her head and genitals are covered with a cloth. In the latter, White's turned-back figure is naked with her hands crossed at her back. While the conscious covering of someone's individual features is typically interpreted as objectification, it can be a means of rejecting the colonizer's gaze when used by Black female artists.¹⁴⁸ During slavery times, the Black population were considered property. Their owners had unrestricted access to their bodies and, for them, privacy was non-existent. By limiting access to her face, White protects her intimate self.¹⁴⁹ The viewer cannot see her emotions and vulnerability as she refuses to reveal them.¹⁵⁰ Her body may be put in a subordinate position but her identity will not be owned nor victimized.

Chez nous we do things like this, here! introduces a different approach to resisting the gaze. The household objects and the generic cotton dress indicate a woman who performs domestic duties. Unlike in widespread images that portray Black women as happily fulfilling their duties as maids, here there is a strong sense of disconformity. White protests by confronting the audience with a direct defiant gaze that seems to state that the viewer is not welcomed. Her expressionless face bears the gender and racial traits that were seen as the justification for discrimination and essentialist definitions of the "other." With it she weakens the authority of the colonizing gaze over her body.

White's body is fundamental to her practice. While it is the site of intergenerational traumas, it is also the place from which she attempts to heal,

celebrate her past, and make her claim to belong. The history of the Black body was marked by violent experiences.¹⁵¹ It has suffered from enslavement, domination, subjugation and confinement.¹⁵² As human property, the Black subject was defined by the productive and reproductive duties it fulfilled.¹⁵³ Moreover, it has been physically displaced and forcefully separated from its cultural roots.

In her artist statement, Karen White narrates the violent process of acculturation experienced by her ancestors. When living in England, they were denied the right to a vital component of their identity: their tongue, Patois. White writes,

My mother's tongue was not hers to own, to cultivate
or to ripen.
My grandmother's tongue was neither hers, it was all
twisted up,
Maimed and broken. And my great grandmother's
tongue was beaten
out of her, wrestled to the ground, violated and
silenced. But it was
closer to her songs, her hands and soles and her people,
closer to her-story.

Stigmatized for not being considered proper English, White did not learn to speak the tongue of her ancestors, without which she fears she cannot be fully Patois. The artist occupies a space of inbetween-ness, as she is not entirely Caribbean, nor is she accepted by the society in which she has been colonized. Racialized subjects are confronted with a dominant culture that has constructed its own identity in opposition to theirs. Their perceived difference acts as a validation for the marginalization of Black female bodies that, while highly visible, are paradoxically unrepresented in society.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, Black females in a postcolonial setting feel as if they do not belong.

The body, however, is not only the site of repression but also a place for resistance. Using self-portraiture to navigate her identity, White recasts herself in different roles of race, gender, and nationality.¹⁵⁵ In doing so, she attempts to reconcile stories of forced displacement with her current role as a Black woman in a society that often denies her humanity. It is through her body that White searches for wholeness, as she yearns to celebrate her Patois heritage in Western society. The artist describes herself as a breathing collage – an individual with

¹⁴⁸ Okwui Enwezor, *Lorna Simpson* (New York: Abrams, 2016), 117.

¹⁴⁹ Wright, "Back Talk", 16-17.

¹⁵⁰ Patricia J. Williams, "On Being the Object of Property" in *Feminist Theory in Practice and Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 281-82.

¹⁵¹ Hartman, "Excisions of the Flesh", 55.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 55-67.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Hartman, "Excisions of the Flesh," 55-67.

¹⁵⁵ Karen White, "Artist Statement," *Dissonant Integrations*, Montreal, 2016.

multiple identities who is in a constant state of being and becoming. These portraits constitute White's claim to be recognized as a human being with a nuanced identity and a rich cultural background to celebrate.

Self-portraiture takes a revolutionary dimension when it involves the Black female body. Marking instances of identity exploration, reconciliation and denunciation, White's autobiographical photographs disrupt externally constructed narratives of gender and race. In her practice, White responds to stereotypes that prevail in society's consciousness and attacks their racist discourses. By raising her voice and standing up to the status quo, White establishes herself as an agential individual. Agency is power – power to belong, to heal, to grow and to live free. When Black women become subjects of their art, they engage in a process of rewriting history.

EAHR Mentor: Joana Joachim

Bibliography

Enwezor, Okwui. *Lorna Simpson*. New York: Abrams, 2016.

Hartman, Sadiya V. "Excisions of the Flesh." in *Lorna Simpson: For the Sake of the Viewer*. New York: Universe Publishing, 1992.

McCauley, Elizabeth. *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

White, Karen. "Artist Statement." *Dissonant Integrations*, Montreal, 2016.

Williams, Patricia J. "On Being the Object of Property." In *Feminist Theory in Practice and Process*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Willis, Deborah and Carla Williams. *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002.

Wright, Beryl J. "Back Talk: Recoding the Body." In *Lorna Simpson: For the Sake of the Viewer*. New York: Universe Publishing, 1992.