

# In Between Subjects

## A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance

Amelia Jones



# IN BETWEEN SUBJECTS

This volume is a study of the connected ideas of “queer” and “gender performance” or “performativity” over the past several decades, providing an ambitious history and crucial examination of these concepts while questioning their very bases.

Addressing cultural forms from 1960s–70s sociology, performance art, and drag queen balls to more recent queer voguing performances by Pasifika and Māori people from New Zealand and pop culture television shows such as *RuPaul's Drag Race*, the book traces how and why “queer” and “performativity” seem to belong together in so many discussions around identity, popular modes of gender display, and performance art. Drawing on art history and performance studies but also on feminist, queer, and sexuality studies, and postcolonial, indigenous, and critical race theoretical frameworks, it seeks to denaturalize these assumptions by questioning the US-centrism and white-dominance of discourses around queer performance or performativity. The book’s narrative is deliberately recursive, itself articulated in order performatively to demonstrate the specific valence and social context of each concept as it emerged, but also the overlap and interrelation among the terms as they have come to co-constitute one another in popular culture and in performance and visual arts theory, history, and practice.

Written from a hybrid art historical and performance studies point of view, this will be essential reading for all those interested in art, performance, and gender, as well as in queer and feminist theory.

A feminist curator, theorist, and historian of art and performance, **Amelia Jones** is the Robert A. Day Professor and Vice Dean of Academics and Research at the Roski School of Art and Design at University of Southern California.



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*Amelia Jones*



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Just as I wrote my book *Self/Image* in the mid-2000s as a love letter to Los Angeles, so now, having returned in 2014 from 11 years abroad, I renew that proclamation of attachment (I am still in love with LA, if such a thing is possible). Without this incredible town—where I can go on walks in my neighborhood to see the Mattachine Steps in the Elysian hills (where queers clustered in the mid- to late twentieth century), watch queer films screened by Dirty Looks at the legendary Black Cat Tavern (site of protests against the LAPD's harrassment of gays and lesbians before Stonewall), cruise the queer archives at the ONE Gay & Lesbian Archives at USC, and generally hang out with the most nurturing queer community of creative friends imaginable—I would have been lost. I sought for years to return and now we're back together. Thank you city of angels.

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# PROLOGUE

Let me set up this book by beginning with a set of highly personal interpretations that make me vulnerable. These are written in the hope that they effectively “say” what they “do,” distilling the effect of the performative across making and apprehending performance by pointing to the way in which performed bodies can productively challenge normative modes of meaning making and embodiment: these performances changed me, even as my writing about them might change *you*, my reader (even if only infinitesimally). The interpretive ruptures—which function as “field notes” to my exploration of queer performance—assert the partiality of my genealogy as well as pointing to the partiality of my choice of art practices and personal examples in the hopes of foregrounding how these have informed the way I write this history. By field notes I fully intend to invoke ethnographic methods as a way of emphasizing my position as interpreter with explicitly revealed cultural and personal biases, although I wouldn’t reduce witnessing, participating in, and inhabiting performances to goal-oriented observational ethnographic approaches (and I certainly cannot claim to have a deep understanding of how to go about a sophisticated ethnographic analysis).<sup>1</sup> Rather the point is to stress my particular positionality as an observer (and sometimes participant) making notes from the field, in this case my own fields of visual arts and performance studies. Of course I focus on performances and other relational situations that opened my consciousness to the queerness of time and space, the power of bodies that don’t belong, and the frisson of intimacies that openly activate sexed/gendered identifications in the realm of the visual arts.

Beginning with openly invested interpretations is my way of framing this book to remind my readers that any historical tracing, any genealogy, is interpretive and partial. In this way, any failure to convince in my genealogy or my interpretations *begins* of course with me, but I would stress too that these are sparked by the practices and theories I engage (that is, I *owe* everything to the

texts and performances I trace here; any lacunae or distortions are admittedly due to my own particularities). My starting point is thus to assert that there is no quintessence of queer performance—its significance and value as such is relational, determined through time and in particular spaces. That said, I have been lucky to encounter myriad examples of performance and performative works, many in their live form; as I experience them, these activate bodies in ways that complicate attempts to fix identifications (including sex/gender ones, intersectionally understood) as representational, as unproblematically real or fixed—and thus as having queering effects (not as “being queer,” which would beg questions of the artists’ essential sexual orientation or gender identification).

Such essences are not the point here, and many of my interpretations will thus engage with bodies *not necessarily explicitly identified* as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, gender non-binary, genderfluid, or otherwise queer. Rather, I claim the performances I examine to have queer effects—but of course only/always in relation to my experience and interpretations. Lest this seem tautological, let me assert that to some degree all interpretations relate to the works they engage through a tightly knit circuit of significatory flow, but one in which the vicissitudes of emotion, desire, revulsion, and other often momentarily shifting vagaries are at issue, always. As many before me have pointed out, live performance has a particularly weighted relation to these vagaries, given the way in which live bodies foreground the potential of emotional exchange to interrelate (the performer and the audience can interact with spontaneous results).

Queer coming from me, then, means something like opening all identifications and meanings to relational exchanges—acknowledging that the appearance of “being” is always activated through “doing.” I begin from a framework that connects queer and performativity, even as this assumed connection irritates me and I seek to denaturalize it. My starting point with these interpretations is to assert that performances arguably become queered when actively polluted or perverted by feelings, opening the subjects (the one performing as well as the one interpreting, if indeed we can separate the two) to the obvious tug of relational desires, revulsions, and otherwise. Performance or performative images work in and on the spaces *in between subjects*.

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*My desires and intellectual interests have led me to mingle emotionally and intellectually with performances such as: Xandra Ibarra’s *Nude Laughing*, April 2, 2016, The Broad Museum, Los Angeles.*

A large audience congregates with anticipation in the downstairs foyer, immediately drawn to the sound of laughter. Ibarra, nude aside from a strange bra with protruding plastic boobs and high heels and dragging a long nylon sack behind her, burbles forth a laughter so intense that it edges over into the maniacal. A large group of spectators follows her up the stairway leading dramatically from the ground floor to the galleries on the third. The stairway seems to have been made just

for this purpose; a vaginal canal or alimentary orifice penetrating the building's center, it channels the movement of Ibarra's naked body convulsed in hilarity, with us trailing after. Bursting out of the stairway with more laughter, Ibarra then leads her audience into the bright white galleries. She proceeds to prance and stumble around the galleries dragging her sack, precariously (or deliciously) close to works of art.



FIGURE 0.1 Xandra Ibarra, *Nude Laughing*, April 2, 2016; performance still, "The Tip of Her Tongue" series, The Broad Museum, Los Angeles; photograph by Priscilla Mars, courtesy of The Broad

The sense of potential danger to the works adds to the slightly anxious feeling that serious institutional boundaries, literal spatial regulations maintained by art museums, are perilously close to being transgressed. Finally, Ibarra stops near the museum's architectural showpiece, a fabulous glass elevator, the audience gathering instinctively around her. She starts to wriggle into the sack, her gyrating motions forcing the extrusion of its contents—ballet shoes, a wig, and other accoutrements of "ideal" (white?) femininity—onto the floor. Her laughter shifts into a disturbing note of hysteria and the piece ends with her extricating herself from the fleshy bag and walking away, silent.

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Cassils' piece *The Powers that Be*, which takes place that same night at The Broad (both part of Jennifer Doyle's curated event *Tip of Her Tongue*), brings the same audience down into the bowels of the

museum to the underground parking lot.<sup>2</sup> We make our way via this trajectory downward into the repressed bowels of the institution, the parking lot being both a site of potential violence, as depicted in so many Hollywood narratives, but also the site where most Angelenos and tourists will have entered the building if they have come by car. We cluster around a kind of loose approximation of a boxing ring on the corners of which sit vintage cars, their headlights providing the “ambient” lighting for the performance, their radios blaring with its soundtrack. I cannot make out the words of the songs or spoken audio, but all convey a sense of urgency and tension as we view/listen from all sides of the “ring.”

Cassils enters, naked and gleaming, their body extremely muscular and buff, and enters into a *Fight Club* style fight to the death—with themselves. The choreography is brutal and exact, setting Cassils’ well-trained body violently against itself.<sup>3</sup> Their body slams against the floor, pushes up against the building’s columns, twists and contorts as it attacks its own limbs and torso. The terror evoked by watching a highly trained body literally try to destroy itself is painful to experience. Their body is on fire with conflict, as if internalizing the hostility of the outer world. As viewers we attach and are repelled, feeling ourselves complicit in the queer body’s self-violation.



FIGURE 0.2 Cassils, *Powers That Be*, April 2, 2016; performance still, “The Tip of Her Tongue” series, The Broad Museum, Los Angeles; photograph by Cassils with Leon Mostovoy, courtesy Cassils and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Extending the “inside/out” nature of a certain kind of queer body: Narcissister’s untitled performance for the event “Live Artists Live,” which I organized at the ONE Gay & Lesbian Archive, USC, January 29, 2015.

Black skin/white masks?<sup>4</sup> Dressing and undressing layers of clothing, masks, and identities, the artist aggressively *performs gender* as queerly raced, sexed/sexualized, fragmented, and relationally determined. While she begins as a consummately fake person (masquerading as a mannequin, with plastic mask and all), the denouement of the performance has her perform one of her classic “reverse stripteases,” in this case starting by wearing only a merkin and re-clothing herself after pulling various articles of clothing out of her vaginal canal. One is reminded of Carolee Schneemann’s classic feminist performance, the 1975 *Interior Scroll*.<sup>5</sup> But here femininity is queered. Is this partly because, as Tavia Nyong’o argues, blackness is “always already queer”?<sup>6</sup> Yetta Howard has noted that Narcissister’s performance of embodiment as an empty signifier of raced/sexed/gendered non-selfhood is a “transgression of nobody” in relation to her “African American and Moroccan Jewish ethnicity,” which “destabilizes the invisibility of dominant whiteness as ‘everybody’ ... Narcissister enacts a body of queer, crip, and ethnic difference, but it is one that has instability at its core.”<sup>7</sup>



**FIGURE 0.3** Narcissister, *Forever Young*, April 9, 2016; performance still, Fusebox Festival, Austin Texas; photograph by Bill McCullough

What/who, then, is the “real” Narcissister? The live artist seems only a conglomeration of mannequin parts (until we get the sense that she has an *interior*, but then we realize this gives us no “authentic” access to her “inner meaning” ...). Narcissister reminds us in her multiple modes of choreographed embodiment of the relationality of all (artistic/performativity) subjects, and of the brute fact that identity can never be representational (fixed for all time) but rather is only ever a process of identification and exchange. No part of the artist’s body, her actions, her enactment accomplishes a wholistic sense of a self to whom we can attach and relate ourselves.

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November 2, 2019: Julie Tolentino’s *REPEATER*, an installation with ongoing performances at Commonwealth & Council, a gallery in Los Angeles.

A room filled with too many things, all showing the signs of bodily activity: metal furniture, some of it hanging, food, incense, pulleys, ropes, and a lot of mirrors on pivoting stands ... The last day of the show, she performs with her partner of many years, Pigpen (Stosh Fila). At various points Tolentino manipulates the mirrors to reflect her body, fragmenting it across our visual field. At another point, the two of them gyrate and writhe in sacks, mingling promiscuously yet separated by the skin-like membranes—the amoeboid sacks seem to want to fuse but, unlike merging bio-life forms, can never fully engulf one another.



FIGURE 0.4 Julie Tolentino, *REPEATER*, an exhibition featuring 108 hours of performance at Commonwealth & Council in Los Angeles; closing event with Pigpen aka Stosh Fila on November 2, 2019; photograph by Amelia Jones

Then, most remarkably, they pierce each other's faces and attach themselves to each other with a metallic golden thread. This action culminates with them detaching the thread and then, blood streaming down their faces, jumping in a frenzy to hard techno beats, flinging blood and sweat as they shake their heads vigorously. The movements are frantic yet strangely mesmerizing as we find ourselves sinking into the beat of the music, of their bodies. They are together and yet excruciatingly alone (together/alone in difference but not indifferently). We are together with them, and yet forever witnessing, uncomfortable yet seduced.

(I'm reminded of another performance I witnessed these two execute at Performance Studies International #19 at Stanford University in 2013—radically opposite in tone and emotional valence but similarly collaborative in its set up—*Honey*. Here, in a durational work, Pigpen sits on a triangular scaffold and slowly ever so slowly pours honey into the mouth of Tolentino, who stands half naked below, her mouth "in the shape of the last kiss, the 'O' of death ... of ecstasy."<sup>8</sup> She gulps and gulps the seemingly endless stream of pure sugar ... I find myself simultaneously erotically drawn in yet wanting to gag. The intensity of love and the violence of disgust are joined in one act of "caring," as Pigpen seems to feed Tolentino beyond the potential of her body to consume ...)



**FIGURE 0.5** Julie Tolentino, with Pigpen aka Stosh Fila, *Honey*, 2013; Performance Studies International, Stanford, California; photograph by Amelia Jones

Tolentino's press release for Commonwealth & Council describes the 2019 work as follows:

*REPEATER* harbors deep, distant "insides" behind a reflective facade, meanwhile trailing the choppy residues of recurring disruptions. There is no "outward" performance. Tolentino's micro-actions produce tremors that keep the room changing, moving, shifting, reconfiguring. Disguised as trivial durational placeholder or a dreamer's haptic escape, these deep dives accelerate the quotidian through inquiries of inner logic, making and remaking temporary structures—bodies, constructions, fabulations, queer habitats: sparse yet generous worlds, demolished before they can fully emerge.<sup>9</sup>

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Ibarra, Cassils, Narcissister, and Tolentino produce inside-out bodies and point to the perversity of the spaces in and around these bodies (sacks, car parks, museums, masks, mirrors) and these unattainable layers of selfhood that both solicit and repel our desire and identification. They enact what in the parlance of queer performance discourse might be called a queer performativity that is specifically feminist in its interrogation of the power accruing to specifically gendered bodies. This book explores precisely the way in which such works bring to mind the discourses that label such moments with the language of queer performance while, at the same time, the discourses overdetermine how we engage the works and the bodies. We are caught in a loop of interpretive engagement, one that I will trace back through some of its forms to earlier moments wherein sexed/gendered embodiment has been linked to modes of queer doing (not being) in Euro-American culture. And so we commence this journey. Thank you for joining me.

## Notes

- 1 The term field notes in relation to these ruptures of interpretive text was suggested to me by Jennifer Doyle.
- 2 See Amelia Jones, "Hurting and Hurling the Body in Feminist Performance, a Review of 'Tip of Her Tongue,' a Performance Series at The Broad Museum, Los Angeles, 2016–17 [Curated by Jennifer Doyle]," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 28, n. 3 (London), special issue on "Contemporary Feminist Theatre and Performance" (2018), 424–7.
- 3 For the choreography Cassils worked with Mark Steger, also a performance artist and best known to the millions as the monster in *Stranger Things*—this is Hollywood after all. Cassils is also known for their previous work, as Heather Cassils, with the Toxic Titties, a late 1990s and early 2000s queer feminist performance collective coming out of the California Institute of the Arts MFA program and also including Julia Steinmetz and Clover Leary.
- 4 I am referencing Frantz Fanon's famous book investigating race in European and particularly French culture, *Black Skin/White Masks* (1952), tr. Charles Lam Markmann (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1967).

- 5 The central moment of Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*, a classic of feminist body art, involves the artist pulling a scroll from her vagina and reading it to the audience. I discuss this work in my *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1998), 1–5.
- 6 This is Nyong'o's argument in *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2019), 94.
- 7 Yetta Howard, *Ugly Differences: Queer Female Sexuality in the Underground* (Urbana, IL and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 112, 113. See also Ariel Osterweis, "Public Pubic: Narcissister's Performance of Race, Disavowal, and Aspiration," *TDR: The Drama Review* 59, n. 4 (Winter 2015): 101–16.
- 8 See Jamie Lyons, "Performance Studies International #19: Julie Tolentino / Stosh Fila HONEY," available online at: [www.jamescharleslyons.com/spectaclism/stanford-theater-and-performance-studies-stanford-taps/performance-studies-international-stanford/](http://www.jamescharleslyons.com/spectaclism/stanford-theater-and-performance-studies-stanford-taps/performance-studies-international-stanford/); accessed March 19, 2020.
- 9 Julie Tolentino, "REPEATER" Press Release, Commonwealth & Council website: <http://commonwealthandcouncil.com/exhibitions/repeater/press>; accessed March 29, 2020.



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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Performing (queer) art and theory, relationally

*In Between Subjects* demonstrates that the concepts of gender performance and queer performativity did not in any way “begin” with c. 1990 queer theory, as many tend to assume. This trajectory, rather, has a long and complex history, and I will point to the ways in which it is articulated through practices as well as intellectual discussion. *Gender is a performance. Queer (or genderqueer) is performative. Performance has genderqueer implications, putting (sexed) subjectivity and selfhood in motion. Art’s performativity attaches itself to genderqueer subjects in a relational way.* Queer artists tend towards performative methods. Queer performance marks the *apotheosis of a radical critique of liberal bourgeois values. Performativity queers art(making). Queer performativity deconstructs gender* (or, as Judith Butler famously put it, “the deconstruction of identity [in gender performance] is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated”).<sup>1</sup>

These and other related formulations have come to seem commonplace in visual art and performance studies discourses, especially in the US, permeating into the fields of popular culture. They have come to be embedded in and informative of not only academic theories of gender/sexuality, contemporary art in general, and performance art; they have also become talking points in mainstream culture, on reality television, social media, popular magazines and blogs, and beyond.<sup>2</sup> What do I mean by “gender/sexuality,” and why do I write the terms this way? Debates about how to understand the relationship between gender and sexuality, and how to theorize their meaning, value, and structure, have been extensive since the mid-twentieth century. I will tend to use gender/sexuality or sex/gender together, as does queer/feminist/trans theorist Viviane K. Namaste, in order to insist upon their coextensive role in articulating subjectivity and the impossibility of fully separating them—albeit politically it can be advantageous to tease them apart.<sup>3</sup>

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Suffice it to say that both gender and sex identifications are involved in the burgeoning of popularized versions of queer. And the relationship among terms and identifications such as genderfluid, gender non-binary, or queer and performance or a performative mode of self-presentation or display is now seen to be self-evident to the point where a fair percentage of selfie posts on Instagram and Facebook seem to pivot around an idea of gender performance in images as necessarily “radical” (as either, paradoxically, a radical assertion of “authentic” self, or a radical unhinging of gender norms).

Seeking to denaturalize these assumptions, this book traces an intellectual and art/performance history of discourses and practices circulating around the concept of gender as performance, especially those associated with experience or subjectivity relating to LGBTQ-identified people, including terms such as performativity, relationality, theatricality, queer, and trans. The focus is not on performance studies, nor on theater, but on ideas about performance and gender/sex as these have circulated in the visual arts and art world since at least 1960. I also point persistently to the narrowness of these discourses in their hegemonic forms as US-based, most often normatively white, cosmopolitan and urban, often male, and clearly linked to late capitalist and postcolonial formations in European-dominant cultures. The *critical* part of the genealogy thus signals my goal of denaturalizing the seemingly obvious and true claims of queer theory and performance theory as these have unfolded and intersected from their pre-history (I date this to around 1950) to their fully developed dominant forms (since the late 1980s).

I am originally trained in art history, and have made an investment in learning and thinking from feminist and queer theory as well as performance studies. My specific interdisciplinary allegiances will be obvious in the ways in which I see these discursive histories, and in my choices of exemplary performance and visual arts practices. This genealogy is thus assertively partial. As Édouard Glissant notes parenthetically of such genealogical attempts: “We are recapitulating what we know of these movements, in an attempt to consider how they have come into our view. And frequently we make mistakes. What is important is that we start retracing the path for ourselves.”<sup>4</sup> I hope that this particular version of the genealogies of queer and performance will spark many others.

One way of denaturalizing the claims made about queer performance today and of foregrounding my own particular participation in historicizing them is through literal disruptions in the text written as highly performative and often personal ruminations on particular performance or performative practices: this is the point I am making by beginning the book with a brief prologue dominated by textual *ruptures* which serve as “field notes” amplifying on the more academic genealogy, and which take shape through a more personal, less explicitly scholarly mode of writing that openly expresses my highly biased interpretive accounts of performance works. The ruptures are not always about performances I view as queer. They range from descriptions of my encounters with bodies that changed my understandings of sex/gender embodiment to vignettes situating my specific personal relationship to the

material at hand—in both cases foregrounding my partiality and (no doubt) my blindnesses, as well as vulnerabilities.

Another way to put pressure on these claims, written into both the genealogy and the breaks from academic argument, is to foreground practices that were ignored or marginalized at the time of their expression and in these genealogies of queer and performance discourses because of their subcultural, assertively non-normatively raced and classed, and/or extreme nature. Both of these methods are recursive, folding the arguments of the book back on themselves again and again, to enact the looping and repetitive nature of historical narrative and assignments of meaning as these are applied to cultural moments we consider queer and/or performative. These narratives are also written so as to highlight the *relationality* of determinations of signification and value, a relationality that (as we will see) itself might be said to be central to the development of concepts of “queer” and “performance” or “performativity,” and to how they work together.

This relationality itself has a history (as will be foregrounded in Chapter 3). Glissant, a key theorist of the Black Caribbean experience, of post-coloniality as well as decolonial theory, for example, makes use of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s poststructuralist concept of the rhizome, to argue:

The notion of the rhizome maintains ... the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other.<sup>5</sup>

It is precisely this immediately post-WWII development of relationality which Glissant unfurls explicitly in relation to the self/other dynamic of postcolonial relations and theories that were at their height (as with queer theories of gender performance) around 1990. This concept of relationality underlies my arguments throughout this book.

I examine relationality, as thus linked to postcolonial and rights-based political movements since WWII, intensively in Chapter 3, focusing there on social sciences theories of “interactive” or “interpersonal” selfhood along with artistic strategies of relationally activating spectators as participants in the artwork which burgeoned from the late 1950s through the 1970s. These developments provide a genealogical subtext to the 1990s articulation of “relational aesthetics,” as well as of queer performativity. As was clear in my prologue, relationality is also a concept I see activated by the works I examine, and a structure I willingly tap into through my own openly relational interpretations—I seek to *perform* my *relation* to and investments in the works I describe. To this end, I mark and even assert my own generational development as a political being raised under the explosive agitations of the US rights movements and identity politics in the 1960s and 1970s, and as an intellectual coming of age in the late 1980s and early 1990s, inspired and guided by feminism and by anti-racist and queer theory and activism, as well as the poetics of poststructuralist philosophy. Because of these

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contexts, I have also fortuitously been able to live in and with queer creative communities, bathing in the glow of what Glissant calls a poetics of relation (or relationality), where the oppositional logic of Western modernism (where “exclusion is the rule in binary practice”) is replaced by a “poetics,” which “aims for the space of difference—not exclusion but, rather, where difference is realized in going beyond.”<sup>6</sup> This context of my immersion in the discourses and practices calling for an end to the violence of this system of exclusion and “binary practice” is the very same I examine historically here, implicating myself in the genealogy I am both immersed in and seek to trace.

This book explores precisely the way in which performances such as those sketched in the ruptures in the prologue bring to mind the discourses that label such works with the language of queer performance while, at the same time, the discourses overdetermine how we engage the works and the bodies. We are caught in a recursive (relational) loop of interpretive engagement, one that I will trace back through some of its forms to earlier moments wherein non-normative sexed/gendered embodiment has been linked to modes of performative saying as doing in Euro-American culture.

### Genealogizing

Tracing a genealogy of discourses surrounding concepts of queer or gender fluidity and of performativity or performance is a way of understanding how these concepts came to be attached. To this end, this book relies on Michel Foucault’s 1971 concept of genealogy borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche, which (in Foucault’s words) “requires patience and a knowledge of details and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material … it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies”; this genealogy “opposes itself to the search for origins.”<sup>7</sup> As Foucault further elaborated this approach in 1976, it is an “attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges … to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse … to reactivate local knowledges … against the scientific hierarchicalization of knowledge and its intrinsic power-effects.” He continues to note that the key strategy for performing a genealogy is *archaeology*—the “method specific to the analysis of local discursivities,” whereby we dig deep into discourses of the time to identify patterns of thought and action.<sup>8</sup> Seeking to explore and trace the hidden histories of interrelated discourses of queer and performativity, then, I attend to local formations of knowledge, some articulated through actual performance, others in writing or argumentation, in order to historicize the co-development of a range of terms intimately related to these beliefs since around 1950 (especially in the USA, but also in the UK, and other white-dominant Anglophone contexts), including: gender, sexuality, performance, performativity, queer, theatricality, camp, relationality, otherness, transsexuality, and transgender.

I look for repeated patterns pointing to modes of belief forming the bases of queer and/or performative cultures. As Foucault might put it, my critical genealogy looks at a “coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories,” or more

specifically in this case excavates an archaeology of art practices and performances (often but not always personally experienced by me in their live form), archives, and texts—as well as chats, emails, and relationships I have (or have had) with the artists in the more recent periods I examine.<sup>9</sup> I do this in order to explore the patterns of feeling, including apparent anxieties, which motivate their articulation of what we can recursively interpret as queer modes of performativity.

As I have noted, I attempt to desubjugate ideas linking these terms both through the act of tracing and through the sections of text that interrupt the scholarly genealogy via performative interpretations or ruptures. And the book becomes increasingly ruptured—or disintegrated—by the end. In the last two chapters I thus move away from the expected genealogy of the interrelation of queer and performance to address, in Chapter 6 (“Other”), my own family’s situatedness in the structures of whiteness and North American dominance that both queer and performance theory sit within and seek to disrupt and (in Chapter 7, “Trans”) focus on variants of performances that show an awareness of but are not enacted entirely *within* Euro-American or US dominant modes of embodiment and performance—specifically from the Pacific region, and in particular performances by Māori and Pasifika people based in Auckland, New Zealand, a Commonwealth country.<sup>10</sup> (Pasifika people are those who have themselves immigrated to New Zealand, or are from immigrant families living there, with their ancestry based in other Pacific Islands, often Sāmoa or Tonga; in contrast, white colonists and their descendants are called “settlers” or Pākehā or, more colloquially, Kiwis.) By virtue of their different modes of embodiment and their mitigated relationship to Anglophone queer theory and white-dominant Commonwealth settler culture in general, these artists enact performances they often themselves call queer, trans, or otherwise connect to North American voguing, and which challenge dominant US frameworks, highlighting genderfluid or gender liminal bodies and modes of action linked to Pacific indigenous cultures’ contrasting understandings of embodied social and sexual life.

As a genealogy in the Foucauldian sense, the histories I trace here are partial, conflicted, and recursive, overlapping rather than neatly linear. They clearly narrate “in between subjects”—both subjects as in *topics* (queer, performative, performance) and as in *people* (relational exchanges that shape what we call queer culture)—without finitude. These histories have no clear origins. They are also continually crossed and disrupted by expressions, acts, images, events (from texts to performances) that do not comfortably reinforce their trajectories but, rather, if we attend to their confusing and dispersive effects, confuse the linear narratives and neat assumptions about gender/sex identification that continually work to reassert themselves. To this end the ruptures throughout the book narrating my personal engagement with performances that I perform interpretively as queer remind us that the genealogy is always what Foucault called “disorderly and tattered,” incomplete and admittedly partial.<sup>11</sup>

Performance or performative modes of expression are often strategically chosen by people in Euro-American cultures seeking to assert non-normative gender/sex identifications and registers of embodiment—artists from the margins. Why and how this

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is the case will be a subtext to the ruptures or field notes. While any cultural product has potential to spark or repulse us, performance art practices, viewed from a visual arts point of view, often seek explicitly to challenge models of art analysis that tend to repress and tame. Here I foreground performances that (through my analysis) seek to tap into rather than mitigating our fears, desires, emotions—seek to open up the messiness of temporalities that join us as “viewers” to bodies that make or made themselves in cultural spaces through the doing of performance.

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Yayoi Kusama, *Homosexual Wedding*, 1968, taking place at Kusama’s “Church of Self-Obliteration” in New York City. Pow! Groovy! A free-love enactment of genderfluid cavorting—or queer performance *avant la lettre*? Bodies covered in polka dots roil half naked in a mass of erotized flesh. Polka dotted phallic objects protrude from the wall behind,



**FIGURE 1.1** Yayoi Kusama, *Homosexual Happening* (or *Homosexual Wedding*), November 25, 1968, Kusama’s officiating of the “marriage” of Falcon McKendall and Jon DeVries at the “Church of Self-Obliteration,” rented loft at 33 Walker Street, New York City; photograph by Bill Baron

and a woman evocatively dressed in a diaphanous gown—the artist Yayoi Kusama—holds her long black hair up and looks down at the mass of bodies imperiously. Carolee Schneemann's 1963 *Meat Joy* (a choreographed bacchanal exploring the joy of eroticism in performance) is recalled, but with a "homosexual" gloss.<sup>12</sup>

Kusama's *Homosexual Wedding* narrates a "homosexuality" conjoined impossibly (or so it would have seemed in the 1960s) with the state-sanctioned institution of "wedding." Homosexual/wedding (gay/marriage): these are the mobilizing forces of the happenings' putting art in motion—all imagined and directed by a Japanese expatriate living in New York. A bold press release Kusama posted publicly in 1968 in New York City states:

This is the first homosexual wedding ever to be performed in the United States. The ceremony will be conducted by Yayoi Kusama ... Both the bride and groom will wear a fantastic "orgy" wedding gown, designed for two ... "Clothes ought to bring people together, not separate them," Kusama insists ... "The purpose of this marriage is to bring out into the open what has hitherto been concealed ... Love can now be free, but to make it completely free, it must be liberated from all sexual frustrations imposed by society. Homosexuality is a normal physical and psychological reaction ..."<sup>13</sup>

Putting aside the concept of homosexuality as a "reaction" (to what?), I am pulled into memories of the languaging and modes of embodiment of the late 1960s, which I witnessed open-mouthed/-eared as a child: Boss! Psychedelic! I'm drawn to Kusama's now dated imagery of multiple eroticized bodies. At the same time, its datedness distances me, and I start to think about who among these lovers is alive, who dead and gone (of drug abuse, complications from AIDS, or simply the travails of old age)? My knowledge of the conflicts and hypocrisy of the "free love" era, which became more evident in the 1970s, threatens to obliterate—one of the artist's favorite words—the joyousness and self-promotional gloss of Kusama's project.

Melancholy sets in. All that utopianism occurred in the same year as two epic political assassinations (Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King), pointing to the 1970s with its multiple terrorist acts and hijackings, the escalation of the Vietnam war, the gutting of American cities, the gas crisis, and widespread recession (only to segue into 1980s Reaganism, with its trickle-down violence).

It is telling that perhaps Kusama—ever keen for the eyes of posterity (and for the yearned-for attention of her art world colleagues)—instinctively reached for the "homosexual" moniker to (as we would say post-1990) "queer" her turning of art into process, her enactment of creative making

as a political gesture. In so doing, she also seems to point to her own future ubiquity in the age of social media, wherein the psychedelic texture of her work will lend itself to millions of selfies.

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Kusama's work exemplifies a shift in the visual arts toward performances of particularly identified bodies, their sexuality and gender visible and even touch-able in haptic ways, in Euro-American and Japanese art after WWII.<sup>14</sup> Activating the creator as performer (and so as *the work itself*), artists also simultaneously activated audiences, putting in question structures of value in the art world—as well as the veiled and authoritative role of the critic or connoisseur (at the time, almost always white and male). In this way they highlighted the interrelated charge of race, class, and gender/sexuality in privileging certain kinds of art makers. Turning art into a relational and performative (time-based, embodied) exchange was to articulate meaning as taking place *in between subjects*. Such works were—in complex ways I will examine throughout this book—intimately linked to energies and agitations in the rights and postcolonial/decolonial movements, which called for interrogating privilege and modernist models of subjectivity as coherent and authoritative (epitomized in the visual arts context by masculinist figures such as the artist as “genius,” the art critic, and the connoisseur).

This book traces the way in which such embodied and performance-based artistic practices connect the mutability and contingency of gendered/sexed subjectivity to an idea of the self as performed and relational. Through a fairly precise archaeological and genealogical method, I connect 1950s and 1960s artists' opening of art to performative body-oriented practices to parallel developments in linguistics, the social sciences, in political activism, and in philosophy around the same time, with a focus on the US. I trace the related assumptions and patterns, for example, in J.L. Austin's development of the linguistic “performative” as a way of “doing” rather than “saying” something; Erving Goffman's sociological concept of the self as performed in the social sphere; activists' insistence on coalitional identity-based movements putting bodies directly into forbidden social spaces (Rosa Parks in the white section of the bus; Black artists in art world settings); feminists interrogating the link between male authority and the subjugation and erasure of women; queers creating communities and relationships that defy patriarchal and state structures; and post-structuralist philosophers' pointed dismantlings of Cartesianism (the belief in the subject as a centered or sovereign self, fully agential and assumed to be normative, his “free will” transparent to his intentionality).

This book offers an intellectual and social history of these interrelated ideas—one (among many) possible ways of thinking about how we got to the point wherein “gender performance” and “queer performativity” became everyday terms in Anglophone countries (and beyond) by the late twentieth century. What do these recent phenomena carry with them from past discourses and articulations?

## Judith Butlering our way out of this

The idea of gender as a performance, connected to popular conceptions of queer (or genderfluid) identification, has become common in mainstream US articles, movies, and television shows addressing queer cultures, from magazine and newspaper profiles of artists exploring genderqueer sexualities in their work to public debates on social media and television shows starring genderfluid, nonbinary, and/or transwomen or transmen characters. Youth and popular culture are rife today with stories and images featuring genderfluid or gender nonconforming bodies: magazines such as *Teen Vogue* (in a 2016 issue) have integrated articles and commentary embracing the “rejection of heteronormativity,” depicting Jaden Smith’s Black body—self-identified as male—adorned by clothing identified as female in a series of 2016–17 advertising campaigns for Louis Vuitton. The magazine resolves this apparent paradox by a typical reliance on a contradictory idea of gender as both mutable and authentic, noting “[s]ometimes combatting the status quo is as simple as being who you are.”<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, television shows have recently featured self-identified queer, lesbian, gay, gender nonbinary, transwomen, and/or transmen characters and participants. While earlier variants, such as *L Word* (2004–9; and revived as *L Word: Generation Q* in 2019) and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, 2003–7 (reworked mid-run as *Queer Eye*, and revived as such with a new cast in 2018) present primarily lesbian and gay characters or “experts” (respectively), more recent series—including *Orange is the New Black* (2013–present), *Transparent* (2014–2019), the short-lived reality television show *I am Cait* (2015–16), the ongoing hit *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (2009–present, featuring competitions among drag queens), and the dramatic series *Pose*, which debuted in 2018 and is based on the Black and Latinx drag balls of 1980s New York City—present or represent assertively queer and/or trans characters. In these more recent shows, dialogue and narratives circulate around the concepts of gender performance, queer performativity, and genderfluid modes of self-presentation, often combined (as in *I am Cait*) with claims of attaining an authentic gender corresponding to an internal truth. Transwomen seem to be the featured figures of interest, with rare inclusion of transmale bodies or characters (in both versions of *L Word*).<sup>16</sup> This rarity parallels the general marginalization of self-identified lesbians in queer performances, a marginalization (as we will see in Chapter 5) sadly typical in the development of dominant modes of performance studies and queer theory as these came to be interrelated in the 1990s.

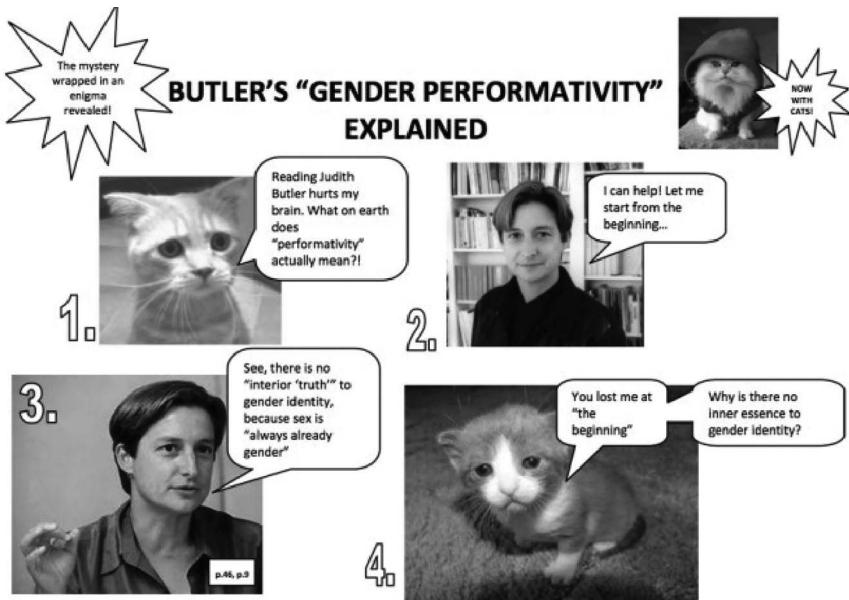
In academic and popular discourse alike, until recently, dominant discourses around gender performance have rarely mentioned the way in which the meanings attached to our sexual or gender identifications always circulate in relation to race and class, or, as Tavia Nyong’o recently put it, the “manner in which gender and sexual norms operate to reproduce systems of racial hierarchy.”<sup>17</sup> While the stories and main characters of the first version of *L Word*, *Transparent*, and *I am Cait* spring from and reinforce upper-middle-class and largely white privilege, seeming to highlight only “gender” among these identifiers by for the most part naturalizing the transparency of whiteness and affluence, *Orange is the New Black* and *Pose* expose the intimate relations

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among race, class, and gender/sexuality by virtue of foregrounding Black and Brown bodies from different social classes in the performance of gender—spurring debates at least in African American publications such as *Ebony* about the meaning such bodies pose for Black masculinity. As Nyong'o would have it, however, such bodies point to the racialization of *all* sexed/gendered bodies—shifting the meanings of *masculinity and femininity in general*.<sup>18</sup> Nyong'o's arguments mark the fact that some forms of queer theory—particularly those in the US coming from or intersecting with Black feminism, Latinx studies, postcolonial and critical race theory—have long foregrounded complex, intersectional versions of queer performativity.

To this end, one of the key goals of this book is precisely to pose a continual reminder that, as self-evident as sex and gender may seem as discrete identifications, they are always already raced, classed, and otherwise identified; they are always already articulated *in social situations, relational to other complexly identified subjects*. My foregrounding of my biased and personal interpretations (marked and limited by my specific class, race, and gender/sex affiliations) is a way of stressing this relationality. Gender performativity always works in a nexus of complex and relational, interpersonal, situational, and social interactions that enact what Jasbir Puar identifies as the “concatenations” of identification that are “unstable assemblages of revolving and devolving energies.”<sup>19</sup>

While popular culture is thus, for better or worse, hosting and replicating versions of queer that normalize it, even the complex theory informing the crystallization of the concept of gender performativity in the late 1980s is thus now common language at least in educationally middle-class cultural venues. The queer feminist theory of gender performativity—and especially the c. 1990 work of Judith Butler—has come to epitomize (reductively) this influential nexus of ideas, and has itself become mainstream to some degree. Examples abound. A 2013 cartoon on a blog by Hannah McCann entitled “Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble Explained with Cats” spoofs Butler’s theory.<sup>20</sup> A 2017 episode of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* includes a segment where Sasha Velour (aka Alexander Hedges Steinberg) riffs on Butler’s theory—describing their choosing between Marlene Dietrich and Judith Butler as their drag character. When RuPaul asks for elaboration, Sasha takes on a pseudo-intellectual locution presumably as Judith Butler, waving manicured hands in the air: “I’m understanding that in this example, hotdog stands in as a kind of social construct, a metaphor if you will, for the idea of a man, for the center of his phallic primacy.”<sup>21</sup> A 2016 episode of the Canadian feminist *Baroness von Sketch Show* features a hilarious send up of Butler’s theory through a dialogue among the members of a lesbian feminist reading group: “What we’re getting at is Butler, right?”; “But she’s not talking about performing ourselves *per se* … it’s more about iterations.”; “Yeah, within a construct of a gender binary.”; “Perpetuated by the patriarchal capitalist machine.”; “Exactly.”<sup>22</sup> And, also in 2016, a *New Yorker* profile of transfemale model and actor Hari Nef cites Nef as saying that, in relation to nonbinary pronouns, she found herself thinking: “I was like, ‘O.K., I can Judith Butler my way in and out of this.’”<sup>23</sup>



**FIGURE 1.2** “Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble Explained with Cats,” Hannah McCann, *BinaryThis* blog, 2013; screenshot



**FIGURE 1.3** Sasha Velour (aka Alexander Hedges Steinberg) explaining Judith Butler’s theory to RuPaul, episode 6 (“Snatch Game”), Season 9, 2017; screenshot



FIGURE 1.4 Baroness von Sketch Show, Judith Butler episode, 2016?; screenshot

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PROFILES SEPTEMBER 26, 2016 ISSUE

## HARI NEF, MODEL CITIZEN

*How the transgender alt-glam scenester faces the demands of being a muse and a mouthpiece.*



By Michael Schulman

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A few days before graduating from Columbia University, in May, 2015, the actress and model Hari Nef showed up at a Flatiron office building to meet Ivan Bart, the president of IMG, the agency that represents supermodels such as Kate Moss and Gigi Hadid. She had walked a few runways at a recent New York Fashion Week, but after a spate of rejections from other modelling agencies her expectations were low. “No one even would meet with



FIGURE 1.5 Hari Nef Profile, “Hari Nef, Model Citizen,” by Michael Schulman, *New Yorker* (September 26, 2016); online version, screenshot

Judith Butler can apparently be used as a verb, or used to spoof the well-meaning openness to gender critique and mutability among highly educated, privileged feminist women and, increasingly, gender nonconforming, trans, or genderfluid cross-dressers and queers as well, per the examples above, at least within certain subcultures now ratified by members of the urban intelligentsia in Canada and the US. These examples make it clear that, for the average *New Yorker* or CBC or RuPaul reader or viewer, the reference to Butler will be understood, pointing to how the moniker “Judith Butler” has itself become a signifier of gender performance or queer performativity across academic and mainstream culture. Queer feminist theory’s concept has become part of at least the North American liberal urban elite lexicon of the rights necessary to live well.

Arguably, these examples demonstrate that the concept of queer performativity has dovetailed with late-capitalist consumerism in some of its forms, providing an underlying bed of assumptions through which the queering of culture, including the gentrifying emphasis on lifestyle (particularly marked with *Queer Eye*), takes place. I leave aside for now the difficulties of parsing out the links among radical queer feminist politics, popular culture versions of gender fluidity, transgender politics and performance, and neo-liberal late capitalism (these will all surface at various points in the chapters to follow). Suffice it to say, as William Turner has commented in his 2000 book *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*, “paradoxically, queer [feminist] theory both depends on and critiques the liberalism of the twentieth-century United States.”<sup>24</sup>

The version of queer theory identified loosely with scholars such as Butler has thus become embedded in popular culture and academic theory via a late-capitalist neo-liberal gloss that troubles its most basic underlying political premise: that queer performance (or performativity) is necessarily or at least generally “subversive” to capitalist, instrumentalized versions of selfhood. These assumptions have a long history in the Euro-American psyche, and are confirmed by Butler’s own subtitle to her influential 1990 book articulating her theory of gender performance, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. As Michael Trask explores in his 2013 book *Camp Sites*, which addresses camp aesthetics in post-WWII US culture, gender performance has been habitually linked to the products and expressions of gay cosmopolitan (and to a lesser extent urban lesbian) subcultures.<sup>25</sup> He notes that a “politics of performance” arose in the immediate post-WWII period in the United States, aligning “liberalism with camp” in complex and often contradictory ways, and demonstrates the deep connections of camp and queer performance to aspects of liberal political and cultural traditions.<sup>26</sup> Trask makes clear that the patterns of thought are interrelated and have a history—co-extensively discursive and material.

## **Mea culpa: siting myself**

The question of where I place myself is key, since I write this book to denaturalize such positionality and to engage with others relationally. As is inevitable, *In Between Subjects* is structured according to my training in the study of the visual arts and

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perspective. My relationship to an educationally upper-middle-class whiteness and to the matrices of femininity/masculinity and hetero- and homo-normativities as well as queer and class identifications are central to how I see or experienced discursive pasts and choose to write this genealogy. The writing of the book itself is motivated by my emplacement within but also my sense of estrangement from the disciplines of art history, sexuality studies, and performance studies, from the models offered by feminist, queer, and critical race as well as post- and decolonial theory (all of which have serious blind spots when it comes to exploring what I feel are the most radical premises of gender-bending performance work from the 1950s to the present).

My discomfort with aspects of each of these disciplines relates to my sustained arguments about their limits throughout my career. Art history at its best is rightly motivated by historical and contextual concerns, and attention to archives and materialities, with a highly developed understanding of aesthetics as a historically specific European Enlightenment mode of philosophy linking people to the world of objects. In its worst, most boundary-guarding forms, however, art history tends to be obsessed with facile and undertheorized notions of form and context, fetishizing the *thing* over the *processes* through which it was made and continues to be displayed, archived, and interpreted. In these (and other) cases, art history fails to attend to the structural bases of art as such in colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy.<sup>27</sup> In my genealogy I work against the grain of conventional art history also in situating creative practices not as simply *following* or *resulting from* historical, aesthetic, or theoretical developments, but as *enacting* their own theorizing of gender/sex formations.

Performance studies, in contrast, tends to sustain a lively and sophisticated understanding of process and meaning as complex and intersubjective, but in some of its forms fails to address material concerns (such as the material conditions of embodiment, including labor, in which a thing or image was produced), and to articulate in a historical register how and why performative bodies tend to articulate the way they do. Here I use my art historical grounding to ask: what are the *histories* of and *strategies* at work in particular materialities of performance and performativity, including those of reception?

Having lived and worked as a foreigner in the UK (Manchester), Canada (Montréal), and New Zealand (Auckland), I came to see the historical and locational specificity of the models of queer performance I examine as starkly clear: there is, for example, no French word for “queer” nor for “performance” or “performativity”—in Québec they simply use English words with a French inflection. This dominance of English words points to the way in which the discourses around queer and performance are dominated by US/English-language texts.<sup>28</sup> Some English and New Zealand theorists of gender rightly resist queer theory in its dominant forms as hegemonically US-based, while others adopt the term but work to revise how it functions in relation to performative bodies. My experience having grown up and lived much of my life in the US on the East and West coasts was vastly expanded by 12 years of living abroad. Being foreign (albeit privileged in many

ways and with an academic job) is a way of understanding the relationship between queer and performativity differently. I bring these insights into my critical genealogy, particularly in the chapter “Other,” mostly by way of acknowledging how learning from other cultures can help highlight the limits of these discourses as these have developed and sometimes become reified in the US contexts, including academia and popular culture.

I site myself to emphasize that my genealogy is not disembodied—in this sense it breaks from the philosophical abstractions of theorists such as Foucault (positioned as he was at the apex of French cultural authority). While “the body” is no longer the most often referenced site through which theorists ponder such questions, it is probably already clear that I insist on embodiment as a key mode for theorizing and historicizing queer performance. (After all, what is a theory of gender performance or queer performativity without the body? It might be interesting to imagine one, but I wouldn’t know how to *think* it.) Like Foucault, I am determined to trace patterns from the past to understand something about where we are in the present. I seek to do this in a manner that indicates my awareness of how I am at least partially co-determining the patterns I seek, find, and analyze. The trick is to trace without limning boundaries or assuming (projecting) sovereign agential subjects, motivated origins, final stories. Maintaining the carnivalesque of the queer as much as possible.

The stakes of this critical genealogy feel intense and extreme at this moment in time. We need models both for tracing particular histories in a way that honors the complexities and nuances and contradictions of the past (as of the present) and for claiming political allegiances and aims through the narratives we lay out, hoping to compel and persuade that attempting to understand past formulations is essential to assisting in understanding current gender politics, broadly construed. Many brilliant minds have already contributed to this critical project. I am indebted to these scholars who have examined the patterns of what we now call queer visual and performance cultures in history as they have been spoken (through gossip, song, proud assertion or otherwise) and visualized, lived, enacted (through modes of disidentificatory embodiment and self-imaging, as well as habits of naming, dressing, and gesturing, loving, connecting, rejecting).<sup>29</sup>

The urgency of articulating a theory of queer that is deeply historical and theoretically rigorous, a history and theory of how performance and performativity connect to queer as an idea or a position to be claimed, occupied, lived, or contested, with reference to material pressures such as the deadly AIDS crisis (which killed Foucault and so many others) should be clear. Like any historical account worth its salt, the works of scholars and many others have traced the vicissitudes of LGBTQ expressions, coalitional identifications, activisms, and cultures, each from a particular, marked point of view as a way of emphasizing not only previously invisible patterns of thought but linking them openly to the scholar’s present pressures and concerns. Studying culture is one of the most important projects today—culture is politics enacted through creative forms of expression. We have been at least since 2000, for example, in a moment marked in the UK

and North America—bizarrely—both by the commercial embrace of LGBTQ cultures arguably as late-capitalist lifestyles in television shows such as *Queer Eye*, noted above, and by the sudden rise of far-right nationalism, with its attendant visible and violent classism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism. In Euro-American culture, queers are culturally accepted (up to a point, but less and less so in Eastern Europe) while LGBTQ people are also being terrorized (for example, with Donald Trump's sudden order to expel trans people from the military in 2017). The far right operates by seeking to cut off discourses around identity from past histories and structures of belief, thought, and embodied enactment that would highlight the connection of these structures to (for example) fascism, genocide, and war: this is what we must interrupt. This is where our interventions and historicizing energies must be oriented. Retrieving the complexities of past discourses and practices connecting queer to the enunciative force of performativity is one way of insisting that we remember the gruesome effects of patterns of exclusion and hatred as well as that we articulate effective progressive strategies of living and making from the past.

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Disco—a performance medium par excellence—came to define one highly visible version of gay masculinity as it became increasingly public in the dance clubs in US cities in the 1970s, following on the gay rights protests in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. As explored by feminist historian Alice Echols, disco developed out of Black R&B, soul, and funk, and the rise of diversely populated, DJ'd gay dance clubs; it was seen by music critics (mostly white men at the time) as encapsulating the (gay/feminine) narcissism and hedonism of US culture in the 1970s, and as sharply moving away from the perceived authenticity of the rights movement of the late 1960s (particularly Black Power). The macho funk of James Brown (seen as a performative extension of Black Power) was replaced in the mid to late 1970s by the definitively queer and ethnically diverse falsettos, repetitions, and synthetic values of disco. This new music was seen as marked (in Echols' words) by "something more reciprocal," linked to queered male bodies such as that of Isaac Hayes (who wore African robes, spandex tights, and gold chains in performances in the early 1970s) and, later, by more obviously gay or queer performers such as Sylvester.<sup>30</sup> Disco marked the queering of US urban and club cultures via performance in more ways than one.

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"You make me feel mighty real ... I feel real/I feel real/I feel real/I feel real ..." In 1978 Sylvester, otherwise known as the Fabulous Sylvester (and born as Sylvester James Jr.), issued what would become a major hit with these key—repetitive—lyrics.<sup>31</sup> Feeling real is a concept linked to the paradox of "realness," key to the queer ball culture.

Sylvester performs parodic “mighty realness,” the obverse of literal realness, energizing the queer versions of it (this is a “realness” so extremely artificial it casts the concept of the real into doubt). As Sylvester asserted, “I want to *destroy* reality when I’m performing.”<sup>32</sup> Simultaneously feeling real and destroying reality perfectly activates the paradox of LGBT identity politics that defined this moment in American culture, where the yearning for authenticity to claim public space was continually undermined by an understanding that sex/gender identity was always in process, relational, unstable, and linked to the newly invigorated concept of *queer*.

Among other things, Sylvester’s identification as a diva disco queen but also as more or less male (he asserted to Joan Rivers, who asked him if he was a drag queen, “Joan, honey, I’m not a drag queen. I’m Sylvester!”) put him at sharp odds with the reigning macho culture of urban gay masculinity.<sup>33</sup> Sylvester outed a particular underground version of queer Black gayness that was threatening not only to mainstream white culture but to disco itself, which was dominated by African American women singers and a few white (and nominally straight, if deeply campy) groups such as the Bee Gees.



FIGURE 1.6 Sylvester in the video to “Mighty Real,” 1978, showing Jewel’s Catch One; screenshot from YouTube

In the period video of the song, the images of Sylvester singing (in a range of sparkly and leathery outfits, mu mus, turbans, wigs, and a white suit) are punctuated by a group of women, white and Black, in tight shorts disco dancing—their hips thrusting in glorious lasciviousness against one another. The video was shot at Jewel's Catch One, a vibrant gay dance club run by African American radical Jewel Thais-Williams just north of South Central (on Pico Blvd).<sup>34</sup> Sylvester personified the commodified yet fully self-willed, “fabulous,” versions of drag queeneries that found their way into disco culture in the US in the 1970s and 1980s. As Malik Gaines has argued, he enacted himself across lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality, through a “transvocality” in which “racial and gender differences are brought together and performed simultaneously.”<sup>35</sup>

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Born in 1947, Sylvester (“Dooni”) James grew up in South Central Los Angeles, then a largely African American area of Los Angeles, and became active in his family’s church choir. He preferred to dress like a girl even as a child, and by the time he was a teenager, he left the judgments of the church behind; in a fit of homophobia, not unusual in the religious African American community, his mother kicked him out and he lived in various pads, including his grandmother’s. His early peripatetic life is a reminder that, as E. Patrick Johnson notes, being Black and queer can be excruciatingly trying if not downright dangerous, given that “[t]he representation of effeminate homosexuality as disempowering is at the heart of the politics of hegemonic blackness.”<sup>36</sup>

By the early 1960s Sylvester had found his cohort in the “Disquotays,” an informal group of queerly femme Black boys who, as his biographer John Gamson wrote (quoting a fellow Disquotay, Tiki Lofton), hung out in “Disquotay apartments, like one on Ninety-second and Vermont that Miss Larry had rented, and beat their faces and rat their wigs and listen to music and smoke weed and drink like the teenagers they had recently become.” Gamson continues on to note that the Disquotays, who “worked on their outfits the whole week,” competing with each other to “steal the show,” were “a cross between a street gang and a sorority.”<sup>37</sup> The group elaborated modes of competition and self-performance that come to define the New York Black and Latinx queer ball scene featured in Jennie Livingstone’s 1991 film, *Paris is Burning*, a few decades later.

But the group had its own roots in Los Angeles Black celebrity culture. The first Disquotay bash was (astonishingly) at blues/rock singer Etta James’s house on 120th Street and Athens (deep into South Central), and by that time “Dooni” (Sylvester’s nickname as a child) had become an expert on *hair*.<sup>38</sup> The Disquotays were all about elaborate drag, and competed with each other in a preview of what would become the voguing culture in big US cities in the 1980s and 1990s (to be

memorialized in the films *Tongues Untied* (Marlon Riggs, 1989), and *Paris is Burning*<sup>39</sup>). Voguing was appropriated and stylized in the music video "Vogue" by Madonna in 1990—and apparently Madonna was mentored by "the boys" at Jewel's Catch One.<sup>40</sup> The Disquotays' focus on extreme, "ridiculous," or "fabulous" versions of femininity and fun (including gay sex) aligned with Sylvester's identification of himself as a "queen" even as a teenager and his "theatrical" training as a gospel singer.<sup>41</sup>

As one of the Disquotays ("Diane") put it, "*Everybody* wanted to be a Disquotay. It was like Folies Bergère in the ghetto."<sup>42</sup> Given that cross-dressing was illegal in Los Angeles at the time, the Disquotays' partying in drag was a dangerous act of resistance, although they were far from expressing their politics through the focused activism of local groups—such as the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP, founded in 1914, or the homophile Mattachine Society, founded in the city in 1951. The Disquotays performed a very early version of what madison moore has recently examined as "fabulousness," a queer politics of style for the "beautiful eccentric," of "abundance, expression, and expansion that marginalized people embrace" fully with ballroom and then Instagram culture in the US and beyond.<sup>43</sup>



FIGURE 1.7 Sylvester (second from left) and the Cockettes (L to R: Tahara, Sylvester, Sweet Pam, Raggedy Robin, and Marquel) performing *Fairytales Extravaganza*, 1970; photograph by Fayette Hauser

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After these teen years in Los Angeles, Sylvester was encouraged by Reggie Dunnigan, an African American member of the "Cockettes," to join this group of radical gender-bending hippie theatrical performers in San Francisco, who (mostly men but some women) embraced a lifestyle of copious drugs and free love, and lived communally, while making elaborate costumes to sport in theatrical productions. Sylvester and Reggie were among the only people of color in the group, and it was not in the end a great match for the ambitious LA queen: unlike most of the other members, Sylvester could actually sing, and he had already elaborated his "fabulous" drag style that didn't always mesh with the Cockettes' grab-bag appropriations of Orientalist styles and themes. Furthermore, Sylvester was, as Gamson puts it, "a Disquotay in Cockette drag ... inimitable and unavoidably black."<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, the extreme theatricality on both sides made for a momentary synergy. As Beat poet Allen Ginsberg noted of the Cockettes, appreciatively: "Their productions were transvestite-glitter-fairie-theatre masques. Transsexual dressing is a gay contribution to the realization that we're not a hundred percent masculine or feminine ... The Cockettes brought out into the street what was in the closet, in terms of theatric dress and imaginative theatre."<sup>45</sup>

In 1971 New York finally acknowledged the energies of the Cockettes' cacophonous and shambolic productions, and the group was invited to head east for a much-anticipated series of shows in the city. They hung out with the queer not-quite-underground (by that time almost-mainstream) glitterati at parties held by the likes of Andy Warhol, but the shows themselves were widely panned, although *Rolling Stone* praised Sylvester as "a beautiful black androgynous who has a gospel sound with the heat and shimmer of Aretha's."<sup>46</sup>

Sylvester left for a solo career, and his most famous mega-hit indeed directly channeled the soul "fabulousness" of Aretha Franklin, whose 1967 hit "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" (penned by Gerry Coffin, Carole King, and Jerry Wexler)—provided the leitmotiv for Sylvester's song, "You Make Me Feel ... (Mighty Real)." While Franklin (or in another version Carole King) are belting out "You make me feel like a natural woman," Sylvester—with his sequin-clad outfits and coiffed hairdo—sings in his signature falsetto, iteratively, "You make me feel mighty real ... I feel real, I feel real ..." While Franklin and King perform as "natural" women, with the emphasis on naturalness *achieved*, Sylvester stresses the "feel": his sensation of mighty realness as attached to his performance of effeminacy is (one might say) performative in its reiterative theatricality and queerness.

Needless to say, Sylvester's theatrical "realness," particularly in the almost all-white context of the Cockettes, was also marked in racial

terms. While other members used drag to other ends and allowed their whiteness to remain invisible (Fayette Hauser, for example, used drag in her words to mitigate drug-induced psychosis as a self-avowed way of “collaging myself together”), Sylvester’s drag served to produce “mighty realness” in gendered, raced, and classed terms that provided an entrée to the (by 1971) “haute” cultural circles of Warhol and all.<sup>47</sup> With a deep understanding of music from Black gospel (from his church days) to the blues-rock of Etta James, Sylvester brought a form of musical blackness to drag and of Disquotay drag to the Cockettes and to disco.

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I have sought out queer communities over the past two decades. Queer performativity is threaded into my body and psyche, from my experiences as a child at the (white privileged) margins in predominantly African American public middle and high schools in central North Carolina, dancing to funk, to my present-day affiliations in twenty-first-century Los Angeles. I cannot escape my positioning on the side of the cultural power of whiteness. I risk(ed) the danger (even as a kid in the American South, half oblivious) of participating in what Hartman calls “the obliteration of the other through the slipping on of blackness or an empathic identification in which one substitutes the self for the other.”<sup>48</sup>

It’s the late 1980s. I’m at Jewel’s Catch One, described recently as “a spot where disco titan Sylvester could bring a full band out to play odes to black queer love.”<sup>49</sup> I’m in my new life as a married woman living in Los Angeles. While I’m certain that I am signaling a blatantly unhip heteronormativity, and a privileged whiteness I cannot escape, I also feel at home at the club. Thinking of my high school years, at the height of funk’s power to claim space, I remember why (even just the sound of Earth, Wind, and Fire and the flitting glints of light thrown off by the disco ball make me feel at home in this public space). Jewel Thais-Williams, a lesbian community builder, has created a safe yet thrilling venue for bodies of all sizes, shapes, colors, genders, sexualities, which writhe, jive, sweat, mingle, and zoom around me. I join them. Regardless of my self-consciousness as a dancer, we are funkng out, and the mood is joyous and welcoming of all.

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It’s the late 1990s and I’m at Vaginal Davis’s cabaret in West Hollywood, still haunting the spaces of queer as I find them increasingly offered to me through friendships developed in my research on performance art (queer and performance stick together in my lived experience). Vaginal Davis also channels the queer/trans Black body in performances that deliberately resuscitate queer figures from Europe’s past cabaret culture

and imagine new modes of irreverent queered embodiment.<sup>50</sup> José Esteban Muñoz has influentially interpreted Davis's gender/race crossings as "terrorist drag"—as resistant to the happy commodification of the "sanitized queen" of mainstream drag culture.<sup>51</sup>

If Dooni/Sylvester could, in 1968 Los Angeles, roller skate down the street to the Clowns Club dressed in "pigtales, A-line dress, licking a big sucker," then Davis's channeling of little-girlness and other modes of "natural womanhood" resonates not only through her own cabaret/club settings but historically with this earlier example.<sup>52</sup> This is not to mention other histories of queer and punk interventions in to the music and movie scenes in Los Angeles, such as her narration of a childhood mentorship by neighbor Jimmy Morrison, for whom Vag's sister Gracie was "the number one fag hag," helping him collect flesh for his gay liaisons; Gracie also (per Davis's various narratives) crossed over into the Hollywood industry in her work as PBX operator for star Rock Hudson, and got Vag invited to parties with the likes of Elizabeth Taylor ... We might doubt the veracity of Davis's always lively reimagined histories, but, based on Sylvester's own story, I'm willing to believe the queer underworld ran this deep and pervasively across Los Angeles social scenes at the time.<sup>53</sup>

Extending her blast into the Los Angeles art and music scene with a gallery called "The Hag Gallery," a group called the "Afro Sisters" (including Clitoris Turner, Fertile La Toya Jackson, and Davis as herself), and a zine entitled *Fertile La Toya Jackson Magazine* in the 1990s, Davis also ran clubs and cabarets as well as co-curating performance festivals with Ron Athey—which, I can attest, having attended a few, were mind-bendingly strange and cuttingly topical. My art world expanded with these networks and filiations across the queer performance and club scenes.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Davis's creative energy and erudition are internationally renowned. Her broad and astute references throughout her performances enact her brilliance and her clarion calls are many and enthusiastic: on her web page for "The Vaginal Davis Institute of HIGH Performance Art," she calls out: "Weirdos and oddballs unite. It's time that The Maladjusted Rule!"<sup>55</sup>

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Davis now lives in Berlin but continues to travel the world with her drag cabaret performances. On June 24, 2017 in Los Angeles she entertained in a classy brown shift and wig at the Broad Museum, in front of projected covers of pulp novels, manipulated with new images and texts: "Whiteys Beware! Radical Blacks Fight Back/Panther Power" is one title, over an image of a woman in 1950s hairdo who looks suspiciously like Vag herself. Part of a Nico tribute called "Warhol Icon," curated by Bradford Nordeen and Brandon Stosuy, Davis's performance monologue was the hit of the night, as noted by Barlo Perry in a review of the evening:



**FIGURE 1.8** Vaginal Davis, performance at *Warhol Icon* festival, June 24, 2017; The Broad Museum, Los Angeles; photograph by Amelia Jones, courtesy of the artist

In theory ... WARHOL ICON took place all over the Broad Museum and its courtyard, and circulation was encouraged. But when the museum doors opened at 8:30, performance artists Sheree Rose and Ron Athey, filmmaker Eliane Lima, and 200-plus revelers made a beeline for Oculus Hall and stayed put for the next two hours, worshiping at the altar of Vaginal Davis.

As Perry recounts, the performance was punctuated by gems enunciated by Davis such as:

Freud and Lacan had it all wrong. Dildo Theory is different from the Theory of the Phallus. The penis is, and always was, just one of many substitutes for the dildo. And not, I might add, a particularly reliable or attractive one.<sup>56</sup>

Touché!

\*\*\*\*\*

Queering experiences: being displaced in foreign environments, confronting our own mortality, feeling out of place as discourses and modes of communication

rapidly shift over time. Sara Ahmed writes that queer moments are moments of “disorientation,” which, citing Maurice Merleau-Ponty, involve not only “the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency and the horror with which it fills us.”<sup>57</sup> These feelings of disorientation (literally, being wrongly oriented in time and space) have motivated me over the years to apply myself to experiencing and writing about the queer performances of Asco, Bob Flanagan/Sheree Rose/Martin O’Brien,<sup>58</sup> Vaginal Davis, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Split Britches, Ron Athey, Nao Bustamante, FAFSWAG, Xandra Ibarra, Cassils, and many other extraordinary performance artists and collectives, drawn inexorably to queer performances that enact rather than suppressing or containing the confusing, messy, durational, relational, and disorienting aspects of being a person in the world.

### **Identifications “in between”**

The phrase *in between subjects* can also point to people who are “in between” or, in this context, gender nonbinary, indeterminate, fluid, and/or hybrid in ways that implicate all forms of concatenated identification into our relation to the social. Such hybridity always already works across identifications, as today’s most cutting-edge cultural theorists insist. A range of the most important and influential of these in the US context—from Hortense Spillers, Manthia Diawara, Saidiya Hartman, Daphne Brooks, José Muñoz, and E. Patrick Johnson to, more recently, Tavia Nyong’o, Joshua Chambers-Letson, Juana Rodriguez, L.H. Stalling, Riley Snorton, Omise’oke Natasha Tinsley, Stephanie Nohelani Teves, and others—are also known as critical race and post-/decolonial theorists and/or as historians of Latinx and/or African American and/or indigenous cultures. They have polemically and compellingly claimed that Black and Brown culture and blackness and brownness in general condition and define performance, performance studies, and gender/sex performance as we know them in the US and beyond.

Each scholar poses these connections in different ways depending on her or his project, but for Hartman, the relation is clear: “The affiliation of performance and blackness can be attributed to the spectacularization of black pain.”<sup>59</sup> Following Hartman, we could say that Sylvester’s “You Make Me Feel … (Mighty Real)” —with its iterative “I feel real”—theorizes another version of Black pain, overtly spectacularized through disco. By repeating “I feel real” over and over again, Sylvester evokes through the dancing and singing Black body (filmed in a queer African American subcultural space) the impossible tension between the desire for authenticity, a crucial moment for any subcultural coalition, and the openness of identification to otherness via an awareness of relationality, a tension which haunts the genealogy of queer performance and its related theories. All of this matters because an underlying theme of *In Between Subjects* is the performativity and relationality not only of gender/sex identifications, of genealogies and dominant narratives, but of

meaning itself—even of the meaning and structures of one's own identifications and sense of self, not to mention the histories and genealogies one writes and traces.

I will claim throughout the book that the relation traced or enacted between queer theory and performance is most useful when linked to or generated out of critical race and/or post- or decolonial theory—a mode of queer performance theory that has become itself increasingly dominant over the past two decades in the US and beyond. While the dominant figures in the 1990s development of theories of gender performance or queer performativity, such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, were not critical race theorists and did not actually address performance art *per se*—any more than they foregrounded gender/sex performativity in relation to racial/ethnic and class identifications—one can turn to a fairly early moment in Sedgwick to clarify the stakes of understanding the deep concatenation of identifications in how performances of gender/sex modalities actually *work*. Thus in “Queer Performativity: Warhol’s Shyness/Warhol’s Whiteness” of 1996, Sedgwick connects Andy Warhol’s glaring whiteness (in his own words “albino-chalk skin. Parchmentlike. Reptilian. Almost blue”) to his public affect of shame and his manifested shyness; she then links his shyness to a mode of generating productive meaning for queers, and of exploring “what it may mean to be a (white) queer in a queer-hating world, what it may mean to be a white (queer) in a white supremacist one.”<sup>60</sup>

Sedgwick thus foregrounds shame as a key aspect of queer identification specifically as attached to whiteness, particularly in the 1960s–70s US context in which Warhol was articulating his relationship to his pallid skin in relation to “the exacerbated race relations around urban space, civil rights, sexuality, and popular culture in the United States.”<sup>61</sup> This is the very moment that, as a white child in predominantly African American public schools in North Carolina, I experienced my own radical shame in the face of the persistent verbal and spatial violence being perpetrated against my Black schoolmates.

Through Warhol, Sedgwick expands upon her formative argument on queer performativity in an earlier 1993 article on a work by Henry James (which also has the main title “Queer Performativity”), in which she had articulated the first extended exposition on the concept. In the 1993 piece she had drawn on J.L. Austin’s theory of the performative to point to the locution “shame on you!” as the ultimate performative elaboration (doing what it says, in this case accusing someone else of shameful behavior and thus making them ashamed), connecting this locution experientially to the “experimental, creative performative force” of queer:

the main reason why the self-application of “queer” by activists has proven so volatile is that there’s no *way* that any amount of affirmative reclamation is going to succeed in detaching the word from its associations with shame and with the terrifying powerlessness of gender-dissonant or otherwise stigmatized childhood. If queer is a politically potent term, which it is, that’s because, far from being capable of being detached from the childhood scene of shame, it cleaves to that scene as a near-inexhaustible source of transformational energy.<sup>62</sup>

My attraction to queer theory and communities, as well as to performance art and its destabilizing and energizing forces, is definitely due to a similar nexus of feelings to those Sedgwick attributes to Warhol and other queers—although I did not have a “gender dissonant” childhood *per se*, but rather one of race/ethnic/class dissonance in relation to my schoolmates. And my point—inspired by the work of the critical race and post-/decolonial theorists noted throughout the book—is that my shame for being white was inevitably attached to my self-perceived failure to be able to perform myself as a socially desirable object of desire (as a friend or as a lover). I felt my disorientation, as Ahmed theorizes, on multiple levels as it foregrounded my contingency in gendered, sexed, raced, classed, and other identifications. This range of feelings is *not* the same as those shameful yet creative affects “cluster[sing] intimately around lesbian and gay worldly spaces,” which Sedgwick is rightly at pains to identify in reminding us that general feelings of social embarrassment or awkwardness are not equivalent to the challenges faced by openly LGBTQ-identified people. It is connected more to her insight about one’s personality being defined by “the highly individual histories by which the fleeting emotion of shame has instituted far more durable, structural changes in one’s relational and interpretive strategies toward both self and others.”<sup>63</sup>

Most importantly, Sedgwick points to the way in which care for others is the best result that comes from the “childhood sense of shame” that accompanies being a strange and out of place person (or, more explicitly, being queer). This care for others I have seen time and time again enacted as central to the binding power of queer performance communities—and as a disoriented person, this is another large part of what has drawn me to these communities and the performance works I explore here and which I thus continually connect to the *relationality* they foreground and solicit. Sedgwick notes that “shame on you” functions via “the level of the relational grammar of the affect of shame itself.”<sup>64</sup> It is for this reason that relationality plays a key, if in some ways oblique, role to the discursive terms foregrounded in the more obvious chapters where I trace the rise and intertwining of ideas of performativity and theatricality, as well as gay/queer, other, and trans identifications. Oblique not because less relevant but because relationality cuts diagonally through and connects all of the major terms that structure the book—in this way I repeatedly enact the way in which queer and performance resonate together through the relational (as well as the processual, but this latter is directly examined in Chapter 2 “Performativity”). Sedgwick’s insistence on a relational model of how queer performativity is experienced and understood *in between* subjects is central to the way I elaborate this genealogy—as an observer of but also a participant in the relations that constitute the queer performative.

### **Relationality, or “in between subjects”**

As my prologue, dominated by opinionated interpretations in the extended field notes, makes clear, this book is both a genealogy and a polemical argument. It seeks

to trace interrelated discourses of queer and performance while also asserting a model of relationality to rethink how we understand the terms, as well as the performance works we attach to them. Relationality foregrounds the structure defining self-other and self-art correspondences but it is also a useful term to signal an awareness of our contingency on others: for example, I allude throughout the field notes to my own experience of contingency through witnessing queer (or queer-ing) performances, as well as to the fragility of my “orientation” in relation to the bodies and theories I encounter.

Relationality conditions the larger structures I explore in this book—both those adopted and furthered in the more enticing variants of queer performance theory and practice, and those underlying my own relationship to performances and to the components of this genealogy. This becomes starkly clear when I reveal my own familial relations to social sciences models (in Chapter 3 “Relationality”), as well as to the particular modes of embodiment I inhabit as an educationally privileged white American (in Chapter 6 “Other”). Relationality is overdetermined throughout: it is played out both between me (as viewer/interpreter) and performers, as it will be between readers (as interpreters) and my text. The relationality I am foregrounding, particularly through the interpretive field notes, is explicitly aimed at making clear the desiring, contingent, and intersubjective nature not only of understandings and experiences of gender/sexuality but of performance art works and of meaning and value in general.

Édouard Glissant puts this situation one way, arguing for a poetics of relation that brings together a performativity of meaning with a politics of difference. This is a relationality in which “each and every identity [including the meaning of performance works, I would argue] is extended through a relationship with the Other”—such that meaning is “no longer completely within the root but also in Relation.”<sup>65</sup> Performance philosopher Kelly Oliver adds to this insight by arguing, through a feminist new materialist intellectual framework but one also embedded in structures of performance and relationality, that

[i]nterpretation is impossible without imagination ... [W]e are psychically alive by virtue of our relations. And without acknowledging our fundamental ethical dependence upon otherness through which we become ourselves, we lose our innovative capacities. Without imagination, that divine space created between people, we lose our ability to represent our experience.<sup>66</sup>

Both Glissant and Oliver (and earlier thinkers of embodied doing such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty) invoke the relation between self and other as key to understanding the implicitly or explicitly performative fluidity and contingency of meaning and identity in general—the way in which the understanding of a performance (or a person!) is equally relational, bringing together the complexities with which we define ourselves in complex psychic embodied ways through open-ended engagements with others.<sup>67</sup> Glissant’s most provocative

phrasing of this relationality, which counters Hartman's concern noted above of the inherent dangers of appropriating otherness, states: "Sometimes, by taking up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself."<sup>68</sup> This is a consummately generous way of looking at the possibility of relating intimately as an audience member to performing bodies or as a reader to theories articulated by another.

Relationality is another way of talking about what we used to (in the heyday of applying psychoanalytic frameworks to cultural analysis) explore in terms of the pressures exerted by *desire* and *identification*, and what is now more often explored as *feelings* or *affect*. Per Sedgwick and Sylvester, *feeling* is central to queer and performative expressions of gendered/sexed selfhood.<sup>69</sup> Attending to feeling troubles the tendency in discussions of gender/sex formations to assume (as Muñoz puts it) "identitarian models of relationality," allowing performative structures of "being and becoming" that resist the fixing of simplistic modes of identity politics while retaining a rigorous understanding of all bodies and subjects as multiply identified (and identifying).<sup>70</sup>

There are several other subthemes signaled by the title and premise of this book, written under the sign of political crisis across the world's self-proclaimed democracies and in an age of "fake news," undermined "realities," and, in the age of COVID-19, virally induced anxieties around social contact. Sylvester's spectacularized, performative "I feel real" would be a place to begin to maintain a rigorous skepticism toward claims of "truth" or "authenticity" while also understanding the importance of distinguishing between actual lies and never-simply—"true" locutions that nonetheless compel belief and allegiance because they honor historical facts and/or the agreed-upon values that structure the parts of our culture that progressives wish to maintain in order to secure a more just society. In this context, I stress three major beliefs motivating my writing of this book: first, that it's worth seeking to come to recognize the "real" of oneself in relation to the histories one cares about—albeit this real as always mobile and contingent (that is, relational, dependent, feeling, and ultimately never fully knowable); second, that it is crucially and even life-sustainingly important to labor to retrace histories of past debates, ideologies, and structures of belief in order to make sense of what is happening in the present, so as to inform (if in ever so tiny ways) what will/might/can happen in the future; third, and finally, that beliefs about race, ethnicity, class, and other identifications always "color" the performance of gender and sexuality to its rhizomic roots (as Glissant might put it), and vice versa, and that colonialism and slavery (with their attendant forces, including capitalism, industrialism, civil war, and diaspora, all of which have contributed to shaping the violent, xenophobic regimes developing around the globe today) have everything to do with how we experience gender and sexuality in the US and beyond in this twenty-first century moment.

These identifications are not additive, but co-constitutive. In his 2003 book *Appropriating Blackness*, E. Patrick Johnson notes,

[r]acial performativity informs the process by which we invest bodies with social meaning ... blackness offers a way to rethink performance theory by forcing it to ground itself in praxis, especially within the context of a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, homophobic society. Although useful in deconstructing essentialist notions of selfhood, performance must also provide a space for meaningful resistance of oppressive systems.<sup>71</sup>

And we certainly need models of resistance today.

Perhaps my ultimate point in attending to the historic genealogies relating to the development of the theory and practice of queer performance and performativity will be something like this: it is by attending to the relationality of all meaning, a relationality exposed in the praxis of theories of performativity and queer identification (as raced, classed, located if disoriented), that we might be able to offer something like what Hartman identifies as “redress,” a performative function (she argues) linked to the creation of a “context for ... transforming need into politics.”<sup>72</sup> Relationality—intimately linked to “queer” and to “performance”—is the key structure through which we take responsibility for our beliefs, statements, interpretations (of bodies, of texts, of political situations). *In Between Subjects* is not about a pre-postmodern assertion that a “real” pre-exists our interpretations of it, or the corollary assertion that, if we could only retrieve some past “real,” we would return to some nostalgic heyday of leftist bliss or white supremacist “greatness.” To the contrary, as Sylvester seems to have understood, “I feel real” must be asserted again and again and again as a way of continually claiming our right to negotiate meaning in the social sphere, precisely by being aware of how things *feel* to us, as embodied (and in his case dancing and singing) subjects. Feminist and performance and queer and critical race and decolonial theory and practice all acknowledge this in different ways.

Feelings *seem* consummately real—when extreme, they consume us as if they “are” the world; we can see and feel nothing else. The danger is in fully acceding to this illusion (a spectacularization that can be deadly). Our consensus about the meaning of facts (performative and relational as all meanings are) has to be socially and relationally confirmed among and “in between” subjects, over and over again. Without an acknowledgment of those structures through which meaning is negotiated and confirmed, highlighted in various ways in performance and queer and feminist theory, we might just be lost to a world in which feelings, not fully acknowledged as such, are thus often asserted as fact. This paradox of the real is happening now.

## Notes

1 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 148.

2 A recent article by Molly Fischer offers a good overview of some of the popular versions of Butler’s theory in particular; see Fischer, “Think Gender is a Performance?

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- You have Judith Butler to Thank for that,” originally published in *New York Magazine* (June 13, 2016); available online at: [www.thecut.com/2016/06/judith-butler-c-v-r.html](http://www.thecut.com/2016/06/judith-butler-c-v-r.html), accessed November 21, 2017.
- 3 Namaste uses the terms “sex/gender relations” and “sex/gender system” in their “Tragic Misreadings: Queer theory’s Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity,” *Queer Studies: Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology*, ed. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York, NY and London: NYU Press, 1996), 183–203.
  - 4 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (1990), tr. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 48.
  - 5 *Ibid.*, 11.
  - 6 *Ibid.*, 82.
  - 7 Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1971), *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1984), 76–7.
  - 8 Michel Foucault, “Society Must Be Defended,” tr. David Macey, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York, NY: Picador, 2003), 10–11; based on Foucault’s lectures at Collège de France in 1976, first published in French in 1997. On archaeology see also Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (1969), tr. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1972).
  - 9 Foucault on genealogy in “Society Must Be Defended,” 8.
  - 10 The term is spelled variously: Pasifika or Pasefika; I will use the first spelling, which is the most common. I am indebted to Pasifika art historian Caroline Vercoe for pointing to the most useful term in such contexts.
  - 11 Foucault, “Society Must Be Defended,” 10.
  - 12 A related film of Yayoi Kusama from 1967, made by Jud Yalkut and called *Self Obliteration*, is even more reminiscent than the photographic images of the epic work of Carolee Schneemann from the same period—the latter artist’s 1967 *Fuses* echoes strongly with Yalkut’s vision of Kusama and friends, shaped through Kusama’s overriding psychedelic aesthetic at the time. The film shows the artist covering animals, trees, and rocks with dots, followed by a sex-drenched happening with an orgiastic play of body painting, tying, wrapping, and multi-racial sex. A Black male body, covered in white spots and trussed, is whipped lightly with a rope; a hand then a corn cob penetrates a woman’s vagina; a man (?) thrusts his crotch against another’s body; a white man’s cock is painted with dots. Kusama reappears, face painted blue and arms covered with blue spots; she covers the man’s crotch with dots, including the pantyhose on his penis, which is then inserted playfully into another person’s anus, connecting the two with a limp relational skein of fabric. Bodies literally merge into one another through the unifying network of dots.
  - 13 Yayoi Kusama, “Homosexual Wedding,” Press Release from “Church of Self Obliteration,” 31–3 Walker Street at Church, New York City, 1968; reprinted in Amelia Jones, ed., *Sexuality* (London: Whitechapel Gallery and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 102–3.
  - 14 I address these shifts and the Gutai group at length in Chapter 2, “The ‘Pollockian Performative,’” in *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 53–102. On Kusama’s move to the US in the 1960s see Vincent Pécoil, “Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World,” tr. Simon Pleasance, *Yayoi Kusama* (Paris: les presses du réel/janvier/Studio Kusama, 2001), 47–52.
  - 15 Lauren Duca, “Jaden Smith Continues Smashing Gender Norms in a Midi Skirt,” *Teen Vogue* (February 6, 2016), available online at: [www.teenvogue.com/story/jaden-smith-skirt](http://www.teenvogue.com/story/jaden-smith-skirt); see also Véronique Hyland, “Jaden Smith Has His Eyes Wide Shut in New Louis Vuitton Ads,” *The Cut* (January 4, 2016), available online at: [www.thecut.com/2016/01/jaden-smith-louis-vuitton-ad-campaign.html](http://www.thecut.com/2016/01/jaden-smith-louis-vuitton-ad-campaign.html). Both accessed November 22, 2016.
  - 16 With a female- and lesbian-identified actress (Daniela Sea) playing the transman in the first version, and a transmale (Leo Sheng) in the second.

- 17 Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2019), 4.
- 18 Ibid., and see Michael Arceneaux "Why Jaden Smith in a Dress Is No Affront to Black Masculinity," *Ebony* (January 6, 2016), available online at: [www.ebony.com/style/why-jaden-smith-in-a-dress-is-no-affront-to-black-masculinity-333#ixzz3zPmBaSEu](http://www.ebony.com/style/why-jaden-smith-in-a-dress-is-no-affront-to-black-masculinity-333#ixzz3zPmBaSEu); accessed November 22, 2017.
- 19 Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 195.
- 20 Hannah McCann, "Judith Butler Explained with Cats," *BinaryThis* (posted May 23, 2013), available online at: <https://binarythis.com/2013/05/23/judith-butler-explained-with-cats/>; accessed May 8, 2020.
- 21 Episode 6 of *RuPaul's Drag Race* season 9 (2017). Thanks to Julia Bryan Wilson for bringing this episode to my attention.
- 22 See *The Baroness von Sketch Show*, Judith Butler episode, 2016?; available at: [www.facebook.com/baronessvonsketchshow/videos/vb.1615867245400520/1684325801887997/?type=2&theater](http://www.facebook.com/baronessvonsketchshow/videos/vb.1615867245400520/1684325801887997/?type=2&theater); accessed April 1, 2017.
- 23 Michael Schulman, "Hari Nef, Model Citizen," *New Yorker* (September 26, 2016); available online at: [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/09/26/hari-nef-model-citizen](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/09/26/hari-nef-model-citizen), accessed December 18, 2017.
- 24 William Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000), 17.
- 25 Michael Trask, *Camp Sites: Sex, Politics, and Academic Style in Postwar America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).
- 26 Ibid., 13.
- 27 I critique art history in relation to performance studies in my essay "Live Art in Art History: A Paradox?", in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. Tracy C. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 151–65. I am also writing a book of manifestos on these points, with the provisional title *Creepy Feminism, Ethnic Envy, and the Contemporary "Global" Art Complex*.
- 28 Ellen Suneson, a scholar from Stockholm, has pointed out to me (in an email of May 4, 2019) that this is the case in Sweden as well.
- 29 See especially E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke U. Press, 2003), on how "[r]acial performativity informs the process by which we invest bodies with social meaning," 9; Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), on gossip and hidden queer cultures in the 1950s US; and Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), which historicizes how lesbians saw and defined themselves in the context of WWI.
- 30 Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2010), 10–11, 23, and on James Brown and Isaac Hayes, see 19–20 and 25.
- 31 Sylvester, "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)," 1978; available online at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ifri13Upytb4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ifri13Upytb4); accessed April 24, 2018.
- 32 John Gamson, *The Fabulous Sylvester* (New York, NY: Picador/Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 92. Sylvester died of complications from AIDS in 1988. For another brief overview of his career (the accuracy of which is not clear, though much of it seems parsed from the Gamson biography) see "My Queer Agenda," no author listed other than "Stories & opinions from a black queer island guy" (February 14, 2014), available online at: <https://myqueerto.com/2014/02/17/sylvester-no-regrets-no-apologies/#more-555>; accessed April 25, 2018.
- 33 Sylvester to Joan Rivers, cited in Echols, *Hot Stuff*, 144. As far as I have ascertained, Sylvester considered himself male and is generally designated as "he."
- 34 See C. Fitz's 2016 documentary *Jewel's Catch One* on the space at 4067 West Pico Boulevard; Fitz traces the racism and homophobia that Thais-Williams challenged

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- with her founding and nurturing of the club and its denizens. I am indebted to Fitz for giving me access to the film before it was widely aired.
- 35 Malik Gaines, *Black Performance on the Outskirts of the Left: A History of the Impossible* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2017), 175.
- 36 Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 51. Later in this chapter on Black nationalism he points out more specifically, “[t]he 1960s Black Nationalist and Black Arts movements provided the cultural backdrop for the establishment of blackness as antigay,” 61.
- 37 Gamson, *The Fabulous Sylvester*, 1–2, 3, 5.
- 38 Gamson writes: “Dooni, who would later become the Fabulous Sylvester, would do your hair and move on down the line, wig, wig, wig, wig, wig.” *Ibid.*, 2.
- 39 As well, the 1968 film *The Queen* documented an earlier version of the voguing scene, a camp beauty pageant organized in New York City in 1968 by Flawless Sabrina (born as Jack Doroshow). Crystal LaBeija, founder of the House of LaBeija featured in *Paris is Burning*, is a fierce presence in *The Queen* and Nyong’o theorizes LaBeija’s appearance as an “afro-fabulation” in *Afro-Fabulations*, 2–5.
- 40 Jewel Thais-Williams notes that Madonna learned voguing at her club in Fitz, *Jewel’s Catch One*.
- 41 Gamson cites Sylvester noting that one of the choir leaders “turned me out” (had sex with him) when he was a youth and following that by: “I was a queen even back then, so it didn’t bother me. I rather liked it,” *The Fabulous Sylvester*, 23.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 43 madison moore, *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 58. This book is itself “fabulously” written. Although the claims for the “inherently queer” aspects of “working a look” arguably neglect the roles of the subconscious and of ideology in our performance of self, it’s a literary performance of queer fabulosity.
- 44 Gamson, *The Fabulous Sylvester*, 58–9.
- 45 Allen Ginsberg, quoted in Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray: Art + Textile Politics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 46–7; I am extremely grateful to Bryan-Wilson for sharing this book in proof stage with me: it offers the best overall analysis of the Cockettes’ practice that I know of, at least until the launch of Fayette Hauser’s *The Cockettes: Acid Drag and Sexual Anarchy, 1969–1972* (Port Townsend, WA: Process Press, 2020).
- 46 Quoted in Gamson, *The Fabulous Sylvester*, 77, citing from Maitland Zane, “Les Cockettes de San Francisco,” *Rolling Stone* (no date or page numbers given).
- 47 Fayette Hauser, an early and long-term member of the group, cited by Julia Bryan-Wilson from an interview with the author, in *Fray*, 63.
- 48 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7.
- 49 As described by August Brown, “The Story of L.A. Club Jewel’s Catch One,” *Los Angeles Times* (May 2, 2018), available online at: [www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-ms-jewels-catch-one-documentary-20180502-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-ms-jewels-catch-one-documentary-20180502-story.html); accessed July 30, 2018.
- 50 The best—though hilariously unreliable—source on Vaginal Davis’s career is her website: [www.vaginaldavis.com/](http://www.vaginaldavis.com/); accessed July 31, 2018.
- 51 José Esteban Muñoz, “‘The White to be Angry’: Vaginal Creme Davis’s Terrorist Drag,” in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 99.
- 52 Mark Bradford produced a beautiful installation work commenting on Sylvester via his 1988 disco hit (the year Sylvester died of complications from AIDS); called *Deimos*, 2015, the piece was installed in a former roller skating rink, and included a video showing the wheels of defunct skates meandering across the screen to a warped version of Sylvester’s hit (see: <https://vimeo.com/148954353>; accessed September 7, 2018). Alpesh Patel, who kindly alerted me to this piece, writes a brilliant

- reading of it in “Queer Exhaustion and Radical Vulnerability,” paper presented at *New Black Queer Audiovisuals Symposium*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, Florida, June 2018.
- 53 See Vaginal Davis, “Late Winter, Almost Spring,” in *Cruising the Archive, Queer Art and Culture in Los Angeles, 1945–1980*, ed. David Frantz and Mia Locks, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles, CA: ONE Gay and Lesbian Archive, 2012), 182–5.
  - 54 See Stuart Timmons, “I’m Just Your Basic Black Blond Bombshell: Wiping Out on the New Wave of Drag,” featuring Vaginal Davis, *The Advocate*, California Regional Supplement n. 509 (October 11, 1988), 13–14. I met Vaginal Davis through Ron Athey, whom, in turn, I had met in the early 1990s via my friendship with Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose, pioneers in BDSM performance art. I cannot remember how I came across Bob and then Sheree, and Bob is no longer around to help me out. The “origins” of filiations sometimes disappear in the mists of time ....
  - 55 Vaginal Davis website, “The Vaginal Davis Institute of HIGH Performance Art” page, available online at: [www.vaginaldavis.com/new.shtml](http://www.vaginaldavis.com/new.shtml), accessed April 24, 2018.
  - 56 Barlo Perry, “Vaginal Davis Plays L.A.,” *ParisLA* blog (June 26, 2017), available online at: [www.paris-la.com/vaginal-davis-plays-l-a/](http://www.paris-la.com/vaginal-davis-plays-l-a/); accessed April 24, 2018. I was present at the performance. See also the press release for this series of events, available online at: [www.thebroad.org/sites/default/files/pressroom/2017\\_summer\\_happening\\_s\\_press\\_release.pdf](http://www.thebroad.org/sites/default/files/pressroom/2017_summer_happening_s_press_release.pdf); accessed July 24, 2018.
  - 57 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 4, citing Merleau-Ponty from *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), tr. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 296.
  - 58 See my essay on the collective work first between Flanagan and Rose, then after Bob’s death, between Rose and O’Brien, in “Rose/Flanagan/O’Brien: The Aesthetics of Resurrection,” *Rated RX: Sheree Rose with and after Bob Flanagan*, ed. Yetta Howard (Columbus: Ohio State Press, forthcoming).
  - 59 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 22.
  - 60 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity: Warhol’s Shyness/Warhol’s Whiteness,” in *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, ed. Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Esteban Muñoz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 135. She is citing Warhol from his book *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 7–10.
  - 61 Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity: Warhol’s Shyness,” 139.
  - 62 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*,” *GLQ* 1 (1993), 4.
  - 63 Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity: Warhol’s Shyness,” 138, 142.
  - 64 Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity: Henry James,” 4–5.
  - 65 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11, 18.
  - 66 Kelly Oliver, “What Is Transformative about the Performative? From Repetition to Working-Through,” *Studies in Practical Philosophy* 1, n. 2 (Fall 1999), 150.
  - 67 See Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s “The Intertwining—The Chiasm,” *Visible and the Invisible* (1964), tr. Alphonso Lingis, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130–55.
  - 68 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 18.
  - 69 See also Ann Cvetkovich on how shared feeling can solidify communities in mutual understanding in her book *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
  - 70 José Esteban Muñoz, “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position,” *Signs* 31, n. 3 (2006), 677.
  - 71 Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 9.
  - 72 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 52.

# 2

## PERFORMATIVITY

“Performative” and “performativity” are terms deployed across the art world, the arts and humanities in academia, and increasingly often in the popular print media as well as social media, where self-imaging of one’s eroticized body is now often conflated with “performing gender” as a queering practice.<sup>1</sup> Vis-à-vis print media, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times* recently drew on the performative to characterize Donald Trump’s public performances:

When word and deed become one—when speaking is acting—we are often in the presence of what philosophers of language call “performative speech acts,” as opposed to “constatives.” Part of what’s so disorienting about Trump is that he uses speech in a relentlessly performative way ... [P]erformatives are simply not truth-evaluatable.<sup>2</sup>

And, thanks to arguments published in the late 1980s and early 1990s by feminist philosopher Judith Butler and feminist literary critic Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, by the early 1990s the term “performative” or its post-Austin variant “performativity” were becoming commonplace in feminist and queer academic discourse and performance studies.<sup>3</sup>

It is striking that the concept of the performative, a term invented by the linguistics professor and analytic philosopher J.L. Austin in a series of originally fairly obscure 1955 lectures at Harvard University, found its way 40 years later first into academic and then mass media discourses on gender fluidity and identification, as well as coming to serve as a shorthand term for referring to process-oriented or queer-identified art practices (not to mention Trump’s capacity to enunciate untruths). Ultimately the term is seen to define the condition of living in a late-capitalist world in which the self is endlessly performed in the social sphere. This chapter will explore two shifts since the 1950s linked to the idea of

the performative. We have now moved towards viewing subjectivity itself (in the words of performance studies scholars Rune Gade and Anne Jerslev) as performative, or as “a question of *doing* rather than *being*” wherein “[b]ecoming a subject depends not only on being recognized and acknowledged but every bit as much on being *seen doing*.<sup>4</sup> And we have transitioned towards viewing this processual subject as linked to genderfluidity or gender nonconformity and sex radical practices.

## 1950–2018: a brief contextual historiography of the performative

Butler proclaimed already in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble* that “identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”<sup>5</sup> And by 1993 the term’s ubiquity in discussions of gender and culture had been established; per performance theorist Jill Dolan that same year:

The proliferation of performative metaphors [across disciplines] is prompted in part by post-structuralist vocabulary that refuses a notion of inherent, essentialist ontology, but that suggests instead a constructionist notion of identity as anti-metaphysical … “Performativity” as a metaphor is used increasingly to describe the nonessentialized constructions of marginalized identities.<sup>6</sup>

By the early 1990s, then, the segue from analytic philosophical models connecting modes of speech to particular kinds of cognitive experience in 1955 to cultural concepts in which questions of identification are inherent to any form of performative self-enactment already seemed natural. By 2000 it was increasingly defined as inevitable. Jon McKenzie in *Perform or Else* (2001) thus explored the disciplining aspects of performance (as applied, for example, in late-capitalist corporate contexts) in relation to queer, feminist, and poststructuralist ideas of performativity, noting:

At the crack of millennia, performativity guides innumerable processes, ranging from the intricacies of class, race, ethnic, gender, and sexual identification to the large-scale installations of technologies, organizations, and cultures … [T]he age of the world picture [in Martin Heidegger’s theory of modernity] is becoming *an age of global performance*.<sup>7</sup>

It was hard to imagine with the first recuperation of performativity into debates about performance and gender around 1990 that, by the 2000s, performativity would become either a keystone for a new episteme (postmodernism) or even a point of reference in the mass media. Tellingly, by 2001 McKenzie’s arguments take for granted that we know what performativity is, that it is somehow

implicitly connected to questions of identity, and that it defines an entire new postmodern age of “global performance.”

How did we get to this place where performativity could, in the hands of an astute intellectual historian and performance theorist such as McKenzie, become the trope of a new era? While McKenzie passes glancingly by feminism and queer theory in his book, he nonetheless acknowledges the suturing of performativity to identity politics movements in this quote here. How did gender (and other aspects of identification) get attached so firmly to performativity? This is largely due to the huge impact of several key texts by Butler and Sedgwick from 1988–95, texts translating Austin’s otherwise fairly arcane linguistic theory of the performative into a description of queer self-enactment.<sup>8</sup> While the performative had already been debated hotly between philosophers John Searle and Jacques Derrida in the 1970s and 1980s (as I examine below), Butler and Sedgwick nurtured the passage of performativity into nuanced models for understanding gender as a performance or, otherwise put, for articulating the performativity of gender and sexuality. Seeking to articulate models to explicate this new concept of gender performativity, Butler and Sedgwick aligned these most often with bodies perceived to be queer. And, reciprocally, through their arguments, bodies perceived as gender performative came to seem to epitomize queerness.

The suturing of queer politics or identifications and performativity in queer feminist theory of the 1990s has been taken up particularly in discourses on and practices of contemporary visual art and performance (where bodies are visible to be seen as performing gender), even more so than in performance studies proper, where the intersection of ethnographic, critical race, and gender studies models have produced a different picture. This slightly different trajectory has thus also conditioned our understanding of Austin’s concept—specifically nuancing the role of performativity in anthropological discourses as these have informed performance studies, cultural studies, and ethnic studies in anglophone scholarship. In these forms, performativity has come to play a key role in the study of modes of embodiment and empowerment within non-European-based or diasporic cultures (such as indigenous and African American or Black studies).

As Dolan suggests, performativity puts in play “a constructionist notion of identity as anti-metaphysical, emphatically material and historical, constantly refashioning itself in various contexts and configurations of reception.”<sup>9</sup> Performativity in this way comes to “perform” as a shorthand reference for the turn towards an understanding of culture and selfhood as in process, relational (or intersubjective), fully marked in terms of a range of identifications—or, perhaps more accurately, for a *kind* of cultural expression that puts these qualities in motion. Performativity thus becomes a catch-all for qualities associated both with postmodern decentering of subjectivity and meaning and with enactments and experiences of the sexed/gendered selfhood. Performativity is in this sense intimately related to relationality. As Gade and Jerslev conclude in their study of

“performative realism” in art, “[t]o be is to perform *for* someone … Becoming a subject is thus a *relational* matter.”<sup>10</sup>

Due to Butler’s and, to a lesser extent, Sedgwick’s outsized impact on and role in forming these discourses, for a long time those adopting the term performativity most often isolated out gender/sexuality in relation to the model of processual subject formation it opened up—this is in spite of simultaneous critical race and Black feminist theorists’ assertions that sex and gender are always already raced, classed, and so on. Notably, Manthia Diawara (based in the US) deployed performativity in her 1992 article “Black Studies, Cultural Studies: Performative Acts,” where he argues for a “study of the ways in which Black people, through communicative action, created and continued to create themselves within the American experience,” one in which “[e]mphasis on hybridity, cross-over, and the critique of homophobia yields some tools with which to check the regressive consequences of any nationalism.”<sup>11</sup>

Diawara’s early assertions, however, were largely marginalized by (white) academic queer theory: until the 2000s, the exclusionary models emphasizing gender/sex through a neutralizing but inherently “white” lens, most often springing off of Butler’s work, were dominant. But as a concept and a linguistic form of action, the performative, in fact, has always been intimately connected to imagined and experienced identifications including race and ethnicity, whether or not its proponents acknowledged this point. This is in spite of the fact that the term developed from the 1950s into the 1970s as a linguistic and philosophical concept in parallel with the burgeoning of political activism around the identity-based movements in the US and anticolonial agitation among the remaining political colonies of Europe (for example, the Indian sub-continent’s break from British control in 1947 and the African nations’ surge towards independence around 1960). Some scholars have recently begun to trace these connections. For example, Craig Pearson has historicized the “theatrics” of US political activist groups in the 1960s to argue that their activation of performative methods was a way of acknowledging the complexity of the blurred lines between politics and aesthetics in this early moment of late-capitalist hegemony. Pearson writes:

the politics of mythmaking [through theatrical performances of political activism] was not so much an effective solution but an exploration of what seemed a disavowed paradox at the heart of much contemporary thinking about political activism, namely, that all calls for “direct” action proceeded according to formal conventions determined largely by the media.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of all this, including Dolan’s perceptive observations, the absence of a general acknowledgment that terms such as performativity hold a formative connection to the historically parallel development from the 1950s onward of rights, postcolonial/decolonial, and identity politics movements and

poststructuralist philosophy is glaring. Peariso's research marks a new age in studies of performance movements; rarely (until recently) have North American queer theorists or scholars of performance art made direct connections between forms of identity politics such as activism and discourses around difference, particularly relating to race/ethnicity and sexuality/gender. My field notes or interpretive ruptures here, as well as the final two chapters of this book, which move towards examining structures of otherness and indigenous trans performance, are intended to resist this erasure and embrace this move over the past two decades towards integrating critical race and post-/decolonial theory in discussions around performativity.

It is also crucial to stress that post-WWII identity politics were politically informed by activists from earlier rights movements, including the abolition and suffragette movements in the US and UK, the Négritude movement in the Caribbean, and worker's rights movements across the world in the twentieth century, among others. They were also motivated in their theorizing by the work of groundbreaking writers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon, whose reliance on Hegelian models of identity as formed in opposition (via the "master-slave dialectic") and emphasis on forming coalitions fired up in opposition to oppressive institutions, stereotypes, and sites of state power might seem to be at odds with the liquidity and open-endedness of meaning and identity implied by the term performativity (about which, more below).<sup>13</sup> However, these movements also relied explicitly on an emphasis on becoming visible and politically empowered by *enunciating* identity in public places in conjunction with other like-minded and/or identified comrades: the mid-century identity movements such as American Civil Rights were therefore supremely performative in this way.

Developed in the mid-1950s, concepts of the performative, I argue, have to this end been partially inspired by but in turn have also mobilized and informed activist rights movements and discourses of identification and identity. This is clear in the case of Butler, whose first book was a feminist poststructuralist analysis of the implications of G.W.F. Hegel's master-slave dialectic in French theories of subjectivity (including the work of Beauvoir, but, tellingly, with no mention of that of Fanon).<sup>14</sup> Butler was firmly established as a feminist philosopher by the 1988 publication of the "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" article and, by the early 1990s, as a queer feminist theorist whose work was often referenced in writing on performance art and in formations of gender in visual culture. Butler clearly positioned herself from the beginning as a philosopher-activist, keen to articulate theories that would bolster claims of social justice, particularly for LGBTQ people.

In turn, these intellectual developments since the 1950s are connected to shifts towards increasingly pervasive economic and cultural globalization and diaspora, and tensions around difference. Identity politics permeated in new forms in the 1990s into popular forms of feminism, gay and lesbian representations, and (in anglophone countries especially) state-sanctioned "multiculturalism" (linked to "diversity" rhetoric in the US), and ultimately became reified

and, in some forms, commodified.<sup>15</sup> Performance artist and theorist Coco Fusco in the mid-1990s interrogated this kind of “happy multiculturalism,” situating her critique in relation to performativity. She notes the importance of focusing on “the construction of Otherness as essentially *performative* and located in the body.”<sup>16</sup>

Also coincident historically and geographically with globalization and mass diasporic moves of populations have been radically reoriented concepts of center/periphery, explosively new modes of self-other communications with internet and social media culture, and the shift post-1960 to what some have called “immaterial labor” and others “experience culture.”<sup>17</sup> Postmodern theory—itself intimately linked to poststructuralist philosophy, and burgeoning in US and French art and cultural discourses of the 1980s—could be understood as another discursive parallel to these transformations, both reflecting on (or mirroring) *and* enacting them. All of these political and social shifts are key to understanding the range of applications and meanings of the term performativity—but are most often ignored in summary examinations of performativity in relation to the visual arts, where the term has come to be used as shorthand for “open ended” or “in process” or “opening to the spectator.”<sup>18</sup>

Postmodernism is intimately linked to concepts of performance and the performative. In *Perform or Else*, McKenzie thus draws on Jean-François Lyotard’s 1979 mobilization of the term performativity in relation to postmodern regimes of “efficiency” as a key element of what Lyotard famously termed the “postmodern condition.” McKenzie notes:

[i]n a certain sense, performativity is the postmodern condition: it demands that all knowledge be evaluated in terms of operational efficiency, that what counts as knowledge must be translatable by and accountably in the “1’s” and “0’s” of digital matrices ... [I]t has come to govern the entire realm of social bonds.<sup>19</sup>

And elsewhere, in the anthropological foundations of performance studies, Victor Turner argues that modernity was characterized by perspectival or “spatialized” vision that authorized a certain kind of viewing subject, while postmodernism is manifested as a turn towards the temporality of ritual and performance.<sup>20</sup> Such arguments (as well as the art historical emphasis on “opening to the spectator”) will lead me ultimately towards my next chapter on relationality, where I explore the profoundly intersubjective and contextual implications of how performativity works, always already between or among subjects—as a *social* function.

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Performativity as it plays a role in visual arts discourses could be said to have erupted before Austin invented the term. Legendarily: a group of experimentally inclined artists, dancers, musicians, and designers—John Cage, Nicholas Cernovich, Merce Cunningham, Charles Olson, M.C.

Richards, Robert Rauschenberg, and David Tudor—followed a loose plan proposed by Cage to produce an event one evening in the summer of 1952 at Black Mountain College in the mountains of North Carolina. This event, retroactively called *Theater Piece No. 1*, involved a series of more or less simultaneous actions loosely choreographed by Cage, who assigned each performer a time bracket as determined by chance procedures. These actions evoked, in Cage's words, a "purposeless purposefulness."<sup>21</sup>

While no direct documentation exists of this event, extensive and conflicting accounts (including a sketch of its layout made years later by participant M.C. Richards) have suggestively put forth a possible general understanding of its choreography. Audience members were seated centrally in ranks of chairs divided by aisles into two to four areas, with an empty cup placed on each chair. One or several of Robert Rauschenberg's 1951 paneled canvases painted entirely white hung from the rafters and Rauschenberg or another participant projected imagery and/or films onto them. Richards and Charles Olson read poetry randomly from the "poet's ladder," and Cage read a text from a podium (here accounts vary widely as to the contents, from a lecture on Zen Buddhism to the Declaration of Independence, or both). Musician David Tudor played piano, possibly a Cage composition, and a small radio. Rauschenberg played scratchy records of Edith Piaf and others on an old-fashioned wind-up record player. At the end of the performance, coffee was served in the cups (some of which had ashes in them as they had been used as ashtrays).<sup>22</sup>

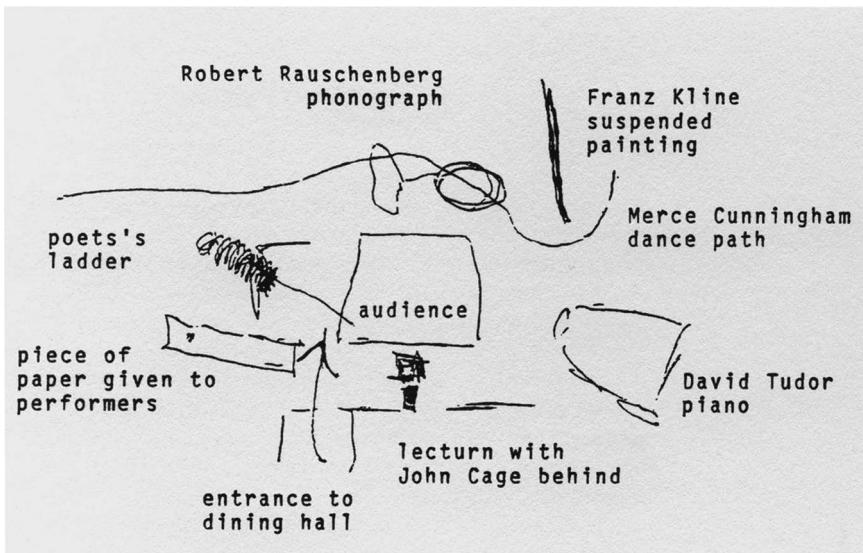


FIGURE 2.1 M. C. Richards sketch of the layout of John Cage's legendary *Theater Piece No. 1*, 1952; drawing made for William Fetterman in 1989

*Theater Piece No. 1* is often retrospectively called the first Happening (but Allan Kaprow and colleagues developed the official Happening movement in 1959 and following in the New York City area). Spectators were seated in the center of the performers, across from other spectators, with multiple actions going on at once above, across, around, and to all sides of them. To this end, it is not surprising that no coherent or singular account of this event remains to us today—the live experience was clearly confusing, complex, and multi-perspectival, working its creative magic in between and among subjects. As Richards noted of this event and others following its loosening of multiple perspectives and actions at once: in being there, you had to “just sort of let it roll over you, and not try to make sense of the individual threads.”<sup>23</sup>

The event channeled Cage’s interest in Zen Buddhism and the chance operations in *I Ching*, as well as elements from the Dadaist work of Marcel Duchamp and Surrealist Antonin Artaud’s exhortation to transform theater from mimesis or textual translation to energetic embodiment. Of particular interest was Artaud’s notion of theater’s capacity to convey “the absolute energies of life,” as Richards described the gist of Artaud’s notion of a “theatre of cruelty,” having translated the book for her colleagues at Black Mountain that summer.<sup>24</sup>

Just after the event, Cage (inspired, in his account, by Rauschenberg’s white paintings) produced 4’33”—his 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence, “played” by David Tudor.<sup>25</sup> Just as Rauschenberg’s canvases acted as blank surfaces marking the atmospheric play of light and shadow (and possibly movies and slides), so a “silent” musical composition could emphasize the role of ambient sound in our overall embodied aural experience.

The merging of arts in this Black Mountain work produced a new concept of the arts in relation to an “anti-binarian durationality” involving all bodies and things in the space in an ongoing experience.<sup>26</sup> Sound (Cage’s music, whether noisy or silent) was a key part of this new fluid activation of art as process. The contingency of art—its meaning, its effects, even its forms—on environment and on the embodied perception of audience members was foregrounded in a new way by these initiatives of Cage and his colleagues. As acolytes of this new mode of enacting art, such as Allan Kaprow, would claim of such “happenings,” they activated space and time through moving and interacting bodies. Retroactively these events have come to be seen as influential early exemplars in the visual arts realm of concrete actualizations of the energies of J.L. Austin’s concept of the performative.<sup>27</sup>

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In the US, 1952 as well marked the highpoint of McCarthyism and the binarizing violence of Cold War politics accompanied by blatant homophobia, sexism, and racism, as well as the beginnings of the official Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King and others. Soon after

bodies had been placed on the line on WWII battlefields and at the same moment in which they were being mobilized in Korea and Vietnam (including disproportionate numbers of African American and Chicano troops fighting for the US), Black and brown bodies began to take to the streets, marching, claiming space, and of course attacked by dogs, pummeled by explosions of water from fire hoses and by police batons (if not simply lynched or murdered outright).

Activating bodies became essential in politics and art. Some bodies (recognizably different, marginalized, oppressed) could not escape being read as *political* if in public: “[f]or black [US] artists ... the social and political aspects of endurance-based performance are inescapable, specifically because the black body has particular meanings and a particular history in the Americas.”<sup>28</sup>

As well, anxieties about conformism, which dovetailed with politicians' phantasmagorical chartings of hidden communist spies in every walk of American life, characterized what Moira Roth brilliantly pinpointed in a 1977 article in *Artforum* as a culture of “bigoted conviction and embittered passivity.”<sup>29</sup> American artists of the 1950s and 1960s (all of them white and male in her account) either tended towards highly emotive “expressionism” or an “aesthetic of indifference.” This aesthetic was aimed at countering the hyperbolic claims of both Abstract Expressionist discourse and a culture of uncertainty and rhetorical (as well as actual) violence in American culture.

According to Roth, artists including Cage, Cunningham, Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns were inspired by the renegade French (anti-)modernist Marcel Duchamp to develop this aesthetic.<sup>30</sup> They were fighting against McCarthyite attacks on American modernism as corrupted, “European,” and thus “communist”—through nonchalance and detachment, rejecting the passionate rhetoric of Clement Greenberg’s and Harold Rosenberg’s art criticism of the 1950s championing the Abstract Expressionists. Whereas the best known Ab Ex painters (such as Jackson Pollock) publicly disavowed their erudition seemingly in a claim to align with more working-class versions of artistic machismo (refined language and technique were seen as aligned with Europeanism and, by right-wing critics, also with the left and thus with communism), Cage et al. were happy to expand on Duchamp’s aesthetic of self-presentation as a detached observer, relying on chance rather than over-determined effort. As Roth puts it: “cool intelligence was the ideal.”<sup>31</sup>

A (performative?) turn to flamboyant modes of self-presentation as a means of artistic expression, aligned with a chance-driven concept of *art as event* produced new bodies, new subjects, new ways of being and making that open art to otherness. This move exemplifies one aspect of the hinge between performative modes of art making and identity politics.

Another aspect was the queering of the artist. While Roth and other art historians from the 1960s through the 1980s largely eschewed

explicit mention of the fact, John Cage and Merce Cunningham (not incidentally) were gay lovers, and Rauschenberg had gay affairs with Cy Twombly and Jasper Johns in the 1950s–60s.<sup>32</sup> By 1955, J.L. Austin was in Boston, just up the road from these queer occurrences, lecturing on the performative, with—as Eve Sedgwick and Andrew Parker have noted—some fairly fey mannerisms himself. But, as Sedgwick and Parker point out, he countered (or covered over?) his queer manner by purveying assertively heteronormative examples of the performative.<sup>33</sup>

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All the artists included in Roth's "aesthetics of indifference," as noted, are white and male. While the exclusion of Blacks and other artists of color as well as women from art institutions and art history is nothing new (to take one obvious example: it would have been very challenging for an African American artist to figure out how to gain access to the Black Mountain College, in the heart of the Southern state of North Carolina, not to mention to gain visibility in white-dominant histories of such a movement), there is no simple account for the fact that there were as far as we know few Black artists and women exploring modernism in precisely the ways Roth examines. One possible explanation: channeling the energies of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, Black artists in the US who developed what is now called the Black Arts Movement in Los Angeles, New York, and other major cities in the 1960s and following did not have the luxury to claim indifference. Instead they developed complex assemblage styles that, by the late 1960s, had begun to evolve into performative events and installations in the work of Black Arts Movement pioneers and followers such as Noah Purifoy, David Hammons, and Senga Nengudi. While a sense of humor is palpable, especially in Hammons' work, the flippant or ironic mode of camp enacted by Roth's exemplary artists had little place in work by Black artists—although a sardonic humor is definitely present across Hammons' oeuvre.

As art historian Kellie Jones has argued, however, their work was highly performative, if (I would insist) in a different way from that Roth ascribes to the gay white artists associated with the aesthetic of indifference. Hammons, she notes, channeled the longstanding imperative for Blacks of "theatrical dissimulation" to evade destruction at the hands of white supremacists in the US by producing "performative" works. In Hammons's *Murder Mystery or Spade run Over by a Volkswagen*, 1972, he thus used the motif of the "spade"—period slang for African American person—here run over by a VW Beetle (a signifier of (white) hippie counterculture at the time), to allegorize the suffering of the Black body in a "performative mapping [that] came back to the body," in Jones's words (making explicit use of Austin's term to join its implication of art as *in process* with its now common tendency to point to non-normative modes of bodily

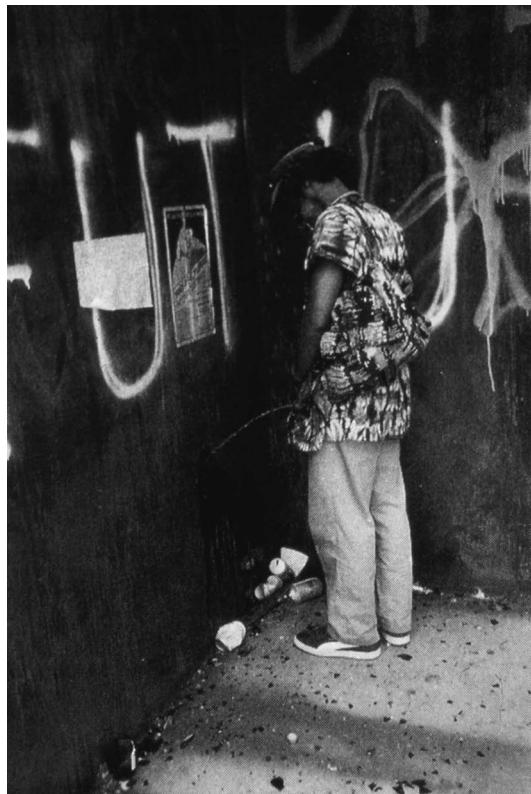


FIGURE 2.2 David Hammons, *Pissed Off (at Richard Serra's T.W.U.)*, 1981; black and white photograph documenting a performative action

enactment).<sup>34</sup> Black artists (one could argue) activated performativity to enunciate their embodied empowerment in the public sphere, even when not directly using their bodies in their works (although Hammons did include his body in a range of groundbreaking urban performances, including his insertion of himself in the history of Minimalism in *Pissed Off (at Richard Serra's T.W.U.)*, 1981, documented by a photograph showing him pissing on Serra's austere public sculpture on the streets of New York). As Tavia Nyong'o describes this dynamic, "body art by black artists is seen as political by definition," and, given that Black artists often work to subvert the automatic sexualization of the Black body in US culture, "this subversion of sex, gender, and reproduction renders Black performance an uncanny double of queer performativity."<sup>35</sup>

"Indifferent" (white, gay/queer) artists activated the performative arguably to produce alternative modes of gendered and artistic being that were veiled and coy rather than fully "out." Black artists tended to "perform" in order to assert their right to be considered active, living

creative subjects, to undermine (sardonically or otherwise) the racist tendency to sexualize and diminish them as subjects. Still, the term is mobilized in both instances. Bodies on the line. Objects put in motion. Identifications marked, remarked, exaggeratedly performed.

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No discussions about the performative or performativity as historically specific concepts, then, can or should unfold without being continually returned to the infinitely complex contexts of these terms' elaborations, which themselves recursively enact the very modes of activist embodiment that theories of performativity in performance studies claim to be identifying in historical and contemporary performance and art. Projection is involved: there is no art practice that contains performativity inherently within it. Rather, the performative is enacted through a relational act of interpretation. Per Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse formation, I am positing (or, in fact, performatively enacting) a relational performativity between theories of performativity and manifestations through visual arts performances—such as the works of John Cage or David Hammons—of radically performative modes of expression and subjectification that open out questions of identification, meaning, and value. I am *doing* what I am also *examining*.

This reiterates the point I introduced in the introduction: in my model of critical genealogy, there can be no prioritizing of linguistic theory or philosophy over artistic performance (or, for that matter, over historical shifts from industrial to post-industrial modes of labor or coalitional forms of activism that questioned dominant norms of subjectivity and power). The point here is to stress that the innovations of art practice in the 1950s and 1960s art centers of Europe and North America directly parallel some of the energies produced through and outlined in the observations of Austin in his theory of performativity—and both are inextricably related to these broad cultural transformations in understandings of subjectivity, identification, and the meanings of art and culture. Both Austin's theory and art practices such as *Theater Piece No. 1* set the stage for decades of later theoretical and artistic enactments of language or art as process, of art as relational (or participatory) and as potentially destabilizing norms of subjectivity and identity by foregrounding the contingency of art and specifically the role of interpretation and context in its meaning and effects.

Perhaps we could go so far as to suggest that Austin could not have formulated his concept of performative utterances without the destabilizing forces coming to play in European and North American culture (Austin was British, and lecturing in the US when he first presented the term). This would include the American Civil Rights movement as well as the increasingly disruptive impact of widespread immigration of the formerly colonized whose presence in Europe challenged these societies and their norms—for example, Jamaicans and South Asians in the UK, and North Africans in France. Understanding theory (such as Austin's) in the various (and really infinite) contexts of its

conceptualization, dissemination, and transformation—that is, acknowledging some of the more crucial historical, social, cultural, and economic pressures informing and informed by it—is the only way to begin to grasp its complexities and make use of it. We can never fully know how and what performativity was and has been and is in a singular way, but we can at least come to a richer understanding of its vicissitudes and the motivations of those who have found it useful to deploy.

### Austin's performance of performativity

As performance scholar Tawny Andersen has explored, in a tape of a lecture called “Performatives” and delivered in Gothenburg in 1959, Austin can be heard speaking the following sentences, performing the performative, as it were:

The performative utterance cannot be true or false. Its special function may be described as that of *effecting an action* by issuing the utterance. By saying so, we *do and act* ... [generally] an action that cannot be performed by any other means.<sup>36</sup>

Austin, whose posh Oxford tones and assertive manner signal a man at the height of his intellectual powers, was to die suddenly three months later. This idea of saying as doing (which Austin says in order to theorize) crystallizes the force of Austin’s term as it has been deployed with increasing frequency since queer theorists’ articulation of it in the early 1990s in relation to models of gender as constructed or performed. Since that moment, innumerable exhibitions and conferences and publications in Europe and North America have foregrounded the problem or the promise of the performative in relation to the visual arts and performance art. Rarely have those deploying the term, however, examined how, exactly, the performative functions in relation to artist/performer, site, and audience. When and why did the term performative develop? How did it eventually shift to the noun form of “performativity” as a desired quality for progressive thought, and how did performativity come to be intimately linked to queer and feminist, as well as Chicano and African American theoretical and artistic explorations of how to enunciate oneself creatively?

Returning briefly to Austin’s original text of the 1955 lectures, *How To Do Things with Words*, published posthumously in 1962, is to remind ourselves of its initiating context. The book traces Austin’s expanding and sometimes self-contradictory concepts unfolding as he lectured: his ideas at the beginning are later in the text revised (in an early footnote, he states that this will be the case: “Everything said in these sections is provisional, and subject to revision in the light of later sections”).<sup>37</sup> As such the book itself has a living, “performative” feel, in the later sense developed for the term—as in, open to revision and relational engagement through later interpretations.

As is well known, Austin jump-starts his discussion of how language *works* (how it effects actions in the world) by inventing the term “performative,” which he initially distinguishes from “constative” (a phrase that merely states something without effecting it): on performatives, he notes that “they do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true or false.’.” His first two examples are important as they provide endless fodder for later theorists engaging Austin’s theory in relation to gender and questions of intentionality:

- a. “I do (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)” —as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony.
- b. “I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*”—as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stern ...

In sum, he asserts: “to utter the [performative] sentence is ... the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something.”<sup>38</sup>

As noted, Austin died suddenly in 1960. Curiously, for this reason, Austin’s book was technically not authored by him; it was *only ever performed verbally* (enacted “live”) as far as Austin himself goes. *How to Do Things with Words* was in fact produced by two Austin scholars (J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà), who transcribed the book from the notes of his Harvard lectures, other notes of Austin and his followers, and two other public talks. As Andersen puts it, “[s]imply put, there is no single author of the inaugural text on the performative utterance, just as there is no ‘pure’ performative. In this way, the history of performativity complicates the very notion of authorship.”<sup>39</sup> Andersen teases out the performativity of Austin’s very text, noting its occupation of a site between writing and saying —as well as its tendency to “do” what it “says” (to enact performativity performatively).

Austin has to be credited with the radical innovation of exploring how speaking can “do” something or allow the speaker to achieve an action, and with speaking a philosophy that, in effect, did what it was talking about. Aside from this epic role, Austin’s other major contribution was to pinpoint the importance of *context* in the linguistic effecting of action or change and the “felicitousness” of this context in determining the ultimate meaning and effect of the utterance: “it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*.” He follows this by one of his key examples, noting that the act of marrying someone can only achieve its presumably intended end by taking place linguistically in a legally sanctioned context for such binding.<sup>40</sup> Not surprisingly, given my own emphasis on seeking to understand at least some of the larger social, cultural, and political matrices in which a theoretical “utterance” has been elaborated, as well as within which gender can be thought of as performed, we will see how important this question of context and the gendering of Austin’s examples becomes in later theorists’ riffs on his ideas. They will be, inevitably, taking Austin out of his context (a context already contaminated by the interpretive contexts of his editors and

transcribers—and even, before that, by the fleshly bodies of his listeners, with their individual modes of perception and interpretation) and placing his arguments in new frameworks, even as I do here. Shifting from adjective/noun (performativity) to noun/quality (performativity), the term will thus become one (if not in some cases *the*) mobilizing trope for theorizing how gender/sexuality and race/ethnicity come to be articulated and relationally determined.

Before moving on to these improvisational borrowings and reworkings of the notion of the performative, attending briefly to a theoretical pre-context for Austin's own philosophical work sheds some light on the context of the larger questions his work opens up. To this end, it is worth noting that his Oxford colleague R.G. Collingwood had theorized the writing of history as a “reenactment” (with performative implications) in his 1946 book *The Idea of History*, also posthumously published. As Collingwood argues here, we can only “do” history or understand the past by reenacting “past thought.” He answers the question “how does the historian discern the thoughts which he is trying to discover?” with the answer, “by re-thinking them in his own mind.”<sup>41</sup> Collingwood’s observations unsettle the truth-value of history writing: all the more remarkable given that he was working, not in Paris in the heyday of poststructuralism, but two decades earlier in the UK, at the heart of the analytical philosophy movement, with its reliance on intentionality and on establishing coherent meanings through logical debate. In what one could view as a proto-poststructuralist observation, Collingwood asks

[h]ow, or on what conditions, can the historian know the past? ... the first point to notice is that the past is never a given fact which he can apprehend empirically by perception ... He knows quite well that his only possible knowledge of the past is mediate or inferential or indirect, never empirical.<sup>42</sup>

To discover previous thought, the historian must effectively perform it: he inevitably “must think it again for himself ... performing an act of thought resembling [but never identical to] the first.” Otherwise, he has “merely philosophical knowledge” of what happened.<sup>43</sup>

Amazingly enough, given the nuances of queer theoretical uses of performativity 50 years later, Collingwood proffers a concept of radical identity-in-difference in relation to the temporality of meaning-making in his arguments about historicizing as performing or reenacting the past. Identity-in-difference is the quality we often assume of something that is repeated (inevitably never exactly the same), which nonetheless resembles closely what it is repeating. Temporality comes into play in Collingwood’s exploration of the processes of thought that took place over time in the first place, to be “re-enacted” later by the historian. Collingwood all but *deconstructs* the concept of historical thought itself in this remarkable text, taking apart our desire to believe that what happened in the past was ever, itself, coherent or whole even as it was spoken,

enacted, or experienced in the first place. Deconstruction was yet to be developed by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the 1960s as a keystone of poststructuralist philosophy. Yet Collingwood's thought—mirrored in some ways by Austin's observations—introduces many of the same questions into the understanding of how meaning and history can be apprehended, known, and recounted.

What Austin and before him Collingwood open up is the possibility of understanding expression or creation (of history or speech or art) as potentially *productive* of linguistic, political, or social change—or of history, as such. This is the capacity of “saying as doing,” or of the performative, that comes to be rearticulated (re-performed) in the 1990s through the new frames of feminism and queer theory by Butler and Sedgwick, and through the lenses of ethnographers’ and critical theorists’ study of difference, such as in the work of scholars such as Dwight Conquergood and Homi Bhabha.<sup>44</sup> This mode of performativity shapes the same theoretical energy that gets reconfigured via a strong attention to ethnic and sexual difference in Chicano/a studies (viz., the writings of José Esteban Muñoz, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Alicia Arrizón, David Román, and others) and in Black studies (in the work of scholars such as Saidiya Hartman, E. Patrick Johnson, Daphne Brooks, Tavia Nyong'o, L.H. Stallings, Malik Gaines, Joshua Chambers-Letson, Ashon Crawley, and others).

Performativity gets sutured to the projects of identity politics and ethnic studies via an enabling of cultural agency and of theories of futurity, opening onto Chapter 3 (“Relationality”): the uses of Austin’s concept linked to models from identity theory rely on the energizing force of performativity to highlight the contextual or *relational* aspect of meaning formation (whether for works of art or *people* who in complex and intersubjective ways take on identifications). Performativity comes to suggest, then, the following matrix of interrelated terms: process, action/agency, relationality, futurity, and in turn the tendency to reconfigure the understanding of meaning as *contextual* and determined through an *interpretive exchange* rather than as residing inherently in static objects (hence also pointing to processes of identification for and with self and other). None of these concepts are directly available in Austin’s 1962 book, so tracing debates around the term will be necessary to understand how these elaborations came about and then later came to contribute to expanding ideas about the capacities of the performative.

### **Performativity as process and as action: Searle versus Derrida**

Philosophers Jacques Derrida and John Searle—one poststructuralist, the other analytic—expansively and acrimoniously debated the meaning and value of the concept of the performative in the 1970s and 1980s. These debates in fact set the stage for Judith Butler’s later largely unacknowledged borrowing of Derrida’s terms and framework in her development of the concept of iterative gender performance. Derrida’s and Searles’s philosophical sparring lays bare the radically

different aspirations and assumptions of these two bodies of philosophy in the latter decades of the twentieth century and confirm the mobilizing force of Austin's theory of the performative.

Derrida, in a 1971 lecture at a philosophy of language conference in Montréal, published in English in 1977 as the article "Signature Event Context," thus deploys the performative to assert a poststructuralist refusal of mystifying concepts of a pre-existing real or a transcendent metaphysics of meaning:

[The] performative does not have its referent... outside of itself or, in any event, before and in front of itself. It does not describe something that exists outside of language and prior to it. It produces or transforms a situation, it effects ... The performative is a "communication" which is not limited strictly to the transference of a semantic content that is already constituted and dominated by an orientation toward truth (be it the *unveiling* of what is in its being or the *adequation-congruence* between a judicative utterance and the thing itself).<sup>45</sup>

Derrida thus nuances performativity in relation to the iterative nature of all human expression and its communicative dimension; performativity marks the fact that there is no pre-existing "real" securing the meaning of any linguistic utterance.

In radical contrast, Searle—who, not incidentally, earned his doctorate at Oxford, following in Austin's analytic philosophical footsteps—uses the performative to stake his analytic philosophical claim on a concept of meaning as anchored by intention. In his 1989 essay "How Performatives Work," Searle thus asserts that the performative is linked to the

essential constitutive feature of any illocutionary act[, which] is the intention to perform that act. It is a constitutive feature of a promise, for example, that the utterance should be intended as a promise ... *its being a promise consists in its being intended as a promise.*<sup>46</sup>

Derrida and Searle thus took sides in disputing whether the performative was fundamentally an act of *intentional* locution, per Searle, or a way of understanding how we never have full control of what we say, per Derrida. Searle's insistence on intention (elaborated originally in his 1969 book *Speech Acts*, and refined in texts in the 1970s and 1980s<sup>47</sup>) was not convincing to later scholars emerging in the 1980s and after, at which point debates about postmodernism and poststructuralist philosophies that questioned metanarratives and modernist models of coherent, unitary subjectivity came to hold more convincing explanatory value. Derrida's insistence on the impossibility of retrieving singular intentionality and his model of meaning as taking place not through unified intention but through the "iteration" of previously known signs clearly deeply inflects Butler's and Sedgwick's later queer feminist theories of the performative. To this

end, it is the concept of iteration, in relation to Searles' claims as Derrida dismantles them, on which I will focus here.

Derrida's focus on the *iterative* dimension of performativity, which defines how meaning takes place across temporal and locational contexts, gets to the heart of the question of agency and change: if meaning is iterative, then how do we articulate speech (or modes of embodiment or art or performance) such that social or cultural change occurs? If artists identifying as feminist, Black, Chicanx, and/or queer seek to encourage such change, how can they iterate codes of identification differently without proposing a transparent relation between "intention" and "effect" (as Searle arguably does)? Iteration is thus a key concept in addressing the theories of performativity relating to questions of identity and identification (such as gender performance and queer performativity).

Derrida begins by deconstructing Austin's assumption that the context of an utterance can be determined by interpreters: he questions whether "the conditions ... of a context [are] absolutely determinable."<sup>48</sup> He turns to a 1746 text by Etienne Bonnot de Condillac to examine the rift that the written word or representation in general entail in relation to claims for a coherent and accessible intentionality based on presence.<sup>49</sup> The sign itself (the vehicle of communicating meaning within models of semiotics) is born "the moment it is necessitated by the absence of the object from present perception" and a speaker seeks to reference that object in its absence. In a gloss on Platonic ideas about ideal versus essence, for Condillac and the French thinkers in his wake, Derrida notes that the sign is a "representation as an ideal content (meaning)" of the thing perceived and presupposes absence. He also stresses that it is *writing* that is specifically "proffered in the absence of the receiver" and that the written sign must function in perpetuity as a mode of communication long after the enunciating subject is gone from the scene.<sup>50</sup>

Following these insights, Derrida elaborates his concept of iterability:

My communication must be repeatable—iterable—in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically determinable collectivity of receivers. Such iterability—(*iter*, again, probably comes from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity) structures the mark of writing itself ... A writing that is not structurally readable—iterable—beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing.<sup>51</sup>

Signs can only communicate if they are identifiable by subsequent readers or interpreters beyond the actual presence of the writer. Writing breaks with its initiating context immediately upon its inscription; it begins to "drift" from the author: it is "an iterative structure, cut off from all absolute responsibility, from consciousness as the ultimate authority."<sup>52</sup> Iterability makes words readable but also proves that whatever "intentionality" the writer imagines wielding to shape her text is an illusory source of "meaning" for it, since the text is reiterating

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codes that went before it. In a similar fashion, there is no easy or transparent relationship between the text and the more general social contexts of its original utterance. The transmission of speech through writing renders the desire to ascertain transparently conveyed intentionality impossible—even as it is driven by this same desire.

This escape of a text from any “intentional” structure of determining meaning does *not* mean that marks can simply mean anything or that they are not at all affected by the context of their production, dissemination, and reception, however:

Every sign ... can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchorage ... This citationality, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called “normal.” What would a mark be that could not be cited? Or one whose origins would not get lost along the way?<sup>53</sup>

Finally, now that he has deconstructed assumptions about intentionality, origins, and presence (all of which, he points out here and in his elaborate reply to Searle, can only be reconciled through recourse to a mystifying transcendental metaphysics), Derrida has landed us at a place where Austin’s performative can play a key role. Asserting that Austin retains a belief in an intentional subject of locution and relies too much on context in defining how the performative works (he notes that “performative communication becomes once more the communication of an intentional meaning” in Austin<sup>54</sup>), Derrida puts pressure on Austin’s point about context:

In order for a context to be exhaustively determinable, in the sense required by Austin, conscious intention would at the very least have to be totally present and immediately transparent to itself and to others, since it is a determining center ... of context.<sup>55</sup>

Arguably, however, with this point Derrida imposes Searle’s more naïve concept of conscious intention onto Austin, who never seems quite to insist on context as “exhaustively determinable” nor on intentionality as defining context. In contrast to Austin, Searle, in one of his rebuttals to Derrida, exposes the naïvité of his reading of the performative in terms of the inherence, transcendence, and transparency of intentionality:

a meaningful sentence is just a standing possibility of the corresponding (intentional) speech act ... [O]f course in serious literal speech the sentences are precisely the realizations of the intentions: there need be no *gulf* at all between the illocutionary intention and its expression.<sup>56</sup>

Aside from his potential unfairness to Austin, Derrida's point is still highly compelling—any reliance on the “original” context of an utterance to determine its performative effect or meaning will inevitably fail to secure a final meaning on that basis. He elaborates on this in his later reply to Searle in “Limited Inc. a b c,” where he introduces the psychoanalytical concept of the unconscious to strengthen his point that original articulating intentionality can never be fully known (another way of saying this would be to note the continual pressure of internalized ideology on our “choices” of what to say and do: an Althusserian point Butler will examine in great detail in her book *Excitable Speech*<sup>57</sup>). By elaborating Austin's performative, shifting speech to writing, Derrida seriously undermines the notions of presence and intentionality underlying Searles' analytic philosophy and introduces the beat of temporality that will be so useful to theorists of queer meaning and subjectivity in adopting the term performativity. If performativity claims to close the gap between saying and doing (as Austin's definition can be read as arguing), seemingly securing the speaker's intention to his “doing” and erasing the temporality and relationality of meaning, Derrida shows that this gap in fact is never closed or secured, reintroducing *durationality* as central to the performative: “*Différance*, the irreducible absence of intention or attendance to the performative utterance, the most ‘event-ridden’ utterance there is, is what authorizes me, taking account to the predicates just recalled, to posit the general graphematic structure of every ‘communication’.”<sup>58</sup>

What Derrida understands and insists upon is that difference (in the form of *différance*, a neologism he develops to indicate a more radical and temporally active form of identity-in-difference) is always at issue in questions of speech, power, and the determination of meaning. The performative cannot occur without difference—the literal differentiation of one word, phrase, gesture, locution, self, or performance from another. The performative is about identity and the significance and power of any utterance is thus always already interrelated to questions of identification, sexual/gendered and otherwise, *but always in relation to otherness*. There is no inherent, coherent meaning of a word, nor of an intentional subject who speaks it, only a self who differentiates (relationally) from others.

Examined through its “graphematic” or written variants, Austin's concept of the performative, then, allows Derrida to take apart the reliance on an idea of an originating intentionality as securing the final meaning of an utterance (the suturing of intention to saying as doing, particularly in Searle's interpretation of Austin in the earlier 1969 *Speech Acts* and reiterated in his 1977 attack on Derrida). At the same time, Derrida makes clear that he is not arguing that there is no intentionality at all: “the category of intention will not disappear; it will have

its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance.”<sup>59</sup> And iteration is not simply repetition; it is, rather:

at once that which tends to attain plenitude and that which bars access to it. Through the possibility of repeating every mark as the same it makes way for an idealization that seems to deliver the full presence of ideal objects ... but this repeatability itself ensures that the full presence of a singularity thus repeated comports in itself the reference to something else, thus rendering the full presence that it nevertheless announces. This is why iteration is not simply repetition ... [I]terability retains a value of generality that covers the totality of what once can call experience or the relation to something in general.<sup>60</sup>

We speak as individuals always, seeming to attain “full presence of a singularity” by referring to what has gone before; but because we can only speak in signs that are already known (which refer to “something else”) our presence is always already ruptured. We can never even know our own intentionality fully.<sup>61</sup>

It is the signature that exposes, finally, the interrelation between utterance and repetition and throws in doubt a Searlean belief in a transcendental originating speaking subject’s intention as transparently “realized” in his or her locutions.<sup>62</sup> Per Austin’s arguments, which Derrida cites directly, the originating source of the utterance makes his authorship secure “in written utterances ... *by his appending his signature* (this has to be done because, of course written utterances are not tethered to their origin in the way spoken ones are).”<sup>63</sup> Derrida responds:

By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains the having-been present in a past *now* or present (*maintenant*) which will remain a future *now* or present (*maintenant*) ... In order for the tethering to the source to occur, what must be retained is the absolute singularity of a signature-event and a signature-form: the pure reproducibility of a pure event.

He goes on to ask: “Is there such a thing?”<sup>64</sup> While there are of course signatures, he concludes, there are no “pure events”—only events that are always already contaminated by the contexts necessary to execute and to understand them, including those conditioning the meaning of necessarily iterated signs.

The question of context will return obdurately in all attempts to theorize performativity, because it relates intimately to an issue at the heart of post-1990 theorists’ interest in the mobilizing potential of the term: the question of *agency* implicit in the idea of gender performance as implementing social change (or as “subversive,” per Butler’s subtitle to *Gender Trouble*, “Feminism and the Subversion of Identity”) begs the question of context and originary “intention,” as Searle and Derrida both understood. If the meaning and significance of one’s

speech, art making, or performance must always be understood in relation to “context” (of initial utterance as well as of interpretive futures) as philosophers tend to agree, and if speech (or making, or performing) can only ever reiterate previously accepted signs or languages (as Derrida rightly insists), then seeking to create political change (i.e., while necessarily reiterating previously elaborated speech) is, at best, a highly complex endeavor. Individuals joining in coalitional political rights movements cannot simply decide to get rid of problematic locutions or structures that they wish to destroy or leave behind: for example, feminists cannot through sheer willed “intentional” critique or “subversion” negate the iterative reproduction of women’s bodies as objects in Euro-American culture, any more than queers can “choose” to subvert gender identity, not even within our own psyches, given that (as Derrida points out) we are not fully “present” even to ourselves.

Derrida himself discusses context directly and at length in relation to performativity and the (in his view) mistaken and naïve arguments of Searle, calling forth one of his most cited phrases, “*il n’y a pas de hors texte.*” As Derrida himself notes, this term is all about context in its actual French meaning (a meaning lost by the common English mistranslation as “there is nothing outside the text”). The more correct English translation, as Derrida himself argues in his Afterword to the English-language *Limited Inc.*, where the debate with Searle is reprinted, would be an English phrase approximating “there is nothing outside *context*” (my emphasis).<sup>65</sup> He confirms, in fact, “one cannot do anything, least of all speak, without determining (in a manner that is not only theoretical, but practical and performative) a context.”<sup>66</sup> One speaks always already in context. One is oneself a context, albeit impossible to know or fully determine (even by oneself).

Derrida is not alone, of course, in continually worrying the question of how to “say” so as to “do” (or accomplish) something that *matters* (to create change for the future). Surely one has to see his entire philosophical oeuvre as yearning towards this goal of a kind of performative philosophizing. Performativity here points precisely to this yearning and a desire for futurity, which also defines a powerful strand of queer theory (the carefully hedged utopianism of the work of José Esteban Muñoz, for example). Nor has Derrida been the only philosopher or cultural critic to identify something about performance or performativity (and/or performance art) that opens up questions of political agency. The relationship of performance to politics has been noted for many decades, with Hannah Arendt arguing in her 1958 article “What is Freedom” as follows:

The performing arts … have … a strong affinity with politics. Performing artists … need an audience to show their virtuosity, just as acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their “work,” and both depend upon others for the performance itself.<sup>67</sup>

Arendt pinpoints a convergence in ideas about how speech or performing arts work, and a shift towards activating political concerns (particularly those of rising identity politics movements and their related theories) through performance or enactment precisely in the period (mid to late 1950s) when Austin is inventing the performative. As Arendt concludes, performance is politically active *because it requires an audience*—calling forth again the structure of relationality linked to performativity.

## **Performativity: making as doing, art as process**

Sketching the intellectual history of performativity, as I do here, is hardly enough to understand the broader “contexts” of the concept as it has come to saturate understandings of the performance of identity or identifications in academic and creative practices, particularly in North America and other anglophone sites. There is a deeper history relating to the rise of explicitly queer and feminist performance art in the 1960s onward, in turn informing the development of queer feminist performance theory and practice in the 1990s.

The most obvious examples of a shift towards a conception of art that parallels Austin’s concept of the performative (as well as, the next chapter will argue, Erving Goffman’s idea of the “self” as a performer and as relational) are the practices of artists in the US, Europe, and Japan in the 1950s, now canonical in Western art history, including those participating in the Black Mountain event and the practice of Abstract Expressionist painter Jackson Pollock (who notoriously flung paint on canvases spread across the floor in an actively performative manner), as well as the work of artists his performative example inspired such as those in the Gutai group in Japan and Georges Mathieu in Paris. In the 1950s, Pollock occupied the now clichéd position of “white male genius”—ratified by the modernist formalist criticism of Clement Greenberg dominant at the time in English-speaking countries. Greenberg’s critical language explicitly abstracted the artwork from its embodied attachment to the particular artist in order to secure its supposedly transcendent values. Modernist paintings such as Pollock’s, he claimed, had only to do with its status as an object or flat plane, and implicitly nothing to do with the artist as an embodied subject with thoughts, desires, and identifications: “It was the stressing … of the ineluctable flatness of the support that remained most fundamental in the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism.”<sup>68</sup>

As I have pointed out elsewhere, the case of Pollock, however, perfectly demonstrates how written or spoken discourse changes the meaning and value of art, acting as a hinge between one belief system and another—and in turn directly changing the meaning (one could say the discursive *context*) of Pollock’s paintings.<sup>69</sup> Due in part to the international dissemination of photographic and cinematic images of Pollock painting in 1949–51 art and popular magazines and in Hans Namuth’s 1951 film *Jackson Pollock*, Greenberg’s Pollock was eventually

rejected and Pollock was repositioned (or—in Derridean terms—iterated differently), his practice described as opening into a new way of understanding art. This occurred most notably in the 1952 article “American Action Painters” by existentialist critic Harold Rosenberg and the 1958 article “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” by artist Allan Kaprow—both published in New York-based *Art News*, copies of which were sent to major art centers around the world.<sup>70</sup> These articles reinterpreted the artist’s practice as a radically new action-based mode of making that profoundly questioned the modernist idea of the artist as singular (yet disembodied and invisible) agent of the artwork and thus of its meaning, the latter a singular, fixed object to be discerned by a trained critic who had direct access to the (hidden) artist’s original intentions. In strong contrast to this dominant model of interpretation, Kaprow thus famously argued:

With Pollock ... the so-called dance of dripping, slashing, squeezing, daubing, and whatever else went into a work placed an almost absolute value upon a diaristic gesture .... I am convinced that to grasp a Pollock’s impact properly, we must be acrobats, constantly shuttling between an identification with the hands and body that flung the paint and stood “in” the canvas and submission to the objective markings, allowing them to entangle and assault us. This instability is indeed far from the idea of a “complete” painting. The artist, the spectator, and the outer world are much too interchangeably involved here.<sup>71</sup>

Rosenberg’s and especially Kaprow’s version of Pollock, ratified by the photographs and film footage being disseminated of Pollock painting, enunciated him as performative (or so we could say now; the word was of course only just being invented by Austin in linguistic philosophy at the time). This version of Pollock resonated in art centers around the world, with the Western art world becoming more “global” after WWII with increasing travel and rapid communications—including the dissemination of print magazines such as *Art News* in places as disparate as Japan and France.<sup>72</sup> In particular, and radically, Kaprow in the 1958 article and in his own performances (called “Happenings”) from the time not only understands the gestural action (or what we would now call the performativity) of Pollock—which Kaprow himself enunciates—as the key innovation of his practice. Kaprow also sees that what we now might call performative art-making opens art to process and temporality as well as splitting agency between the artist and the interpreters of the work (“[t]he artist, the spectator, and the outer world are much too interchangeably involved here”): this is a new model of making and interpretation, and thus of art itself, as performative and relational.

Kaprow’s formulation is compatible with Austin’s analytic philosophical view of performativity as enacting promises or vows for receivers. And this performative subject (albeit not using these exact words) becomes a key concept in younger generations of artists’ explorations of new models of art to think

beyond modernism. The activation of performance and the concept of art as process in the visual arts elaborate a deep interrogation of the idea in artistic modernism and formalist criticism of meaning as originating expressively from a singular, determinable artistic subject. This belief system, with its apotheosis in abstract modernist paintings of the mid-twentieth century (for example, the smooth saturated expanses in Mark Rothko's color field paintings) had relied on the erasure of the visible body of the artist from the field of the work—an erasure equivocated by Pollock's practice, with its flung gestural marks, which enabled Rosenberg and Kaprow to re-interpret the artist as embodied and performative. Among other things, as I have explored extensively in my work on body art and self-imaging, the erasure of the specific body of the artist served to legitimate the unspoken and naturalized normativity of the artist as white, male, middle-class, Euro-American, and presumptively (even with an obviously gay artist such as Rauschenberg) heterosexual. Reciprocally, it legitimated the authority of the (white, male) formalist art critic, whose interpretations were presented as truthful renderings of the hidden artist's expressed intentions as discerned through a disinterested critical facility.<sup>73</sup>

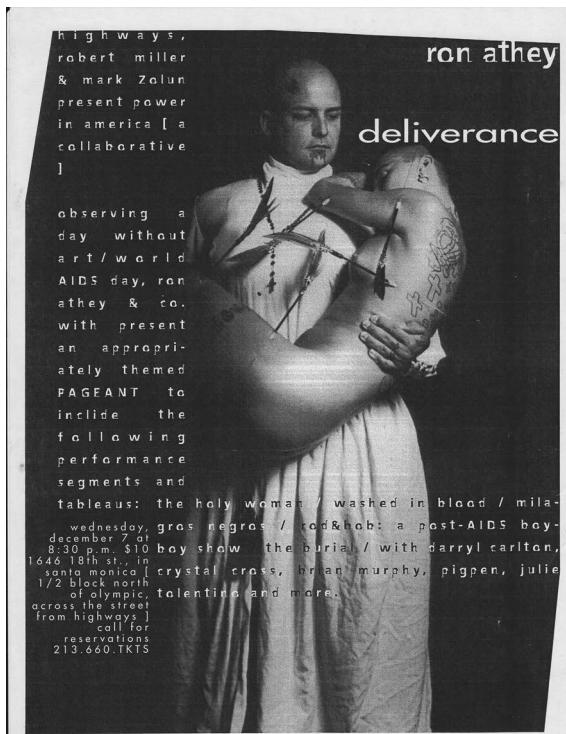
While Austin put forth a model to understand the complexities of how language could "do" something through its "saying," rather than just making statements about the world, Kaprow elaborated descriptions of what Pollock was *doing* in ways that accelerated a shift towards a concept of art as *process* (to be interpreted by other, often active "participants") instead of art as *object* (to be interpreted in a final way by trained critic who could magically access the originating intention supposedly defining the work). Kaprow, like Cage and all the creatives at Black Mountain, helped initiate a new model of understanding art as durational and what we would now call performative—opening it to interpreters and future re-readings. This curtailed the "authority" of both the (male) artist and the (male) critic and allowed for the adoption of processual, performative strategies by feminists, artists of color, and queers, who sought to change the world by transforming the structures of meaning underlying modernism.

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The question of broader "contexts" presses on my mind. As Butler was writing and publishing *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), her most influential explorations of the performative in relation to gender performance, the AIDS crisis was devastating creative queer (primarily gay male) urban communities around the world. Queer and allied artists in the US were, in traumatized and enraged but also rapturous ways, responding to the federal government's failure to address the nightmare (at best) and its vicious homophobia (at worst). As Butler herself has attested not the least in her shift to writing about grievable lives, the AIDS crisis is far from being incidental to the rise of queer theory, to the adoption of the

term queer by LGBTQ rights movements, or to the suturing of queer to gender performance.<sup>74</sup>

Los Angeles based queer performance artist Ron Athey—who has lived with HIV since 1986—began to produce major works in the 1990s. I witnessed *Deliverance*, an excerpted version of part of his “Torture Trilogy” in 1994 at 18th Street Arts Complex in Santa Monica—he had been developing the trilogy since around 1990, and the work was presented in this case as part of the “Day Without Art to Mark the AIDS Crisis.” I can’t remember anything except a series of ritualistic actions, culminating in a scene with Athey’s supine body on a raised bed with “helpers” grouped around his body, lacerating his flesh. I was not horrified, but the work did not speak to me. I felt “outside” the pain it narrated, a pain I was not seeing as directly relevant to my life, even though I had queer friends and had recently experienced a grad school colleague die of complications from AIDS.



**FIGURE 2.3** Flyer for Ron Athey, *Deliverance*, 1994, 18th Street Complex, Santa Monica, California; Ron Athey archive, courtesy of the artist

At that moment in what was at the time a fairly conventional life as a middle-class white woman in a more or less heteronormative relationship, I was not prepared for Ron Athey.

A decade later I moved to the UK and my heteronormative nuclear family structure was brutally destroyed by my then-husband who abandoned me and our two children. In the UK I experienced Athey's work again (and again, and again ...). It suddenly made perfect sense to me on a visceral emotional level. In the depths of my personal agony, I wrote about this flesh-wounding (in which I experience his BDSM pain as an echo of my own) and about how my own shattering opened me to Ron's work, such that it got under my skin.<sup>75</sup>

By 2005, Ron's lacerations and self-penetrations *pierced* me in ways I was able fully to engage—in ways I could *feel* as well as intellectualize. The parallel between the harrowing life sentence he received in 1986 of finding out he was HIV+, propelling him towards more and more honed, spectacular, and flagrantly politicized BDSM performances, and the theorization of gender performance slowly presented itself to me. While I had initially, in the early 1990s, clearly seen the link between Butler's arguments and, say, the willfully sexualized and performative self-imaging works from the 1970s and 1980s of feminist artists such as Yoko Ono, VALIE EXPORT, Hannah Wilke, Carolee Schneemann, and Lynn Hershman Leeson—all more or less heterosexually identified—now I saw something even more laceratingly relevant to my current state of mind in Ron's work.

You could say Ron Athey's work queered my sense of self, relationally opening up a desire for queer community that has now come to define my social and personal life as well as my teaching and research.<sup>76</sup> Wounds could also be publicly enacted. Hurts could be externalized. The crushing physical and mental effects of political violence could be subverted and sublimated through embodied actions in performance art—exposed such that the inevitable forgetting and repression of the living pained body would be delayed. Finally I was prepared (as a hollowed-out subject who could only weakly "perform" what, from long internalized cues, I intuited was necessary to survive) to understand (gender) performativity differently.

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### **Queer performatives, shame, and time**

While I will address queer performativity more extensively in Chapter 5 ("Queer"), where the suturing of performativity to queer by Butler and Sedgwick will be the focal point, here I will briefly pinpoint each theorist's early interest in performativity in particular. Butler's and Sedgwick's models are

themselves explicitly critical of origin stories, and the issue of agency (as the originary force of the meaning or valence of a gesture) haunts the earliest formulations of queer performativity. Their theoretical ruminations on performativity are thus key sites for the formulation of so-called postmodern concepts of fluid or contingent subjectivity as well as latter-day identity theories. Taking up Derrida's abstract version of performativity as iteration directly and applying it to embodied subjectivity, for example, Butler's 1988 formulation in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" proffers a concept of gender and sexuality as taking place performatively through the very comportment of the body:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.<sup>77</sup>

Setting forth her influential concept of gender as "a stylized repetition of acts," Butler gestures towards implicating the materialities of the body in performativity. Elsewhere in the article, she explicitly cites Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory of the "body in its sexual being" as a "historical idea" or a construction.<sup>78</sup> This focus on embodiment and stylized repetition has made her theory a model for many artists deploying performance, either live or in self-imaging practices.<sup>79</sup> At the same time her theory, while it verbally references the body, is otherwise as abstract as Derrida's and, at its base, it is binarizing—an echo of her beginnings as a scholar of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, as noted above. As Sedgwick put it in her 2003 book *Touching Feeling*, seemingly in a strong retort to Butler, "it's far easier to deprecate the confounding, tendentious effects of binary modes of thinking—and to expose their often stultifying perseveration—than it is to articulate or model other structures of thought."<sup>80</sup> Perhaps it is because Butler is a philosopher that her theories tend towards the abstract, even when she is exploring and insisting upon materialities and bodies (as in the long quote above). In contrast, Sedgwick's work as a queer feminist literary theorist is itself performatively enacted and makes frequent intimate contact with stories about bodies in the world as they are discursively positioned and articulated through emotions, desires, and other uncontrollable forces, including most emphatically her own.<sup>81</sup> Sedgwick's theory is also explicitly focused on exploring the relationship between the theory of performativity and queerness, whereas Butler deploys "gender performance" rather than "queer" in her early work. For Sedgwick, too, queer identification always already calls forth aspects of ethnic, class, racial, and other modes of identification—albeit she does not foreground how these interrelate.

Sedgwick's attention to embodiment allows for a performative exploration of how the performative works in relation to the dispossessed, queered subject. Confirming the move to align queer politics and experiences with performativity, and pointing to the role of the theatrical in the queer imaginary, Sedgwick and co-author Andrew Parker thus note in a 1995 text of Austin's own analysis that, while resistant to moralism, he inadvertently links "the excluded theatrical ... with the perverted, the artificial, the unnatural, the abnormal, the decadent, the effete, the diseased." Parker and Sedgwick emphasize that, with Austin's theory, we are thrown into very materialized and embodied circumstances: specifically his exclusion of what he called the "etiolated" language of theatricality from performativity, which targets *specific kinds of bodies and subjects*. They point out that, strikingly, this etiolated expressiveness is connected by Austin—"dandyish" as he was himself—anxiously with theatricality and "the Gay 1890s of Oscar Wilde," such that "the performative has thus been from its inception already infected with queerness."<sup>82</sup>

Through such deliberately self-reflexive critical analysis—which playfully reembodies and queers the initial enunciation of the concept of the performative (via Austin)—Sedgwick (here with Parker) performs the performative in a performative way that is also *queer*. Or, differently put, Sedgwick performs the complex significations of the queer performative through performatively queer interpretations. She "says" in order to "do" a kind of queer performance of meaning that is profoundly performative (in process and relational). Sedgwick provides an alternative to the more abstracting and covertly binarizing terms laid out in Butler's work, allowing more space for performative articulations of the performative that might be themselves thus "do" queerness. While Butler deploys Austin's ideas to theorize gender of any kind as performative (albeit she privileges gender fluid and drag performances in her 1993 book *Bodies that Matter*<sup>83</sup>), Sedgwick sutures performativity to queer by enacting performativity as constitutive of its very locational force as a linguistic/philosophical (and in her work political) concept. Both theorists, however, understand the importance of temporality in determining the valence of how gender or queer are performed, pointing to the idea that the political effects that result from gender performance or queer performatives have everything to do with the interpretive *other* who will engage the text, the body, or the signifier *at a later moment*.

It is not a coincidence, then, that, after the explosion of "gender performance" onto the scene of queer feminist theory around 1990, the next move was to embrace questions of queer time, key to the poststructuralist and queer and feminist concepts of contingent selfhood. In turn queer time opened the door for examinations of the role of desire, shame, and emotions or affect in performing queer subjects. Sedgwick's work was crucial to this shift. In her influential 1993 essay "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," she stresses the importance of attending to the temporality of the gender/sex performative:

If queer is a politically potent term, which it is, that's because, far from being capable of being detached from the childhood scene of shame, it cleaves to that scene as a near-inexhaustible source of transformational energy ... “[Q]ueer performativity” is the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma ... [O]ne of the things that anyone’s character or personality *is*, is a record of the highly individual histories by which the fleeting emotion of shame has instituted far more durable, structural changes in one’s relational and interpretive strategies toward both self and others.<sup>84</sup>

Returning to themes in her work which I addressed in my introduction, here I would stress that Sedgwick’s performative description of queer performativity via the interpersonal mechanisms of shame foregrounds relational and interpretive aspects of how it comes to mean through time: queer performativity points to the contingency of any concept of self or meaning on later engagements, and this insistence on temporality is key to the term’s mobilization of anti-essentialist notions of identity. Sedgwick thus concludes, “[s]hame interests me politically, then, because it generates and legitimates the place of identity—the *question of identity*—at the origin of the impulse to the performative, but does so without giving that identity-space the standing of an essence.”<sup>85</sup>

An insistence on the temporality of queer performativity—especially as time relates to spatial relations (being out of *place*)—thus foregrounds its relationality (its dependence on others) as well as its function in refusing *essence*. Butler’s 1997 book *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* returns to the performative as a tool to examine hate speech and the rhetoric around it in a model that is predicated on temporality—her expansion on the performative here is both provocative and problematic as it begins to expose serious contradictions in her applications of the concept. Butler does not assume or theorize the performative here as inherently positive by any means: to the contrary, her extended analyses of gender performance and hate speech imply that, more often than not, the presumptive tying together of saying to doing is linked to an erasure of the gap between signifier and referent that has dangerous implications for progressive thought. Butler’s theory, when closely attended to, indicates that performativity can in fact, and often does, (re)produce normative forms of gender rather than radically freeing the subject into what she earlier called “subversive” fluid gender/sex identifications. And yet those who have taken up her work in gender theory, and more broadly in the arts and humanities, have tended to ignore this aspect of Butler’s work on the performative, focusing rather on her concept of drag performance and its subversive potential.<sup>86</sup>

In *Excitable Speech*, Butler explores debates about hate speech to argue that proponents of outlawing hate speech rely on a concept of intentionality that implies a collapse of signifier with signified, word with action; anti-porn activists such as Catherine MacKinnon thus conflate pornography with rape. This erasure of

temporal space between saying and its effects, Butler argues compellingly, simply restages “the performance of hate speech” and supports “the case for state intervention.” She asserts that those wishing to counter the effects of hate speech such as pornography would be better served by acknowledging that “speech is always in some ways out of our control.”<sup>87</sup> This assertion allows Butler to insist that acknowledging the split between signifier and signified produces the possibility for the locution to be *resignified*, a key argument for her larger theory of performativity. Resignification relies on maintaining or even widening the gap between “utterance and meaning” so as to open the potential to make change (echoing Derrida, she asserts: the “potential incommensurability between intention and utterance … utterance and action … and intention and action” leave room for “the possibility for agency and expropriation at the same time”).<sup>88</sup>

Butler also, importantly, uses this model of the performative to examine how it works in relation to two strong examples—that of anti-porn feminists, as noted, and cases involving the proclaimed “right” of white supremacists to terrorize Black people in the USA, specifically a case involving a cross burning on a Black family’s yard, legislated as “free speech.” Butler’s brilliance here is to note the asymmetry between the ways in which sexuality versus race are dealt with by American courts: regarding sex, the courts tend to conflate the speech with the act (“sexual speech is a sexual act,” per MacKinnon’s arguments) but, regarding race, the courts tend to dispute the conflation of speech and conduct (i.e., denying the immediate harm caused by racists terrorizing Black people under the guise that their acts are covered by freedom of speech).<sup>89</sup> Butler’s criticisms of the disparity in legal logic between cases seeking to outlaw pornography and those seeking to outlaw the overt expressions of anti-Black violence are groundbreaking and extremely important in understanding the lack of symmetry between how sexuality/gender versus race/ethnicity are “enunciated” and take effect in US legal culture.

The sophistication of this more nuanced account of how speech signifies is often lost, however, in the mobilizations of Butler’s model via a reductive idea of gender performance drawn from her earlier work, and the limitations of this reduction are evident, for example, if we look at how concepts of performativity are deployed in art, art history, and performance studies discourses. In these, Butler’s concept of performativity as potentially subversive, often siphoned through secondary or tertiary sources and pulled away from the specificity of gender performance, are evoked largely to indicate a kind of radical shift towards art as process, as literally involving some kind of performance (or performative) action and thus paralleling the dislocation of the subject in postmodern or poststructuralist discourse—the “performative turn” is thus credited with “building up the … (literal) street cred” of performance art as a “boundary-defying movement that would radically define the future of art,” in just one of thousands of examples of the weak mobilization of performativity in art discourse.<sup>90</sup> The tendency to collapse signifier (performative art making) into signified (inexorably radical meaning) is relentless, driven by a failure to consider the temporal and spatial beat of interpretation (taking place later in time and in a different space from the “original”) and the varied contexts of a performance’s

presentation and reception which continually redefine what it means and its larger significance.

In performance and art discourse performativity can also be, and much more commonly is, claimed as doing something that might appear on first glance to fulfill Butler's call: saying as doing (or performing art rather than making "final" objects) can in these contexts be seen as opening up circuits of meaning to the temporal vicissitudes of particular contexts of apprehension, specific bodies, and thus to the potential of "resignification"—all of which acknowledge and even embrace the temporal and spatial gaps between making and apprehension or reception. This function of performativity in relation to performance art is alluded to by many a performance theorist, viz. Elin Diamond's observation:

When performativity materializes as performance in that risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing (a reiteration of norms) and a thing done (discursive conventions that frame our interpretation), between someone's body and the conventions of embodiment, we have access to cultural meanings and critique. Performativity, I would suggest, must be rooted in the materiality and historical density of performance.<sup>91</sup>

The key commonality here in both art/performance discourse and the work of Butler is the materiality of the body and temporality (which together Diamond is calling "historical density"). Both models posit potential for radical intervention at the level of the body and of time as introduced by one or another version of the performative. The key is that this corporeality *must be understood to include the potential interpreters' bodies*, as well as those of the makers (this opens up temporality, as well as spatial differences): meaning itself thus must be understood as relational and durational.

Returning to *Excitable Speech*, it is here that Butler begins to expose the problem she will continue to have with intentionality. Butler's greatest contribution, I would argue, is not in mobilizing the signifying dimension of performativity but in the attempt she makes to disinvest from teleology (that is, to pull the performative away from the claim of an intentional origin, per Searle's argument). Not directly citing Derrida, but channeling his concepts, Butler thus reverses Searle's causality: "is iterability of citationality not precisely this: *the operation of that metalepsis by which the subject who 'cites' the performative is temporarily produced as the belated and fictive origin of the performative itself?*"<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Butler reiterates (but with a strong focus on gender) Derrida's emphasis on the *difference* always already rupturing enunciative claims of authority or universality, which can only ever be reiterated from previously accepted language. In this model, those who are "excluded," Butler writes, "constitute the contingent limit of universalization."<sup>93</sup> This is an argument that, by highlighting the importance of resistance to this "limit," will merge with her fairly binary (covertly Hegelian) model of self and other to power her theory of queer as abject, that which is

radically excluded from the normative but is still implicated in it (just as the master is implicated in the slave, and vice versa)—an argument that has been hugely galvanizing for younger generations of theorists and artists. In the 1993 *Bodies that Matter*, she thus elaborates this model of abjection:

Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a “pure” opposition, a “transcendence” or contemporary relations of power but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure.<sup>94</sup>

Finally, it is this suturing of performativity to queer (and implicitly feminist) politics and ideas of producing social change in the work of Butler and many others (including Timothy Gould, Eve Sedgwick, and Diana Fuss) in the 1990s that define the apotheosis of the discourses I explore through my genealogy of the term. In the 1993 article “Critically Queer,” Butler thus crystallizes earlier points, making use of Derrida’s notion of (re)iteration to clarify a distinction between performance and the performative and to reject misapplications of her work by those who wished to perform themselves against the norm through willed and intentional action:

*In no sense can it be concluded that the part of gender that is performed is therefore the “truth” of gender; performance as bounded “act” is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which preceded, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s “will” or “choice”; further, what is “performed” works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, un-performable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake.*<sup>95</sup>

In some of its more deliberately political—often explicitly queer and/or feminist—guises, performativity in this way (as Dolan points out) is fully aligned with poststructuralist theory and postmodernism.<sup>96</sup> By the early 1990s it is already linked to feminist and queer theory and after that the performative becomes a common trope for activist impulses in queer theory and the visual arts. Projects such as the 1995 edited volume *Cruising the Performative*, edited by Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett, and Susan Foster, foreground the suturing of performativity to queer practice, while, as art critic Boris Groys has recently written in relation to the visual arts, “the performative subject is constituted by the call to act, to demonstrate oneself as alive.”<sup>97</sup> Groys’s arguments indicate the continuing significance of the performative as a political trope—and its continuing reduction to functioning as a sign of the radical as such.

## The paradox of the racial performative

Even as some of the most perspicuous re-readings of Austin in the 1990s have thus attended to gender and sexuality in relation to his concept of the performative, these theories tended to ignore or downplay issues of nationality, ethnicity, race (not to mention class and history itself) in their openings out of the concept. They tend to ignore what Ann Pellegrini, in her “re-sighting [of] the performative,” calls the “inter-implicating or ‘interarticulated’” capacities of differences through the processes of identification, wherein “the historical meanings and discourses of gender, race, and sexuality emerge through and against each other.”<sup>98</sup> In turn, Black and brown feminist, anti-racist, and postcolonial cultural theorists from the 1970s through 1990s, from Gloria Anzaldúa and bell hooks to Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Trinh T. Minh-Ha, commented only tangentially on developments in performance studies and queer theory as they sought to theorize identification in relation to cultural forms such as the visual arts. Due to the dominant assumption of whiteness in art history, art schools, and the art world throughout the twentieth century, these writers’ works (while they deeply informed critical race theory and performance studies), until recently, had much less direct impact on visual arts theory or practices than the work of queer theorists such as Butler. Correlatively, the term performativity is now common in art historical and curatorial discourse, and yet those who deploy it still often fail to acknowledge the interrelations among activism (particularly the rights movements), identity politics and theories addressing ethnic and racial identifications and the experience of “subaltern” or non-white people in white-dominant societies, political/social experience, and what artists or art works are supposedly “performatively” doing.<sup>99</sup> In 2014 art historian Dorothea von Hantelmann thus describes the soft understanding of performativity in art fields (where it is rarely connected to concrete activism or politics) as follows: “Today any artwork that in some formal, thematic, or structural way alludes to ideas of embodiment, enactment, staging, or theater is called performative.”<sup>100</sup>

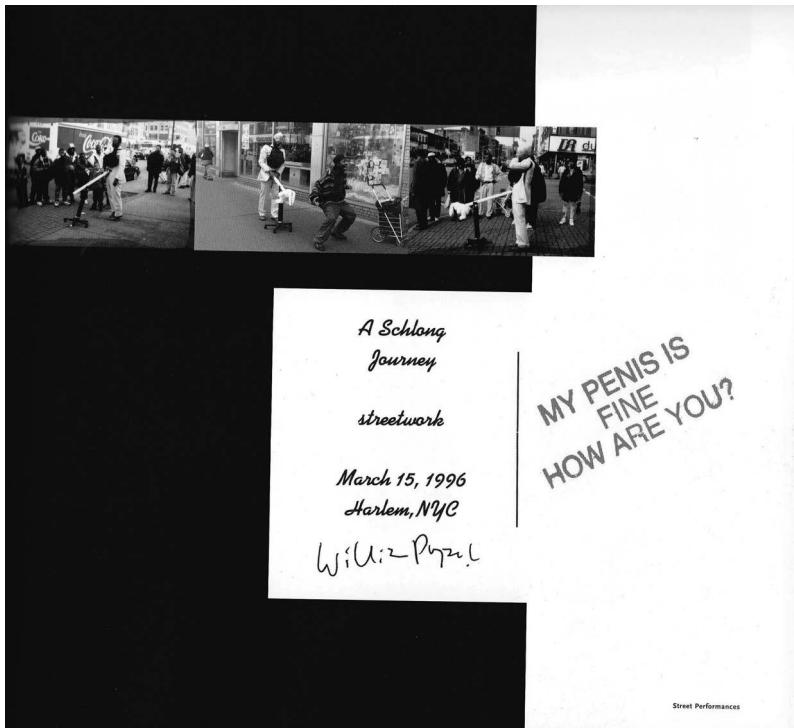
In parallel with von Hantelmann’s arguments, performance studies scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte in 2008 describes the “performative turn” of the 1960s and following, as characterized by a shift towards process, embodiment, and participatory strategies in contemporary art, and a corresponding dissolution of the former boundaries between art and life, and within art media.<sup>101</sup> The performativity of these European scholars is definitively if invisibly white: neither scholar acknowledges the revolutionary pressure of civil rights, postcolonial/decolonial movements, feminism, Black Power, Chicanx rights, or LGBTQ rights movements on methods of putting art into action—some of these have particular force in US culture after all. But clearly, as I have argued elsewhere, for artists actively to perform their bodies in and as the work of art in the 1960s and 1970s was not simply a gratuitous means to gain attention: the very *structure* of performance, its capacity performatively to “say” and so “do” art, facilitated artists’ (such as feminists’) claiming of the agency to *make* art simultaneously with

potentially being an object for viewers to contemplate, per reigning theories of the male gaze.<sup>102</sup>

But, in spite of the myopia of whiteness in queer feminist theory, performativity is never linked to the articulation of sex/gender alone. In the 2010s, scholars, mostly from Black and Latinx Studies in the USA, have directly and insistently attended to the performativity of race and ethnicity as part of what, as noted, Jasbir Puar terms the “concatenations” of difference conditioning how subjects relate to one another in the world.<sup>103</sup> At the nexus of performance studies and Black (or African American) Studies, for example, authors from E. Patrick Johnson, Daphne Brooks, and Bryant Keith Alexander to Ann Pellegrini, L.H. Stallings, Tavia Nyong’o, Ashon Crawley, and Joshua Chambers-Letson have tended to understand performance and performativity not as necessarily subversive, per the (mostly white) feminists such as Butler, Sedgwick, Sue-Ellen Case, and Jill Dolan, but as explaining the inevitable objectified embodiment of Black subjects in white-dominant cultures, particularly the US with our legacy of slavery. Interestingly in this light, Bryant Keith Alexander, in a 2004 article, “Black Skin/White Masks: The Performative Sustainability of Whiteness (*With Apologies to Frantz Fanon*),” springs off of Frantz Fanon’s model of understanding racial difference to acknowledge the performativity of Alexander’s own whiteness (as “something that does something in the world”) in the classroom, calling on white academics to be self-reflective about our privilege.<sup>104</sup> Even as Fanon understood the sexual *and* racial aspects of the brutal “performance” by French citizens of his inferiority as a Black French colonial subject, so this recent work expands our understanding of performativity to encompass larger concatenations of difference and identification, pointing to a crucial revision in theories of the performative.<sup>105</sup>

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William Pope.L, or Pope.L as he is most often called today—artist, poet, playwright, and teacher—produces a flyer for a street work called *Schlong Journey* (which is stamped with the text: “*My Penis is Fine: How Are You?*”). Pictures on the flyer show a man—a Black man no less, and one known for his historic forays with body clad in superman outfit, crawling through the glass- and trash-filled streets of New York—pushing the pedestal of an office chair in front of him. It is Pope.L, dressed in a white suit, carrying a knapsack on the front of his body. On the base of the chair he has carefully placed a very long (approximately 4 feet) white phallus, its tip adorned at some moments in the photographic sequence with a stuffed white bunny rabbit. (We remember Tavia Nyong’o’s assertion that, due to the sexualization of the Black body in US culture, Black performance by definition becomes “an uncanny double of queer performativity,” a dynamic Pope.L seems explicitly to enact in this work.<sup>106</sup>)



**FIGURE 2.4** Pope L., *Schlong Journey (My Penis is Fine, How Are You?)*, 1996; flyer for streetwork in Harlem, New York

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A few years later Pope.L is invited to give a plenary lecture at a huge international performance event at the Tate Modern in London. He is late. The organizer of the event, Adrian Heathfield, explains to the audience—I am among them—that Pope.L has had trouble getting to London, has been delayed (Heathfield is a maestro of slowing down the time of performance).<sup>107</sup> Finally the artist walks out to the podium. He begins speaking in a strange squawking, clicking torrent of noises that sound vaguely like words (more and more as he progresses) but never congeal fully into sense. The cadence is like that of English but no explicit words are recognizable.

With Pope.L's "lecture," the potential of the performative is impossibly deferred: without specific words, we have no promise. Yearning for the "authentic" live Black male performing body, we are left laughing, uneasy,



**FIGURE 2.5** Pope L., lecture at Tate Modern, London, 2003; at the “Live Culture” event organized by Adrian Heathfield; video version, screenshot by Amelia Jones

baffled, intrigued.<sup>108</sup> As Pope.L has written: “Blackness is a notion, a desert, a nothing.”<sup>109</sup>

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This author of “eRacism” imagery (in which he dribbles white milk over his bared Black torso, the word “eRacism” painted in white on his chest and a large plastic cow tied to his waist with a belt) offers his body, sexed, exclamatory, perhaps severely wounded, but in ways we cannot know. We have only the outsized phallus at once proclaiming while facetiously deflating his prowess in his “schlong journey.” (Pope.L: “I am a fisherman of social absurdity ... My focus is to politicize disenfranchisement.”)<sup>110</sup>

As if to taunt us with the inevitable sexualization of the Black body, elsewhere Pope.L writes about his desire to make a billboard stating: “This is a Painting of Martin Luther King’s Penis From Inside My Father’s Vagina.” Not surprisingly, no sign company would produce the billboard for him, so he fabricated postcards and flyers as well as an interactive website with the text.<sup>111</sup> In his writing Pope.L often touches on sexual themes: in “Hole Theory” (2002) he identifies with the vaginal absence of hole-ness: “I am the hole ... Hole Theory is/Theory in process engaging/Lack as an ongoing interaction.”<sup>112</sup>

Sexy as hell, challenging, rigorous, and sobering, Pope.L’s practice manifests what performance studies scholar Martin Patrick has called a “spectacular intersubjectivity,” with the “audience playing a crucial

role.”<sup>113</sup> Through this, rather than enacting his body/self in opposition to others (members of the white art world, for example), Pope.L performs a radically intersectional range of identifications that keep all spectators thinking and moving in relation to his actions.

Pope.L’s self-abjecting debasements of his body in the cause of activist performance shatter the complacency of the urban scene. In the urban “crawl” pieces, or for that matter in *My Penis is Fine*, the Black body labors publicly in ways that are also deeply unsettling in relation to the sexualization of Black male bodies in American culture. The performances operate to challenge what cultural theorist Herbert Marcuse famously and influentially called “repressive desublimation” in his 1955/1962 book *Eros and Civilization*. Pope.L does this by refusing the coercive “performance principle” of modern life through which Black bodies are controlled and simultaneously, if often covertly, sexualized. Pope.L plays with “non-repressive sublimation,” whereby, as Marcuse puts it, “the sexual impulses, without losing their erotic energy, transcend their immediate object and eroticize normally non- and anti-erotic relationships between the individuals and between them and their environment.”<sup>114</sup> Explicitly eroticizing the laboring Black male body in urban spaces as “art,” Pope.L sexualizes through a different kind of performance (or performativity) to that demanded in the labor economies of late capitalism.

The work in this way is profoundly queer, if by queer we mean manifestations that call forth the relationality (intersubjectivity) of our sexual selves as they navigate the world through highly raced, classed, gendered, and otherwise constituted—iterative—but ultimately never fully fixed formulations.

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Theories of performativity in the visual arts discursively enact while also describing what artists have achieved through embodiment since the 1950s, and yet these theories have for many years shaped intellectual and art/performance histories often without attending to Black creative bodies and practices. For example, the radical social and art activism of Noah Purifoy from the 1950s until his death in 2004 has been totally excluded from contemporary art histories until very recently, even those focusing on art in Los Angeles, where Purifoy formed and supported alternative Black art institutions such as the Watts Towers Art Center while producing riotous and innovative assemblage sculptures filling entire landscapes in Southern California. This is also in spite of the fact that Purifoy nurtured Black art on the West Coast, providing fertile ground for artists such as David Hammonds and Senga Nengudi to perform and make work a few years later.<sup>115</sup> As well, the marginalization of those activist bodies of the picket lines and protest movements from histories and theories of performance and performativity have compromised these by limiting the concept and force of the performative to sexuality and gender. These activist bodies are those that, as Pope.L, Purifoy, Nengudi, Hammonds, and many other artists attending to and furthering the concerns of the rights movements since the 1950s have taught us, were inextricably interrelated.

## Time, again, or the materialist/utopian queer performative in the 2000s

Butler's Derridean attention to the function of temporality in the performative (the temporal gap necessary for resignification) has contributed to other key developments in queer theory in the 2000s, some spearheaded as well by Sedgwick's nuanced performative unfurlings of queer performativity. Temporality in Sedgwick's work and that of her followers becomes a hugely mobilizing factor in articulating what queer is or can become, even after "gender performance" and "queer performativity" went mainstream and became less rigorous as applied concepts by the late 1990s. Queer time (in the scholarship of Jack Halberstam and others), temporal drag (in the work of Elizabeth Freeman), and queer futurity (in José Esteban Muñoz's late work) become mobilizing concepts or points of debate for a new generation of theorists bent on the impossible task of maintaining the openness of queer and its specificity as empowering those otherwise marginalized and oppressed on the basis of their experienced and perceived gender/sex identifications. By opening a temporal gap, showing the art work to be open to multiple ongoing interpretations, performativity in these models becomes an opening to otherness for artists claiming agency in the face of oppression. Claiming a relational performativity becomes a way of insisting on the complexity, reciprocally determined nature, and investedness of meaning (of bodies, of performances, of social discourses, of art)—an extension of the poststructuralist or postmodern theoretical project, but one that involves bodies in space.

Adding to these theories, then, by 2003, Karen Barad—a new materialist feminist philosopher—refigures performativity in terms of the concerns of her discipline, using the term precisely to turn it against weak poststructuralist accounts that dematerialize or disembody relationality:

A *performative* understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real.<sup>116</sup>

Leaving aside Barad's implication that there is a single "properly construed" meaning of performativity (a contention clearly belied by the historically shifting range of deployments of the term traced here), her critique, which clearly takes issue with "weak" forms of discourse theory relating to Butler's project, demonstrates the usefulness of performativity as a means of undermining realist claims to knowledge founded on the idea that the world *pre-exists* its representations—in this case, that a sovereign subject preexists ideology and can willfully decide to "perform gender" or other aspects of identity a certain way. More specifically, Barad explores performativity to develop a new way of thinking about agency through a "relational ontology" that brilliantly insists on the "agential intra-action" between and among

materialities. She uses examples from experimental physics to note that apparatuses developed in the field by scientists such as Niels Bohr are not neutral probes of a preexisting reality but rather are themselves performative tools, arguing that “apparatuses are dynamic (re)configurings of the world, specific agential practices/intra-actions/performances” through which boundaries are enacted.<sup>117</sup> Barad’s “agential realist account” strongly supports my critical genealogical approach, which attempts to interrelate identity politics activities and theories, actual protesting/suffering/performing bodies, with discourses and practices relating to the arts:

On an agential realist account, *discursive practices are specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, practices, and meanings are differentially enacted ... [D]iscursive practices are ongoing agential intra-actions of the world through which local determinacy is enacted within the phenomena produced. Discursive practices are causal intra-actions ... [M]eaning is not a property of individual words or groups of words but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential intelligibility.*<sup>118</sup>

We might extend Barad’s quite revolutionary concepts, then, to argue that performativity has long been its own kind of “apparatus” mobilizing a set of “causal intra-actions,” one that sparks agential intra-activity. So much I have implied through the discursive analyses here and the rupturing interpretations of art practices that interweave obvious materialities with theoretical abstractions, which I hope have at least pointed to the way in which the shift to performativity as a model of making and meaning occurred through an increasing attention to the power of foregrounding embodied exchanges (relationality) as a means of transforming the social and aesthetic realms.

Relevant to this point of transformative goals, as these have been connected to performativity, is Kelly Oliver’s extension of Butler’s arguments in her 1999 article “What is Transformative about the Performative? From Repetition to Working-Through.” Oliver argues that the psychoanalytical concept of “working-through” is key to performativity’s capacity to transform through repetition: “Performative repetitions resignify in ethically transformative ways only when accompanied by, or in the form of, critical self-analysis and interpretation conceived as *always fundamentally dialogic and relational.*”<sup>119</sup> In order to work as a political theory (which, Oliver compellingly argues, is the goal—albeit often unarticulated—of theories after 1990 deploying the performative), the theory must also mobilize “a notion of working-through as an on-going process of self-critical interpretation in which the self is conceived as fundamentally dialogic and relational rather than sovereign.” Performativity only functions the way progressives want it to if we implicate ourselves:

While performative repetitions can resignify words and practices, changing the structure or terms of performative repetition itself requires critical self-analysis and interpretation which acknowledge our transferential investments in others and otherness.<sup>120</sup>

Oliver's arguments, like those of just about every theorist deploying the term performativity, presume the desirability of often inchoate progressive political goals, which in turn rely upon a kind of utopian wish for better futures. José Esteban Muñoz (mentored by Eve Sedgwick, among others, in his graduate studies at Duke University in the 1990s) similarly deploys the performative to point yearningly and urgently towards futurity. In Muñoz's theory, as crystallized in a section entitled "Utopian Performatives" in his 2009 book *Cruising Utopia*, he draws on Ernst Bloch's theorization of a "principle of hope" to suggest that "hope ... is the modality that permits us to access futurity," an absolutely desirable goal in a world of violence where hope is continually denied to "minoritarian subjects."<sup>121</sup> Muñoz argues that, via the force of performativity, performance extrudes and makes possible a "potentiality" that is "always in the horizon and ... never completely disappears but, instead, lingers and serves as a conduit for knowing and feeling other people."<sup>122</sup>

Muñoz notes that potentiality activates a temporality of the horizon and refutes presentness, because what is potential is not present yet. In this way, potentiality is the aspect of performativity that includes all future manifestations of that which is performed.<sup>123</sup> He is clear on this point: performativity, as a mode of potentiality, *opens performance (whether of art or gender) to future readings or interpretive engagements*. He writes, movingly, of his direct engagements with living artists, which "debunk the false principle of the critic's objectivity. Queer intimacies underwrite much of the critical work I do ... [wherein I] embrace the idea of the performative collaboration between artist and writer."<sup>124</sup> Embracing rather than obscuring our investedness in the performances we engage, performativity allows us to continue to hope for more progressive futures—for, as Muñoz asks, without hope, what else do we have?

"Cruising utopia," as he does in the book by this name, Muñoz exemplifies and enacts the way in which performativity (and performance) can be *performed* interpretively and relationally in a utopian vein, providing a politics that is not only sutured to the concerns of the marginalized and brutalized brown, Black, and queer people of the world, but is motivated (one could say *performatively enacted*) by and through them. This version of performativity is brought to an apotheosis in a 2018 book by Joshua Chambers-Letson (a former student and friend of Muñoz—in an extension of the queer filiation that Sedgwick explores in her work): *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life*.<sup>125</sup> Here, Chambers-Letson explores community building among queers, specifically via the joyous parties (often tinged with desperation) that the dispossessed attend, bringing themselves together and warding off loneliness and despair; on this point, Chambers-Letson cites Wallace Stephens: "We collect ourselves, out of all the indifferences, into one thing."<sup>126</sup> Could this be the renewed, pulsating variant of today's performative, which ties it both to revitalized, nuanced forms of identity politics (coalitional activism as well as theory) and to erudite theories/philosophies of subject formation and political resistance?

Bodies and institutions change. Materialities continually shift. Meanings transform. Coalitions form and reform, and action is mobilized or halted. All of this takes place in a deeply performative and so, in Barad's and Kelly's terms, necessarily *relational* way, and (per Muñoz and Chambers-Letson) pointing us towards potentially utopian yet communitarian futures. No wonder the term has become so tantalizingly ubiquitous.

## Notes

- 1 On this point, see Derek Murray's two articles exploring the gendered self in selfie culture, "Notes to Self: The Visual Culture of Selfies in the Age of Social Media," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 18, n. 6 (2015), 490–516; and "Selfie Consumerism in a Narcissistic Age," *Consumption Markets & Culture* 21 (published online June 1, 2018), available online at: [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10253866.2018.1467318](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10253866.2018.1467318); accessed August 2, 2018.
- 2 Virginia Heffernan, "President Trump Is His Own Wiretap," *Los Angeles Times* (May 20, 2018), available online at: [www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-heffernan-tv-types-20180518-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-heffernan-tv-types-20180518-story.html); accessed May 16, 2019.
- 3 As Diana Taylor has pointed out to me, there is no evidence that Austin ever used the term "performativity" himself, and there is a danger in this "trajectory that moves from making language that acts into bodies that act" (in an email to me of October 26, 2017). This is in fact the "dangerous" move that Butler makes in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, n. 4 (December 1988), 519–31, and, less directly, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," *GLQ* 1 (1993), 1–16.
- 4 Rune Gade and Anne Jerslev, "Introduction" to *Performative Realism: Interdisciplinary Studies in Art and Media* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen/Museum Tusculanum Press, 2005), 7.
- 5 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 33.
- 6 Jill Dolan, "Geographies of Learning: Theatre Studies, Performance, and the 'Performative,'" *Theatre Journal* 45, n. 4 (December 1993), 419. Dolan's article and James Loxley's *Performativity* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2007) provide excellent overviews of the interrelation of poststructuralist philosophy and feminist, queer, and performance theory. Dolan tends to see the term largely in relation to theater studies, while Loxley does not fully address the adoption of the term in anti-racist, post- and decolonial theory.
- 7 Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2001), 171.
- 8 For example, arguments from Butler's first widely read text on the Austin theory, the 1988 *Theatre Journal* article, were modified into the final chapter of her widely-read book *Gender Trouble*; both cited above. And in 1993, answering those who chose to adopt her theory superficially by theorizing one's gender as something one could simply choose to perform one way or another, Butler published the brilliant *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), which draws on phenomenology to bring the theory of gender performance into the explicit zone of embodiment and explicitly challenged essentializing and naively intentionalist models of gender performance.
- 9 Dolan, "Geographies of Learning," 419.
- 10 Gade and Jerslev, "Introduction," 8. See also the work of linguist Émile Benveniste, who took up Austin's performative to position it as explicitly social and relational or

- intersubjective in his essay “Analytic Philosophy and Language” (1963), *Problems in General Linguistics*, tr. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, FL: Univ. of Miami Press, 1971), 231–8.
- 11 Manthia Diawara, “Black Studies, Cultural Studies: Performative Acts” (1992), reprinted in *What Is Cultural Studies?: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (London: Arnold Publisher, 1996), 305.
  - 12 Craig Pearson, *Radical Theatrics: Put-Ons, Politics and the Sixties* (Seattle, WA and London: University of Washington Press, 2014), 7.
  - 13 I discuss the importance of Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) and Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* (1952) as situating the key terms for Euro-American postwar coalitional rights movements and discourses in Chapter 2, “Art as a Binary Proposition; Identity as a Binary Proposition,” *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (London: Routledge, 2012), 18–62. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949), ed. and tr. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011); and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (1952), tr. Charles Lam Markmann (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1967).
  - 14 See Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1987).
  - 15 See my Chapter 4, “Multiculturalism, Intersectionality, and ‘Post-Identity,’” in *Seeing Differently*, 117–69.
  - 16 Coco Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance” (1994), reprinted in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2010), 226, 229.
  - 17 See Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133–47; on experience culture or the “experiential turn,” see Gerhard Schulze, *The Experience Society* (London: Sage, 2005); first published in German in 1992.
  - 18 This occurs in two 2014 extended online essays on the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis) website by German art historian Dorothea Hantelmann and US performance studies scholar Shannon Jackson. See Jackson, “Performativity and Its Addressee,” and Hantelmann, “The Experiential Turn,” *On Performativity*, ed. Elizabeth Carpenter, Vol. 1 of *Living Collections Catalogue* (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2014), available online at: <http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/performativity-and-its-addressee/>; and <http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn>; accessed March 22, 2019. These accounts are telling in their gaps and emphases in relation to the scholars’ disciplinary training. Notably, neither of the scholars fully acknowledges the huge role of the rights movements in conditioning the turn to the body in contemporary art. Jackson, in “Performativity and Its Addressee,” sums up almost 20 years of art historical work addressing the putting-into-process of the body in visual art practices (such as my book *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998)), arguments that are well-known in art history. Hantelmann in turn discusses George Schulze’s theory of “the experience society” in relation to performativity in “The Experiential Turn.” Looking at performativity entirely in the visual arts context as well (appropriately given the website), Hantelmann argues erroneously that performative strategies began with Minimalism in the late 1960s and focuses almost entirely on the work of canonical white male European and American artists, ignoring the importance of feminist, postcolonial, LGBTQ, and civil rights movements and an entire US-based art historical literature on performance and body art, which identifies this “performative” shift as beginning in the early 1950s interdisciplinary performance work I explore here.
  - 19 McKenzie, *Perform or Else*, 14. See Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), xxiii–xxiv.

- 20 Victor Turner, “The Anthropology of Performance,” in *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York, NY: PAJ Publications, 1987), 72–4. Turner ties this shift to Richard Schechner’s version of performance studies, linked as well to the work of Erving Goffman on the relational or “performed-for-an-audience” aspect of social performance (74).
- 21 Originally from Martin Duberman’s interview with John Cage, April 26, 1969; as cited by Ruth Erickson in “Chance Encounters: Theater Piece No. 1 and Its Pre-history,” in *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1933–1957*, ed. Helen Molesworth with Ruth Erickson (Boston, MA: Institute of Contemporary Art and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 299.
- 22 Many conflicting descriptions exist in published accounts of Black Mountain College. This one is taken largely from Mary Emma Harris’s *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 226–8. See also the descriptions in Ruth Erickson, “Chance Encounters,” 298–303, and in Erika Fischer-Lichte’s *The Transformative Power of Performance* (2004), tr. Saskya Iris Jain (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2008), 131–2.
- 23 Cited in William Fetterman, *John Cage’s Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 100.
- 24 I am indebted to Jonathan Katz for his input here, and his stress on “the queer Zen inflected art practices of the 50s & 60s—Tobey, Martin, Cage, etc.—as a form of anti-binarian durationality as per your definition,” in an email of November 29, 2009. See also Harris’s account in *The Arts at Black Mountain College*, 228; M.C. Richards is cited here from a phone conversation with Harris, June 25, 1980.
- 25 See the account of Francesca Wilmott, Curatorial Assistant, “Composing Silence: John Cage and Black Mountain College,” Museum of Modern Art “Collection and Exhibitions” website, posted January 3, 2014; available online at: [www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2014/01/03/composing-silence-john-cage-and-black-mountain-college-3/](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2014/01/03/composing-silence-john-cage-and-black-mountain-college-3/); accessed February 11, 2018.
- 26 This is Jonathan Katz’s term; email to the author, November 29, 2009.
- 27 See for example the “Two Happening Concepts: Allan Kaprow and Wolf Vostell,” Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (no author listed and no date given), where it is claimed that “Happenings emerged around the US and Europe in the late 1950s and 1960s, eventually becoming a flexible concept used to describe a wide array of performative pieces that combined visual, olfactory, and auditory material”; available online at: <https://mcachicago.org/Exhibitions/1967/Two-Happening-Concepts>; accessed August 7, 2018. The best sources on Kaprow’s happenings are his books: *Assemblage, Environments, Happenings* (New York, NY: Harry Abrams, 1966), and his collected writings, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).
- 28 Valerie Cassel Oliver, “Putting the Body on the Line: Endurance in Black Performance,” in *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, ed. Valerie Cassel Oliver (Houston, TX: Contemporary Arts Museum, 2013), 14.
- 29 Moira Roth, “The Aesthetic of Indifference,” *Artforum* (November 1977); reprinted in *Journal of Art and Art Education* (November 22, 1990), 4.
- 30 I extensively examine the appropriation and construction of Duchamp and his work by US artists and art writers in my book *Postmodernism and the Engendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 31 Roth, “The Aesthetic of Indifference,” 7.
- 32 Roth is courageous enough to note “homosexuality and bisexuality [were] permissible and even common among the new aesthetic group” but does not elaborate; Roth, “The Aesthetic of Indifference,” 6. Jonathan Katz emerged into art history in the 1990s with articles challenging these erasures, as in his “The Art of Code: Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg,” *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, ed. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle Courtivron (New York, NY: Thames &

- Hudson, 1996), 189–206. However, it must be noted that Calvin Tomkins also explicitly “outed” the gay/queer axis of artists emerging in the 1950s in *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-Garde, Duchamp, Tinguely, Cage, Rauschenberg, Cunningham* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) and *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980). I discuss Tomkins’s queering of these artists in *Postmodernism and the Engendering of Marcel Duchamp*, 32–6.
- 33 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker, “Introduction,” in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Parker and Sedgwick (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1995), 9–10.
- 34 Kellie Jones, Chapter 4, “In Motion: The Performative Impulse,” *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 185–264. Jones uses “performative” loosely in this chapter.
- 35 Tavia Nyong’o, “Between the Body and the Flesh: Sex and Gender in Black Performance Art,” in *Radical Presence*, ed. Oliver, 27, 26.
- 36 My emphasis to indicate Austin’s stresses in speaking. See Andersen, “Performativity as Critical Praxis: J.L Austin, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Catherine Malabou, c. 1955–2014,” PhD Dissertation submitted to McGill University, Montréal, 2017; I was Andersen’s PhD supervisor.
- 37 J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1955 lectures first published in 1962), second edition, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 4.
- 38 Ibid., 5, 6–7.
- 39 Andersen, “Performativity as Critical Praxis,” 64.
- 40 See Austin, *How to Do*, 8.
- 41 R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946/1956), 215.
- 42 Ibid., 283–4.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 See for example Dwight Conquergood, “Ethnography, Rhetoric, and Performance,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992), 80–123; and Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 291–322.
- 45 Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context” (1971), tr. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (1977), reprinted in Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 1–24, this citation 13–14. After its delivery in Montréal, the text was published first in French in *Marges de la philosophie* (1972) and then in English (translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman) in *Glyph* in 1977, and it is this version that is reprinted in *Limited Inc*.
- 46 John Searle, “How Performatives Work,” *Linguistics and Philosophy* 12, n. 5 (October 1989), 544; my emphasis.
- 47 See Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Searle, “Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida,” *Glyph* 2 (1977), 198–208; and Searle, “How Performatives Work.”
- 48 Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” 2–3.
- 49 Specifically Condillac’s 1746 *Essai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines* (Essay on the origin of human knowledge).
- 50 Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” 6, 7.
- 51 Ibid., 7.
- 52 Ibid., 8, and see 8–10.
- 53 Ibid., 12.
- 54 Ibid., 14.
- 55 Ibid., 18.

- 56 Searle, from his “Reiterating the Differences” attack on Derrida’s “Signature Event Context” in *Glyph*, 202.
- 57 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1997). Butler makes a rare foray into the theory of Louis Althusser (see 24–31), which is otherwise missing from much of performance theory. Althusser’s model affords an understanding of the inexorable pressure of ideology via the unconscious internalization of structures of meaning and value—this would include the way in which our unconscious participation in state and local ideologies of identification puts pressure on any “performance” or “performative.” See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)” (1969), published in English in *Lenin and Philosophy*, tr. Ben Brewster (New York, NY and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127–88.
- 58 Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” 18–19.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 60 Derrida, “Afterword,” *Limited Inc.*, 129.
- 61 Derrida does acknowledge defeat: “What does ‘intention’ properly mean as the *particular* or *original* work … of iterability? I admit that this enigma grows increasingly obscure for me,” *Ibid.*, 130. He takes this opportunity to dismantle Searle’s 1983 book entitled nothing else but *Intentionality*.
- 62 Derrida eviscerates Searle’s reliance on speech as a transparent realization of intentionality in Derrida, “Afterword,” 121–2. In doing so, he cites and dismantles Searle’s following claims: “*a meaningful sentence is just a stand-in possibility of the corresponding (intentional) speech act*,” and “of course in serious literal speech the sentences are precisely the realizations of the intentions: there need be no *gulf* at all between the illocutionary intention and its expression.” From Searle, “Reiterating the Differences,” an attack on Derrida’s “Signature Event Context” in *Glyph*, noted above; here 202.
- 63 Austin, *How to Do*, 60–1, cited by Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” 20.
- 64 Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” 20.
- 65 Derrida, “Afterword,” 136. I am indebted to Andersen’s “Performativity as Critical Praxis” for reminding me about this exploration of context; see 82–3.
- 66 Derrida, “Afterword,” 136.
- 67 Hannah Arendt, “What Is Freedom?,” in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 154.
- 68 Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting” (1960/1965), reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956*, volume 4, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 87.
- 69 See my chapter “The Pollockian Performative,” in *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, 53–102.
- 70 Rosenberg, “American Action Painters,” *Art News* (December 1952), 22–3, 48–50; Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Art News* (October 1958), 24–6, 55–7, available in the *Art News* archives online at: [www.artnews.com/2018/02/09/archives-allan-kaprow-legacy-jackson-pollock-1958/](http://www.artnews.com/2018/02/09/archives-allan-kaprow-legacy-jackson-pollock-1958/); accessed March 24, 2019.
- 71 Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock.”
- 72 On the trajectory of Georges Mathieu (France) and Gutai (Japan) in relation to the images of Pollock painting, see my “The ‘Pollockian Performative.’”
- 73 Disinterestedness is a key element of European aesthetics as interpreted from Immanuel Kant’s 1790 *Critique of Judgment*; I discuss this dynamic in “Every man knows where and how beauty gives him pleasure”: Beauty Discourse and the Logic of Aesthetics,” *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, ed. Emory Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 215–39.
- 74 See, for example, Butler on AIDS, grieving, and gender melancholia in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), see 138–40.

- 75 See my rather heated article, “Holy Body: Erotic Ethics in Ron Athey and Juliana Snapper’s *Judas Cradle*,” *TDR (The Drama Review)* 50.1 (Spring 2006), 159–69.
- 76 I am organizing a major retrospective of Athey’s work, entitled *Queer Communion: Ron Athey*, which will travel in the US and Europe in 2020–2021.
- 77 Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 519.
- 78 Ibid., 520.
- 79 On the latter, see my book *Self/Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2006).
- 80 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.
- 81 See Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “A Dialogue on Love,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, n. 2 (Winter, 1998), 611–31. This essay, written as she struggled with cancer, is laceratingly personal, revealing as an admitted therapy patient her profound vulnerabilities in relation to her large body and even musing about her sexual identifications and sex life.
- 82 Sedgwick and Andrew Parker, “Introduction: Performativity and Performance,” 5.
- 83 See Butler, Chapter 4, “Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion,” *Bodies that Matter*, 121–40.
- 84 See Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity,” 4, 12–13, 14; this essay was reworked into Chapter 1 of her book *Touching Feeling*, 35–66.
- 85 Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity,” 12–13.
- 86 In his book *Perform or Else*, Jon McKenzie notes the tendency to take up this relatively minor aspect of Butler’s arguments at the cost of recognizing her far more complex and extended work on the equivocal political nature of claiming representations as performative. But, as noted, the larger tendency to oversimplify performativity of gender or bodies as necessarily “radical” or “subversive” is encouraged by Butler herself with her use of the latter term in the subtitle to *Gender Trouble* and in the subtitle to the “Gender is Burning” chapter of *Bodies that Matter*, where she privileges drag queerness as subversive.
- 87 Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 23, 5, 4. Timothy Gould, in 1995 (two years before Butler’s book was published), had already elaborated a similar argument in relation to the performative, suggesting that the nurturing of a “perlocutionary delay” would be advantageous in making it possible to “think about the differences that might occur within this gap”; for Gould, the perlocutionary delay assists in destabilizing philosophy’s claims of authority, in its wish to “create the conditions of its own reception, the happiness of its performances.” He concludes: “perhaps if it stopped trying to enforce its vision of its audience and of its subjects, it would give itself more room for its own forms of speech—and hence for its own forms of listening.” Timothy Gould, “The Unhappy Performative,” in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Parker and Sedgwick, 39, 41.
- 88 Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 92, 87. Butler’s critique of those who wish to monitor and restrain hate speech relies on a rather simplistic and unsympathetic reading beginning with Austin’s work—which she determines as positing a sovereign subject who precedes the speech in question, in opposition to her claim (via Althusser and Derrida) that speakers are always “in” ideology and that speech is always citational such that we do not preexist our speech as pure subjects. While I agree completely with her Derridean/Althusserian version of how we speak and act, I see Austin as being more subtle in his claims—it is the *speech* that purveys authority through the illocutionary act for Austin, not the speaker (although the latter may gain authority, this is not Austin’s point). I am not alone in this position; see Loxley’s critique of Butler’s evaluation of Austin, *Performativity*, 6–21.
- 89 Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 41.
- 90 Alice Bucknell, “Can Anything Be Performance Art?,” *Artsy* (June 21, 2017), available online at: [www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-performance-art](http://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-performance-art); accessed June 26, 2018. The fact that the article goes on use the words of YouTuber Molly

- Soda (described as producing “makeup tutorials”) in order to dismiss “someone pouring chocolate all over themselves and screaming” as not being “self aware” (which describes, without explicitly naming, Karen Finley’s epically important 1987 feminist performance piece *The Constant State of Desire*) points to the dangerous superficiality of such accounts. Erika Fischer-Lichte, in theater studies, was among the first to use the term “performative turn,” in *The Transformative Power of Performance*.
- 91 Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1996), 5.
  - 92 Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 49; see also her (rare) citation of Derrida on 51.
  - 93 Ibid., 90.
  - 94 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 241.
  - 95 Butler, “Critically Queer,” *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 1 (1993), 24; italics in the original.
  - 96 See Jill Dolan, “Geographies of Learning.”
  - 97 Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (London: Verso, 2016), 63. Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett, and Susan Foster, ed., *Cruising the Performative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).
  - 98 Ann Pellegrini, “The Seen of Difference: Re-Sighting the Performative,” in *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 2. Pellegrini is adamant that this “re-sighting” must happen through psychoanalysis, as itself a performative story-telling discourse.
  - 99 See Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 271–313.
  - 100 Dorothea von Hantelmann, “The Experiential Turn”; see also Dorothea Von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art: The Meaning of Art’s Performativity* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2010), 18, 19.
  - 101 Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*; see especially Chapter 2, “Explaining Concepts: Performativity and Performance,” 24–37.
  - 102 See my arguments about the work of Carolee Schneemann, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, 1–5.
  - 103 Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 195.
  - 104 Bryant Keith Alexander, “Black Skin/White Masks: The Performative Sustainability of Whiteness (*With Apologies to Frantz Fanon*)”, *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, n. 5 (2004), 647–72.
  - 105 Fanon showed serious limits in addressing sexuality; on his overt homophobia in *Black Skin White Masks*, see Kobena Mercer ‘Decolonisation and Disappointment: Reading Fanon’s Sexual Politics,’ *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, ed. Alan Read (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1996), 114–31.
  - 106 Nyong’o, “Between the Body and the Flesh,” 26.
  - 107 See his beautiful book on *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (London: Live Art Development Agency, 2009).
  - 108 Darby English has noted Pope.L’s activation of the “productive potential of apositionality,” but this doesn’t seem right; the work to my mind is not about a lack of positionality (apositionality) but about an opening up and scrambling of positionalties such that we question our belief in what they seem to signify. See English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 259.
  - 109 Pope.L, *Some Things You Can Do with Blackness ...* (London: Kenny Schachter Rove, 2005), n.p., as cited in William Pope.L, *A Long White Cloud* (Auckland: Te Tuhi Gallery, 2013), 10.

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- 110 Pope.L quoted by Mark H.C. Bessire in “The Friendliest Black Artist in America,” *William Pope.L: The Friendliest Black Artist in America*, ed. Mark H.C. Bessire (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 23.
- 111 This project is discussed by Martin Patrick in *Across the Art/Life Divide: Performance, Subjectivity, and Social Practice in Contemporary Art* (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2017), 28. Pope.L’s website includes personal diary posts and guides the user through a wacky networked experience with nonintuitive logic; <http://distributingmartin.com/>, accessed April 2, 2019.
- 112 Pope.L, extracts from “Hole Theory: Parts Four & Five” (2002), *Eating the Wall Street Journal* [self-published as a facsimile in booklet accompanying performance; italics correspond to handwriting in original]; reprinted in *Sexuality*, ed. Amelia Jones (London: Whitechapel Gallery and Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014), 195–9; these quotes 195, 198.
- 113 Patrick, *Across the Art/Life Divide*, 27. He cites Pope.L: “I like audience. I like giving good audience. I like people. My appreciation comes more from my background in theatre and rock bands than from being in the art world. [...] I also respect and fear the audience. Like my family, the audience is also bigger than me. I see my relation to audience as a kind of dance in which I must be sensitive to the ebb and flow of the choreography. This choreography is a collaboration. No one owns it. Its nature is mutually influencing. Bridges must be built and burnt viscerally.” Originally from *William Pope.L*, ed. Bessire, 64–5.
- 114 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1955), reprinted 1962 with new “Preface,” from which this quote comes, ix.
- 115 See Kellie Jones, *South of Pico*, and my essay “Please Respond: Senga Nengudi’s Art as ‘Human Relationship’,” *Senga Nengudi* (Colorado Springs, CO: University of Colorado, Colorado Springs Galleries of Contemporary Art, 2015), 42–9.
- 116 Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” *Signs* 28, n. 3 (2003), 802.
- 117 Ibid., 816; emphases in original.
- 118 Ibid., 820–1; emphases in the original.
- 119 Kelly Oliver, “What Is Transformative about the Performative? From Repetition to Working Through,” *Studies in Practical Philosophy* 1, n. 2 (Fall 1999), 144; my emphasis.
- 120 Ibid., 164, 165.
- 121 José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 97.
- 122 Ibid., 113.
- 123 Ibid., 99; Muñoz is referring to Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).
- 124 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 101.
- 125 Joshua Chambers-Letson, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2018), the book is dedicated to Muñoz and the entire preface addresses Muñoz’s untimely death in 2013.
- 126 Ibid., xii; Stevens’ is quoted from his poem “Final Soliloquy of the Interior Par amour,” *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1990), 524. I am indebted to the author for sharing his book in proof stage with me. It has been inspirational in shaping the final version of this book.

# 3

## RELATIONALITY

The questions opened up in the 1950s around what we now think of as performativity, from Austin's invention of the term performative to artists putting art in motion and opening it to the audience, generally link, sometimes quite directly, to an awareness of the *relationality* of the force of signification. Picking up on this link, this chapter explores the pulse of relationality that circulates through (and is thus also acknowledged and produced by) the social sciences as well as the visual arts and performance discourses and practices from the 1950s through the 1970s and beyond.

Relationality and related social science terms such as interaction, interactivity, and interpersonal perception have come to be understood as crucial structures by which subjects engage with one another, coarticulate each other's expressions, responses, and even personalities, and through which one subject makes or interprets meaning in relation to another through texts or art works. Relationality became a ubiquitous concept during this period in Euro-American thought, signalling new ways of thinking about meaning and human social life—with even individuals themselves viewed as interdependent rather than singular and fully coherent within themselves. This new notion of the subject as relational also orients towards an understanding of gender/sex as constructions, and thus towards the queer.<sup>1</sup> It is fully adopted by queer theory as paradigmatic of the dynamic of queer performativity by the 1990s.

In her 1997 book *Excitable Speech*, Butler thus refers to Austin's work to link performativity with relationality (or “transitivity”):

The title of J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* poses the question of performativity as what it means to say that “things might be done with words.” The problem of performativity is thus immediately bound up with a question of transitivity.<sup>2</sup>

With the recognition of Richard Schechner, one of the founders of performance studies, we see that by the 1980s, the term is ensconced in the field: “the world that was securely positional is becoming dizzyingly relational … In-between is becoming the norm.”<sup>3</sup> And by the 1990s, relationality becomes the trope through which the interdependency of subjects as queer and performative is articulated as having political valence, per Peggy Phelan in her influential book *Unmarked* in 1993:

*It is in the attempt to walk (and live) on the rickety bridge between self and other—and not the attempt to arrive at one side or another—that we discover real hope. That walk is our always suspended performance—in the classroom, in the political field, in relation to one another and to ourselves.*<sup>4</sup>

As with any discourse, there is no simple or unidirectional causal structure in this genealogy linked of ideas about queer and performance or performativity to relationality. In this chapter, as well, queer performance *art* might seem to disappear here and there with the emphasis on social sciences model of the performance of the self—here perhaps the field notes or ruptures are particularly useful in reattaching those discussions to queer performance work being done simultaneously by important artists. Just as I have already suggested that the theoretical development of performativity was accompanied from the 1950s by its virtually simultaneous development as a mode of creative expression in a broad range of literary, musical, theatrical, and artistic practices, so here I narrate parallels between social science and artistic or performance enactments of relationality. I put all of these in context with queer theory’s notion of the queer subject as in process or relational.

### The relational self post-WWII

Massive social changes were occurring in the 1950s and 1960s in the increasingly global so-called Western world (and elsewhere, but European-based cultures are our focus here), including most notably rights and postcolonial movements based on the rights of subjects oppressed because of their relationship to the power structures of patriarchy, imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism. Theories of performativity and relationality are linked to questions of identification and, I argue, can best be understood in relation to this rise of consciousness about identity and structures of selfhood as articulated in relation to otherness from the 1950s forward. This understanding includes an increasing awareness of heteronormative structures of gender and sexuality, but also of racial/ethnic identifications, and generally intersectional and relational concepts self and other. As the Cold War and colonial conflicts in India, Vietnam, and Algeria and elsewhere moved into the 1960s, and travel and communication among previously isolated parts of the world increased in volume and speed, a general consciousness of self and otherness as taking place in encounters in social spaces, with selfhood

defined and experienced through an idea of a performative self enacted in relation to otherness, began to develop and solidify in the social sciences.

As Jon McKenzie has noted, these patterns corresponded as well to the rise of digital technologies and of “techno-performance,” performances mobilizing digital and networked technologies; they also, as I have suggested, paralleled the development of poststructuralist philosophy’s concept of the postmodern subject. McKenzie, as noted in the previous chapter, cites French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard’s observations in the highly influential 1979 book *The Postmodern Condition* about the decentering of master narratives, including that of the sovereign, centered subject of European modernity. Here I want to stress McKenzie’s argument, following Lyotard but applying a performance framework, that “performativity is the postmodern condition … [I]t has come to govern the entire realm of social bonds.”<sup>5</sup> While I focused in Chapter 2 on the “performativity” aspect of this quote, here it is the focus on “social bonds” McKenzie is identifying in 1950s and 1960s American culture—which I am bringing together under the rubric of “relationality”—that is at issue. It is in this sense (among others) that the so-called postmodern self or subject becomes decentered, no longer fully coherent or sovereign, as defined in polar opposition to “others” defined in terms of gender, race, or otherwise. A relational self is *imbricated in the other*, not diametrically opposed in a binary logic of difference.

Models critiquing modernist concepts of selfhood shift understandings in numerous ways, not the least by interrogating how, in Enlightenment-based Euro-American modernity, the subject came into being through oppositional moves that relentlessly defined a quality of gender/sexuality, race/ethnicity, nationality, class, etc., in relation to the debased parallel qualities of an “other.” As I explored in Chapter 2, this Hegelian recognition of how the modern Euro-American subject had been constructed through opposition (per a permutation of Hegel’s model of the master/slave dialectic from his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*) played a key role not only in general concepts at play in the post-WWII period, but were central to the rise of identity politics as we know them today. That Hegel’s theory and, later, Karl Marx’s theory as well as Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological model of intersubjectivity are deeply invested in exploring human existence as relational is clear in their mutual understanding of human embodiment and labor as establishing a relation with the natural world and its materialities.<sup>6</sup>

Per the work of author activists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon, the formation of coalitions in the 1950s and 1960s often took place via a recognition of the binary positing the “other” as subordinate and disempowered. Basic to the struggles against oppression in this period were the strategies of acknowledging the hierarchical othering of the oppressed group of people—women, per Beauvoir’s example—and reversing the power structure to give them agency. This could take, and has taken, two forms in identity politics: either through a reversal whereby “essentialist” ideas of the coalitionally defined self as inherently “female” or “Black” was aimed at the reclaiming of an “authentic” and positive voice or image and sense of cultural pride; or, via notions such as Beauvoir’s famous claim that “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman,” as an anti- or “de-essentialized” concept of the

self as “performed” in relation to social norms, other people, and larger structures of power—sometimes still implicitly binary in function.<sup>7</sup> Both of these variants thus to some degree rely on concepts of the self as defined in relation to others. Coalitional identity politics most often aim to wrest the oppressed person (or group) away from a negative definition as assigned by a dominant power; the coalitionally identified subject thus takes on “selfhood” rather than acceding to “objecthood,” but the opposition is still more or less in place.<sup>8</sup>

The de-essentialized concept of the self, a key trope of postmodernism, is my focus here, as it dovetails with the concepts of performativity and relationality as these were mobilized in this period, and with understandings of queer (as subjectivity, desire, and/or cultural concept). Relationality can be the primary mechanism in the formation of coalitional communities as well as for self-identification as queer (experiencing one’s sexuality as fluid, as open to, and affected or shaped by, those with whom one engages). The queer potential of this transitivitv (as Butler called it) is thematically as well as structurally evident in the 2011 16mm film *At Least You Know You Exist* by transwoman artist Zackary Drucker. This film weaves together the bodies and stories of Drucker and Flawless Sabrina (born Jack Doroshow), cinematically (visually as well as narratively) illustrating the relationality of their creative friendship.



**FIGURE 3.1** Zackary Drucker (with Flawless Sabrina), *At Least You Know You Exist*, 2011; 16mm film; screenshot

Drucker sums up the relational aspect of queer intimacy in her loving comment at the end of the film to her mentor and friend, Flawless, who was a key instigator of drag balls across the US in the 1960s and following: “Because of you I know that I exist.” This mode of relational subjectification is here explicitly generational (Drucker was born in 1983; Flawless Sabrina in 1939) and thus fulfills Carla Freccero’s call for a forging of queer “intergenerational quasi relationality,” a relationality that binds queers across temporal experiences.<sup>9</sup> It is played out as well structurally in the film via a creative identification in which Drucker intercuts her body and voice cinematically with those of Flawless Sabrina. For example, Drucker’s voice over stating “because of you I know I exist” occurs at the end of the film with an image of the heads of the two filling the frame, with Drucker’s forehead intimately leaning into Flawless; this moment confirms in a formal and aesthetic register a powerful relationality across generations of gender-nonconforming queer transwomen. Embracing and paying homage to the older generations who laid paths for trans people her age, Drucker specifically binds herself to Flawless, who (in turn) was featured in one of the first films about the early New York drag balls, *The Queen* of 1968.<sup>10</sup>

Theories of performative and relational subjectivity—which were aligned with the perceived need among members of coalitional movements seeking to develop more subtle and less essentializing ideas of positive selfhood in the 1980s and 1990s—relate to the crystallization of theories of queer performativity around 1990. The model of meaning-in-process afforded by (in particular) the Derridean gloss on performativity discussed in Chapter 2—wherein he opens it to the insistent pressure of “*differance*,” with “iteration” always already rupturing metaphysical concepts of meaning as coherent or final—was hugely mobilizing, even for the many who had not directly read Derrida and took up these ideas second- or third-hand through texts by Butler and her followers. And philosopher Michel Foucault, in his *History of Sexuality* volumes, directly addressed the role of relationality in power relations in modern sexed subjectivity, in turn opening up the question of whether political resistance (even for the queers with whom he was increasingly openly identifying) can occur without some binary structure of opposing through relation:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet... this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power ... [We must understand] the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends upon a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network.<sup>11</sup>

As Foucault’s reminder suggests, along with resistant sexualities, performance or performativity are far from being inherently progressive and liberatory; no articulation is ever fully outside existing power relations. All modes of opposition are bound up in that which they oppose.

Performance and performativity are also linked to more institutional aspects of post-WWII culture—namely the exhortation within corporations or state agencies to “perform or else!,” which McKenzie highlights in the title of his book. McKenzie notes that Herbert Marcuse, who was lecturing to future activists such as Angela Davis at the University of Frankfurt and then University of California at San Diego in the 1950s and 1960s, clearly identified the tendency within postindustrial societies to be ruled by this more coercive version of a “performance principle,” linked to economic alienation and, as we have seen, to what Marcuse influentially called “repressive desublimation” whereby (in his words) American capitalism encourages the desublimatory “release of sexuality in modes and forms which reduce and weaken erotic energies … [such as in] the introduction of sexiness into business, politics, propaganda.”<sup>12</sup> Given Marcuse’s substantial role in teaching activists such as Davis, who was a key figure in the Black Panther movement and to this day a crucial voice in critiquing the violent culture of incarceration that destroys the lives of innumerable African Americans in the US, it is worth trying to understand the complexities of how performativity and relationality can both productively loosen but also *coerce* formations of belief and selfhood as these are inhabited and (as Derrida would put it) “iteratively” repeated on the social stage.

McKenzie’s book critically identifies the tendency to assume that performativity or what he calls “cultural performance” is necessarily progressive and in correcting this one-sided view by reminding us, via Marcuse’s warning, how regressive and disciplinary performance rhetoric and mandates can be. McKenzie provides a meta-theory of the “performance stratum,” emerging in the United States post-WWII, which he argues is replacing “discipline” (via Michel Foucault’s concept of the term) as the defining structure of power of the modern period. The “performative subject,” he notes, “is constructed as fragmented rather than unified,” decentered, and resolutely interactive as well as being interrelated with systems of performance by which “the circuits of our post-industrial, postcolonial world” are being rejigged.<sup>13</sup>

The decentered subject is a resolutely interactive, situated one—defined always already in relation to people and contexts around her. How does this relational (decentered) subject come to be coterminous with a subject-in-process who might have queer intersectional identifications (especially in performance art practices), or might be identified as behaving queerly? Per my critical genealogical method, I will query this tendency—exemplified in McKenzie’s idea of a performative subject—to assume a progressive value attaching to decentered or relational subjectivity. At the same time, I will not attempt to define a “correct” lineage or to replace McKenzie’s evaluation, but, rather, through Foucault’s genealogical method pull together repeated patterns in the thinking around relationality and look at these self-reflectively in order to explore how they work to form a dominant figure of the performative/relational, contingent, and ultimately genderfluid or queer subject.

Foucault in fact quite directly connected performative relationality to queer subjectivity and culture in a 1980s interview:

Homosexuality is a historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the “slantwise” position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light.<sup>14</sup>

How and why Foucault’s connection of “affective and relational virtualities” to “the homosexual” came to seem so natural by the 1980s that Foucault would articulate his ideas in this way is key to my inquiry in the book as a whole. Fundamental to my arguments in this chapter is the point that artists’ practices (in tandem with broader cultural movements) can enact parallel “relational virtualities” through materialities most often involving their own and others’ sexed/gendered bodies increasingly from the 1950s onward, opening art to performance (and thus to time and space). What better way to explore the relationality of the self (and its processual, situational, and contingent nature) than to enact the artist as embodied relational subject in social spaces?

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**1964–5 Cut Piece:** Japanese artist Yoko Ono (born 1933 and raised in Japan, experiencing the horrors of WWII manifest in that country), in what is now known as one of the most famous performance art pieces of the past half a century, sat on stages in Kyoto (1964), Tokyo (1964), New York (1965), and London (1966) and invited the audience members to come forward and cut off her clothes as she sat passively.<sup>15</sup> This simple piece shattered two longstanding conventions in both theater and the visual arts: the theatrical separation of proscenium or artwork and audience, as well as the necessary occlusion of the direct appearance of the artist in the field of her or his visual art work. Ono performed art as relational, the artist’s body as central to the art work’s formation and meaning (which took place in a specific social space, over time).

All of this transpired before Ono exploded into international prominence through her soon-to-be-established relationship with then-Beatle John Lennon. Erased by this latter identity was Ono’s crucial role among experimental artists in the international Fluxus group working in New York, Europe, and Japan. In the early 1960s, Ono’s loft on Chambers Street in New York City, for example, was a key site for performance and installation works, which she organized with composer and John Cage collaborator La Monte Young.

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**1968 Relational Object (Goggles) and 1967, The I and the You:** Brazilian artist Lygia Clark (1920–88) produced these radical works during a period



FIGURE 3.2 Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, August 11, 1964; Sogetsu Arts Center, Tokyo, Japan; photograph by Minoru Hirata © Yoko Ono, courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co., New York

of extreme repression in Brazil (which suffered under a dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s).<sup>16</sup> These pieces called for the explicit enactment of *relations* between two people as the art work (typically, as *Relational Object (Goggles)*), these encounters between the artist and one other are documented in photographs; in more recent remade versions of the piece, two visitors engage one another). With *The I and the You*, Clark literalizes relationality of self and other by making doubled rubber outfits to be donned by two visitors to a gallery or public space. The two halves of the suit, which include masks covering the face area, are joined by an umbilical cord of rubber and, once put on, the participants cannot see each other but, in her formulation, are psycho-sexually connected.

Trained in Paris and Rio de Janeiro in international and local versions of modernist abstraction, Clark joined her fellow Brazilian Hélio Oiticica to develop the Neo-Concrete movement in the 1960s, calling for a return to



FIGURE 3.3 Lygia Clark, *Relational Object (Goggles)*, 1968; photo documenting relational encounter; photographer unknown, courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association



FIGURE 3.4 Lygia Clark, *The I and the You: Cloth-Body-Cloth*, 1967; photo documenting relational outfit; photographer unknown, courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association

intuition and the subjective. They both produced art that eroded the boundaries between self and other and within the self, expanding art to a relational situation. Clark was driven by humanitarian and psychological interests to explore the interconnectedness of people through art's materialities: in the *Bichos* (also from the 1960s) she demanded that the visitor activate the objects' shapes and volumes through manipulation. As Clark stated of her interest in engaging the spectator as participant: art is "now lived as a part of them, as a fusion .../This experience lives in the moment. Everything takes place ... as if an entire eternity were secreted within the act of participation."<sup>17</sup>

Clark's work offers a complex relationality, not a happy joining of spectator with artist or material. Guy Brett sensitively describes this aspect of Clark's work in relation to the legacy of violence (slavery but also political violence) in Brazil:

Paradoxically (by a strange dialectic found in her work between the monstrous and the joyful), some of Clark's forms have subliminally referred to this abuse of the body [in Brazilian culture] ... The evolution of Clark's work may perhaps be summed up as a radical journey beyond the traditional relationship between artist and spectator.<sup>18</sup>

And Brett cites Brazilian writer Lula Wanderley, who notes of Clark's relational objects that they are not representations but activations, relying "not on a sensorial outlining of shape nor some quality of surface, but [on] something that ... makes the object to be lived in an 'imaginary inwardness of the body' where it finds signification."<sup>19</sup>

Clark's work explodes forth from a corner of the world previously ignored by Euro-American modernists—an activist assertion and yet also emotional embrace by an artist determined to mobilize art's relationality, activating art materials to change people by staging relations between and among subjects. Art was not inaccessible, expensive, or rarified. It consisted of materialities put in place by artists and participants to activate bodies in social space.

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1968 VALIE EXPORT, *Tap and Touch Cinema*: EXPORT's well-known collaboration with Peter Weibel also existed and continues to exist in and through the process of relational encountering as it takes place in public spaces and, simultaneously, in and through photographic media (specifically photographic documentation and the parodied structures of cinema). The participants are instructed by Weibel's barking commands through the megaphone, exhorting witnesses to reach through a box EXPORT wears on her torso to touch her breasts. The performative action by a person self-identifying as an artist is the "art" of the work, which otherwise would simply not exist as art; the art is ratified both by the action and by the structures of photography and cinema.



FIGURE 3.5 VALIE EXPORT, *Tapp und Tastkino* (*Tap and Touch Cinema*), 1968; © VALIE EXPORT, Bildrecht Wien, 2018; photograph © Werner Shultz, courtesy VALIE EXPORT

It is key that EXPORT choreographs and directs this entire situation, as well as having it documented. Through this constructed situation EXPORT's work (like Ono's *Cut Piece*) produces a cut in the circuits of fetishism through which women's bodies had long been objectified in Western visual culture—cinema in particular. With the male barker demanding that participants actively *touch* an actual female body rather than simply ogle an idealized, representational white female body from afar, *Tap and Touch Cinema* choreographs a radical encountering with the very endpoint that the heteronormative male gaze imagines as its goal, overturning the desired (but tantalizingly deferred) consummation by making it radically *actual* and openly public: others can now view he who gazes. Forcing a touch collapses the distance required for fetishism to function—it literalizes the conflation of signifier and signified. Even viewing the piece through its documents evokes the titillation and radical disruption of this embodied and conceptually driven intervention.

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1986 *My Calling Card*: Adrian Piper, philosopher and artist, produces two cards, one on white paper (#2) and one on beige (#1). The former warns aggressive men: "Dear friend, I am not here to pick anyone up or to be picked up. I am here alone because I want to be here. Alone." The latter, more famous, version she would purportedly hand out to people at social events who made racist comments, people who seemed not to realize that the artist at the time identified as Black:

Dear Friend, I am black./ I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark ... I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.

With the "calling cards" Piper actualizes the relationality through which Blacks and women are relegated to object status by white-dominant US culture and/or by white men: the very "othering" process that Hegelian-based identity theory pinpointed as constituting power imbalances in white Western patriarchy. By literalizing this relationality, and assertively reversing it (enunciating the sexist or racist person to be the object of *her* scolding), Piper forces the white person who made racist comments or the man who aggressed without invitation to become the objectified others to her performative articulation of selfhood as a self-identified Black woman.<sup>20</sup>

(These "calling cards" have a powerful effect even when viewed in a catalogue or online. When I think about this piece, particularly card #2, I cringe in fear and anxiety. Just thinking about the process Piper is initiating reminds me of growing up in the segregated American South in the 1960s and 1970s. I experienced directly how white people, whether consciously or not, persistently "other" and belittle the experience of those who do not have full access to the privileges whiteness confers. Such is the power of the calling card, and its operation through structures of relationality, that to this day even in the abstract it has the power to make us—perhaps particularly progressive whites in the art and academic worlds—squirm with a recognition of how we participate in these structures of power. There is a violence to relationality as well as a potential intimacy, as Piper well understands.)

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### **Participation and the bodies of the rights movements**

These examples point to the way in which, from the early 1960s through the 1980s, a number of relational works redefined what art could be by mobilizing performance to insist on art as a process taking place in the moment of interpretation, which was foregrounded as an exchange with viewers (or more

accurately *participants*) of the work. This particular reconceptualization of art did so along *structural* lines—through the literal staging of the artist’s body as the work, to be engaged by others in art situations, and was complementary to the opening of art to process, time, and embodiment explored in the last chapter. It led to a burgeoning discourse on “participation” in art or “participatory” art or even, recently, in the polemical work of Gustaf Almenberg, to a defining an “age of participation” in art.<sup>21</sup>

Such discussions have often overlapped with art critical texts that use the term “relational” explicitly. Most notably, Nicolas Bourriaud popularized the term “relational aesthetics” in the late 1990s.<sup>22</sup> Bourriaud’s term has been highly influential in Anglophone debates about the political role of contemporary art and performance. Although Almenberg includes the term relational art in his title, he barely mentions relationality as such in the book. As is typical of discussions of this kind of art-world examination of interactivity, which remain on the level of abstractions, neither Almenberg nor Bourriaud connect the shift to relationality or participation to larger social concerns such as identity politics or philosophies or social science models redefining selfhood. In fact Bourriaud specifically dismisses identity politics as if they are irrelevant to relational aesthetics; Bourriaud also fails to address the earlier history of relational strategies among artists, such as Clark’s work as noted here.<sup>23</sup>

The development of relational and participatory approaches have, however, always been closely connected to the ways in which rights movements have articulated their claims. Specifically in the visual arts, such practices have been linked in complex ways to gay/lesbian, feminist, and queer urban creative cultures and their related rights movements; more recently Latinx and Black Studies in the USA have insistently claimed the radical qualities of participatory approaches for the cultures they examine. In both cases, the durationality of the performative is explicitly linked to its quality of foregrounding the exchange with future viewers or interlocutors through relationality. In her 2017 book *South of Pico*, for example, art historian Kellie Jones draws on performance studies and Black Studies (particularly the work of Daphne Brooks) to argue the following: “Within an African American context, concepts of performance have always been tied up with the means of survival … Liberation from enslavement often involved theatrical dissimulation, including cross-dressing and ‘passing’ (for white).”<sup>24</sup> The works of the Black Arts movement, Jones concludes, were performative above all and performative strategies opened works directly for audience participation.

In this light, relationality is intimately linked to how performance and performativity (as well as identity politics in general) were seen as functioning from at least the 1960s onward. If performativity came to be understood as both a name for how enunciation can work and a concept that aligns with a politically activating mode of creative expression, then these temporal/spatial experiences have long been understood as being ultimately about the specific social engagements that take place in relation to them, between and among specifically identified bodies. And in turn these engagements shift meanings of the work, of those

who engage it, in potentially progressive ways. My argument has long been that it is no accident that this kind of radical relational work has largely been activated and produced most often in the history of contemporary art by women, people of color, and queers. Ono, Clark, EXPORT, and Piper all mobilize the relational self to interrogate the modernist belief in a (white male) sovereign subject, full within himself—and, in their work, this is a fundamentally feminist and anti-racist gesture (if not in these cases explicitly LGBTQ identified). These staged situations put forth artists' bodies in ways that open art to active relational engagements—wherein, as we have seen in Allan Kaprow's 1958 text cited in the previous chapter, “[t]he artist, the spectator, and the outer world are much too interchangeably involved.”<sup>25</sup> To involve agents and contexts “interchangeably”—forces that had been kept strategically completely separate, so as to shore up the modernist notion of the coherent, fixed authorial origin—was to insist that identity, meaning, and value are contingent, relational, and situational. This gesture in itself has powerful political implications for marginalized people.

As discussed in Chapter 2, modernist criticism relies on occluding the artist's as well as the critic's body. Art practices exploring action and embodiment begin to articulate art as material and relational. While, in Euro-American modernism, intentionality is seen to reside “in” the object, to be excavated later by a trained art critic, whose own investments and desires are hidden behind a veil of “disinterestedness,” in relational art these investments are tapped and laid bare. In this new way of thinking, the performativity of the creative act served to join subjects across temporal and spatial registers in structures of overtly relational co-determination.

### **Sociology, anthropology, and the relational, interactive, interpersonal self**

From the late 1950s onward, North American social scientists articulated theories of the self as situational, relational, interactive, or interpersonal—and elaborated this self as particular in its identifications. And yet, the social sciences are rarely given credit for playing a key role in the development of the nexus of terms examined in this book, including especially performativity and gender or queer theory. Queer feminist theorist Heather Love is an exception to this erasure. In her study of Erving Goffman's work, she cites a huge range of theorists honored as precursors for queer studies, noting the tendency to erase the social sciences from the field's genealogies: “since the dominant, humanistic branch of the field has defined itself in opposition to empiricism and objectivity, the contributions of empirical research on sexuality to the founding of queer studies continue to be overlooked.”<sup>26</sup> As Love rightly notes, this erasure belies the fact that the social sciences have long informed sexuality studies and gender theory—as is explicitly clear in the groundbreaking lesbian feminist anthropological work of Esther Newton and Gayle Rubin. All of this is linked to the fact that Goffman's work on the performance of self is better known

than his explicit writings on gender performance, which are rarely mentioned in queer, feminist, or sexuality studies.

In 1956 Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* burst onto the scene, becoming hugely influential within the fields of sociology and anthropology as well as breaking into the consciousness of artists and theorists of performance and into popular consciousness.<sup>27</sup> Lesser known is the fact that, in a 1976 essay entitled "Gender Display," Goffman, sounding a bit like the queer feminist theorists who followed him later, argued that gender is enacted in social situations in relational ways, involving "a dialogic character of a statement-reply kind, with an expression on the part of one individual calling forth an expression on the part of another."<sup>28</sup> Gender is not "essential" nor does it reside within individuals: "One might just as well say there is no gender identity. There is only a schedule for the portrayal of gender." And, most surprisingly, he argues that, while signs of gender might seem to confirm a pre-existing reality, "[n]othing dictates that should we dig and poke behind these images we can expect to find anything there—except, of course, the inducement to entertain this expectation."<sup>29</sup>

Goffman expands on this approach to gender as interactive, contextually determined, and socially enacted in his 1977 article "The Arrangement Between the Sexes," and implies a genealogical approach acknowledging the very role of social science in articulating the various meanings and valences it purports to study: "*beliefs* about gender, about masculinity-femininity, and about sexuality are in close interaction with actual gender behavior ... here popular social science plays a part."<sup>30</sup> Here, too, Goffman refers to the women's rights movement and is clearly motivated in a positive way by the claims of feminists to rethink the relationship between biologically sexed bodies and gender. He picks apart gender roles in relation to the claims put forth by women's lib and concludes that the radical shift marked by the women's rights movement is to question the belief that women's traditional place is a natural expression of their natural capacities; this questioning leads to the current situation, in which "the whole arrangement between the sex-classes ceases to make much sense." Remarkably, in terms of the relevance for renewed debates regarding transgender rights, Goffman also questions the longstanding canard that women and men must use separate bathrooms, summing up the arbitrariness of such architecturally defined social rules:

But the sequestering arrangement as such cannot be tied to matters biological, only to folk conceptions about biological matters. The *functioning* of sex-differentiated organs is involved, but there is nothing in this functioning that *biologically* recommends segregation; *that* arrangement is totally a cultural matter.<sup>31</sup>

Not bad for a man in his 50s, far into his successful career as a lauded sociologist, and in a decade in which trans discourse was in a nascent state, applying fairly narrowly to those who identified as transsexuals.

Colleagues drawing on Goffman's work helped push his ideas forward. In 1987 Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman drew on Goffman's exploration of the self as performance and his concept of "gender display" to argue that individuals "do" gender in everyday encounters with others. Gender, for West and Zimmerman, is fundamentally a relational performance, and they focus on "the interactional work involved in being a gendered person in society" and gender as "situated conduct," producing a model of "the social doing of gender" through "interaction." Their overall stress is on "the interactional work involved in 'being' a gendered person in society," a being that is clearly in process in relation to others and contexts.<sup>32</sup> Goffman himself had himself elaborated on the self as performed through "interaction" in works such as the 1967 *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*.<sup>33</sup> Interaction of course implies relationality—a relationality that, as Love points out, Goffman extends to a self-reflexivity regarding his own role in the interpretations he makes of gendered behavior.<sup>34</sup>

Goffman's contribution, then, is not simply parallel to the development of performance studies and theories of gender performance; it is foundational to them. Notably in this regard, Judith Butler cites Goffman in her original 1988 article on "performative acts and gender constitution," and dismisses his work as essentializing; this dismissal is unfair: she notes that he provides a theatrical account of gender performance as the taking of a "role which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self,'" which he patently does not.<sup>35</sup> Butler does, however, use this case to differentiate "gender performance" (Goffman's term) from "gender performativity" (her preferred term). But she discards this discussion altogether in the reworked version of this material in *Gender Trouble*, wherein she excises any reference to Goffman.

Goffman's work points to a general interest among sociologists, social psychologists, and anthropologists, as well as artists and performers, in exploring the meanings of sex/gender identification in relational situations. As Heather Love compellingly argues, his theories of gendered behavior are de-essentializing and ahead of their time. Footnoting the work of cutting edge theorists Jasbir Puar, Susan Stryker, and Mel Chen, Love notes:

Goffman's own late work on gender ... is corrosive to the notion of human sovereignty; it resonates with anti-identitarian, post-human, and object-oriented queer and transgender scholarship of the past decade. Goffman frustrates any clear distinction between a "hard" empiricism and a self-enclosed textuality. Goffman's reading practice cuts across the division between the social sciences and the humanities.<sup>36</sup>

McKenzie's *Perform or Else* also stresses the impact of these social sciences discourses on the founding of performance studies. He notes in his history of the field that John MacAloon's 1984 edited book, entitled *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle*, had already traced the disciplinary roots of performance studies in the work of anthropologists Victor Turner and Milton Singer (the latter of whom

developed the notion of “cultural performance”), communications scholar Kenneth Burke, and what MacAloon calls Goffman’s “social psychology of everyday life.”<sup>37</sup> McKenzie also notes that Marvin Carlson’s handbook *Performance: A Critical Introduction* of 1996 sketches the development of our current notion of performance as a central mode of cultural expression and links it to the social sciences as secondary offshoots:

With performance as a kind of critical wedge, the metaphor of theatricality has moved out of the arts into almost every aspect of modern attempts to understand our condition and activities, into almost every branch of the human sciences—sociology, anthropology, ethnography, psychology, linguistics.<sup>38</sup>

While Carlson sees performance (and specifically theatricality) as beginning with the arts and moving outward, my argument here is that arts, rituals, behaviors, beliefs, and theories work in tandem, mutually defining and interrelating with one another in complex ways that also link to broad social and political and intellectual shifts I’ve pointed to here. Art is a form of discourse, in Foucault’s terms.

Richard Schechner—a key figure with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and later Peggy Phelan and others, in the development of the official discipline of performance studies at New York University in the 1970s and following—has stressed to me the impact of Goffman’s work (especially *The Presentation of Self*) to the initial foundation of performance studies. Schechner in fact knew Goffman personally and had invited him in 1979 to participate in a summer program on “Performance Theory” relating to the foundational NYU program, with other emerging scholars in the field such as Victor Turner (whom Schechner had met in 1977) and Barbara Mayerhoff also participating.<sup>39</sup>

Schechner has also noted the importance of anthropology (specifically ethnography) in the development of performance studies; he insists that Goffman saw himself as an anthropologist and ethnographer, although Goffman is generally known as a sociologist.<sup>40</sup> Goffman is known for having done research involving hands-on “ethnographic” data collection, confirming the hybrid nature of his approach to exploring the intersection of the individual and the social. Schechner himself was functioning as somewhat of an ethnographer in his early work—most of his 1960s–70s publications on performance begin with descriptions of ritual performances by non-urban, non-European cultural groups—and was deeply invested in the work of Claude Levi-Strauss and structural anthropology in general, as well as in the work of Milton Singer on cultural performance. Singer’s project broadened the pre-1950s concept of performance to turn it into an all-purpose descriptor for exploring how cultures sustained their group identities in “performative” ways, as Schechner put it to me.<sup>41</sup> Performance, Schechner has argued, is “a kind of communicative behavior that is part of, or continuous with, more formal ritual ceremonies, public gatherings, and various means of exchanging information, goods, and customs.”<sup>42</sup>

Ethnographer Dwight Conquergood was also a key figure in developing the anthropological approach to performance. Evaluating Goffman's work unfavorably as representing a "mimetic view of performance," reiterating a boundary between reality and appearance, Conquergood privileges the model of Victor Turner, who (he argues) moved performance away from mimesis with his "constructional theory of performance."<sup>43</sup> While I would argue he is, like Butler, reading Goffman over simplistically (as a popularizer of complex social scientific concepts, Goffman was clearly tempting to critique), his point that Turner develops the Austinian idea of performativity to evaluate the "productive capacities of performance" is useful. This point allows us to connect models of performativity to poststructuralist ideas of dislocated subjectivity and specifically postcolonial theory's development of marginal tactics in relation to state power.<sup>44</sup>

Most importantly for my points here, Conquergood clearly identifies the importance of performance and performativity in highlighting the *relationality* of understandings between ethnographer and those she studies. In his review of Johannes Fabian's study of the people of Shaba, Zaire in his *Power and Performance* of 1990, Conquergood noted that Fabian's arguments define a performative model of ethnography in which knowledge about social life is "performative rather than informative" in that it activates the researcher's consciousness of "the circumstances under which the knowledge was produced."<sup>45</sup> Conquerhood notes in conclusion that c. 1990 ethnographic research by the likes of Fabian "pushes towards a performative cultural politics," promoting a "deconstructivist view" (linked to poststructuralism) in which the authors question their own premises through an acknowledgement of the relationality of their frameworks for studying the "other."<sup>46</sup>

One can clearly see the impact of such arguments among social scientists on key performance studies theorists such as Diana Taylor, whose influential 2003 book *The Archive and the Repertoire* promoted a theory of cultural resistance among the colonized that closely parallels Conquergood's (and Bhabha's and Fabian's) frameworks. Focusing on Mexican culture, she extends Conquergood's summation of Fabian's point that "performance [is] ... a way of knowing" to elaborate a model of performance studies that acknowledges the difference between European modes of knowledge through documents (placed in archives) and modes of knowledge formation found in performance (in relation to bodies): "we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices. Performance, for me, functions as an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis."<sup>47</sup> Taylor's point—that the "embodied memory" of repertoire (in Mexico, for example, the "failed performative" of hybrid forms of Mexican culture such as the figure who manifests the (queer?) art of "reversal, exaggeration ... camp") must be honored as part of the conveying of cultural knowledge—has been hugely influential, as has her argument that the colonizers' division of privileged archive from devalued repertoire must be challenged.<sup>48</sup>

The social sciences have been central to theories of cultural (and gender) performance and Goffman's role in the early development of performance studies

was direct. As well, Goffman's work parallels the innovations among artists working to establish performance practices in the art context from the late 1950s onward—for example, Allan Kaprow. The parallels between Kaprow's 1958 re-scripting of Jackson Pollock as engaging later viewers by turning painting into performance (such that “the artist, the spectator, and the outer world are much too interchangeably involved here”) and Goffman's 1956 notion of the self as performed in social spaces in relational ways are striking.<sup>49</sup> For both Kaprow and Goffman, the self is activated as situational and relational. In *Presentation of the Self*, Goffman thus argues towards the end of the book:

[The] self ... is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented ... [The body] merely provide[s] the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time... [T]he firm self accorded each performed character will appear to emanate intrinsically from its performer.<sup>50</sup>

By the early 1960s, we can thus see a cluster of concepts coalesce that challenge modern European concepts of the subject or the self as full within himself, a more or less coherent and willful origin of meaning. As Goffman makes clear, the self is but a “*product of a scene*” not its “*cause*”: this is a radical shifting of agency from individual will to a relational situation, though an idea of performance that is close in overall thrust to Austin's performative.<sup>51</sup> Goffman's research insistently traces the “interactive” nature of subjectivity and society, and of individuals in social situations, as mutually constituted or of “collaborative manufacture.”

Most interestingly for my arguments here, even in the 1956 book Goffman applies his theory directly to behaviors associated with racial, class, and gender identifications (although he does not foreground them). While at first glance his examples as he articulates them seem blatantly racist and sexist to today's readers, on closer look their attention to race, sexuality, and gender is aligned with Goffman's strong argument that such distasteful qualities are put-ons to navigate the oppressions and exclusions Blacks and women face in American society. (This does not negate the inaccuracy of the stereotypes he attends to, nor does it mitigate how rightly disturbing they are to contemporary readers.) Thus, as an example of a performance of a self that is deliberately “inferior” in order not to threaten those in power, Goffman cites this example:

The ignorant, shiftless, happy-go-lucky manner which Negroes in the Southern states sometimes felt obliged to affect during interaction with whites illustrates how a performance can play up ideal values which accord to the performer a lower position than he covertly accepts for himself. A modern version of this masquerade can be cited.<sup>52</sup>

Goffman is equally troubling in his examples of gender performance. He cites a second example of this phenomenon of deliberately performing oneself as inferior, in this case in order to *attract* rather than distance the privileged other who would otherwise be threatened—an example that is highly gendered: “American college girls did, and no doubt do, play down their intelligence, skills, and determinativeness when in the presence of datable boys.” He follows up by noting that this kind of performance demonstrates “a profound psychic discipline in spite of their international reputation for flightiness.”<sup>53</sup> These descriptions, while highly offensive today, nonetheless also make the reader aware of the gap between such extremely negative stereotypes of Blacks and women and what Goffman is clearly assuming in each case to be sharply intelligent agents who, whether consciously or not, choose such socially performed forms of debasement that function strategically as modes of survival in a white and patriarchal world. More importantly, Goffman’s examples demonstrate his awareness of the extent to which any concept of performance or performativity or relationality is always already raced, gendered, and otherwise linked to charged identities within the context in which the author is writing.

In Goffman’s later work on stigma in the 1960s and on gender display in the 1970s, he explicitly refers to gender and sexuality as performed (or, as we might say today, *performative*) and, notoriously, draws on tropes from underground gay male culture. In his 1963 book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, he defines stigma, or the assignment of negative attributes to individuals and then their marginalization or rejection on that basis, as specifically contextual and relational: the term stigma refers to

an attribute that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that *a language of relationships*, not attributes, is really needed. An attribute that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and is therefore neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself.<sup>54</sup>

Not only do attributes signify in relational and relative ways based on context, per Goffman’s model, they have a direct relationship to aspects of identity connected to social performance. Goffman thus outlines stigma in terms of three possible relationships: being the person who bears the stigma; being a “normal,” who does not bear the stigma; or—borrowing a term “once used by homosexuals”—being a “wise” normal, one among the “normal,” those “whose special situation has made them intimately privy to the secret life of the stigmatized individual and sympathetic with it, and who find themselves accorded a measure of acceptance, a measure of courtesy membership in the clan.”<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, the notion of someone who is among the “wise” parallels the 2000’s idea of an “ally” of a coalitional group sharing marginalized identification(s), now a common concept among queer and other minority communities in the US.

Furthermore, in elaborating the workings of stigma, Goffman points to other examples that are equally loaded in terms of identity politics: the examples of “wise” normals Goffman provides are those of bohemians who accept a prostitute as “an off-beat personality”; and a white man recounting playing with “Negro boys” as a child and becoming integrated such that he could call them “nigger.” Later on he lists “social deviants,” with the list running from “prostitutes, drug addicts, delinquents, criminals, jazz musicians,” to “bohemians, gypsies, carnival workers, … homosexuals, and the urban unrepentant poor,” as the “folk who are considered to be engaged in some kind of collective denial of the social order.”<sup>56</sup> Even here, Goffman is crystal clear in his language: homosexuals, like others *considered* social deviants, are only *imagined* to “represent failures in the motivational scenes of society.”<sup>57</sup> They are not *inherently* deviant. The attaching of stigma to people is quintessentially relational.

Goffman is addressing stigma as perceived or constructed during a period in which, thanks to the Civil Rights, Black Power, Chicano/a, free love, women’s, youth, and homosexual rights movements, sexual identifications were starting to broaden and race relations were being seriously reconfigured, with the rhetorical and actual violence towards Blacks and Chicano/a people (among others) openly challenged in protest movements. Goffman clearly understood stigma in terms of social hierarchies that are predicated on sexual, ethnic, or gender performances of *non-essential* subjects who are constructed in relation to others in particular social situations.<sup>58</sup>

### The relational self and (too close) filiation

This underlying oppositional structure is also seen as foundational in much social psychological research on stigma. In *Social Stigma*, Edward E. Jones et al. thus argue that “the strong taboos against homosexuality, bestiality, and transvestism that arise periodically in Western societies are explained as a result of attempts to establish … boundaries,” such that group solidarity (and, I would suggest, an individual sense of corporeal integrity) can be asserted by the reinforcement of traditional binaries. This reinforcement, they assert, is a political act, aiming at “gain[ing] control over others.”<sup>59</sup> Is anyone asking who gains control over whom?

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Scene, around 1975 in Durham, North Carolina (just down the road a mere 200 miles from the by-then defunct campus of Black Mountain College): it’s dinner time, and the setting is the kitchen table of a middle-class white American family, politically liberal, the father an eminent social psychologist at Duke University—Edward Ellsworth Jones—and the mother, Virginia Sweetnam Jones. Both are Civil Rights activists, picketing “whites only” movie theaters in Durham, and the latter a women’s rights activist and member of League of Women Voters who works primarily at home.

Four kids are at the table, with two others away at college. The youngest, born with Down Syndrome in 1967, occupies a clearly stigmatized social position, which fascinates the father in the abstract, but which he finds frustrating to deal with on a daily basis.

The father asks his two children then in high school (in the interests of his research) to attempt a social psychology experiment on interpersonal relations and the creation of fads at their high school, a public institution in central North Carolina populated primarily by African American teens. He asked the two teenagers, aged 14 and 18, to try to spread a new slang word to see if they could get it to catch on. Presumably the research question was to address whether simple suggestion could influence our peers in the school to adopt new language trends.

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This was myself and my older brother. The word—"warm"—was absurd, pointing to Dad's cluelessness as a middle-aged man in an age of hip slang he clearly (in our view at the time) could not possibly understand; warm would never replace cool. Obviously. As well, his inability to comprehend our absolute isolation as privileged middle-class white kids at the mostly Black school was remarkable. It was intuitively clear to my brother and I that nothing we could say could ever seem trendy in that context. Neither my brother nor I, already acutely aware of our position as "marked," were remotely interested in assisting in this experiment. Was he joking? Making fun of us young people? Seeing us as susceptible (in his view) to every latest trend? Or was he dead serious? No one will ever know.<sup>60</sup>

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Goffman was inspirational in rethinking selfhood in terms of social situations and developing a model of relationality. In fact, Jones cites Goffman and knew him in passing; his work makes fairly direct use of Goffman's idea of the social performance of the self. Relating to Goffman's more sociological theorizing, for example, Jones's research produced a raft of theories exploring "fundamental attribution error" (our tendency to attribute motives to people even when we perceive clear situational pressures that would explain their behavior), interpersonal perception, and social stigma from the 1950s onward that provided a more data-based, experimentally driven—social psychological—version of Goffman's sociological and anthropological theories. As Jones notes, Goffman's approach differed widely from his own and that of other social psychologists: "Goffman did not emphasize or focus on the personal motivations that are satisfied by creating particular kinds of impressions on others. This latter emphasis has been more characteristic of the approach psychologists have taken to the topic."<sup>61</sup>

As a social psychologist, Jones made it clear that he did not simply theorize based on potentially untrustworthy anecdotal stories (as Goffman so often does, drawing on everything from early modern political theory to novels). In stark contrast, Jones eschewed any form of populism. Based, as was the norm at the time, on experiments using undergraduates from his institution (who were mostly men and almost all white, as I was fond of pointing out to him), his research produced, within this narrow demographic, a robust data-confirmed set of theories about individual behavior in social situations—that is, selfhood as interactive or relational. His theories were largely informed by his own and others' contributions to the general theory of attribution.

A former student of Jones's, Linda Ginzel, has thus noted his importance in examining "attributional logic," not only for those attributing but for those seeking positive attributions in a clearly relational schema. "How do people elicit desirable attributions?," he taught Ginzel to ask; and she concludes, "[w]hat we observe in others is often shaped by our actions, yet we tend to treat these reactions of others as independent of our own influence."<sup>62</sup> A book published in 1998 after Jones died suddenly at the age of 66, *Attribution and Social Interaction: The Legacy of Edward E. Jones*, summarizes his contribution to the field as follows:

When we "perceive" others, we do so not as disinterested scientists but as perceivers of our own selves. When we interact with others, we do so with some image of their personality, and we guide our interactions in light of that image.<sup>63</sup>

His life work was to articulate an immersive relationality wherein each self is continually interrelated to and bound up in other selves.

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Jones's last book, the 1990 *Interpersonal Perception*, is a summation of much of his life's work, and he seems to have been reaching his stride by articulating a more personal voice, citing examples that are in fact anecdotal. In describing how two individuals reciprocally define each other in social situations ("Our actions toward others are shaped by our perceptions of them. Understanding persons means that we have to understand situations ... The actions we observe [on the part of the other and ourselves] are an interpersonal product"), his discussion pivots around a college student, "Amy," who is for the first time interacting with her roommate, "Beth." He notes, "Amy and Beth meet—not in limbo or in a vacuum, but in a particular situation that constrains (sets limits on) and channels their behavior in a number of important ways."<sup>64</sup>

I grew up being called Amy. My college roommate first year was named Beth.

It has become apparent to me that I am theorizing relationality through a theory partly based on my own past experience, as elaborated by my own father ... I thought his work had nothing to do (relationally speaking) with my intellectual interests until I started writing this chapter, and his work on interpersonal perception came up in my research on social science theories of the self as socially or relationally determined.

What this means I leave for the reader to decide. On my part, this “coincidence” (which is anything but: my interests have been relationally determined by my father, even after his death) exceeds my capacity to process it.

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June 2013: Stanford University, the yearly Performance Studies International conference (just a scant mile away from the Center for the Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences, where my father had drafted *Social Stigma* with his colleagues three decades before<sup>65</sup>) and I've commissioned Ron Athey to do a performance. He does a short, modified version of *Incorrputible Flesh*, a piece he had performed in several durational versions around 2005. The various versions of *Incorrputible Flesh* extended and commented on Athey's 1990s *Torture Trilogy* of extreme performance works connected to the beat of loss and trauma Athey and others faced during the AIDS crisis, but also to the joys and pleasures of sex and queer community.

In *Incorrputible Flesh*, Athey lies on a metal rack, a baseball bat inserted into his rectum, his scrotum, filled with water, bulging uncomfortably between his legs. His eyes are pinned back by hooks, and a caretaker must administer eyedrops periodically to keep his eyes from drying out. One of these caretakers in an earlier version of the piece at Artist's Space in New York, where Athey was supine for six hours, was Jennifer Doyle, who has written of this piece as follows: “The real ‘show’ in this performance is not Athey's body, but the spectacularization of our communal relationship to it.” The relationality here is not symmetrical, as Doyle points out:

Athey may be visible to his audience, but in this work that audience is not visible to him ... This foregrounds the spectacular nature of the relationship of the toucher to the touched, not as a site of communication but as an image produced for others.<sup>66</sup>

We thus have no idea of what Athey is feeling or thinking—the relationality is both intensified by his request (via the caretaker) for us to rub

and care for his body and mitigated by his refusal or inability to look back at us. Doyle points out that, even while we may touch or stroke his body, our ministrations do not change his situation appreciably ("the touch produces no intelligence, no epistemic shift"<sup>67</sup>) nor do we gain any power over him or over the situation as a whole.

During the Stanford version of the piece, as the commissioner and programmer responsible for bringing the piece to PSi, I stroked Athey's body in a gesture of (helpless and ineffectual) caretaking.

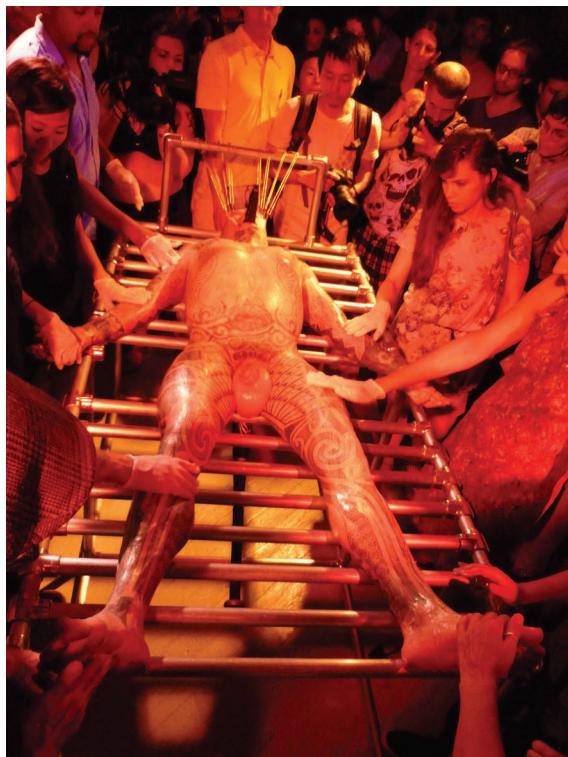


FIGURE 3.6 Ron Athey, *Incorruptible Flesh: Messianic Remains*, 2013, Grace Space, Brooklyn; photograph by Slava Mogutin, courtesy of the artist

What could this work and my attraction to it possibly have to do with my (now dead) father? A yearning for connection, for relationality, motivates everything we do. In my case, the relationality is also part of the context of my original filiation—likely I return to my father's work as a way of "reconnecting" with him (only to find myself, weirdly, in his pages and among his theories). In turn, I am drawn to Athey's work as he opens himself to audiences, but also to his friends. I study and curate his archives; I support him as an artist and friend; I am organizing

a retrospective exhibition of his work (*Queer Communion: Ron Athey*), exploring his vast creative output in relation to queer community.<sup>68</sup>

All ineffectual? Is connecting with and attaching to (queer) bodies in art or performance simply another way of yearning to confirm I exist, for someone—relationally—as gendered or otherwise? Certainly *Dissociative Sparkle* makes me acutely aware of this desire, and of my helpless love for Ron as a friend (just as my love for Dad was hopeless, in the face of his clinical depression when I was young, his absorption in his work, and his final catastrophic collapse).

Is all creative making and interpreting about such a desire to be confirmed, relationally? A desire that is, no doubt, destined to be thwarted ...

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In a 2006 article, “The Relational Self in Historical Context,” Kenneth Gergen (who was Jones’s PhD student at Duke) connects Jones’s work to postmodern theory, which Jones, being a traditionalist, would have hated. Gergen thus aligns the theories of Derrida and Butler with social science models, exploring the historical specificity of a marked shift from the “bounded to the socially contextualized self” in the post-WWII period (as, Gergen argues, “a pervasive feature of contemporary scholarship” and psychoanalytical theories).<sup>69</sup> This is precisely the shift haunting this genealogy.

Gergen usefully hypothesizes that there have been two forces contributing to this large conceptual and ideological transformation. The first he describes in relation to “the explosion in technologies of soscation” (from low-cost transportation to radio, television, and the internet), encouraging a shift from the Cartesian “I think therefore I am” to “I am networked, therefore I am”; the second he links to globalization, accompanied by “an increasing consciousness of difference,” noting “[a]s the world’s peoples increasingly intersect, so do their different values, religious beliefs, politics, and ways of life become apparent.”<sup>70</sup> While in many cases this intersection results in bloodshed and oppression, in others it results in “the increasing sense of the culturally constructed character of the real and the good. What were once unquestionable verities and values, are more frequently seen as outgrowths of particular peoples in particular contexts ... [issuing] from relationships.”<sup>71</sup> Gergen also perspicaciously notes that evaluations or determinations of this contextual and relational subject are tinged with “a sense of moral purpose,” which he deems “rightly placed” given the vast influence such models of subjectivity play as they are “slowly secreted into the public sphere,” coming to affect every aspect of social life from psychoanalytic therapeutic methods to education to social media networking.<sup>72</sup>

From the generalized observations of Goffman to the highly specialized social psychology experiments (and subsequent theories) by Edward E. Jones to the broad postmodern social theory of Gergen we see clearly a strong pattern in social science research towards theories of subjectivity or selfhood as relational and contextual or social. Such theories (as Gergen himself points out) strongly

parallel developments in philosophy and, more broadly, in technology, and to economic and political globalization.

The only flaw in Gergen's compelling observations is his tendency to see these theories as "influencing" the public sphere, rather than constitutive of it (and thus of these broader changes). Gergen makes the mistake (at least in terms of a more Foucauldian view) of seeing social science ideas as subordinate or superstructural in relation to presumably "base" structures of globalization. In contrast, I would assert again that theorizing (like art making) is itself a social, and thus relational, project. No mode of expression or structure of power is purely superstructural; none is purely foundational. All discourses are contributing to patterns of meaning in this wide-scale genealogical shift where concepts such as performativity and relationality come to have enormous valence in wide-scale reconceptualizations of what it means to be human in the world. The visual arts, and performance art, have a role here, as do gender roles and concepts of identification as these relate to all levels of cultural, political, and social interactivity during this period. Each element of culture, economic affairs, politics, and psychological modes of identification inflects the others, *relationally*.

Nonetheless, Gergen's work is useful in that it pulls together different disciplinary models of thinking about relationality or interaction. Relational structures, in this way, can be seen to inform and to be informed by identity politics movements, and postcolonial discourses aimed at exposing systems of "othering" in white-dominant, patriarchal, homophobic Euro-American cultures. For Goffman this was at least implicit in his examinations of stigma and the performance of gender. For the remainder of this chapter I look more closely at echoes of such ideas in visual arts and performance art discourses and practices in order to stress the activist dimension of art's turn towards the relational.

### **Relation, situation: art as conceptual body, or a moment of encountering**

I have already pointed out in the previous chapter that artists in the 1950s and 1960s, from John Cage to Allan Kaprow and beyond, were busy opening up the visual arts by redefining art in terms of embodiment, site, temporality, and process—in relation to what is later theorized as performativity and relationality. In an article addressing visual art through the relational mode of *encountering*, I have theorized this shift specifically in relation to particular artists and their attention to broad questions of social belonging (or marginalization) and to the protest and rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>73</sup> Motivated by these social and political imperatives, artists move towards staging an "encountering" through the performance of what I call the "conceptual body," a move tied to developing ideas redefining art as a social situation involving participation such that meaning, value, and even subjectivity are constituted relationally. The body is conceptual in that it is mobilized by the artist in order to explore conceptual

themes and structures in the art world while the performative projects also work to achieve activist goals.

Even as Gergen points to the relational self as deeply contextual, this foregrounding of the body in art works that address conceptual problems vis-à-vis structures of meaning and power takes place through staging art as a *relational encountering*. As accessed through a process of encountering, art is shown to be profoundly contingent—inextricably (relationally) tied to social life, political movements, and intellectual debates, as much as to individual bodies coming into contact in spaces marked as aesthetically charged.

Viewed within this framework, works such as Yoko Ono's 1964–6 *Cut Piece* gain even more relevance. *Cut Piece* forced an active moment of encountering, where spectators became complicit in an obvious and heightened way in the meaning of the work and thus became aware of their complicity in the determination of the meanings and states of bodies and subjects as such. The specific site of each version of the piece—originally mounted in 1964 at the Yamaichi Concert Hall in Kyoto and at Sogetsu Kaikan in Tokyo, at Carnegie Hall in New York City a year later, and in London at the Africa Center in 1966—and the specific audiences at each site have everything to do with these meanings. In Japan, as scholar Jieun Rhee has noted, the *Cut Piece* performances were largely viewed with consternation and dismissed—described in reviews as “unoriginal appropriations of western forms,” with Ono a “high priestess of Cagean avant-garde art.”<sup>74</sup> The “ambivalent aggression” of the cutters in Kyoto was replaced with predatory aggression in New York, with one male audience member grabbing her breast, preening before the audience, and presenting his cutting and touching actions as “exotic striptease.”<sup>75</sup> In London a few years later, Ono repeated the piece with a collaborator calling forth audience members with the phrase “A Study in Audience Participation”; a reviewer of the London piece described Ono as a “young Oriental lady” rather than as a Japanese avant-garde artist based in New York, and disrespectfully called her “Yoko” throughout his review. As Rhee concludes of the New York and London versions of the piece: Ono’s “victimization … is not simply the passive objectification of the Japanese female body. It can also be seen as Yoko Ono’s attempt to negotiate her position in the Western art world.”<sup>76</sup>

*Cut Piece* functions as a critical commentary on the objectification of women's/Japanese people's bodies precisely because of the theatrical structure through which it was/is presented as gesture (largely in concert halls!), as performative, as open to (and in fact counting on) its viewers and participants to engage with it. We need only imagine the difference between how Ono's work was received in Japan versus how it read in New York, a mere 20 years after the end of the war in the Pacific. The lingering anti-Japan sentiment was strong across sectors of US society, but perhaps especially among WWII veterans.<sup>77</sup> Among Americans, Ono's body, disrespected as female, would have summoned forth still sharp memories of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as

the US role in the Korean War of the 1950s, and the active and ongoing violence perpetrated by the US military in Vietnam.

The conceptual body was developed in tandem with the parallel energies of the anticolonial and rights movements exploding across Europe, Africa, and North America from the 1950s onward. The developments in continental philosophy, those of radical conceptually oriented body artists, and the energies of the activist movements were all inextricably interrelated in the impulses and insights of each artist to varying degrees—as is explicitly clear in Ono's work, culminating in *Bed In* (1969), her performative sit-in with John Lennon, in which they took a strong position against the Vietnam war. *Bed In*, in fact, was an act of encountering specifically staged for the media, in an early example of social activism through live action disseminated via networks of information exchange.

While many of these artists activating the conceptual body through relationality were not American, many (such as Ono) were producing work at least partly in the US context, or at least responding to the rising hegemony of American politics and culture on the world scene. As such their works read as comments on structures of political and cultural power at the very moment in which initial European structures of value supporting the modernist project in the visual arts were being challenged and even superseded by artists in New York City in particular—one mode of critique cannot be separated from the other. New York became the key site both for the consolidation of American modernism in the 1950s and for its contestation in the late 1950s into the 1960s and 1970s—sparked by the artwork, writing, and teaching of John Cage with emerging artists such as Allan Kaprow, Carolee Schneemann, Ono, and (another Japanese expatriate) Yayoi Kusama, all working in New York at this point in their careers.

The framework of relational encountering, and related terms such as participation, situation, and interactivity, suggests an inextricable immersion of the artist's action-driven body in social space, mobilizing interactions that defined personal, group, and larger social identities and modes of empowerment. In this way, it is interesting to see that social science arguments are explicitly paralleled in art discourse in the 1960s: a series of articles and artworks from the 1960s through the early 1970s began to elaborate the terms identified here. We have seen that Brazilian conceptual body artist Lygia Clark developed works and called them “relational” in the 1960s. We have seen that theorists in performance also explicitly asserted relationality as key to performance; in 1970 Richard Schechner thus beautifully summed up this aspect of performance: “all performances are vis-à-vis someone ... performance is a set of exchanges between the performer and the action. And of course among all the performers and between them and the audience.”<sup>78</sup>

The idea of art as taking place in (or constituting) a “situation,” closely linked to the interaction and context theories of social scientists, was also developed in the 1960s by a younger generation of artists and art critics seeking to move out

of the stalemate of modernist formalism gripping New York and other Euro-American art-world centers. In 1962 American artist Robert Morris already determined that “art is primarily a situation in which one assumes an attitude of reacting to … one’s awareness as art.”<sup>79</sup> Situation was also elaborated in terms of participation, per Ono’s framing of *Cut Piece*. And, in a 1963 *Art in America* article entitled “The Audience Is His Medium!,” Dorothy Gees Seckler presciently described what at the time was called “neo-Dada” art, including public performances of artmaking by French American artist Niki de Saint Phalle, as “audience participation art … [in which] the artist is *for* the audience and not *against* it,” as per the original confrontational Dada impulse.<sup>80</sup> Seckler elaborates by giving credit to predecessors of neo-Dada (the French arm of which was also called Nouveau Réalisme or “New Realism”) such as Duchamp, who, she argues, “anticipated nearly all the devices used by ‘participation’ artists” in his objects and exhibition designs. She also credits Fluxus artist George Brecht, who staged his *Play Incident* at Martha Jackson Gallery in New York in 1960, engaging visitors in a game with ping-pong balls.<sup>81</sup> Saint Phalle’s early 1960s “shooting” performances, in which the artist encouraged visitors to take up a gun and shoot canvases or sculptures she had made in which she had embedded bags or cans of paint, were paradigmatic examples of this move towards engaging spectators and collaborators in relational encounterings that activated them and the works through action.

In 1966, Kenneth Coutts-Smith, in his article “Violence in Art,” addressed St. Phalle’s work and expanded on the idea that artists were opening art to process and, specifically, to the status of event. Coutts-Smith sets forth very early on the paradigm I am exploring of art’s efficacy and even identity *as* art relying on its context and the encounters it solicits:



**FIGURE 3.7** Niki de Saint Phalle, shooting event in Malibu, California, 1962; attendees included Jane Fonda, Peggy Moffit, John Houseman, Henry Geldzahler, Ed Kienholz, and others; photograph © 1962 NIKI CHARITABLE ART FOUNDATION

A revolution in art, spurred by Marcel Duchamp, occurred in which [the] environment, both inner and outer, was seen in a different way ... Reality was no longer seen as a static “thing” that one attempted to understand, but was seen to be an extended network of relationships, a juxtaposition of events. It was something that needed to be *experienced*. For the artist, the painting or sculpture had also to become something that was experienced, become, in fact, an *event*. Aesthetic experience is now a matter of participation, a three-way dialogic situation actually taking place in space and time between the artist, the spectator, and the object. It is something which *happens*, in which one is actively and psychologically involved rather than something you look at and take on subjectively.<sup>82</sup>

Using psychological language—as was common in essays about situational or participatory art from this period—Coutts-Smith stresses the “reciprocal” aspect of this kind of “three-way dialogic situation” or “*event*” activated by contemporary artists such as those grouped under the rubrics of neo-Dada, Happenings, or Nouveau Réalisme (including Yves Klein and Niki de Saint Phalle); Coutts-Smith cites John Cage and stresses the need for artists to activate “a reciprocal act of violence to free a person from his masks.”<sup>83</sup>

Drawing on Coutts-Smith’s attention to “reciprocity,” we can activate Saint Phalle’s 1966 massive interactive art installation at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, *Hon: A Cathedral*—an approximately 25-foot-high and 100-foot-long supine female body with her legs spread, opening a door for visitors to enter her interior—via an interpretation of it as provoking highly charged moments of encountering. *Hon* is notorious in art history because of its combination of embodied engagement of visitors in the literal penetration of a female body with the performative strategy of drawing them into the body via a vaginal opening, promising a playful “funhouse” interior: inside, there was a Coca-Cola bar in one breast, a small movie theatre, a planetarium, an aquarium, and an art gallery including copies of modern art works.<sup>84</sup> As massive and outrageous as it was, St. Phalle’s *Hon: A Cathedral* did not provoke an instantaneous feminist revolution. But it was experienced as an event of note in the art centers of Sweden and beyond—and one with explicitly radical, feminist overtones. Partly because of its status as soliciting encounterings and the direct participation, even *immersion*, of visitors, it created a firestorm of media reaction across the Euro-American art world; it was often dismissed as frivolous.<sup>85</sup> Paradoxically *Hon*—as massive as it is—exemplifies the way in which an artwork deemed minor or not serious enough can become major in its expansion of the moment of encounter to rippling waves of future impact, as images of visitors streaming into the vaginal opening and reviews of the experience of the interior elements have come to confirm in histories of contemporary art.<sup>86</sup> Never before had an artist addressed spectatorial relations through such an aggressively gendered and sexed form, in this case clearly interpreted by many as feminist or at least pro-women.



**FIGURE 3.8** Niki de Saint Phalle (with Jean Tinguely, Ulf Linde, and Pontus Hultén), *Hon: A Cathedral*, 1966; installation at Moderna Museet, Stockholm; photograph © 1966 NIKI CHARITABLE ART FOUNDATION

*Hon* literalizes the beaver shot of heteronormative Western pornographic imagery or of Gustave Courbet's infamous *Origin of the World* (1866), a realist painting of the lower torso of a woman with her legs spread; in a similar dynamic to EXPORT's *Tap and Touch Cinema*, by turning the nth degree objectification of a woman's body as locus of sexual desire into an actual physical space, the piece defuses the power differential that visual fetishism maintains. For the typical male museum-goer, gender/sex otherness had to be engaged relationally and materially in order for the work to be experienced. *Hon*'s gargantuan supine woman's body turned art into a radical feminist relationality, an encountering that ended up revealing, not the truth of the female subject, but a funhouse of absurd-to-sublime interactive and spectacular effects inside. *Hon* joins feminist activism, art making, and Saint Phalle's own particular quite specific and uniquely politicized practice, merging play

with anger through performative works that reach across time and space to engage others.<sup>87</sup>

### **"Context art," and the relational self/work of art**

By the late 1960s, then, a concept of art as situational, performative, and reciprocal or relational—as activating a situation of encountering with potential political effects—was circulating widely across Europe and North America, and beyond. Art writers were keen to theorize this shift. In 1969, for example, expanding on the earlier writings and practices cited above, British artist and theorist Victor Burgin published his important article “Situational Aesthetics” in *Studio International*; in a 1974 article in *Art in America*, Allan Kaprow, originator of Happenings, elaborated his concept of “situational models” of contemporary art; and in 1980 *Artforum* published a special issue on “Situation Esthetics: Impermanent Art and the Seventies Audience,” edited by Nancy Foote and with contributions from numerous artists.<sup>88</sup>

While neither the body nor the concepts of performance and relationality are elaborated explicitly in these discussions, relationality takes an implicitly central role in the shift to situation. The lack of any direct reference to embodiment in these early analyses of “situation” or “event” in contemporary art locates in early form the tendency to separate performance or body art from conceptual art. Furthermore, the use of psychological rather than phenomenological models and language for understanding the opening of art to situation during the 1960s and 1970s exemplifies but also discursively enacts the separation of mind from body that arguably leads to the misbegotten separation of body or performance art from conceptual art, a tendency that is also inaccurate in terms of the actual practices of the time, which (as I interpret here) clearly mobilized the body in conceptually driven ways. Even mainstream artists such as Robert Morris were forging ground in articulating phenomenological, anthropological, conceptually rigorous and fully embodied theories and practices of performance in the 1960s.

Among these writers and practitioners, another exemplar is Allan Kaprow, who, like Morris and Victor Burgin was both theorist and artist. Kaprow was among the least guilty of dichotomizing body and mind in his writing and artwork, perhaps not surprisingly given his role as a Happenings artist who was also an important teacher and theorist of performance art. In his description of “situational models” in his 1974 article, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part III,” Kaprow cites a number of key examples including the feminist body-art performance by Sandra Orgel, *Ironing*, performed in Los Angeles at Womanhouse in 1972.<sup>89</sup> All of Kaprow’s examples, in fact, involve bodily actions that (in explicitly gendered ways in the case of Orgel’s piece) either directly engage the bodies of audience members or indirectly activate the understanding of embodiment in future viewers—from dance works by Steve Paxton and Merce

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Cunningham, to Joseph Beuys staging a sit-in for 100 days of Documenta in 1973. Kaprow's article is a kind of primer for what I am calling the conceptual body, mobilized in works that *do* what they *say* (performatively and relationally).

Just before that, Burgin's influential 1969 article had noted the new emphasis in artmaking on “[a]ccepting the shifting and ephemeral nature of perceptual experience,” through the production of “aesthetic objects” in everyday “real space,” implementing a “revised attitude towards materials and a reversal of function between these materials and their context” such that “process-oriented attitudes” are embraced and “art is justified as an *activity*.<sup>90</sup> Usually identified as a conceptual artist, Burgin emphasizes process and action but does not explicitly highlight the role of the body in his model of “situational aesthetics.” The body, however, is often explicit in his art, if representationally (as in his 1981 *mise-en-abyme* self-portrait photograph *Sigmund Freud House*, where he depicts himself photographically as a reflection in a mirror at this site of the London home of the founder of psychoanalysis) and is implicit in his descriptions of how “behavior” and “perception” determine the meaning and value of such works, concerns definitively tying future viewers into the work relationally.<sup>91</sup>



**FIGURE 3.9** Victor Burgin, *Sigmund Freud House*, 1981; photograph courtesy Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York

The contributors to the roundtable in the *Artforum* “Situation Esthetics” issue of 1980, too, focus on “attitude” rather than embodiment, although the editor of the roundtable, Nancy Foote, introduces the special section by noting the tendency of contemporary artists “to extend the art audience,” linking this to “[t]he increase in the ‘70s of ‘project,’ performance, film and video art, all of which have their origins in the ‘60s.”<sup>92</sup> Among the artists reporting their thoughts on “Situation Esthetics,” Vito Acconci notes the structure of art as an “exchange system,” and Dan Graham stresses the “inter-subjectivity of the observer(s) and the artwork,” both activating relationality between future viewers and the work of art.<sup>93</sup>

After the 1970s, the concept of situation aesthetics or situational art clearly shifted to new terms—with Austrian artist and writer Peter Weibel (the very same who collaborated in EXPORT’s relational works of the late 1960s) characterizing similar work as “context art” in a 1994 article. Weibel provides a description that helps link the concerns of artists in the 1960s and 1970s, oriented primarily towards opening art to everyday life or the harsh concerns of political and social spheres (moving art into “situations” so as to engage viewers as participants in a process of meaning making), to the developing interests of artists in the 1990s:

Artists are now becoming independent agents of social processes, partisans of the real. The interaction between artist and social situation, between art and extra-artistic context has led to a new form of art, where both come together: context art. The objective of the social structure of art is participation in the social structures of reality.<sup>94</sup>

Weibel’s notion of context art and his emphasis on participation, as well as on art as fully invested in “the social structures of reality,” in turn paralleled the “relational aesthetics” moment spearheaded in the 1990s by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud and the shift to what is now called “social practice” or “participatory” art—terms often viewed by art critics, curators, and artists as new, even though the concepts of “relational” and “participatory” had clearly already been introduced in the 1960s, as I have demonstrated.<sup>95</sup> For Weibel and theorists of relational as well as social practices, the artist engages publics in spaces that allow for a merging of art and activism.

Weibel’s theory, however, as with the feminist social practice work of US artists such as Suzanne Lacy and Mierle Ukeles in the 1970s, is strongly differentiated from the focus on the “convivial” in Bourriaud’s theory of relational aesthetics. Weibel, Lacy, and Ukeles as artists and theorists were not interested in making friends in the art world, per Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics argument emphasizing the convivial.<sup>96</sup> Their work was about engaging participants relationally but by creating public situations that were not primarily aimed at being easy or “fun” (per Bourriaud’s arguments). While Weibel (especially his work with EXPORT) was known for antagonizing audiences to political effect, Lacy and Ukeles worked through a common feminist strategy of creating intimacies to solicit care and concern—for example, Ukeles’s *Touch Sanitation* project, 1979–80, for which (among

other elements) she made a point of meeting and shaking the hand of every sanitation worker for the City of New York, documenting each encounter.<sup>97</sup>

Art discourse since the 1960s until recently has ignored performance art and separated conceptual art and body art. I would insist, however, that the relational work I explore here functions conceptually *and* corporeally, and, by extension, psychologically *and* phenomenologically—and all through performance of one kind or another. Bodily experiences, gestures, and of course the glue of desire or the repelling force of anxiety, anger, or other negative feelings provide the intersubjective connectors/dividers that make artwork based on encountering and relationality function the way it does. The kind of performance art I identify as conceptual body art works relationally. It most often begins with a political urgency or conceptual concern, which is turned into aesthetic action through the embodied gesture of the artist in the specific frameworks of art discourse, although very often *not* in official art institutions—Ukeles's *Touch Sanitation* epitomizes these structures. Both the bodies and the specific situation are necessary for this kind of practice to work aesthetically *and* politically; the aesthetic working is defined in and through the political working, and vice versa. Activism is made art, and art informs activism. This interrelation clearly energized later activist-art and art-activist groups from Gran Fury and WAC! (Women's Action Coalition), to Black Lives Matter, but also in art performances that stage moments of encountering.

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Nao Bustamante, *Indigurrito*, a 1992 performance in San Francisco: witness and engage relationally.<sup>98</sup> Art as encountering, as activating relational circuits of meaning: this structure of contemporary art/performance is foregrounded in *Indigurrito*, a live performance I have viewed in its video documentation.<sup>99</sup> *Indigurrito* explicitly negotiates the colonial histories Diana Taylor influentially examines in her model of "archive" versus embodied "repertoire."<sup>100</sup> Motivated by the swell of celebrations of Columbus's "discovery" of "America" going on in the USA that year, which sparked the commissioning of her piece, Bustamante stated: "I was told this year, that any artist of color must complete a performance based on 500 years of oppression in order to get funded, so this is my version." Standing on stage scantily clad in some sort of vaguely BDSM garb (José Muñoz describes her appearance as that of a "post-modern Aztec Priestess/Dominatrix"), Bustamante challenges all of the white men in the audience to apologize.<sup>101</sup>

Bustamante straps what she narrates as a "vegetarian and ... no dairy" burrito, "ordered ... without chili out of consideration for the white folk" onto her crotch like a dildo, then urges the "white men" or "anyone with an inner white man" to come and nibble off a piece to show their contrition. Once the participants come to the stage, she commands that they kneel one by one, introduce themselves, and take a bite in an amusing and campy yet pointed polemic, a playful version of postcolonial, feminist, and queer critiques, and a skewed version of



FIGURE 3.10 Nao Bustamante, *Indigurrito*, 1992, performance at Theatre Artaud, San Francisco; photograph courtesy of the artist

Catholic ritual: "I would like to offer you a bite of my burrito to absolve you of sin ... [as a] ritual purification."

Bustamante's burrito-dick is humorously, but also pointedly, offered to audience members, by invitation and only to the white male participants, or those "with an inner white man" presumably struggling to break free, one of whom announces: "I am a girl ... [and] Hispanic." White masculinity is both aggressively essentialized in Bustamante's enunciation of their presumptive guilt in relation to her objectification as a Latina ("I would like to ask any white men who would like to take the burden of the last 500 years of guilt to report to the stage now ...") and exposed as a construction. It is blamed for possession of phallic authority while at the same time potentially detached from its privileges and its related guilt. It is, after all, Bustamante's gorgeously zaftig body, her face made up and sporting a black wig, which wields this ridiculous, edible prick, crumbling into pieces as the various kneeling "men" chomp or nibble off pieces. And in a stroke of

inspiration, the self-proclaimed “Hispanic girl” tries unsuccessfully to apply a condom at the end to keep its remaining ingredients intact and in a coherent penis formation.

The humour in *Indigurrito* is dark, cutting, and unforgiving: as Bustamante says at one point, after strapping on the burrito-dick, “anyone who’s offended by this, I really encourage you to leave your body.” Her performance of this burlesque, postcolonial/decolonized, phallic body, no matter how excessive and over-the-top, places us in a position of responsibility for her objectification: in the abstract, we all become members of the white, male-dominant, middle-class art world, no matter our self-determined identifications. The audience laughs uproariously; but there is pathos as well in the kneeling bodies of the “white men,” who attempt to present themselves with varying degrees of contrition, cleverness, and bravado.

*Indigurrito* relies as well on Bustamante’s will to self-expose and perform: her brazen exhibitionism makes us laugh. Her joke makes several crucial points: most obviously about arts funding initiatives and the ongoing legacy of colonialism, but also about which bodies are expected to bear witness to this nefarious colonial past—certainly not usually those of so-called white men. While few today would point the finger at actual contemporary people identified as “white men” to hold them solely responsible for colonialism, by taking this deliberately extreme and tongue-in-cheek essentializing position, Bustamante makes it difficult for anyone in the audience, and particularly white-identified people, to avoid taking some responsibility. She produces this situation relationally, by soliciting direct engagement.

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### Queer relationality, antirelationality, and anti-antirelationality

So far I have skirted the question of psychic interconnection in this account of theories of relationality—easy to do if one focuses on social sciences discourses, since these fields in the US over the past half a century have assertively rejected psychoanalytic explanations of human behavior. Relationality as theorized in the social sciences and as alluded to or enacted in poststructuralist philosophy rarely attends to the complexities of how the interaction between subjects, between subjects and objects, between selves and the social scene, or for that matter among artist, art work/performance, and receivers is always already conditioned and pressured by the vicissitudes of desire, feelings, identifications, and so on. We must turn to feminist and queer theory in the first instance to open up the question of the *unconscious* as it shapes every relational encounter—and this moves us substantially beyond approaches in sociology and social psychology, with their eschewal of the individual psyche as a site of investigation. In fact, as

queer feminist affect theorists such as Sara Ahmed and Ann Cvetkovich have demonstrated, there is something particularly advantageous about the relational to queer and feminist communities and theoretical models, particularly in its link to desire, affect, and intimacy.<sup>102</sup>

Queer and feminist theorists enter into these cultural debates with an impulse, at least in part, to insist on intimacy (whether sexual or emotional or both) as essentially motivating in and informing of any social encounter. They often seek to foreground intimacy and feelings in contrast to their usual repression or disavowal in social science, philosophy, and other dominant models of meaning formation. In this light, the problem with Goffman and with all the art critics writing about relationality is that none of them acknowledged desire, emotions, and the unconscious as these clearly not only relate to but arguably *define* the forms and nuances of any relational encountering between or among bodies/selves. The artists whose projects I dwell on in this chapter clearly understood this dynamic of mutual defining. Bustamante's *Indigurrito* thus quite directly taps into psychic structures by enacting a body that both solicits and/or repulses her audience: the performance would not take place or signify without this crucial relational activation of desire/fear.

The acknowledgment, even nurturing, of the affective and potentially erotic aspects of relational bonds between artist and audience members could be (and has been) said to be a *queer* and *feminist* act—perhaps quintessentially so. Certainly most performance from the past decades we consider to be queer and/or feminist works in this way. José Muñoz has been one of the most important voices asserting a nuanced version of relationality in the constitution of selfhood, especially in relation to queer identifications and performance. In his 2009 book *Cruising Utopia* he draws on philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of "being singular plural" as a post-phenomenological category to address the way in which singularity or singular existence is always coterminously plural:

... which is to say that an entity registers as both particular in its difference but at the same time always *relational* to other singularities. Thus, if one attempts to render the ontological signature of queerness through Nancy's critical apparatus, it needs to be grasped as both *antirelational* and *relational*.<sup>103</sup>

Muñoz taps into one important strand of phenomenology that informed the shift from Edmund Husserl's influential concept of intersubjectivity in his *Cartesian Meditations* of 1931 to post-WWII developments of models of relationality, linked to the broader genealogy I am tracing in this book. Others have expanded on the potential of relationality with attention to phenomenology, intersubjectivity, and structures of identification. As examined by Anya Topolski in her 2015 book *Arendt, Levinas and a Politics of Relationality*, the model of intersubjectivity in Husserl, expanded by Martin Heidegger and tempered through Judaic thought in the work of his students Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel

Levinas, has afforded a new model to imagine a twenty-first-century politics and ethics of relationality.<sup>104</sup> Topolski's overall point is useful here: while Husserl's model still relied on the "subject" as "foundational" (more or less pre-existing any social relationships), and Heidegger privileged *Dasein* (individual being) over *Mitsein* (being-with, or being in the social sense), Arendt and Levinas make a key move post-Shoah to develop complex and nuanced models of politics and ethics based on a concept of selfhood as fundamentally interdependent, as contingent and situational, and as thus ultimately *relational*.

This "post-foundational" system is one that does not insist upon a singular framework (such as a pre-existing "subject" or, in Kant's terms, a "categorical imperative") for ethical behavior but, rather, articulates a mobile structure of relational behavior and belief that is in process or, as Topolski puts it, "performative" and situational, between and among subjects in what Arendt calls "plurality." In a perverse twist on Hegel's master/slave and fleshing out Levinas's model of ethics, Topolski argues: "[a]t the origin of our 'identity,' constructed dynamically by means of performativity, is an alterity." She notes that Levinas's ethics is the "face-to-face" experience, which "is a transformative encounter that prepares the possibility for all other reflective processes ... [such that] relationality must be conceived of as a praxis."<sup>105</sup> Here we see the clear use of performativity to suggest philosophically that *process* is closely linked to *relationality*. Topolski develops this twenty-first-century model of political ethics on the basis of a relationality that is drawn out of Arendt's concept of a politics of plurality and Levinas's ethics of radical alterity or difference—both circling around the structures key to Euro-American identity politics movements. She examines relationality as moving beyond the sovereign subject of modernity to posit the self as always already in social relations, always already riven by its own alterity and in relation to others. This is not far from the notion of relationality I have parsed out of the various art and performance discourses and practices discussed here.

Topolski's arguments, which do not address specific social/personal aspects of individual experience such as sexuality, race, or class, nonetheless relate directly to Muñoz's favoring of relationality in his larger rebuttal to the then ascendant queer theory of antirelationality as attached to queer subjectivity and experience—most notably by Leo Bersani in the books *Homos* (1995) and *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (2010) and Lee Edelman with his stridently anti-family, antirelational concept of queer in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004).<sup>106</sup> In *Homos* Bersani asserts in the prologue to the book: "the most politically disruptive aspect of the homo-ness that I will be exploring in gay desire is a redefinition of sociality so radical that it may appear to require a provisional withdrawal from relationality itself." His vehement rejection of relationality is powered by his psychoanalytically informed concept of queer sex as anticomunitarian and shattering of the self—which he plays out by citing Jean Genet's furiously counternormative descriptions of gay male sexual encounters.<sup>107</sup> And in *No Future* Edelman takes aim

at feel-good political imperatives in the gay rights movement, particularly those based on a yearning for mainstream rights for LGBTQ people. His argument seeks to counter the future-oriented reproductive politics of heteronormative culture, which, he argues, these imperatives are repeating. (In *Homos* Bersani similarly labels this aspect of queer politics dismissively as “the rage for respectability so visible in gay life today.”)<sup>108</sup>

One permutation of queer activism and queer theory has involved asserting positive images of gays and lesbians, and claiming rights such as that of forging legal unions—thus embracing and even exalting the LGBTQ subject’s ability to love and to have a claim to bourgeois institutions such as marriage. Theorists such as Edelman and Bersani reacted strongly against this mainstreaming of queer by asserting (as Muñoz puts it) a “queer antirelationality.”<sup>109</sup> Muñoz’s nuanced model, in contrast, poses an “antirelational and relational” queerness, wherein the subject is both radically different from and yet relational to other singularities, is informed in part—he asserts—by the work of queer feminist and queer of color critiques in providing a “counterweight” to this covertly homonormative antirelational theory, which (he compellingly argues) actually masks the interests of gay white men, in spite of their strident calls to reject just such homonormativity.<sup>110</sup>

What Muñoz understood in nuancing debates about relationality is its capacity to trouble definitive claims made in queer theory against sociality or intimacy or futurity (claims that, among other things, as he points out, tend to erase work by woman-identified or feminine queers, as well as queers-of-color, and queers from class backgrounds that would otherwise likely consign them to poverty). Relationality troubles simplistic assertions of the “right” or “wrong” way to be (queer or anything else), assertions that Bersani and Edelman rely on in articulating their universalizing antirelational theories; as polemics, they can hardly do otherwise, but their polemical frameworks are extremely narrow, as Muñoz asserts.

Jack Halberstam is equally fierce in their challenging of the normative assumptions still lingering in Bersani’s and Edelman’s models. For example, regarding Bersani’s promotion of Genet’s sex writing as exemplary of this privileged antirelational version of “homos,” Halberstam makes a brilliant move, pointing out the narrowness of the archive presented by Bersani and Edelman in their antirelational theory, an essentially “gay male archive” that “coincides with the canonical archive and narrows it down to a select group of antisocial queer aesthetes and camp icons and texts,” including the likes of Genet and Andy Warhol. This archive then simply repeats a predictable range of affective responses, including indifference and ironic distancing, which radically excludes the more disruptive anti-sociality of queer women writers and artists such as Valerie Solanas and Marga Gomez.<sup>111</sup>

Citing earlier queer and feminist of color scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Muñoz also understood the value of utopian thought in moving queers out of such despairing and isolating modes of disconnection—a key political move in wresting queer theory away from the nihilisms it flirted with in these antirelational modes. Relationality troubles simplistic assertions of the “right” or

“wrong” way to be (queer or anything else). In contrast, citing crucial precursors such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Muñoz was among the first to insist directly on the importance of the creative energies of women and people of color in this picture—a recognition that would change performance studies as well as queer and feminist theory. Muñoz is essentially calling us forth to recognize the radical alterity that is always already permeating any discourse, even that of “queer theory,” “feminism,” or “performance studies.” There is no “gender performance” or “queer performativity” that is not always already about myriad other forms of difference rupturing its claims.

It is within this impulse towards reaching out and relationally connecting as well as broadening the examples of what queer can be that Muñoz takes up Nao Bustamante’s work as radically relational; his writings on her practice have been hugely galvanizing to my own understanding of her work as well as the broader questions of queer performance I pose here.<sup>112</sup> My analysis here is as relational–antirelational and as hyperinvested as the queerness Muñoz examines: I engage with the work of Bustamante, Muñoz, and others to enact what Topolski calls a “performative and participatory *polis*,” a site of imperfect relational–antirelational meaning making where I take responsibility for the interpretations I am making and ask others to join me in this process.<sup>113</sup>

While Muñoz and Halberstam in some ways distinguish themselves as almost diametrically opposed to the premises of Bersani and Edelman, all of these queer theorists are driven by an implicit assumption that queer must in some way radically disrupt bourgeois, heterosexual norms of behavior: Halberstam promotes the premise that the queer must “disrupt, assassinate, shock, and annihilate.”<sup>114</sup> Most queer and performance theorists continue to seek and to make examples of queer performativity that involve some form of disruption, often linked to the theatricalized (white) gay male body. Halberstam notes the tendency in Edelman and Bersani to repeat the emphasis on “style and stylistic order that characterizes both the gay male archive and the theoretical writing about it.”<sup>115</sup> This, Halberstam rightly notes, is the order of camp. The defining feature of these disruptions, then, is often their identification as campy or, otherwise put, as *theatrical*. The 1960s ambivalence towards the intertwining of gay/queer and performative/performance cultures as theatrical moves us away from the relational to the artist as spectacle (where the artist performs himself *as* his work). Hence I now turn my attention to theatricality.

## Notes

1 See Lisa Duggan on the rise of the “constructionist perspective” on gender and sexuality, including work by scholars such as Jeffrey Weeks who drew on sociological theories including George Herbert Mead’s “symbolic interactionism,” which also informed Erving Goffman’s work. Duggan, “Making it Perfectly Queer,” in *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. Abigail J. Stewart (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 224.

- 2 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1997), 43.
- 3 Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (College Station, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 322.
- 4 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1993), 174, italics in the original.
- 5 Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2001), 14. See also Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
- 6 See especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), tr. Colin Smith (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2002), which develops a Hegelian model of subjectivity based not on oppositionality but the chiasmic interrelation of bodies/selves via embodied experience. Husserl's connection to political and ethical philosophy in the latter twentieth century, and specifically the work of Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas, is extensively addressed vis-à-vis relationality in Anya Topolski, *Arendt, Levinas and a Politics of Relationality* (New York, NY and London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015). Topolski, however, does not mention identity politics or the obvious connection to Hegel's model of intersubjectivity via the master/slave dialectic. See also Sean Sayers, "The Concept of Labor: Marx and His Critics," *Science & Society* 71, n. 4 (October 2007), 435.
- 7 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949), ed. and tr. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2011), 283.
- 8 This model also finds an early form in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, through her important exposure of the alignment of "immanence" (or corporeality and object-hood) with women and "transcendence" with men in patriarchal societies.
- 9 Carla Freccero in Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Jack (formerly Judith) Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, and Nguyen Tan Hoang, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities, A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ* 13, n. 2–3 (2007), 187.
- 10 For a brilliant reading of *The Queen*—specifically Crystal LaBeija's revolt against Sabrina's orchestration of the ball prizes, see Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2019), 1–4.
- 11 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1: *An Introduction* (1976), tr. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1980), 95.
- 12 McKenzie, *Perform or Else*, 3, 16; and see Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1955), reprinted 1962 with new "Preface" where he addresses these concepts; this quote ix–x.
- 13 McKenzie, *Perform or Else*, 18.
- 14 Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961–1984)*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, tr. John Johnston (New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 1989), 138.
- 15 As I elaborate below, Jieun Rhee discusses the different cultural resonances of these different performances and sites in "Performing the Other: Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*," *Art History* 28, n. 1 (February 2005), 96–118.
- 16 This text on the Clark, EXPORT, and St. Phalle pieces is revised from my article "Encountering: The Conceptual Body, or a Theory of When, Where, and How Art 'Means,'" *TDR: The Drama Review* 62, n. 3 (Fall 2018), 12–34.
- 17 Lygia Clark, "Art, Religiosity, Space-Time" (1965), published in Yve Alain Bois, "Nostalgia of the Body," *October* 69 (Summer 1994), 105. See also Guy Brett "Situating Participation: Three Pioneers," *The "Do-It-Yourself" Artwork: Participation from Fluxus to New Media* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2010), 33.
- 18 Guy Brett, "Lygia Clark: In Search of the Artist's Body," *Art in America* (July 1994), 57–8.

- 19 Lula Wanderley, cited in *Ibid.*, 58.
- 20 More recently, Piper has publicly noted recently her discovery that she is only 1/8 Black and in 2012 she stated she had “retired from being black.” See Thomas Chaterton Williams, “Adrian Piper’s Show at MoMA,” *New York Times Magazine* (June 27, 2018), available online at: [www.nytimes.com/2018/06/27/magazine/adrian-pipers-self-imposed-exile-from-america-and-from-race-itself.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/27/magazine/adrian-pipers-self-imposed-exile-from-america-and-from-race-itself.html); accessed March 24, 2020.
- 21 Gustaf Almenberg, *Notes on Participatory Art: Toward a Manifesto Differentiating It from Open Work, Interactive Art and Relational Art* (Central Milton Keynes: AuthorHouse, 2010). Almenberg helpfully sketches the broader late capitalist imperative towards participation (or “customer focus,” and differentiates it from contemporary artistic notions of participation, which “give … the spectator an opportunity for her/his creativity to be used in the *here and now*,” 2, 6 (author’s italics). See also Robert Atkins, Rudolf Friedling, Boris Groys, and Lev Manovich, *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now* (Thames & Hudson, 2008); Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2006); and Adaïr Rounthwaite’s compelling *Asking the Audience: Participatory Art in 1980s New York* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
- 22 See Bourriaud’s exhibition catalogue *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1998).
- 23 See my critique of Bourriaud in “Unpredictable Temporalities: The Body and Performance in (Art) History,” in *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*, ed. Rune Gade and Gunhild Borggreen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2013), 53–72.
- 24 Kellie Jones, *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 190–1.
- 25 Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Art News* (October 1958), available in the *Art News* archives online at: [www.artnews.com/2018/02/09/archives-allan-kaprow-legacy-jackson-pollock-1958/](http://www.artnews.com/2018/02/09/archives-allan-kaprow-legacy-jackson-pollock-1958/); accessed March 24, 2019.
- 26 Heather Love, “Reading the Social: Erving Goffman and Sexuality Studies,” *Theory Aside*, ed. Jason Potts and Daniel Stout (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 238; I am indebted to Love for sharing this important essay with me before publication, and to Ken Wissoker for alerting me to Love’s research.
- 27 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1959), original publication date 1956.
- 28 Erving Goffman, “Gender Display,” *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 3, n. 2 (1976), 69. Goffman even responds sympathetically to the rise of women’s liberation, arguing that, while other subordinated groups can retreat to home sphere to escape domination, women cannot: “the places identified in our society as ones that can be arranged to suit oneself are nonetheless for women thoroughly organized along disadvantageous lines,” 77.
- 29 Goffman, “Gender Display,” 76, 77.
- 30 Erving Goffman, “The Arrangement between the Sexes,” *Theory and Society* 4 n. 3 (Autumn 1977), 304.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 309, 316.
- 32 Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, “Doing Gender,” *Gender & Society* 1, n. 2 (1987), 125, 126, 129, 127, 130.
- 33 Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1967).
- 34 Love, “Reading the Social,” manuscript page 12.
- 35 Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, n. 4 (December 1988), 528. Heather Love has also noted Butler’s misreading of Goffman, and generously calls it “strategic,” in her talk focusing on Goffman’s insights in his work on

- stigma, “Queer Method and the Postwar History of Sexuality Studies” (State University of New York, Stony Brook, 2013); available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkkZV6GkkKo>; accessed September 10, 2018. For another critique of Butler’s ambivalent use of Goffman as well as Esther Newton’s work on camp (female impersonators), see Michael Trask, *Camp Sites: Sex, Politics, and Academic Style in Postwar America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 166–71.
- 36 Love, “Reading the Social,” manuscript page 6.
  - 37 John MacLloon, ed., *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals toward a Theory of cultural Performance* (Philadelphia, PA: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), 1–2, as cited by McKenzie, *Perform or Else*, 33.
  - 38 Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 6–7; cited by McKenzie, *Perform or Else*, 35.
  - 39 Goffman stayed for two days; Schechner, notes from a skype interview with the author, December 13, 2017 and from Richard Schechner, “What is ‘Performance Studies’ Anyway?,” unpublished manuscript, c. 2017. I am indebted to Schechner for his generosity in sharing memories and writings relating to this period.
  - 40 Richard Schechner in skype interview with the author, December 13, 2017. See also Schechner’s genealogy of important publications contributing to the foundation of performance studies (including his own work and that of Austin, Goffman, Turner, and Singer) in “PAJ Distorts the Broad Spectrum,” *TDR (The Drama Review)* 33, n. 2 (1989), 7. Janelle Reinelt offers a useful overview of these developments, in relation to the concept of theatricality, in her article “The Politics of Discourse: Performativity Meets Theatricality,” *SubStance* 31 n. 2/3 (2002), 202–3.
  - 41 Richard Schechner in skype interview with the author, December 13, 2017. Singer was an anthropologist focusing on South Asian (Indian) culture and ritual, but also developed the method of anthropology, including the concept of cultural performance (the study of ritual as key to understanding cultures) and the idea of “semiotic anthropology” in the 1970s; see his book *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Modern Civilization* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1972).
  - 42 Schechner, “What Is ‘Performance Studies’ Anyway?”
  - 43 Dwight Conquergood, “Ethnography, Rhetoric, and Performance,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992), 84.
  - 44 Conquergood cites Homi Bhabha’s development of the idea of performativity in “DissemiNation,” wherein Bhabha poses the performative (with its “repetitious, recursive strategy”) in relation to the pedagogical (with its “continuist, associative temporality”) as both relate to the narration of nationhood. Conquergood, “Ethnography,” 84, citing Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 291–322.
  - 45 Conquergood, “Ethnography,” 86–7; he is reviewing Johannes Fabian’s *Power and Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and Theater in Shaba, Zaire* (1990).
  - 46 Conquergood, “Ethnography,” 95.
  - 47 Ibid., 85, and Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), xvi.
  - 48 Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20, 125.
  - 49 Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” 5.
  - 50 Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 245.
  - 51 Goffman cites many examples of this reversal, going back as far as the early modern period, making clear that the idea of self as performance has earlier roots—for example, in Adam Smith’s mid eighteenth-century notion of the nobleman who “studies to perform … small duties with the most exact propriety” to ensure “his

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- authority,” cited in Ibid., 44. Goffman’s observation simply confirms Foucault’s point that genealogies have no singular “origins.”
- 52 Ibid., 47. This observation is qualitatively not far from that made by scholars of African American cultural history such as Daphne Brooks and Kellie Jones, the latter in her argument cited above.
- 53 Ibid., 48.
- 54 Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1963), 3; my emphasis.
- 55 Ibid., 28.
- 56 Ibid., 29.
- 57 Ibid., 143–4.
- 58 In “Reading the Social,” Love repeatedly notes Goffman’s disinterest in psychological explanations, which is part of this de-essentializing of the subject in the social.
- 59 Edward E. Jones, Amerigo Farina, Albert Hastorf, Hazel Markus, Dale Miller, and Robert Scott, *Social Stigma: The Psychology of Marked Relationships* (New York, NY: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1984), 96–7. Jones et al. are citing a study by C. Davies, “Sexual Taboos and Social Boundaries,” *American Journal of Sociology* 87 (1982), 1032–63.
- 60 Jones died suddenly in 1993. I was recently surprised to discover, through my father’s work, that his attempt to corral his children into introducing a new trendy slang word links to classic research by social psychologist Solomon Asch from 1946 involving substituting either the word “cold” or “warm” in a list of attributes to be judged by experimental subjects. See Edward E. Jones, *Interpersonal Perception* (New York, NY: Wiley, 1990), 27–8.
- 61 Jones, *Interpersonal Perception*, 174.
- 62 Linda Ginzel, “Ingratiation: An Overview,” flyer in Edward E. Jones archive, c. 1993.
- 63 John Darley and Joel Cooper, ed., *Attribution and Social Interaction: The Legacy of Edward E. Jones* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1998). This text is on the APA website promotion for the book, at <http://www.apa.org/pubs/books/4318680.aspx>; accessed April 4, 2019.
- 64 Jones, *Interpersonal Perception*, 2, 3, 7.
- 65 See Jones’s “Preface,” *Social Stigma*, where he mentions the “stigma group” at the Center in 1980–1, vii.
- 66 Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It against Me: Difficulty and Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 51.
- 67 Ibid., 52.
- 68 See the catalogue for the exhibition, Amelia Jones and Andy Campbell, ed., *Queer Communion: Ron Athey* (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2020).
- 69 Kenneth Gergen, “The Relational Self in Historical Context,” *International Journal for Dialogic Science* 1, n. 1 (2006), 119–20.
- 70 Ibid., 121.
- 71 Ibid., 122.
- 72 Ibid. Here, Gergen cites the work of H.J.M. Hermans, and particularly his article “The Dialogical Self as a Society of Mind: Introduction,” in *Theory and Psychology* 12 (2002), 147–60.
- 73 The following section is revised from my article “Encountering.” I am indebted in this section to the editorial comments of Richard Schechner and Marianne Sandford.
- 74 Rhee, “Performing the Other,” 109.
- 75 Ibid., 110.
- 76 Ibid., 111–12.
- 77 My evidence for this is firstly anecdotal. My father, a WWII veteran, was an open-minded liberal on many points but frequently expressed anti-Japan (although not

- anti-Japanese) sentiments, which extended to his refusal to consider buying a Japanese car. On anti-Japanese sentiments in the US, particularly in relation to the incarceration of Japanese-American citizens in concentration camps such as Manzanar, California, see Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar: A True Story of Japanese American Experience during and after the WWII Internment* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).
- 78 See Richard Schechner, “Actuals” (1970), reprinted in *Performance Theory* (New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2003), 43, 54.
- 79 Robert Morris, “Blank Form” (1962), reprinted in *Situation*, Claire Doherty, ed. (London: Whitechapel Gallery, and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 25.
- 80 Dorothy Gees Seckler, “The Artist in America: The Audience Is His Medium!” *Art in America* 51, 2 (April 1963), 62.
- 81 Ibid., 63.
- 82 Kenneth Coutts-Smith, “Violence in Art,” *Art and Artists* 1, n. 5 (August 1966), 5.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Swedish art historian Patrik Andersson notes that the film showing in the theatre was Greta Garbo’s first silent movies, in which Swedish women bathe in a Nordic landscape; Andersson, “Euro-Pop: The Mechanical Bride Stripped Bare in Stockholm,” PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2001, 186–93.
- 85 Patrik Andersson’s dissertation, “Euro-Pop,” and particularly the chapter on *Hon*, makes clear the attempts to demean it as frivolous but also the epic status of the work in Swedish cultural and political history and in the history of Euro-American modern and postmodern art; see especially Chapter 3, “The Mechanical Bride Stripped Bare in Stockholm, Even,” in “Euro-Pop,” 143–206. He also notes the important collaborative role of Jean Tinguely, St. Phalle’s partner at the time, and curator Pontus Hultén, as well as artist-friend Ulf Linde—and the participation of these men gives the potentially feminist aspects of the piece even more of an epic status. The fact that some critics at the time viewed the piece as misogynistic does not controvert the work’s feminism but proves that *Hon* initiated debate that had not existed before that time about gender, women’s bodies, and the art world.
- 86 On the power of the “minor” to shift thought, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), tr. Dana Polan (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) and Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
- 87 I elaborate on this unusual combination in Saint Phalle’s practice in my essay “*Fille sauvage, âme sauvage, herbe sauvage: les fémininités féroces de Niki de Saint Phalle vers 1960–1966*” (“*Wild Maid, Wild Soul, A Wild Wild Weed: Niki de Saint Phalle’s Fierce Femininities, c. 1960–1966*”), *Niki de Saint Phalle 1930–2002*, ed. Camille Morineau (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux—Grand Palais, 2014), 156–63. See also my discussion of “queer feminist durationality,” which correlates with what I am exploring here as feminist relationality, in *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2012), 170–217.
- 88 Victor Burgin, “Situational Aesthetics” (1969), *Art in Theory: 1900–1990, An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 883–5; Allan Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part III” (1974), reprinted in Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 130–47; Nancy Foote, ed., “Situation Esthetics: Impermanent Art and the Seventies Audience,” *Artforum* 18, n. 5 (January 1980), 22–9.
- 89 Kaprow, “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part III,” 133.
- 90 Burgin, “Situational Aesthetics,” 883, 885.
- 91 Ibid., 884–5.
- 92 Foote, Introduction to “Situation Esthetics,” 22.
- 93 Acconci and Graham in Foote, “Situation Esthetics,” 22, 25.

- 94 Peter Weibel, “Context Art: Towards a Social Construction of Art” (1994), reprinted in *Situation*, ed. Doherty, 51.
- 95 See Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*.
- 96 Claire Bishop’s critical analysis of Bourriaud’s stress on conviviality is influential; see “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetic,” *October* 110 (Fall), 51–79.
- 97 See Shannon Jackson, “High Maintenance: The Sanitation Aesthetics of Mierle Laderman Ukeles,” in *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 75–104.
- 98 This reading is revised from my essay “Archive, Repertoire, and Embodied Histories in Nao Bustamante’s Performative Practice,” *Artists in the Archive: Engagements with the Remainders of Art and Performance*, ed. Paul Clarke, Nick Kaye, Joanna Linsley, and Simon Jones (London: Routledge Press, 2018), 143–67.
- 99 The videotape of this version of *Indigurito* is available online at Hemispheric Digital Video Library, <http://hidvl.nyu.edu/video/000509510.html>; accessed August 13, 2018.
- 100 Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.
- 101 José Esteban Muñoz, “The Vulnerability Artist: Nao Bustamante and the Sad Beauty of Reparation,” *Women & Performance* 16, n. 2 (2006), 196.
- 102 See Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London: Routledge, 2004); Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke U Press, 2003); and see also Heather Love’s “Feeling Bad in 1963,” *Political Emotions: New Agendas in Communication*, ed. Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich, Ann Reynolds (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 112–33.
- 103 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 10–11; my emphases.
- 104 Topolski, Arendt, *Levinas and a Politics of Relationality*.
- 105 Ibid., 205.
- 106 Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) and *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
- 107 Leo Bersani, *Homos*, 7; and Chapter 4 “The Gay Outlaw,” 113–81. It is Genet’s descriptions of (in Bersani’s words) “the inestimable value of sex without exchanges” that Bersani gives value as radically transgressive; see 164.
- 108 Ibid., 113.
- 109 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 14. See also Muñoz, “Thinking beyond Antirelationality and Antiutopianism in Queer Critique,” in Robert Caserio, Lee Edelman, Jack (formerly Judith) Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Tim Dean, “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory,” *PMLA* 121, n. 3 (May 2006), 825–6.
- 110 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 11. Muñoz’s brilliant trick is to take theories posing themselves defiantly *against* neoliberalism (under the assumption that antirelationality resists the lures of late capitalism) and exposing their homonormativity. On homonormativity, see Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 175–94.
- 111 Jack (formerly Judith) Halberstam, “The Politics of Negativity in Recent Queer Theory,” in Caserio et al., “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory,” 824.
- 112 See also José Esteban Muñoz on Bustamante’s work in his essay in a special issue of *Signs* I co-edited with Jennifer Doyle: “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position,” *Signs* 31, n. 3 (Spring 2006), 675–88.
- 113 Topolski, Arendt, *Levinas and a Politics of Relationality*, 224.
- 114 Halberstam, “The Politics of Negativity in Recent Queer Theory,” 824.
- 115 Ibid.

# 4

## THEATRICALITY

The words theatricality and the spaces of theater have been haunted by anxieties around effeminacy and homosexuality for hundreds of years in European-based cultures. As Friedrich Nietzsche famously wrote in *The Gay Science*, “I am essentially anti-theatrical at heart … No one takes his finest taste in art into the theatre with him … there one is people, public, herd, woman, Pharisee, voting animal, democrat.”<sup>1</sup> Theatricality is debased because it is connected implicitly to femininity or to gay men who are effeminate; in turn, femininity and gay masculinity are assumed to be theatrical, lesser versions of human embodiment and subjectivity. By the early 1960s, mass media accounts also offhandedly reinforced these assumed connections suturing gay men to “creative” fields. Thus journalist R.C. Doty wrote in a 1963 *New York Times* article, one of the first texts addressing homosexuality as linked to a creative class, that “inverts” are concentrated

in the fields of the creative and performing arts and industries serving women’s beauty and fashion needs … [T]he list of homosexuals in the theater is long, distinguished and international. It is also self-perpetuating. There is a cliquishness about gay individuals that often leads one who achieves an influential position in the theater—as many of them do—to choose for employment another homosexual candidate over a straight applicant.<sup>2</sup>

Even Foucault, in his later thinking, marked this conjunction of terms and the terms themselves as self-evident:

Historically, when you look at what homosexual practices were, as they appeared on the surface, it is absolutely correct that the reference to femininity has been very important, at least certain forms of femininity. This is the whole problem of transvestism; it was not strictly linked to

homosexuality, but it was nonetheless a part of it ... So homosexuals become transvestites ... The question of femininity appear[s] ... at the heart of homosexuality.<sup>3</sup>

The terms queer and performativity have not always been connected in queer-friendly ways, but rather have a long history of interconnectedness linked to homophobic and misogynistic accounts of gay or effeminate “theatrical” culture. Addressing the ideological baggage theatricality brings along with it is a complex endeavor, but doing so casts a revealingly harsh light on the interconnection of queer and performativity that comes to an apotheosis in queer theory and performance studies in the 1990s. This chapter explores a range of discourses from philosophy to theater and art criticism in the 1960s, seeking to trace repetitious patterns in order to tease out projections of effeminacy or gayness (whether repressed, incipient, blatant, or otherwise) in modes of and discourses about performance as articulated through terms relating to theater and theatricality, such as, most notably, camp. This genealogy, more than any other, clarifies the moment in the 1990s when Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and others traced and reinforced the link between LGBTQ-identified subjects and various forms of theatrical self-presentation such as voguing but reversed the value to present queer performativity as radically positive for a queer feminist agenda. As Sedgwick put it in her 1993 essay “Queer Performativity,” parodic performances of normative gender, as identified in Butler’s work, place “theater and theatrical performance at front and center of questions of subjectivity and sexuality,” which in turn lean toward the “experimental, creative performative force” of queer energies.<sup>4</sup>

### Theatricality as a threat

Theatricality’s effeminacy is foregrounded in the rather disturbing Foucault quote above, which, among other things, implicitly excludes women from homosexuality while appropriating the feminine for gay men and conflating transvestism with male homosexuality. Foucault does not look at the way in which the subject at issue in discussions of gay theatricality, particularly in cases of camp, is almost always the “creative,” white urban gay man—although drag queens and female-identified transpeople (often from marginalized communities) also play some role in this imaginary. Drag kings, transmen, and lesbians are generally ignored in discussions of theatricality. And, aside from crucial interventions by Sue-Ellen Case, Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, Diane Torr, and Stephen Bottoms, and a few others, lesbian camp and drag kings have rarely made it into dominant discourses of camp or drag in queer theory or popular culture—in spite of the fact that many of these theories were initially most influentially articulated by lesbian-identified feminist women such as Susan Sontag, Esther Newton, and Judith Butler.<sup>5</sup>

Theatricality haunts all of these assumptions and exclusions in and beyond queer theory. As Neil Bartlett recently summed up the situation, “[y]ou might think the word ‘theatrical’ as a euphemism for queer is a term that has had

its day ... However, the word still has a curious traction.”<sup>6</sup> And Doty’s *New York Times* article and Foucault’s slippages make it all too clear how easily “gay” or “queer” and “theater” or “theatrical,” as well as “camp,” come to be conflated through assumptions unpleasantly saturated (Foucault’s queer activism notwithstanding) with homophobia and/or misogyny.

From the early 1990s, Eve Sedgwick understood this danger of sliding into negatively balanced conflations of anti-female and anti-gay undertones. In an influential text on performativity written with Andrew Parker, she cites J.L. Austin’s elaboration of the performative utterance as

*in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage ... Lan-*  
*guage in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not ser-*  
*iously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under*  
*the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from*  
*consideration [as performative utterances].*<sup>7</sup>

Sedgwick and Andrew Parker argue that in this moment Austin points to the way in which *perversion* is central to distinguishing the performative in opposition to something dirtier, more theatrical: “the perverted, the artificial, the unnatural, the abnormal, the decadent, the effete, the diseased.” The performative, they conclude, “has thus been from its inception already infected with queerness” and the key problem of the performative is the determined “relation of *act* to *identity*.<sup>8</sup> Theatricality “perverts” enunciation, preventing the purity of performative language as Austin articulates it and making performativity queer. This text marks one of the most direct examinations in queer theory of the joining of queer to the performative and the theatrical.

Theatricality also threatens coherent and originary subjectivity as constituted by European discourses since the early modern period and secured in the watered-down Cartesianism of “I think therefore I am” that has been woven into European culture. As David Marshall has noted, when evoked outside actual theaters, the term theatricality “represents, creates, and responds to uncertainties about how to constitute, maintain, and represent a stable and authentic self; fears about exposing one’s character before the world; and epistemological dilemmas about knowing or being known by other people.” Citing Marshall, Andrew Parker precedes this quote with an observation pertinent here: “male homosexual panic and anti-theatricalism resonate strikingly with one another.”<sup>9</sup> What these discourses demonstrate, then, is that concepts relating to performativity are haunted by anxieties relating to forbidden identities: in the case of theatricality, a specific, representational or “fake” mode of the enunciation or performance of words, bodies, and forms of culture, most obviously homosexuality or gay male identity—but these as connected to effeminacy or femininity. (The word theatrical was originally used in the eighteenth century by the Earl of Shaftesbury in 1711, who aligned it with fakery by defining it as that which appears to have been depicted “at second hand” rather than “drawn from

Nature-herself.”)<sup>10</sup> Thus, Sedgwick and Parker note that, as fey and dandy-esque as Austin was, he clearly aimed to assert theatrical performance as the perverse opposite of or other to a refined notion of the performative as somehow more essential or authentic.

Many have traced the roots of these deep psychic anxieties surrounding theatricality and the “perverse” sexualities it seems to echo, call forth, or encourage, most notably Jonas Barish in his influential 1981 book *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. Barish begins with the “Platonic Foundation” of Western unease in relation to artifice as opposed to an idealized “essence” or pre-existing “real”—with “artificers” seen by Plato as debasing selfhood or, in Barish’s words, “distancing them from their ‘essential’ selves,” and imitation or even art itself as distancing us dangerously from essence.<sup>11</sup> Barish’s analysis moves through Rome’s increasing ostracization of theater, which is notably attached to condemnations of feminine dress and cosmetics, through the centuries of subsequent European Christian—and particularly Anglophone and Protestant—thought: for example, Puritanism banned any cultural form that gives pleasure as debasing the individual by drawing him into wanton sexuality and effeminacy.<sup>12</sup> He then moves through the apotheosis of Nietzsche’s explicitly misogynistic rejection of the theatrical and the feminine (as cited above, most notably in *The Gay Science*, where the philosopher is reacting against the perceived excesses of Richard Wagner’s operas), and beyond, into the mid-twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> This apotheosis, in turn, serves to expose the co-extensivity of misogyny and homophobia in discourses around theatricality, a co-extensivity that is evident in the suturing of the later formulation of the camp subject to male-identified homosexuals seen as effeminate. As Michael Trask notes in his rigorous study of camp in the postwar USA, “the sensibility that attaches to camp is never precisely embodied in gay male identity, although it routinely comes to rest there.”<sup>14</sup>

In their edited volume *Theatricality*, Tracy Davis and Thomas Postlewait’s introduction offers an overview of debates on the theater studies side of performance studies. Davis and Postlewait note that some of the negativity surrounding theatricality is related to deep fears about the existence of an essence or an authentic “real” that anchors human experience and is countered by the fake or theatrical. In describing a key example of unease around the role of the actor, they note: “Thus, a man impersonating a woman may persuasively signify femaleness, and though he will never become a female, in theatricalizing one he deceives as to the very nature of the absence.”<sup>15</sup> In this way, putting their dismissal of the possibility of transfemininity aside, they perhaps inadvertently point to an interrelation between the fears surrounding artifice, imitation, and representation from Plato onward and the trepidation surrounding the inevitable challenges to secure concepts of identity—particularly often gendered/sexed identity—in Western thought and culture.

Davis and Postlewait stress the entrenched patriarchal values underlying the antitheatricality at the base of European ideas about art, representation, and selfhood:

In telling ways this opposition [between nature and artifice or theatricality] has also been used to distinguish between masculine and feminine traits, with women portrayed (from the perspective of patriarchy) as duplicitous, deceptive, costumed, showy, and thus as a sex inherently theatrical. The norms of natural behavior and sincere judgment reside within masculinity ... In these sets of antinomies, the second term—the realm of the theatrical—is, by definition, the inauthentic.<sup>16</sup>

While usefully stated, I would add to Davis and Postlewait's observations the strong point that it is not just “masculinity” that is in question here but *heteronormative* masculinity, which is intersectionally white, straight, economically secure, and politically enfranchised within the European imaginary. Antitheatricalism is clearly an articulation linked to patriarchal structures of power, which demand that the self be firmly identifiable in relation to the matrices of status established in heteronormative, white-dominant societies.

In this context, nothing could be worse than a person perceived as a female or male impersonator (or, in the US, a black person passing as white, but that's another story), often rising to visibility out of a marginalized lower-class background; those who flamboyantly refuse to pass run a close second. Just so, these figures (particularly the drag queen) have come to dominate discussions around theatricality as it relates to individuals, as well as those around how gender gets performed in social situations. Esther Newton's highly influential 1972 anthropological study, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, thus focuses on the threat of drag queens to mainstream culture, their adaptive strategies, and their role as urban US “gay male culture ‘heroes’ in the mid-sixties.”<sup>17</sup> *Mother Camp* marks a key moment when the drag queen subjects (who, she admits, are largely white in her study) became important figures of incipiently queer underground culture. They also, via scholars such as Judith Butler (for whom Newton's book was important), later became figures of gender performance or performativity.<sup>18</sup> In relation to our genealogy, it is important to stress that Newton already understood the co-articulating force of female impersonation and performance: “Because female impersonators are an occupational group, I focused my observations on performances.”<sup>19</sup>

Theatricality threatens not only because, in its connection to drag, it blurs boundaries of the “proper” expression of anatomically secured gender/sex, but because it demands an acknowledgment of the importance of audience to the fulfillment of the work of art. Theatricality is simultaneously a means of self-articulation as excessive and artificial, and a strategy for claiming authenticity (as we see in much voguing culture). Trask draws on the work of Goffman and the concept of “symbolic interactionism” from 1950s sociology to argue that the theatrical or camp figure of the immediate postwar period threatened previous authoritative models of selfhood—precisely in its relationship to new social scientific models of “process-centered self” with identity “contingent on unstable interactions,” the same qualities I explored in my chapter on relationality.<sup>20</sup> The

camp theatrical figure performs explicitly the way in which every self needs an audience to elaborate its identifications—the self doesn’t pre-exist these performances, but (as Goffman puts it) is enacted in social situations. Goffman, Trask notes, situates this relationality historically, describing the dynamic as accelerating after WWII; Trask links it as well to the sociological concept, in the 1950 study *The Lonely Crowd*, of the “other-directed” person who “tends to become merely his succession of roles and encounters.”<sup>21</sup>

Theatricality also threatens boundaries between self and other, and structures of authority based on the assertion of disinterestedness in determinations of artistic value—such as, in particular, modernist formalist criticism, which prefers the work of art that does not pander to the viewer in a manner perceived as debased and effeminate. Thus, Michael Fried decries the “theatrical” work of art’s “attempt to impress the beholder and solicit his applause.”<sup>22</sup> Art described as theatrical opens itself to the viewer, both obviating the role of a specialized art critic and exposing the desires at play in any art interpretation. Theatricality exposes the fact that the work is tied to its contexts, its readings, and its meanings are thus always interested (as opposed to disinterested)—it puts the productive tension discussed in the introduction of disco star Sylvester’s *feeling real* (I know I’m performing artifice, but I “feel” authentic) at the center of culture, rather than suppressing or marginalizing this dynamic.

Performance theorists such as Josette Féral have also stressed theatricality as potentially radical in that it emphasizes the role of “the spectator’s act of recognition” in the performance viewing situation.<sup>23</sup> As well, performance studies scholar Rebecca Schneider has connected this anxiety about opening the work to spectatorial recognition (and, I would add, desire) to fears circulating around originality, which in turn relate to new experiences of time itself:

To trouble linear temporality—to suggest that time may be touched, crossed, visited or revisited, that time is transitive and flexible, that time may recur in time, that time is not one—never only one—is to court the ancient (and tired) Western anxiety over ideality and originality. The threat of theatricality is still the threat of the imposter status of the copy, the double, the mimetic, the second, the surrogate, the feminine, or the queer.<sup>24</sup>

Schneider points to the deep implications of the “threat of theatricality.” Western obsessions over originality (versus the fake or theatrical) are linked to the desire for clear and definable origins. In the case of the visual arts, I would add that this origin is viewed as the intentional subject (the artist), who secures the value of the work of art—a value that is both abstract and literal in that there exists an extensive international marketplace for buying and selling art works. In art discourses anxieties around theatricality are linked to the *fear of otherness*, which cannot be contained by these structures of value.

## Theatricality, camp, and otherness

In contrast to the situation in the art marketplace and art history, a resolutely Euro-centric discipline, in theater studies and performance studies otherness has long been embraced and even arguably in many cases cannibalized and fetishized: with the enthusiasm for ethnographic approaches, the study of non-European ritual, and of course the incontestable and literal centrality of actual theater to the practices to be studied and engaged, there are other disturbing issues at hand from a progressive point of view (of appropriation, colonizations of indigeneity, and so on). But in art history, it is in part these anxieties around otherness—which include “other” bodies but also “other” modes of practice that open art to the desires that render us *all* “other” to ourselves—which prevented the discipline until very recently from acknowledging performance or body art within its narratives historicizing post-WWII art. This is a bizarre exclusion considering that just about every truly groundbreaking artistic practice from the 1950s onward involved artists’ overt exploration of time, space, and embodiment.

The exclusion of these performing (often overtly theatrical) bodies and practices in art discourse is not surprising. It relates, quite directly, to the intimate relation between the “dangers” of the theatrical to the visual arts and the fact that so many artists adopting embodied and “theatrical” and so (in Fried’s or Austin’s terms) perverted or debased practices did so out of their desire to critique or question the exclusions put in place under modernism’s regime of formal purity and covertly privileged white male artists. Thus, artists in the Euro-American context who took up “theatrical” methods to pervert modernist frameworks have often been directly motivated by and empowered through the rights and postcolonial/decolonial movements. The recent embrace of performance art by art institutions, including museums and art history, testifies not (or not only) to a complete reversal nor to a profound acceptance of the corrupting force of (other) bodies into the otherwise clean spaces of modernist art. Rather, in many of the cases in which performance art is now ensconced in mainstream museums, the motivation seems to be—once again—to contain otherness and control the otherwise terrifyingly unpredictable live body.

Theatricality in this light, even the performing body of a woman from a culture marginal to Western European modernism (the former Yugoslavia), can be fully commodified and objectified—and thus contained—by an institution such as the Museum of Modern Art: as in the exhibition *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present* (2011).<sup>25</sup> Or, as commonly occurs, performance is nominally embraced, but in actuality relegated to the educational programming arm of an art institution—as with The Broad Museum in Los Angeles.<sup>26</sup> For this containment to be successful, the work (the performing body) must be de-eroticized, de-racialized, and overall cleansed of any messy particularities of the performing subject such that he/she can, paradoxically, hide as a “neutral” agent behind

his/her obvious embodiment. In turn this body must be made into spectacle or picture, as Abramović acceded to in sitting almost motionless, her objectified body bathed in the glow of klieg lights in the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art during her retrospective. In contrast, the disorderly or radically eroticized body cannot be fully accommodated; or, as Sally Banes put it in her groundbreaking study of New York performance in the 1960s, the “effervescent” and anarchic sexualized bodies of artists such as Jack Smith and Carolee Schneemann worked at complete odds with existing models of art display and criticism, which demanded the erasure or at least downplaying of the body.<sup>27</sup>

In a society of repressive desublimation, as Herbert Marcuse described contemporary Euro-American culture in his highly influential work of the 1950s and 1960s, desire is solicited only to be channeled into commodity culture. In this situation it is precisely the overtly sexualized, gendered, raced body that, at least superficially, would have seemed a highly effective means to challenge state power.<sup>28</sup> And yet, as the case of Abramović makes clear, the normatively sexed/gendered body, a body revealed or enacted in a literally theatrical setting, whether experienced live or via photographic documents, can be easily (in Marcuse’s terms) folded back into commodity culture. This is also a danger feminist body artists courted and for which some were famously criticized—Fluxus leader George Maciunas thus chastised Schneemann, categorizing her work as “too baroque, too sexual, too operatic, and there’s too many things in it” (otherwise put, as too theatrical!), and Lucy Lippard famously censured feminist body artist Hannah Wilke on the grounds that, in the exposure of her body in her work, she confused “her roles as beautiful woman and artist, as flirt and feminist.”<sup>29</sup> The deliberately perverted (queer/feminine/of color) *theatrical* body, however, continued to thwart reincorporations throughout the 1960s and 1970s—if anxious art critical responses to theatricality in radical performative and body art works are any proof.

Theatricality, then, has been especially controversial in visual arts discourse, even within feminist variants; theater and performance studies discourses have been more charitable. More to the point of this book, an increasingly strong relation developed in the latter twentieth century between theatricality and queer via camp, with links to relationality and performativity. By the 1990s, interestingly, performativity had thus virtually replaced theatricality as the term of choice to describe gender fluidity or transgressive performances of gendered identity. As Elin Diamond put it in 1996, “performance discourse and its new theatrical partner, ‘performativity,’ are dominating critical discourse almost to the point of stupefaction.”<sup>30</sup> Or, as theater historian and queer theorist Stephen Bottoms put it in 2003, “much that once would have been regarded as ‘theatrical’ has been annexed off and relabeled as ‘performative’.”<sup>31</sup>

With the increased public awareness of the claims being made by the developing lesbian and gay rights movement in the late 1960s US, specific bodies were performing visible versions of what came later to be called queer identities. But these visible and now historically canonized moments had earlier roots. The

1960s were marked by galvanizing protests leading to the coalitional formation of the early versions of what would come to be the LGBTQ movement—such as the gay rights demonstrations sparked by systematic police harassment of queers: in Los Angeles at Cooper's Donuts in 1959 and the Black Cat Tavern in 1967, in San Francisco at Compton's Cafeteria in 1966, and in New York at the better-known Stonewall riots in 1969.<sup>32</sup> Accounts and photographs from these events have made evident the role played by theatrical self-presentational modes and specifically the energetic theatricality of drag queens in calling attention to the oppression and violence directed against lesbians, gays, trans, queer, and bisexual people.<sup>33</sup> Important correctives to the previously white-washed histories of the LGBTQ movement, for example, have in the 2010s pointed out that drag queens (including the activists Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, both trans women of color) marched on the front lines of the Stonewall and other New York gay liberation protests (see Figure 5.1).<sup>34</sup>

As art historian Craig Pearson has argued in *Radical Theatrics*, his study of theatricality and activism around 1970, groups such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in New York (founded just after the Stonewall protests, in 1969) staked a claim on the usefulness of theatrical modes of drag, in this case largely for those identified as homosexual men, in embodying the potential critical power of radical social and sexual politics.<sup>35</sup> Pearson cites articles from the period to make this point, including Pat Maxwell in the GLF's newsletter *Come Out!* in 1970. Maxwell argued that, while other protest movements such as the Yippies (the “Youth International Party,” politicized hippies) wore “Indian drag, police drag, Uncle Sam drag,” they never crossed the “sex role boundary”; drag queens from the gay rights movement, in contrast, renounced claims to “masculine privilege.”<sup>36</sup> Pearson also cites Brian Chavez’s comment from a 1970 issue of San Francisco’s *Gay Sunshine*, rejecting the former secretiveness of gay and drag cultures in favor of public displays of theatricality: “It’s time to be YOURSELF. Don’t blend in with Straight people—that’s oppressing yourself. BLATANT IS BEAUTIFUL!”<sup>37</sup>

Pearson’s research makes clear that ambivalence around drag, camp theatricality, and transvestism was addressed head-on in the developing gay and lesbian rights movement—and that drag (especially drag queenerie) was already being promoted within the movement as a means of furthering activism. A clear relationship was established between theatricality, a term related to gay performance or self-display, and the very public claims for identity-based rights and activist, public protest movements, particularly clearly in the US context. And we see, via Doty’s influential 1963 *New York Times* article cited above and a wealth of other contemporaneous examples, that the American public at the time was encouraged to make a direct connection between the term theatricality or camp and implicit or explicit beliefs about homosexuality or queer subjects and values.

These alignments were occurring, of course, in positive community-building ways as well as homophobic ones—the formation of queer community has often taken place via working through coalitional socializing as well as activisms

deploying flamboyantly theatrical strategies. Joshua Chambers-Letson's book *After the Party*, mentioned in Chapter 2, extensively explores this dynamic in terms of socializing as a key part of the formation of queer community. As well, many active in queer creative communities during the 1980s and 1990s have pointed to the power of "theatrical" partying, socializing, and modes of self-display in helping gay men and their allies survive the AIDS crisis. The hugely influential queer feminist performance artist and writer, Karen Finley, thus recently noted

The nightclub life was a sacred space for celebration, the evocation of spirit, in particular it was an active space of resistance while chain smoking. Art, love, being fucked up, in the night of debauchery, packed as sardines, touching, strangers confide and dance despite despair against a landscape of Nancy Reagan's Just Say No campaign. Oh, shut the fuck up and dance. A nightly dose till dawn in the city that never sleeps gives momentum, connection, and intimacy.<sup>38</sup>

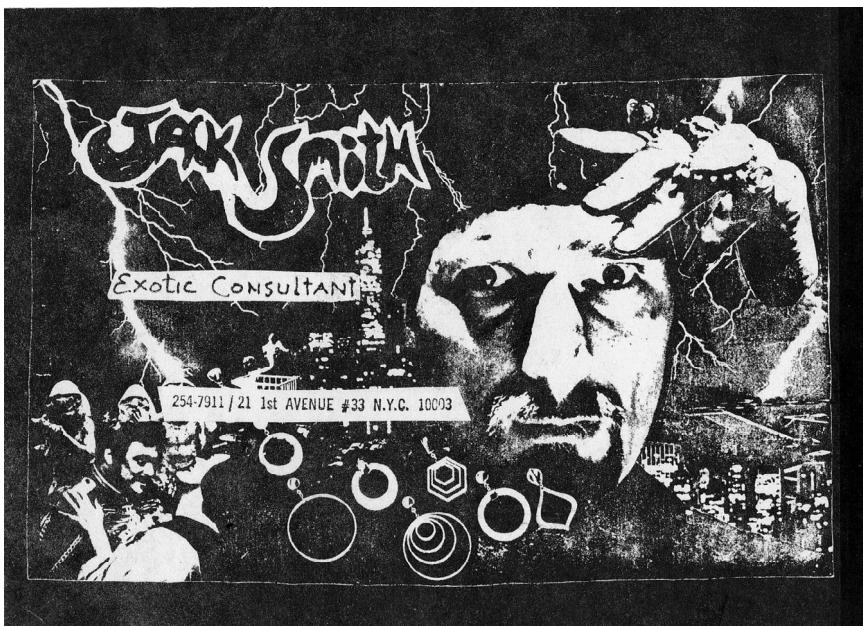
As historians of gay masculinity have pointed out, these alignments also precipitated a reaction formation within the gay male community. Dennis Altman thus wrote in 1982, ironically still deploying the term "theatricality" but to define *hypermasculinity*:

No longer characterized by an effeminate style, the new homosexual displayed his sexuality by a theatrically masculine appearance: denim, leather, and the ubiquitous key rings dangling from the belt ... the super-macho image of the Village People disco group seemed to typify the new style perfectly.<sup>39</sup>

The flexibility of "theatricality" as a term covering a range of gendered behaviors is clear in its ubiquitous but differently valenced use across queer theory. In the introduction to her book about sadomasochistic performance, Lynda Hart, for example, argues that the study's focus is "on the ways in which s/m sexual practices have been variously caught up in a theatrical discourse ... [circling around] the 'real' and the 'performative,'" and later on in the book ties queer to performance through theatricality, noting that "queer sexualities ... are absolutely permeated by theatrical rhetoric."<sup>40</sup> These interconnections were manifested across interrelated modes of incipiently queer creativity in cities such as New York and Los Angeles.

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*Exotic Theatrical Genius! Exotic Consultant!* The "poetry of transvestism"!<sup>41</sup> Jack Smith openly embraced orientalism, which defined his theatricality: "You may not approve of the Orient but it's half of the world and it's where spaghetti came from."<sup>42</sup>



**FIGURE 4.1** Jack Smith, “Exotic Theatrical Genius!,” flyer from Jack Smith Papers at Fales Archive, NYU

Smith’s midnight theater events in New York in the late 1960s and 1970s proclaimed his identity plainly and forthrightly as a gay male avatar of camp—a queer radical like no one the art world had ever seen. While Warhol was relentlessly hiding behind his façade of indifference, which solidified in the mid-1960s, Smith repeatedly exposed himself in his flaming queerness as a means of confronting the hypocrisies of the art world and of American capitalism. As Stefan Brecht evocatively described one of Smith’s night-long performances in his loft (with Smith playing a perverse version of Hamlet), Smith’s aesthetic merged glamour with trash, undermining the pretensions of modernism:

[The material on the stage] clearly and definitively comes off the street ... The heap glitters melodiously. It is clearly exotic, a landscape of desire. The fact that the material is with puritanical strictness, in demonic purity junk,—in substance, shape and monetarily of absolutely no value,—isolates this longing into its form of pure sentiment. But this is no dream world ... it is the world of art, a formally artificial arrangement. Its artificiality is explicitly part of its form.<sup>43</sup>

Smith’s handwritten auto-biographical statement describes his (fake? embellished ...) creative trajectory: “In Hollywood studied dance with

Ruth St. Denis, in New York studied directing with Lee Strasberg, witchcraft with Joseph Kaster at New School for Social Research." He also notes his role in a "Nude Kusama film for German television" in 1968, tracing a line to Kusama's seemingly inadvertent queerness.<sup>44</sup> Then there is his carnivalesque body blazing through the night, performing in photographs and films:

- Strutting not only in Kusama's film but also in Warhol's 1964 *Batman Dracula*, while Warhol's cameo graced Smith's *Normal Love*, 1963–5;<sup>45</sup>
- Performing in the daytime at the Cologne zoo (feathers waving, cloak flapping, he sits at a table dressed in the cheesy Orientalist garb of the cardboard sorcerer in the *Wizard of Oz*, or a Victorian parlor seer manipulating a Ouiji board);
- Eyes hollowed by black makeup, head covered with badly wrapped "Arab" headdress which clashes with a vaguely Polynesian shell necklace;
- Dressed in a cheap rendition of "Egyptian" skirt, neckcloth, and headdress he braves a forest of tropical plants.



**FIGURE 4.2** Jack Smith, *Untitled*, 1982; 15 x 12 inches framed; photograph by Uzi Parns, copyright Jack Smith Archive, courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

There are dozens of images of Smith left to us, some on celluloid, mapping his wildly queer orientalized body, which sends ripples back in time to that dandified velvet-clad corpus of Oscar Wilde as he performatively co-invented a certain flamboyant urban homosexual male subjectivity in late nineteenth-century London (see Figure 4.6).<sup>46</sup>

Jack Smith perhaps manifested the quintessential queer performative. As Dominic Johnson has argued, his life-as-work exploded the traditional historical narrativizing of art and art history.<sup>47</sup> The threat that Smith posed to the mainstream bourgeois art (as well as theater and film) world(s) is legendary. Susan Sontag wrote about this threat in a 1964 review of *Flaming Creatures* (Smith's tour-de-force film that leaped from Kenneth Anger's example to burst the limits once and for all between explicit, if de-eroticized, sexual imagery and experimental art), which interpreted the film primarily in formalist terms, acknowledging its purveying of "transvestitism" but not its orientalism.<sup>48</sup>

Smith performs to change art, performance, film, in part by blurring boundaries that otherwise separate the arts, queering the artist as the visible agent within the work. The self-described "Exotic Consultant" makes his mark through embodied and linguistic performatives enacting his genderfluid rejection of artistic subjectivity as such ("ARTIFICIAL clam scented crocodile tears will be cemented into place IN ICING FLESH"<sup>49</sup>). He adopts camp orientalizing signifiers, taken second or third hand from Hollywood B-movies, and appropriates the "exoticism" of actress Maria Montez—whose beauty and trashy foreignness encourages Smith to argue: "Trash is true of Maria Montez flix but so are jewels."<sup>50</sup> He twists the artistic masculine subject into anti-capitalist, theatrical, and flashily, obdurately, in-your-face, self-destructive queer parodies of itself.

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### Masculinity and camp in post-WWII New York

The campy self-articulations of Jack Smith continually hailed those around him to configure themselves in relation to his overtly non-normative masculinity, tapping into a newly visible suturing of "theatricality" to feminized and gay male urban experience among creatives in cities such as New York. Smith, at the same time, has come to exemplify the "disidentification" with whiteness that accompanied camp self-performance in such a way as to performatively enunciate something that would later be embraced as "queer." In José Esteban Muñoz's argument, Smith "made worlds during his performances," and put forth these worlds as a way of performing disidentification with whiteness. In Smith's notebooks, as Muñoz remarks, Smith wrote, "I overcame pastiness," which Muñoz interprets as "white normativity." Muñoz goes on to define his theory of queer disidentification via Smith, although he primarily associates it with "queers of color":

Disidentification is the process in which the artist reformulates the actual performativity of his glittering B movie archive, which is to say that the images that Smith cited were imbued with a performativity that surpassed simple fetishization. Glitter transformed hackneyed orientalisms and tropical fantasies, making them rich antinormative treasure troves of queer possibility.<sup>51</sup>

Elsewhere Muñoz noted that Smith’s “renderings of the East” were “simulacra of simulacra,” shifting him away from hostile forms of orientalism.<sup>52</sup>

Muñoz spent time rethinking camp through 1990s concepts of queer in ways that insistently account for race and ethnicity as aspects of how we perform our gender. This was not a common move before the late 1990s, and in fact his *Dis-identifications* book is one of the pioneering texts in this pushing forward of a more intersectional understanding of queer (and camp). In groundbreaking texts defining camp such as Susan Sontag’s 1964 “Notes on ‘Camp’” and Newton’s *Mother Camp*, camp’s whiteness is for the most part assumed. And, in her 1964 article on Smith’s *Flaming Creatures*, Sontag ignores the orientalist aspects of the artist’s work and persona. Her comments on theatricality in “Notes on ‘Camp’” also convey a racially neutralized, if complex and contradictory model of camps:

Camp sees everything in quotation marks ... To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre ... When does travesty, impersonation, theatricality acquire the special flavor of camp? ... Camp introduces a new standard: artifice as an idea, theatricality ... The peculiar relation between Camp taste and homosexuality has to be explained ... [T]here is no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap ... homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard—and the most articulate audience—of Camp.<sup>53</sup>

Sontag’s essay has been parsed, critiqued, and creatively interpreted thousands of times—it is truly the “ur” text for theorists of camp and also has been for many camp performers. Even as early as the later 1960s, when Esther Newton was doing her fieldwork interviewing female impersonators for *Mother Camp*, she solicited their thoughts on Sontag’s essay—although she admits that she gave the text to them and that most female impersonators would not have chosen on their own to read it. One informant raged to Newton about how wrong Sontag was about camp, noting that “she had almost edited homosexuals out of camp.” At the same time, Newton cites Sontag’s argument that camp is about “being as playing a role” and “life as theater” to argue that the camp as a person is “definitely a performer”—substantiating a nexus of terms that to this day links the drag queen almost inexorably to camp.<sup>54</sup>

The key elements from Sontag's essay taken up in subsequent queer theories and discussions of camp have already been introduced above; they begin with the concept of camp as a "sensibility (as distinct from an idea)."<sup>55</sup> This emphasis on sensibility and Sontag's comments on camp as a *perceived* rather than inherent quality align camp with the structures of contingency and relationality we have already explored: camp, per Jack Babuscio in a 1977 article, "resides largely in the eye of the beholder."<sup>56</sup> Sontag asserts this quality but also equivocates: "It's not *all* in the eye of the beholder"; she goes on to clarify the nuanced questions of intentionality this relationality raises: "it is not so much a question of the unintended effect versus the conscious intention, as of the delicate relation between parody and self-parody in Camp."<sup>57</sup> Relationality, in this sense, is directly connected to the homosexual via a theatricality as interpreted through the beholding eyes of others. And Sontag's inclusion of "Notes on 'Camp'" in the book *Against Interpretation* (where she argues for a performative kind of interpretation as a political act) further highlight these interconnections I am tracing here.<sup>58</sup> In the lead essay of the book, "Against Interpretation," Sontag rejects the tendency to reduce art to content in the reigning modes of interpretation at the time; her clarion call at the end of the essay—"In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art"—clearly establishes the kind of performative interpretation integrating feeling and desire which, I am arguing, theatrical queer performances (as we now identify such practices) encourage.<sup>59</sup>

In relation to Smith, camp can be seen as veiling over a deep capacity to *feel*. As Dominic Johnson puts it in his important 2012 study of the life-work of Smith, the artist's career of "glorious catastrophe," can be defined through a "subcultural ethics of wounded recognition."<sup>60</sup> Smith not only acted out drag characters in performances and beyond; he lived a life of self-proclaimed failure and "contradictory investments," as Johnson puts it, which "conspired to efface his own importance to the rise of queer art and life in 1960s New York."<sup>61</sup> Smith continually undermined himself, driven by rage toward the capitalized and commodifying forces of the art world (by all accounts, he was a difficult person to work with and to love). He even second-guessed his own relationship to theatrical masculinity, stating bitterly, "I've been influential in the most god-awful way. I didn't want this, to create a race of prostitute drag-queens. I'm ashamed of it."<sup>62</sup> But I would assert nonetheless that his foregrounding of the racialized aspects of camp and theatricality was confirmed not debased by the power of its uptake by "a race of prostitute drag-queens," which furthered his life-long mission to destroy capitalism's grip on American creative life.

### **Queer masculinity, drag queendom, and theatricality**

Smith's angst and equivocations, while unusual in their blatant, direct, and often public character, epitomize the riven and contradictory field of the visibly gay male artist in 1960s New York. One could argue that he lived the way in which theatrical camp self-displays could be seen as structures of *making visible*

the formerly invisible or hidden body of the (white) gay man of the 1950s US art world.<sup>63</sup> In this way camp was also a manner of revaluing the formerly debased “effeminate” homosexual figure that haunted accounts of queer culture. Before the 1960s, as historian Barry Reay has noted, homosexuality had been largely “conceived in terms of effeminacy in the sexual culture of interwar America.”<sup>64</sup> Urban (white) gay men in New York up until the 1960s, Reay asserts, tended to differentiate between male homosexuals—who were thought to be effeminate men—and hustlers—more “masculine” men who, it was believed, simply engaged in male-to-male sex by penetrating, rather than allowing themselves to be penetrated by, another man.<sup>65</sup> The hustler was considered heteronormative (up to a point) regardless of his sodomitical engagements, and even to inhabit an ideal macho form of masculinity; some were married with children.

These distinctions extended into the art and literary bohemia of the Beats as well. In 1950s San Francisco and New York, even for some of the Beats who were out as bisexual or homosexual in their sexual object choice—such as William Burroughs—effeminacy was considered anathema. Just after finishing the manuscript for his novel *Queer* (completed in 1952, but only published in 1985), Burroughs wrote to Allan Ginsberg,

I don't mind being called queer. But I'll see him [my publisher] castrated before I'll be called a Fag ... That's just what I been trying to put down uh I mean *over*, is the distinction between us strong, manly, noble types and the leaping, jumping, window dressing cock-sucker.<sup>66</sup>

The homophobic language we would tend to associate solely with those identifying as heterosexual was equal opportunity (so to speak) in the 1950s, when the gendering of gay masculinity (i.e., its enacted valence as “masculine” or “feminine/effeminate”) was at a height even among subcultures such as communities of creative gay or bisexual men. Interestingly, too, although Burroughs might well not have known of Andy Warhol at this point in the 1950s when he wrote this screed, the “window dressing cock-sucker” might perfectly describe Warhol’s fey form of white urban homosexual creative masculinity in the US. Warhol, in fact, was at this time designing shop windows for Bonwit Teller and working as a graphic artist producing advertisements in New York.<sup>67</sup>

Reay stresses that the 1960s mark an emergence and solidification of the very concept of (male) homosexuality as connected to sexual object choice, but as an *identification* rather than a practice. Aligned with the consolidation of the gay and lesbian rights movement and the newly found enthusiasm for the radical cultural and personal potential of the performances of effeminate homosexual men, the drag queen or the camp (as campy or theatrical homosexually-identified men were then called) became more visible in the 1960s as a proud rather than shameful articulation of effeminate masculinity. Here, Newton’s observation in *Mother Camp* that drag queens became the “gay male culture ‘heroes’ in the

mid-sixties” is again relevant.<sup>68</sup> She differentiates the drag queen from the camp as follows:

Both the drag queen and the camp are expressive performing roles, and both specialize in transformation. But the drag queen is concerned with masculine-feminine transformation, while the camp is concerned with what might be called a philosophy of transformations and incongruity ... [S]trictly speaking, the drag queen simply expresses the incongruity while the camp actually uses it to achieve a higher synthesis. To the extent that a drag queen does this, he is called “campy.”<sup>69</sup>

In Reay’s terms, the camp thus personified queer or gay masculinity as a performance but one solidifying into an identification with the emergence of the gay rights movement in the US in the late 1960s.

The hypervisibility of Jack Smith’s theatrical self-imaging and of the drag queen (hypervisible at least within their own theatrical environments) contrasts strongly with the underground nature of gay male or queer identities in the art world before the 1960s. Here, the literal “window dressers” such as Andy Warhol, but also gay lovers Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns (who worked together to design Bonwit Teller windows as “Matson Jones” in the 1950s), were only partly “out” as gay men—in Rauschenberg and Johns’s case, paralleling the tendency for romantic and creative partners such as John Cage and Merce Cunningham, Rauschenberg’s colleagues at Black Mountain College in the early 1950s, to downplay their relationship. As art historian Jonathan Katz has pointed out, those who knew Rauschenberg and Johns or hung out in their circles surely knew they were in a gay relationship; but in the 1960s and 1970s as well, the artists downplayed their sexual identification, and the art world studiously ignored it for decades.<sup>70</sup> This occurred as well in relation to Warhol, who made his queerness fairly explicit in the early 1960s but then retreated somewhat, as I discuss at greater length below. In an age still dominated by modernist values, an admission of gay or queer subjectivity in art criticism, curating, and art history would have “feminized” their work and debased it as theatrical—understandably artists were reluctant to court such derisive evaluations of their work.

Art historian Gavin Butt has explored the historical forces informing the desire to occlude or mask gayness in 1950s and 1960s New York, including the art world. Butt argues that the hugely influential 1948 Kinsey report on male sexuality initiated a culture in the US in which the “codes of normative masculinity become loosened from their heterosexual moorings, rendered semiotically unstable as they become subject to the play of perverse thoughts about what they may harbor.”<sup>71</sup> Butt points to how Kinsey’s report had exposed, shockingly to most Americans, the fact that a fairly high percentage of heterosexually identified men (around 37%) admitted that they had had explicit homosexual experiences at some point in their lives, with Kinsey even arguing vis à vis sexual

identification that “[i]t is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories.”<sup>72</sup>

In the report Kinsey and his colleagues thus effectively argued that sexuality should be understood as exhibiting along a spectrum rather than as a binary. However, as Butt notes, Kinsey’s report paradoxically had the effect not of *loosening* attempts to fix homosexuality to bodies through identity politics but of *increasing* the “effect of producing a widespread cultural concern for identifying or recognizing ‘homosexuals’ … in everyday social life.”<sup>73</sup> In this climate—also riven by Cold War anxieties about hidden motives and communist spies—in both cases, people who were not what they seemed—Butt argues that a “culture of uncertainty” and “homosexual suspicion” accompanied “epistemological unease … borne of the visible body’s limited capacities for telling the truths of sexuality in the early 1950s.”<sup>74</sup> And the effort to identify queers was only exacerbated with the threatening rise of gay pride and the visibility of gay activists on the streets of US cities in the 1960s and following.

A now-infamous 1964 *LIFE* magazine issue on “Homosexuality in America” explicitly foments these anxieties. The introductory text notes, “for every obvious homosexual, there are probably nine nearly impossible to detect”; the text continues, “[t]he social disorder, which society tries to suppress, has forced itself into the public eye because it does present a problem—and parents are especially concerned.”<sup>75</sup> These statements are clearly motivated by fears linked to Cold War rhetoric around the dangers of hidden or covert behaviors (not the least, non-normative sexual ones). J. Edgar Hoover, the communist-baiting director of the FBI, even accrued a large file called “Sex Deviates,” and attempted to smear many a progressive or radical with accusations of hidden sexual improprieties—among which being a homosexual was considered the most shameful.<sup>76</sup>

It is also during this period that the rhetoric of shameful sexual practices (now linked to identifications) was put to use directly by police across the country, who were known especially in the big cities habitually to harass gay clubs and bars, and the US government. Sparked by the Kinsey study, the Senate released a 30-page report in 1950 entitled “Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government,” which includes sections on “General unsuitability of sex perverts,” and “Sex perverts as security risks.”<sup>77</sup> As the report argues,

[t]he social stigma attached to sex perversion is so great that many perverts go to great lengths to conceal their perverted tendencies. This situation is evidenced by the fact that perverts are frequently victimized by blackmailers who threaten to expose their sexual deviations.<sup>78</sup>

(How many times can “pervert” be deployed in two short sentences?) This is a violently negative discursive performance of homosexuality as perversion, which was taken up by Senator Joseph McCarthy and colleagues as a key driver for their witch-hunt for and firing of homosexuals in the government and which thus had

equally explicit and concrete negative effects on actual people. This discourse explains the reticence of artists to put their gay identities out front.

And yet, all of this took place in the face, again, of the Kinsey report's arguments for sexuality as existing on a continuum, and its debunking of stereotypes about gay masculinity, including the belief that homosexual males are "less robust physically," exhibit a "feminine carriage of the hips" along with a high-pitched voice, as well as being "artistically sensitive, emotionally unbalanced, temperamental ... difficult to get along with, and undependable in meeting specific obligations."<sup>79</sup> The public chose to ignore the Kinsey report's rejection of these stereotypes, which unfortunately instead became more entrenched moving into the 1960s, even within gay communities (as we saw with Burroughs). The contradictory yet powerful tendency to fear homosexuals because of their invisibility or indeterminacy while also excoriating them for supposedly identifiable, visible, stereotypical behavior permeated the art world in the 1960s, and deeply overdetermined attitudes about theatricality and camp.

Butt's key point, then, is that the 1950s and 1960s art world in New York was defined by a forcefield of homophobia sparked by anxieties about the simultaneous indeterminacy and overtness of gay masculinity. Doty's piece cited earlier, while making attempts at sympathy, for example insisting that fears of pedophilia among homosexuals are unfounded, is relentlessly homophobic, with descriptions such as "those who are universally regarded as the dregs of the invert world—the male prostitutes—the painted, grossly effeminate 'queens' and those who prey on them."<sup>80</sup> The *LIFE* article is marginally more evenhanded, at least in its focus on two (rather than one) forms of homosexual urban culture, pointing directly to both the campy exhibitionists and the macho leather bar queers, describing "furtive," "flaunting" "fluffy sweatered" queens as well as examples and photographs from gay "leather" communities, specifically San Francisco's Tool Box bar.<sup>81</sup> The most famous photograph of the latter shows a group of shadowy macho men in leather motorcycle jackets, military hats, and/or tee shirts standing in front of a now-legendary mural by Chuck Arnett of gay men posing in black like James Dean or Marlon Brando; the caption in *LIFE* reads: "A San Francisco bar run for and by homosexuals is crowded with patrons who wear leather jackets, make a show of masculinity, and scorn effeminate members of their world. Mural shows men in leather."<sup>82</sup> The feature story in *LIFE* is credited for having encouraged gay men to flock in droves to San Francisco, seeing it as what the *LIFE* writer calls a new "gay capital."<sup>83</sup>

While both period articles pivot around stereotypes, and the *LIFE* spread sketches a simplistic picture of a dichotomized (white) urban gay world, split between macho men and effeminate queens, the cultural discourses around camp and theatricality focus entirely on the latter, linking the figure of the theatrical male to the cross-dressing, female impersonating drag queen. The drag queen or campy theatrical artist purveys a body associated until recently with a gay male subject, versus the threatening, shady, "impossible to detect"

masculine gay male noted in *LIFE*. In the 1960s, the camp or theatrical queer, in Neil Bartlett's terms, performed "queerness as a pleasure, placing it not in the script but in the body of the performer, outrageous and the focus of attention."<sup>84</sup>

The role of drag queenery or female impersonation in vitalizing a more visible, and proud, urban gay male culture in the 1960s echoes throughout queer theory, due to the impact of Newton's *Mother Camp* study as well as the 1968 film *The Queen*, a documentary featuring New York drag queens from the 1960s, including Flawless Sabrina (discussed in Chapter 3). Judith Butler's arguments on drag and gender performance in the 1990s, however, took place with little attention to earlier histories of drag queenery, focusing rather on the New York voguing scene depicted in the 1991 film *Paris is Burning* to the exclusion of earlier histories (I discuss this further below). But the New York voguing scene had clearly followed after and was inspired by the world documented in *The Queen*, as recent scholarship and creative work by Zackary Drucker and Tavia Nyong'o have rightly asserted.<sup>85</sup> Attention to these deep histories is essential to understanding the complexities of theatricality and its role in defining queer culture.

### **The case of Warhol's camp**

As I explored in my 1993 book on the American reception of the work and persona of Marcel Duchamp, *Postmodernism and the Engendering of Marcel Duchamp*, Sontag's explicit connection of camp to homosexuality in "Notes on 'Camp'" is consistent with a strand in contemporary art history which, with varying degrees of openness, explores the relationship between a particular "neo-Dada" or "anti-aesthetic" and an effeminate, homosexual, or otherwise non-normative masculinity. This strand was minor and marginalized until the rise of queer theory, when previous artists and discourses were revived to produce revisionist art histories of this period such as Gavin Butt's. In the 1960s and 1970s in the US, however, as noted in Chapter 2, a few art historians and critics, including Calvin Tomkins and Moira Roth, had already explored links between a new attitude in contemporary art, associated with Duchamp's "aesthetic of indifference," and new modes of embodiment and subjectivity linked either explicitly or indirectly to homosexuals or a homosexual sensibility.<sup>86</sup>

Jack Smith aside, until very recently the key figure taken up as an exemplar of camp in the visual arts has been Warhol, who (as we have seen) evinced a strong affinity to a swish camp sensibility. While Smith overtly theatricalized himself and his collaborators throughout the 1960s, however, Warhol skirted the complexities of camp, eschewing overt theatricality in favor of an oxymoronic low-key camp inflected by Duchampian "indifference," mapping it into an extreme detachment. Butt includes a brilliant chapter in *Between You and Me* on the camp self-construction on the part of Warhol. He convincingly shows a transformation in Warhol's self-presentation after his first New York solo exhibition, in 1962, indicating a shift in agency wherein

Warhol *self-consciously* purveyed a “sissy” persona—he acknowledges his “swish” affectations—while more or less disavowing his gay relationships with men. Diverging from the arguments of previous art historians asserting that Warhol closeted himself after the early 1960s, Butt argues rather than he “inned” himself in a complex shuttling between avowal and disavowal of his queer subjectivity through the mobilization of camp.<sup>87</sup> For Butt this “inning” function is epitomized in Warhol’s public statements such as the following, published in the 1980 book *Popism*:

As for the “swish” thing, I’d always had a lot of fun with that—just watching the expressions on people’s faces. You’d have to have seen the way all the Abstract Expressionist painters carried themselves and the kinds of images they cultivated, to understand how shocked people were to see a painter coming on swish. I certainly wasn’t a butch kind of guy by nature, but I must admit, I went out of my way to play up the other extreme.

The world of the Abstract Expressionists was very macho.<sup>88</sup>

Butt rightly ties Warhol’s particular form of campy swish persona (his “theatricalized effeminacy”) to his working-class otherness—but also to his “racial” otherness, which is less convincing: Butt bases this argument entirely on an early 1960s racialized description of Warhol as a “cooley little faggot” by New York socialite Frederick Eberstadt.<sup>89</sup> Warhol’s class anxieties, however, are palpable; as Butt points out, he sought to transform himself from “working-class fairy” as he was viewed by many in the New York art world in the 1950s to “upper-strata dandy,” modeled after Oscar Wilde.<sup>90</sup>

A more productive approach to race in Warhol’s camp in my view is to look at the artist’s blinding whiteness. Eve Sedgwick explores this angle in a 1996 article expounding on performativity (and, indirectly, on camp) and race in relation to Warhol.<sup>91</sup> Sedgwick describes Warhol as radically shy, motivated by shame, and argues, “[w]hat it may mean to be a (white) queer in a queer-hating world, what it may mean to be a white (queer) in a white-supremacist one, are two of the explorations that, for Warhol, this shyness embodied”; she refers to his description of himself as having “albino-chalk skin. Parchmentlike. Reptilian. Almost blue.”<sup>92</sup> Warhol’s shyness, she notes, is a “heuristic of being ‘white’,” complicating her desire to link his shyness and queer shame to a “political telos”; she also admits that Warhol often evinced a “casual and more-than-casual racism.”<sup>93</sup> In this way, Sedgwick subtly shifts shame from his gayness to his whiteness, which would have been excruciatingly visible for white people in progressive contexts during this period of highly visible Civil Rights and Black Power public actions (for anyone, Sedgwick argues, “involved, at any angle, in the exacerbated race relations around urban space, sexuality, and popular culture”).<sup>94</sup> With this gesture Sedgwick also connects these intersectional identifications of Warhol to a relationality of subjectivity that is itself queer—enacted

in and through an attention to Warhol's whiteness, focusing on "the highly individual histories by which the fleeting emotion of shame has instituted far more durable, structural changes in one's relational and interpretive strategies toward both self and others."<sup>95</sup>

As Sedgwick's analysis makes exquisitely clear, Warhol's overtly enacted queer camp persona—in his words, his whiter than white skin, "faggy air," "artistic movements," "nice hands, very expressive ... sometimes I wrap my arms around myself ... I walk like a woman, on the balls of my feet"—activates the mutually sustaining bond between the common formulation of the camp or theatrical gay male persona during the 1960s and *whiteness*.<sup>96</sup> The whiteness of camp in its most common formulations is glaring. Sedgwick recognizes that race and sexuality are inextricably connected in twentieth-century concepts and experiences of queer embodiment. What camp allows us to see in relation to the hyperbolically sexed/gendered bodies in Jack Smith's fake orientalized practice, or even the placid pretense at campy, swish asexuality in Andy Warhol's hyper-white "disinterested" persona, is that, equally, such theatricalized versions of effeminate, creative masculinity are always already raced.

### **Theatricality as debasement: Michael Fried's homophobia**

As I have suggested, there are innumerable examples in the 1960s in the US of theater and art critics damning one form of art or performance or another as "theatrical"—a term that works as an implicit negative to debase that which it modifies. It should be clear by now that such rhetorical strategies have everything to do with anxieties around homosexuality, as directly connected to effeminacy and racialized whiteness, and to fears linked to the perceived threat of newly empowered gay men, women, and Blacks and Chicanos/as in the Cold War period and after.

These discursive applications of theatricality expand upon earlier more overt castigations of effeminacy in artistic production. In 1935, Thomas Craven thus argued in a short piece called "Effeminacy?," published in *The Art Digest*, that the "idea that shapely, slender hands denote the sensitive artist is part of the modern cult of effeminacy," and embellishes this point: "today, more often than not, [the artist] is a shiftless epicene pretending to ... possess ... abnormal sensitivity."<sup>97</sup> Often, too, such excoriations in US criticism in the 1930s connected effeminate and implicitly homosexual weakness in artistic execution to the supposed decadence of European art. Thus, Craven even manages to "queer" the macho Pablo Picasso by noting that he is a "diabolically sensitive artist" of "trifling ingenuities!"<sup>98</sup> And the American realist painter Thomas Hart Benton made comments in the 1930s linking high, European culture and art museums to the decadence of homosexuals, dismissing the art museum as "a graveyard run by a pretty boy with delicate wrists and a swing in his gait."<sup>99</sup>

Perpetuating this strand of homophobic and implicitly misogynistic criticism in relation to theater itself, in a 1970 article, theater director and critic Robert

Brustein argued that revolutionary politics had been reduced to a form of theater (as a negative); for Brustein, radical political groups such as the Weathermen and the Black Panther Party present “actions and rhetoric [that] are an extension of theatricality … [W]hen the Panthers, in paramilitary costumes, have their pictures taken serving breakfast to ghetto children, then the link with public relations and play acting becomes obvious.”<sup>100</sup> This argument implies that theater is a debasement of “real” politics and dismisses the revolutionism and activism of the most important political group of the Black Power movement (further racializing and classing his dismissal by connecting its debasement to “ghetto,” i.e., racialized lower-class) children. Ironically, given his preeminence as a theater director, Brustein deploys theatricality as having an implicitly negative valence, a negativity linked quite directly to what many whites, even so-called liberal or progressive ones, clearly perceived as a terrifying urban, lower-class blackness.

This negativity takes its value as well, as we have seen, from broader cultural beliefs attaching theater to effeminacy and homosexuality. Thus, Donald Kaplan, in an often-cited 1965 article in *The Drama Review*, anxiously bemoans the “homosexuality” of the current theater in New York in the following terms:

[a]mong the wrongs which the current theatre is said to sustain to its detriment, homosexuality is included with an increasing alarm … Homosexuals—the indictment goes—have exploited the theatre’s traditionally liberal hospitality toward deviant and errant souls and have become numerous, widespread, and powerful.<sup>101</sup>

Kaplan also connects this queer figure of the theater to the legacy of effeminate artistic subjectivity implicitly linked to Oscar Wilde and earlier dandies by quoting Albert Camus in *The Rebel*:

The dandy … can only be sure of his own existence by finding it in the expression of others’ faces. Other people are his mirror … For the dandy to be alone is not to exist … he compels others to create him while denying their values. He plays at life because he is unable to live it.<sup>102</sup>

The theatrical and effeminate dandy requires an audience: his queer-ness thus ties theatricality once again to the concept of relationality and the (homosexual) dependence of self on other.

Art criticism had its very strong variants of this explicitly homophobic language. In a 1961 review of a Robert Rauschenberg exhibition, “J.K.” (Jack Kroll) cites John Cage describing Rauschenberg’s works as “entertainments to celebrate unfixity” and goes on to connect the artist directly to “Capotean indulgence” and “*Harper’s Bazaar* sensibility.”<sup>103</sup> The latter epithet clearly connects the artist, known by then to be a homosexual (having been in relationships with Cy Twombly and Jasper Johns throughout much of the 1950s), with

women's popular culture and with a figure whose name could be shorthanded to indicate queer: Capotean would at the time have been instantly understood to be an insult among "serious" intellectuals, given Truman Capote's visibility as an openly gay and highly effeminate man. As Reay puts it, in the 1960s the "fag" Capote was the stereotypical homosexual as far as national prejudices went; if he did not exist, he would have had to be invented."<sup>104</sup>

Theater scholar Stephen Bottoms examines this conjunction of terms critically and specifically addresses Michael Fried's 1967 "Art and Objecthood."<sup>105</sup> Bottoms notes, "theatre is still linked integrally and stereotypically with homosexuality, and particularly with male homosexuality. Theatre may be 'OK for girls,' but ... it is simply not something that 'real men' do."<sup>106</sup> While his attention to these links is laudable, Bottoms never nuances the tendency to conflate a negative concept of theater as homosexual with the assumed negative value (in patriarchy) of the feminine. The misogyny here is notable: homophobia and misogyny are explicitly mutually implicated through anxieties around theatricality, camp, and drag. Bottoms points out that Richard Schechner, one of the founding figures of performance studies as a discipline, wrote theatrical reviews in language that perpetuates the homophobic assumptions of the 1960s. In his 1962–3 review of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, Schechner disparages the American theater for giving voice to too many gay male playwrights and directors, such as the author of this play, Edward Albee. Schechner asserts that the theater in New York "has been too long the call-girl of money and ambition. In some sense we hope to restore [its] virginity," and continues on to lament Albee's homosexual and feminized vision: "Self-pity, drooling, womb-seeking weakness ... I'm tired of morbidity and sexual perversity with are there only to titillate an impotent and homosexual theatre and audience."<sup>107</sup>

Cementing this continuum between the homophobia of theater criticism and that of art criticism, Bottoms also links Schechner's attack to Fried's work on theatricality in the visual arts, citing my earlier scholarship making this point.<sup>108</sup> Seemingly not aware of Tomkins' and Roth's 1960s and 1970s contributions to outlining the anti-modernist neo-Dada anti-aesthetic in American art—which both of them link to homosexuality or artists known to be gay<sup>109</sup>—Bottoms misleadingly gives Fried too much credit in setting the stage for future developments:

[Fried's article functioned to] separate the minimalists from their hard-drinking, macho forebears in the New York School (such as Pollock and de Kooning), and to align them instead with the more flamboyantly theatrical spirit of other 1960s art-world developments such as pop art and "neo-Dada." The most influential figures in these areas were, of course, gay men—Marcel Duchamp [sic], Andy Warhol, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg—and it is surely not coincidental that Fried's heatedly anti-theatrical rhetoric invoked the same homophobic tropes of disease, perversion, and degeneracy utilized by [Schechner in] *TDR*.<sup>110</sup>

Aside from the fact that Duchamp was by all accounts heterosexual (and some of his greatest works explored the psychic structures of heterosexual desire), in terms of my genealogy, Bottoms usefully connects theater studies with Michael Fried's now-infamous excoriation of "theatricality" in his 1967 article "Art and Objecthood." Bottoms highlights the way in which Fried's article evinces a pointed rage against minimalism (or what he calls "literalist art"), the extremity of which vastly overdetermines what otherwise seems a banal spasm of art critical aversion.

As performance philosophy scholar Tawny Andersen has noted, theatricality for Fried and other Anglo-American critics attached directly (as with Fried) or indirectly to analytic philosophical traditions seems to point to anxieties over a dynamic of perception—whereby theatricality dangerously resides with the viewer's experience, thus opening art to relationality and a democratizing effect.<sup>111</sup> It is precisely this relational opening of art to embodiment and process—to the desires of the *other* and to temporality or duration—and its correlative embrace of the spectator which makes even an art form as seemingly mute in its abstraction as minimalist sculpture so threatening to Fried, who laments "the special complicity that that work extorts from the beholder."<sup>112</sup> Fried is explicit about the threat of durationality as a destruction of modernism's putative purity; duration troubles the "*wholly manifest*" quality of modernist painting and sculpture ("it is by virtue of their presence and instantaneoussness that modernist painting and sculpture defeat theater").<sup>113</sup>

Fried assumes and asserts that presence is to be desired, ending the essay as follows: "Presentness is grace."<sup>114</sup> As Jacques Derrida put it in one of many brilliant observations about the inevitably failed fantasy of presence (or "presentness"), which modernists such as Fried demand: "the presence of the perceived present can appear as such only inasmuch as it is *continuously compounded* with a nonpresence and nonperception ... [N]onpresence and otherness are internal to presence."<sup>115</sup> Theatricality always already challenges the presentness that Fried claims.

Fried applies theatricality with an apparent philosophical gloss, but covertly his language signals anxiety around queer and effeminate aesthetic relations encouraged by literalist works that, relationally, demand an audience and thus threaten his authority.<sup>116</sup> This is clearly signaled by the urgent italics in his famous clarion call against the promiscuous blurring of boundaries of theatrical art toward the end of the essay:

*Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre ... The concepts of quality and value—and to the extent that these are central to art, the concept of art itself—are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only within the individual arts. What lies between the arts is theater.*<sup>117</sup>

Asserting qualities as factual values, Fried cannot see his participation in a specifically valenced viewing system that benefits from and supports his

heteronormative white male privilege. Never has a modernist claim more blatantly (if inadvertently) illustrated the points made in poststructuralist philosophy (such as Derrida's work) about the limits of the metaphysical, Cartesian world view underlying modernism.

Notably, some of the artists involved in making minimalist works were also theorists and had already pointed out the phenomenological aspects of this type of work before Fried published his article. In the same venue, *Artforum*, for example, Robert Morris had already begun to publish the first of four major articles entitled "Notes on Sculpture" (numbered parts 1–4); in these articles (which Fried cites in "Art and Objecthood"), Morris describes minimalism in relation to its major aesthetic terms, which "are not in but dependent upon this autonomous object and exist as unfixed variables that find their specific definition in the particular space and light and physical viewpoint of the spectator."<sup>118</sup> The implications of this nuanced statement are very clear: nothing is *in* the art work; it can never be fully present in itself. Rather, the art work, its form, scale, and content devised by the artist, is later engaged by spectators, who determine its ever-shifting meaning and values. This simple idea challenged the basic premises of modernist formalist art criticism, whereby writers such as, in particular, Clement Greenberg (one of Fried's mentors) and Fried determined the art work to manifest inherent meanings, which, paradoxically if conveniently, could apparently only be interpreted by highly trained critics such as themselves. As Morris's argument asserts, minimalism's theatricality is threatening because it is about opening out the "dependence" of the object on its "particular space" and the "viewpoint of the spectator."

The perceived debasement of theatricality is implicitly linked to femininity, effeminacy, and gay men throughout Fried's and Greenberg's work. Fried even cites Greenberg on the corrupted "effect of presence" associated with "literalist [Minimalist] work" and notes that Greenberg's argument is made in relation to the practice of Anne Truitt, who (in Greenberg's words) "made art that did flirt with the look of non art."<sup>119</sup> One of the only woman sculptors successfully showing work in New York galleries in the 1960s, Truitt somehow is guilty of "flirting" and perverting the medium (one wonders what Greenberg or Fried would have said about Hannah Wilke's or Lynda Benglis's 1960s and 1970s sculptural work—explicitly vaginal or phallic—if they had deigned to consider it!). Further on in the article Fried famously borrows the language of sexual perversion to note that literalist artists evince a "sensibility *already* theatrical, already (to say the worst) corrupted or perverted by theater."<sup>120</sup>

For decades I have taught "Art and Objecthood"—now a canonical text in art history—to undergraduates, drawing out their understanding by allowing them to note the gap between Fried's extreme rhetoric and the seemingly non-threatening, floor-bound metal slabs and blocks of the minimalist works he excoriates. Imagine my fascination, then, when I was recently apprised of new research by art historian Christa Robbins, who unearthed a March 16, 1967 letter from Michael Fried to Philip Leider, founding editor of *Artforum*,

regarding the imminent publication of “Art and Objecthood” in the magazine in June of that year. Here, Fried references his use of the term “theatrical” in the article and notes to Leider:

I keep toying with the idea, crazy as it sounds, of having a section in this sculpture-theater essay on how corrupt sensibility is *par excellence* faggot sensibility, and how even if the faggots didn’t kill Kennedy (and I love this guy Garrison for insinuating they did) they ought to be kicked out of the arts and forced to go to work on Wall Street or something.<sup>121</sup>

This extraordinary passage, sadly, confirms as *explicit* the homophobia I had assumed all these years to be implicit and unknowing on Fried’s part. Robbins’s sleuthing has revealed the more casual (yet deeply held) ideologies and biases behind authoritative modernist art critical models in the late 1960s, which she attributes to the threat of “the slow infiltration of that hetero-masculine space” of the New York art world by “both female and openly gay voices.”<sup>122</sup> Robbins also, crucially, notes that this is not a problem of the distant past of contemporary art discourse but, unfortunately, still active, noting that recent work by scholars such as Walter Benn Michaels have taken up Fried’s 1967 terms to argue against the plurality of viewing experiences they perceive as debasing contemporary art criticism.<sup>123</sup>

Robbins’ article is groundbreaking, not only in its archival insights but in its nuanced arguments and courage in exposing Fried’s letter as part of the field of meaning around the 1967 article. I would only take issue with Robbins’ diplomatic skirting of the implications of Fried’s egregious homophobia. Robbins lets Fried off the hook by noting his broad range of discussions with Leider about hidden sexual identifiers—all of which nonetheless assume homosexuality in men to be a feared negative trait. She cites Leider bantering with Fried in the correspondence around the idea of Leider being a latent homosexual (because he defers to his wife!), and Fried noting in return that he thinks Barbara Rose (an art critic then married to Frank Stella) is nervous when she observes Stella and Fried “fondle each other” in male comradery.<sup>124</sup> She concludes,

Such playful nods to his own love of men demonstrate the complexity from which Fried’s evocation of “faggot sensibility” needs to be read. In the context of his aesthetic theory, it reads not as a straightforward denouncement of gay men and women but rather as an expression of fear and anxiety over the instability of identity as such.<sup>125</sup>

I respectfully disagree. Here I would assert, rather, that Fried’s letter reads inevitably as both. This is not simply a question of the “instability of identity as such”: Fried’s jokey call for the “faggots” to be booted out of the art world and his supercilious rants against Morris have a sharp edge of maliciousness. Fried’s homophobia had concrete effects on actual people. In the 1967 article, for

example, he explicitly and negatively names John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg—both known in the New York art circles to be gay men—as making works aligned with “theater” in opposition to the practice of lauded artists such as Morris Louis, a heterosexually identified abstract or “color field” painter whose work Fried slavered over in his criticism at the time.<sup>126</sup> Due to the influence of Greenberg and Fried, those of us trained in art history in the 1980s and 1990s were never taught about the work of “theatrical” or “flirtatious” artists such as Jack Smith or Anne Truitt; when we were taught Rauschenberg’s or Warhol’s or Twombly’s work, their gayness was never mentioned. Here is a place to stress that homophobia is always already both global and specific. It is motivated by a fear of instability, as well as by a deep antipathy toward those whom the homophobe perceives as embodying this instability or as putting it in play through theatrical modes of art and performance.

These specific dynamics of homophobia are clear in exclusions of any consideration of sexuality in relation to discussions of Warhol—both tendencies of which are absolutely endemic to 1980s and 1990s texts on and exhibitions presenting the artist’s work. Thus Fredric Jameson, one of the most important theorists of postmodernism in the 1980s and 1990s, famously dismisses the “camp or ‘hysterical’ sublime” in his definitive and influential exposition on postmodernism as a “logic of late capitalism,” from which he excludes Andy Warhol on this basis; as Richard Dellamora has convincingly argued of Jameson’s elision, it marks an attempt to “defend his position against homosexual contamination.”<sup>127</sup> And, as queer activist and art historian Douglas Crimp noted of modernist criticism, it relies on a presumed “universal [that is] constituted by disavowing gender and sexuality.”<sup>128</sup>

Art historian David Getsy has recently summed up the situation with Fried’s anxieties as follows: “As Fried famously narrated, [supposedly theatrical works] … merely waited for the viewer (like a person in a ‘somewhat darkened room’), locating their meaning, differently, in each new phenomenal encounter.”<sup>129</sup> Offering another archivally specific challenge to Fried’s authoritarianism and hegemonic grip on debates over theatricality in the visual arts, Getsy is currently researching the case of Scott Burton, who was an art critic and editor of *Art News* in the 1960s and who became a sculptor and body artist by 1970. While still identified as a critic, Burton gave a series of lectures and published texts in the late 1960s embracing feminism and openly criticizing “Art and Objecthood.” For example, in a lecture on minimalism given in 1967, Burton countered Fried’s anxiety about minimalism’s opening of the work to “the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work” (citing Fried’s 1967 essay), arguing “this concern with actual circumstances is an essential condition of any sculpture,” and concluding, “[o]ne admires Morris … and others … for making us aware once again that sculpture exists in *our* space, in our world.”<sup>130</sup>

In addition to such lectures, around 1970 Burton began articulating his critique through performances that overtly theatricalized the self as a racialized

gender—and explicitly queer—performative, as in an outrageous gallery performance called *Self Portrait as Modern American Artist* from 1974. Here, standing like a traditional sculpture on a pedestal, he wore whiteface, his luxuriant long hair down, and a large exposed erect phallus.<sup>131</sup> His *Self Portrait* performance performatively literalized the absurd phallocentrism and the white privilege underlying Fried's heated claims for modern art against minimalism's perceived democratizing strategies of opening the work to the viewer. Minimalism, Burton concedes, is in fact theatrical in that it “reconnects sculpture to … its existence in a real environment.”<sup>132</sup>

Burton's early 1970s performance pieces—in particular his “Lecture on Self” and “Individual” and “Group” “Behavior Tableaux” performances, and his *very* queer *Self Portrait as Modern American Artist*—performatively enacted his theoretical points by exposing precisely the bodily attributes underlying the anxieties motivating Fried to exclude and excoriate the theatrical. The modernist critic's “phallus” and his “white face” had to be veiled in order for his authority to be substantiated—Burton theatrically uncovered them. Burton clearly understood that any work that exposed these (by soliciting desire, for example) had to be excluded from the category of modernist art—and flaunted this prohibition in the most assertive, public way. Burton had an intuitive understanding of the force of performance and the live body in his challenge to Fried. Overt theatricality would thus come to be understood—per the challenges by Burton, as with those of Yayoi Kusama, Jack Smith, and many others—as explicitly queer and/or feminist.

Of course Fried and Greenberg deigned to address *actual* queer performance (an artist such as Smith was beyond their ken, and Kusama rates only a dismissive footnote by Fried<sup>133</sup>). Crucially, attending to the context in which Fried (and other homophobically anxious writers) were working—which was visibly fraught by direct challenges to white male authority by avatars of the rights movements as well as the exuberant theatricality of queer artists and collectives such as Jack Smith, Kusama, the Disquotays, and the Cockettes—is a way of understanding this threat in more concrete terms. Ultimately debates about aesthetics are always debates about the core values that define a country or culture, as illustrated by periods in which America has experienced “culture wars,” for example, in the early 1990s, tied to the AIDS crisis and radical feminist and queer artists' interventions, which acted as sparks to fire national debates.<sup>134</sup>

All of this is specific to the US context—in this chapter, I have not focused on Europe or other parts of the world, and so have ignored radically important art works, theories, and exhibitions moving the visual arts toward an embrace of theatricality—such as the work of VALIE EXPORT, or the exhibition *Transformer: Aspekt der Travestie* (aspects of travesty), held in 1974 in central Europe and presenting artists who “travesty” themselves in their work through self-imaging involving grossly inferior imitations of normative gender signifiers.<sup>135</sup> Because Greenberg (and later Fried) had international influence, and modernism was deeply entrenched in places such as France, in Europe major critics, curators, and institutions were

very slow to embrace embodied forms of art. Fried's text (rather than Morris's more nuanced writings) unfortunately long ago set the terms in the US and beyond for the refusal of the theatrical, the queer, the performative on the part of art criticism and its related institutions such as the art gallery and museum. Fried's arguments point even today to the continuing threat of queer performative energies to institutions of the visual arts, including art history, museums, and galleries.

### **Appropriated theatricality: the gender/sex of race or the race of queer**

Drag for queer-identified men and women or genderfluid, transgender people or those who eventually would identify as transwomen or transmen is always already positioned within complex and shifting matrices of social power and cultural visibility/invisibility linked to myriad other identifications. As black studies scholars from Daphne Brooks to Riley Snorton have pointed out, drag's structures of equivocation (is s/he? is s/he not?) are not entirely (or even primarily) historically white in the US context. In her influential 2006 book *Bodies in Dissent*, Brooks argues that these structures come at least in part from modes of black performance in the US such as the cakewalk—first performed by African American slaves forced to parody European dance styles for the amusement of their owners (culminating in the “winners” being awarded with pieces of cake). Brooks goes so far as to argue that forms of performance such as cakewalking show that camp has “black genealogical roots” in these forms of nineteenth-century performance, which of course were motivated by the harsh necessities of attempting to survive in a violently racist society.<sup>136</sup>

Along these lines, Siobhan B. Somerville has recently stressed the co-implication of racial and sex/gender identifications in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the US (the same period of Brooks' focus) when race and sexuality were being mutually codified in American social life and law—through the introduction of Jim Crow segregation practices and the invention of modern homosexuality. It was, she argues,

not merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies as “homosexual” or “heterosexual” emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively constructing and policing the boundary between “black” and “white” bodies ... The simultaneous efforts to shore up and bifurcate categories of race and sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were deeply intertwined.<sup>137</sup>

Racialized bodies are always already sexed and gendered; as Somerville puts it, “existing cultural stereotypes of African Americans were largely sexualized.”<sup>138</sup>

To this end, Jack Smith's theatricality thus makes gay masculine artistic subjectivity visible—but it also makes it visible as *raced*, in ways that have often not been acknowledged in scholarship around Smith, until very recently, in explorations of his

orientalism by José Muñoz, Dominic Johnson, and Paisid Aramphongpham.<sup>139</sup> The artist's orientalism is itself implicitly racist in its stereotyping, albeit it functions as noted through a jumble of incoherent signifiers performed in hyperbolically fake and thus ultimately de-essentializing ways, which is Muñoz's and Johnson's argument. However it also points to an orientalizing relationship to temporality (as Aramphongpham compellingly argues<sup>140</sup>), and to the otherwise whiteness of the traditional hyperbolically masculine figure of the male artistic genius—for example, the Jackson Pollock represented as macho, heteronormative, masculine before Kaprow's 1958 rereading. And Smith's adoring paean to 1940s Latina (Spanish-Dominican) B-movie icon Maria Montez exemplifies his complex and celebratory if appropriative relationship to Latino/a and Eastern cultures. He describes her as follows: "Moldy Movie Queen, Shoulder pad, gold plated form wedgie Siren, Determined, dream-bound, Spanish, Irish, Negro?, Indian girl who went to Hollywood," and facetiously extols the "Orient" in relation to Montez's trashy acting in the 1944 movie *Cobra Woman*:

Wretch actress—pathetic as actress... one of her atrocious acting sighs suffused a thousand tons of dead plaster with imaginative life and truth ... You may not approve of the Orient but it's half of the world and it's where spaghetti comes from.<sup>141</sup>

The quintessential camp of the bad actress, raced as Latina and as theatricalized "Oriental," is summed up by Smith as follows: "Corniness is the other side of marvelousness."<sup>142</sup> Smith's orientalizing modes of self-display and his appropriation of Montez and *Cobra Woman* epitomizes his camp aesthetic—or we could say his queer anti-aesthetic. It also reinforces the point that discourses around camp as theatrical associated it almost exclusively with white gay men in large cities such as New York—and these camps often appropriated non-white cultural forms in ways that tended *not* to be examined as racial drag.<sup>143</sup>

Through his embrace of theatricality and his orientalism, Smith, however, also gives us a conduit into looking at the queer drag of Mario Montez (né René Rivera), the Puerto Rican female impersonating "star" putatively named by Smith after Maria Montez. In Mario Montez's obituary in 2013, J. Hoberman first extolls the performer as an "unclassifiable gender blur and underground luminary of the first order," then notes that Rivera was a "post office clerk 'discovered' and given his stage name by Smith."<sup>144</sup> Montez/Rivera became well known in queer subcultures in New York and beyond through their appearance in *Flaming Creatures* as well as in key Warhol films such as *Harlot* (1965), *Screen Test #2* (1965), and *Chelsea Girls* (1966), and then as a staple player in the queer performances of the Play-House of the Ridiculous from John Vaccaro and Ronald Tavel days, as well as under Charles Ludlam—also designing and making the troupe's costumes for Ludlam.<sup>145</sup>



**FIGURE 4.3** Mario Montez (René Rivera); according to independent scholar Roberto Ortiz in “I look sexy-but sweet’: Notes on Mario and Maria Montez,” 1969, this is Montez in an early version of the “Carla gypsy wildcat costume” they designed for Charles Ludlam’s plays *Turds in Hell* and *The Grad Tarot*; photograph by Tom Hardy

In an important 2008 article “The Puerto Rican Lower East Side and the Queer Underground,” Juan Suárez clarifies the mechanisms at play in the white queer underground’s relationship to figures such as Montez. As Suárez argues,

we do not lack studies that place the 1960s underground within the history of queer culture—as a revival of 1910s and 1920s Greenwich Village bohemianism, a time of growing visibility after the closeted 1940s and 1950s, or a foundational period for subsequent queer art and life—but we still have to examine how this particular moment intersects with a number of ethnic cultures, particularly with Latino cultures.<sup>146</sup>

Suárez traces material connections among experimental artists in New York such as Cage, Cunningham, Smith, Ludlam, and Vaccaro (as well as Warhol Factory habitués such as Billy Name) and a large group of diasporic Caribbeans on the lower East Side of Manhattan in the 1960s. Ludlam and Vaccaro’s Play-House of the Ridiculous produced plays such as *The Life of Juanita Castro* (1964), in which Fidel Castro is played by a woman and “Juanita” Castro by

a drag queen. He concludes, the “Latino presence in the underground is by no means extensive, but neither is it . . . negligible.”<sup>147</sup>

Suárez notes that Smith, most likely as guided and inspired by Montez/Rivera, was the most prolific among these avant-garde figures in deploying camped up allusions to Latin culture, “placed on a continuum with Eastern Iconography . . . and mythic locales” such as Smith’s fantasized “Atlantis.”<sup>148</sup> The “divas” of these films—including Maria Montez—were already campy (as Jack Smith so clearly understood), ripe for appropriation by underground artists whose world view was driven by an anarchic desire to undermine normative heterosexist and capitalist values in the US. Maria Montez already purveyed a theatricalized, excessive femininity that could be easily re-appropriated by artist such as Smith, who valued her celebrity persona openly for its theatrical feminine sensibility and secondarily, possibly less consciously, for its campy racial drag. In turn, Mario Montez/Rivera extends the usefulness of a particular mode of (Latin) drag, working directly with Smith, Warhol, and the Play-House of the Ridiculous creators, thus effectively creating a character across these three disparate modes of New York based theatrical and cinematic queer performance. Furthermore, Montez/Rivera’s drag, as Suárez puts it, was radical in its failure: “his style of drag [was marked by] . . . an improbable mixture of glamour and frumpiness. Passing was not in the books for Mario. His masculine, well-defined body showed under the drag.”<sup>149</sup>

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It’s the early 1990s and, doing research for my teaching in a local art magazine, I come across an image of artists’ graffiti on the Los Angeles County Museum of Art from 1972—the words “herrón, Gamboa, GRONKIE” are spray-painted on the museum’s wall. This is art I was never taught in art history programs. In the photograph a woman stands behind the wall, looking to her left. I discover that this is a work by the radical Chicano/a art collective “Asco,” one of their “no movies”—street performances or interventions documented by Harry Gamboa Jr. and thus self-consciously presented as if part of a larger film narrative that, nonetheless, never actually existed. The members of the group at the time were Willie Herrón, Gamboa, Gronk, and (the woman in the photograph) Patssi Valdez.

I find another image of the group where the four members, dressed to the nines, stand nonchalantly in a destitute city landscape next to a giant sewage pipe: this “no movie” is, appropriately, called *Asshole Mural* and becomes one of my favorite hybrid photographic performance works to bring into my teaching, introducing links between 1970s conceptual body art and identity politics. Other Asco pictures extend their radical crossovers between activism and art. For example, the *Walking Mural* images of 1972 show Gronk in drag as a chiffon Christmas tree, queering Asco’s image and message of performative muralism.<sup>150</sup> I manage to hunt down Gamboa and invite him to lecture to my

students. As the photographer behind all these images, he explains the “no movie” concept: responding to Hollywood’s exclusion of Chicanx people from the movie industry down the road, the group perform various tableaux as if from a movie still, taking the situation into their own hands.<sup>151</sup>



**FIGURE 4.4** Harry Gamboa Jr., *Walking Mural*, 1972, Asco street performance ©1972 Harry Gamboa Jr., 16 x 20 inches, chromogenic print, edition of 10, printed 2012 (Gronk as a chiffon “Christmas Tree,” Willie Herrón as “mural,” and Patssi Valdez as the Virgin of Guadalupe)

Race always “colors” the performance of queer, just as, whether acknowledged or not, sex/gender identifications haunt the politicized public performance of race.

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There is a deeper history of the queer aspect of Asco’s practice, however. In the late 1960s, Gronk had produced a play with Robert Legorreta, a gay activist and member of the Southern California Gay Liberation Front, and Mundo Meza, a painter and activist and Legorreta’s “soul mate” from the late 1960s, when they met, to Meza’s death from AIDS-related illness in 1985.<sup>152</sup> Gronk’s 1969 theater production *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* included Legorreta’s performance as the flamboyant “Cyclona” (an “outrageous drag character who paid homage to the Pachuca bombshells of the zoot-suiter 1940s”).<sup>153</sup> *Caca-Roaches* celebrated the power of cross-gendering radically to challenge audiences, in this case, consisting largely of Chicano families expecting

agitprop but not queer theatricality. Cyclona wore a black gown stripped down to the waist and a fur stole with his face made up with white skin, red mouth, and black rings around his eyes. The “climax” of the play, called the “Cock Scene,” involved Cyclona stripping a male actor (Legorreta’s boyfriend), then biting and popping a phallic water balloon between the actor’s legs.<sup>154</sup>



**FIGURE 4.5** Robert “Cyclona” Legorreta in *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends*, 1969; color photographs on construction paper; from the Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta—Cyclona Collection, courtesy of the artist and the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center; copyright Robert Legorreta

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*Caca-Roaches*, as Legorreta put it in a recent interview, was “a protest against ... a society ruled by men,” and the Cyclona character (like other queer, transgendered, and cross-cultural figurations in later Asco performances) was both inspired by the glamour of friends such as Valdez and another female high school colleague Marisela Norte and an extension of Legorreta’s and Gronk’s own cross-dressing experiments as

teenagers in East Los Angeles.<sup>155</sup> As Legorreta describes his interest in cross-dressing, as a teenager he would parade the streets “dressed as a psychedelic creature … I wore psychedelic jumpsuits and I wore false breasts: I would hang two water balloons on a string around my neck.”<sup>156</sup> He flaunted his exaggerated adoption of Chola accoutrements and gestures, flirting with Chicano gangsters cruising the boulevards of East Los Angeles.<sup>157</sup>

This radical performance of self, narrated by Gronk into a theatrical rejection of patriarchy in the context of Chicano community theater, blatantly queered Chicano subjectivity, itself (in its dominant nationalist forms within the Chicano movement) largely heteronormative and masculine. For Gronk the play was in part an explicit response to the fact that “many of our friends were being drafted [to Vietnam] and coming back in body bags.”<sup>158</sup> *Caca-Roaches* was thus underlaid by a kind of over-the-top black humor directed at the impossible political situation in which younger Chicanos were finding themselves.<sup>159</sup> Rejecting patriarchy through queer interventions in conventional (straight, white, middle-class) masculinity was one strategy for rejecting the war, with the racist singling out of disadvantaged Chicano youths as its fodder.

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While Valdez consistently practiced a sort of hyper-femininity that might read as feminine drag (and certainly recalled an earlier era of feminine glamour), Cyclona and Gronk blew apart gender stereotypes through the activation of queer feminine/masculine personae, confusing the boundaries defining the singular (male/macho) “Chicano” subject with a radically queer sensibility. Gronk was frequenting the “queer table” at their high school even as he was beginning to pen examples of radical queer theater. Gronk’s queer feminism was sustained until, in his post-Asco practice, he would develop in his drawings and paintings erotically and playfully gendered bodies and tropes of empowered female subjectivity such as “Tormenta,” an iconic diva who, he noted, was “a mythical figure … like Medea, like Electra. A woman’s image that is strong and still can be glamorous.”<sup>160</sup>

Asco members performed queer feminist theory long before it was written down, and one deeply implicated in ethnic and racial identifications through which they navigated urban space.

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Even as Montez/Rivera added depth and texture to the white-dominant queer art scene in New York and Asco paraded in the streets in a merging of activism and art, the art world continued to marginalize such work—even in the face of white artists’ overt appropriations of black and Latinx bodies, practices, and forms. Usefully adding to Suárez’s account of this dynamic, Gavin Butt has recently addressed the tendency among the white queer underground to

appropriate African American culture, focusing on Shirley Clarke's classic 1967 experimental film *Portrait of Jason*, featuring a durational self-presentation by Black gay hustler named Jason Holliday (né Aaron Payne in 1924).<sup>161</sup> Butt notes the larger picture in the US in the 1950s of white artists and writers such as Norman Mailer and members of the Beats famously claiming Black American culture in a primitivizing way as more "authentic" and hip than white culture, with Mailer notoriously describing the (white) hipster in 1957 as absorbing "the existentialist synapses of the Negro," thus gaining street credibility as a "White Negro."<sup>162</sup> Butt notes a strong shift marked by Clarke's film from this embrace among white urban bohemians from the 1950s of Black and queer culture to a more complex picture of how racial and sexual otherness function in white-dominant avant-garde film and art by the late 1960s.

Shirley Clarke, who was white, made films about junkies featuring Black jazz musicians (and starring her then-boyfriend, Black actor Carl Lee), focusing on (as Butt puts it) "the marginal cultures of the hep cat and the camp queen" or (specifically in *Portrait of Jason*) the "entertaining minstrel and the drama queen."<sup>163</sup> Jason Holliday's performative self-display throughout the film (he is shown in real time, imbibing alcohol and smoking pot, becoming more and more inebriated) is at once highly theatrical, campy, and hip; he uses black vernacular and "hep cat" verbiage throughout. In his defiantly effeminate self-presentation, Holliday represents a strong departure from the late 1960s valuing of "authenticity" within both the Black pan-African and Black Power movements (where "authentic" Black subjectivity was attached to heteronormative masculinity) and within white bohemian cultures of the 1960s.

E. Patrick Johnson has interrogated period notions of black authenticity, noting via the work of Black Power activist Eldridge Cleaver the role in these notions of explicit misogyny and homophobia in the black heteronormative masculinity that wards off queer desires. In his manifesto *Soul on Ice* (1968), written while in prison, Cleaver thus famously excoriated James Baldwin (the openly gay black writer and activist) for his "sycophantic love of the whites," and "total hatred of the blacks," which he then connects directly to homosexuality: "The black homosexual [...] is an extreme embodiment of this contradiction. The white man has deprived him of his masculinity, castrated him in the center of his burning skull," and then he "takes the white man for his lover" and turns against "all those who look like him" in a "racial death-wish," which is "manifested as the driving force in James Baldwin."<sup>164</sup> Johnson summarizes: "[t]he 1960s Black Nationalist and Black Arts movements provided the cultural backdrop for the establishment of blackness as antigay."<sup>165</sup>

But, as Tavia Nyong'o asserts in *Afro-Fabulations*, his 2018 book reevaluating the role of black and queer performance in American culture, Cleaver was to some degree an outlier among black activists in his blatant homophobia. Nyong'o ratifies the complexity of Clark's film in its figuring of Holliday, positioning this representation within the "crushed blacks" of the indexical photographic image wherein a "dark vitalism and dark time" that can't be fully

retrieved is marked.<sup>166</sup> In the “blocked-up shadows of everynight life” that Holliday and Clark and her friends occupy and explore in the film, blackness subsumes or “crushes” figures such as Holliday both literally and figuratively and always in relation to other blacks, in this case Carl Lee (Clark’s boyfriend), his performances in Living Theatre productions (including as a “fag for money”), and his family legacy in Black cabaret.<sup>167</sup>

There is, then, no simple gay/straight binary in Black politics and intellectual thought in the 1960s and 1970s, no more than there is a simple black/white binary in how racialized versions of queer subjects are understood and portrayed. James Baldwin’s bestselling 1962 novel, *Another Country*, makes this ambiguity and nuance explicit.<sup>168</sup> Here, Baldwin explored the fluidity of sexual and intimate encounters among a group of Black and white friends and lovers (hetero/homo/and bisexual) living in New York in the late 1950s. Baldwin’s novel promotes an understanding of sexuality and gender as complex and mutable, always already informed by racial and class dynamics of power and self-assertion. And yet, in spite of such exceptional cultural expressions, mainstream American culture was clearly not ready to acknowledge or accommodate such nuanced understandings of Black and/or queer experience.

Part of the claim of authenticity attaching to blackness in this period, as Butt notes, was the demand that the life lived by the subject so fetishized would itself be a paragon of the remarkable—so as to provide material for white bohemians to appropriate and re-perform. But even as Baldwin courageously refused to accede to the heteronormative frameworks being applied to blackness in many of its forms in the 1960s, so Jason Holliday performs a theatrical and uncontrollable Black masculinity that specifically conjoins (as Butt puts it) a “queer, camp and subcultural mode of appreciation” with the “spectacle of a minoritarian life already mired in the artifice of performance” (Holliday being a hustler, after all).<sup>169</sup> This conjoining produces a disruption in the attempts among white artists in America’s urban bohemia to make use of Holliday’s performance: “the hep-cat queen was a troublesome presence when rendered as a representation in avant-garde culture, troublesome precisely because his performances undermined the very ‘authenticity’ that avant-gardists, paradoxically sought to find in him.”<sup>170</sup>

These accounts point out that in the 1960s and beyond, queers and Latinos/as as well as Blacks were both extremely marginalized but also colonized as sites of curiosity and appropriation in art cultures of US cities, especially New York. Their cultural, social, and even geographical marginalization is precisely what made the figures from these cultures enticing to white avant-gardists such as Warhol, Clarke, and Smith (albeit in very different ways). As Suárez sums up this dynamic, which he insists exists as well *within* what he calls “Latin culture”: “Queer underground artists, who championed B movies, faded film cults, drag, the rundown inner city, and sexual unconventionality at large, may have taken on ‘Latin culture’ as another devalued repertoire to be recycled in their art.”<sup>171</sup> The conflation of radically disparate minoritarian identities into appropriated modes of performed marginality is not a coincidence but a reaction formation to

the situation at the time—where queerness could be signified *as* blackness or Latino/aness (and vice versa).

These connections among creative communities were not just appropriative, however; the energy transfer went in both directions. Suárez's article makes clear how members of the queer underground embraced their likeminded queer colleagues in the Puerto Rican gay world, and reciprocally how Puerto Rican gays—who tended to flaunt their homosexuality through open drag and riotous parties—found themselves in spaces of relative freedom in white-dominant urban gay circles.<sup>172</sup> Within this matrix, Mario Montez/René Rivera embodied a willingness to move across borders—gender performance, with Montez/Rivera, was produced through hybrid ethnic and class markers as well. The deployment of theatricality by both Montez/Rivera and Smith showed the workings of camp, in this way, to be reliant on the mobilization of signifiers of “low culture”—including those highly racialized signifiers linked to orientalism and Latin culture—in relatively high cultural frameworks (if Jack Smith’s films and performances could be called high culture!). Sontag makes this point central to her definition of camp, as did many others from the time, such as populist writer Tom Wolfe in his characterization of 1960s American culture: “now high style comes from low places.”<sup>173</sup>

Nonetheless, white gay artists appropriated Latin, African American, and other racialized codes of theatricality with abandon, apparently unconcerned about their own lack of knowledge about the specific original cultural meanings of the signifiers adopted. As Suárez compellingly argues, Jack Smith was among them, adopting what he perceived as Latin or Puerto Rican elements (including *altarcitos* or home altars, which he mimicked and used in several films) among other “exotic” cultural elements as part of his drive to decapitalize artistic practice through a visual excess that was impossible to contain through marketing. I would add to this that Smith’s racial drag and his appropriation of otherness—even, one could argue, his embrace and renaming of René Rivera—was central to the way his queering of subjectivity worked. Smith queered the subject of art precisely through orientalized drag, thanks to its detachment of racial signifiers from actual bodies, conflating myriad signifiers of non-white exoticism across Latin and other cultures. As his relationship to Montez’s drag makes clear, Smith’s queerness demonstrates that gender/sex performance is always already racialized. Crossing gender borders (as the figures of Montez/Rivera and Jason Holliday demonstrate) is always already crossing borders in terms of one’s class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and otherwise.

### The politics of camp

All of these ambiguities point to the difficulty of ascertaining the political value of performances deemed camp or theatrical. Sontag’s highly influential original formulation in “Notes on ‘Camp’” claimed that camp is apolitical, but in a later 1975 interview, she credits camp with raising women’s consciousness about the

“corny flamboyance of femaleness” (as highlighted by Jack Smith’s appropriation of Maria Montez), helping to undermine stereotypes of femininity and opening the door to the women’s movement.<sup>174</sup> But debates about the political force and nature of camp have raged. As early as 1978, Andrew Britton critically noted of this assumption, “[i]t almost seems at times to have become a matter of common acceptance that camp is radical … [C]amp is the means by which gay men may become woman-identified = radical = socialist.”<sup>175</sup> Around the same time, Jack Babuscio and Richard Dyer argued against camp—Dyer specifically questioning the potential misogyny of gay men’s appropriation of female signifiers in the camp style.<sup>176</sup>

In his *Camp Sites*, Michael Trask applies a materialist framework to argue that camp is largely aligned with liberalism—and, interestingly, achieves this through attaching the term to performance. He argues that a “*politics of performance* aligns liberalism with camp”; with camp exposing the fact that attitudes are all, he then argues politics becomes but an attitude: per the value systems of 1960s radical politics, “attitudes themselves can never count for the sort of political interventions we like to think they furnish.”<sup>177</sup> The problem here is that, rather than evaluating camp on the terms established within queer circles, Trask evaluates it in relation to “straight” Marxist radicalism from the 1960s. Within that logic, camp could only fail; as Babuscio puts it, even though it is serious about its ironic and theatrical approach to the world, camp, because of its combination of “fun and earnestness … runs the risk of being considered not serious at all,” certainly by Marxists.<sup>178</sup>

With the explosion of AIDS activism and queer theory in the 1990s, giving new urgency to the coalitional defining of queer agency, camp became a pivotal term in the teasing out of the model of gender performance crystallized in Judith Butler’s work: as David Bergman has put it, “[i]t took AIDS and post-structuralist theory to make camp intellectually and politically respectable again.”<sup>179</sup> But camp had completely different valences for drag performers who formed AIDS activist groups such as Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in San Francisco, founded in 1979. The Sisters members perform camp humor and rage to “expose the forces of bigotry, complacency and guilt that chain the human spirit,” versus the more genderfluid (or “genderfuck”) versions of camp (see Figure 5.2).<sup>180</sup> As early as 1974 cross-dresser and theorist Christopher Long in his presciently titled “Genderfuck and Its Delights” asserted:

It is my choice to not be a man, and it is my choice to be beautiful. I am not a female impersonator; I don’t want to mock women. I want to criticize and to poke fun at the roles of women and of men too. I want to try and show how not-normal I can be. I want to ridicule and destroy the whole cosmology of restrictive sex roles and sexual identification.<sup>181</sup>

Genderfuck is one form of the enunciation of camp as de-essentializing (one of its claims to radicality), linking it to other radical forms of queer humor and parody solidifying the requisite queer agency to produce social change—

including publications such as *Diseased Pariah News*, published in the 1990s and including both key logistical information to help victims of AIDS find resources as well as darkly humorous imagery and writing to lighten the sense of isolation born of the disease.

Still, race and ethnicity do disappear from most theories of camp, with rare exceptions.<sup>182</sup> As radical as camp is commonly claimed to be in discourses of the 1970s through 1990s, it is generally assumed to apply to white urban gay male culture primarily or exclusively: the major anthologies on camp published in the early to mid-1990s include dozens of articles, all almost exclusively addressing white gay male urban culture. Generally speaking, in the 1990s, when investigations of camp were at an all-time high, theorists and historians of camp as a theatrical mode of self-presentation relating to homosexuality accepted a lineage beginning with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century figures such as the gay white male “macaronis” and frequenters of the “molly houses” in England and, by the late nineteenth century the key example of Oscar Wilde, known publicly to be a homosexual and linked to the theatrical in a literal as well as style sense.<sup>183</sup>

Camp, in this lineage, “integrates … gender with aesthetics; in a sense it renders gender a question of aesthetics,” as Jonathan Dollimore notes.<sup>184</sup> Via Wilde, Dollimore claims a radically transgressive effect linked to camp, although he also acknowledges its ambiguity and disavows Sontag’s concept of camp as a “sensibility” connected to homosexuality (camp “negotiates some of the lived contradictions of subordination” and is definitively not a “gay sensibility” but an “invasion and subversion of other sensibilities”).<sup>185</sup> But Dollimore is typical in ignoring the fact that Oscar Wilde, like Jack Smith, had enacted theatrical masculinity through clearly racialized signifiers. Wilde signified his sex/gender otherness (and his ethnic otherness as an Irish man making a go in English culture) by channeling orientalism. For Wilde and the actress Sarah Bernhardt this signaling of extravagantly feminized embodiment took place in performances of orientalism in the photographs by Napoléon Sarony of the 1880s and 1890s: most dramatically, in the image of Bernhardt as Cleopatra, but also in pictures of Wilde against backgrounds of “exotic” plants and oriental carpets in loose furs or velvet smoking jackets.<sup>186</sup>

Midcentury this figure disappears into various subcultures, and later explodes in the Cockettes and the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence into the 1990s, when AIDS activist groups were the most visible performers of LGBTQ on the public stage in the US. On a more popular level, camp emerged into public view again with a vengeance in the 2000s in the US, when television started accommodating theatrical forms of gender performance in shows such as *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (which first aired in 2006) and *Pose* (which first aired in 2018).<sup>187</sup> The ongoing popularity of camp—and its alignment with feminine/gay male concerns—is crystal clear in a 2019 *New York Times* article on camp (in relation to an exhibition “Camp: Notes on Fashion” at the Metropolitan Museum in New York), which the newspaper chose to publish in the “Style” section.<sup>188</sup>



**FIGURE 4.6** Oscar Wilde, portrait by Napoléon Sarony, 1882; © John Cooper, courtesy the “Oscar Wilde In America” Archive

The erasure of race from debates about camp came to a head, most notoriously, in Judith Butler’s focus on *Paris is Burning* in one of her key texts on gender as performance, the chapter “Gender is Burning” of her 1993 *Bodies that Matter*, which helped catapult the film into international circuits of awareness around an increasingly accepted notion of theatrical forms of drag as “subverting” normative gender roles.<sup>189</sup> And yet, while Livingston’s film is entirely about queens-of-color, Butler downplays race and ignores trans identifications in the text. Trans theorist Talia Bettcher astutely critiques Butler’s arguments, asserting that Butler’s focus in “Gender is Burning” on gender performance as subversion requires an opposition to heterosexual gender behavior, which for some transwomen in the film is not accurate (such as, notably, the case of voguer Venus Xtravaganza, who seeks “gender realness” as a woman).<sup>190</sup> In her analysis, Butler briefly focuses on the violent death of Xtravaganza, self-identified as a pre-operative transsexual woman, attributing it to Xtravaganza’s failed desire for middle-class, respectable (i.e., white) femininity, which, Butler argues, “testifies to a tragic misreading of the social map of power.”<sup>191</sup> Butler does attend briefly, in her long paragraph on Xtravaganza’s death, to the role of whiteness in the performer’s fantasized ideal femininity. But her laser-eyed focus on gender performance leads her to downplay the complexities of transsexual, transgender, and trans identification and overall to compartmentalize race—this brief discussion is one of the only moments in which she takes on the roles of race and class within her book-length elaborations on gender performance.<sup>192</sup>



**FIGURE 4.7** Venus Xtravaganza in *Paris is Burning*, 1991; directed by Jennie Livingston; screenshot

Important to note also is the historical context of Butler's text—it was published at the moment in which Madonna was “whitening” and commodifying the voguing movement in her 1990 song and video “Vogue” (where she appropriated styles and dance movements from the queer balls and clubs), making it marketable for a general public that would likely have been deeply unsettled by the truly uncontrollable bodies of the club voguing culture of New York City or of Jewel’s Catch One in Los Angeles. In tracing the genealogy of discourses that connect theatricality with gay men or “subversive” (queer) gender performance, it is crucial to end by asserting again that *camp and theatricality are always raced*, whether or not the queer theorist openly recognizes the fact. Work from the past 20 years by Muñoz, Butt, Johnson, Suárez, Nyong’o, and Aramphongpham suggests as much, shifting the framework thorough which queer and performativity, with their *theatrical* manifestations, are understood as conditioned by all levels of embodied and psychic experience.

## Notes

- 1 Fredrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882), tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1974), 152.
- 2 R.C. Doty, “Growth of Overt Homosexuality in City Provokes Wide Concern,” *New York Times* (December 17, 1963), 1, 33.
- 3 Michel Foucault, and Jean Le Bitoux, Interview: “The Gay Science” (1978), tr. Nicolae Morar and Daniel W. Smith, *Critical Inquiry* 37 (Spring 2011), 394, 395, 396.

- 4 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*,” *GLQ* 1 (1993), 1, 4.
- 5 See Sue-Ellen Case’s pioneering “Towards a Butch/Femme Aesthetic,” *Discourse* 11:1 (Fall–Winter 1988–9), 55–73; Jack (formerly Judith) Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); José Esteban Muñoz on the femme theatricals of Ela Troyano and Carmelita Tropicana in Chapter 5, “Sister Acts,” of *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 119–42; and Diane Torr and Stephen Bottoms, *Sex, Drag, and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010). Alpesh Patel discusses these interventions in “Camp Aesthetics and Desi Art: Parody, Pastiche, and Embodiment,” 2008, unpublished paper; I am grateful to Patel for sharing this brilliant paper with me.
- 6 Neil Bartlett, “Theatrical Types,” *Queer British Art 1861–1967*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Clare Barlow (London: Tate Publishing, 2017), 69.
- 7 J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1955 lectures first published in 1962), second edition, ed. J.O. Urmsom and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 22; italics in original.
- 8 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker, “Introduction,” to *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1995), 5, 6.
- 9 David Marshall, *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), 1; as cited by Andrew Parker, “Unthinking Sex: Marx, Engels, and the Scene of Writing,” *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 30.
- 10 Earl of Shaftesbury, from *Charactericks*, 1711; cited by Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, “Theatricality: an introduction,” *Theatricality*, ed. Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17.
- 11 Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 21–2.
- 12 Ibid., 84–5. Barish examines William Prynne’s 1633 *Historiomatics*, which attacks the theater in terms of what Barish calls the “language of female contamination in association not just with sexuality but with the overthrow of maleness itself,” concluding, “Prynne is terrified, maddened, by the fear of total breakdown,” 85, 87.
- 13 See Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, Chapter 12, “The Nietzschean Apostasy,” 400–17.
- 14 Michael Trask, *Camp Sites: Sex, Politics, and Academic Style in Postwar America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 13.
- 15 Davis and Postlewait, “Theatricality: An Introduction,” 5.
- 16 Ibid., 17.
- 17 Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972; new edition with preface 1979), this quote is from “Preface,” new edition, xi.
- 18 Butler cites Newton’s *Mother Camp* in her “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, n. 4 (December 1988), footnote 12, 528.
- 19 Newton, *Mother Camp*, 4.
- 20 Trask on Goffman and Goffman’s mentor Herbert Blumer, who developed the notion of symbolic interactionism, in *Camp Sites*, 126–7.
- 21 This quote is from David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), cited in Ibid., 126. I discuss *The Lonely Crowd* in relation to these shifts and the rise of postmodernism and performance art in the visual arts in my book *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 77–8.

- 22 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 100. On the debasement of theater as linked to its relationship to audience, see Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013).
- 23 Josette Féral, “Foreword,” special issue on theatricality, *SubStance* 31, n. 2/3 (2002), 3–16, this quote 10; see also Josette Féral, “Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified,” tr. Terese Lyons, *Modern Drama* 25 (1982), 170–81.
- 24 Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 30.
- 25 See my extensive arguments on how this containment was effected, with Abramović’s active consent and participation, in “‘The Artist is Present’: Artistic Re-Enactments and the Impossibility of Presence,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 55, n. 1 (Spring 2011), 16–45.
- 26 For example, the Broad Audience Engagement (public programming) department commissioned “Tip of Her Tongue,” a queer feminist performance series curated by Jennifer Doyle. See my review of the works in this series, “Hurting and Hurling the Body in Feminist Performance, A Review of ‘Tip of Her Tongue,’ a Performance Series at the Broad Museum, Los Angeles, 2016–17,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 28, n. 3 (2018), 424–33.
- 27 Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).
- 28 In *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (New York, NY: Beacon Press, 1964), Herbert Marcuse used the term repressive desublimation in examining the system by which advanced capitalist societies offer instant gratification through commodities under the guise of liberation. Craig Pearson elaborates on the intersection of rights movements and Marcuse’s work in 1960s body art in his important book *Radical Theatrics: Put-Ons, Politics, and the Sixties* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2014), see 21–2, 75–6.
- 29 George Maciunas, as cited by Schneemann in Christy Sheffield Sanford, “Interview with Carolee Schneemann,” *Red Bass: Journal of Politics and Art* (1989), 20; as Schneemann also noted of such misogynistic comments, “[a]n erotic self becomes an object in Fluxus actions. A note was once sent out that I was not to be considered a Fluxus artist because of my eroticism and baroque tendencies./You must realize this tremendous female genital phobia that runs through much of the Fluxus men’s work.” Barbara Smith, “On the Body as Material,” interview with Carolee Schneemann, *Artweek* 21, n. 32 (October 4, 1990), no page numbers visible. Lucy Lippard, “The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth,” in Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women’s Art* (New York, NY: Dutton, 1976), 125, 126.
- 30 Elin Diamond, “Introduction,” in *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 2. See also Virginie Magnat, “Theatricality from the Performative Perspective,” and Janelle Reinelt, “The Politics of Discourse: Performativity Meets Theatricality,” in Josette Féral’s special issue of *Sub/Stance* on theatricality (2002), 147–66, 201–15; Erika Fischer-Lichte, “From Theater to Theatricality: How to Construct Reality,” *Theatre Research International* 20, n. 2 (Summer 1995), 97–105; and Marvin Carlson in his important book *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), especially 7.
- 31 Stephen J. Bottoms, “The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid: Unpicking the Performance Studies/Theatre Studies Dichotomy,” *Theatre Topics* 13, no. 2 (2003), 173.
- 32 On the Black Cat Tavern protest, see Hailey Branson-Potts, “Before Stonewall, there was the Black Cat,” *Los Angeles Times* (February 8, 2017); available online at: [www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ls-silver-lake-black-cat-lgbtq-20170208-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ls-silver-lake-black-cat-lgbtq-20170208-story.html); accessed April 16, 2019.

- 33 Police harrassment of gays and lesbians had become systematic and institutionalized in cities across the USA by the postwar period. In Los Angeles mid-century, under police chief William H. Parker, vice squads were formed to target queer clubs and LGBTQ people who were arrested were placed in a jail in Lincoln Heights colloquially called the “Fruit Tank,” although, tellingly, the persecuted Latinx and Black people arrested after being brutalized during the Zoot Suit and Watts “riots” in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s were also held there (as well as Al Capone!); see Los Angeles Conservancy, “Lincoln Heights Jail,” (2016), available online at: [www.laconservancy.org/locations/lincoln-heights-jail](http://www.laconservancy.org/locations/lincoln-heights-jail); accessed September 14, 2018. See also Grace Dunham, “Out of Obscurity: Trans Resistance, 1969–2016,” *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, ed. Reina Gossett, Eric Stanley, and Johanna Burton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 99.
- 34 On the role of Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson (who would not have considered themselves trans in 1969 in the sense we mean it today, but were drag queens and identified as feminine/female), see the film *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson* (directed by David France for Netflix), 2017; and Natasha Schlaffer, “The Unsung Heroines of Stonewall: Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera,” *Femme Fatales*, Pennsylvania State University (October 23, 2016); available online at: <https://sites.psu.edu/womeninhistory/2016/10/23/the-unsung-heroines-of-stonewall-marsha-p-johnson-and-sylvia-rivera/>, accessed April 24, 2018. Schlaffer points out that Rivera and Johnson actually met at Stonewall.
- 35 Peariso, Chapter 2, “‘Watch Out for Pigs in Queen’s Clothing’: Camp and the Image of Radical Sexuality,” *Radical Theatrics*, 78–114.
- 36 Pat Maxwell, *Come Out!* (1970), 5, 10; cited in *ibid.*, 79.
- 37 Brian Chavez, “sister,” *Gay Sunshine* (October 1970), np; cited in Peariso, *Radical Theatrics*, 88.
- 38 Karen Finley, part of a eulogy for Stephen Saban, posted on FaceBook, June 28, 2018.
- 39 Dennis Altman, *The Homosexualization of America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1982), 1.
- 40 Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), 6, 148.
- 41 Multiple flyers from the Jack Smith Papers show his self-designation as “Exotic Theatrical Genius” and “Exotic Consultant”; see Box 1, Folder 3, Fales Archives, New York University. “Poetry of transvestism” is from Susan Sontag, “Jack Smith’s Flaming Creatures” (1964), *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Farrar, Picador/Straus and Giroux, 1996), 230.
- 42 Jack Smith, “The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez” (1962–3), reprinted in Jack Smith, *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool: The Writings of Jack Smith*, ed. J. Hoberman and Edward Leffingwell (London: Serpent’s Tail/High Risk, 1997), 26–7.
- 43 Stefan Brecht, “Jack Smith, 1961–1971. The Sheer Beauty of Junk,” in *Queer Theatre* (New York, NY: Methuen, 1986), 21; book originally published in Germany in 1978.
- 44 Handwritten bio on back of avant-garde film flyer from The Jewish Museum, Box 1, Folder 1, Jack Smith Papers. Smith did apparently meet St. Denis on a visit to Los Angeles in 1952 and thereafter described himself as her student; see Paisid Aramphongpham, “Reading Jack Smith’s *The Beautiful Book Reparatively*,” in *Art Journal* 78, n. 1 (Spring 2019), 39.
- 45 Callie Angell, “Batman and Dracula: The Collaborations of Jack Smith and Andy Warhol,” *Criticism* 56, n. 2 (Spring 2014), 159–86.
- 46 For a look at some less known images of Smith in drag, see J.C. Gonzo, “Jack Smith’s Sensual Mayhem: Rare Photos from the Master of Camp,” in *The End of Being: An Esoteric Guide to Difficult and Unusual Art, Music, Film, People and Ideas*

- (July 11, 2014), available online at: <http://theendofbeing.com/2014/07/11/jack-smiths-sensual-mayhem-rare-photos-from-the-master-of-camp/>; accessed March 30, 2017.
- 47 Dominic Johnson, *Glorious Catastrophe: Jack Smith, Performance and Visual Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).
  - 48 Sontag, “Jack Smith’s *Flaming Creatures*,” 226–31. Smith hated Sontag’s interpretation of the film, as Dominic Johnson notes in *Glorious Catastrophe*, 109, and as is evident in his interview with Sylvère Lotringer, “Uncle Fishhook and the Sacred Baby Poo-Poo of Art,” originally published in *Semiotexte* (3, n. 2 (1978)), and reprinted in *Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool*, ed. Hoberman and Leffingwell, 107–22. Here, Smith clearly connects “that writing” (Sontag’s article) with Jonas Mekas’s supposed appropriation and showing of the film against Smith’s interests; see 107. Elsewhere he describes Mekas as one of the “media lesbians” who “witch their spicy, orchid hothouse and turned my film into a sex issue of the Cocktail World.” See Smith, review of John Waters’ *Pink Flamingos*, originally published in *Village Voice*, July 19, 1973, 69, reprinted in *The Village Voice Film Guide*, ed. Dennis Lim (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 197–9.
  - 49 Jack Smith’s handwritten notes, Box 1, Folder 4, Jack Smith Papers.
  - 50 Flyers (“Exotic Consultant”), Box 1, Folder 3, Jack Smith Papers; and (“Trash”) from Jack Smith, “The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez,” 28. On Smith’s obsession with Hollywood, see Tyler Oyer, “Wait for Me at the Bottom of the Pool, Or Jack Goes to Hollywood,” 2019, unpublished paper accompanying a version of his ongoing performance series “Calling All Divas” at Snowden House, Los Angeles (January 12–13, 2019), sent to me by the author. Oyer describes his series as follows: “Calling All Divas is my performance methodology that focuses on actual and imagined queer ancestries, inheritances, transference, idol worship and fandom. A performative conflation of multiple personas presents the complex possibilities and limits of identifying, indexing, archiving, and fantasizing inherited and desired radical, queer intergenerational linkages on the body and mind,” 7, note 24.
  - 51 Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, ix, x, xii.
  - 52 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2009), 171.
  - 53 Susan Sontag, “Notes On ‘Camp’” (1964), in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), 280, 288, 290.
  - 54 Newton, *Mother Camp*, 107.
  - 55 Sontag, “Notes On ‘Camp,’” 275.
  - 56 Jack Babuscio, “Camp and the Gay Sensibility” (1977), *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 20; Esther Newton notes that informants “stressed that even between individuals there is very little agreement on what is camp because camp is in the eye of the beholder,” *Mother Camp*, 105.
  - 57 Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” 277, 282.
  - 58 Ibid., 279–80.
  - 59 Sontag, “Against Interpretation,” *Against Interpretation*, 14.
  - 60 Johnson, *Glorious Catastrophe*, 144.
  - 61 Ibid., 48.
  - 62 Smith in a public statement entitled “Remarks on art & the theater,” 1989, cited in Ibid., 59.
  - 63 On the enforced invisibility of male artists’ homosexual identification and gay liaisons in 1950s US culture, see Jonathan Katz, “The Art of Code: Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg,” *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, ed. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle Courtviron (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 189–206.
  - 64 Barry Reay, *New York Hustlers: Masculinity and Sex in Modern America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 147.

- 65 Ibid.
- 66 William Burroughs from *The Letters of William S. Burroughs 1945–1959*, ed. Oliver Harris (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1993), 298; as cited by Reay, *New York Hustlers*, 171. And see William S. Burroughs, *Queer* (1952/1985), 25th Anniversary Edition, ed. Oliver Harris (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 2010).
- 67 For a brief, anecdotal and unverified history of the Bonwit Teller “art” windows, see “How a NYC Department Store Launched Warhol and Friends,” *The Art Story Blog*, available online at: [www.theartstory.org/blog/how-a-nyc-department-store-launched-the-art-careers-of-warhol-and-friends/](http://www.theartstory.org/blog/how-a-nyc-department-store-launched-the-art-careers-of-warhol-and-friends/) (not dated or authored); accessed July 9, 2018.
- 68 Newton, *Mother Camp*, new preface (1979), xi.
- 69 Newton, *Mother Camp*, 105.
- 70 Katz, “The Art of Code.” On these points see also Caroline Jones, “Finishing School: John Cage and the Abstract Expressionist Ego,” *Critical Inquiry* 19, n. 4 (1993), 628–65.
- 71 Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 34. See Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia, PA: W.B. Saunders Company, 1948). Kinsey also released a report on female sexuality in 1953. For a historical examination of Kinsey’s informants and the Kinsey archive see also Barry Reay’s “Autoarchivism: Alfred Kinsey’s informants,” in his book *Sex in the Archives: Writing American Sexual Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 66–97.
- 72 Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, 639; cited in Butt, *Between You and Me*, 31.
- 73 Butt, *Between You and Me*, 32.
- 74 Ibid., 34, 29.
- 75 *LIFE* magazine special section “Homosexuality in America” (June 26, 1964), introductory text, 66.
- 76 See Trask on Hoover, *Camp Sites*, 97; Trask notes that this reflects in part general anxieties over queers having no loyalties, being shifty, indirect, and indifferent to commitment.
- 77 81st Congress, second session, Interim Report, “Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government,” 1950, iii; available through the Mattachine Society website: <https://mattachinesocietywashingtondc.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/document141.pdf>; accessed April 12, 2018.
- 78 Ibid., 3.
- 79 Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior*, 637; cited in Butt, *Between You and Me*, 32.
- 80 Doty, “Growth of Overt homosexuality in city provokes wide concern,” 33. The article ends with psychiatrist Dr. Charles Socarides claiming definitively, “[t]he homosexual is ill,” 33.
- 81 On the leather versions of gay masculinity and their visual cultures, see Andy Campbell, *Bound Together: Leather, Sex, Archives, and Contemporary Art* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2020).
- 82 See “Homosexuality in America.” *LIFE*, caption on 66, and photo 66–7. The photographs in the piece are by Bill Eppridge.
- 83 See Paul Welch, “The ‘Gay’ World Takes to the City Streets,” *LIFE* (June 26, 1964), 68.
- 84 Bartlett, “Theatrical Types,” 70. Bartlett is actually referring to shifts in theatrical approaches to homosexuality, but his well worded comment applies to the bodies of gay men as well.
- 85 *The Queen* (1968) features the drag queen Flawless Sabrina as well as Crystal LaBeija. The work of Zackary Drucker has been key in keeping Flawless Sabrina’s drag embodiment in the public eye. According to Drucker, the scene in *The Queen* in which Crystal

- Labeija accuses the judges of fixing the competition in favor of a younger unknown white drag queen (a protégé of Flawless's) inspired the founding of the “House of Labeija,” featured in *Paris is Burning* via house “mother” Pepper Labeija. Drucker, in comments made in our public dialogue for “Dirty Looks” queer film series, REDCAT Theater, July 8, 2018. See also Tavia Nyong'o's brilliant description of Crystal Labeija's role as “afro-fabulating” in *The Queen* in his *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2019), 1–4.
- 86 See my discussion in *Postmodernism and the Engendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 31–6, on the work of Tomkins and Roth. And see note 109 below.
- 87 Butt, *Between You and Me*, 123 and note 35, 184. Butt is critiquing art historians Caroline Jones (*Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 248–63), and Richard Meyer (*Outlaw Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)).
- 88 Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Warhol Sixties* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 12–13; cited in Butt, *Between You and Me*, 113.
- 89 Butt, *Between You and Me*, 119, 115, citing Frederick Eberstadt from *Victor Bockris, Warhol* (London: Penguin, 1989), 161–2.
- 90 Butt, *Between You and Me*, 126.
- 91 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity: Warhol's Shyness/Warhol's Whiteness,” in *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, ed. Jennifer Doyle et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 134–43. In view of my appreciation of Sedgwick's attention to race, all too rare in queer theory, it is important to note Michale Hames García's brilliant critique of the separation of sex from gender, and both from race in Sedgwick's earlier work; see Michael Hames García, “Queer Theory Revisited,” *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Hames García and Ernesto Javier Martínez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 23.
- 92 Sedgwick “Queer Performativity,” 135; she is citing Warhol from *Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 137.
- 93 Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity,” 138, 139.
- 94 Ibid., 138.
- 95 Ibid., 142.
- 96 Ibid., 135, 136; she is citing Warhol from *POPism*, 199–200.
- 97 Thomas Craven, “Effeminacy?,” *The Art Digest* (October 1, 1935), 10.
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 Cited in Holland Cotter, “America's Portraitist,” *New York Times Sunday Book Review* (June 29, 2012), available online at: [www.nytimes.com/2012/07/01/books/review/thomas-hart-benton-by-justin-wolff.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/01/books/review/thomas-hart-benton-by-justin-wolff.html); accessed September 12, 2018.
- 100 Robert Brustein, “Revolution as Theater,” *New Republic* (March 14, 1970), 14; cited in Pearson, *Radical Theatrics*, 1.
- 101 Donald Kaplan, “Homosexuality and American Theatre: A Psychoanalytic Comment,” *Tulane Drama Review* 9, n. 3 (1965), 25.
- 102 Ibid., 37 and 41, citing from Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York, NY: Vintage Press, 1956).
- 103 J.K. (Jack Kroll) “Robert Rauschenberg: Reviews and Previews” *Artnews* 60 (December 1961): 12; thanks to Jonathan Katz for calling my attention to this source.
- 104 Reay, *New York Hustlers*, 174; Reay expounds on Gore Vidal's macho response to his effeminate gay rival Truman Capote (174–6), once again proving that these value systems exist within the LGBTQ community as well as beyond it.
- 105 Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood” (originally published in 1967 in *Artforum*), as reprinted in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–72.
- 106 Bottoms, “The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid,” 175–6.

- 107 See Richard Schechner “TDR Comment: Who’s Afraid of Edward Albee?” in *Tulane Drama Review* 7, n. 3 (1963), 8–9; cited by Bottoms, “The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid,” 176. Tom Folland’s excellent article on Rauschenberg called my attention to Bottoms, see: “Robert Rauschenberg’s ‘Red Show’: Theater, Painting, and Queerness in 1950s Modernism,” *Modernism/Modernity* 24, n. 1 (January 2017), 87–115.
- 108 Bottoms cites my fairly general arguments suggesting that Fried’s vehement rejection of minimalism no doubt had hidden motivations in my book *Body Art*, 112. I write a more extensive critique of Fried in my essay “Art History/Art Criticism: Performing Meaning,” *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, ed. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (London: Routledge Press, 1999), 39–54; however, at that time, I was not aware of the newly revealed Fried letters I discuss below.
- 109 See Calvin Tomkins’ *The Bride and Her Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-Garde, Duchamp, Tinguely, Cage, Rauschenberg, Cunningham* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), and the chapter “Towards Theater” in *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and The Art World of Our Time* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 134–47; and Moira Roth, “Aesthetic of Indifference,” *Artforum* 16, n. 3 (November 1977), 46–53.
- 110 Bottoms, “The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid,” 180.
- 111 Tawny Andersen, “Performativity as Critical Praxis: J.L Austin, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Catherine Malabou, c. 1955–2014,” PhD dissertation submitted to McGill University, Montréal, 2017. I supervised Andersen with this dissertation. Andersen is drawing on the arguments of Janelle Reinelt, “The Politics of Discourse: Performativity Meets Theatricality.” For an uncritical approach to Fried’s attention to theatricality and his relationship to analytic philosophy (specifically the work of Stanley Cavell), see Paul Gudel, “Michael Fried, Theatricality, and the Threat of Skepticism,” *Michael Fried and Philosophy: Modernism, Intention, and Theatricality* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 129–37.
- 112 Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 155.
- 113 Ibid., 166–7.
- 114 Ibid., 168.
- 115 Derrida, “Speech and Phenomena: Introduction to the Problem of Signs in Husserl’s *Phenomenology*” (1967), *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, tr. David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 64, 65.
- 116 Fried is explicit on the threat of a kind of democratizing art that opens itself to a non-specialist audience; see “Art and Objecthood,” 163.
- 117 Ibid., 164.
- 118 Morris, “Notes on Sculpture,” *Artforum* 4, n. 6 (February 1966), 42–4; “Notes on Sculpture, Part 2,” *Artforum* 5, n. 2 (October 1966), 20–3; “Notes on Sculpture, Part 3,” *Artforum* 5, n. 10 (June 1967), 24–9; “Notes on Sculpture, Part 4,” *Artforum* 7, n. 8 (April 1969), 50–4. This quote is from “Notes on Sculpture Part 2,” 21.
- 119 Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 152, citing Greenberg from “Recentness of Sculpture,” *American Sculpture of the Sixties* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967).
- 120 Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 136.
- 121 Fried is referring to Jim Garrison, an investigator into John F. Kennedy’s assassination who was convinced a homosexual plot was behind the deed. “Philip Leider papers, 1962–1997,” in *Archives of American Art* (Washington, DC). Cited by Christa Robbins in “The Sensibility of Michael Fried,” *Criticism* 60, n. 4 (Fall 2018), 429–54. I am deeply grateful to Robbins for sharing this article in manuscript with me (2017 and 2018 draft versions), and to my USC colleague Megan Luke for apprising me of Robbins’ project.
- 122 Robbins, “The Sensibility of Michael Fried,” note 20, 451.
- 123 Ibid.; Robbins stresses this point much more strongly in the 2018 manuscript, 7–8.

- 124 Robbins, “The Sensibility of Michael Fried,” 441, citing letters between Leider and Fried from February 1967.
- 125 Ibid., 441.
- 126 Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 141. For Fried on Louis see *Morris Louis* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1970).
- 127 Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” (1984), reprinted in *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 34; and Richard Dellamora, “Absent Bodies/Absent Subjects: The Political Unconscious of Postmodernism,” in *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Culture*, ed. Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 29.
- 128 Douglas Crimp, “The Boys in My Bedroom” (1990), *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 163.
- 129 Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy, “Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation,” *Art Journal* 72, n. 4 (Winter 2013), 63.
- 130 Scott Burton, “Tony Smith and Minimalist Sculpture” (1967), lecture given at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, October 10, 1967; published in *Scott Burton: Collected Writings on Art and Performance 1965–1975*, ed. David Getsy (Chicago, IL: Soberscove Press, 2012), 59, 60.
- 131 Thanks to David Getsy for sharing this work with me (April 3, 2017 email to the author).
- 132 Burton, “Tony Smith,” 60. Here, Burton elaborates a complex argument, noting that in some ways minimalist works are *not* theatrical, but in this particular way they are.
- 133 See Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” note 13, 170; Kusama is one in a list of artists attached to theatricality, including Kaprow, Rauschenberg, and others.
- 134 On the culture wars and the AIDS crisis, see Jonathan Katz, “The Senators Were Revolted’: Homophobia and the Culture Wars,” in *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 231–48. The notorious “NEA Four” (Karen Finley, John Fleck, Tim Miller, and Holly Hughes), whose grants were revoked by the National Endowment for the Arts (but who sued and won restitution), were all queer and/or feminist. Ron Athey, a radical BDSM queer performance artist, was called out by right wing senator Jesse Helms on the floor of the senate in 1994, another clear victim of the culture wars.
- 135 See the important catalogue to this show, *Transformer: Aspekt der Travestie* (Graz: Neue Galerie Am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 1974).
- 136 Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom 1850–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 272. Snorton discusses Brooks’ argument in their *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 2–4. Reilly Snorton uses this idea from Brooks to suggest that gender can be viewed as fluid (or trans) because of the slipperiness of the production of racialized gender in the US context.
- 137 Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 3.
- 138 Ibid., 11.
- 139 See Dominic Johnson’s *Glorious Catastrophe*, which recuperates Smith’s orientalism as critical in its excess (functioning as pastiche rather than as a “straightforwardly racist economy of representation”), 207. Aramphongpham cites Johnson’s work and moves into “reparative” readings (borrowing from the work of Eve Sedgwick) of Smith’s orientalism in his “Reading Jack Smith’s *The Beautiful Book* Reparatively.”
- 140 Paisid Aramphongpham, “Reading Jack Smith’s *The Beautiful Book* Reparatively,” 33.
- 141 Jack Smith, “The Perfect Filmic Appositeness of Maria Montez,” 26–7.
- 142 Ibid., 31.

- 143 In Esther Newton's *Mother Camp*, she even inserts a telling caveat in a footnote, noting the shift from the 1960s emphasis on effeminacy in gay male urban communities in the US to a 1970s interest in macho or masculine self-presentation, “[t]hat is, among urban, white males. There is a possibility that Black and Hispanic gays (and poor whites?) have retained the effeminate drag style,” xiii. The fact that Newton makes no note of the fact that her ethnographic study of female impersonation, as important as it is historically, cites entirely white men makes it typical of scholarship on drag, camp, and indeed LGBTQ issues and theories in general from the 1960s through the 1990s. Nonetheless, Newton's footnote at least opens the door for an acknowledgment of broader phenomena around gay or queer style, theatricality, and camp by noting that not all drag or queer artists are male-identified or white.
- 144 J. Hoberman, “Mario Montez, Warhol Superstar, Dies at 78,” *Blouin Art Info International* (October 3, 2013); available online at: [www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/966735/mario-montez-warhol-superstar-dies-at-78](http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/966735/mario-montez-warhol-superstar-dies-at-78); accessed April 12, 2018.
- 145 For a first-hand yet theorized account of the Play-House of the Ridiculous version of queer performance, see the Stefan Brecht, *Queer Theatre*. The Play-House of the Ridiculous was clearly one of the key sites for the development of a carnivalesque queer camp theater; the discussion at the conference “Stefan Brecht’s Queer Theatre,” The Graduate Center, CUNY, September 30, 2015 (available online at: <https://vimeo.com/163744696>; accessed July 18, 2018) makes this association of camp and the Ridiculous crowd clear, as do Brecht’s descriptions of the group’s work.
- 146 Juan A. Suárez, “The Puerto Rican Lower East Side and the Queer Underground,” *Grey Room* 32 (Summer 2008), 6. Two major projects on Latinx/Chicanx contemporary art have helped redress this lack of attention in queer performance histories to this work: the exhibition and catalogue *Asco: Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective 1972–1987*, organized and the catalogue edited by C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz Verlag and Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011); and, even more directly relevant, *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, organized and the catalogue edited by David Frantz and Ondine Chavoya for the ONE Archive of Gay & Lesbian Histories at USC (University of Southern California) (Munich: DelMonico Books-Prestel, 2017).
- 147 Suárez, “The Puerto Rican Lower East Side,” 7–8.
- 148 Ibid., 10. Suárez connects these elements to camp but as well notes the historical rise in “Latin” and “Caribbean” films being made in the US, sponsored by the US government’s “good neighbor” policy created during WWII to foster positive relations with Latin America.
- 149 Ibid., 18.
- 150 Gronk cross-dressed at school and in the streets of Chicano East LA as a teenager in the 1960s (Amelia Jones interview with Gronk, October 31, 2009; Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions Archive). See my extended article on the queer aspects of Asco in “‘Traitor Prophets’: Asco’s Art as a Culture of the In-Between,” *Asco: Elite of the Obscure*, ed. Chavoya and Gonzalez, 107–50.
- 151 Gronk inspired the obsession with Hollywood as he had researched classic Hollywood films as a teenager in 1960s East Los Angeles (Jones interview with Gronk).
- 152 See Robb Hernandez’s excellent article, “Performing the Archival Body in the Robert ‘Cyclona’ Legorreta Fire of Life/El Fuego de la Vida Collection,” *Atzlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 31, n. 2 (Fall 2006): 113–25; “soul mate” is Hernandez’s term, on 116. See also Hernandez’s book, *The Fire of Life: The Robert Legorreta-Cyclona Collection* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, 2009).

- 153 Hernandez, “Performing the Archival Body,” 118. This description of *Caca-Roaches* is revised from my essay “Traitor Prophets.”
- 154 The play is described thus by Jennifer Sternad and Robert Legorreta in Sternad, “Cyclona and Early Chicano Performance Art: An Interview with Robert Legorreta,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, n. 3 (2006): 476, 478, 482.
- 155 Gronk described his open-ended relationship to his own sexual and gender identification, which he explains as intimately connected to his general interest in mixing up mainstream Hollywood and Mexican B-movie glamour and theatricality with the staginess of Latin American and Mexican (Catholic) pageants, in his interview with Jones; see also Jennifer Sternad, “Painting Stages/Performing Life: Gronk,” an interview, *Contemporary Theatre Review* 15, n. 3 (2005), 343.
- 156 Sternad, “Cyclona and Early Chicano Performance Art,” 481.
- 157 See Hernandez, “Performing the Archival Body,” 117.
- 158 Gronk, interview with Jones.
- 159 Patssi Valdez noted that Herrón himself was drafted at one point, bringing the actuality of the war home; she helped Herrón find an attorney who got him exempted from the draft; described in Patssi Valdez, interview with Amelia Jones, November 2, 2009. In this interview she also linked Asco members’ anger about Vietnam explicitly to their negative treatment as Chicanos in American society: “our young men were being slaughtered. So that’s what we did because it’s like nobody really likes us. There is always negative crack with the news here. I’ve been spit in my face. I’ve been called the worst names and here your young men are defending this country and I couldn’t believe they would draft somebody in high school but anyway. So [I] felt very strongly about that.”
- 160 Gronk in Sternad, “Painting Stages,” 342. The erotically charged bodies are central in his 1984 sketchbook entitled *Waylay*; Gronk Papers, UCLA Chicano Research Center, Collection 95, box 35, file 5. My personal favorite among these gorgeous line drawings is a large, erect, mushroom-like penis with a small moon shape coming out of the slit at the end, entitled *Moon*. This image complements *In a ditch* a few pages later, a hairy crevice filled with a large phallic shape. For more of the sense of sexual play in the practice of Asco members, see also the erotic penis print and pornographic Pinocchio Jerry Dreva sent Gronk as part of their mail art project; Gronk Papers, Collection 95, box 1, file 3.
- 161 Gavin Butt, “Stop that Acting!: Performance and Authenticity in Shirley Clarke’s *Portrait of Jason*,” in *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures*, ed. Kobena Mercer (London: Iniva; and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 36–55.
- 162 Normal Mailer, “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster” (1957), reprinted in *Dissent* (June 20, 2007), available online at: [www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/the-white-negro-fall-1957](http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-white-negro-fall-1957); accessed August 15, 2018; and Butt “The Gift of the Gab: Camp Talk and the Art of Larry Rivers,” *Between You and Me*, 74–104.
- 163 Butt, “Stop that Acting!,” 39, 40.
- 164 Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York, NY: Dell, 1968), 97, 101; Johnson discusses this in Chapter 2, “Manifest Faggotry: Queering Masculinity in African American Culture,” *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 53.
- 165 Johnson, “Manifest Faggotry,” 61.
- 166 Nyong’o, *Afro-Fabulations*, 70.
- 167 Ibid., 47–9.
- 168 James Baldwin, *Another Country* (1962; London: Penguin Books, 1990).
- 169 Butt, “Stop That Acting!,” 47.
- 170 Ibid.
- 171 Suarez, “The Puerto Rican Lower East Side,” 13.

- 172 Suárez cites research showing that migration from places like Puerto Rico to New York often aligned with “sexual unconventionality.” Migrants were more likely to be queer, motivated by the desire to escape sexual conservatism as well as poverty. He is citing work by Larry La Fountain-Stokes; “The Puerto Rican Lower East Side,” 13.
- 173 Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1973), 38.
- 174 Susan Sontag from “*Salmagundi* interview,” with Robert Boyars and Maxine Bernstein, reprinted in *A Susan Sontag Reader* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982), 338–9; cited by Andrew Ross, “Uses of Camp,” in Bergman, ed., *Camp Grounds*, 72.
- 175 Andrew Britton, “For Interpretation: Notes Against Camp,” *Gay Left* 7 (Winter 1978/79), reprinted in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject, A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 136, 137.
- 176 See Babuscio, “Camp and the Gay Sensibility” (1977), 19–38; Richard Dyer, “It’s Being So Camp as Keeps Us Going,” first published in *Playguy* (1976), reprinted in *Camp*, ed. Cleto, 110–16, on women see especially 114.
- 177 Trask, *Camp Sites*, 13 (Trask’s emphasis).
- 178 Babuscio, “Camp and the Gay Sensibility,” 28.
- 179 Bergman, “Introduction,” *Camp Grounds*, 9.
- 180 The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence quote is from their website, [www.thesisters.org/](http://www.thesisters.org/); accessed July 11, 2018.
- 181 Christopher L onc, “Genderfuck and Its Delights” (1974, originally published in *Gay Sunshine Press*), reprinted in *Gay Roots: Twenty Years of Gay Sunshine*, ed. Winston Leyland (San Francisco, CA: Gay Sunshine Press, 1992), 225.
- 182 Even when Jonathan Dollimore characterizes Joe Orton’s extension of camp in his 1969 novel *What the Butler Saw*, which Dollimore describes as an “orgy of cross-dressing, gender-confusion, and hierarchical inversion,” as “black camp,” he (shockingly) is referring to its tone rather than to issues of race; Dollimore, “Post/Modern: On the Gay Sensibility, or The Pervert’s Revenge on Authenticity,” in *Camp*, ed. Cleto, 228. Exceptions to this white dominance include mostly recent work such as Susan Gubar, “Racial Camp in the Producers and Bamboozled,” *Film Quarterly* 60, n. 2 (Winter 2006), 26–37; Uri MacMillan, “Nicki Aesthetics: The Camp Performance of Nicki Minaj,” *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 24, n. 1 (2014), 79–87; and Kathryn Bond Stockton’s exploration of the meeting of “black” and “queer” in relation to camp and shame in her *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
- 183 For an excellent, if brief, overview of the cultures of the Molly Houses and Macaronis as illustrated through visual culture, see Danielle Thom, “18th Century Queer Cultures #1: The Macaroni and His Ancestors,” Victoria and Albert Museum website, available online at: [www.vam.ac.uk/blog/out-in-the-museum/18th-century-queer-cultures-1-the-macaroni-and-his-ancestors](http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/out-in-the-museum/18th-century-queer-cultures-1-the-macaroni-and-his-ancestors); accessed April 13, 2018.
- 184 Dollimore, “Post/Modern,” 225.
- 185 Ibid., 224–5.
- 186 I address dandyism and the images of Wilde in “‘Clothes Make the Man’: The Male Artist as a Performative Function,” *Oxford Art Journal* 18, n. 2 (1995), 18–32. See also “Oscar Wilde in America/Sarony,” [www.oscarwildeinamerica.org/sarony/sarony-photographs-of-oscar-wilde-1882.html](http://www.oscarwildeinamerica.org/sarony/sarony-photographs-of-oscar-wilde-1882.html); accessed August 15, 2018.
- 187 See Seth Clark Silberman, “Why RuPaul Worked: Queer Cross-Identifying the Mythic Black (Drag Queen) Mother,” *Territories of Desire in Queer Culture: Refiguring Contemporary Boundaries*, ed. David Alderson and Linda R. Anderson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 166–82.

- 188 Matthew Schneier, “It’s Unnatural? Absolutely,” *New York Times*, Style section (June 5, 2019), cover story; available online at: [www.nytimes.com/2019/05/04/style/met-gala-camp-theme.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/04/style/met-gala-camp-theme.html).
- 189 Judith Butler, “Gender Is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion,” Chapter 4 in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 121–41.
- 190 Talia Bettcher, in “Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues” (2009, revised 2014), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; available online at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-trans/>; accessed July 9, 2018.
- 191 Butler, “Gender is Burning,” 131.
- 192 Butler at least clearly articulates in these few pages very strongly the pressure of race and ethnicity on the experience and performance of gender, stressing “the place and force of ethnicity in the articulation of kinship relations” in the voguing houses, which (she notes) “are organized in part along ethnic lines.” Butler, “Gender Is Burning,” 134.

# 5

## QUEER

Queer is and has been continually contested as a concept, strategy, and mode of identification (or disidentification, as the case may be) since its mainstreaming in the US as a positive or defiant signifier of empowerment with the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and its shift to a mode of theorizing in the 1990s. The concept of queer has now spread around the world, and is often enthusiastically borrowed by artists, performers, and scholars globally as a trope of identification linked to sex/gender as potentially fluid or as a site of political energy relating to disruption of normative culture. This chapter focuses explicitly on the dominant Anglophone and US generated discourses around queer as it relates to performance, performativity, and performance theory—but from a point of view informed by work outside of the US. This chapter is *not* meant to encapsulate the complexities of debates across queer theory in the US, but focusses strategically on the aspects of these debates that both relate to performance and have reached beyond gender and sexuality studies contexts to become broadly influential across humanities departments and research in the US, UK, Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Queer theory and queer activism were contradictory from the moment of their burgeoning around 1990, paradoxically normative in many of their basic assumptions while also radically mobilizing towards new ways of imagining how sex/gender *perform* subjects and cultural expressions.<sup>1</sup> In an influential 1991 article, activists Jeffrey Escoffier and Allan Bérubé defined queer as follows: “*Queer* is meant to be confrontational—opposed to gay assimilationists and straight oppressors while inclusive of people who have been marginalized by anyone in power,” and follow this by describing some of its cultural forms; queers thus borrow styles and tactics from “popular culture, communities of color, hippies ... [and] feminists.”<sup>2</sup> This definition is unfortunately revealing of the whiteness of much queer theory. Queers, it is implied, are not *actually from* communities of

color or feminists (not to mention that this text was included in the perversely entitled “Birth of a Queer Nation” special issue of *Out/Look*, evoking D.W. Griffith’s racist film at the origins of Hollywood classical cinema as a signifier in the field of queer). Escoffier and Bérubé are after all writing about Queer Nation, one of the most radical and effective activist arms of the queer movement—and Esther Kaplan reinforces their assumption, proclaiming in the 1990 “A Queer Manifesto,” Queer Nation openly borrows from other “threatening” power movements—black nationalist, feminist separatist.”<sup>3</sup> Queer thus announces its appropriation up front, and in so doing lays bare its exclusions: as Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman noted in 1992, Queer Nation activism was already by that time limited by the “masculine *a priori* that dominates even queer spectacle,” exposing at its contemporary inception “the relative weakness with which economic, racial, ethnic, and non-American cultures have been enfolded into” queer activist and theoretical tactics.<sup>4</sup> This is US queer politics and queer enactment in all of their whiteness, but also in their potential, their fierce power, and their productive contradictions.

As has been extensively discussed in this discourse, queer, while contradictory and contested, is mobilizing for a range of progressive projects. It is both fluid and coalitional. It is both radically anti-normative while in many cases reiterating discriminatory exclusions all too common in heteronormative, white patriarchy. Keguro Macharia thus notes in a 2013 alternative, anti-racist genealogy of queer:

The thing-making project of New World subject production ([where] the “captive body” is “*being*” for the “captor”) refuses the too-celebratory discussions of undifferentiated gender and un-gendering in Queer studies. The much-heralded “blur” and “undecidability” [of queer theory] understood as conditions of freedom must contend with its longer genealogy in a thing-making project.<sup>5</sup>

Queer is as slippery as the sex/gender identifications of those subjects it claims. There is nothing unequivocal or determinant about queer, although it is tempting to identify it in relation to the tendency to align it with strange, uncanny, and processual structures of how we inhabit our sexual and gendered selves (as Edward Sagarin queried as early as 1951: “Is it, perhaps, in the baffling character of the unknown that there can be found the origin and significance of the word *queer*? ”<sup>6</sup>). These are structures that themselves, as Macharia points out, too often align with normative structures of “New World”—binary, racist, and colonial—“subject production.”<sup>7</sup> This is not to negate, however, the crucial aspect of queer theory that has always been about interrelating structures of racial, ethnic, class, and national identification with those of sex and gender—which emerged simultaneously with queer theory.<sup>8</sup>

In this “Queer” chapter, I examine the most hegemonic, dominant patterns of discourse connecting to queer particularly as it intersects or aligns with or even coincides with theories of performance and performativity. As this brief

introductory section suggests, I emphasize here the contradictions and lingering essentialisms, whiteness, and male privilege often accompanying the performativity of queer but also the way in which queer theory mobilizes such a critique. For, arguably, Macharia, Duggan, and the many others (including me, here) who point to queer's limitations could not be mounting such arguments without its anarchic energies.

## The invention of queer theory

Clearly there are no singular origins of queer as we know it today. Rather, it is a complex field of concepts and words eventually pointing to crystallized activist and theoretical definitions by 1990, shifting into mainstream applications by the 2000s in television and other mass media. Interestingly, Judith Butler, the person most often credited with founding queer theory and/or inventing the idea of queer performativity did not initially use the term “queer” in her theory of gender performance, which foregrounds instead her own affiliation with an explicitly lesbian feminism. It was Teresa De Lauretis who arguably first used the term “queer theory” around 1990 at a conference at University of California Santa Cruz, and in the subsequent special issue of *differences* she produced in 1991, where she famously notes that queer theory might offer “another way of thinking the sexual.”<sup>9</sup> And Sue-Ellen Case, in the same special issue, famously sutured queer theory to the counter-normative force of queer performing bodies: “[u]nlike petitions for civil rights, queer revels constitute a kind of activism that attacks the dominant notion of the natural. The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny.”<sup>10</sup>

Recently, however, in his 2019 book *Afro-Fabulations*, Tavia Nyong’o claims the honor of inventing queer theory for authors including Samuel Delany, Pat Califia, and Octavia Butler—each of whom, as early as the 1960s, developed modes of theoretical and fictional writing that enacted if not explicitly defined this genre of critical thought across trans and/or Black bodies.<sup>11</sup> Nyong’o offers an alternative genealogy or “dark precursor” to the white genealogy of queer, insisting that “a more expansive genealogy of queer theoretical writing can reveal the place of theorists-of-color, and black theorists specifically, in the intellectual and political genealogy of what we now call queer theory”; he concludes: “If we understand queer theory as always already shaped by the thinking of Delany … then … we would have a queer theory grounded in the feminist and black literary bohemia of 1960s New York City.”<sup>12</sup>

These alternative genealogies, however, still attach queer to performance or performativity, adhering to the idea of gender as display or enactment or performance, as well as to the bodies of creative individuals and collectives putting non- or anti-normative modes of sexuality subversively into process as performative. Terms designating performance are mobilized specifically as they adhere to queer: effeminate masculinity, drag queens, AIDS activists, and/or other subjects performatively articulating queer modes of being and thinking. As this list makes

clear, it must be stressed again that lesbians, bisexuals, and drag kings—linked to a century-old history of “inverts,” as identified in sexological accounts by Richard von Krafft-Ebbing and Havelock Ellis—have tended to be sidelined in the most influential texts in queer theory, which tend to focus on the theatrical effeminate or (male) camp versions of queer performativity. To this end, the work of queer feminist theorists such as Case, with her insistent and groundbreaking focus on lesbian performance art, did not have the extensive influence across the arts and humanities that Judith Butler’s and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s queer feminist theory had in the 1990s.<sup>13</sup>

This chapter traces one dominant version of queer theory’s genealogy (or genealogies), then, sketching more or less the accepted narrative as this discourse unfolded primarily in the US context and then fanned outward in arts and humanities discourses and practices across academic and art contexts, especially in Anglophone cultures such as those of Australia and New Zealand. This trajectory has its apotheosis in the late 1980s and 1990s, with the suturing of queer to performativity in the work of Butler and Sedgwick, the most often cited theorists on gender performance or queer performativity—notably without either ever addressing queer performances *per se*. This theory limits attention to lesbian performers or performativities, and so this chapter, in tracing the dominant genealogy, also tends to slight the fabulous array of lesbian-identified creative figures and performers who have activated performative versions of creative subjectivity, from Claude Cahun and Gladys Bentley in the early to mid-twentieth century, to the myriad of inspiring overtly lesbian and/or queer performance artists in the 1970s through the 1990s (Holly Hughes, Cheri Gaulke, Split Britches [Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw in the group’s best-known formation], Karen Finley, Kembra Pfahler, Sacred Naked Nature Girls [Danielle Brazell, Laura Meyers, Akilah Oliver, Denise Uyehara], etc.). While feminist theater studies scholars such as Case and Jill Dolan have done an excellent job of redressing the exclusion of 1970s work by lesbian-identified artists in performance histories, my focus is on the heyday of queer theory as it attached to concepts of performativity in the early to mid-1990s in the work of Butler and Sedgwick and fanned across the arts and humanities.<sup>14</sup>

As with queer theory in general, the key founding texts of queer theory, largely by white academic feminists from the early to mid-1990s, do not tend to foreground the role of race, ethnicity, class, able-bodiedness, religion, nationality, or other aspects of identification as these relate to queer-identified people and practices. Interestingly, Butler and Sedgwick are/were both Jewish—marked by an ethnic otherness within WASP US culture—but this aspect of their identification, while not disavowed, has rarely been noted or expanded upon by themselves or others.<sup>15</sup> These founding texts had yet to integrate what Black feminist legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw—around the exact same time—influentially theorized as intersectionality: the co-constitutiveness of sexuality and gender with myriad other forms of lived identification and experience.<sup>16</sup> Critical race theorist Roderick Ferguson put the issue in terms of what he calls “queer

of color analysis,” which “has to debunk the idea that race, class, gender, and sexuality are discrete formations, apparently insulated from one another.”<sup>17</sup> In making this point, Ferguson draws on the critical race queer performance theory of maverick scholar José Esteban Muñoz. Scholars situating themselves in performance studies through queer theory, such as Muñoz, had begun already in the late 1990s to rethink the limits of feminist theory in general and theories of queer politics and gender performance more specifically by attending to the intersectional identifications of every gendered/sexed body, as well as to the impact of colonial and decolonial structures of power in queer performance art. It is in this framework that this chapter traces the accepted 1990s genealogy of theories of gender performance or queer performativity as largely white feminist while also asserting alternative histories, theories, and practices of queer performance to challenge the narrowness of this genealogy.

The reiteration of dominant assumptions of whiteness within queer theory has become such an obvious and glaring problem, at least among US scholars, that Jack Halberstam, David Eng, and Muñoz noted in 2005: “Much of queer theory nowadays sounds like a metanarrative about the domestic affairs of white homosexuals.”<sup>18</sup> To this degree I admit that I am in danger of repeating a core problem with queer genealogies exposed by Michael Hames García, in an excoriating and largely compelling critique of the whiteness of these narratives. Tracing the rich history of feminist-of-color theorizations of sex and gender from the 1970s onward, García notes: “Most queer genealogies chart a movement away from feminism to a study of sexuality and then a later addition of the question of race by people of color and queer theorists.”<sup>19</sup> García is absolutely right in his exposure of how most queer theory—in its “move to isolate sexuality as a field of inquiry” and in certain “separatist” cases to insist on gender and sexuality as having (in Gayle Rubin’s words) “a separate social existence” from other identifications—erases intersectional work exploring or activating gender and sexuality from a postcolonial or anti-racist point of view.<sup>20</sup>

Most important is García’s assertion in a coda to the article, where he points out that “queer theorists tend to understand the history of sexuality from within a Eurocentric frame.”<sup>21</sup> In fact any Euro-American discourse on gender or sexuality is always already *white* in the extent to which European-based modern cultures are structurally specific in terms of assumptions based on the whiteness of those in positions of power. Racialized modes of thought have absolutely shaped conceptions of gender and sexuality, and vice versa, since the early modern period in Europe—a period structurally and ideologically formed through the colonial encounters of the time (including slavery), which were in turn intimately linked to the rise of capitalism and of European Enlightenment philosophies of the (white male) subject as a unified, agential self. This complex is described in María Lugones’s terms as a “colonial/modern gender system,” one defined in and by and through the encounter between white Europeans and the colonized, whom they relentlessly sought to contain and define as inferior others—through sexualizing means involving brute violence and/or humiliation.<sup>22</sup> And as Ann

Laura Stoler has argued, the “technologies of sexuality” examined and codified by white European theorists (including Foucault) must be “refigured in an imperial field” in order to make any sense of sex/gender formations at all.<sup>23</sup> These are the arguments that compelled me to include as my final two chapters, “Other” and “Trans,” which pivot around critical race, postcolonial, and decolonial theories of gender and sexuality in relation to performance.

The entire framework of queer theory is based on European, Christian, post-Enlightenment, Cartesian concepts of selfhood, constitutive of modern beliefs about what we call in English sex and gender. It is also obvious (if usually unremarked) that English is the predominant language of queer theory (as well as performance theory), with US scholars dominating. As García points out, all of these ideas in fact took shape *in relation to* colonization. They did not develop in a vacuum and are not hermetically internal to Europe, nor are they unilaterally devised by Europeans and imposed on colonized peoples. Per the work of Lee Wallace and other scholars of colonialism and gender/sex identity, whose theories I will discuss in the final two chapters, it is a crucial point that European structures, language, and models for understanding and experiencing sexuality and gender were formed *in relation to* their encounters with non-Europeans, whose cultures and modes of embodiment have much to do with European Anglophone formations of queer and performance theory.<sup>24</sup>

Queer theory thus offers an understanding of gender as a performance, as constructed through such encounters (in performative and relational ways). Diana Fuss’s introduction to her influential 1991 queer theory anthology *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* sums up the implications of this confluence: “Sexual identity may be less a function of knowledge than performance, or, in Foucauldian terms, less a matter of final discovery than perpetual reinvention.”<sup>25</sup>

However, understanding gender/sex as performed, while mobilizing, brings its own set of problems. Coming to a deeper historical understanding of where this nexus of terms came from complicates the current understandings of queer and performativity as political and theoretical concepts. By assuming gender performance or performativity to be necessarily *subversive*, for example, we risk missing the complexities of any manifestation or experience or claim of sex/gender as embodied, contingent, intersectional. The contradiction is quite obvious: if sex/gender transgressions of norms are inherently “progressive” or “subversive,” as is so often claimed or implied, then we are fixing their political valence rather than accepting the confusion and undecidability they supposedly promise. Claiming performativity and openendedness themselves as inherently subversive is a contradiction in terms. We are celebrating sex/gender-fluidity while fixing it as a determinable, subversive “identity.” The very premise of contemporary adoptions of the idea of performativity is that (for example) sex/gender can never be “identities” (in the sense of fixed attributes) but are always already performed, relational—identifications.

Why assume that some kind of putting in process of non-normatively gendered/sexed bodies will have progressive effects? And what kind of progressive

effects do we think such a performance of gender-fluidity might have? When and why did this sutured together complex of gender/sex and performativity come to seem desirable in the first place?

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Queer performance is intimately linked to the embodied and material forms of activism and street protest, connected to earlier histories of radically resistant gay/lesbian club cultures, drag queen, gay male, and lesbian resistance to police harassment in cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York. But, as Jamilah King recently noted: “as iconic as Stonewall was to the gay liberation struggle that blossomed in the 1970s, it also became a symbol of a largely white, male movement that relegated people of color and women to its margins.”<sup>26</sup> As noted in Chapter 4, the signature events of the gay and lesbian rights movement, claimed until recently in dominant (white) histories as spearheaded by white gay men, in actuality often involved transwomen (many of color): “marginals” played a key role in actions resisting police brutality from the 1959 riot at Cooper’s Donuts in Los Angeles to the early 1970s gay pride and activist events in New York, led by transwomen of color Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson.

Also key to the rise of a concept of queer performance were the celebratory drag queen cultures engaging the public through camp and play. Through these manifestations, gender bending was articulated in relation to theatricality by way of partying, street life, and political activism; this was queer as fundamentally lived and relational rather than an adjectival appendage to art objects or performances—a larger, more communitarian version of queer that has been historically recuperated by important new work in performance studies, Black studies, and elsewhere in the humanities.<sup>27</sup>

Founded in 1979 in San Francisco, just before the public explosion of the AIDS crisis that would devastate queer communities across the US from 1981 through the 1990s, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence continues to be a self-proclaimed “leading-edge Order of queer nuns.”<sup>28</sup> The drag queens of Sisters channeled the flamboyant theatrical self-display, lived queer community, and play seen a few years earlier in the Bay Area performances of the Cockettes onto the streets. The Sisters shifted the hedonistic hippie-dom of the earlier group to more socially directed activism that was nonetheless still motivated by the embrace of glamour, humor, and fun. Billing themselves in 2018 as providing “community service, ministry and outreach for those on the edge,” they also issued the clarion call of “go forth and sin some more!” In this way, for 40 years, the Sisters have meshed the carnivalesque impulse of drag and the urge towards joyous promiscuity of urban gay cultures pre-AIDS, with the post-AIDS energies of protest culture and the practical goals—as a 501c non-profit corporation—of raising funds to support queer causes.



FIGURE 5.1 Sylvia Rivera (holding banner) and Marsha P. Johnson (holding cooler) of the Street Tranvestite Action Revolutionaries (S.T.A.R.) at the Christopher Street Liberation Day, Gay Pride Parade, New York, June 24, 1973; photograph Leonard Fink, National History Archives of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center

The history of the Sisters exemplifies what queer performances activating the gender-theatrical body can do on the streets and beyond: initially founded to resist the dominant gay figure in San Francisco of what they called the macho gay male "Castro Clone," the four founding Sisters (Sister Vicious PHB, Reverend Mother, Missionary Position, and Hysterectoria-Agnes) produced a brief mission statement: "to promulgate universal joy and expiate stigmatic guilt."<sup>29</sup> Other orders were soon founded in Sydney and Toronto. By the 1980s the Sisters took on healthcare support (some were registered nurses) to address the AIDS crisis, and one of them ran for Supervisor of San Francisco under the category "Nun of the Above" (winning over 23,000 votes). Local politicians such as Dianne Feinstein (then Mayor of San Francisco, now a right of center Democratic senator of California) and the mainstream media took

note (a CBS national TV show featured Sister Boom Boom in its 1985 show "Gay Power—Gay Politics"). Meanwhile, the Sisters have dominated many a Pride parade with elaborations on the "habit," including penis costumes and other humorous variations on drag. By the 1990s, with "Houses" in cities all over the world, the Sisters continued to agitate and raise funds for social justice causes, while also shifting their attention to transgender inclusion—combining playful cross-dressing and cavorting antics with fervid political intent. To this day, they continue to agitate and raise funds while maintaining a sense of humor, keeping queer politics in motion.



FIGURE 5.2 Sister Boom and other members of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence hold an "exorcism" in Union Square during the 1984 Democratic convention, San Francisco

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Stop respectfully in the late 1980s and early 1990s to take note of the serious business of queer activism during the AIDS crisis: ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), Queer Nation, and Gran Fury, the more official (and predominantly white), officially recognized AIDS activist groups, all founded in New York. These have dominated the narratives of queer strategies in relation to AIDS protests. As Gran Fury co-founder Avram Finkelstein recently noted succinctly, "[t]he aggregate account

we popularly accept as the ‘History of AIDS’ is a saga that torques our understanding toward one appealing corner of it”—one dominated by the “presumptive neutrality of whiteness.”<sup>30</sup> ACT UP (founded 1987) sought initially to call attention to the epidemic which was being ignored by the Reagan administration. Gran Fury (1988) and Queer Nation (1990) were spawned from the energies of ACT UP. Gran Fury founders, artists and designers, emphasized visual activism—posters and logos, such as the influential “Silence = Death” (actually designed by several members *before* Gran Fury was official).<sup>31</sup>

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**FIGURE 5.3** Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled” (*Go-Go Dancing Platform*), 1991; wood, light bulbs, acrylic paint, and go-go dancer in silver lamé bathing suit, sneakers and personal listening device; platform: 21 1/2 x 72 x 72 in. (54.6 x 182.9 x 182.9 cm) (overall dimensions vary with installation). This particular performance was part of *Danser sa vie*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2012, photograph by Jean-Claude Planchet, © Felix Gonzalez-Torres; courtesy of The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation

Félix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled* (*Go-Go Dancing Platform*), 1991: the gay male body (participants enlisted ahead of time by the artist or gallery; they are not always white, but always athletic and trim) gyrates on a platform lit with stage lights around the edges.<sup>32</sup> We cannot hear the music to which he dances, only the squeak of his trainers and, in some

instances, the huffs of his breathing. However we identify, there is a large chance we will be seduced—we are drawn to the partying figure in an experience that is both intimate (he is lost in his world of music and yet his body moves *for me*) and completely alienating (we cannot have him: he is a club dancer or an art work, on a platform/plinth, over *there*). This is official queer art in the form of performance at the inception of queer theories of gender performance or performativity, enacted at the deadly apotheosis of the AIDS epidemic in the US. Relational, intimate, theatrical, and insistently calling forth sexual attachments and repulsions, reminding us of the vibrancy of the live un-sick body that flaunts itself joyously for our desires—yet silently, privately. This is AIDS activism and queer art (it functions more as an artwork than as a performance), using the refined art-school language of installation art to convey political and aesthetic meaning.

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An earlier object more directly connected to partying as an antidote to the terrors of AIDS: Ron Athey's go-go dancing codpiece, c. early 1990s. This is a leather studded pouch encrusted with the sweat of a dancing body that (we know just from looking at it) thrust the crotch forward into faces leering at and cheering for its suggestive twitches and grinds at queer clubs across Los Angeles (such as two of the least subtly titled: Sin-a-Matic and Club Fuck!).<sup>33</sup>



FIGURE 5.4 Ron Athey holding studded leather go-go dancing codpiece (from around 1990), 2017; photograph by Amelia Jones

What does it mean to look at this studded leather object today? What does it mean to touch, feel, smell, and turn it around in our hands? I have it at my fingertips, so to speak, held in the part of Athey's archive that resides in my house, waiting for the retrospective of his work I am organizing.<sup>34</sup> Does it bring to life a body-in-movement (vibrantly defiant of its status since 1986 as HIV+)? Does it speak for and of the vitality of the gay male body, even in potential sickness? Does it call us back to this riotous and ecstatic past of queer pleasures? Is it *performative* enough? Or is it simply now a fetish, quiet and still, replacing the live cock it covered in its heyday with its now dried, sweat-shrivelled leather pouch? Do we have to be looking at live bodies to experience the processual queer of gender performance that theorists such as Butler outlined?

This is also queer performance as art, and its own form of AIDS activism in its flamboyant substitution of the image of suffering for that of anarchic, eroticized joy.



FIGURE 5.5 Ron Athey go-go dancing at Club Fuck!, c. 1990; photograph by Sheree Rose, courtesy of the artist

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## Homosexual to queer, a brief history

Recursively looping backwards, perhaps now is the moment to ask: where do the late-twentieth-century US versions of queer come from? As is generally accepted, the concept of homosexuality is a European invention and came into being around 1800 with the rise of modernity in the western world. Queer then solidified as a theoretical and activist term with the AIDS crisis. This is the usual story.

The narrowness of this particular genealogy has already been noted, but more examples point to different aspects of the need for interventions into standard histories. In his important 1983 essay “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” the esteemed historian John D’Emilio acknowledges the greater visibility of gay men over lesbians in historical narratives about homosexual experience in the US, and then dismisses this as simply reflecting the “larger numbers” of gay men overall, due to women’s economic dependence on men—a questionable conclusion both in terms of lesbian visibility (and lesbian experience altogether) and in terms of the white middle-class assumptions built into this concept of economic dependence; to make just one initial corrective, at the time, it was far less likely for Black women in the US to have access to the luxury (or disempowering situation) of depending on men for economic support than for white women.<sup>35</sup> A second example is equally telling: in his important 1982 book, *The Homosexualization of America*, Dennis Altman thus offhandedly comments, in relation to questions of homosexuals gentrifying urban areas in the US: “gays displace Blacks and Puerto Ricans in West Side Manhattan or Chicanos in Silverlake (Los Angeles)”—without the slightest consciousness that this wording betrays the assumption that gays must be white.<sup>36</sup>

The work of Michel Foucault, foundational to queer theory as articulated in the 1990s, is exemplary both of the persuasive quality of dominant narratives and, unfortunately, also of its exclusions—as Judith Butler, among many others, has pointed out.<sup>37</sup> As García asserts, the centrality of Foucault’s work to the (white) queer imaginary is both a problem and a fact.<sup>38</sup> Foucault’s multi-volume *History of Sexuality* both mobilized his concept of genealogical tracing and specifically historicized the European concept of homosexuality, famously asserting that European culture articulated modernity in part through the “putting into discourse of sex,” and that sexuality is in fact a key mode through which institutional and psychological forms of power under modern European regimes manifested themselves.<sup>39</sup> In her critique of Foucault, Ann Laura Stoler, as noted above, asserts that this putting into discourse of sex and sexuality took place *specifically in relation to colonial relations of self and other*, wherein “bourgeois identities in both metropole and colony emerge [in the colonial period] tacitly and emphatically coded by race” such that “the racial configurations of [the] … imperial world, rather than being peripheral to the cultivation of the nineteenth-century bourgeois self, were … constitutive of it.” Much to the point of my framework here, Stoler emphasizes the “*relational* terms in which [inherently European] bourgeois selves have been conceived” interactively via colonized others.<sup>40</sup>

Foucault identifies the genealogy of homosexuality as beginning with prohibitions against sodomy in Europe in the early modern period, but fails to connect these prohibitions to structures of colonization. He notes the evidence of the widespread “tolerance” of sodomy, and that this is at odds with records of occasional “extreme severity” of punishment in various parts of Europe before the modern era.<sup>41</sup> His most useful point is his tracing of the formation of the concept of the homosexual as a term identifying *people* in the nineteenth century, shifting away from the earlier tendency to focus on homosexuality as linked to sodomy as an act; he connects the emergence of the idea of the homosexual with the burgeoning of discourses around “perverse” sexualities. Homosexuality was fully crystallized as an individual sexual identification around 1870 as “a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul”; if the sodomite “had been a temporary aberration … the homosexual was now a species.”<sup>42</sup> He elaborates:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality inversion pederasty, and “psychic hermaphroditism” made possibly a strong advance of social controls into this area of “perversity”; but it also made possible the formation of a “reverse” discourse: homosexuality began to speak in [sic] its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or “naturality” be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.<sup>43</sup>

Foucault’s definition of homosexuality as a reverse discourse, when deployed superficially, holds the seeds that will flower into many of the equally superficial applications of Butler’s concept of “subversion” as an oppositional mode of willfully overturning gender norms. Much to Butler’s stated chagrin in her 1993 book *Bodies that Matter*, many have latched on to the idea of a reverse (or oppositional) discourse to characterize queer as subversive, or those identified as gay, lesbian, or later queer or trans as necessarily challenging norms—often (it is implied) through willful performances of non-normative gender tropes to overturn these norms.<sup>44</sup> For example, Oscar Wilde (who, one could argue, exemplifies one of the first major versions of what Foucault calls “all those minor perverts” in nineteenth-century discourses), has often been recuperated by queer theorists or historians as wielding a feminized theatricality to “subvert” c. 1900 constructions of proper heteronormative masculine behavior; and, in the mid to late twentieth century, this idea of theatrical masculinity (with many other components, as we have seen) is activated as attached to gay men and then to camp, drag, and queer—with an implication of willed disruption to gender norms.<sup>45</sup> It is important to assert that I am not anachronistically positioning Wilde as “illustrating” or “following” these developments identified by Foucault half a century later. Rather, the figure of Wilde discursively instantiates shifts in ideas about

gender, sexuality, and the modern subject—he comes to embody the idea of subversive gender performance in discourses of the late twentieth century which are shaped by Foucault's ideas.

Stoler's study, among others, allows us to see how this articulation of the homosexual also parallels ideas about self and other built into European concepts of subjectivity, ideas that relate directly to colonialism. Europeans (Christian and white) dominated the worlds they colonized, through religion, language and cultural policing, guns, ideological warfare, and the brute confiscation of land. But in doing so, in spite of the clearly unequal power relations, Europeans did not remain unchanged by these encounters. From the beginnings of modern colonialism in the fifteenth century, these encounters also reciprocally shaped Europeans' sense of individual identity in terms of sex/gender as inherently racialized concepts as well as the larger culture and models of self in relation to those they violated and subordinated. Thus, for example, we could argue that, even as Europe invented the concept of art to substantiate its claims of being superior to those it colonized (who, they decided, could only craft fetishes), the colonizers also defined modern European selfhood and sexuality—including homosexuality—*specifically in relation to the perceived devalued attributes, practices, and identifications of colonized others*.<sup>46</sup> In so doing, however, Europeans inexorably attached themselves to the otherness they sought to control or expel.

Of course this parallels the very dynamic Butler explores (again, in *Bodies that Matter*) of sexual abjection—the heterosexual matrix by which subjects are formed in heteronormative patriarchy, which requires the construction of a “domain of abject beings”—queers—who form the outside to the domain of the subject. This binary, she argues, in turn allows for queerness as a “citational politics,” a “specific reworking of abjection into political agency” whereby the “public assertion of ‘queerness’ enacts performativity as citationality for the purposes of resignifying the abjection of homosexuality into defiance and legitimacy.”<sup>47</sup> In fact, then, the dependence of the dominant subject on those he violates or subordinates is also the binary through which Butler's concept of subversion is articulated (and this model of course echoes back through Butler's first book, the 1982 *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, to Hegel's master/slave, published in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807, just as the homosexual was coming into being in the European imaginary, per Foucault).<sup>48</sup>

In this way, the complex lineage of queer is inextricably connected even in its deep historical formations to racialized identifications. Gender and sexuality within the European imaginary are always already constituted in and through Europeans' perceptions of non-white, non-European sex/gender identifications. Abjection on the basis of sex/gender formations is always already racial abjection, and has been from the beginnings of the West's colonial encounters. European sex/gender concepts and experiences could in this way be seen as reaction formations to anxieties formed around the perceived/projected excessive sexualities of the colonized (and of course, as contemporary feminists have long argued, of women, queers, and the poor).

Class, then, is also complexly implicated in the othering of those deemed sexually abject, who are marginalized as social misfits, perverts, or criminals in Euro-American discourse. In English speaking contexts, but particularly the US, by the early twentieth century the word homosexual was used in tandem with “invert,” and—usually but not always pejoratively—queer. Records from an early series of 1914 raids on male homosexuals in the Los Angeles area show a journalist describing the harassment of those labelled “social vagrants, calling themselves the ‘society of queers’ [who] flaunt their vice to heaven,” and are “now positively known to the officers of Los Angeles and Long Beach.”<sup>49</sup> This characterization indicates that, by the very early twentieth century, groups of gay men in cities were already reclaiming the word queer and shifting its signification from the pejorative at least among themselves, even as police and other state officials used the term as an epithet. By the 1930s the term was being used apparently quite often within the subculture of urban homosexuals. In a 1931 novel by A. Tellier, a character announces “I’m what the world considers queer”; and showgirl Evelyn Nesbit is quoted in 1934 as having said, “[t]wenty years ago ‘queers’ were a rarity—today they are quite the fashion. They are undoubtedly the heaviest drawing cards in the night clubs of today.”<sup>50</sup>

In Donald Webster Cory’s influential 1951 book, *The Homosexual in America*, he acknowledges the word queer as a potentially non-derogatory term but argues in favor of the word “gay.”<sup>51</sup> And William Burroughs, in dialogue with fellow Beats Jack Kerouac and Allan Ginsberg, decided to title his 1952 novel about a gay white American man cruising in Mexico *Queer* (although the novel wasn’t actually published until 1985). As Oliver Harris explains in an introduction to a 2010 anniversary edition of Burroughs’ novel, Kerouac had suggested the title to Burroughs, who wrote to Ginsberg that Kerouac’s suggested title “had me baffled”; in another letter the author noted his outrage at a suggestion by Carl Solomon “that the novel be called *Fag*.<sup>52</sup> Although it took 30 years for him to embrace the title *Queer* fully, clearly even in the 1950s for Burroughs “queer” at least held some productive ambiguity, whereas “fag” he viewed with disdain. Interestingly, too, Harris points out that Burroughs knew about and was contemptuous of the pro-gay rhetoric of Cory’s book, excoriating Cory for his approach of liberal tolerance and, again in a letter to Ginsberg, noting such mainstreaming of bourgeois values in relation to gay culture was “[e]nough to turn a man’s gut.”<sup>53</sup>

Burroughs comments from deep within the sometimes gay but masculinist Beat culture, pointing to its bizarre and unpleasant mix of misogyny and homophobia with gay, heteronormative, and bisexual identifications.<sup>54</sup> To some degree the Beats must be understood as situated within the ethos of the Cold War period in the US, wherein homosexuality was ideologically sutured to communism, and both were constructed as threats to wholesome Americanness—particularly in the rhetorically and institutionally violent attacks on “liberals” of all kinds under McCarthyism. The construction of homosexuals and communists as security risks, ostensibly because of their vulnerability to blackmail (a vulnerability based entirely

on their already-established demonization) is one of the great hypocrisies of the time. As well, with the increasing medicalization of homosexuality as a psychiatric “disease,” gay men were actively kept out of the US military, paralleling an “elaboration of a culture of hyper-masculinity as part of the American defense against Communism” (and homosexuality).<sup>55</sup> As I noted in the previous chapter, the publication of the Kinsey report on men in 1948—which stressed the fact that almost half of American men admitted to participating in some kind of homosexual behavior—increased rather than deflated this anxious rhetoric.

This was the same period marked by the rise of “homophile” (pro-gay and lesbian) movements such as the Mattachine Society (founded in 1950 in Los Angeles) and the Daughters of Bilitis (founded in 1955 in San Francisco), which aimed both to inform members and to offer support.<sup>56</sup> The homophile movements opened the door for gay pride and the rise of San Francisco as a “gay mecca,” with increasing legal protections put into place and homosexuals, usually gay men, effectively defined as a minority demanding protected status. Connected to the positive reclaiming of gay and lesbian as identifications and to the rise of the gay and lesbian rights movements, by the mid-1970s the psychiatric establishment in the US (and more broadly) removed homosexuality from the category of pathology, illness, or perversion; most states in the US dismissed anti-sodomy laws and employment discrimination.<sup>57</sup> This is the moment when homosexuality defined as act or devalued subject position shifted definitively to homosexual defined as identification or identity, opening the door for the rise of the queer-identified subject and queer activism.

### **LGBT + Q, activism, BDSM club culture, the AIDS crisis, and the problem of “subversion” as queer**

With the gay and lesbian activist movements of the late 1960s “gay pride” became a clarion call and words such as “dyke” and “queer” were openly reappropriated for positive use, as proclaimed in public in 1990 by the ACT UP members (gay, lesbian, trans, bi-, and queer) who formed Queer Nation.<sup>58</sup> Their act of naming as a radical activist LGBT rights movement called attention to queer as an openly re-signified term of queer pride—effectively expanding the acronym to LGBTQ (albeit, LGBT identified people had claimed queer here and there before this time<sup>59</sup>). Queer Nation solidified the recuperation of the term with their enraged manifesto “Queers Read This,” handed out at the New York Gay Pride Parade that year.<sup>60</sup>

But before that, the struggle had been largely focused on substituting the word “gay” for homosexual. In the late 1960s, Dennis Altman argues, the terms shifted: “traditional gay culture … is associated with survival; contemporary gay culture (that is, post-Stonewall) is about self-affirmation and assertion”—and this assertion is (he argues) connected to camp or theatrical self-display.<sup>61</sup> But even fairly left or liberal papers such as the *Village Voice* and *New York Times* had to

be chastised for refusing to use the word “gay” per the rising movement’s demands.<sup>62</sup> The alternative press pushed boundaries much farther and harder, articulating drag, genderfuck, and genderfluid self-performance as terms associated with non-normative sexuality. For example, Christopher Lone published an article entitled “Genderfuck and Its Delights” in the San Francisco-based *Gay Sunshine* in 1974: “I want to try and show how not-normal I can be. I want to ridicule and destroy the whole cosmology of restrictive sex roles and sexual identification”; he presciently claims drag as “guerilla theater,” effectively performing as a “revolutionary army attacking the entire straight structured world.”<sup>63</sup> Lone articulates a mode of aestheticized, campy theatricality-as-activism that forms the basis of what will become celebrated in mainstream queer theory two decades later—setting the terms for both its radical political potential and its limits as a concept underlaid by whiteness and a focus on cosmopolitan gay or queer male culture.

With the rise of gay pride and at least some legislated gay rights in the 1970s in the US came the concomitant explosion of explicit homophobia in the press and, particularly in the Reagan administration in the 1980s (as John D’Emilio put it in 1983, “with the resurgence of an active right wing, gay men and lesbians face the future warily”).<sup>64</sup> Figures such as Anita Bryant spread poison in the media in their fundamentalist Christian fight for so-called family values; in 1977, as a justification for promoting homophobia, Bryant wrote, “[c]ultures throughout history have dealt with homosexuals almost universally with disdain, abhorrence, disgust—even death,” and went on to characterize homosexuals as operating by actively recruiting among the ranks of innocent teenage boys and girls.<sup>65</sup>

It was, of course, precisely in this context of the rise of open homophobia that queer began to be deployed routinely within the LGBT rights movement as a clarion call and sign of defiance towards the refusal of the Reagan administration to acknowledge the rising deaths relating to AIDS and the homophobic public culture surrounding the victims of the AIDS crisis. Notably, in most accounts, AIDS activism is discussed in terms of performance, whether in the form of explicitly political protests that the fairly savvy and enfranchised, and mostly white and male, queer communities in cities such as New York mounted, or in the visible lived protests marked by drag queen cultures. In the former case, groups such as ACT UP themselves took fairly aesthetic approaches to queer political agitating, but also, as noted, spawned activist art groups such as Gran Fury (in 1988), the artist-members of which deployed art and film techniques to push their fiery anti-homophobic agenda. In parallel to the noted drag cultures still operating across Euro-American cities in variously renegade, touristic, and/or politically sharp ways, by the late 1980s the notion of queer as linked to performance (whether in drag clubs, on the streets, or in explicit political protests) came to seem obvious.<sup>66</sup>

The groundbreaking book by Stefan Brecht, *Queer Theatre*, initially published in German in 1978 and translated into English in 1986, fleshed out this “natural” connection between queer (in this case, embodied through white gay

masculinity once again) and theatrical performances at New York City venues such as Jack Smith's loft and the Play-House of the Ridiculous, with the latter's founders claiming "Jack is the daddy of us all."<sup>67</sup> Summing up many of the terms that even today are attached to the concept of queer, Brecht describes the work of the "Ridiculous" players and their audience as follows:

slovenly, amateurish, silly, just boring; a put-on ... [N]ot art, certainly not serious art; a coterie occasion for a pariah in-group; by and for queers (not the nice kind, but drag queens and dykes and leather/motorbike/S and M hard trade); a display case for transvestites, pure camp, devoted to movie fetishism ... ritual enactment of an impotent humiliation of women (vicious, loveless); pointless, emotionally impactless, untheatrical; certainly devoid of social relevance; in sum, *stupid* and *immoral*.<sup>68</sup>

Crucial to emphasize in this description is the fact that this trajectory of queer was also clearly aligned with and/or came out of marginal subcultures ("drag queens and dykes," etc.). The performers/artists and impresarios (including Warhol and Smith) were often from lower-middle or working-class backgrounds and developed forms of entrepreneurship out of these roots, as Giulia Palladini's work on 1960s underground theater in New York reminds us.<sup>69</sup> Just as important a reminder is the exclusion of female/feminist queer performers both from the venues and networks at the time and from subsequent historical accounts (pointed to by Brecht's complete exclusion of women from his account of queer theater, and arguably also in his description of the work as perpetrating "humiliation of women," a reading of drag that is unnuanced, to say the least).<sup>70</sup>

These marginal subcultures included those producing creative work through their sex/gender performativity, as exemplified by the confluence of queer politics and culture with the rise of experimental dance and theater, the drag scene, performance art, and (by the 1970s and 1980s) punk, post-punk, as well as disco music (to name a few of the cultural movements embracing of or partly produced by self-identified LGBTQ people).<sup>71</sup> It is this confluence that must have tempted Judith Butler to include the word and concept of "subversion" as central to her theory of gender performance, signaled in the subtitle of her most influential book, the 1990 *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. This idea of subversion shortly thereafter came to be sutured to drag queen culture through Butler's well-known and contested attention to the drag ball voguing scene in her "Gender is Burning" chapter of *Bodies that Matter* (1993). Here, Butler positions drag ball communities (as viewed through the 1991 film *Paris is Burning*) as exemplifying gender performativity, and thus of the potential "subversion" of gender norms—a potential that was oversimplified into a necessary outcome by those eager to find a method they could apply to theory and practice to ensure a radical challenge to gender norms.<sup>72</sup> Effectively, the take-up of Butler's work conflated the idea of gender performance as subversive

from *Gender Trouble* to the concept of drag queeneries and voguing culture as subversive in her reading of *Paris is Burning* in *Bodies that Matter*.

Read critically and with hindsight, the tendency in subsequent work to idealize the of-color drag queeneries of *Paris is Burning* as overturning gender norms simply extended the problematic and avant-gardist tendency to fetishize those perceived as exotic and marginal as “subverting” the tropes of European modernism. The vast oversimplification of Butler’s complex arguments in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*—albeit one that is understandable given the slippages around intentionality in her work, as discussed in Chapter 2—hinges partly on a misreading of her notion of gender performance. In the articles and practices citing Butler’s work, her complex argument was distilled into the idea of gender performance as deliberate method or voluntaristic act, effectively giving “theatrical agency” a central role, rather than as Butler articulated it—as a complex function of discourse.<sup>73</sup> Arguably, as Phillip Brian Harper has noted, the genderfluid or transwomen of color in *Paris is Burning* had very little agency beyond that exhibited in the actual ballrooms—hence this idealizing conflation in queer theory, pushed forward partly through Butler’s work, is not useful in terms of addressing the actual social and economic inequities at issue in the lives of voguers.<sup>74</sup> Harper critiques Butler’s notion of “subversion” in relation to the film, arguing it arose from her conflation of voguing’s supposed surfacing of artifice with the practice’s ostensible manifestation of authenticity (two incompatible functions).

As Butler herself noted in *Gender Trouble*, performative imitation or parody of gender

by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. A typology of actions would clearly not suffice, for parodic displacement [or performativity] ... depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered.<sup>75</sup>

Clearly Butler has a deep, philosophical appreciation for the question of context and the contingency of how gender performance actually *works* at any moment or time and in any space, although she does even here imply that the repetitions can be “disruptive, truly troubling” in a fixed way, disregarding the vicissitudes of interpretive context (thus, the site or particular audience for a voguing enactment might suppress or refute any disruptive effects from landing). And her focus on context gets lost elsewhere in her theories, which masterfully reel out arguments about gendered/sexed subjectivity that often fail to consider her own role in constituting the narratives she compellingly argues.

Here it is worth expanding briefly on my examination of Butler’s return to intentionality in Chapter 2. In an interview with Sara Ahmed in 2014, Butler

beautifully equivocates on the question of agency or will, beginning by noting, “I think performativity may operate in the interstices of the willed and the unwilling,” and later segueing into a more intentionalist language (if slippery as such): “The formation of the will in the sphere of gender might be understood as taking up the task of self-assignment, and we might understand the linguistic register of autonomy here.”<sup>76</sup> The question of agency is never fully resolved for Butler. The disappointing aspect of her theory is that this problem is never fully acknowledged, either; rather, Butler’s voice slips now and again (as here) into assertions that seem to express a desire to escape the impossibility of navigating the shoals of “will” versus ideologically coerced iteration. Perhaps it is in this tension between intentional self-assignment of sex/gender identification and non-motivated iteration that queer in fact resides, as performative (as Butler suggests). But, if so, it behooves us to keep that undecidability in motion.

### **The subversion problem in relation to queer as (gay male) liberatory sex**

The idealizing tendency in queer theory of the early 1990s arose out of a period in which the liberationist discourses of the gay and lesbian rights movements began to be actively intertwined with radically anarchic urban subcultures such as drag queeneries and the party scenes, anonymous sex (mostly gay male, at least in the record), and BDSM homosexual club cultures that had been outlined already in popular articles such as the 1964 *LIFE* magazine piece on “Homosexuality in America.”<sup>77</sup> These were urban subcultures, predominantly white gay male, that had been previously repressed and hidden from view or contained figuratively as a “foreign infection” (usually “French”) in American and British culture.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, these attempts at containment were never fully successful. With the post-war Kinsey reports, cultural theorists such as Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse creating theories around the potential of unleashed sexual energies, and the burgeoning of homophile and free love movements, as well as the rising visibility of sexual subcultures among French avant-gardes (given texture in writings by Georges Bataille and explicitly queer texts by Jean Genet as well as in the BDSM imagery of photographer Pierre Molinier—perhaps a “foreign infection” after all!), these subcultures became more visible for those who sought them out.

The work of French writer and activist Guy Hocquenghem, active from the early 1970s until his death from AIDS-related complications in 1988, epitomizes the celebration of gay male sexuality as desublimatory and revolutionary and of gay male sex as inherently liberatory—arguments that have been deeply influential in US queer theory. He is even, anachronistically, called the first queer theorist by some (including in the anonymous Wikipedia entry on his work and life).<sup>79</sup> Drawing on the work of Jacques Lacan, and the critique of capitalism and psychoanalysis in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, but also

clearly on the French Surrealist concept of sexual energy as radically disruptive to bourgeois norms (found in Bataille's late Surrealist work, for example), Hocquenghem's writings promote desublimatory modes of gay sexual experience and practice that work against the machinations of capitalist regimes. In key texts such as *Homosexual Desire* (1972), Hocquenghem developed what his biographer, Bill Marshall, succinctly summarizes in the following way:

primarily an ethical and aesthetic [project] which cultivates the margins of sexualities, those non-totalisable practices which fall through the system, such as *les folles* (camp or drag queens), "on the frontier between art and life, outside politics," "that patchwork of street culture, art, preciosity and vulgarity which formed the complex tissue of a mode of apprehending the world without dullness or common sense," and delinquency. However, [Hocquenghem] ... also seeks to challenge the homo-hetero binary, as well as the segregation of generations to be found in the discursive system surrounding children's sexuality.<sup>80</sup>

While not explicitly central to the genealogy of North American queer theory, Hocquenghem's work exemplifies the tendency to make claims in relation to queer "subversion" as we see so centrally in Butler's arguments around gender performance—such claims are indeed a foreign, and particularly French, "infection" of a sort. It also reminds us of the importance of French concepts of liberationist erotics, filtering into art and performance practice and theory through figures such as Wilhelm Reich, Norman O. Brown, and Herbert Marcuse, as well as French Fluxus impresario Jean-Jacques Lebel—well-known amongst US intellectuals and artists. These concepts also entered into US culture through the work of renegade Surrealists, via radical performance artists such as Ron Athey, who references Bataille and Genet directly in his work. The feminist performance artist Carolee Schneemann, too, was inspired by Reich's writings and the discourses of free love and feminism in devising her 1964 collaborative performance *Meat Joy*: a raucous and joyful celebration of the sensuality of human relations, in which half-naked men and women roll around with erotic abandon among slabs of raw meat, fish, and wet paint. Schneemann's *Meat Joy* clearly pushed forward liberationist eroticism, in this case driven especially by Reich's emphasis on the evils of sexual repression. As Schneemann has described her interest in Reich's theories at the time,

[t]he late 1950s and early 60s was a time of profound erotic suppression ... and here was this brave, challenging, and remarkable psychoanalytic [theorist] delving into the forms of suppression that related to governance, to militarism, to patriarchy. Certainly, political oppression had a crazy sexualized slant to it then; you felt it in the culture wherever you went, and if you weren't part of it, you were threatening to it.<sup>81</sup>



**FIGURE 5.6** Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy*, 1964; photograph by Al Giese, courtesy of the artist

These ideas surrounding subversion and the ostensibly freeing energies of desublimation (or “un-repression”) of sexual energy inform discussions about the political potential of queer, even as the incommensurability of gay pride, radical poststructuralist understandings of subjectivity and agency, the gay marriage movement, the BDSM queer club scene, and the motivations of queer subcultures produces some of the many frictions in queer theory. The most dogged conflict or tension in concepts of queer has been the incompatible yet often simultaneous dual desires: both to assert, in alignment with or paradigmatic of poststructuralist ideas and postmodern theory, that performances of an openly sexual, genderfluid, queer, or erotic body “subvert” gender norms and decenter subjectivity, and to claim simultaneously that the gender performing body (for example, of some trans people) expresses an “authentic” interior self or enacts freely chosen gender attributes.

Queer theory and critical race theory scholars García and David Eng have been much sharply critical of the idealizing impulse that articulates queer as necessarily subversive. In his 2010 book *The Feeling of Kinship*, Eng points out the ideological underpinnings of the desire to see queer as offering an agentially empowering range of “choices” to the gender-curios subject. Eng expands on John D’Emilio’s arguments in the important 1983 article “Capitalism and Gay Identity” to address “late capitalism and gay identity as a function of a contemporary U.S.-led political economy of neo-liberal globalization and governmentality.” Eng’s critique of the confluence of white neoliberalism and this version of queer theory and politics leads him to go on to assert that “queerness is increasingly rendered an aestheticized lifestyle predicated on choice” and to conclude that “the production of queer liberalism and the discourse of racialized immigrant homophobia are two sides of the same liberal coin.” Earlier in the book, Eng had set out this critique as follows:

“Queer” was once understood as the name for a political movement and an extensive critique of a wide range of social normalizations and exclusions. However, in our putatively post-identity age, the term has become increasingly unmoored from its theoretical potentials and possibilities. Instead, it has come to demarcate more narrowly pragmatic gay and lesbian identity and identity politics, the economic interests of neoliberalism and whiteness, and liberal political norms of inclusion.<sup>82</sup>

Eng’s arguments take up and extend Lisa Duggan’s groundbreaking 2002 critique of “homonormativity”—the ways in which discourses and practices around queers are often in late capitalism marketed and commodified.<sup>83</sup>

In spite of these nuanced and important critiques, claims for queer as necessarily subversive continue to dominate discussions of sexuality and gender in art and performance: it has been difficult to give up the hope that such concepts provide, albeit they are clearly anchored in white privilege and middle-class values, not to mention North American frames of reference—often as reified through academic discourse. Art historian David Getsy thus argues in his introduction to *Queer* (2016), a handbook anthology of texts relating to queer politics and the visual arts, “the defining trait of ‘queer’ is its rejection of attempts to enforce (or value) normalcy … brashly embrac[ing] … disruption as a tactic.”<sup>84</sup> Getsy’s avant-gardist formulation (in which queer is that which disrupts or subverts) is compatible with his disciplinary background—art history being, still, a discipline deeply indebted to French modernism and avant-gardist ideas of disruption. His arguments are also, however, subtended by his deep knowledge of queer and trans theory and thus linked to the previous histories of the term queer, including Foucault’s notion of a “reverse discourse” and Butler’s concept of gender performance as potentially subversive. And Getsy attaches his celebratory framing of queer practices to a rigorous historical approach, going on to note, importantly, that this brash and confrontational version of queer on which

the book focuses coalesced in the 1980s as an anti-assimilationist attitude in relation to the AIDS crisis.<sup>85</sup>

By the 1990s in US academic theory, then, gender seemed to fit naturally with performance, queer with performativity, and all framed through a utopian fantasy that queer performativity would necessarily subvert undesirable heteronormative and patriarchal norms of gender/sex identification if not also potentially capitalism itself. In the latter case, queer came to be viewed as instantiating a performative mode of gender while performance practices (including some forms of performance art but also more populist modes such as drag queenery and voguing) came to be understood as the quintessential structure through which queer was most obviously and forcefully articulated.

### **Butler's queer theory and performative (versus essential) gender**

Butler's initial arguments immediately became ubiquitous in academic and art discourse. As early as the fall of 1991, for example, filmmaker Tom Kalin (a founding member of Gran Fury and queer filmmaker) edited a special issue of New York-based *Movement Research/Performance Journal* on "Gender Performance." Kalin's issue was at the very cutting edge (if not in advance of this edge, helping to define it) of art-related writing taking on this concept of gender as performance. He paraphrases Butler in his introductory essay:

Gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original ... If gender is drag, and if it is an imitation which regularly promotes the ideal it attempts to approximate, then gender is a performance that *produces* the illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic core.<sup>86</sup>

As Kalin's quick uptake indicates, gender performance was a concept of its moment, and caught like wildfire, largely driven by the 1990 publication of Butler's *Gender Trouble*, one of the most cited and circulated academic books of its time.

The virtually simultaneous emergence on the art scene of films and images documenting subcultural queer lives, from performances by Ron Athey to the photographic work of Nan Goldin and Lyle Ashton Harris to the film *Paris is Burning*, also helped along this quick incorporation.<sup>87</sup> Butler herself quickly took credit for the rise of self-consciously performative modes of queer performance in the 1990s. Thus, in a new introduction to *Gender Trouble*, published in the 1999 edition, she notes that the radical activist group Queer Nation took up the book, "and some of its reflections on the theatricality of queer self-presentation resonated with the tactics of Act Up"; she asserts as well the impact of the book on the visual arts: "The questions of performative gender were appropriated in different ways in the visual arts, at Whitney exhibitions, and at the Otis School for the Arts in Los Angeles, among others."<sup>88</sup> She also argues for the importance of attention to the "racial presumptions" that "invariably underwrite the

discourse on gender,” but (as García points out) does not herself here or elsewhere address how this would occur.<sup>89</sup>

But, as I have already noted, Butler was not alone in theorizing gender as a performance (viz., the earlier work of sociologists or the earlier proto-queer enactments such as Claude Cahun’s self-imaging photographs, Flawless Sabrina’s drag balls, or the cavorting of the Disquotays in Los Angeles), nor in extending feminist methods to embrace larger questions of sexuality. This latter work had started with the rise of the second wave movement, and theorists such as Gayle Rubin, B. Ruby Rich, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Arlene Raven, Harmony Hammond, and many others must be heralded for opening up that investigation from the 1970s onward, with transnational feminists such as Trinh T. Minh-ha and Gayatri Spivak picking up the gauntlet in the 1980s. Feminist queer theorists including Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Lauren Berlant, Sue-Ellen Case, Lisa Duggan, Peggy Phelan, and many others were crucial to the development of an acknowledged preeminence of feminist academic discourses of queer theory by the mid-1990s. As William Turner puts it usefully, albeit erasing the crucial feminist-of-color contributions:

the concerns of queer theorists for sexuality, gender, and the relationships between the two, as well as their political and intellectual reifications, grow distinctly out of feminist political and scholarly activity as much as, if not more than, out of gay political and scholarly activity.

Nonetheless, as Turner offhandedly remarks, Sedgwick and Butler are the “founding mothers of queer theory.”<sup>90</sup>

As Tavia Nyong’o argues in *Afro-Fabulations*, it is limiting (to say the least) to accept this self-proclaimed and white lineage, which erases a myriad of queer of color theorists active since the 1960s, whose work can offer “other, complementary myths of how we enter into the space called queer.”<sup>91</sup> But Nyong’o’s observation does not negate that, as Turner’s argument makes clear, the “official” (and self-proclaimed) academic genealogy does feature Butler and Sedgwick as origin figures in the articulation of what De Lauretis labeled as “queer theory” in 1991. Part of the problem is that “queer theory” in this official capacity has not been capacious enough to include figures Nyong’o hopes to retrieve for it, such as Samuel Delany, who since the 1960s has written science fiction, memoirs, and other texts that transgress academic definitions of “theory” but (as Nyong’o argues) might be seen as enacting a queer theory *avant la lettre*.<sup>92</sup>

The role of the AIDS crisis, particularly deadly in the US from the mid-1980s through the 1990s, of course had an impact on how feminists and queers navigated community and the political issues surrounding sexuality—as De Lauretis put it, the horrors of the crisis produced a “[c]ommon front or political alliance of gay men and lesbians.”<sup>93</sup> And this common front was also represented as white-dominant, often downplaying the role played by activists- and theorists-of-color in articulating a queer politics. In spite of appearances, feminists

identified as straight, lesbian, bisexual, as well as transwomen and transmen often claimed common cause with the primarily gay male urban communities beset by AIDS, and provided key energy and insights in forwarding the various AIDS activist groups. Furthermore, within these groups the brute physical aspects of the transmission of AIDS emphasized the absolute necessity of attending to bodily differences, desires, limits, and functions in articulating any politics relating to sex/gender. Within this context, essentialism as a central polemic of some feminist and gay and lesbian discourses in the late 1960s and 1970s faded into the background and the concept of gender performance or queer performativity moved to the foreground as a more progressive and convincing way to theorize how we occupy gendered/sexed bodies as well as social scenes of gendered and sexed spaces and representations. The ubiquity of Butler's theory in texts motivating and crystallizing this shift is undeniable.

Strangely enough, however, Butler did not even deploy the term *queer* in the 1988 article, and only used it once (among a list of terms applied to those perceived as homosexuals) in the main text of *Gender Trouble*; it is in the new 1999 "Preface" where Butler deploys the term queer numerous times.<sup>94</sup> Performative, however, is important from the beginning of her theorizing of gender, as signaled by the title of the 1988 article, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution." The article, however, has little to do with Austin's concept of the performative—rather it focuses on embodiment, via a much-needed attention to phenomenology. Butler does not define the concept of performativity here nor does she explicitly reference or acknowledge Jacques Derrida's concept of iteration (that will come later, specifically in the 1997 book *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*).<sup>95</sup> In the 1988 article and in *Gender Trouble*, performativity takes on a loose meaning not unlike the significance of gender as a performance in Goffman, relating to the concept of gender/sex identity as taking place over time, in social situations, through performance: gender is (famously) a "stylized repetition of acts," and identity is constructed as "a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief."<sup>96</sup>

It is clear to anyone who has read Erving Goffman's work that her concept of gender performance is indebted to his work, although most likely in an attenuated second-hand way: his work was central to intellectual discussions around gender at the time, such as Esther Newton's key 1972 sociological study of female impersonators, *Mother Camp*; Butler cites both Newton and Goffman in passing in the 1988 article, as I have discussed in previous chapters. Michael Trask has expanded on this erasure in Butler's work, noting that Goffman's 1976 article "Gender Display," published in his *Gender Advertisements* book shows a "clear precedent" for Butler's arguments on gender performance.<sup>97</sup> Trask cites Goffman as follows from the 1976 book:

To accept various “expressions” of femininity (or masculinity) as indicating something biological or social-structural that lies behind or underneath these signs, something to be glimpsed through them, is perhaps to accept a lay theory of signs. That a multitude of “genderisms” point convergently in the same direction might only tell us how these signs function socially, namely, to support belief that there is an underlying reality to gender. Nothing dictates that should we dig and poke behind these images we can expect to find anything there—except, of course, the inducement to entertain this expectation.<sup>98</sup>

Given this nuanced and de-essentializing account of “gender display” as *constructing* a body’s gender rather than reflecting its pre-existing truth, it is all the more surprising, then, that Butler offhandedly dismisses Goffman as essentializing in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” and entirely excises the reference to his work in *Gender Trouble*.

As discussed in Chapter 3 in the exploration of “relationality” in social science, there are other sociological precedents for Butler’s arguments that certainly informed general debates about gender/sex identification in the period leading up to the publication of *Gender Trouble*—albeit these precedents were not coming from the same radical queer feminist perspective. Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, followers of Goffman, published an article in 1987 in *Gender & Society*, which revised a paper they had given in public at the American Sociological Association in 1977, entitled “Doing Gender.”<sup>99</sup> Here, drawing explicitly on Goffman’s work, they use language that sounds *very* “Austinian,” arguing that gender is “routine, methodical, and recurring *accomplishment*,” and is situated and social, “constituted through interaction.”<sup>100</sup> Suddenly Butler’s notion of “performative *accomplishment*” from the 1988 article has an explicit discursive context in relation to earlier sociological arguments.<sup>101</sup> In spite of these important attempts to de-essentialize gender as an interactive performance on the part of Goffman and his followers, Butler wanted nothing of this connection, however. This distancing of her work from Goffman’s was most likely due to understandable anxieties around the empiricism of sociological methods, which, at the time, seemed haunted by essentialism (in spite of their direct arguments to the contrary), although Michael Trask persuasively argues provocatively that Butler must reject Goffman because of his idea that the performance of gender is not political (or specifically queer)—i.e., it does not imply “subversion” but describes how everyone engages the world.<sup>102</sup>

Other feminist queer theorists worked harder to accommodate a range of discourses approaching the de-essentialized force of queer. Along these lines, De Lauretis deserves credit not only for being the first to use the term “queer theory” in the special issue of *differences* on the topic, which she edited. This groundbreaking issue also included texts by a number of writers and scholars of color, including Samuel Delany, Tomás Almaguer, Ekua Omosoupe; as well, De

Lauretis in the introduction directly addresses the importance of acknowledging race as central to sex/gender identification, arguing:

it is because sexuality is so inevitably personal, because it so inextricably entwines the self with others, fantasy with representation, the subjective with the social, that racial as well as gender differences are a crucial area of concern for queer theory.<sup>103</sup>

The issue stands out for De Lauretis's attention to avoiding the white dominance of much feminism and gender theory.

Marked by De Lauretis's attempt at acknowledgement, the discourse around queer and the performance of gender was already itself coming under fire as presumptively white and driven by the concerns of privileged, middle-class academics. By the late 1990s, queer theory became immeasurably enriched by important anti-racist correctives in texts on queer performance as racialized, such as Cathy Cohen's "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics," David Román's *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS*, José Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, and Alicia Arrizón's *Latina Performance* (which includes material on queer Latina performance).<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, as I explore at length in Chapter 7, trans discourses had been developing for over two decades, making transgender people and their concerns increasingly visible to non-trans-identified scholars in these debates. By the late 1990s, the separatist arguments that queer (or gender/sexuality in general) functioned on a different plane from other modes of identification were being very actively debunked, as García points out.

### **Queer theory, more on "subversion," and agency**

Without first tracking through a deeper analysis of the lingering binarisms and tensions in Butler's *Gender Trouble*, however, it would make no sense to move on to deeper challenges to the feminist queer theory later in the 1990s and following. *Gender Trouble* in fact toggles between identifying gender performance as a coercive aspect of living in a heteronormative patriarchal regime—on gender as a repressive regime, she writes that the “‘naming’ of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, an institutionalized performative that both creates and legislates social reality by requiring the discursive/perceptual construction of bodies in accord with principles of sexual difference”—and, as we have seen, making the utopian claim that certain gender performances can be “subversive” or anti-normative.<sup>105</sup>

As I have suggested, Butler tends to skirt the question of individual agency in such subversive practices. In *Gender Trouble*, she thus asserts (drawing on Foucauldian arguments): “If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself.”<sup>106</sup> And, by the

final section of the book, “Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions,” citing Esther Newton’s *Mother Camp*, she argues: “[t]he performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed … *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*;” following this, Butler asks rather instrumentally: “what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire”?<sup>107</sup> Given that she has already suggested that exposing the contingency of gender is a progressive and desirable goal, we are now left with the concepts—which have dogged her through subsequent books and decades—that there is a norm of gender and an oppositional anti-norm; and the unfortunate implication of this is that one can simply imagine or willfully adopt a “kind of gender performance” to destabilize norms. This implication undermines her continual attempts, even in *Gender Trouble* itself, to assert agency as a problem rather than as a simple formulation of free will (“agency,’ then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition”).<sup>108</sup>

It is in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *Excitable Speech* (1997) where Butler most extensively addresses the tendency among her readers to extrapolate a “method” of gender subversion from *Gender Trouble*. She addresses this problem in these later works through the question of the body’s materiality. Merging a beautifully articulated phenomenological model of intentional embodiment with a Foucaultian idea of discourse as productive and a Derridean concept of the performative (as the processual, dynamic way in which expression takes place via iterations of norms), Butler famously asserts in the introduction to *Bodies that Matter* that performativity is not a deliberate act but

the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names … [T]he regulatory norms of “sex” work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body’s sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative.<sup>109</sup>

This set of ideas, as convincing as they are in the abstract, will get Butler into her own “gender trouble” from which she never fully escapes: for what do these concepts mean in relation to actual people seeking either to understand their own painful relationship to gender norms in the “heterosexual imperative” or to articulate ways of challenging or undermining these norms?

It is arguably in the chapter “The Lesbian Phallus” of *Bodies that Matter* where the tension between a psychoanalytic model of the subject (she relies heavily on Jacques Lacan’s theory of the phallus), which many feminists have pointed out is ultimately essentializing, and a performative model of gender and embodiment as always already in process comes to a head, so to speak, via the contradictions of the phallus: the construction of gender, as she articulates in the introduction and in “The Lesbian Phallus” chapter, is “a temporal process which operates

through the reiteration of norms; sex is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration” and “the anatomical is only ‘given’ through its signification.”<sup>110</sup> She later articulates this tension explicitly in terms of a long-standing issue for feminism (and, arguably, any coalitional political movement):

Within feminist debate, an increasing problem has been to reconcile the apparent need to formulate a politics which assumes the category of “women” with the demand, often politically articulated, to problematize the category, interrogate its incoherence, its internal dissonance, its constitutive exclusions.

She concludes: “The signifiers of ‘identity’ effectively or rhetorically produce the very social movements that they appear to represent.”<sup>111</sup>

Ultimately the question raised by Derrida of how change occurs if all expressions can only be understood through their iteration (thus implying there can be no break with norms) stymies Butler in *Bodies that Matter*, where the question relates explicitly to our repetition of coercive gender norms, as well as in her subsequent work on power, precarity, and the subject. In abstract terms, she has the problem covered, arguing (again, via Derridean theory, which is nonetheless not fully acknowledged in *Bodies that Matter*), that political signifiers are *performative*, with performativity “rethought as the force of citationality.” Agency is thus “the hiatus in iterability,” a “repetition that fails to repeat loyally, a reciting of the signifier that must commit a disloyalty against identity … in order to secure its future.”<sup>112</sup> This all seems well and good, and an impeccable line of reasoning for those of us invested in Derridean poststructuralism, but in fact it fails entirely to explain where the impulse to “commit a disloyalty” comes from—or indeed if there is an impulse at all (since she gives agency only to the noun “repetition,” which gets us nowhere in terms of human subjects). Does it just *happen*, without conscious intention? If so, surely it would not be “disloyal” but a mistake (or some version of unconscious behavior, which introduces an even more complicated problem).

This analysis is important because of the ubiquity in discourses from queer theoretical scholarship to much visual art practice drawing on a usually fairly simplified version of Butler’s arguments to foreground gender performances as ascribed either to overt or covert assertions of willful political subversion. While to some degree these applications can be viewed as based on misreadings of Butler’s work, as noted above there is no question that slippages in her arguments about gender subversion and agency make such readings possible and (one could argue) likely—even acknowledging that these dissonant applications are clearly deeply frustrating to Butler.<sup>113</sup>

For obvious political reasons, recent debates about transgender in relation to queer theory have encouraged Butler to address the question of agency again (where does trans “begin”? is it motivated? inherent?). Thus Butler states ambiguously in the 2014 interview with Sara Ahmed, “[t]he formation of the

will in the sphere of gender might be understood as taking up the task of self-assignment, and we might understand the linguistic register of autonomy here.”<sup>114</sup> Butler seems to be having a Searlian moment, wherein intentionality seems the only “out” in acknowledging the need for certain trans or intersex people to claim an alignment with a pre-existing “authentic” gender/sex identification: “Many people with intersexed conditions want to be categorized within a binary system and do not want to be romanticized as existing ‘beyond all categories’.”<sup>115</sup> Of greatest importance here is that Butler again takes the always tempting risk of implying that we can in fact *choose* to deviate from the norms we otherwise repeat, noting:

The moment that interests me, a recurrent moment, is what happens when we grasp that we are in the midst of reiterating a norm, even that a norm has entered into a basic sense of who we are, and start to deviate ... from the more obedient sense of repetition ... [D]eviation brings with it anxiety, fear, and a sense of thrill, and ... when it is undertaken in concert with others, it is also the beginning of new forms of solidarity that make it possible to risk a new sense of being a subject.<sup>116</sup>

Two problems here: both her assumption that we consciously “grasp” our reiteration of norms (calling to mind conceits in Euro-American thought about an avant-garde identifying bourgeois norms and critiquing them); and that the answer to this recognition is to perform “deviation” or anti-norms.

This begs the key question: can we think ourselves out of such a binary? The lingering binarism of Butler’s arguments can be seen as well in “Critically Queer,” the final chapter of *Bodies that Matter*, where she poses an explicitly oppositional model of performativity: “Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power.” Butler’s following caveat—that this turning is

to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a “pure” opposition ... but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure. For one is, as it were, in power even as one opposes it, formed by it as one reworks it

—is not enough to save her formulation from oppositionality in the end.<sup>117</sup> One can agree with all of Butler’s apparent political impulses and still see that, while in the abstract her arguments are unassailable, in practice she returns over and over again to impute the intention to subvert through opposition.

In examining the most hegemonically influential forms of theories of queer performativity in relation to Butler’s work, I seek not to dismiss the importance of her work, which is undeniable; rather, I point to our implication in that which we seek to transcend—precisely (and paradoxically) through the

invocation of an Austinian notion of the performative that has become so loose that (ironically) we could say its Butlerian queer feminist iterations have *changed* its meaning beyond recognition—is this the “error” she identifies above which has been introduced into the discourse such that it has been transformed? We still want there to be a clearly identifiable norm that we can identify and subvert without attending to the unfathomable complexities of how identification as a process actually *functions*—relationally, contextually, and in covert ways to which we can have no conscious access. Arguably this positing of queer as anti-norm indicates that we are still in a post-Enlightenment Euro-American binary here, still operating in and through the “colonial/modern gender system” Maria Lugones astutely identified at the base of (white) theories of gender and sexuality, and still repeating the “technologies of sexuality” in the “imperial field” of European thought which Ann Laura Stoler identifies as crucial to rethink.<sup>118</sup>

The binaristic tendencies of this form of queer theory are at radical odds with (one is tempted to say they “oppose”) its reputation as a signifier of the in-between, or the processual (performative), expression of gender as a range of unfixable fluidities or politics or bodies. And yet such tendencies are ubiquitous, and even proudly announced, in queer theory. Thus, David Halperin (in the 1995 *Saint Foucault*) argues: “‘queer’ does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.*”<sup>119</sup> The very concept of queer as “at odds with the normal” or as a “subversion of identity” (per Butler’s subtitle) presumes an “identity” that can be opposed and that is thus at least relatively fixed—the entire argument is based on a lineage of ideas and formations stemming from US-style identity politics discourses, themselves indebted to a long genealogy of ideas about selfhood passing through Hegel and his radically binary master/slave model of European subject formation.

Lee Edelman sums up this dilemma in his 2004 *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, a cranky, sometimes extreme, but brilliant challenge to the structures of dominant forms of queer theory and politics. Edelman cites the “Child,” evoked in heteronormative discourse as “futurity’s unquestioned value,” and proposes against it

the impossible project of a queer oppositionality that would oppose itself to the structural determinants of politics as such, which is also to say, that would oppose itself to the logic of opposition. This paradoxical formulation suggests a refusal—the appropriately perverse refusal that characterizes queer theory—of every substantialization of identity, which is always oppositionally defined.<sup>120</sup>

Elsewhere Edelman challenges Jack Halberstam’s emphasis on queer futurity by acerbically noting: “The fantasy of a viable ‘alternative’ to normativity’s

domination—a fantasy defended as strategically necessary when not affirmed as unquestionably good—offers nothing more ... than futurism's redemptive temporality gussied up with a rainbow flag.”<sup>121</sup>

Acknowledging its continual flirtation with oppositional politics, Edelman situates queerness as violently rejecting a hope-based politics, including “the absolute value of reproductive futurism.”<sup>122</sup> While Edelman’s intervention in the tendency to binarize queer against a phantasmagorical norm has sparked important debates in queer theory, such a polemical contestation of oppositionality and futurity still clearly rests on (unacknowledged) privilege and a distilling of queer from the vast range of other identifications that haunt its every articulation.

### **Anti-anti-relational (and nonbinary) versions of queer, Sedgwick and after**

The capacity to articulate a political version of queer that is against futurity, intimacy, and relationality—qualities Edelman excoriates in the book as part of the regime of “reproductive futurism”—is most certainly linked to Edelman’s status as a highly educated, middle-class, white male subject living in the US. As Muñoz brilliantly argues in a 2006 article:

denouncing relationality first and foremost distances queerness from what some theorists seem to think of as contamination by race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality as a singular trope of difference ... Antirelational approaches to queer theory were ... investments in deferring various dreams of difference.<sup>123</sup>

Muñoz’s 2009 *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* furthers these arguments, drawing on twentieth-century models of utopian political thought (notably the work of Ernst Bloch) to insist on hope and futurity as the best chances for queer theory to move forward.

As I discussed briefly in Chapter 3, *Cruising Utopia* is a convincing riposte to Edelman’s dour, if provocative, antirelational rendition of queer. Muñoz self-consciously stages the book as “an anticipatory illumination of art,” through a “process of identifying certain properties that ... [help] us see the not-yet-conscious.” Within this matrix, Muñoz situates queerness as that which escapes an instrumentalized (and oppositional) notion of performance:

In [Marcuse’s] *Eros and Civilization* the aesthetic and the surplus it provides can potentially stand against the coercive practicality of the [industrial] performance principle. A queer aesthetic can potentially function like a great refusal. Queerness, as I am describing it here, is more than just sexuality. It is this great refusal of a performance principle that allows the human to feel and know not only our work and our pleasure but also our selves and others.<sup>124</sup>

Muñoz's importance is not only in his understanding that queer is raced—but also in his performance of his own *implication* in articulating queer as such, an implication that also honors previous modes of queer theory: “[m]y approach to hope as a critical methodology can be best described as a backward glance that enacts a future vision.”<sup>125</sup> Muñoz is not afraid to admit what he wants from queer and from queer theory, and consistently enacts what he describes it as wanting to do (i.e., he *says* in order to *do* queer theory): his model is performative. Queer, he asserts, is about “doing, performing, engaging,” and as such any method or interpretive mode that claims to be queer must admit its own parameters of engagement.<sup>126</sup> This sensitivity to “doing” what one is “saying” about queer—and to admitting it and building this consciousness into one’s analyses—reminds one of the original concept of the performative as Austin elaborated it. And of course, in this, Muñoz is indebted in part (as he was the first to say) by the model of queer theory posed by Eve Sedgwick, who was a key mentor at Duke University, where he obtained his PhD in the 1990s.

Sedgwick had paved the way in directly theorizing the relationality and performativity of queer as a performative. Her first well-known salvo in queer performativity debates was her article “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*,” published in the same 1993 issue of *GLQ* as Butler’s “Critically Queer.”<sup>127</sup> She had, however, introduced the performative already in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), where she put forth a method of attending to “performative aspects of texts … as sites of definitional creation, violence, and rupture,” constituted in and through a crisis of homo/heterosexual definition. She relies on a linguistic idea of performance in the book’s arguably most influential concept: “[c]losetedness’ itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence.”<sup>128</sup>

In the “Queer Performativity” article, Sedgwick immediately notes her awareness of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, as cited at a 1991 conference on Gay and Lesbian Studies at Rutgers University, and then compellingly suggests the need to move gender performativity beyond the case of drag to acknowledge the importance of activism in queer performance:

[W]here are we to look for performativity itself? I would like the question of performativity to prove useful in some way for understanding the obliquities among *meaning*, *being*, and *doing*, not only around the examples of drag performance and (its derivative?) gendered self-presentation, but equally such complex speech acts as coming out, for work around AIDS and other grave identity-implicating illnesses, and for the self-labelled, transversely but urgently representational placarded body of *demonstration*.<sup>129</sup>

This crucial freeing of performativity from its narrow attachment to drag (with generous acknowledgment to Butler’s concept) allows Sedgwick to pinpoint its “present moment” authority as coming from “two quite different discourses, that of theater on the one hand, of speech-act theory and deconstruction on the

other.”<sup>130</sup> Leaving aside her obvious sidelining of feminist gender theory itself (an interesting lacuna, to say the least, given her deep understanding of it), Sedgwick’s quick historiography passes through sources as diverse as Michael Fried and Jean-François Lyotard, as well as Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller. Plowing through an astute analysis of Austin’s *How to Do Things With Words*, she then shifts from his emphasis on the performative of “I do” to that of “shame on you,” a key pivot that will define her emphasis in her subsequent work on the affect of shame as intimately linked to queer performativity and queerness in general.

In Sedgwick’s elaboration and reworking of these arguments in Chapter 1 of the 2003 book *Touching Feeling* (“Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*”), she establishes what arguably became the most influential aspect of her theory of queer performativity. She claims James as “a kind of prototype of, not ‘homosexuality,’ but queerness, or queer performativity,” as a “strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma”; these qualities of queer performativity might be “features of all performativity,” thus linking queer as a concept to the mobility and openendedness signaled by a particular reading of Austin’s notion of the performative.<sup>131</sup> Performativity is saturated with queerness as Sedgwick performatively describes it, and queer and performativity mutually define one another. She urges us not to dwell on “the nonreference of the performative but rather on (what [Paul] de Man calls) its necessarily ‘aberrant’ relation to its own reference: the torsion, the mutual perversion, as one might say, of reference and performativity.”<sup>132</sup> In this sense, the very grammatical behavior of performativity is queer.

With “Queer Performativity” Sedgwick shifts fully into Austin’s realm; unlike Butler, she cites Austin’s examples of performatives directly and attends to the ambiguities and tensions in his original theory. She counterposes his example of the marriage ceremony as a performative (“I now pronounce you husband and wife” literally does what it says, enacting a legal bond) to her own example of a performative (“shame on you”) as the ultimate performative elaboration, and one deeply connected to queer subjects and politics: “there’s no *way* that any amount of affirmative reclamation is going to succeed in detaching the word from its associations with shame and with the terrifying powerlessness of gender-dissonant or otherwise stigmatized childhood.”<sup>133</sup>

Sedgwick’s account is deeply empathetic and itself performative. Referencing Goffman’s concept of “spoiled identity” in his work on stigma, Sedgwick’s argument enacts the “experimental, creative performative force” of the politics of queer, which it also describes and labels.<sup>134</sup> Just as importantly it is mobilized in such a way as to foreground the *relationality* of queer, its exacerbation of the relationality of all feeling and thus of all (sex/gender) identification: “Shame on you,” she notes, works via “the level of the relational grammar of the affect of shame itself,” as described by psychologist Silvan Tomkins: “transformational shame, *is performance*.<sup>135</sup> Through these nuances Sedgwick is able to mobilize

performativity to activate the way in which identity is always already in flux and interactive, based on “one’s relational and interpretive strategies toward both self and others.”<sup>136</sup> This opening of identity to the continually active process of social interaction (itself arguably a queer strategy) through a self-reflexive performative articulation of queer performance moves us away from the some of the potential contradictions of Butler’s model.

Sedgwick’s focus on gay shame was mobilizing momentarily, but also critiqued for its erasure of other forms of shame—including those attached to race. Jack Halberstam thus rightly noted in an influential article “Shame and White Gay Masculinity” (2005):

[G]ay shame has a tendency both in its academic and in its activist incarnations to become a totalizing narrative that balances out the consumer focus of “gay pride” with the faux-radical chic of white gay shame; because of its binary structure, shame/pride then seems to have covered the entirety of gay experience ... [G]ay shame stabilizes the pride/shame binary and makes white gay politics the sum total of queer critique [but] ... shame for women and shame for people of color plays out in different ways and creates different modes of abjection, marginalization.<sup>137</sup>

Halberstam’s point is crucial, and through this sharp analysis they assist in the shifting of queer theory from a putatively neutral and thus “universal” discourse to one always already framed through Euro-American, white, and middle-class interests—even when these are feminist and queer rather than masculinist. Calling for a move away from white gay male identity politics and towards the “radical critiques offered by a younger generation of queer scholars who draw their intellectual inspiration from feminism and ethnic studies rather than white queer studies,” Halberstam concludes: “If queer studies is to survive gay shame, and it will, we all need to move far beyond the limited scope of white gay male concerns and interests.”<sup>138</sup>

In 1993, Sedgwick published *Tendencies*, wherein she elaborates the tensions in queer discourse performatively, effectively showing by doing how it can be several contradictory things at once:

That’s one of the things that “queer” can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, or anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be made*) to signify monolithically.<sup>139</sup>

Notably, rather than theorizing a model for situating queer in philosophical discourse (which is Butler’s job), Sedgwick, as a literary critic, always leaves her poetic explorations of queer in the conditional (“one of the things that ‘queer’ can refer to”); queer here is articulated only as a potential, as an idea of non-monolithic and itself performative signification—specifically in the sense not of

inherent meaning but of signification *as interpreted by others*.<sup>140</sup> And, importantly for my arguments here, Sedgwick keeps this idea of queer as an “open mesh of possibilities” open to any subject. But, she asserts, this openendedness is always in tension with an acknowledgement of how queer sticks to subjects involved in “same-sex sexual object choice” because of the “historical and contemporary force of the prohibitions against *every* same-sex sexual expression, for anyone to disavow those meanings, or to displace them from the term’s definitional center, would be to dematerialize any possibility of queerness itself.”<sup>141</sup> Or, as Sharon Marcus put it in 2005, “[i]f everyone is queer, no one is.”<sup>142</sup> And yet, returning dialectically to the openness of queer, per Sedgwick: “[a]t the same time, a lot of the most exciting recent work around ‘queer’ spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all.”<sup>143</sup>

This brilliant enactment of the tension between an essentialized and a fluid notion of queer is importantly reasserted in *Touching Feeling*:

Everyone knows that there are some lesbians and gay men who could never count as queer and other people who vibrate to the chord of queer without having much same-sex eroticism, or without routing their same-sex eroticism through the identity labels lesbian or gay. Yet many of the performative identity vernaculars that seem most recognizably “flushed” (to use [Henry] James’s word) with shame consciousness and shame creativity do cluster intimately around lesbian and gay worldly spaces.<sup>144</sup>

Sedgwick concludes the chapter in which this argument appears by noting:

Shame interests me politically, then, because it generates and legitimates the place of identity—the question of identity—at the origin of the impulse of the performative, but it does so without giving that identity space the standing of an essence. It constitutes it as to-be-constituted.<sup>145</sup>

This formulation allows Sedgwick to evoke identity (the disavowal of which often gets queer theorists into trouble, as they return to it covertly) but to place it in brackets at the same time as performative identification, as “to-be-constituted.”

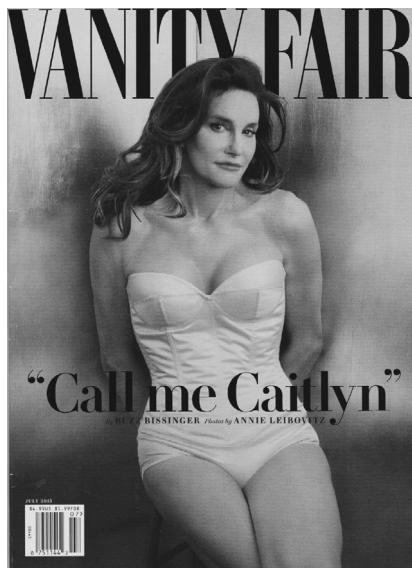
In Sedgwick’s work from the 1990s, we see the apotheosis of the co-articulation of queer and performativity, each constituting the other in a model of discourse formation that is also one of gender/sex identification. Hence Sedgwick’s importance at the crux of this genealogy. The trick is to read her compelling words (as with Butler’s) as themselves contingent and, in Sedgwick’s case self-consciously performative, as doing what they are saying in particular historical, social, academic, and personal contexts, rather than as definitively fixing terms in some trans-historical or trans-locational way. This is not the “truth” of gender/sex, nor of “queer” or of “performativity”—all profoundly Euro-American and late-twentieth-century constructs. This theorizing is one mode of

their articulation as “to-be-constituted” in ways that have dominated our understanding over the past 30 years.

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There’s no question (is there?) at this point in my argument that queer performatives are contextual and contingent, taking place in specific sites through particular relational bonds that condition those who perform and those who engage them. Amplifying this point involves moving towards critical race theory and trans. The latter, trans discourse and experience, has played a powerful role in reshaping ideas about the queer performative over the past decade—pushing the boundaries of both ends of what queer performativity can do, acting both as the most essentializing variant of the public performance of queer and, in other cases (sometimes graphically marked as “trans\*”), as the destabilizing force of gender-fluidity.

US television has recently embraced and explored transgender experience, celebrating and inevitably commodifying by reinforcing the essentializing aspect of some trans discourse. Arguably the most mainstream version is the case of Caitlyn Jenner, the former Bruce Jenner (gold-medal Olympic athlete and former husband of media mogul Chris Kardashian), who transitioned publicly through a televised interview with Diane Sawyer on ABC’s *20/20*, a cover story in *Vanity Fair*, and a reality television show called *I Am Cait*, on the air from 2015–16.<sup>146</sup> In this narrative, Caitlyn was always meant to be Caitlyn in some “essential” way and was simply born with the wrong sex apparatus and hormones, which had to be corrected by a sex change.

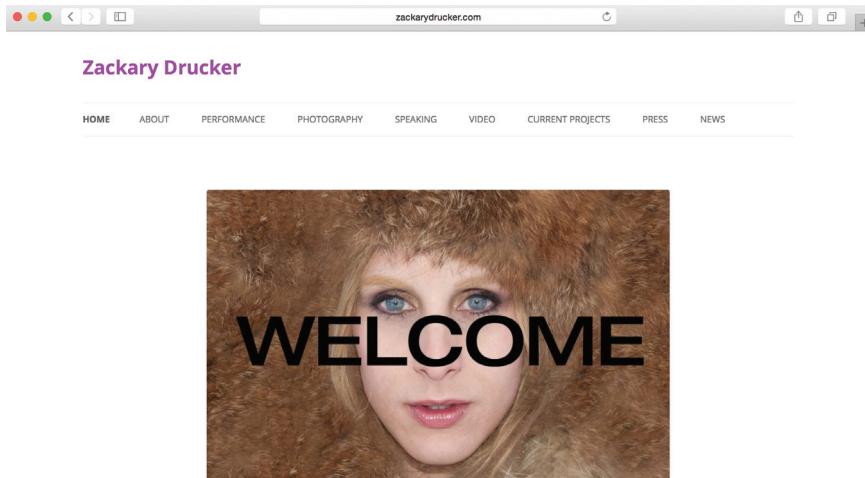


**FIGURE 5.7** Caitlyn Jenner on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, 2015

Claims of “authenticity” (such as she is becoming her “authentic” self) were made frequently in *I Am Cait*. And Jenner’s repeated attempts to reassure herself that transwomen (whom she meets through the show as she attempts to join their community) are “normal” reveal other assumptions about this populist version of trans.<sup>147</sup> A more subtle and conflicted portrayal of trans occurs on the show *Transparent*, started in 2014 and ongoing. But *Transparent* (with the main trans character played through early 2018 by a cis-identified heterosexual man, Jeffrey Tambor) still narrates the main transfemale character, “Maura,” as more or less having yearned her entire adult life to be fully and authentically female.<sup>148</sup>

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However, a potentially radical thread runs through *Transparent* and *I Am Cait*: Zackary Drucker, a transwoman performance artist, supporter of trans legacies, actress, and producer can be seen on both shows and is in fact a producer on *Transparent*; she is also featured in the mini-documentary series on transgender people that sprung off from *Transparent*, *This is Me* (2015).<sup>149</sup> In *Transparent* (season 1, 2014) Drucker plays a minor character at a trans support group; in *I Am Cait* she plays herself, a member of the community of transwomen Jenner seems to be hoping will embrace and legitimate her. Pulling this thread out to focus on the performance and film work of Zackary Drucker, we find a figure, a persona, an agent, as well as an artistic subject who enacts the instability but also agential empowerment of trans even as she generously offers herself to Jenner as



**FIGURE 5.8** Zackary Drucker, website with “WELCOME” home page, 2019

a transwoman friend (hoping to offset Caitlyn's previous tendency, as "Bruce," to hang out with cis-identified male Republicans).<sup>150</sup>

Drucker's "meaning" as trans varies widely in relation to the context of her appearance and agency as a mass media producer. Gorgeously and glamorously "feminine" in embodiment and gestures, and with pale white skin and long blond hair (particularly strong signifiers of desirable femininity in the locus of the Hollywood industry), Drucker speaks with a husky voice that lingers between the stereotypically masculine and feminine and of course her name is one associated with male subjects.

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FIGURE 5.9 Zackary Drucker in trans support group in *Transparent*, 2014; screenshot

As noted, Drucker is also a queer performance artist in her own right. Here, we might begin with the opening page of her website, which includes an image of her lovely face surrounded by fur with "WELCOME" written across her face and the sarcastically friendly exhortation:

Okay—so now you found me. What now? Should we have a conversation? You and me? ... Things are changing, I know, the unknown is scary, but we will navigate this new landscape together ... I aim high, I aim to please, I love you.<sup>151</sup>

The BDSM and generally erotic but also generous overtones of Drucker's invitation (hence the face as a welcome mat) are deeply relational. Across her modes of expression (including installation, videographic/cinematic,

and photographic art works, and performances), Drucker, flirting with and never disavowing the power of essentialisms, enacts a profoundly “welcoming,” erotically charged trans subjectivity that calls us forth to receive, negotiate, and relate to her equivocally gender—identified by empowered self-enactments. She asks us, already, to walk over her virtually rendered face (as welcome mat) and with her to navigate the “scary” territory of gender slippage within which we might find ourselves in twenty-first-century US culture. Engaging Drucker, we must acknowledge that any gender determination is reciprocal—based on inevitably essentializing guesses, assumptions, attributions, and projections, as well as de-essentializing disidentificatory moments. There are no simple answers here.

The power of this “welcome,” and its complex de-essentializing thrust, is evident in Drucker’s “Relationship” project with her then partner Rhys Ernst, a series of photographs documenting their lives together as an “opposite-oriented transgender couple” (Drucker transitioning to transwoman, Ernst to transman).<sup>152</sup>

As well, Drucker’s 2008–9 performance *The Inability to be Looked at and the Horror of Nothing to See* (performed three times in California, once in London, once in New York) expresses a body that can only be identified in dramatic relationship with those of us who apprehend, desire, identify with, and/or manipulate it.<sup>153</sup> Drucker invites visitors into a room in which she lies, almost naked (she wears only underpants, and sometimes a pair of strappy sandals), with a large silver ball in her mouth. Her voiceover addresses visitors:

clear your mind ... look at the body on the table in front of you; while you’re concentrating, try to feel that you yourself are this body ... Now, approach the table ... Thank you ... Gently rest your hands on the body ... Locate a five-inch radius [of skin and] ... remove these hairs one by one through extraction ... Don’t be afraid. The bitch can take it.

Laughing in response to the sardonic self-labelling as “bitch,” visitors commence plucking, uprooting “all of the ugly things that are growing inside of you,” as Drucker’s voiceover intones. Suddenly the mood shifts: “This body is a receptacle for all of your guilt and shame and trauma ... The art you make is derivative ... Your world is collapsing into a scum filled puddle of ... lard ass thighs ... You will never be desirable.”

In this work, Drucker both performs a transgender feminine body (verbally marking it with all the self-judgment that acculturated femininity entails in contemporary US culture) and points to the complexity of the trans experience by asking those who engage with the piece to imagine ourselves as turned inside out (our inner “ugliness” expiated through the act of touching and plucking her body; her body a “receptacle” for our otherwise internalized shame and trauma). One imagines the title to



**FIGURE 5.10** Zackary Drucker, *The Inability to be Looked at and the Horror of Nothing to See*, 2008–9; photograph by Leon Mostovoy

refer to her reluctance to “be looked at,” and the “horror of nothing to see” reflects back on our tendency to project our own fears onto others. By turning against us (or rather against *herself*—since she could well be talking to *herself* in the third person) at the end of the piece, Drucker reminds us that all identifications are reciprocal and mutable. Bodies might appear to be identifiably sexed/gendered (as well as raced, etc.), but their perceived gender has as much to do with how they are engaged and embraced or repulsed by others.

Drucker’s splitting of her voice from her body (where the actual mouth is literally blocked) also complicates our tendency to believe in bodies as clearly “spoken” in one way or another, as coherent and fully identified. The materiality of the body is offset by the immaterialities of vocal timber, which metaphorically point to the immaterialities of desire, identification, and other modes of relational engagement with gendered/sexed bodies (in performance). Drucker performs trans as gender/sex performative.

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### ***Tendencies and entanglements***

While Sedgwick herself did not write about performance or performativity in the visual arts, her suggestive, performative articulations of queer and the

performative have come to be mobilized relationally in some of the most interesting contemporary art and performance criticism, including that of former students such as Muñoz and Jennifer Doyle.<sup>154</sup> Muñoz and Doyle have contributed to shifting critical language around performance and performative art, developing new methods to address how this work is motivated and made. Doyle's *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, for example, extends Sedgwick's attention to *feelings* in relation to queer. One section thus explores Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of relational aesthetics as connected to "affective labor" in performative art works; to this end, Doyle discusses Santiago Sierra's deliberate exploitations of day laborers in the performative 2002 installation *Nine Forms* in relation to a larger "professionalization of affect" in late capitalism.<sup>155</sup> Doyle compares Sierra's work unfavorably to the emotionally intense and elegiac performances of Italian-British artist Franko B, such as his *I Miss You!* performed at the Tate Museum "Turbine Hall" space in London in 2003. In *I Miss You!*—which Doyle and I experienced together—Franko B (his large naked body covered entirely in greasy white body paint) walked slowly up and down a catwalk, his arms bleeding profusely in drips and streams along the white canvas covering the walkway.<sup>156</sup> We could hear the artist's feet sticking in the viscous dripping fresh blood and smell its metallic scent. As Doyle puts it in her book, evoking the intense relationality of the experience: *I Miss You!* "is a stark enactment of a fantasy [played with the audience members] about love and its allure," the feelings elicited "do not come from the artist so much as they circulate around the room."<sup>157</sup>

Doyle channels Sedgwick's interpretive method but in relation to visual arts performance. This model is clearly performative and queer and feminist—it *enacts what it describes and discusses*, and in doing so implicates the writer in its very determinations as well as performatively inspiring new ways of thinking and making. This method is linked to French literary theorist Roland Barthes' influential (and highly relational) notion of the "writery" text—a text that, unlike the closed, fixed readerly text, is a "perpetual present," engaging the interpreter relationally in a "plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages."<sup>158</sup> One could argue both that Sedgwick, Doyle, and Muñoz engage texts in a way that performs them as *writery* and so queer and that their interpretive texts are, in turn, writery (and queer) as they are engaged by subsequent readers (such as myself). And then there is the further recursivity added by the fact that Muñoz and Doyle knew/know my work, and that both of them were/are professional acquaintances or friends of mine: the vicissitudes of queer genealogies are complex.<sup>159</sup>

These filiations have everything to do with queer and performativity. Sedgwick thus notes in *Tendencies* that queer, which "dramatizes locutionary position itself," hinges "on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation," enfolding it in the relational and affective realms of flesh-to-flesh desire, affection, and intimacy.<sup>160</sup> And this intimacy, linked to the formation of queer filiations, was directly enacted by Sedgwick as



**FIGURE 5.11** Franko B, *I Miss You!*, 2003; “Live Culture” event, Turbine Hall, Tate Museum of Modern Art, London; photograph courtesy of the artist

mentor and colleague creating queer community through her work, her seminars (such as, famously, one on “Queer Theory”), and in her own home in Durham, North Carolina, while a professor at Duke (1988–97)—coincidentally in the same neighborhood where I had grown up in the 1960s and 1970s, where Edward E. Jones began developing his theories of interpersonal relations.<sup>161</sup>

Sedgwick claims “queer performativity” as the name of her project and rightly so; she adheres much more closely to Austin’s premises than does Butler, implicating herself and her desires in the formulation of what queer and performativity mean. In *Tendencies* she thus describes her own experience with breast cancer in foregrounding her interest in “the phenomenology of life-threatening illness; the performativity of a life threatened, relatively early on, by illness.”<sup>162</sup> The harrowing poignancy of reading this after her death from cancer in 2009 is

almost too much to bear (even for someone who barely knew her). Sedgwick gets *really* personal—excruciatingly so—in “A Dialogue on Love,” 1998, which asks of us that we hold her self-revelations in a relational structure of trust. Here, she writes as a therapy patient going through cancer treatments, revealing (even reveling in) her profound vulnerabilities. She goes so far as to describe explicitly the disjunction between her queer sexual identifications and her ostensibly heteronormative sex life. She openly admits she has suffered depression through embodied poetic writerly text that is startlingly evocative (her “deepest dread” is “*I may stop knowing/how to like and desire/the world around me*”).<sup>163</sup>

The inevitability of death stokes the ultimate terror that short-circuits our ability to accept our (queer) contingency as relational beings. Sedgwick notes in *Touching Feeling*: “The ‘queer’ potential of performativity is evidently related to the tenuousness of its ontological ground,” referring of course to its processual nature and refusal of fixity but also potentially to the mortality that ends all referentiality.<sup>164</sup> Read through the lacerating scrim of her suffering, this tenuousness has both broad political implications and sharply personal ones—she implicates herself performatively and yet also literally in the insubstantiality of human existence she describes: living itself is precarious, confusing, and potentially depressing yet also wonderful. Contrary to García’s interesting point that this refusal of a fixed ontology for queer simply masks white privilege (which it clearly can do in some cases), I see Sedgwick’s insistence on this tenuousness as powerfully self-interrogating: it functions as a way of implicating herself—and her whiteness, middle-classness, *along with her vulnerability as human and mortal*—in the arguments she makes about what queer’s potentialities might be. This is clear in her tone, her use of language, and in the personal anecdotes through which she argues the relationality, vulnerability/shame, and openendedness of queer.

With my privileging of Sedgwick’s performative account of exploring performativity in relation to queer, I self-consciously note my own investment in privileging Sedgwick (as it were) over Butler in this account, while noting the preeminence of Butler’s *Gender Trouble* as an internationally cited text in subsequent queer and performance theory. I *need* Sedgwick because she affords a vulnerability I can attach to in my own (queer?) neediness. In substantiating my construction of the Sedgwick I need—while also recognizing the “significant political stakes” in my interpretation, which is even overdetermined by Sedgwick’s onetime geographical proximity to the city of my childhood and by my relationships with Muñoz (himself now gone) and Doyle—let me point out Sedgwick’s own critique of Butler’s model in *Touching Feeling*.<sup>165</sup> Here, she returns to Esther Newton’s *Mother Camp* to note how subtle Newton’s analysis of drag is, in that it “is less a single kind of act than a heterogeneous system, an ecological field whose intensive and defining relationality is internal as much as it is directed toward the norms it may challenge.” This enables her to note that Butler’s account of gender performance in *Gender Trouble* reduces this “ecological attention to space” by focusing on the temporality of gender as “stylized

repetition” and “social temporality.” This focus, she generously concludes, is largely what tempts readers of the Butler text to misinterpret the philosopher as “prescribing a simplistic voluntary” idea of gender performance as inherently queer. Sedgwick in contrast vows to attend to the rich dimension of *space* in *Touching Feeling*.<sup>166</sup>

As Sedgwick suggests, attending to context is attending to spatial relations in an “intrinsically interactive” mode of encountering the world.<sup>167</sup> More specifically, this involves looking at the historicity of what we encounter through a quality of materiality Renu Bora calls texxture, which Sedgwick paraphrases as “a kind of texture that is dense with offered information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being.”<sup>168</sup> Through this concept, Sedgwick rereads Austin and concludes: “Clearly for Austin, taxonomic work with particular sentences is not a rigid, Searlean reification of performativity, but rather the filthy workshop of its creation, criss-crossed with skid marks, full of dichotomies that are [in Austin’s words] ‘in need, like so many dichotomies, of elimination.’” This quality of expression is what she calls the “painful, not-yet-differentiated quick from which the performative emerges,” and one that—through the touch of texxture—connects every encounter with affect.<sup>169</sup> This, her work suggests, is queer: both the action of suturing our identifications to performativity and the textured, relational quality of how this process takes place.

As noted before, ultimately, in *Touching Feeling* Sedgwick performs a convincing performative stitching of queer to performativity by implicating both of them in touching and feeling through queer *shame*. This is a formulation that itself emerged in relation to the AIDS crisis and the expansion of the LGBT pride movement.

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Is queer performance queer because it *activates*, putting sexed subjectivity and/or identifications in motion as fluid and relational? Because it generates filiations (as Sedgwick puts it) and communal experiences? Because it is theatrical?

Cultural studies guru Raymond Williams understood the way in which art can activate bodies, creating communal situations. Williams in “Structures of Feeling” (1977) writes that “we have to make [art] ... present in specifically active ‘readings,’” and that this interpretive making produces “not silence: not the absence, the unconscious, which bourgeois culture has mythicized,” but “a kind of feeling and thinking which is social and material.”<sup>170</sup> Mightn’t queer performance be the art form most evocative of “a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material”?

Trained as a child (by his family out in Pomona, California) to be a future, in his words, “white trash” Pentecostalist minister (to speak in tongues, to inhabit and perform his body as channeling that of the divine), Ron Athey knows his ritual and knows the importance of compelling his “flock” by evoking structures of feeling.<sup>171</sup> In ecstatic religious

rituals bodies are compelled through gestural and rhetorical strategies that arguably *queer*—or at least *distort*—oppositional models of subjectivity. Athey performatively queers meaning by creating communal engagements that are emotionally charged across and beyond the bodies in his performances (including those of his immediate audience, and later viewers). Athey's activation of structures of feeling works through theatrical and ritualistic but also community-forging ways.

Some of his works—such as the virtuosic and lavish 2005–6 *Judas Cradle* (with opera singer Julianna Snapper), or the 2018 multi-performer theatrical extravaganza, *Gifts of the Spirit: Prophecy, Discernment, and Automatism*—are staged with the elaborateness of opera or theater.<sup>172</sup> Others are solo (or almost solo) works that encourage direct participation of the spectators or “witnesses.”<sup>173</sup> We thus occupy a range of positions in this witnessing of Athey's work, sometimes all at the same time: from the relatively distanced audience of his proscenium-mounted events, to active participants who are invited in to touch, stroke, or otherwise care for him through these proximal ministrations. This latter involvement has been most assertively solicited in Athey's *Incorporeal Flesh* series. In a key sequence of most versions of *Incorporeal Flesh* (which Athey performed first in 1996, and then through 2013), he lies on a rack with a bat penetrating his anus; helpers encourage audience members to care for him, including rubbing his skin with oil and dispensing eye drops into his eyes, which are violently forced open with hooks through the lids (see Figure 3.6).<sup>174</sup> *Incorporeal Flesh* raises an important issue that must be stated directly: these harrowing and extreme strategies, and in fact Athey's very mode of inhabiting his body through living as well as performance situations, relate in complex ways to his physiological vulnerability to the health ramifications of his HIV+ status (he was diagnosed in 1986), as well as his profound psychological vulnerability to his own losses and his participatory sharing of the sufferings of his ill and dying lovers and friends.

Notably in this regard, Athey began the *Incorporeal Flesh* series with his friend and mentor Lawrence Steger in 1996 in Europe—Steger was dying of complications from AIDS, and Athey has called their tour with his characteristic macabre humor a “sick-boys-do-AIDS-death-trip-cabaret.”<sup>175</sup> For Athey the work was “a collaboration of death in progress (incorruptible).”<sup>176</sup> He has also noted, “AIDS destroyed my world, so, how to go forward?,” and has stated that his performances manifest a triumph over what had seemed to be a death sentence. Athey says that he now considers himself “post-AIDS,” and weirdly traumatized by “the loss of my own death cloud.”<sup>177</sup>

AIDS is performed in its defeat in Athey's work. It cannot have him. But even without the threat of its murderous effects on the daily

horizon, he still needs us, gives himself to us, the participants who can stroke and care for him.

Across his practice, Athey offers his “incorruptible” and yet fully mortal body—beautiful, covered with tattoos, intense in its energies—to be venerated and cared for, to be visually enjoyed in its spectacularity. But he also opens it, making it vulnerable to love, rejection, or even vilification—viz. right-wing Senator Jesse Helms’s calling out of the artist on the floor of the senate in 1994 at the height of what we might now (in the Trump era) call the “first” culture wars.<sup>178</sup> Viciously jamming a pointer towards a blown-up image of Athey posing as a wounded St. Sebastian, Helms wrongly accuses the artist of dripping “AIDS blood” onto the audience in a 1994 Minneapolis performance of *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life*. Part of the “Torture Trilogy,” *Four Scenes* epitomizes the collaborative pieces Athey did with his performance troupe in the 1990s—including and dominated by collaborating queer women such as Julie Tolentino and Cathy Opie. The latter has noted of Athey’s creative language that it should not be thought of as only “a language of male homosexuality, but rather as a queer language that passes through any gender classification ... What other gay male performer ... has embodied a dyke sensibility?”<sup>179</sup>

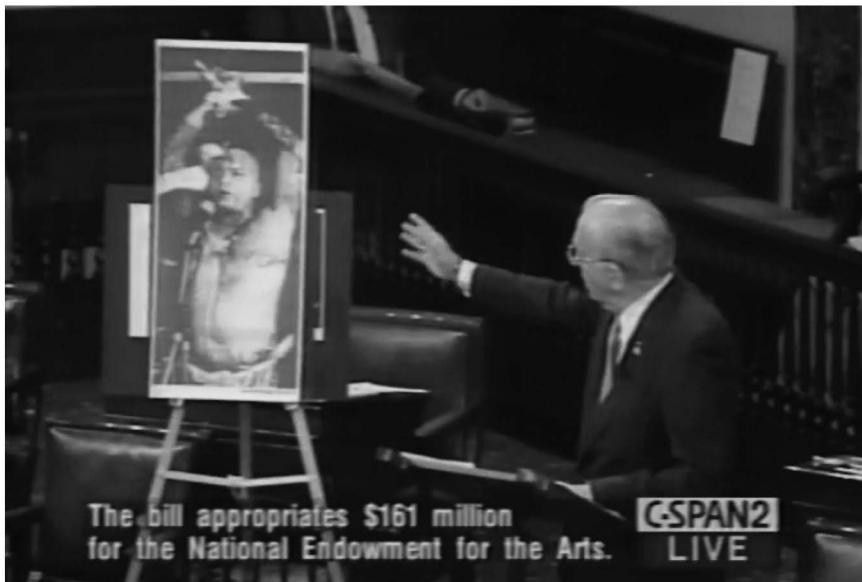


FIGURE 5.12 Jesse Helms pointing to a photograph of Ron Athey performing as St. Sebastian on the floor of the US Senate, 1994; screenshot from C-span video

What the targeting of Athey by the far right just as much as Opie's embrace make clear is that Athey's practice enacts and takes its meaning from a bodily intensity that *presents* queer themes through queer embodiment but also, and more importantly, *queers* circuits of meaning and ultimately of human subjectivity itself even as it helps form queer communities (audience members of *Incorruptible Flesh* and the troupe members of the "Torture Trilogy" join in caretaking). Entrenched in as well as soliciting corporeal actions and reactions, Athey's work directly threatens the sanctity of the male body in patriarchy as well as hackneyed and hallowed concepts in modernism of art as transcending embodiment. Athey's threat to Helms and his right-wing friends—and his gift to those of us open to the penetrating force of his work—is to articulate through his body a hinge between violence and beauty, turning the male body inside out. As a white male subject, he is an artist but far from transcendent genius. His body is immanent, wounded, splayed, insistently in our faces. His whiteness is trashy, dispersed, interrelated with the bodies of his long-standing companions and collaborators-of-color such as Divinity Fudge (Darryl Carlton), Julie Tolentino, Lisa Teasley. He makes a community of his body, offering it for group "salvation."



FIGURE 5.13 Ron Athey, *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life*, 1994, Patrick's Cabaret, Minneapolis, finale with Athey, Julie Tolentino, and Pigpen (aka Stosh Fila), screenshot of video footage at Walker Art Center, 2015, by Amelia Jones

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Even as I stroke his body in *Incorruptible Flesh* and cringe in shared pain at his (harsh) attempt at singing opera in the theatrically staged *Judas Cradle*, listen to his echoing speaking-in-tongues in *Gifts of the Spirit*, I vibrate to the openness of this queer flesh. Rather than repelling me, it keeps drawing me in. Everything about the work allows and encourages us to understand and embrace the erotics of interpretation itself. As such, it invites us to embrace the erotic openness of (sexed/gendered) selfhood.

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Ron Athey's practice might be thought of as *doing* what Sedgwick's work is *saying* (albeit also *doing*), performing the nexus of queer and the performative. Queer community expressively expands across generational networks. Across his practice, Athey offers his "in incorruptible" and yet fully mortal body—beautiful, covered with tattoos, intense in its energies—to be venerated and cared for, to be visually enjoyed in its spectacularity. But he also opens it, making it vulnerable even to worldly politicians such as Jesse Helms (whose voice trembles as if with desire while he spits epithets at the picture of Athey's body he points to). Generously, Athey also makes himself available for *love*, which also indicates the possibility of mutual transformation (if we open ourselves to caring, we can be changed). As Lauren Berlant, one of queer theory's most eloquent and feeling authors, put it, "I often talk about love as one of the few places where people actually admit they want to become different."<sup>180</sup>

I am citing Athey's work not because but in spite of the fact that it could be seen to epitomize queer performance. I am engaging with it here (as I have done in the flesh and in writing many times in the past) because it allows and encourages us to see how we can affiliate, relate to, and allow ourselves to be intimate with, penetrated by, other bodies and texts and performances in ways that do not confirm us but further our awareness of our own contingency, openendedness—and thus develop our self-reflexivity, letting us love, and see where we might want to "become different," as Berlant puts it.<sup>181</sup>

How can we move towards "Other" and "Trans" with this reiteration of white masculinity as queer performance's exemplar? Athey is arguably a cis-identified white gay man. Arguably because one would have to accept the binarism of "cis" as it tends to be applied by members of trans and queer communities—as a label asserting a person's non-trans identity (or putative unproblematic alignment with their "birth" gender or anatomical gender). A more viable definition has been proposed by Paul Preciado: the terms "cis—" and "trans-," "two biopolitical gender statuses, are technically produced. Both of them fall within the province of common methods of visual recognition, performative production, and morphological control."<sup>182</sup> And yet ...

Athey is also, by his own performative admission, "white trash," and lives precariously at the edges of late-capitalist art worlds in North America and

Europe and on the fringes of bourgeois urban life (at this point, in Los Angeles). If we stay within the whiteness of queer, as tended to happen throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s in dominant debates about its meanings and effects, we could (in my opinion) not do much better than Sedgwick's and Athey's performative enactments of what queer could be, in that both of them unfold in their work complex and overtly self-aware versions of queer masculinity. But maybe it's time to move firmly out of this domain of whiteness that threatens to limit queer to the concerns of the privileged and the so-called first world subjects of most 1990s queer theory.

## Notes

- 1 See Lisa Duggan's important description of the modes of queer theory bursting onto the scene around 1990 and their links to feminism, social construction theories of homosexuality, and Foucault's work, in "Making it Perfectly Queer" (1991), *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. Abigail J. Stewart, second edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 215–32.
- 2 Jeffery Escoffier and Allan Bérubé, "Queer/Nation," *Out/Look: National Lesbian and Gay Quarterly*, special issue "Birth of a Queer Nation," n. 11 (Winter 1991), 14–16; they do include AIDS activists and early gay liberationists in the list—so some openly LGBT allies are also considered supplementary to their version of queer. See also Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman's compelling account of the queering of American nationalism Queer Nation in "Queer Nationality," *Boundary 2* 19, n. 1 (Spring 1992), 149–80.
- 3 Esther Kaplan, "A Queer Manifesto" (1990), cited in Berlant and Freeman, "Queer Nationality," 156.
- 4 Berlant and Freeman, "Queer Nationality," 171.
- 5 Keguro Macharia, "Queer Genealogies (Provisional Notes)," *Bully Bloggers*, January 13, 2013, available online at: <https://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2013/01/13/queer-genealogies-provisional-notes/>; accessed March 31, 2020.
- 6 Edward Sagarin writing under the pseudonym Donald Webster Cory, *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* (New York, NY: Greenberg, 1951), 22; as cited in Oliver Harris, "Introduction," to William S. Burroughs, *Queer* (1952/1985), 25th Anniversary Edition (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 2010), xlvi.
- 7 Macharia, "Queer Genealogies"; Howard Chiang and Alvin K. Wong, "Asia is Burning: Queer Asia as Critique," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 58, n. 2 (2017), 121.
- 8 An early example of explicit theorizing around these interrelations is the special issue "Queer Transexuals of Race, Nation, and Gender," ed. Phillip Brian Harper, Anne McClintock, José Esteban Muñoz, and Trish Rosen, *Social Text*, No. 52/53, (Autumn–Winter, 1997).
- 9 Teresa De Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities. An Introduction," *Differences* 3, n. 2 (1991), iv. On this founding moment, see David Halperin, "The Normalization of Queer Theory," *Journal of Homosexuality* 45, n. 2–4 (2003), 339–43. Halperin sees queer theory largely as opportunistic and as problematically replacing the rigor of gay and lesbian studies: "queer theory has been so successful in its dash to academic institutionalization that it has left tread marks all over earlier avatars of postmodern theory [...] As such, queer theory was simply too lucrative to give up," 340–1.
- 10 Sue-Ellen Case, "Tracking the Vampire," *Differences* 3, n. 2 (1991), 3.
- 11 Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2019). I am deeply indebted to Nyong'o for long discussions about this

point. That Delany is implicated in De Lauretis's concept of queer theory is clear both in her 1991 text, which cites his work, and in Delany's recursive citation of De Lauretis's comments on his work from that article in his brilliant exploration of the queer slippages of lesbian and gay identifications and desires in "Aversion/Perversion/Diversion" (from a 1991 talk), published in Delany's *Longer Views: Extended Essays* (Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 119–42. Ultimately, Delany teaches us that queer (albeit he does not use this word, other than when citing De Lauretis) is not (just) about language, which can be enlisted into policing the incommensurability of (gay) sexual desire, and that "Gay Identity" does not exist, any more than does "a single, essential, transcendental sexual difference," 142.

- 12 Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations*, 154, 153.
- 13 Among Sue-Ellen Case's many books on feminism and performance, see her *Feminist and Queer Performance: Critical Strategies* (London: Palgrave, 2009). On the sidelining of bisexuals, see Ruth Goldman, "Who Is That Queer Queer? Exploring Norms around Sexuality, Race, and Class in Queer Theory," *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Anthology*, ed. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York, NY: NYU Press, 1996), 169–82.
- 14 See Case in previous note, and Jill Dolan, *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, and Performance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1994).
- 15 Judith Butler mentions her Jewishness in explaining her tendency towards abstracting the body in *Undoing Gender* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2004), 198–9. In *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick addresses Jewishness in relation to Marcel Proust's gayness (but does not elaborate on her own Jewishness in relation to her queer identification); see 67–90.
- 16 See Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, n. 6 (July 1991), 1241–99.
- 17 Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 4.
- 18 David L. Eng, Jack (formerly Judith) Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, "Introduction: What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?," *Social Text* 23, n. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2005), 12.
- 19 Michael Hames García, "Queer Theory Revisited," *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Hames García, Ernesto Javier Martinez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 28.
- 20 Ibid., 28, 22; García is citing Gayle Rubin from her epically influential anthropological examination of sex/gender identification, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (1984), in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 137–81.
- 21 García, "Queer Theory Revisited," 40.
- 22 María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial," *Hypatia* 22, n. 1 (Winter 2007), 186–209, especially 201–3; García usefully discusses Lugones's arguments in Ibid., 40–1.
- 23 Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 6.
- 24 Lee Wallace, *Sexual Encounters: Pacific Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).
- 25 Diana Fuss, "Inside/Out," *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 6–7.
- 26 Jamilah King, "Meet the Trans Women of Color Who Helped Put Stonewall on the Map" (June 25, 2015), *MIC*, available online at: [www.mic.com/articles/121256/meet-marsha-p-johnson-and-sylvia-rivera-transgender-stonewall-veterans](http://www.mic.com/articles/121256/meet-marsha-p-johnson-and-sylvia-rivera-transgender-stonewall-veterans), accessed March 31, 2020.

- 27 For important arguments historicizing queer and Black socializing and bodily styles as a mode of resistance see Josh Chambers Letson, in particular *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2018), Ashon Crawley, *The Lonely Letters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), and madison moore, *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018). And for a riveting study of the flamboyant performativities of “wayward” Black women in early twentieth-century US cities, see Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York, NY: WW Norton, 2019).
- 28 All citations from the Sisters website, “The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, Inc.,” available online at: [www.thesisters.org/](http://www.thesisters.org/); accessed May 21, 2018.
- 29 This and all following information is from “Sistory,” on the Sisters’ website, [www.thesisters.org/sistory](http://www.thesisters.org/sistory), accessed May 21, 2018. I learned much about the Sisters from Jason B. Crawford, “‘Go Forth and Sin Some More’: A Performance Geography of the San Francisco Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence,” PhD Dissertation for Concordia University, 2011.
- 30 Avram Finkelstein, *After Silence: A History of AIDS through Its Images* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2018), 3.
- 31 Finkelstein was at the forefront of these intersecting components of the New York AIDS activist groups and explains this sequence in the “Preface” of *After Silence*, xii. On queer design by Gran Fury and beyond, see Andy Campbell, *Queer X Design: 50 Years of Signs, Symbols, Banners, Logos, and Graphic Art of LGBTQ* (New York, NY: Black Dog, 2019).
- 32 There are examples of women taking the dancer position in alternative versions I have found on the internet, but it is not clear whether these are sanctioned or spontaneous redos—most likely the latter. For video clips of the sanctioned piece see a version in 2017 at David Zwirner Gallery in New York, see Adam Milner, “Falling in Love with a Felix Gonzalez-Torres Dancer,” *Hyperallergic* (July 7, 2017), available online at: <https://hyperallergic.com/389326/falling-in-love-with-a-felix-gonzalez-torres-go-go-dancer/>; accessed May 21, 2018.
- 33 Club Fuck!, for example, was a queer nightclub party that started in the summer of 1989; it was hosted by Miguel Beristain, Cliff Diller, and James Stone, and took place at Basgo’s Disco in the Silverlake neighborhood of Los Angeles. This read of the audience reactions is due in part to snapshots I have seen of Athey go-go dancing in the clubs, including one by BDSM performer and photographer Sheree Rose; see *Queer Communion: Ron Athey*, ed. Amelia Jones and Andy Campbell (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2020), 362; and for images from Club Fuck! and Sina-Matic, see 358, 361–2, 365.
- 34 See my “Object Lesson: Codpiece,” in *Ibid.*, 311–13. This book is the catalogue for the forthcoming exhibition by the same name, which I am curating with the help of Assistant Curator Hannah Grossman.
- 35 John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharan Thompson (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 105–6. For general statistics on this latter point, see *Black Demographics*, available online at <http://blackdemographics.com/economics/employment/>; accessed August 20, 2018.
- 36 Dennis Altman, *The Homosexualization of America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1982), 32.
- 37 Judith Butler on Foucault, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 95–6; see also Duggan, “Making It Perfectly Queer.”
- 38 See García, “Queer Theory Revisited,” 26, 39.
- 39 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, volume 1: *An Introduction* (1978), tr. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1980), 8, 12.

- 40 Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, 7, 8, 12.
- 41 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 101.
- 42 Ibid., 43. He is citing an 1870 article by Westphal ("Archiv für Neurologie," 1870) as introducing the notion of the homosexual.
- 43 Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 101.
- 44 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1993), see especially "Preface," ix–xii, a brilliant discursus on the problems of agency and materiality in relation to theorizing gender performance.
- 45 Foucault on "all those minor perverts," *History of Sexuality*, 43.
- 46 On this point regarding the defining of art in early modern Europe, see William Pietz, "Fetish," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 306–17; and Claire Farago, ed., *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450–1650* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).
- 47 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3, 21.
- 48 Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1987).
- 49 Cited in Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley, CA: UC Press, 2007), 45; and on later raids see 121–3. As Hurewitz notes, homosexual clubs in LA in the 1920s and early 1930s were fairly open and sites of "an ongoing fascination—half positive, half condemning—with fairies," but increasingly after that the police cracked down on "panze joints" and arrested "queers," viewing "fairies and other homosexually active men as possessing a fixed and dangerous fundamental essence," 123.
- 50 Barry Reay discusses this history of the term queer via these sources in *New York Hustlers: Masculinity and Sex in Modern America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 149–50. Tellier's novel is *Twilight Men* and in it he cites Evelyn Nesbit from L.F. Potter, *Strange Loves: A Study in Sexual Abnormalities* (1934).
- 51 Donald Webster Cory, *The Homosexual in America*; Reay's discussion of Cory's book is very useful, in *New York Hustlers*, 161.
- 52 William S. Burroughs, *Queer* (1952/1985); see Harris's "Introduction," footnote 6, xlvi.
- 53 Harris, "Introduction," xxv.
- 54 On the misogyny and normative masculinism of the Beat male writers and artists, see Barbara Ehrenreich's important "The Beat Rebellion," *Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York, NY: Random House, 1983), 52–67.
- 55 Hurwitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles*, 232–3.
- 56 See Hurwitz, Chapter 6, "Getting Some Identity: Mattachine and the Politics of Sexual Identity Construction," Ibid., 231–67. Interestingly, as Hurwitz notes, the founding of the Mattachine Society was linked to broader protests in LA against police harassment, promoted by Los Angeles radicals in support of Chicano and African American rights (such as "Civil Rights Congress" and the "Citizens' Committee to Outlaw Entrapment"); these organizations were second only to the Chicago "Society for Human Rights," founded in 1924 to protect homosexuals, 231. On the founding of the Daughters of Bilitis, see Marcia M. Gallo, Chapter 1, "Qui Vive," *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York, NY: Seal Press, 2006), 1–20.
- 57 See Altman, *The Homosexualization of America*, 23–4, 26; and D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," 100. The issue of legal support for gay rights and the timing of progress is complex; in some ways, such initiatives have been more advanced in places far from US urban centers, such as Québec, which approved domestic partnerships as early as 1982; see Leigh W. Rutledge, *The Gay Decades* (New York, NY: Penguin Books USA, 1992), 200.

- 58 Ann Cvetkovich studies the lesbian involvement in ACT UP as well as the role of such movements, driven by extreme feelings in relation to the AIDS crisis, in constituting queer community in her book *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
- 59 Jeffrey Escoffier thus notes in an interview, “When I was a young man, I always said *queer* nonpejoratively. I called myself queer. I had never even heard the word *gay* until 1969,” in Gerard Koskovich, “Voices from *Out/Look*: Jeffrey Escoffier,” *Out/Look & The Birth of the Queer*, n.d. (c. 2017) and n.p., available online at: [www.queeroutlook.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/OutLook\\_Interview\\_Escofier.final-copy.pdf](http://www.queeroutlook.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/OutLook_Interview_Escofier.final-copy.pdf); accessed May 1, 2019. Also it is notable that the “T” in LGBT originally signified “transsexual”; the term has more recently shifted to “transgender” or just “trans” or “trans\*” as I will discuss in Chapter 7.
- 60 See the Queer Nation website: <http://queernationny.org/history>, accessed July 20, 2018; and the history sketched in Berlant and Freeman, “Queer Nationalism,” 155; they explore Queer Nation’s articulation of “the national’ with a camp inflection” in relation to the neoliberalism and noxious patriotism of US culture at the time (152). In her 1991 article about her invention of the term queer theory, De Lauretis states: “My ‘queer’ had no relation to the Queer Nation group of whose existence I was ignorant at the time,” in De Lauretis, “Queer Theory,” xvii; the fact that De Lauretis feels the need to note her ignorance of Queer Nation at that time signals the perceived importance of Queer Nation already by 1991.
- 61 Altman, *The Homosexualization*, 152.
- 62 In 1969 for the *Voice* and as late as 1981 for the *Times*; see *Ibid.*, 6.
- 63 Christopher Lone, “Genderfuck and Its Delights,” *Gay Sunshine* (1974), discussed in David Bergman, “Introduction” to *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 7.
- 64 D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” 100–1.
- 65 Bryant, in *The Miami Herald* (March 20, 1977), quoted in Rutledge, *The Gay Decades*, 103.
- 66 There are many excellent sources exploring the histories of queer performance in relation to the AIDS crisis, including the foundational work of David Román, including his book *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1998). See also the more recent Dirk Gindt and Alyson Campbell, ed., *Viral Dramaturgies: HIV and AIDS in Performance in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Palgrave, 2018).
- 67 Stefan Brecht, *Queer Theatre* (New York, NY: Methuen, 1986), 28 (originally published by in German in 1978); Brecht is citing Charles Ludlum on Smith’s importance to the group’s aesthetic.
- 68 *Ibid.*
- 69 See Giulia Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay: Theater, Labor, and Leisure in 1960s New York* (Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 107.
- 70 Several commentators at the conference “Stefan Brecht’s Queer Theatre” held at The Graduate Center, City University of New York (September 30, 2015) pointed out this tendency especially in Brecht’s book to exclude women from the genealogy of queer performance, although the examples surveyed by conference participants—such as Spiderwoman, WOW Theatre, and Split Britches (with Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw in all three)—came into being in the late 1970s, which is after Brecht had written the essays collected in his book. A videotaped version of the conference was available online at: <https://vimeo.com/163744696>; accessed July 18, 2018.
- 71 For social histories of the backdrop to the development of performance art in New York in the 1960s, see Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Dominic Johnson, *The Art of Living: An Oral History of Performance Art* (London: Palgrave, 2015); Craig Pearson, *Radical Theatrics: Put-Ons, Politics, and the Sixties*

- (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2014); and Giulia Palladini, *The Scene of Foreplay*.
- 72 For a debate on the tendency in queer theory to focus on “antinormativity” or the subversion of gender norms, see Robyn Weigman and Elizabeth Wilson, ed., special issue on “Queer Theory without Antinormativity,” *Differences* 26, n. 1 (2015). See also Édouard Glissant’s argument about such claims of subversion in cultural theory, which create an opposition while claiming binary thought is being subverted, *Poetics of Relation* (1990), tr. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 11–12.
- 73 “Theatrical agency” is Butler’s term in “Critically Queer,” *GLQ* 1, n. 1 (1993), 21.
- 74 Phillip Brian Harper, “The Subversive Edge: *Paris Is Burning*, Social Critique, and the Limits of Subjective Agency,” *Diacritics* 24, n. 2/3 (Summer–Autumn 1994), 90–103; see especially 93.
- 75 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 139.
- 76 Sara Ahmed “Interview with Judith Butler” (September 2014), *Sexualities* 19, n. 4 (2016), 2, 5.
- 77 *Life* magazine special issue, “Homosexuality in America” (June 26, 1964), 68–73.
- 78 On the perception of sodomy and persecution of “sodomites” in England as a “French” problem as early as the eighteenth century and during the period of the Napoleonic wars, see Niko Besnier, “Polynesian Gender Liminality Through Time and Space,” *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1994), 293.
- 79 See “Guy Hocquenghem,” *Wikipedia*, available online at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy\\_Hocquenghem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_Hocquenghem); accessed May 1, 2019.
- 80 Bill Marshall, *Guy Hocquenghem: Theorising the Gay Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1996), 12, citing Hocquenghem, *La Dérive: homosexuelle* ([Paris?]: Jean-Pierre Delarge, 1977), 19, 140, 109.
- 81 Carolee Schneemann in “Carolee Schneemann with Jarrett Earnest, In Conversation,” *Brooklyn Rail* (December 6, 2016); available online at: <https://brooklynrail.org/2016/12/art/carolee-schneemann-with-jarrett-earnest>; accessed July 20, 2018.
- 82 David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 25, 29, 33, xi.
- 83 Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana Nelson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 175–94.
- 84 David Getsy, “Queer Intolerance and Its Attachments,” in *Queer*, ed. David Getsy (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 12.
- 85 Ibid., 18. See also my dialogue with Getsy, where I pushed him on some of these points, “Abstract Bodies and Otherwise: A Conversation with Amelia Jones and David Getsy on Gender and Sexuality in the Writing of Art History,” *CAA Reviews* online (February 16, 2018); available online at: [www.caareviews.org/reviews/3426#.Woft6RPwbUp](http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/3426#.Woft6RPwbUp), accessed April 3, 2020.
- 86 Tom Kalin, special issue of *Movement Research/Performance Journal* #3, on “Gender Performance” (1991). Kalin’s short essay has no footnotes but he seems to be citing Butler’s “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 13–31. I am grateful to Kalin for sharing this difficult to find text with me and sharing his thoughts on the visibility of Butler’s theory even by this early 1990s moment.
- 87 Lyle Ashton Harris’s photographic self-imaging practice from the 1990s was crucial to my understanding of queer performativity before I knew the word; see Harris’s *Today I Shall Judge Nothing that Occurs* (New York, NY: Aperture, 2017).
- 88 Judith Butler, Preface to 1999 “anniversary edition” of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), xvii.

- 89 Butler argues: “I would note here not only that racial presumptions invariably underwrite the discourse on gender in ways that need to be made explicit, but that race and gender ought not to be treated as simple analogies. I would therefore suggest that the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race. Many of these debates have centered on the status of ‘construction,’ whether race is constructed in the same way as gender. My view is that no single account of construction will do, and that these categories always work as background for one another, and they often find their most powerful articulation through one another. Thus, the sexualization of racial gender norms calls to be read through multiple lenses at once, and the analysis surely illuminates the limits of gender as an exclusive category of analysis,” in *Ibid.*, xvi. Omise’oke Natasha Tinsley points usefully to the limits of Butler’s claims in this moment of revision in later editions of *Gender Trouble*, using the example to note that “prominent queer theorists continue to work from Rehoboth Beach” (the site of Butler’s self-narrated early cruising) but wash away questions of race, failing to acknowledge the histories of slavery passing across these shores. Tinsley notes more specifically: “But of course there is not just one question to ask of the meeting point between Butler’s theory and race, and those I would pose would be different still. Namely, what happens when queer theories start with explicit formulations of racialized sexuality and sexualized race, rather than add them in after theories like performativity have already been elaborated? How does this change in point of departure change the tidal pattern of queer theory? How might it shift the field’s dominant metaphors, decentering performativity’s stages and unearthing other topoi?” Tinsley, in “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage,” *GLQ* 14, n. 2–3 (2008), 206, 205.
- 90 William Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000), 5.
- 91 Nyong’o, *Afro-Fabulations*, 153.
- 92 *Ibid.*, 154.
- 93 De Lauretis, “Queer Theory,” v. This section on AIDS activism is indebted to my work with Erin Silver, who co-authored with me the introductory chapter, “Queer feminist art history, an imperfect genealogy,” in our co-edited book *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2016), 14–50.
- 94 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 122; she also uses queer in the term “queer-bashing” in note 26, 166.
- 95 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), see for example 49–51.
- 96 Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, n. 4 (December 1988), 519–20. Butler does explicitly introduce Austin’s role in developing the term performative utterance slightly later, in her text “Critically Queer”; here she emphasizes “reiteration” as a key part of how performatives work—an emphasis surely coming from Derrida’s rethinking of Austin’s term and his concept of iteration in “Signature Event Context” (1971), tr. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (1977), reprinted in Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 1–24. Butler’s “Critically Queer” was published as an article in *GLQ* and (in revised form) as Chapter 8 of *Bodies that Matter* (223–42).
- 97 Trask, *Camp Sites*, 166–71. He is citing Goffman, “Gender Display,” in *Gender Advertisements* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1976), 1–9; this article was earlier that year published as “Gender Display,” *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 3 (1976), 69–77. Trask also examines in these passages Butler’s debt to Newton’s *Mother Camp*.
- 98 Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, 9.

- 99 Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," *Gender & Society* 1, n. 2 (June 1987), 125–51.
- 100 Ibid., 126, 129; my emphasis on accomplishment.
- 101 Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 520; my emphasis on accomplishment
- 102 Trask, *Camp Sites*, see 171.
- 103 De Lauretis, "Queer Theory," xi.
- 104 Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" (1997), *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 21–51; David Román, *Acts of Intervention*; José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Alicia Arrizón, *Latina Performance: Traversing the Stage* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), including a chapter entitled "Self-Representation: Race, Ethnicity, and Queer Identity."
- 105 Butler in *Gender Trouble*, 115.
- 106 Ibid., 93.
- 107 Ibid., 137; italics from original.
- 108 Ibid., 145.
- 109 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 2.
- 110 Ibid., 10, 90.
- 111 Ibid., 188, 210.
- 112 Ibid., 220.
- 113 She makes her frustration clear in the "Preface" to *Bodies that Matter*, where she notes her turn to the materiality of the body as a response to anxieties prompted by *Gender Trouble*, with its seeming attention to a disembodied form of discourse; ix–xi.
- 114 Sara Ahmed "Interview with Judith Butler," 486.
- 115 Ibid., 490.
- 116 Ibid., 484.
- 117 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 241.
- 118 Lugones, "Heterosexism and the Colonial," 201, and, Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 6.
- 119 David Halperin, *Saint Foucault* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62; emphases in the original.
- 120 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.
- 121 Edelman to Halberstam in Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith [now Jack] Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, Nguyen Tan Hoang, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities, A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ* 13, n. 2–3 (2007), 194.
- 122 Edelman, *No Future*, 3.
- 123 José Esteban Muñoz, "Thinking Beyond Antirelationality and Antiutopianism in Queer Critique," *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 121 n. 3 (2006), 825.
- 124 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2009), 134–5.
- 125 Ibid., 4.
- 126 Ibid., 32.
- 127 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," *GLQ* 1, n. 1 (1993), 1–15.
- 128 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 3. Notably, she does not directly cite Austin's work in this book, but seems to be accessing the general ideas of speech and silence through Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* of and linguistic theories of performativity through an unpublished paper by Sally McConnell-Ginet,

- “The Sexual (Re)Production of Meaning: A Discourse-Based Theory,” manuscript pages 387–8, as cited in Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler, *A Feminist Dictionary* (Boston, MA: Pandora Press, 1985), 264.
- 129 Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity,” 1–2.
- 130 Ibid., 2.
- 131 Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 61.
- 132 Ibid., 7.
- 133 Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity,” 4.
- 134 Ibid.
- 135 Ibid., 4–5, citing Sylvan Tomkins, *The Negative Affects* (New York, NY: Springer, 1963).
- 136 Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity,” 12–13.
- 137 Jack (formerly Judith) Halberstam, “Shame and White Gay Masculinity,” *Social Text* 23, n. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2005), 223.
- 138 Ibid., 220, 231.
- 139 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.
- 140 Sedgwick offers another definition of queer in “Queer Performativity”: “Persons who self-identify as queer [...] will be those whose subjectivity is lodged in refusals or deflections of (or by) the logic of the heterosexual supplement. [...] The emergence of the first person, of the singular, of the active, and of the indicative are all questions rather than presumptions, for queer performativity,” 4.
- 141 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 8.
- 142 Sharon Marcus, “Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay,” *Signs* 31, n. 1 (Autumn 2005), 196.
- 143 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 8–9.
- 144 Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 63.
- 145 Ibid., 64.
- 146 The Diane Sawyer interview took place April 24, 2015; and see Buzz Bissinger (with photos by Annie Leibovitz) cover story, “Call Me Caitlyn,” *Vanity Fair* (July 2015), 50–69, 105–6. *I Am Cait* debuted on E! channel in July 2015 and the last episode was aired April 24, 2016; it was produced by the same team behind the successful *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*.
- 147 See especially episode 3, *I am Cait*, which aired Sunday August 9, 2015.
- 148 Tambor and his character Maura were removed from the show in February 2018 due to a harassment scandal. See “Amazon Fires Transparent star Jeffrey Tambor after Harrassment Investigation,” *The Verge* (February 15, 2018); available online at: [www.theverge.com/2018/2/15/17017814/amazon-transparent-jeffrey-tambor-sexual-harassment-investigation](http://www.theverge.com/2018/2/15/17017814/amazon-transparent-jeffrey-tambor-sexual-harassment-investigation); accessed May 4, 2019. “Cis” or “cis-gendered” refers to people perceived as identifying with the sex that corresponds with their anatomical gender or socially recognized sex. I discuss the binarizing and potentially essentializing implications of this term below and in Chapter 6.
- 149 *This is Me* was produced by Amazon Prime and Drucker is featured in episode 3. The opening credits of *Transparent* include footage from the historic film about drag queens and ballroom culture, *The Queen*, 1967, a documentary featuring Flawless Sabrina, Zackary Drucker’s mentor.
- 150 As stated by Zackary Drucker to Amelia Jones in conversation, June 29, 2015.
- 151 See Drucker’s website: <http://zackarydrucker.com/>; accessed August 22, 2015.
- 152 The project is documented in Zackary Drucker and Rhys Ernst, *Relationship* (London: Prestel, 2016).
- 153 See Drucker’s website on the project, <http://zackarydrucker.com/performance/the-inability-to-be-looked-at-and-the-horror-of-nothing-to-see/>; accessed March 16, 2016, which includes the video from which I access the piece as I did not experience it live.

- 154 According to Doyle, she and Muñoz worked closely with Sedgwick while PhD students at Duke; although they were in the Literature Program, while Sedgwick was in the English Department, “Eve was heavily involved” in Muñoz’s work. Doyle email to the author, May 4, 2019.
- 155 Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 91. The full title of Sierra’s work is *Nine Forms of 100 x 100 x 600 cm Each Constructed to be Supported Perpendicular to a Wall*, installed (with the day laborers, paid minimum wage for their efforts, holding up giant beams of these dimensions) in Deitch Projects Gallery, New York, 2002. For the artist’s and gallery’s statements on the work, see: [www.deitch.com/deitch-projects/nine-forms-of-100-x-100-x-600-cm-each-constructed-to-be-supported-perpendicular-to-a-wall](http://www.deitch.com/deitch-projects/nine-forms-of-100-x-100-x-600-cm-each-constructed-to-be-supported-perpendicular-to-a-wall); accessed July 19, 2018.
- 156 Franko B performed the work at the same “Live Culture” event, organized by Adrian Heathfield, in which Pope.L performed his “lecture” (see Chapter 2).
- 157 Doyle, *Hold It Against Me*, 76.
- 158 Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay* (1970), tr. Richard Miller (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974), 5.
- 159 Muñoz died suddenly in 2013.
- 160 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 9.
- 161 See the extensive biography of Sedgwick (probably written by her husband Hal Sedgwick, as he is credited with other parts of the website), which describes her home in Durham as a locus of queer community and AIDS activism, and her learning about drag and doing drag performances with one-time housemate Stephen Barber, available online at: <http://evekosofsky.sedgwick.net/biography/biography.html>; accessed May 4, 2019. See also the biographical article by Jane Hu, “Between Us: A Queer Theorist’s Devoted Husband and Enduring Legacy,” *New Yorker* (December 9, 2015); available online at: [www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/between-us-a-queer-theorists-devoted-husband-and-enduring-legacy](http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/between-us-a-queer-theorists-devoted-husband-and-enduring-legacy); accessed July 20, 2018.
- 162 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 11, 13.
- 163 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “A Dialogue on Love,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, n. 2 (Winter 1998), 611–31, this quote 613–14, emphases in the original.
- 164 Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 3.
- 165 With the phrase “the Sedgwick I need,” I am referring to Douglas Crimp’s important article on art historical interpretations of the work of Andy Warhol, which points to the way in which we reciprocally and performatively construct the artist/author we “need” through our interpretations: “Getting the Warhol We Deserve,” *Social Text* 59, vol. 17, n. 2 (Summer 1999), 49–66; Crimp insists we at least acknowledge these political stakes, which I hope I am doing effectively here.
- 166 Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 9.
- 167 Ibid., 13.
- 168 She is drawing on Renu Bora’s “Outing Texture,” *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 94–127.
- 169 *Touching Feeling*, 17, citing Austin from *How to Do Things With Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 149.
- 170 Raymond Williams, “Structures of Feeling,” *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 129–31.
- 171 See Athey, “Ron Athey’s Dissections: Split Personality, or So Many Men,” *Honcho* (January 1998), 65–6, reproduced in *Queer Communion: Ron Athey*, ed. Campbell and Jones, 121.
- 172 *Judas Cradle* was performed several times; I witnessed two of the performances, which I write about with deliberately subjective, emotional attachment in “Holy Body: Erotic Ethics in Ron Athey and Juliana Snapper’s *Judas Cradle*,” *TDR* 50,

- n. 1 (Spring 2006), 159–69. *Gifts of the Spirit* in the form I describe here was performed in December of 2018 in the deconsecrated Church of St. Vibiana in downtown Los Angeles. For a beautiful analysis of this epic work, see Andy Campbell, “Glory Be,” *Artforum* (January 30, 2018), available online at: [www.artforum.com/performance/andy-campbell-on-ron-athey-s-gifts-of-the-spirit-73982](http://www.artforum.com/performance/andy-campbell-on-ron-athey-s-gifts-of-the-spirit-73982); accessed July 19, 2018.
- 173 Jennifer Doyle has noted: “You won’t be hurt at one of these [Athey’s] performances. But you might feel upset, sad, disturbed, or agitated. You are more likely to feel like a witness than a spectator. This is no small thing,” “Blood Work & ‘Art Criminals,’” *Art:21* blog (post dated December 10, 2008), available online at: <http://blog.art21.org/page/10/?s=gugg>; accessed November 13, 2011.
- 174 One of the last versions of the series, called *Incorporeal Flesh: Luminous/Dissociative Sparkle*, was performed in 2013 at Performance Studies International, part of a panel organized by Marin Blazevic and myself, “The Implicit Body in Performance: Rupturing Habit in the Live Act,” Stanford University. Other variants have different subtitles, such as *Incorporeal Flesh: Perpetual Wound* (with Dominic Johnson), c. 2005, where he explores intergenerational communication with his performance partner Johnson, then in his 20s. A fourth part, Part IV: *Incorporeal Flesh: Messianic Remains*, was performed at Human Resources, Los Angeles, 2013. “Dissociative sparkle” itself is a term Athey developed (in the words of Dominic Johnson) to indicate moments of “frailty, joy or transcendence,” seeking to produce modes of living embodiment that, through relationality, move beyond individual subjectivity; Johnson, “Introduction: Towards a Moral and Just Psychopathology,” *Pleading in the Blood: The Art and Performance of Ron Athey*, ed. Dominic Johnson (Bristol: Intellect Press and London: Live Art Development Agency, 2013), 34.
- 175 Athey, cited by Dominic Johnson in *Ibid.*, 33.
- 176 Athey, email to the author, March 2, 2017.
- 177 Athey, email to the author, February 9, 2012.
- 178 See C-Span clip of the Jesse Helms moment from 1994: [www.c-span.org/video/?c4520996/jesse-helms-ron-athey](http://www.c-span.org/video/?c4520996/jesse-helms-ron-athey); accessed August 23, 2018.
- 179 Cathy Opie, cited in Maura Reilly, “The Drive to Describe: An Interview with Catherine Opie,” *Art Journal* 60, n. 2 (Summer 2001), 85.
- 180 Lauren Berlant, in Berlant and Michael Hardt, with Heather Davis and Paige Sarlin, “No One Is Sovereign in Love: A Conversation between Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt,” *Amour* n. 18 (2011), available online at: <http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/no-one-is-sovereign-in-love-a-conversation-between-lauren-berlant-and-michael-hardt/>; accessed July 19, 2018.
- 181 See also Jennifer Nash, “Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, Intersectionality,” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 11, n. 2 (2013), 1–24. Nash cites Berlant but swiftly moves on to articulate a theory of “black-feminism’s love politics” as “both a practice of the self and a nonidentitarian strategy for constructing political communities,” one that transforms love from the personal domain “into a theory of justice,” 1, 2.
- 182 Paul (formerly Beatriz) Preciado, *Testo-Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacophornographic Era* (New York, NY: The Feminist Press, 2013), 127.

# 6

## OTHER

This book was transformed by a five-month stay in New Zealand or in what is called in te reo (the Māori language) Aotearoa. I was there as a Fulbright scholar for the first half of 2018 researching and writing this book—in turn following on my 11 years (2003–14) having lived abroad in Manchester, UK, and Montréal, Canada.<sup>1</sup> Experiencing a state of displacement (and the emotional fallout from life changes ensuing) has been a strong element in my increasing identification with queer as a mobilizing concept and the queer community more specifically. I am laying these structures of identification bare in this chapter. After all, as Sara Ahmed, citing Maurice Merleau-Ponty, has influentially pointed out in her queer phenomenology, disorientation is a queering experience in that it involves “the intellectual experience of disorder, but [also] the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency.”<sup>2</sup>

By necessity (it feels), the end of the book will thus now turn on the gender liminal Pasifika (diasporic Pacific Islanders living in Aotearoa) and Māori cultures and performances I engaged with as I wrote the first draft of this book.<sup>3</sup> I borrow Juana Maria Rodriguez’s language from a different, but related, context: I am not authorized

to speak about others whom I know or don’t know. My experience does not authenticate me. Yet I do speak about others, clear in the knowledge that I am not speaking for them ... Do not believe everything I say ... this text ... is a product of my critical imagination.

She ends as if presaging my experience in Aotearoa: “This is not the text I intended to produce,” when I made plans to write the book in that foreign country; “and it is not the same as the text you are reading.”<sup>4</sup>

With Rodriguez's proviso firmly in mind, the one thing I most wanted to avoid in doing this research of attending myriad performances during Auckland Pride Week and beyond was reproducing the situation described by Eng-Ben Lim in 2005, in which the "global propagation" of Western queer or gay culture is believed (by Westerners) to bring with it a liberation of third world sexual minorities. As Eng explains: "Called 'global queering' by some theorists, this neoliberal model of free-market transmission, by which an emancipatory and often glamorized Western gay culture is transforming the rest of the world, presumes a primarily North American and secondarily European standard."<sup>5</sup> And yet, as I will explore here and in Chapter 7, many of the performance artists I met and whose work I saw themselves adopt the words queer and/or trans to self-identify and to describe their practices. The tension between respecting these self-assigned identifications and questioning "primarily North American" notions of queer will I hope remain visible for the remainder of this increasingly tentatively traced genealogy.

The point is that I cannot *not* include these works, as they conditioned and reshaped how I was able to articulate the critical genealogy that is this book. I will cite research here—such as the work of New Zealand scholar Lee Wallace and Māori performance artist and scholar Tāwhanaga Nopera—which precisely shifts the locus of colonial power to assert that "Western" understandings of sexuality (including the invention of the notion of the "homosexual" around 1800, and the concept of gender as performative) in fact have always already been conditioned by the European colonial encounters with non-Europeans. To this end, the gift of Aotearoa was in the furthering of my disorientation, beyond the disruptions of my earlier diasporic experiences.

### **"Global queering," a decolonial view**

Aotearoa New Zealand was colonized by the British relatively recently, in the nineteenth century, and many of the Pākehā (te reo for white Europeans or "settlers") say they feel like visitors still, that they have been given only the provisional right to stay by the majority of Māori, who never ceded sovereignty to the British crown. As well, my generous Māori and Pasifika artist and scholar contacts have assured me, Māori and Pasifika people by and large do not feel "othered" in the context of Aotearoa (Pasifika scholar Caroline Vercoe asserted: "many Māori and Pacific feel very much in the 'centre' here").<sup>6</sup> This dynamic seems especially true of the Māori or first people. Māori artist Michael Parekōwhai asserted compellingly to me that Aotearoa is a bicultural not multicultural place: the Māori view themselves as the founding human culture (they themselves were explorers who arrived here on giant waka or canoes around 1250 from Polynesian forays across the Pacific Ocean), with everyone else having come later—subsequent waves of Pasifika peoples (most often from Sāmoa), Pākehā from the early nineteenth century onward, and more recently other immigrants from other parts of the world such as South and East Asia.<sup>7</sup> Notably,

while married to one, I myself am not Pākehā, and when in Aotearoa I am definitely situated (and feel myself) outside Māori and Pākehā (not to mention Pasifika) cultures.

This is the point to note the symbolism, which reads interestingly in relation to the mobilization of queer: in a perfect example of how identification is always relational, the word “Māori” was self-applied when the colonists arrived—it simply means “normal people.” While not discounting the state violence and white supremacy that resulted in the Māori losing their land and, for a period (until the recuperations of the Māori rights movement in the 1970s and 1980s), their language, the Māori to some degree kept the ideological upper hand throughout the colonial period, designating the colonizers automatically as outsiders through this naming process. The colonizers, in Judith Butler’s queer theory terms, were from this moment *abjected*, forced to justify themselves as “non-normal,” and not belonging. In contrast, I was in Aotearoa as a white middle-class American intellectual (-sponsored by the US government, no less!), engaging a complex cultural space/place with very marked decolonial agitations in the air. I was both spoken by the Māori as “non-normal,” and as potentially an intellectual and cultural colonizer.

Sparked by this unique dynamic, and the strength and visibility of Māori culture, as well as a consciousness of the increasingly widely discussed oppressions they have faced through colonization, I found myself delving into customs that were extremely foreign to me. I am, as noted, married to a Pākehā from Māngere, South Auckland (then and now a predominantly Māori and Pasifika, working-class part of Auckland), but before arriving I knew little of the lived cultures here other than through my partner and from brief previous visits. Whereas before I had only passing impressions, now I know enough to know how little I know and understand, reinforcing the importance of Rodriguez’s arguments above (“I do speak about others, clear in the knowledge that I am not speaking for them … Do not believe everything I say”). After seeing many performances and engaging with many generous people, I can see shadows of outlines of a vast network of concepts, beliefs, modes of embodiment that I will never fully grasp.

My disorientation catapulted me backward to other situations in my life in which I felt “queer,” in the Sedgwickian sense noted in the previous chapter —of feeling marginal, strange, or out of place, embarrassed or ashamed to be where I find myself, representative of white middle-class Americanness (an increasingly shameful positionality in the Trump era, unfortunately). This queerness, born of a sense of not belonging, sits uneasily with this white, middle-class, and by appearances, for some, “cis” and “straight” gender-sex formations I also seem to embody. (Personally, I am not comfortable with being labeled “cis” as it creates a new binary. Plus I’m not sure how much I have ever aligned with my birth sex/gender of femaleness, as “cis” implies that I would, nor is my partner conventionally masculine. Still, if a trans person feels it important to label me such for their own purposes, I accept

that assignation within that limited context. But I do not use the term outside of the genealogical context in this book.) As one of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's thoughtful definitions reads: "*Queer* ... might usefully be thought of as referring in the first place to this group or an overlapping group of infants and children, those whose sense of identity is for some reason tuned most durably to the note of shame."<sup>8</sup> Along with Ahmed's productive idea, we can see forms of discomfort or disorientation as defining factors aligning one with queer communities and politics.

Shame also usefully reaches into the intersectional identifications that make queer even more complex. Claire Denis recently described being raised the child of progressive white, French diplomats in various parts of Africa, "It was very embarrassing," to be the only white child in her school, "Not because I was white, but because I was not black."<sup>9</sup> In my case, this shame was attached to my middle-class whiteness in relation to the history of enforced desegregation of the public schools in 1970s North Carolina: being a white girl bussed across town to public schools that were 90% African American, I was identified quite openly (if understandably) by some of my schoolmates, in the era of Black Power and the inspiring television melodrama *Roots*, as a symbol of white domination.<sup>10</sup> Of course, none of this kind of feeling of displacement is unique to *me* (it seems, rather, to define human life in late capitalist globalization; as well, in our current culture of complaint enacted via social media, we are made well aware of just how much of an "outsider" seemingly every American felt when in high school). And feeling disoriented as a middle-class white American with an academic job in Commonwealth countries is not remotely commensurate with being overtly displaced or marginalized as most of my African American classmates were in 1970s North Carolina, or no doubt with the experience radically queer trans person of color living in New Zealand or the US: feeling as if one does not fully belong in a social context cannot be equated in any way with being brutalized, taunted, murdered, marginalized, and/or racially profiled.

As Sedgwick is careful to note, while queer can be thought of as "an open mesh of possibilities," not explicitly defined by one's sexual object choice or gender, we must be careful not to let it mean just anything: because of "historical and contemporary force of the prohibitions against *every* same-sex sexual expression, for anyone to disavow those meanings, or to displace them from the term's definitional center, would be to dematerialize any possibility of queerness itself."<sup>11</sup> I am thus wary of adopting queer to signify my sense of displacement unless it is given to me by others. But my sense of disorientation is nonetheless crucial for me to put forth as a motivating factor for writing this book, and indeed as amplified in my various sites of diasporic self-placement—including that of what for me was an unexpectedly complex and different environment in New Zealand (or, to reverse the codes, a moment experiencing myself as an exotic American in Aotearoa).

This set-up is all a way to say that I want to take this chapter as a moment to ponder one way of thinking the nexus of queer and performance as part of a matrix of deep affiliations and disidentifications that we all experience, in particular to examine sex/gender identifications in terms of colonial/decolonial, racial/ethnic, national/local, and class identifications. I explore here how gender/sex articulates in relation to locational or cultural displacement bred of diasporic displacement—even if that movement is not forced but chosen. This is an important distinction for someone like myself for whom moving abroad was a choice and opportunity: no one questioned my right, as a white American, to live in the UK, Canada, or New Zealand (other than immigration officials, but the hurdles they threw in front of me over and over again, while terrifying at the time, I see in retrospect were fairly routine). In each case I had a job or a fellowship justifying my being there; as well, I “matched” to a greater or lesser degree the origin cultures of the dominant group in each place I arrived (I do have ancestors from England, as well as from elsewhere in Northern Europe)—it is hardly diasporic in the typical sense for a white American to move for a few years to the UK. Strictly speaking, all whites in North America are here through diaspora at any rate. Still, diaspora is as much a frame of mind, a means of relating to one’s family and community, as anything else.<sup>12</sup> And cultural displacement is a wrenching feeling, even when one is not being harassed or overtly maligned.

Language also determines one’s sense of belonging (as the English colonizers well knew, leading them to use their claim on state power in order to force indigenous people such as the Māori to learn the colonizers’ language and drop their own). Aside from politicized language issues in Montréal, with my eighth-grade French vocabulary, I spoke the dominant language in the UK and New Zealand. And yet in the latter country I clearly did not speak the language culturally speaking (whether Māori or even Pākehā, which is always already a language conditioned by proximity with Polynesian cultures, whether this is admitted or not<sup>13</sup>). From that particular experience of not belonging, I offer this chapter both as what I now believe to be a crucial foregrounding of “other” forms of otherness (locational, generational, racial/ethnic, class-based, etc.) to understanding anything about the performance or performativity of sex/gender, and as a thought piece on my own “otherness”—a radical gesture of exposing my shame and sense of “unbelonging” which, I hope, serves to disorient my attempt at genealogizing and so is aligned with the queer aspirations of this project.

## **Myths of Aotearoa New Zealand: indigeneity and performance (studies)**

It is difficult as a visitor from a country currently in disarray (the USA) not to romanticize New Zealand as a functioning democracy, albeit one so small that there is little room (materially or discursively) for violent dissent. It is especially challenging to avoid idealizing the indigenous—Māori—culture in its complexity, power, sophistication, and nuanced ways of functioning. Just before my

arrival, the country had even elected a government headed by a young woman—Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern—who had a baby (out of wedlock!) immediately after assuming office. However, far from aligning easily with the usual American tendency to attach to fantasized versions of New Zealand as a combination of exotic island paradise, its beauties elaborated in the *Lord of the Rings* movies (which were shot there), and the “civilized” British attitudes and cultural modes still evident to outsiders, I have witnessed some of the complexity of and conflict within Aotearoa New Zealand identifications. These range from the celebrated visibility of Māori culture as a vital living and even in some senses dominant culture, long interwoven with the cultures of other “visitors,” from the subsequent waves of Polynesians to the descendants of the original British colonizers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mostly English and Scots, to other more recent immigrants from all over the world. As anthropologist Anne Salmond has argued in her 2018 book about the colonization of Aotearoa, *Tears of Rangi*, the country might be studied as a model of “cosmodiversity (in the sense of multiple ‘worlds’),” where adaptation between and among people creates a new culture that moves beyond “the old Cartesian dualisms [of Europe] and their fragmented dreams [which] are no longer working.”<sup>14</sup>

Salmond’s study was inspirational to my own attempt to render in this book the useful aspects of what I learned from my time in Aotearoa—*Tears of Rangi* understands and narrates the deep connections between Māori and European cultures as relational, particularly in the sense of the nuances of the national culture, which is clearly co-determined through this relationship. Salmond offers a deep history of the interrelation of Māori and Pākehā peoples and cultures since the first known moments of European contact (Abel Tasman sited Aotearoa in 1642 and James Cook landed and began to explore it in 1769–70). From this moment on, Pākehā culture was and continues to be shaped in relation to Māori culture, which has always remained visible and a powerful (even now dominant) part of the country’s identity, even as, sometimes coercively, Māori experience has come to be informed by white European and Pasifika cultures. The Pasifika populations grew exponentially in the mid to late twentieth century, leading to a broad cultural shift, especially in Auckland, where the majority reside (Auckland has the highest number of Pacific Islanders of any city in the world, including any of the island cities themselves). Pasifika artists have become more visible in Aotearoa as well, as art historian Caroline Vercoe points out, and have increasingly visibly contributed to the broader culture as well as informing indigenous (Māori) culture.<sup>15</sup>

While the white-dominant power structure sought actively to suppress Māori language and culture in the early through mid-twentieth century (the so-called “Liberal era” and following, wherein whites expanded their claim on the land and pressured the Māori not to speak or promote te reo), the Māori rights movements surging in the 1970s and following reversed this trend and now Māori te reo is considered an official language along with English and Māori arts and culture are foregrounded (some would say commodified) by the

government as key signifiers of New Zealand as a nation.<sup>16</sup> As Pākehā scholar Margaret Werry has explored, this promotion of Māori culture (where the colonized Māori are called upon by the state to act as “performing fetishes of authenticity … to secure racial *doxa*”) is hardly disinterested; in her 2011 book *The Tourist State: Performing Leisure, Liberalism, and Race in New Zealand*, Werry examines the fairly recent “rebranding strategy” of the New Zealand tourism industry, which has drawn on the *Lord of the Rings* franchise and the idea of “biculturalism”—putting Māori culture in parallel with the Pākehā, while erasing Māori tales about the land in favor of the mythical British version supplied by the movies (based on J.R.R. Tolkien’s backward-looking medievalist version of England).<sup>17</sup>

Werry rightly connects the embrace of Māori culture in touristic representations as an extension of colonial “symbolic violence,” where cultural appropriation occurs and “settlers declare their newfound national identity by presenting those they have displaced as their symbolic surrogates, nostalgically borrowing the authenticity of indigenous belonging … buttressing the racial distinctions between primitivism and modernity that undergird the whole edifice of nation.” She also describes tourism through this example as a *performance* of the state—a means by which the subjects of Aotearoa New Zealand, are led to rehearse a specific version of national identity that shores up the dominant state apparatus. She notes that the state does not pre-exist tourism as its “real,” but “the doing of tourism helps to give the state its ‘effect,’” directly aligning these ideological mechanisms with the illocutionary force of the performative. In this sense, she argues, race is not incidental to the formation of a nation-state such as New Zealand; rather the country exemplifies the way in which race, “in a very basic sense, makes liberal states go” in the late capitalist domain of liberalism.<sup>18</sup>

Werry’s observations seem both empirically accurate to me, from what I observed there, as well as theoretically apposite in terms of how I am examining the nexus of queer and performativity in this book—as a discourse, New Zealand state-sponsored tourism *does* what it *says* with racialized, gendered/sexed, and classed implications. Her book also substantiates my point that models of performativity have permeated all levels of humanities and social science scholarship such that (as she puts it) “performance methodologies” can be usefully applied “to the study of the stated, addressing the bodied, emplaced, artful, and imagined dimensions of statehood.”<sup>19</sup> Her work allows me to see that I was perfectly placed to live and embody these performative effects as a US-government sponsored tourist/visitor studying performativity with an acute awareness of how the New Zealand government markets the country’s national identity.

These dynamics are not new—Werry also extensively studies modes of literal (gendered, raced) performance as these have long been exploited by the Pākehā to promote Aotearoa New Zealand, as a tourist designation. In her article “The Greatest Show on Earth,” Werry thus adds historical texture both to the history of American aggression in the Pacific—motored by

a new form of colonialism driven less by the “right of occupation” than by the right of “intervention”—and to the sexualized performance of Māori bodies for colonizing appetites.<sup>20</sup> She notes the moment in the early twentieth century, under Teddy Roosevelt’s administration, when the US Navy scoured the Pacific hungrily looking for resources and making its belligerent presence known—annexing Hawai’i as a state in 1906 and occupying the Philippines. Roosevelt staged a global tour of the US Navy at that time in order to flex the country’s might through the visible presence of US ships, jockeying with New Zealand for power in places like Sāmoa. Landing in New Zealand, the naval men were hosted in Rotorua, which Werry calls the “ethnic tourism capital” of the country. Here, Māori tribes performed a full ceremonial welcome, perverted through the aims of the government:

The paradoxical effect was that Māori bodies were invoked to legitimate the revitalization of Anglo-Saxonism, and Māori culture—borrowed and burlesqued—forwarded as an entertainment commodity into the spectacular economy of the American Pacific as the symbolic medium—a trademark, essentially—through which the New Zealand state could distinguish itself in a competitive market for migrants, tourists, trade, and investment.<sup>21</sup>

Māori performance has thus long been directly deployed as propaganda to promote the interests of Pākehā New Zealand. As Werry notes, a special supplement of the *New Zealand Herald* of August 10, 1908 shows the Prime Minister and members of the cabinet welcoming the US fleet by performing a *haka*, now an internationally known challenge ritual associated with the New Zealand rugby team (the “All Blacks”) but initially coming from Māori ceremonial rituals.<sup>22</sup> The conflation of certain sanitized versions of Māori culture with New Zealand national identity was sealed early on, as Werry notes, with the shipping of a group of Māori from the Ngāti Whakaue tribe of the Rotorua area to the Hippodrome in New York, where they spent a season performing the *haka*, chants (*karanga*), a female-only dance with twirling balls or “*poi*,” and speeches of welcome or *whaikōrero*. The visitors were also driven around New York City in a display accompanied by a brass band. At one point they even went (as themselves tourists) to see a group of Filipino performers on Coney Island, and Werry notes that the newspapers tended to compare them favorably to these other “colored people.”<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, author Henry James (one gathers that everyone in [white] high society attended!) remarked on the Hippodrome spectacle that it was tainted by a “germ of perversion and corruption,” returning this supposedly superior group of “primitives” to the debased language of feminized spectacle.<sup>24</sup> (This is of course the very Henry James upon whom Sedgwick called in 1993 to authorize her invention of the queer performative—resistant as he is here to the theatrical!<sup>25</sup>) Yet on a visit to New York City the New Zealand Prime Minister of the day, Joseph Ward, corroborated the claims that the Māori had made to the local press that they were the only

race the British had never conquered.<sup>26</sup> And, meanwhile, a journalist in 1909 noted the participation of some of the Māori women from the show in suffrage meetings in New York—observing that the stereotype of the New Zealand tourist

may now be replaced by the figure of a Maori suffragette skirting Central Park New York in a taxicab, taking notes for a magazine article on the ruins of a bygone social system by which the American Woman once suffered in bondage as “wife,” “mother” or married slave.<sup>27</sup>

The Māori woman is thus returned to a binary, but one now in relation to the subordinated white woman in American society. Racism, sexism, and colonialism are as always intertwined, and infinitely complex in how they operate.

Werry’s work, like that of Salmond, explicitly outlines the relational aspect of identity formation vis-à-vis this culture and land—and this specifically in relation to performance and performative encounters. The idea of Aotearoa as bicultural is not, however, solely an invention of the tourism industry (viz., my citation of Parekōwhai above). The relation between the Māori and white Western culture is a key question in understanding non-normative gender as it plays out in Aotearoa. Michelle Elleray (who identifies as a Māori lesbian and takatāpui—person with an intimate relationship with someone of the same sex) notes,

Maori are necessarily bicultural—both tangata whenau (indigenous peoples) and Westerners, saddled with the task of translating themselves between those two designations—so the Maori lesbian may be both part of a community of Maori women attracted to one another, and part of the Western gay and lesbian movements.<sup>28</sup>

This situation parallels the ways in which European thought and society have been shaped by colonial encounters. Just as the Māori recognize the impact of the colonizing culture (often through their own incorporation and refashioning of it), so the colonizer—including her/his beliefs about and experience of gender/sex formations—is forever transformed from first contact. In V.K. Preston’s poetic analysis, “mingled translations signal catastrophes across ways of knowing, disclosing the very near proximities of a resilient daily life in the midst of precarity, pandemic and upheavals.”<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, Māori and Pākehā peoples and cultures are clearly not symmetrically positioned in the country’s culture or legal hierarchies; the communities are not equally vested and powerful. First of all, the Māori still suffer many extreme disadvantages due to the lingering effects of colonization and the effectiveness of white supremacy in defining mostly invisible standards that privilege Pākehā New Zealanders over indigenous and Pasifika ones—including the usual phenomena of racial profiling and other forms of overt discrimination, which permeate New Zealand society.<sup>30</sup> Māori and Pasifika people represent vastly

disproportionate numbers of those in prison and in poverty in the country. Second of all, as noted, even in spite of these disadvantages, the Māori people have retained a visibility and grasp on political power that is rare if not unique among peoples colonized by Europeans, with the current Deputy Prime Minister, Winston Peters, a Māori with nationalist views who has held visible positions of state power for many years.<sup>31</sup>

Visitors to the country who seek understanding must acknowledge our position in relation to what scholars Jacqueline Shea-Murphy (white American) and Jack Gray (Māori) call “reciprocal beneficial interactions” among white American and Māori, Pasifika, and Pākehā cultures, with the proviso that white American visitors are offering a lot less than we are taking.<sup>32</sup> My experience of Māori and Pasifika people is that they are profoundly generous and expect or at least hope for generosity in return; asking for information without giving something of oneself is not a good strategy for getting to know the indigenous and Pasifika people of Aotearoa, who hope for mutuality in the exchange. It is telling, in this light, that Marcel Mauss’s important anthropological study of exchange culture—*The Gift* (first published in French in 1950)—is based in part on examples of the exchange in Māori culture of “taonga” (objects or ideas of special significance, which possess “hau,” energy or spirit).<sup>33</sup> Any exchange between people involves a transfer (“to make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself”<sup>34</sup>)—in an ultimate exemplification of the power of relationality to challenge the radical dualisms of European thought, where opposition and domination structure relations between self and other.<sup>35</sup>

Mauss is clearly struck, and thrilled by, the implications of this way of thinking, even as Salmond’s *Tears of Rangi* more recently concretizes the ways in which these exchanges actually took place, shifting ideas, energies, and objects from culture to culture in that process of establishing cosmodiversity she believes Aotearoa exemplifies. The request for information is considered an invitation to share in return—I participated many times in conversations with Māori and Pasifika people which made the generosity of this dynamic clear. (Given that the University of Auckland libraries have no subscription to *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, for example, I could make a small contribution by offering some exposure to US dominant queer theory that was otherwise lacking.)

It is important to stress, however, that the exchange does require an explicitly performative and vulnerable and respectful opening to the other culture—one in which the Westerner is truly open to being called out, rendered vulnerable and “wrong” in this different context, and in which indigenous forms of knowledge are honored. Sharon Teves explores precisely this dynamic in a recent article on indigenous critiques of performance studies, noting an example of a Pākehā scholar at the annual Performance Studies International conference in 2015 applying poststructuralist ideas of performativity to the haka, arguing that the haka is essentially hybrid, performative, “artificial” and thus open to commodification. Teves describes this scholar being challenged by a frustrated and angry Māori scholar in the audience. A native Hawaiian herself, Teves acknowledges the usefulness of North American performance theory, but also asserts the

importance of honoring “forms of indigenous knowledge” and of not assuming, as this Pākehā scholar clearly did, Māori performers to be naively acceding to a coercive state form of commodification. This argument, Teves argues, fails to honor the way in which “[d]oing the haka or the hula as a tourist performance or some other kind of ‘impure’ nontraditional occasion does not lessen who we are as a people because it reminds us that we have survived.” In sum, she notes: “If the Pakeha scholar had couched her arguments in the idea that Maori people perform haka as a form of indigenous agency in the face of a colonialist settler culture, the reaction to her presentation might have been different.”<sup>36</sup> The Pākehā scholar, trained in Western ways, forgot how to put aside frameworks to be “applied” to indigenous performance, instead acting as if those frameworks were neutral. Such a forgetting (such an imposition) fails to honor the exchange culture that shapes and enlivens Māori and other Pasifika societies, linking people across a neverending network of exchanges, of attending, listening, opening to others.

Through this custom of exchange in the Māori and Pasifika communities I learned a lot about how structurally imperialist my research instincts are regardless of my “good” intentions. Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith has pointed this out in her influential 2012 study *Decolonizing Methodologies*, where she argues that

research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions ... Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized.<sup>37</sup>

To this end, it is not surprising that Māori and Pasifika artists are wary of these modes of regulation and, in my experience, tend to be polite but withholding to (white) visiting scholars from the epicenters of Euro-American cultural power. When I asked local curators and scholars about this, they confirmed that there would be suspicion among some Māori and Pasifika artists about my motives, but also a desire for reciprocity which I did not have the luxury fully to establish in my brief time there. While I found this situation frustrating, this circumspection is something I profoundly respect. The limits this refusal places on what I can say or know about the work—the dangers and temptations of reducing the works I saw to easy formulations to fit the logic of this book—are reminders of my potential role as appropriator (*colonizer?*) of Māori and Pasifika performance cultures in Aotearoa.

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Who, what, where, when: Waiwhetu Marae building complex, on the outskirts of Wellington, February 1, 2018. A marae is a Māori meeting and community house for a particular tribe (*iwi*), sub-tribe (*hapū*), or extended family (*whānau*)—in this case the Te Atiawa *iwi*. I am there with 40 or so American Fulbright scholars and their families as well as my Pākehā partner. After a day of lectures on Aotearoa Pākehā and Māori customs in Wellington, we have taken a bus to the suburbs where the marae sits. We are

greeted as is the custom at the front of the main meeting house by a small group of community members performing a Pōwhiri (traditional Māori welcome ceremony). The introductions continue inside, with a discussion of the whakapapa of the people of the marae: loosely speaking, the whakapapa is layering—it's the genealogy or networks of past people and achievements linking one to one's "earth," connecting one to members of the extended family (whānau and hapū) and tribe (iwi), present and past, and thus with the local as well as broader ancestry as Māori.<sup>38</sup> Per Carol Brown and Moana Nepia, "*Whakapapa* ... is a genealogical paradigm of thought ... *Whakapapa* position people and ideas through tracing and also making connections."<sup>39</sup>

I try to understand this concept but cannot fully grasp it. As an American with what my partner tells me are naïve views about the Commonwealth, I find it hard to accept the 1950s photograph of Queen Elizabeth hanging ceremonially among the pictures of the illustrious ancestors of the tribe. Her appearance is linked to the Māori relationship to "the crown," with whom they have held an agreement (based on the Treaty of Waitangi) since 1840. In the broad sense, Elizabeth II is linked to the Māori via the treaty and so she is considered whakapapa.



FIGURE 6.1 Pictures of "whakapapa" of Te Atiawa iwi (tribe), including Queen Elizabeth II, Waiwhetu Marae, Lower Hutt (Wellington area), 2018; photograph by Amelia Jones.

After dinner, we are led through a mind-blowing workshop by Kura Moeahu, an important figure at the marae and a senior advisor to the New Zealand parliament. Moeahu leads us, with gentleness and humor, to *perform* the losses the Māori suffered from settler greed and violence, and the betrayals of the British government. First he breaks us into two groups. Mine goes into the dining hall, where we are led through a series of Aotearoa children's chants developed to teach Māori numbers ("Tahi, Rua, Toru, Whā! Rima, Ono, Whitu!"). We are then told by our teacher (a Māori elder woman from the marae) that when we return to the meeting room we are to sit in a line across from another line of our colleagues (who have been preparing their role in the other room). We are to sing "A Hunting We Will Go" and then when Moeahu says "go" we are to run across to the person on the other side and rip off half of the piece of paper laid in front of him or her. This task seemed innocuous enough ...

We enter the open space of the marae, take our places. As we start singing "A Hunting We Will Go," our Fulbright colleagues and family members on the other side start singing "All You Need is Love." They sit passively as we are commanded to "go." Over and over again we "go" across the floor and tear off half of the paper, realizing right away that there is a drawing on the other side. Moeahu has us keep going until we have all of the paper (but now in bits). He then explains: our colleagues had been told to make a drawing of their sense of home or place. We were taking their homeland away from them. We could feel this from the second or third run, as we saw images of houses and families and landscapes on the papers as we ruthlessly tore them apart.

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Moeahu is obviously well used to leading Pākehā in the parliament through such exercises to get them *inside* what it feels like to be of the Māori people, still fighting to get their land back. Powerfully, at the end of the exercise, he made sure to absolve all of us of the sins of the white settlers (the whakapapa of the Pākehā among us—including my partner), making it clear that the Māori have enough power to forgive—but will never forget. No point in carrying the burden into the future as a wound, he noted. Just remember the lesson and the history of the often-broken Treaty of Waitangi (signed in 1840 between a number of key Māori tribes and the British crown, the treaty still remains in force and has become a guide for current negotiations over reparations and land transfers).

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Living in Aotearoa, I was forced to inhabit *my* otherness. Nothing could have been more painful but more useful for writing this genealogy.

## Queer's pact with whiteness

Such experiences help one see the limitations of theories generated from one place and propelled into other cultures—in the best of cases, when this is working as a relational exchange, it can provide tools to question one’s sense of emplacement, one’s identifications, even one’s concepts of intimacy and family. Whakapapa, as the example of the photograph of Elizabeth II indicates, is a complex concept signifying a non-European concept of connectedness, a relation to the land or groundedness, and genealogy. As the website of Waiwhetu Marae proclaims, expanding on the importance of whakapapa:

The people of Waiwhetu, and those whānau [extended family] who live elsewhere, know who they are, where they are from and where they’re going. Inspired by their elders, they are ambitious for the health and education of their tamariki and have developed services and infrastructure to ensure the success of future generations.<sup>40</sup>

It might be tempting to label the force of whakapapa as queering Western modes of identification (expanding beyond literal patrilineage), but that would be an egregious act of cultural appropriation, since the term has nothing directly to do with concepts of gender and sexuality in the Euro-American sense (nor with our ideas about performativity). What it does do is slice through European modernist models of identity as inexorably linked to a kind of teleological genetics and as ultimately binary (master/slave, self/other).

This mismatch between queer theory and “other” cultures beyond those in which queer has been developed links back to Frantz Fanon’s work, which developed Hegel’s model of the master/slave in relation to colonization, demonstrating that gender and sexuality are profoundly shaped by the mechanisms of colonialism, and thus that they are inexorably raced. (And Hegel’s model itself was, not incidentally, written just after the Haitian revolution—and so was already deeply intertwined with colonialism and its regimes of violence and subjection.<sup>41</sup>) Keguro Macharia addresses Fanon, forcing him back into queer theory (from which he had largely been banished, due to his homophobia), and concludes:

The thing-making project of New World subject production … refuses the too-celebratory discussions of undifferentiated gender and un-gendering in Queer studies. The much-heralded “blur” and “undecidability” understood as conditions of freedom must contend with its longer genealogy in a thing-making project.<sup>42</sup>

This assertion brilliantly sums up the tension between claims of queer as fluid and performative, as process (in mainstream—white-dominant—queer theory) and the understanding of gender/sex identification as queered by the racialized

body (part of a “thing-making project”), which exposes the limits of white-dominant concepts of gender and sexuality that do not take into consideration the radical shifts in subjectification sparked by colonialism.

Macharia’s reading of Fanon (a kind of queering that is resistant to white-dominant queer theory) encourages a focus on the problem of queer as it is always already overdetermined by cultural, racial, ethnic, class, national, and other identifications. Confronted with an entirely new way of imagining my own placement in social space as well as local and general histories of colonialism—the whakapapa—I started questioning my own, and broader American, concepts of self as untainted by colonialism. For the remainder of this chapter, then, I want through a performative analysis of my own whakapapa to crack open the sealed container of selfhood, which such lies enable for white Americans (whether “liberal” or overtly racist). The shattering (hastened along by the radical destruction of liberal values by the Trump administration) has not been without pain and discomfort and I hope to hold these performatively in view. I would even assert that queer can *only* (or should *only*?) be theorized through such acknowledgments of our implication in the structures we examine. In order to follow that idea through, I begin with Black and Latinx feminist theory, which foregrounded exactly such structures of interrelation in the theorization of queer.

Black cultural studies scholar Manthia Diawara argued in 1992 that performativity could be mobilized by scholars in his field to produce a “new black public sphere.” Implicitly acknowledging the extent to which queer was already aligning with performativity, he also astutely noted the importance of queer politics in keeping this performative Black cultural studies scholarship from the worst excesses of earlier forms of Black nationalism (but also, by extension, to white-dominant forms of the same): “Emphasis on hybridity, cross-over, and the critique of homophobia yields some tools with which to check the regressive consequences of any nationalism.”<sup>43</sup> As is so often the case, white-identified scholars have often not seen the always already imbricated nature of gender and sex identifications with class, race, ethnic and other forms of identification. The Black scholar (in this case a Malian living in New York), conversely, has no choice *but* to experience his perceived race/ethnicity in relation to his sex/gender in white-dominant society. Diawara thus theorizes as he has no doubt *lived* what Jasbir Puar later theorizes as the “concatenated” nature of these positionalities and identifications.<sup>44</sup>

The first important critiques of the whiteness of gender theory in fact came out of feminism itself, before theories of queer performativity were articulated in the 1990s. Many key feminist scholars and theorists from fields as diverse as law, sociology, and anthropology were busy interrogating the universalizing assumptions of mainstream feminism from the very beginning of the second-wave feminist movement (most notably, the tendency to essentialize women’s experience and thus to effectively cite white middle-class Euro-American women’s experience as universalizable to all women). Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Gloria

Anzaldúa, bell hooks, and many others persistently and courageously developed a feminism that is inherently race-critical, often explicitly queer (especially Lorde and Anzaldúa), and pointedly addresses the experiences of Black women, Chicanas, and other women of color in the US.<sup>45</sup> In a 1977 manifesto, the Black feminist Combahee River Collective famously and concisely offered an early theory of the interrelatedness of all forms of positionality and identification; here they note the necessity for Black feminism to offer an

*integrated* analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.<sup>46</sup>

Pulling together this range of ideas, Black feminist American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the hugely influential theory of intersectionality around 1990, arguing for a consideration of the interrelation of forms of oppression (particularly race-, gender-, and class-related) affecting Black and other women and troubles a simplistic belief in the universalizable, shared experiences of all women.<sup>47</sup> Crenshaw's ideas, ultimately mainstreamed by new generations of American feminists born in the 1990s, were formed at the culmination of debates about identity politics and around the question of multiculturalism in the US, which became a code word for North American cultural institutions' often commodifying attempts to deal with racial and ethnic difference.<sup>48</sup> Around the same time, the advent of third-wave or transnational feminism, trans studies, critical race theory, postcolonial and decolonial theory, as well as masculinity studies and whiteness studies (these all often connected to cultural studies, ethnic studies, anthropology, or early forms of performance studies), have also offered models for complicating the tendency in North American feminist and queer theory to posit categories of gendered/sexed identity as knowable, as binaristic at their foundations, and as implicitly white.

Since the late 1980s visual, cultural, and performance studies scholars working from a feminist agenda have theorized the racialized nature of gender/sex identifications—even going so far as to assert that people of color and/or trans people have a particularly sharp relationship to unraveling or thwarting gender and sex norms. Donna Haraway's hugely influential 1986 “Cyborg Manifesto” thus asserts that “‘women of color’ might be understood as a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity” who challenges phallogocentric Western patriarchy.<sup>49</sup> Eve Sedgwick, in turn, argued in *Tendencies*:

a lot of the most exciting recent work around “queer” spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses ...

Intellectuals and artists whose sexual self-definition includes “queer”—I think of an Isaac Julien, a Gloria Anzaldúa, a Richard Fung—are using the leverage of “queer” to do a kind of justice to the fractal intricacies of language, skin, migration, state. Thereby the gravity (I mean the *gravitas*, the meaning, but also the *center* of gravity) of the term “queer” itself deepens and shifts.<sup>50</sup>

While these polemics have been influential in reminding all theorists of gender to acknowledge race as a constituent factor in how we experience ourselves in terms of sex/gender, this tendency among white feminists to adopt “of color” women and/or artists as transformative in putting gender/sex identifications in motion begets its own set of problems.

Black feminist queer theorist Cathy Cohen mounted a convincing anti-racist critique of queer theory pivoting around this problem of privileging “fluid” gender/sex identifications in her often-cited 1997 article “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” She sums up the paradox of claims for queer’s radicality by noting that queer theory’s idealizing of the *non-binary* is based on the staging of this non-binary paradoxically in *opposition* to “category-based identity politics of traditional lesbian and gay activism.”<sup>51</sup> Cohen astutely notes the way in which “heteronormativity interacts with institutional racism, patriarchy, and class exploitation to define us in numerous ways as marginal and oppressed subjects,” and extends this rightly to queers and queer theory: “varying relations to power exist not only among heterosexuals but also among those who label themselves queer.”<sup>52</sup>

Cohen goes on to assert that claims of fluidity in sexual behavior are available primarily to those in positions of class privilege (in turn attached in the US and other European-based cultures firmly to white privilege and thus inextricably aligned with identifications of race/ethnicity).<sup>53</sup> Cohen also argues that the claims show a lack of attention to the different ways in which people from non-privileged backgrounds even within the US might be motivated to stick with binary gender norms:

Queer theorizing that calls for the elimination of fixed categories of sexual identity seems to ignore the ways in which some traditional social identities and communal ties can, in fact, be important to one’s survival. Further, a queer politics that demonizes all heterosexuals discounts the relationships—especially those based on shared experiences of marginalization—that exist between gays and straights, particularly in communities of color.<sup>54</sup>

Ultimately Cohen calls compellingly for queer theorists to “advance strategically oriented political identities arising from a more nuanced understanding of power.”<sup>55</sup>

Gloria Anzaldúa is a key theorist in activating this more nuanced understanding from a queer feminist and Chicana point of view, and she puts the concept of fluidity (linked to performativity) in a different context. As she noted in 1991, even at the beginning of queer's hegemony, queer theory was being produced largely by white middle-class lesbians and gay men and the theory "make[s] abstractions of us colored queers," limiting "the ways we think about being queer." Queer is deployed, she argues,

as a false unifying umbrella which all "queers" of all races, ethnicities and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences.

Finally, evoking an organic metaphor that activates the notion of identity as process (or as performative), she notes: "Identity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river—a process."<sup>56</sup>

Anzaldúa and Cohen, however, are still working in a US context and so grappling with the oppressive normalizing function of queer theory more or less from within its cultural milieu. In complicating this US-centrism of queer theory, it is extremely helpful to read about, and experience first hand, artists and intellectuals from other cultural contexts contesting the hegemony of queer performativity (or queer theory in general). It is important in this light to *other* queer in its relationship to performativity as a US-based discourse by putting a pressure on this nexus of terms—"queer" to "performance" to "performative"—which were generated specifically within the English language. It is important to disorient the naturalness of the words used to identify, self-identify, and discuss non-conforming, non-binary genderings by stressing the anglophone nature of these words used to discuss sex and gender in dominant modes of theory, including performance studies.

To this end, in my academic travels, I have been fortunate to engage queer feminist theorists of color from Mexico, Ecuador, New Zealand, and Australia, who have broadened the discourse further for me. In 2015, for example, I gave a paper in Mexico City, on "Performance and the Queer and Feminist Body in Contemporary Art," with María Amelia Viteri responding and Susana Vargas Cervantes moderating.<sup>57</sup> I learned a great deal from listening to these two sharp Hispanophone Latinx women, and Viteri's insistence, as an Ecuadorian queer feminist anthropologist currently working in New York, on rethinking not only the *words* used but the very frameworks through which they are mobilized. What white-dominated urban queer theorists would call "queer," she noted, most Latinx communities would articulate through other terms such as "loca," "trans," or even estereosexual—performative gender/sex expressions and experiences that co-articulate with the complex meanings and values assigned to what are currently termed "Latinx" people in the Americas.

As Viteri has argued in her 2014 book *Desbordes: Translating Racial, Ethnic, Sexual, and Gender Identities across the Americas*, the meaning, valence, and experience of terms such as “queer” and “Latinx” shift from place to place, even from community to community and person to person across the Americas; they do not apply equally to any two individuals.<sup>58</sup> The very idea of the queer Latino/a or Latinx—who might think of themselves as a *loca*—Viteri argues, puts identification in process as translation, moving across “languages” both literal and figurative. As such, all of these terms are profoundly performative in that they mean only and always within embodied and locational contexts.<sup>59</sup> Viteri’s points apply to the complex range of terms relating to gender and sex identification in the Pacific region. Most notably in the Aotearoa context, I have had many discussions about the terms fa’afafine (Sāmoan), and takatāpui (Māori), which refer in complex ways to people born as anatomically male who manifest as feminine or female through dress and/or behavior and tasks (fa’afafine) or people in intimate relationships with someone of the same sex (takatāpui).<sup>60</sup>

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Yuki Kihara (Sāmoan/Pasifika), *Fa’afafine: In a Manner of a Woman* (2004–5): a series of images linked to the figure of the fa’afafine—in Sāmoa, a word meaning “in the manner of a woman.” In one triptych in the series Kihara is shown as a bare-breasted odalisque on a European-style chaise longue in three different sex/gender variants: the top image shows her with a grass skirt, the middle image with crotch chastely absent of visible genitalia, the bottom image with penis laid nonchalantly against a leg. She is self-possessed, her wavy black hair sensually cascading over her chest. She takes a pose known for its key role in fetishizing women (often of color) for the European white male gaze and switches it up, asserting her right to sex/gender self-determination, while also shockingly disorienting the viewer, who will not see what he expects or desires particularly as his eyes pan across to the third image in the series.<sup>61</sup> Deliberately “perverting” the expected bodily attributes of the stereotyped Pacific Islander “dusky maiden,” the half-naked exotic available for colonial male delectation, Kihara perverts orientalism’s fetishizing projection of the female body as object of European desire, her objectification a symbol of European political power in the colonies.<sup>62</sup>

It is tempting, as an American, to call this work queer. However, Kihara has noted,

[t]here is a movement amongst the Fa’afafine within Samoa and the wider Samoan Diaspora to the USA, Australia and New Zealand that has become independent of the Western queer movement because most of the time the Western queer movement is driven by, catered for, and to benefit white gay men.<sup>63</sup>



**FIGURE 6.2** Yuki Kihara, *Fa'afafine: In a Manner of a Woman*, 2005; triptych; courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries, Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand

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*O Le Taunu'u Mai O Te Taenga Mai O (The Arrival of Salome)*: Yuki Kihara's 2018 exhibition at the MTG ("museum theatre gallery") Hawke's Bay, in Napier: in each of a series of large black and white lenticular prints made while on residency at the MTG, Kihara stands in a black Victorian mourning dress, her back to the viewer, in the center of a landscape in Aotearoa (the images flicker to the eye across the lenticular cuts, never fully visible and forcing the viewer to perform her act of looking over and over again). Each locale, as indicated in the title of the photograph, resonates with the history of Māori and Sāmoan settlement in Aotearoa—such as *Takitimu Landing Site, Waimārama*—and Salome (Kihara herself) plays the observer, reminding us that history will never be forgotten, that all currently living in New Zealand are connected to all of those who arrived before. (Takitimu is the giant waka or canoe that, legend has it, carried the people who would become the Māori people from Sāmoa, the country Kihara came from and to which she has now returned after living in New Zealand for many years, to the shores of Aotearoa.) As Kihara notes,



FIGURE 6.3 Yuki Kihara as "Salome" in *Takitimu Landing Site, Waimārama*, 2017; lenticular print, edition of 5, 58 1/2 x 41 inches; photograph courtesy of Yuki Kihara and Milford Galleries Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand

the landing site at Waimārama speaks to the indigeneity of the Ngāti Kahungunu [people, those comprising the original Māori iwi or tribe] ... and their continued struggle for sovereignty as tangata whenau [indigenous people to the land]. Salome is ... looking out to the vast ocean that connects Aotearoa to a complex web of genealogies and histories that are yet to be uncovered.<sup>64</sup>

Acting as Salome (a figure that connects Biblical histories as well as the symbolists' and Oscar Wilde's projective fascinations at the turn of the nineteenth/twentieth century to Kihara's Sāmoan/New Zealand body and culture), Kihara crosses codes by personifying this seductress while wearing a Victorian mourning dress—such as was de rigueur across the Commonwealth after the death of Queen Victoria's consort, Albert, in 1861. Kihara performatively mimes the queen just as the colonized and colonizers mimicked Victoria's mourning, but the artist also embodies a figure captured in a colonialist photograph by Napier-based Thomas Andrew from 1886 entitled *Samoan Halfcaste*, and showing an elegant, supposedly "half" Sāmoan woman sitting contemplatively in a mourning dress.<sup>65</sup>

For Kihara, the oppressive, flesh-covering dress subverts the European fantasy of the desired "dusky maiden," as well as alluding to "the syncretism between Fa'a Sāmoa (Sāmoan way) and Christianity."<sup>66</sup> This is particularly clear in the image in the series where Kihara stands in front of a site of Christian worship, entitled *EFKS Church, Maraenui*. A colonizing force, the Christian (in Sāmoa, Catholic) church also became a site of support and community as well as of oppression. As well, Salome, in her movements, her watching, exemplifies for Kihara the cross-Polynesian concepts of tā (time) and vā (space), "intersect[ing] past and present; Pacific and European cultures; colonised and coloniser; dance and lens-based media."<sup>67</sup>

Kihara calls herself fa'afafine and uses female gender pronouns; she stated to me that she does not identify with queer or trans.<sup>68</sup> When I ask her about why there seem to be many visible m-to-f or fa'afafine people in Sāmoa and the Sāmoan diaspora but few f-to-m (at least who are visible) she agreed but noted that the latter do exist and that there is a term applied to such people: fa'atama ("in the manner of a man"). Sources on gender liminal people in the Pacific Island cultures tend to argue that there simply are more m-to-f gender liminal people in *all* countries and cultures. I wonder if this is accurate or only what is visible or conceivable through Western patriarchal models of gender/sexuality, with our heightened anxieties around the debasement of the feminine ...



## Locating queer performance, from an “other’s” point of view

Identity is fluid like a river ... or an ocean. Pacific Islanders view the Pacific Ocean not, as members of European-based cultures have done, as an impediment to their desire to acquire land and dominate other peoples, but as a vast extension of homeland.<sup>69</sup> In Aotearoa, after the arrival of the initial Māori people from across the seas, waves of Pacific peoples (and then whites and other Asians, as well as Middle Eastern and South Asian people) have continued to the present day. The initial encounters between Europeans and indigenous people in the Pacific most often took place on or near boats.

The most interesting studies of Pacific cultures and sexuality, many of them anthropological, have pointed out that pre-colonial societies of the area apparently all included some version of cross-gendering or what from a Western point of view looks like gender fluidity—most commonly taking the path of what Euro-Americans would call a male-to-female transwoman or transgender person. But these culturally specific terms developed out of the complex Euro-American trajectories of queer culture I have examined here, and, depending on the person and their locale among the islands or in Aotearoa, these cultures may or may not be known to them or feel like a “fit” to their experience and situation. Some—like Kihara—resist on political grounds as well as for personal reasons at some moments, and claim queer or trans at others.

Anthropologists and historians of gender (mostly white Euro-American academics or those trained in Western institutions) have, of course, spilled much ink over these gender non-conforming people. But even this seemingly open term signifies in our parlance a person not conforming to *our* (western) binary concepts of gender binaries and roles: encompassing opposition, it is itself based on a binary. In 1994 Niko Besnier, wrote one of the most often-cited texts on what he calls “gender liminal” people of Polynesia—a term that is helpful in that it avoids applying Euro-American binaries of conforming/non-conforming, queer (versus straight), or even “trans” versus “cis” (albeit the words gender liminal are still English).<sup>70</sup> As Besnier describes, every Polynesian culture has a version of gender liminality, but the relationship of gender liminal people to roles and sexual object choice is different from place to place across the Pacific—the best known are the Tahitian and contemporary Hawaiian *māhū*, the Sāmoan *fa’afafine*, and the Tongan *fakaleitī* (root from English “lady”).<sup>71</sup>

As I discuss more extensively in Chapter 7, I arrived in Auckland to write this book felicitously during Pride Week in February of 2018; without having any idea what was going on I suddenly found myself immersed in performances by Māori and Pasifika gender liminal people, most notably the Pasifika performance collectives Fine Fatale and FAFSWAG, both of which do work that (from an outsider North American point of view) seems radically queer as well as fiercely decolonial, but that also in various ways resists such Westernizing categorization. The very name of FAFSWAG comes from a merging of the term *fa’afafine* with “swag,” which, drawing from voguing culture, in member Tanu

Gago's words, implies "[y]our demeanor, your attitude, your cool."<sup>72</sup> The name also, of course, suggests the word "fag."

Because of the difficulties of a US-based scholar applying the word queer blithely to characterize this complex work, which is precisely the kind of gesture I am attempting to expose and denaturalize, for discussions of this work when I am referring to the values of queer performance theory I am tempted to use the term (queer), since some members of the groups do explicitly use the word "queer" in self designating (they are all well aware of queer discourse), but others do not and this seems a good way to point to their radical engagement with gender and sexuality. The press on these shows, particularly those of FAFSWAG, tends to mention the term fa'afafine, as the groups are dominated by Pasifika people from Sāmoa (although there are performers of Māori and Tongan and other Pacific Island backgrounds in FAFSWAG<sup>73</sup>). The dance troupe Fine Fatale also includes complexly sexed/gendered bodies identified in some of the press as fa'afafine.

I began meeting people from FAFSWAG and other performers who came from Pasifika and Māori communities. I quickly learned that, increasingly since the 1970s (the period in which an explosive Māori civil rights movement began to reclaim the language and culture and started reasserting claims to the land), in the Māori community the term takatāpui, meaning (in the classic dictionary of Māori/English, as noted earlier) "close companion of the same sex," has been revived for those identifying as gender liminal.<sup>74</sup> As with fa'afafine, takatāpui, as it is used today, is necessarily informed by Euro-American discourses around queer, which cannot—particularly in urban areas such as Auckland, where club and drag culture has a fairly long and rich contemporary history—be stripped away from contemporary Māori and Pasifika lives and culture in their ever-changing vital living forms. This term, concept, and subject-position allows many in this community to celebrate what Jessica Hutchings and Clive Aspin (who identify as takatāpui) call "sexual diversity within historical Māori society," as well as to assert the history of a utopian, pre-Christian Māori tolerance for such subjectivities. In their introduction to *Sexuality and the Stories of Indigenous Peoples*, an anthology of texts by takatāpui authors, Hutchings and Aspin thus assert: "stories such as these give support to the claim that Māori society was tolerant and accepting of diversity and difference, especially that which was based on sexuality and sexual expression."<sup>75</sup>

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In January of 2018, Dr. Tāwhanga Mary-Legs Nopera, a gender liminal performance artist and PhD—with an ambivalent relationship to queer—who lives in Rotorua, Aotearoa, produced a performance, which they posted on their blog, entitled *Wrapping Up*.<sup>76</sup> Here, dressed in boots, diaphanous white tutu, white jacket, and black shirt, with dangling earrings and headphones, they lay down large sheets of paper or fabric with images on a plaza, then slowly place small objects (stones, shells, trinkets, jewelry—all precious items from their personal collection) in patterns.<sup>77</sup> Many passersby linger and look. Some inadvertently step on the objects, and Nopera is

happy, they tell me later, to mask the sound of crunching with their head-phone-piped music. Nopera softly sings to themselves. Slowly they retrieve the objects, broken or not, which have marked out space on the plaza, gently shifting the trajectories of those who walk by.



FIGURE 6.4 Tāwhanga Mary-Legs Nopera, *Wrapping Up*, January 2018; performance at Waikato University; photograph by Ngawai Smith, courtesy of the artist

As they explained (patiently) to me, Nopera mobilizes their body in public space as a way of enacting Kaupapa Māori theory, a decolonizing body of thought based on Māori principles and developed by Māori thinkers such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith. The theory is aimed at “challenging the ‘ordinary’ or notion of normal that has been constructed by the dominant culture, and [at seeking] … to identify and uphold Māori views, solutions and ways of knowing.”<sup>78</sup> Marking and inhabiting public space differently, Nopera’s performance enfolds the private (their favorite objects, their music, to which they listen and sing softly) into the public (the plaza at Waikato University).

Immersed in Kaupapa Māori, Nopera is activating public space as vā, filling it with meaning and slowing people down. This particular valence of vā is intertwined with takatāpui modes of being as well as with an activation of tā, a Pacific version of recursive and full temporality, through performance and the deceleration of time through formal intervention. Tā-vā work together to express the belief systems across the Moana (Pacific Ocean peoples) in relation to history, both the time and place of it, which are oceanic. As artist Kalisolaite ‘Uhila points out of the tā-vā concept, from a Pasifika-Tongan point of view it aligns beautifully with performance art because of the latter’s necessary engagement of time and space through the body. ‘Uhila explores in his work and in his 2016 MA thesis the tā-related concept of “wasting time,” such that “time becomes timeless,” and the vā-oriented idea of “activating space,” wherein vā “is about relationships.” In this way the coupled tā-vā relate to the embodiment of such durational projects of live art as Nopera’s *Wrapping Up*, which gently reconfigures public space through the imposition of private objects and gestures.<sup>79</sup>

There is a resonance from a US point of view of Nopera’s activation of tā to Elizabeth Freeman’s concept of a queer temporality wherein the performer thwarts chromonormativity through a “counter-genealogical practice of archiving culture’s throwaway objects, including the outmoded masculinities and femininities from which usable pasts may be extracted.” Freeman notes that the “name for this practice, as well as for the set of feelings that informs it, is *temporal drag*.<sup>80</sup> However, while temporal drag puts a wrench in the works of teleological, competitive, fast-paced Western modes of being, doing, and thinking (where the body is erased as the mind races always forward), inserting the wrench of temporal drag to slow down this propulsive, goal-oriented way of moving through the world, tā-vā does something different, more recursive and explicitly embodied—something Pacific and oceanic rather than Euro-American, reminding us that all experiences of time are experiences of space: “Tā (time) and vā (space) are arranged in plural, cultural, collectivistic, holistic, intertwining, and circular ways in the Moana—as opposed to their arrangement in singular, technoteleological, individualistic, atomistic, analytic, and linear modes in the

West.”<sup>81</sup> Tā-vā actualizes what neither Judith Butler (who focuses, like Freeman, mostly on time) and Eve Sedgwick (who, as we have seen, dwells in/on space), in their theories of queer performativity, are able to do.

Does Nopera mobilize tā-vā knowingly against the grain of this explicitly Western queer theory? Nopera, like Kihara and many other Māori and Pasifika artists I met, actualizes the “cosmodiversity,” the relational merging of Pacific and European selves, sexualities, genders, modes of embodiment and being, that Salmond explores in her anthropological project. (This arguable queering of cosmodiversity in the Pacific has a parallel in the Atlantic, per Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, who has addressed this oceanic queering of space and time via histories of slavery in the article “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic”: “The brown-skinned, fluid-bodied experiences now called *blackness* and *queerness* surfaced in intercontinental, maritime contacts hundreds of years ago: in the seventeenth century, in the Atlantic Ocean. You see, the black Atlantic has always been the queer Atlantic.”<sup>82</sup> But in this specific oceanic context, queer, Tinsley insists, operates as a “praxis of resistance” against the particular oppressive forces of slavery, marking “disruption to the violence” instituted by the commodification and regulation of flesh through non-procreative intimate relations.)<sup>83</sup>

Nopera openly acknowledges that Western/European/Pākehā modes of being and queer theoretical tropes have infiltrated Māori thinking and theory and vice versa.<sup>84</sup> But, with Kaupapa Māori as a driving impulse, key aspects of Māori thought and structures of being (repressed due to colonization) are being strategically retrieved and reworked. In this way, from Nopera’s point of view it is completely wrong to subsume their practice into US models of queer performance. Forcing their work into the critical framework of Freeman’s temporal drag (as beautiful as it is) would miss the way in which Freeman’s concept is not the only way of challenging Western models of being and sex/gender identification.

Furthermore, it is clear that categorizing Nopera as a queer performance artist is a problem: can we (should we) even call Nopera queer? Nopera has explained to me their vision of being a takatāpui as an identification through their own whakapapa: their literal genetic ancestry links them directly to Tūtānakei, the man whose love for a male companion gave birth to the term takatāpui in the pre-colonial legends of the Māori.<sup>85</sup> As well, they assert the signification of takatāpui as a mode of relationship rather than a sex/gender identification: takatāpui signifies a “sense of oneness with a person of the same gender” (whether sex is involved or not), indicating its disjunction from most definitions of queer (which tend to require a questioning of gender as determinable, and of sexual object choice as heteronormative).<sup>86</sup> As Nopera asserts, takatāpui is “about oneness” with another person of the same gender, whereas the Western term “gay” is “a box.” Furthermore, in a play on the limits of terms to apply across languages and cultures, Nopera

pushes the boundaries of our understanding of Māori as a “race” or “ethnicity” or even as an identification of a fixed group of indigenous people living in one place, noting to me that one cannot be “Māori and queer at the same time,” because (in fact) the word “Māori” signifies “normal” or “natural” or “common” person. Before colonization, the people of Aotearoa did not call themselves Māori as they had no colonizing others—freakishly abnormal—from whom they needed to differentiate themselves as “natural.”

And there is more. Nopera has extended Kaupapa Māori decolonial theory to the question of knowledge in general. (What does it mean, then, for me to be attempting to understand or “know” his work, in the context of this book?) Having just received their PhD from the University of Waikato (which has extensive Māori Studies programs), Nopera writes in a recent catalog essay: “The institution has forgotten that it’s held up by Māori whenu [land, country], the blood and bones of my tūpuna [ancestors]. Apparently I’m supposed to care about a language they speak in England, [or] some German guy’s ideas.” Nopera calls for attention in Aotearoa arts education to “Māori knowing” in order to thwart “violating colonial intent.”<sup>87</sup>

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White European Enlightenment thought divided and continues to divide the world into systems of binaries (male versus female, us versus them, civilized versus savage). As Nopera and many others have stressed, Māori forms of knowing tend to see the world as a vast system of interconnections and complements. Salmond writes: “While in the Māori creation story, each form of life engaged with its complement, generating something new from their union, in the Christian account [of the missionaries] God ordered the world by splitting its parts into binary opposites.” Furthermore, in Māori myths and carvings, genders are interrelational rather than binary (“ancestors emerge from each other or are locked in sexual congress”).<sup>88</sup> This aligns with Nopera’s description of takatāpui as a state of “oneness” with a beloved other of the same gender.

It is, again, so tempting to project queer—networked, interrelational, fluid, *performative* gender/sex identifications—onto this mode of knowledge through which the Māori experience and make sense of the world (and to project it onto Nopera). But this is of course projective and essentializing. In fact, it cannot be called queer because that would be to imply it is based on the same foundations (of European heteronormative, white patriarchy) on which queer still rests, regardless of the desire of those who wield it to move somewhere else through its performative force. (At least one can say with confidence that queer theory and practice hugely enable an awareness of these limits.)

Where are the boundaries? How is Nopera's gesture of marking space to be understood? Can tā and vā be discussed by anglophone academics—can it be discussed by me in this context of a book genealogizing queer performance and in relation to a gender liminal Māori practice—without implying some connection to Western queer time and space?

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Indigenous or colonizer claims of tolerance before colonization (in particular before the moralizing force of Christian missionaries, who arrived with the military colonizers) are considered debatable by many anthropologists and theorists. Jonathan Goldberg, for example, brilliantly deconstructs the Western romanticization of the supposed precolonial embrace of gender fluidity across Polynesia; but Hutchings and Aspin assert that the term takatāpui pre-existed colonization, citing as evidence the fact that it appears in the first dictionary translating Māori terms into English from 1832.<sup>89</sup> In her extended study of the takatāpui phenomenon, Māori scholar Elizabeth Kerekere has fully established the uses of the term in a number of early colonial contexts, affirming it as a common term at the point of European mass colonization in the 1840s, and tells of its rediscovery as a term of empowerment among gender liminal Māori scholars in the 1980s—often as thoughtfully informed by mainstream, initially white North American, LGBT debates.<sup>90</sup>

While the interrelation among Māori and Pākehā ideas and experiences today inevitably leads to some muddying of terms (where taketāpui slides into queer, and no doubt vice versa), there is an aspect of Māori thought that might resist such a mingling. As Hutchings and Aspin continue to note, the term takatāpui allows those who choose to use it to assert affiliation—among each other and as part of whakapapa—signaling the interconnectedness of contemporary Māori to past and present ancestors and relations, and the strategic power of takatāpui as mobilizing a specific Māori form of coalitional politics. They refuse to go back to the situation in the mid-twentieth century of denying that takatāpui is part of whānau (family, in a broad sense) and whakapapa: takatāpui marks

a strong and tangible connection with our ancestral past, based on the knowledge that there were members of traditional Māori society who were also described as takatāpui. Clearly, takatāpui were an integral component of relationships that existed among our ancestors, and today, we can take courage from this knowledge.<sup>91</sup>

The mobilizing force of takatāpui in the New Zealand context can be understood in Hutchings and Aspin's Westernized Anglophone formulation as *performative*: that is, they announce its usefulness via concepts informed by queer theory and through the saying it becomes useful in a new way.

As a thought experiment, and per Nopera's inspiring call for Pākehā and white culture in general to learn from Māori ways of being, I turn to the Māori

valuing of whakapapa to put in motion another performative process that opens up a queering of self (in its more conventional US or Western forms). Given the presence of Queen Elizabeth II in the marae I visited in Wellington, it seems that Māori feel comfortable claiming far-away powerful (sometimes white) people unconnected by genetic ties (especially those who affect the Māori person or group in question) into their whakapapa. As I have noted, for most Māori introductory rituals the individuals directly and succinctly present a brief story about their whakapapa, explaining briefly who their ancestors were in relation to the current site and situation.<sup>92</sup> As Kerekere puts it: “most Māori meeting for the first time will still ask, ‘Where are you from?’ in order to develop a tribal link … pride in our identity and giving specifics in naming ourselves is nothing new for Māori. It is expected.”<sup>93</sup> Salamond argues further that this commitment to performing oneself in relation to one’s whakapapa is tied to Māori cosmo-logic, wherein “beings are generated by the constellations of relations that constitute their identity,” a concept that contrasts starkly with the modern European idea of entities as “isolates, linked by relations that are external to the boundaries that define them,” which leads to and justifies the Euro-American focus on individuals and individual rights.<sup>94</sup> Far from deferring unquestioningly to British royalty (as I first assumed when I saw the framed photograph of the queen), then, the Māori, by incorporating Elizabeth II into their whakapapa, force the crown to find a place in *their tā-vā*. This is ultimately a powerful act of shifting the terms of who is allowed to speak for whom. Not a reversal, but a complex reframing, this gesture subsumes the ultimate image of Western power (the picture of the body of the queen of England) into the performative context of Māori familial and community relations.

It is in this context that Hutchings and Aspin rightly assert that reclaiming takatāpui is a crucially important way for gender liminal Māori to reconnect to their pre-colonial past, at least in theory and as a political gesture. Even as Hutchings and Aspin perform takatāpui as both pre-colonial and contemporary, they could be said to be performatively establishing a counter-whakapapa, as it were. They are asserting a genealogy of what North Americans might call queer community for themselves and their takatāpui colleagues.

### **A performance of coloniality, or, what to do with a colonizer whakapapa**

The generous and insistent focus on whakapapa among Māori as a crucial concept in presentations of self, claiming agency, but also accepting responsibility for the past, triggered an awareness for me of the nature of the US as a colonized and colonizing nation. A few months in the Pacific as a US citizen made the predatory history of my country very clear: what did I think Hawai‘i was? I had swallowed almost wholesale the US ideology of innocence vis-à-vis colonization (inculcated from a child’s earliest years in school), narratives whereby the US exists only as a heroic democracy that broke away from the

colonizer Great Britain. This sojourn also raised an acute consciousness of my debt to—and my implication in—the achievements and colonizing activities of my own whakapapa, in the general sense of the Americans who comprise what the US is at any point in time and in the specific sense of my actual—largely English, Irish, and Swedish—ancestors. I am suddenly made aware of those who came before me and made my existence and path possible.

Being exposed to the wisdom of the Māori concept of whakapapa has made clearer to me that my sex/gender identifications are always already complicated by my very specific relationship to my ancestors, both literal (my family as it echoes backward to my four paternal great-grandparents, who were missionaries in India in the late nineteenth century, for example) and chosen (my family of feminist, queer performance and art theorists/historians as well as critical race and decolonial theorists to whom I am indebted in what Sedgwick would call a queer, filial way). Examining my chosen ancestry has been the overt project of this book—a critical genealogy of the theories that have defined what queer performativity can be. Attention to my literal ancestry and thinking about what it means for me today is aimed at diminishing the to-date veiled and occluded force with which my whiteness and access to educational class status has no doubt conditions everything I do and has informed the ways in which my actions and intellectual contributions are perceived.

Thus: it was in living in Auckland that I came, for the first time, to appreciate the impossible combination of courage, altruism cum do-goodism, and inevitable condescension, violence, and racism linked to colonization that compelled and justified my great-grandparents on my father's side who were missionaries in India: Capitola Maud Berggren Jeffrey and Franklin (Frank) Jeffrey (the parents of my father's mother, Frances); Sarah Amy Hosford Jones with John Peter Jones (the parents of my father's father, Edward).<sup>95</sup> Born in the 1840s and 1850s, these well-meaning Congregationalist Christians (what Christian missionary didn't *mean well*?) obtained education, sometimes at great cost, in order to bring "light" to the Hindus: John Peter Jones, born the son of a coalminer and publican in Wrexham, Wales, had himself been a coal miner before emigrating to the US as a teenager and putting himself through school to become a Doctor of Divinity in the Congregationalist faith. Jones even wrote books about converting the "heathens" (including *India's Problem: Krishna or Christ* (1903) and *India: Its Life and Thought* (1908)), which I first encountered in the University of Pennsylvania library when writing a paper on colonialism in India.<sup>96</sup> In his turn, Frank Jeffrey founded a Church of South India compound in Aruppukottai, where a large stained glass window, still visible today, is dedicated to him. Lest the do-goodism of this tale serve to occlude my acknowledgment of the inevitable violence accompanying any missionizing effort, let me assert that I have the family photo albums from this period, and some of the imagery is chillingly direct in documenting the power differentials—including a page with two pictures of five boys, on the left in turbans with the caption "five little Hindus," and then on the right in suits and ties labeled "four little Christians."<sup>97</sup> Another

picture shows my great-grandfather Frank sitting at a meticulously laid table (replete with white table cloth) next to a covered wagon beside a dusty road, his Indian servant serving him tea. One cannot escape such personal relics which so visibly map assumptions about self and other.



**FIGURE 6.5** Jeffrey family photo album, clockwise from top left: “Five Little Hindus,” “Dindigul Girl’s Boarding School,” and “Four Little Christians”; Ruth Jeffrey (who died shortly thereafter), a wedding among missionaries, and Richard Jeffrey, c. 1905; handwriting most likely that of Amelia Jones’s great grandmother, Capitola Maud Berggren Jeffrey

As for my great-grandmothers, so much less is known. They toiled away with their children and Indian servants in various domestic spaces visible but unelaborated across the images in the photo albums. They of course were not given the educational means nor the authority to ruminate publicly on their mission work as did John Peter Jones in his books. Although my grandmother’s parents seem to have encouraged their daughters to become educated—Grandma Frances graduated from Oberlin College in the early 1900s.

This missionism is part of my fairly recent ancestry, and connected to the zeal with which my family members have taken advantage of the education made available to us. I knew my grandparents on my father’s side well, and was aware from an early age that they had grown up in India in the 1890s into the early twentieth century. Christian missionism is a key instantiation of European colonialism (Salmond

writes in relation to the case of New Zealand, “[f]rom the outset, evangelism and colonization were linked together”).<sup>98</sup> Their missionism, linked directly to their own self-empowerment through education and a desire to bring education to people they viewed as unenlightened, was of course driven by a belief in the superiority of Euro-American culture and specifically the Christian faith. The most important point here is that, through acknowledging my whakapapa I came to see the way in which my white privilege is quite specific: it rests on educational privilege, which made their experiences abroad possible, which has also made my life as an intellectual not only possible but obvious as a life path. They passed down a drive toward the pedagogical and a legacy of educational aspiration—my grandfather raised in India by his coalminer-cum-intellectual, missionary father became a professor; my father was a professor.

While in no way lessening the racism fueling their deeply invested ideas about helping those they colonized, I recognize that I am using the tools I know and to which I have access in order to explore and assert an aspect of my own understanding of the world. How different is my evangelism—which I know echoes the other similar voices across the channels of liberal-opinion making so visible on social media platforms and in the vestiges of print media—from theirs? Their capacity for self-introspection remains withheld from me. All I have evidently is signs of their sense of righteousness (Jones’s books, the photo albums) and a long-ago discussion with a beloved yet racist great aunt, who had married my grandmother’s brother (Richard, in the photo album as a boy) in the 1920s and spoke of the debt owed by the Indian people to the colonizing British. All else is withheld from me.

Zealous attention to social justice, self-reflexivity combined with self-righteousness, and a radical questioning of the status quo, however, are also in my ancestry. My mother’s maternal grandfather was a Marxist with a thick Swedish accent. And, genetically linked to two of the missionaries (Frank Jeffrey and Sarah Amy Hosford), I am related through two different lines (one direct, one less so) to a maverick Puritan, Roger Williams, son of a London merchant or tailor. Williams became a radical religious crusader, an early English colonizer (and as such developer of English interests) on the North American continent, but also an important seventeenth-century Native American rights advocate. From his beginnings in the nascent middle class, Williams worked his way up the ladder at the time by gaining the patronage of the radical agitator Sir Edward Coke, who helped him attain admission to the Charterhouse School and then Cambridge University—so the raising of social status through education goes back to the early modern period in my family.<sup>99</sup> Williams left England due to the persecution of free-thinking protestant radicals in the early seventeenth century and by 1631 had joined the Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He was eventually kicked out by the government of John Winthrop, the aristocratic leader of the colony, for being too extreme in his insistence on the separation of church and state, attending to Native Americans as equal in humanity, and for breaking from what he viewed as the heresies of the Church of England. Scholars have called him a “rigid idealist,” bent on a form of

“perfectionism” that was corrosive, “intransigent” and a “zealot,” but also “begrudgingly admired.”<sup>100</sup> He has also, more charitably, been described as possessing a “combination of charm, confidence and intensity a later age would call charisma,” which made him, from his opponents’ point of view, all the more dangerous.<sup>101</sup> Most interestingly, his lifework has been described in terms of his maverick egalitarian concern for the discernment and agency of people from radically other cultures, including Jews, Turks, and “pagans” such as the native Narragansett tribes of the region. As Bruce Prescott argues of Williams’ particular brand of ethics: “here Williams’ concern for how Christians were being perceived by ‘others’ was clear”—I am tempted to characterize this as a prescient belief in the *relationality* of cultures and peoples.<sup>102</sup>

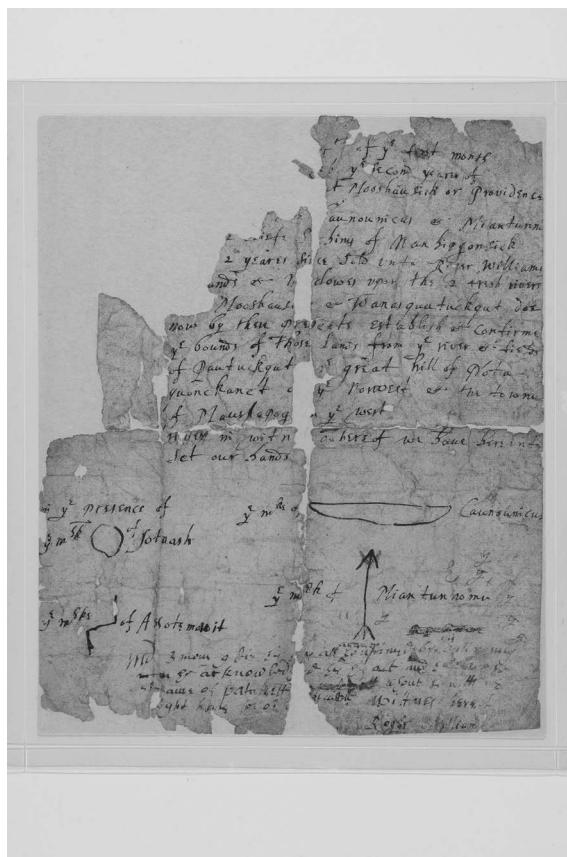
I had been vaguely aware of these connections all my life, but always thought them irrelevant to my achievements, my identifications, and my interests as an intellectual—until I began examining my privilege through the concept of whakapapa. Identifying with the downtrodden (as most academics in the humanities and arts tend to do, in an un-self-reflective attempt to align with the victims rather than the perpetrators of the systems of violence we tend to examine), I had long tended to dwell on the less fortunate and much more dominant strands of my own family lineage—the coalminers, impecunious farmers, and plebeians among my more recent immigrant ancestors, many of whom desperately sought work and better prospects by leaving Ireland and Sweden in the mid-nineteenth century and coming to the US. But whakapapa is not about identifying only with those elements that serve one’s already established sense of self. The layering of genealogies are there, regardless of which one picks out to amplify one’s personal narrative. What happens to my identification with queer communities and my attention to performativity if I acknowledge the part of my family that was both resolutely colonizing but also took an ambivalent position in relation to the British powers-that-be and ways of thinking of the time?

Roger Williams seems to represent the extremes of many white colonists in the early days of what is now the US: both persecuted (by his own people) and a zealot both admired and feared; both an advocate of the personhood and rights of Native Americans within his early modern English imagination and a colonizer who displaced some of them, albeit by purchasing rather than taking by force parts of their land, he founded what are now the city of Providence and the colony then state of Rhode Island, on record as the first democratic establishment in the modern world. Williams’ colony allowed Native Americans and women to live and own property independently. Williams was both an early advocate for the separation of church and state who thus founded the first fairly democratic secular state in the world, and a religious fanatic who alienated his colleagues in the Massachusetts Bay Colony by accusing them of not being pure enough.<sup>103</sup> Williams, a contradictory and flamboyant minister and intellectual who fought British autocracy while founding a colony of his own, embodied the deadly coupling of educated missionizing Christianity and the need for more land and resources to achieve missionizing (and proto-industrializing) goals.

The pretty side of this picture of course has been long extolled by white-dominant histories of the United States, whereby Williams can be credited for having an impact on John Locke and, later, on Thomas Jefferson and other framers of the constitution.<sup>104</sup> Within the framework of US–UK liberalism, such ideas have long been lauded as exemplary of the positive side of modernity itself; the dark and dirty side (as with facts about Jefferson’s holding of slaves and impregnating of one of them, Sally Hemmings) has been much less commented upon by the powers that be. While Williams afforded Native Americans the status of human, his views were incorporated into and downplayed within the US model of Western liberal democracy and, as Lisa Lowe has rightly noted, “modern liberalism” is responsible for defining “the ‘human’ and universaliz[ing] … its attributes to European man,” while simultaneously differentiating “populations in the colonies as less than human.”<sup>105</sup> The history of liberalism *is* a history of colonialism *is* a history of racism. Not only Roger Williams, but John Locke himself had direct experiences living in the colonies (in Locke’s case, what was then called “Carolina”), shaping his theories through experiences of the direct oppression of indigenous people and Black slaves, theories that would provide the basis of English liberal political theory.<sup>106</sup>

Most striking in his North American career was Williams’s open defense of Native American rights—considered incendiary among most of the colonists. Williams had stayed with members of the Wampanoag native tribe when expelled from Salem for his radical views; when he arrived in the area of what is now Rhode Island, as noted, he befriended the Narragansett people, even learning their language. The deed for the settlement at Providence (originally Moshassuck), the land of which he purchased from the Narragansett tribe, still exists: it is signed by Williams, and by Narragansett Sachems (Chiefs) Canonicus and Miantonomi.<sup>107</sup> He seems to have displaced his Native American associates by buying their land, only to invite others among them to buy plots of land and establish residence among his family and other Europeans.

While Williams thus bought the land fair and square in European terms, these transactions of course took place in a coercive context—just as was to occur in Aotearoa around 200 years later.<sup>108</sup> It is not likely that the Narragansett had many other options, regardless of Williams making the effort to learn their language. And by later in the seventeenth century, with colonist numbers growing, the New England area tribes were to be pushed to the West and their land outright seized. After failing to drive the colonists out of their land (in what was called by Europeans “King Philip’s War” of 1675–6, based on the English name for a Pokunoket chief), the local tribes were decimated, some of them sold into slavery in the West Indies and New England. King Philip’s War against the indigenous people was explicitly “justified by portraying them as threats to the settlers, and thereby giving up their rightful claims,” in a narrative that was to be repeated innumerable times across the European colonies and which was also used by John Locke to justify slavery.<sup>109</sup> Most distressingly and unfortunately, Williams participated in this decimation: he played a decisive role in assisting the Massachusetts Bay Colony in defeating the Pequot people in 1637–8, by dissuading the Narragansett people

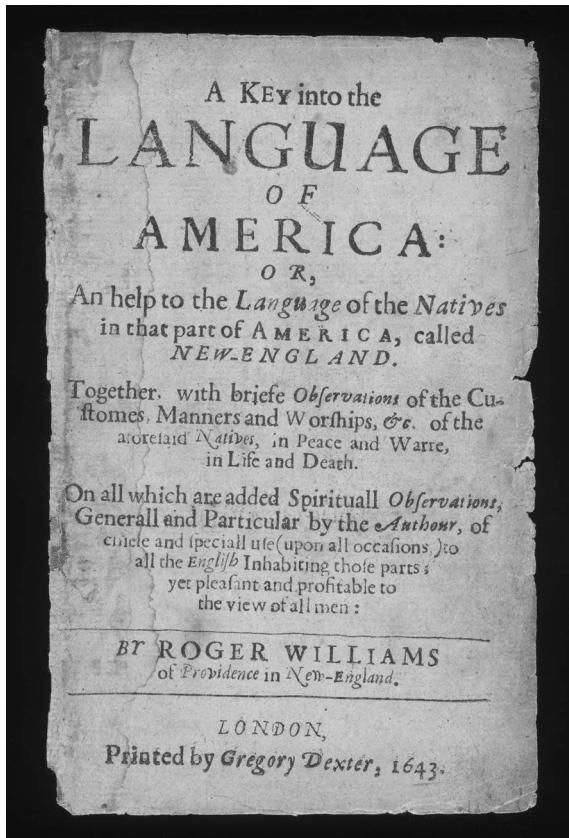


**FIGURE 6.6** Original deed for the city of Providence, Rhode Island (formerly the area of Moshassuck), c. 1640; courtesy of the Roger Williams National Memorial, Rhode Island

from joining in the fighting. Williams's ultimate alignment with the colonizing militia toward the end of his life, while perhaps in part out of concern for his indigenous friends and allies, exemplifies the darkness that haunts the history of even the most "enlightened" colonizers and forms of colonization.

Per the logic of whakapapa, in my limited understanding of this Māori concept, Williams's legacy conditioned and gave privilege to the generations who followed, including eventually myself. But he also bequeathed us with a responsibility to honor his exploits as well as acknowledge the damage wrought by his colonization of Rhode Island and his collusion with the English, his own people, against his Narragansett friends. Clearly, my genealogy is both literal and (per Foucault) conceptual and ideological; the violence wrought by my ancestors was both linguistic/cultural and material/structural. Thus, just as we have John Locke's slightly later political theory based on his experience in Carolina, and which he draws on to

justify slavery and the decimation of the Native Americans, so we have a book—key to the discursive contribution Williams made to the connectedness between Puritan colonizers and Narragansett peoples—affording a deeper understanding of the complexities of this particular encounter. In 1643 Williams published *A Key into the Language of America*, which translated the language of the Narragansett people into English as well as extensively and flatteringly describing their customs and culture. Far from a disinterested embrace of the culture, however, it was written at least in part to obtain a charter from the British crown to support Williams's colony in North America—which would, in ultimate collusion with the other English colonies nearby, eventually almost wipe out the tribe. Here the contradiction is stark: Williams simultaneously acknowledges the humanity and intelligence of the Narrangansett specifically as well as the equality under god of Native Americans and the “proud English” while he asserts the right to establish a colony on their territory.<sup>110</sup>



**FIGURE 6.7** Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* ... 1643: frontispiece

Williams attests in the book to the diligence and humanity of the Native Americans, extensively describing their care for their land, as well as their consciousness of its boundaries, an argument extremely rare if not unique among educated colonists at the time (they tended to argue that indigenous people had no concept of land ownership and therefore had no rights to the land): “Nature knowes no difference between Europe and Americans in blood, birth, bodies, &c. God having of one blood made all mankind.” Williams even gives his Native friends the agency of *vision* in his entry on sight, where he describes as an example of their language:

Kunnúnni     *Have you seene me?//Kunnúnnous     I have seene you*<sup>111</sup>

Williams translated Narragansett language and customs for the English crown in an appeal for the sovereignty of his democratic colony—he drew on the concept of the Narragansett as equal under democracy in order to request that the parliament give *him* rather than the Massachusetts Bay Colony the right to colonize their land. Within this translation of words and customs, which attempts to create a bridge between European and indigenous cultures, he of course begins always from a European point of view, in the English language; his heteronormative, patriarchal Christian European views permeate, and one sees how they shape the forms his kindness takes. Under the topic “Of their relations of consanguinitie and affinitie, or, Blood and Marriage,” for example, he includes an anecdote about teaching a native friend to whip a recalcitrant son, an objectifying description of how “[t]heir virgins” are distinguished by “falling downe of their haire over their eyes,” and a poem, part of which characterizes the indigenous people as “pagans.”<sup>112</sup> From a Christian point of view this of course would have been understood to say that they worshiped false idols, although he elsewhere argues they had their own esteemed beliefs: “The Pagans wild confesse the bonds/Of married chastitie.” Elsewhere, under “Of Their Persons and parts of bodie,” he further notes the moral and intellectual status of the Narragansett Indian to be equal to that of Europeans and concludes, as noted: “Nature knows no difference between Eu/rope and Americans in blood, birth, bodies, etc. God having of one blood made all mankind.”

Williams’s attempts at translating customs, rituals, beliefs, and language into English (always, then, the standard) bear the marks of the violence of colonialism even as related to such more erudite attempts at *understanding* rather than *annihilating*. Among other things, Williams surely could not comprehend the nuances of how the Narragansett people were intimate with one another, nor how they might have imagined what we call their sexuality and gender (did they even imagine such a thing? certainly not via Christian-valued concepts such as “virgin”!); this of course is the case in terms of their experience of embodiment, but also, even on the level of the gendering of language. As V.K. Preston writes of another example of a seventeenth-century colonizer’s book attempting to translate Native North American language and customs into a European language (in this case French),

I address transcription and translation in the context of a tacit historiography, here of North America. The generalized or “unspoken histories” of Indigenous-settler histories are performative as well as grammatical; they hold sway in the doing of the everyday, often with little critical scrutiny.<sup>113</sup>

As Preston alludes, even the concept of North America is a discursive construction on the part of colonizers—it is *performed* (in language, as well as with guns and borders). In the case of Williams’s book, the concept marks a complicated example of European colonizing, brutal as always in the very fact of the encounter, linked to his privilege as part of a group of Europeans with access to fire-power and other key resources. While Williams conditions this violence through his commitment to learning their language and customs, his efforts in the end did not mitigate the brute oppressiveness of the binary hierarchies through which the white settlers of North America suppressed, oppressed, killed, exiled, and violated those whose lands they wanted, whether they purchased these lands with deeds or outright stole them.

From what I understand of the Māori concept of whakapapa, finding that one has an ancestor one can admire is not about building up one’s own political or moral credibility. It also does not negate the empowerment and privilege and violence no doubt linked to that person and sustained through present generations because of whiteness and educational advantages, nor does it erase the hundreds of years of permeating effects—positive or negative—that go along with that person’s actions long ago. So much I learned from Kura Moeahu’s exercise at the marae: history sticks to bodies in the present; we carry the past with us. Acknowledging this past is then a crucial step in reconciling with present circumstances.

To this end, any act of encounter with unequal partners, as colonization inevitably involves, entails the subordinating translations, transpositions, transmutations of the other (who cannot speak for him/herself) into the same. The pride of ancestry mustn’t blind me to the power differential Williams participated in and helped to create. None of the progressive aspirations on Williams’s part, then, ultimately negate the fact that he was a colonialist and colonizer, fleeing persecution to live on someone else’s land, opening the door for the colonizers’ annihilation of the tribes across North America. None of this ancestral genealogy absolves me of dealing here today with my own educational privilege in speaking for others I cannot fully understand.

### **“Sexual encounters” (the queering of queer through pacific forms of knowledge?)**

Educational privilege ties me across the bodies of my ancestors to Williams—my visit to New Zealand was, in turn, made possible through my invitation by the University of Auckland and my grant from the Fulbright. Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes that schools—especially higher educational ones such as the University of

Auckland—are deeply implicated in the colonizing process: research became “institutionalized in the colonies … The transplanting of research institutions, including universities, from the imperial centres of Europe enabled local scientific interests to be organized and embedded in the colonial system.”<sup>114</sup> The Fulbright, supported by the US government, fully supports and is driven by this colonizing impulse.

Smith’s point is incontrovertible. But, even as the power structures I experienced and of which I took advantage were far from symmetrical, the knowledge exchange went in both directions. In my case, I’m sure I learned more than those I spoke to and whose performances I viewed. And this is a very old dynamic. For example, the understanding of early modern to modern European concepts of sexuality and gender as *coming out of* the colonial experience is a key point as well in work by Jonathan Goldberg (1993) and Lee Wallace (2003).<sup>115</sup> Goldberg examines a text from an early encounter between the Spanish conquistador Vasco Núñez de Balboa and a group of cross-dressed, anatomically male Quarequa people in what is now Panama from 1513. In this case, Europeans took the upper hand, brutally massacring the group of “sodomites,” these “younge men in womens apparel” (as Balboa’s translator put it a few years later) who radically and threateningly confused the violators’ concepts of gender and sexuality as binary and relatively fixed. But through this horrific interaction, Goldberg points out, the natives also conditioned and shaped European structures of belief around sexuality and gender:

These cross-dressed bodies are the locus of identity and difference, a site for crossings between Spaniards and Indians, and for divisions between and among them. The differentials involve class, race, and gender, all in uneasy relation to each other, sites capable of ideological mobilization, but also of resistance.<sup>116</sup>

In a brilliant 2003 book *Sexual Encounters*, Pākehā scholar Lee Wallace parallels Goldberg’s assertion, arguing that the “discovery” of Polynesian gender/sex complexities “redefined the possibilities for sexual variance within European masculinity.”<sup>117</sup> Wallace compellingly asserts the interrelation of European and Pacific structures in the constitution of what Europeans call gender/sex identification and in fact of the entire (European) concept of homosexuality:

it is warranted to speak not of a Polynesian sexuality or a Western sexuality but of a shared Pacific sexuality that takes its shape and volatility from a geographic and discursive field twice crossed by the histories of homosexual difference and cultural exchange. This Pacific sexuality, from its origins in colonial encounter to its current reprise in the sexual politics of postcoloniality, continues to be the very paradigm of a modern sexuality … *Male homosexuality, such as we have come to understand it, was constituted in no small part through the European collision with Polynesian culture.*<sup>118</sup>

The Euro-American (white) concept of homosexuality, which Michel Foucault establishes as having come into being around 1800, was constituted *through* Europeans' contact with gender liminal Polynesians in the century before. Wallace elaborates this key point by examining a number of the historical European texts describing initial encounters with Pacific peoples in the eighteenth century, several of which note the shocking appearance of feminine people (first perceived as female) who turn out to possess male anatomy (in some cases flaunting their penises to shocked Europeans for a laugh).<sup>119</sup> These "discoveries" turned Europeans' concept of sexuality and gender roles inside out and Wallace insists that we attend to their role in constituting the binaries of hetero/homosexual, binaries that—as with the heteronormative othering of colonized women that postcolonial theorists have long addressed—served at the time to condition and justify colonial domination. Wallace thus argues that we address "the relation of heterosexual metaphorization to the justification of the power relations of empire," whereby Europeans' perception of sodomy becomes a key mechanism for subordinating indigenous people.<sup>120</sup>

The "queerness" of these encounters thus works in tandem with the male European heterosexualizing accounts of "exotic" women (or "dusky maidens") as imminently and forever available for sexual conquest, such that the "sexual discourses of Pacific discovery ... produce both categories [heterosexuality and homosexuality] as their historical effect."<sup>121</sup> When considering performances by self-identified fa'afafine (and this would apply to takatāpui as well), then, Wallace is adamant that the researcher must understand the way in which "the difference the category of *fa'afafine* represents must resonate against those other distinctly modern categories of sexual identification—the homosexual, the transvestite, the transsexual—to whose historical formation it has itself contributed."<sup>122</sup>

The research conundrum for an outsider like myself is thus complex and can seem inexorable. As Tuhiwai Smith acknowledges, after vigorously critiquing Western research, such research is nonetheless necessary (her book, she admits, is "an anti-research book on research").<sup>123</sup> While her main concern is, rightly, to educate indigenous scholars in a range of critical methods, my primary interest in this book has been in tracing histories of largely US-generated, white-dominant genealogies of queer performance in order to denaturalize them. If I write here and in the following chapter about gender liminal (queer?) performance in Aotearoa it is recognizably within my (all the same) queer feminist—and white and North American and educated—frames of reference (frames which, as Ann Laura Stoler points out, have always already been conditioned by assumptions born out of the colonial encounters of my intellectual as well as biological ancestors).<sup>124</sup>

If Roger Williams's book was a literal, and quite efficient, translation machine, directed both at humanizing the Narragansett people and at ensuring his colony's survival (and thus, as he may have recognized and deeply regretted at the end of his life, their ultimate destruction as a coherent culture<sup>125</sup>), my book is written from within a framework that bears echoes of the conflicted one of my ancestor. This account is, I can only hope, at least moderately successful

in critiquing even my *own* genealogical frames, self-reflexively also engaging with the energies of decolonization. So much Williams seems to have already understood by at least posing the problem of being human as one of reciprocal exchanges across gazes and cultures.

## Notes

- 1 I will alternate usage of Aotearoa and New Zealand according to which seems more appropriate given the context. Montréal, Québec, is of course the largest non-anglophone city of North America.
- 2 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), tr. Colin Smith (London: Routledge Kegan and Paul, 2002), 296; discussed in Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 4.
- 3 Throughout this chapter I spell words such as Māori with macrons (the line over certain vowels that are verbally emphasized) as called for unless I am quoting directly and the macrons did not appear in the original.
- 4 Juana Rodriguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2003), 2, 3.
- 5 Eng-Beng Lim, “Glocalqueering in New Asia: The Politics of Performing Gay in Singapore,” *Theatre Journal* 57, n. 3 (October 2005), 383.
- 6 Caroline Vercoe, in an email of August 28, 2018.
- 7 Parekōwhai in conversation with the author, May 17, 2018, Auckland. Pākehā in its longer form “pakepakeha,” “fantasy creatures with white skin.” These definitions of Pākehā come from the excellent article placing Pākehā culture in the context of critical whiteness studies, Claire Gray, Nabila Jaber, Jim Anglem, “Pakeha Identity and Whiteness: What does it Mean to be White?,” *Sites: New Series* 10, n. 2 (2013), see 84; thanks to Charlotte Huddleston for sending me this article. The authors question the tendency for white-identified New Zealanders to use the term in ways that, they argue, can function as a way of masking their participation in systems of white privilege. Scholar Margaret Werry (herself a Pākehā) has put it slightly differently: “to be Pakeha (for most of the 20C at least) was to experience your own nationality, and speak for/about the nation as an outsider, through the proxy of the tourist,” in an email to me of August 29, 2018. I am grateful to Werry for this more personal dialogue. Nonetheless, given the pressure I am putting on such erasures, as well as the fact that Pākehā is resisted by some whites as part of their rejection of the dominance of Māori culture (which I would overturn in any way possible), I use the term here because it is accepted and plays a key role in sketching colonizer-indigenous relations in Aotearoa.
- 8 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*,” *GLQ* 1 (1993), 13.
- 9 Claire Denis, quoted in Alice Gregory, “Unbreakable: The Fearless Cinema of Claire Denis,” *The New Yorker* (May 28, 2018), 34.
- 10 I expand on this part of my childhood and teen experience as it relates to my later displacements in my book *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), xxiii–xxvi.
- 11 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.
- 12 See Sandra So Hee Chi Kim, “Redefining Diaspora through a Phenomenology of Postmemory,” *Diaspora* 16, n. 3 (2007), 337–52.
- 13 In terms of national languages and the dominant culture, tellingly, the Fulbright orientation package I received included a number of guides to the Māori te reo (language) and customs but as well a guide for “Understanding ‘Kiwi’ Talk,” an extensive list of slang—all of which was English, and much of it British. Kiwi, then,

- must be understood not as a shorthand for New Zealander (as white people within and beyond New Zealand might imagine) but as specifically referring to Pākehā culture, in that covert way that most dominant discourse functions.
- 14 Anne Salmond, *Tears of Rangi: Experiments Across Worlds* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2018), 2–3.
  - 15 See Caroline Vercoe, “Art Niu Sila: Contemporary Pacific Art in New Zealand,” *Pacific Art Niu Sila: The Pacific Dimension of Contemporary New Zealand Arts* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2002), 191. I am grateful to Vercoe beyond words for sharing her thoughts and as well her unpublished paper exploring connections between Pasifika and Māori culture in her essay “Migration and Memory: A Site of Beginning and Conflict,” 2008, delivered at the Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art, Melbourne.
  - 16 Classes in Māori te reo are currently so popular they can be difficult to get into and there are waiting lists.
  - 17 Margaret Werry, *The Tourist State: Performing Leisure, Liberalism, and Race in New Zealand* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 45.
  - 18 Ibid., xiv, xv; on “the performative character of tourism” in relation to ethnicity, see also xx.
  - 19 Ibid., xvi.
  - 20 Margaret Werry, “‘The Greatest Show on Earth’: Political Spectacle, Spectacular Politics, and the American Pacific,” *Theatre Journal* 57, n. 3 (October 2005), 363. A revised version of this article appears in Chapter 3, *The Tourist State*, 90–133.
  - 21 Werry, “The Greatest Show on Earth,” 366.
  - 22 Ibid., 367.
  - 23 Ibid., 377.
  - 24 James, cited by Michael Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre, 1850–1910* (Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 17.
  - 25 Sedgwick, “Queer Performativity.”
  - 26 Werry, “The Greatest Show on Earth,” 379, n. 72.
  - 27 Article (no author cited) in *The World*, September 12, 1909, cited in Ibid., 378.
  - 28 Michelle Elleray, “Weaving the Wahine Takatāpui,” *Queer in Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Lynne Alice and Lynne Star (Palmerston North, NZ: Dunmore Press, Ltd., 2004), 177. On these points, see also Alison J. Laurie, ed., *Lesbian Studies in Aotearoa New Zealand* (New York, NY and London: Harrington Park Press, 2001).
  - 29 V.K. Preston, “A Dictionary in the Archives: Translating and Transcribing Silenced Histories in French and Wendat,” *Performance Research* 21, n. 5 (2015), special issue “On Trans/Performance,” ed. Amelia Jones, 87.
  - 30 This point is rightly foregrounded in Gray, Jaber, Anglen, “Pakeha Identity and Whiteness,” 82–106. On the history of discrimination against Pasifika people, who were lured en masse to the country after WWII because of a shortage of workers, see also Julie Hill, “Dark Side of the Rori,” *North & South* (November 2015), available online at *Noted*: [www.noted.co.nz/life/life-in-nz/dark-side-of-the-rori/](http://www.noted.co.nz/life/life-in-nz/dark-side-of-the-rori/); accessed May 14, 2019.
  - 31 Winston Peters represents “New Zealand First” (Aotearoa Tuatahi), a nationalist, xenophobic, and populist right wing party promoting highly restrictive immigration policies. This set of beliefs is not typical of Māori politicians or people as far as I could tell.
  - 32 Jacqueline Shea Murphy and Jack Gray, “*Manaakitanga* in Motion: Indigenous Choreographies of Possibility,” *Biography* 36 n. 1 (Winter 2013), 247.
  - 33 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* (1950), tr. W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990), see 13–16. Mauss cites in his conclusion the Māori proverb “Ko Maru kai atu/Ko maru kai mai/ka ngohe ngohe,” or “Give as much as you take, all shall be very well,” 91. Mauss also uses examples from among indigenous cultures elsewhere in the world—of course it is a sign of the

- time in which he wrote the book that indigenous people are offensively called “archaic” in his title.
- 34 Ibid., 16.
- 35 In a very productive and slightly different reading of how Māori view self/other relations specifically in terms of the “encounter of performance,” Carol Brown and Moana Nepia cite a Māori proverb, which they translate as “Walking together means: when you walk into the hole I cannot walk alongside, I must walk-with. This walking-with is more than taking a step with you; it is creating a movement with you.” Brown and Nepia, “*Te Kore* and the Encounter of Performance,” in *Collaboration in Performance Practice: Premises, Workings and Failures*, ed. Noyale Colin and Stefanie Sachsenmaier (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 197.
- 36 Stephanie Nohelani Teves, “The Theorist and the Theorized: Indigenous Critiques of Performance Studies,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 62, n. 4 (Winter 2018), 139, 134–5; Teves’s acerbic criticism of Richard Schechner’s shaping of performance studies around the study of “other” cultures is important, as she notes sharply that his approach is imperialistic and extractive and fails to understand the nuances of indigenous forms of performance; see 135.
- 37 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, and London and New York, NY: Zed Books, 1999), 5, 7.
- 38 Whānau means extended family in a general sense; hapū is a term used for clans or descent groups that would have banded together to defend land and interests.
- 39 Brown and Nepia, “*Te Kore* and the Encounter of Performance,” 200, 208. I am indebted to Carol Brown for her generosity in sharing in person her research knowledge about Pasifika and Māori dance in particular.
- 40 “Waiwhetu Modern Urban Marae” description, *E Tū Whānau!* website (May 3, 2016), available online at: <http://etutuhanau.org.nz/waiwhetu-marae-urban-papa-kainga-for-21st-century/>; accessed August 29, 2018.
- 41 Susan Buck-Morss makes this point in “Hegel and Haiti,” *Critical Inquiry* 26, n. 4 (Summer 2000), 821–65.
- 42 Keguro Macharia, “Queer Genealogies (Provisional Notes),” *Bully Bloggers* (January 13, 2013), available online at: <https://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/?s=Macharia&submit=Search>; accessed September 14, 2018.
- 43 Manthia Diawara, “Black Studies, Cultural Studies: Performative Acts” (1992); reprint in *Border/Lines* 29/30 (1993), 25–6.
- 44 Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 195.
- 45 Classics by these authors include Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Inc., 1983); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (New York, NY: Ten Speed Press, 1984); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); and bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992).
- 46 Combahee River Collective Statement (1977), from *Combahee River Collective* website, available online at: <https://combaheerivercollective.weebly.com/the-combahee-river-collective-statement.html>; accessed May 18, 2018.
- 47 See Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, n. 6 (1991), 1241–99.
- 48 On the commodification of multiculturalism see Coco Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” *TDR (The Drama Review)* 38, n 1 (Spring 1994), 143–67.
- 49 Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1986), *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 174.

- 50 Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 9.
- 51 Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” (1997), reprinted in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 24.
- 52 Ibid., 34.
- 53 One could argue that this is not generally the case in lived experiences of gender fluidity (given the huge range of trans and gender nonconforming folks who visibly populate drag clubs and other avenues of urban culture this seems clear); but Cohen’s point is directed more towards theoretical articulations.
- 54 Ibid., 34.
- 55 Ibid., 43.
- 56 Gloria Anzaldúa, “To(o) Queer the Writer: Loca, escrita y chicana,” in *Versions: Writing by Dykes, Queers and Lesbians*, ed. Betsy Warland (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1991), 251, 250, 252–3.
- 57 Amelia Jones, presentation on the topic “Performance and the Queer and Feminist Body in Contemporary Art,” for “Mesas de Dialogos,” with María Amelia Viteri and Susana Vargas Cervantes, Museo Jumex, Mexico City (December 2015). The panel was part of a series of talks organized by Vargas Cervantes, including one just before mine featuring Judith Butler.
- 58 María-Amelia Viteri, *Desbordes: Translating Racial, Ethnic, Sexual, and Gender Identities across the Americas* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2014). Viteri’s research looks at alternative terms for queer from within Latino/a communities, but is very clear that even these vary from place to place and person to person. Juana Rodriguez also plays out the problems and temptations of applying queer to Latinx cases and assertively claims it as a utopian term: “‘Queer’ is not simply an umbrella term that encompasses lesbians, bisexuals, gay men, two-spirited people, and transsexuals; it is a challenge to constructions of heteronormativity. It need not subsume the particularities of these other definitions of identity,” in *Queer Latinidad*, 24.
- 59 In this discussion I am also indebted to the insights of Cecilia Palmeiro on “loca,” from our time together at the *Histories of Sexuality* event at Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Brazil in May 2017. I gave a keynote based on an earlier form of this book project, “Queer Performance,” and Palmeiro’s untitled presentation on what she termed queer feminism in Argentina was hugely inspiring.
- 60 I am indebted in particular to the students and faculty at University of Auckland for discussions about takatāpui as a Māori phenomenon and to Yuki Kihara and Edward Cowley (aka “Buckwheat,” the drag queen) for sharing their insights on fa’afafine. In the end, the terms are extremely complex and each person I met who claimed them asserted a different definition and personal relationship to Western concepts of trans or queer subjects. A recent definition of fa’afafine from an article about Kihara’s work reads as follows: “Fa’afafine is a Samoan term which translates as ‘effeminate man ... An inclusive descriptor, it is used by those born biologically male who perform gender and sexuality in ways that go well beyond dominant masculinities, sometimes being considered and passing as female.’ Fa’afafine are an integral part of the Samoan islands and their diasporic communities, though many now suffer persecution and discrimination due to colonization and Christianity, as Kihara [has noted in a 2011 interview with Teaiwa] ... fa’afafine identities do not neatly align with those known elsewhere as ‘gay’ or ‘transgender,’ though some fa’afafine may also identify with those terms. There is no clear equivalent in English. Fa’afafine has connections with identities in other Polynesian societies, such as *fakaleiti* (Tonga), *mahu* (Tahiti), and *akava’ine* (Cook Islands), among others, and also with two-spirit identities in Native American societies.” See Mandy Treagus and Madeline Seys, “Looking Back at Samoa: History, Memory, and the Figure of Mourning in Yuki Kihara’s *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We*

*Going?," Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas* 3 (2017), 88. With other panelists, Kihara nuances the term as well in Yuki Kihara, moderator, "Fa'afafine Towards Decolonization" panel, "Quiet Riot Art" series, Gallery of New South Wales, June 3, 2015; including Australia-based Sāmoan fa'afafine and human rights advocate Tuisina Ymania Brown; lawyer Phineas Hartson, and curator Léuli Eshraghi; available online at: <https://soundcloud.com/artgalleryofnsw/quiet-riot-1-faafafine-towards-decolonisation-moderated-by-artist-shigeyuki-kihara>; accessed August 24, 2018. And on the contentiousness and complexity of the term fa'afafine, see also the film *Nothing to Declare: Fa'afafine in Transit*, Lisa Taouma, director, which includes statements from Cowley and others, including "Lindah," who notes "I'm not a woman in a man's body ... Don't mess with Samoan fa'afafine—she won't hesitate kicking your ass," and Kihara stating "I'm a transsexual"; the film can be available online at: [www.thecoconet.tv/know-your-roots/pacific-documentaries/faafafine-documentary/](http://www.thecoconet.tv/know-your-roots/pacific-documentaries/faafafine-documentary/); accessed August 24, 2018.

- 61 For a useful discussion of this work, see Erika Wolf, "Shigeyuki Kihara's 'Fa'a fafine: In a Manner of a Woman': The Photographic Theater of Cross-Cultural Encounter," *Pacific Arts*, new series 10, n. 2 (2010), 23–33.
- 62 On the "dusky maiden," see A. Marata Tamaira, "From Full Dusk to Full Tusk: Reimagining the 'Dusky Maiden' through the Visual Arts," *The Contemporary Pacific* 22, n. 1 (2010), 1–35.
- 63 Yuki Kihara, cited in Celeste Federico, "Gender & Identity: Samoa's Narratives, Shigeyuki Kihara," *Aesthetica* (2009), 33–5; available online at: [www.aestheticamagazine.com/gender-identity-samoas-narratives/](http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/gender-identity-samoas-narratives/); accessed August 24, 2018.
- 64 Yuki Kihara, in "Discussion" with Jess Mio (curator) and Yuki Kihara, in *Yuki Kihara: O Le Taunu'u Mai o Te Taenga Mai o/The Arrival of Salome*, exhibition catalogue (Napier: MTG Hawke's Bay, 2018), n.p.
- 65 Contrary to earlier assumptions that the "halfcaste" referred to a half Sāmoan, half white woman, it refers to her ethnic identity as half Marshallese (from the Marshall Islands) and half Sāmoan. See Treagus and Seys, "Looking Back at Samoa," 95.
- 66 Kihara, in "Discussion."
- 67 Wall text from the exhibition. Tā and vā are extremely complex and debated concepts. Caroline Vercoe ratifies the appropriateness of attending to time and space in exploring indigenous art (particularly in the Pacific), noting "indigenous understandings of place have long demonstrated a complex understanding of the interrelated and contingent nature of the temporal, spatial and cultural," in "Contemporary Māori and Pacific Artists Exploring Place," *Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies* 5, n. 2 (2017), 132. On the complexities of tā-vā as concepts that are Polynesian-wide (across the "Moana" or peoples and area of the Pacific), but have myriad meanings, see Hūfanga 'Okusitino Māhina, "Tā, Vā, and Moana: Temporality, Spatiality, and Indigeneity," *Pacific Studies* 33, n. 2/3 (August–December 2010), 168–202; and the articles in the special issue, "Tā-Vā (Time-Space) Theory of Reality," edited by Tēvita O. Ka'Ili, 'Okusitino Māhina (Hūfanga), and Ping-Ann Addo, *Pacific Studies* 40, n. 1–2 (April–August 2017). From a Pasifika/Tongan point of view, see also the interesting MA thesis by Kalisolaite 'Uhila, "MauMau-taimi: Wasting Time; Being Useless," submitted to Auckland University of Technology, School of Art & Design, 2016. I am indebted to Caroline Vercoe for her thoughts and suggested sources on tā-vā.
- 68 Kihara in conversation with the author in Auckland, April 1, 2018.
- 69 As Caroline Vercoe argues, citing the 1990s essays of Epeli Hau'ofa, the Pacific region (including New Zealand) can best be understood through the networked concept of a "pan-Oceanic identity, grounded not in relation to ethnic identifications or geographic homelands [as the West would tend to see things], but defined by a relationship with the ocean." Vercoe, "Contemporary Māori and Pacific Artists Exploring Place," 133.

- 70 Niko Besnier, “Polynesian Gender Liminality Through Time and Space,” *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1994), 284–328, notes on 554–66.
- 71 Ibid., 286. Besnier notes that the opposite transgender situation does exist (he cites the Tongan *fakatangata* and Samoan *fa’atama*, “in the fashion of a man”) but “considerably fewer and less noticeable than liminal men; similar asymmetries are very common with gender-crossing across the world”; furthermore, he goes on to suggest that lesbianism or “female liminality” “may be of relatively recent origin,” for which he does not provide convincing arguments (see 288).
- 72 Tanu Gago is a founder and key spokesperson for FAFSWAG; he is cited in Jeremy Olds, “FAFSWAG: The Artists telling Queer Pacific Stories,” *Stuff Entertainment* (August 9, 2015), available online at: [www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/70898666/FAFSWAG-the-artists-telling-queer-pacific-stories](http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/70898666/FAFSWAG-the-artists-telling-queer-pacific-stories); accessed June 22, 2018. This article points out the origins of FAFSWAG around 2010, when Gago developed a photography series (*Avanoa O Tama*) based on getting to know local Pasifika people by engaging with them around their potential queerness (his term) and questions of gender and taking pictures of them in sets he designed. Finishing the series, he had established intense creative rapport with ten people with whom he founded FAFSWAG.
- 73 Jacob Tamata, an important choreographer and dancer in FAFSWAG, is Māori; Akashi Fisi’inaua, dancer and the key “chanter” or MC of the group’s voguing performances, is from Tonga.
- 74 *Concise Māori Dictionary Māori-English/English-Māori*, compiled by A. W. Reed, Revised by T.S. Kāretu (Auckland: Reed Methuen Publishers, 1948/reprint 1987), 53. This definition is taken from Herbert Williams, *Dictionary of the Māori Language*, the first Māori/English dictionary of 1832, supporting the concept of its pre-colonial existence, since the major colonizing of the land did not begin until the 1840s.
- 75 Jessica Hutchings and Clive Aspin, “Introduction,” *Sexuality and the Stories of Indigenous Peoples* (Wellington: Huia, 2007), 16. I am indebted to Rebecca Hobbs for recommending this excellent source.
- 76 Nopera’s blog can be found at: <https://hukacanhaka.com/>; accessed May 23, 2018. Thanks to performance studies scholar Martin Patrick (based in Wellington) for introducing me to Nopera.
- 77 Nopera filled in the details here, taught me about Kaupapa Māori, and conveyed the detailed impressions he felt producing this performance; discussion in Auckland June 28, 2018.
- 78 See “Rangahau,” *Rangahau*, [www.rangahau.co.nz/rangahau/31/](http://www.rangahau.co.nz/rangahau/31/) and “Principles of Kaupapa Māori,” [www.rangahau.co.nz/research-idea/27/](http://www.rangahau.co.nz/research-idea/27/); both accessed June 28, 2018.
- 79 See ‘Uhila, “Maumau-taimi,” 12, 13.
- 80 Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xxiii.
- 81 Ka’ili, Māhina (Hūfanga), and Addo, “Introduction,” 5.
- 82 Omise’cke Natasha Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage,” *GLQ* 14, n. 2–3 (2008), 191.
- 83 Ibid., 198.
- 84 Nopera was clear on this in our conversation of June 28, 2018.
- 85 Nopera, in an email of May 26, 2018, wrote to me: “Takatāpui identity is an area I’m passionate about, given that contemporary definitions for Takatāpui in Aotearoa have been contextualised through the life and experiences of my direct ancestor Tūtānakei. At the moment I am working alongside other Takatāpui researchers on the first national survey of Takatāpui well-being, as a means to understand and also decolonise contemporary Māori interpretations. It is very exciting work, although as you can imagine, difficult terrain and complex!”

- 86 This and remaining quotes from this paragraph are all from my discussion with Nopera, June 28, 2018.
- 87 Nopera, “Ārai: Breaking Beyond,” essay for *Ārai: Margaret Aull, Zena Elliott, Aimee Ratana*, exhibition catalogue (March 16–April 5, 2018), available on Nopera’s blog at: <https://hukacanhaka.com/2018/03/25/araibreaking-beyond-catalogue-essay/>, accessed May 23, 2018.
- 88 Anne Salmond, *Tears of Rangi*, 59, 44. Salmond points out that alternative, relational modes of knowledge did exist in Europe but were not dominant; see 36–7.
- 89 Goldberg, “Sodomy in the New World: Anthropologies Old and New,” in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3–18; Goldberg here excoriates anthropologist Walter Williams’s situating of the “special status accorded by some tribes to cross-dressing [as] a transhistorical locus for the affirmation of alternative sexual practices,” 12. Hutchings and Aspin, “Introduction,” 15.
- 90 Elizabeth Kerekere, “Part of the Whānau: The Emergence of Takatāpui Identity/*He Whāriki Takatāpui*,” a thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy, Te Kawa a Māui School of Māori Studies, Victoria University of Wellington (2017), 17.
- 91 Hutchings and Aspin, “Introduction,” 22–3.
- 92 Nopera, in our discussion June 28, 2018, noted to me that whakapapa can be challenged—one Māori person is likely to correct another Māori person’s narration of whakapapa, particularly if it appears egotistical or as glossing over forgotten tensions in the past.
- 93 Kerekere, “Takatāpui—Where Worlds Collide,” in *Sexuality and the Stories of Indigenous Peoples*, ed. Hutchings and Aspin, 38.
- 94 Salamond, *Tears of Rangi*, 52.
- 95 For details on this genealogy I am indebted to my mother, Virginia S. Jones, who maintained records and albums from my father’s side, as well as to my sister, Sarah Jones Cuskle, who has recently confirmed our family lore through her extensive research on ancestry.com and through travel and archival research.
- 96 See “Rev. J.P. Jones, D.D.,” in *Some American Opinions on the Indian Empire* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1916), which includes an excerpt from Jones’s *India, Its Life and Thought* (1908), 28–31.
- 97 These photographs, needless to say, reflect my family’s aspirations rather than the actual religious beliefs of those pictured. One of the things about Christian missions in India I discovered in my graduate school research years ago was that the Indian Hindus often appeared to accept Jesus and the Western trinity, but in fact were simply adding these elements to their elaborate pantheon of gods and goddesses—which could be viewed as simply practical, or as an act of energetic if necessarily passive resistance along the lines of Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, whereby in order to survive the colonized mimic but also distort customs and rituals of the colonizers; see Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *The Location of Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 85–92.
- 98 Salmond, *Tears of Rangi*, 76.
- 99 Biographical details in this section are drawn from Harrison T. Meserole, ed., “Roger Williams,” *American Poetry of the Seventeenth Century* ([?]: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 175–7, and James A. Warren, *God, War, and Providence: The Epic Struggle of Roger Williams and the Narragansett Indians against the Puritans of New England* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2018).
- 100 These are the terms proffered by Charlotte Gordon in her biography of Williams’s fellow Puritan colonist, the poet Anne Bradstreet, *Mistress Bradstreet: The Untold Life of America’s First Poet* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 2005), 144–9.

- 101 John Barry, “God, Government, and Roger Williams’ Big Idea,” *Smithsonian Magazine* (January 2012), available online at: [www.smithsonianmag.com/history/god-government-and-roger-williams-big-idea-6291280/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/god-government-and-roger-williams-big-idea-6291280/); accessed August 29, 2018. This article (which is hagiographic) is an excerpt from John Barry, *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 2012).
- 102 See Bruce Prescott, “Roger Williams, John Winthrop, and the Other,” *Ethics Daily* (June 2, 2008), available online at: <https://ethicsdaily.com/roger-williams-john-winthrop-and-the-other-cms-12719/>, accessed April 9, 2020.
- 103 This information on the founding of Providence in 1636 and the ownership of land can be found in wall texts at the Roger Williams National Memorial, Providence, Rhode Island (viewed on July 20, 2016).
- 104 On Williams’s thought and influence on later political theory, see Barry, “God, Government, and Roger Williams’ Big Idea.”
- 105 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 6.
- 106 See David Armitage, “John Locke, Carolina, and the *Two Treatises of Government*,” *Political Theory* 32, n. 5 (October 2004), 602–27.
- 107 See the very brief biography of Williams and mention of the deed at the National Memorial website: [www.nps.gov/rowi/learn/historyculture/rogerslife.htm](http://www.nps.gov/rowi/learn/historyculture/rogerslife.htm); and on Providence history, see [www.goprovidence.com/things-to-do/historic-providence/providence-history/](http://www.goprovidence.com/things-to-do/historic-providence/providence-history/); both accessed August 27, 2018. The deed visibly shows Williams’ signature as well as symbols ratifying Canonicus’s and Miantonomi’s agreement, with their names translated into English, along with another symbol translated as what looks like “Assotemasoit”—but this name I cannot trace. Another Narragansett tribe member, Sotaash (?), acted as a witness.
- 108 See Salmond on the Māori being coerced into the first land sale, without speaking English or being familiar with the concept of land as property that could be owned; *Tears of Rangi*, 91.
- 109 See Lisa Lowe, whom I quote here from *An Intimacy of Four Continents*, 10; and Armitage, “John Locke,” 619. For a brief history of the later seventeenth-century Narragansett, see Barry Byron, “Native Americans Shaped Rhode Island’s History,” *Providence Journal* (December 4, 2014); available online at: [www.providencejournal.com/opinion/commentary/20141204-barry-bayon-native-americans-shaped-rhode-islands-history.ece](http://www.providencejournal.com/opinion/commentary/20141204-barry-bayon-native-americans-shaped-rhode-islands-history.ece); accessed July 19, 2020.
- 110 Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America: Or, an Help to the Language of the Natives in that Part of America, Called New-England, Together, with briefe Observations of the Customes, Manners and Worships, etc., of the Aforesaid Natives in Peace and Warre, in Life and Death* (London: Gregory Dexter, 1643), digital version of the book available through the John Carter Brown Library, <https://archive.org/details/keyintolanguag00will>; accessed August 27, 2018. For a very flattering overview and assertion of the importance of the book see the Carter Roger Williams Initiative website: [www.findingrogerwilliams.com/essays/an-essay-on-a-key-into-the-language-of-america](http://www.findingrogerwilliams.com/essays/an-essay-on-a-key-into-the-language-of-america); accessed September 14, 2018. Williams also wrote a highly influential book a year later (1644) entitled *The Bloody Tenent, of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience, Discussed, in a Conference betweene Truth and Peace*, which John Barry has called “one of the most comprehensive treatises about the freedom of religion ever written,” in “God, Government and Roger Williams’ Big Idea.”
- 111 Digital version of Williams, *A Key into the Language of America*. All following quotes are from this source.
- 112 On Williams’ status as a poet, established through his verse in *A Key*, see Meserole, ed., “Roger Williams,” 175–84.

- 113 Preston, "A Dictionary in the Archives," 87.
- 114 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 8.
- 115 See Jonathan Goldberg, "Sodomy in the New World," 3–18; and Lee Wallace, *Sexual Encounters: Pacific Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).
- 116 Goldberg, "Sodomy in the New World," 7.
- 117 Wallace, *Sexual Encounters*, 1.
- 118 Ibid., 7, 8; my emphasis.
- 119 Niko Besnier, for example, describes a 1789 English account of encountering a Tahitian *māhū* ("this supposed damsel, when stripped of her theatrical paraphanelia [sic], [was shown to be] a dapper lad") and the Tahitians laughing at the Europeans' shock, see "Polynesian Gender Liminality Through Time and Space," 291–2.
- 120 Wallace, *Sexual Encounters*, 25, 26.
- 121 Ibid., 28.
- 122 Ibid., 139–40.
- 123 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 16.
- 124 Stoler argues in relation to the colonial encounter's reciprocal conditioning of European culture that postcolonial scholars have been working "to disassemble the neat divisions that could imagine a European History and its unified collectivities apart from the externalized Others on whom it was founded and which it produced," in *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 5.
- 125 By all accounts, Williams died a bitter man after backing the colonial militia in King Philip's War, as noted briefly above.

# 7

## TRANS

The prefix “trans-” mobilizes a series of concepts that offer rich possibilities to the understanding what performativity can do in relation to gender as a continual negotiation; trans- thus has an intimate relationship to queer discursively but also psychically. Trans- links, mediates, and interrelates qualities in ongoing ways, connecting the trans- (implying exceeding, moving toward, changing; going across, over or beyond) to the performative (saying as doing, or that which performs something while articulating it) and thus challenging the idea of the body and its sex/gender as fixed or immutable. Trans- can queer the body and our understanding of gendered subjectivity, speaking the body as relational, enacted, performative. As Mel Chen has noted, “*trans-* is not a linear space of mediation between two monolithic, autonomous poles ... Rather, it is conceived of as more emergent than determinate, intervening with other categories in a richly elaborated space.” The “prefixial *trans-*,” Chen continues, opens up what Mira Hird has described as a “broader sense of movement across, through, and perhaps beyond traditional classifications.”<sup>1</sup> Shifting away from the prefix to the word and identification as it is currently mobilized, trans moves us through time and space, exceeding normative modes of sex/gender being.

Huge claims have thus, not surprisingly, been made for trans in relation to gender. In this chapter I will use the terms “transgender” or “trans” to refer to people who self-identify as not conforming “to traditional gender identity binaries.”<sup>2</sup> Queer feminist theorist Jack Halberstam thus positions the transgender body as enacting queer’s promise, asserting in 1998:

The appearance of the transgender body in visual culture is ... part of a long history of the representation of unstable embodiment. We might even say that this form of postmodernism can be read as the cultural logic of anticapitalist, subcultural queer politics.<sup>3</sup>

But trans in relation to sex/gender is in fact far more complicated as an identification. Jay Prosser, specifically engaging Judith Butler's model in *Gender Trouble*, warns of this tendency among queer theorists to claim transgender as doing the work it demands:

While ... queer's alignment of itself with transgender performativity represents queer's sense of its own "higher purpose," in fact there are transgendered trajectories, in particular *transsexual* trajectories, that aspire to that which this scheme devalues. Namely, there are transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be nonperformative, to be constative, quite simply, to *be*.<sup>4</sup>

There is, then, a fraught but also often productive relationship between queer theory and transgender or transsexual individuals and identifications (transsexual was the term of common usage before the term transgender was introduced in the 1960s; transgender has become dominant since around 2000). At the same time, the intersection of queer theory and marginalized, of color, self-identified queer and/or trans bodies in other parts of the world—as FAFSWAG's performances and Tāwanga Nopera's work, introduced in the previous chapter, make clear—produces a wealth of opportunities for those willing to appropriate Western (primarily US) concepts of trans and rework its assumptions. Scholar of Pacific sexuality Katrina Roen thus points out that "a discussion of transgenderism would benefit from further consideration of the effects of westernization on gender liminality" in the Pacific, and I have asserted via Lee Wallace and others that Western queer theory would, reciprocally, benefit from attention to the effects of Pacific gender liminality on our models and experiences of the sex/gender complex.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter begins from the understanding that trans theory, a key intervention into second-wave feminist and gender theory from their burgeoning in the 1970s, has become an essential touchstone in understanding the genealogical trajectories of queer, performance, and related terms such as gender performativity. Trans modes of self-presentation, including in performance and art practices from voguing to the trans-critical work of artists such as Nopera, have greatly contributed to these insights. It is thus imperative to address trans theory and performance as integral to any discussion of gender/sex and performance or the performative—as well as of the political effects or valences of the latter.

I will address trans politics, experiences, and discourses, however, mostly obliquely here, by narrating personal experiences of dislocation via trans performances produced in Aotearoa New Zealand by performers primarily from Māori and Pasifika backgrounds. While in some cases I assign the term through the artist's own self-identification (which I specifically note), in most other cases, when I do not know how the performers self-identify, my reading of these performances as trans is meant loosely. In these latter contexts trans is meant to signify not necessarily "transgender" in the Western/anglophone sense but simply the fluidity or anti-(Western-)normative sex/gender identifications the performances seem to convey. In these cases my use of trans is admittedly

highly relational and projective—this determination has as much to do with me and the context of this book as with the performances. This text is inevitably written from my US point of view, looking toward Māori and Pasifika performances as they disorient or disrupt the genealogies I am tracing.

I leave aside for now Prosser's articulation of the key tension within trans discourse and experience—the desire among some trans people to “be” rather than performatively “do” gender—but this chapter will circle around it many times (as has the book as a whole). In so doing I hope to trace the path of debates, tensions, synergies, and revelations among feminism, queer theory, trans discourse, and the practices that relate to a range of sex/gender-critical performances without claiming to fully know or understand their complex relations, all of which are continuing to unfold in the present. Key to the shifting energies of the book, this chapter also allows the field notes to dominate, performatively putting practice in the foreground. This is an admitted attempt to narrate the limits of my own authority as I encountered worlds I could not fully understand.

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### Trans Performative Dislocations, I

It's February of 2018 and I've only just arrived in Auckland for my five-month stint as a Fulbright scholar, a representative of the US government (a state-sponsored carrier of US queer and performance theory). Fortunately, it's Auckland Pride week, and numerous performances are being presented. I attend as many as I can with my partner. (Note: we might appear to be heteronormative, as apparently a cis man and a cis woman; but I am fairly butch in my presentation these days and he has some femme alignments and we both consider ourselves at the very least as queer allies; as well, we are clearly identifiable as white, in his case Pākehā. It is worth noting that one of the reasons he left New Zealand in his 20s was the homophobic bullying directed at him as a fairly flamboyantly dressed and often femme young man. Perhaps we trouble in some ways trans discourse's tendency to binarize the “cis” versus the “trans”?)

The first performance we attend is by FAFSWAG—the collective of Māori and Pasifika self-described “queer” performers from South Auckland—at the Auckland Art Gallery.<sup>6</sup> We're still jet-lagged, and not sure what to expect. Ushered along with hundreds of other spectators, we go inside the gallery, then to an upper level with an outside terrace facing Albert Park (its name one of the many ubiquitous public signs of membership in the Commonwealth). I space out a bit, watching the large screen at the far end of the terrace, which is showing a new FAFSWAG documentary, bodies gallivanting across the luminous display; they appear gender-queer from a US point of view, bodies of all sizes in campy “ballroom” outfits, doing voguing moves.

Milling around is a mix of mostly white (art world?) people as well as many Pasifika and Māori people, and gender indeterminate or flagrantly gender-queer people, some in outlandish outfits, including several of the FAFSWAG members featured in the film being projected. Anticipation builds as we all begin to cluster in two groups on either side of a strip of ground that seems to be turning into a catwalk.

Suddenly the energy shifts as the charismatic Akashi Fisi'inaua or simply "Akashi," the primary FAFSWAG vogue ball MC or "chanter," explodes onto the scene. In beige harem pants, black bustier, spike heels, and slicked back wavy black hair with blond highlights, this gorgeous self-identified transwoman struts up and down the ad hoc catwalk.<sup>7</sup> In a mix of what seems to be rap, hip hop banter, and auctioneering patter, in English and some Pacific Island language I do not recognize (I learn later that she is from Tonga and lives in Auckland), she electrifies the crowd in preparation for a series of voguers twirling, duck walking, cat walking, punching, framing, kicking, spinning and dipping, and flipping their hands and arms down the runway—first FAFSWAG members and other apparent pros, followed by those participating in an open competition.<sup>8</sup>

Performance artist and theorist val smith, who identifies as a Pākehā gender non-binary person, describes FAFSWAG beautifully, with a mashup of mostly Western terminology, as follows:

[The] artists of FAFSWAG ... are broadening notions of what it means to fuck shit up, fuck up space, and [in Fisi'inaua's words] "fuck up the patriarchy." Through a framework of decolonisation, these artists are creating nuanced responses to the policing and violation of gender non-conformity and representation of Pacific stories, bodies and identities. Simultaneously, they are celebrating the public and private lives of Pacific queers living in Aotearoa ... and drawing attention to a system of white supremacy.

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Voguing: most agree that this dance/performance form as we currently know it originated in the 1980s in New York City among African American and Latinx drag queens, adopting gestures and moves from a range of sources including *Vogue* magazine style shoots, fashion runway modeling, breakdancing, and Egyptian hieroglyphs.<sup>9</sup> These communities gathered in "houses," run by "mothers," just as those in the Auckland voguing scene do today (FAFSWAG acts as a kind of alternative "house").

Tavia Nyong'o points to the link between vogue balls and the "black and brown working-class communities of the sex- and gender-nonconforming."<sup>10</sup> And, as DJ and queer theorist madison moore elaborates in a celebratory read of voguing, the catwalk or voguing runway

is about “self assertion, creativity, ownership, and fierceness”—spaces “to demand self-worth,” sites for the “fierce” performance of self by members of “queer and brown communities, disempowered groups that make their own culture” to assert agency and “crack … open normativity.”<sup>11</sup>

In spite of this relentless flirtation with “realness” and authenticity, voguing is also simultaneously a quintessential (or arguably constitutive, given Butler’s obsession with it) example of the *performativity* of gender as a “discourse” that merges hybrid elements from diverse cultures and forms of embodiment—in its original expression in New York City, voguing structurally connected modes of embodiment from Black, Latinx, and queer cultures, producing a syncretic articulation of “Africanist and of gay struggles.”<sup>12</sup> As moore puts it, the fierceness that voguers articulate through their performances enacts a form of what José Esteban Muñoz calls “critical idealism,” privileging “hope and possibility” among people who otherwise might be hopeless.<sup>13</sup> One could say voguing paradoxically makes the “realness” of gender/sex identifications performative (as Muñoz asserts, “[q]ueerness is … a performative” because of its “ideality” and futurity, its “insistence on potentiality”<sup>14</sup>), exposing the impossibility of securing gender/sex in any stable form. This is not to deny the urgent need to claim prideful identification (the “core aspect of yourself” moore asserts), which is key to coalitional determination and individual self-assertion among those in marginalized communities.

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Extending this concept to the Pasifika and Māori context of Aotearoa, which is justifiable to the extent that, as I elaborate below, these performers speak publicly of US queer theory, their knowledge of *Paris is Burning* as a model, and their awareness of their appropriation of urban Black and Latinx US culture, FAFSWAG appropriates voguing as a mode of self-empowerment for oppressed communities in South Auckland. They are self-conscious in effectively binding elements from these sources in US Black and Latinx urban dance cultures with gestures and modes of embodiment that are specifically Pasifika and Māori. FAFSWAG forms as it also expresses a self-identified queer and trans community figuring out a way to survive in Pākehā-dominant institutions while appropriating US queer theory and practice (white, Black, Latinx) to their own ends, crossing over and intertwining class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other identifications in doing so.

Tanu Gago, a leading figure in and co-founder of the collective, notes the crucial importance of FAFSWAG as an alternative “family,” a locus of bonding and mutual support where gender-liminal people rejected by their original families and/or by their communities or New Zealand society as a whole find common purpose. It is a site where bodies are

activated (it is tempting to say performatively) to *articulate* new forms of agency: Gago notes, “body sovereignty is a really important issue … the body [is] the last place people [still] have control.”<sup>15</sup> In South Auckland Gago notes that “until ‘trans lives matter,’ they didn’t matter,” and thus a key goal of FAFSWAG is to provide visibility and a community for its members to articulate empowered forms of queer and/or trans (or *fa'a-fafine*, *takatāpui*, gender liminal) embodiment.<sup>16</sup> FAFSWAG member Moe Laga adds, “performance is a tool of escaping to another world where I’m allowed to do whatever the fuck I want.”<sup>17</sup>

FAFSWAG members note the genesis of their voguing as residing in the American voguing scene (“Madonna didn’t start it,” however, as Laga rightly asserts). Member Roy Aati specifies their attraction to the New York model (which they would copy from videos online): “everyone in *Paris is Burning* had this bit of a lost soul and found themselves through the ballroom scene … seemed like they walked the same path as I did.”<sup>18</sup> FAFSWAG was inspired as well by the prevalence of hip hop in South Auckland in the 1990s—another appropriation of Black US urban culture that laid the groundwork for this later generation.

Akashi (her stage name) has made clear the drive to draw on voguing and a politics specific to the Pasifika queer community to counter the racist, sexist, and homophobic status quo in the quote partially cited earlier, where she asserts that FAFSWAG’s goal is “fucking up the patriarchy one Caucasian space at a time.”<sup>19</sup> In working with Akashi one sees her achieving this through adopting elements of Western/US styles such as voguing but tracking and transforming them via her body as habitualized to other forms of cultural ritual—all siphoned through a verbal tone and bodily gestures that are both impassioned and generous. Her habitus is specifically Tongan-Pasifika culture and her voguing moves inevitably draw on Pasifika ritual gestures and modes of embodiment as (in her words) a “way of letting go of trauma” through performance, where one can “hold complexity”; she concludes, “[t]hat place of unbalancedness [among elements in a performance] is where the juice is.”<sup>20</sup>

FAFSWAG is also fundamentally communal. As FAFSWAG’s website notes, they are joining forces with other Auckland voguing groups to form “Auckland Vogue Community” and it even allows for the fact that “FAFSWAG is not the identity of the community.” They are, however, explicit and forceful in their political claims: FAFSWAG artists are “not interested in power sharing unless it’s with the underclasses.”<sup>21</sup>

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Where are the Māori and Pasifika artists in texts and shows about LGBTQ artists and communities in Aotearoa? Can FAFSWAG be situated in a broader history of LGBTQ and/or Māori/Pasifika performance? Discussions of LGBTQ history and present activisms tend to divide into two



FIGURE 7.1 Akashi Fisi'inua MC'ing for FAFSWAG vogue event at Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland Pride week, February 7, 2018; photograph by Amelia Jones

separate worlds of discourse. In the mainstream (white) histories, the gay liberation movement arose in the early 1970s in New Zealand, with a major homosexual rights law (the Homosexual Law Reform Act) passed in 1986; the official LGBTQ movement was long dominated by the interests of white gay men, as I've noted occurred in the US to some degree.<sup>22</sup> In the art world, white male artists also dominated, although a few key Pākehā women—Fiona Clark, Ann Shelton—made important images documenting transgendered women, queers, and other sexual bohemians in Aotearoa from the 1970s through the 1990s. Shelton's 1990 photographs of queer and bohemian denizens of K Road (Karangahape Road, a hotspot in Auckland's queer scene) are known in the New Zealand art world.<sup>23</sup>



FIGURE 7.2 Ann Shelton, *Booby Tuesday at Home in Ponsonby*, from "Redeye" series of photographs on or near Karangahape Road (K Road), c. 1995–6; photograph courtesy of the artist

Exceptions to the white-dominance of the art and LGBTQ worlds of Aotearoa have always been around, of course (given the long pre-colonial history of takatāpui), and since the 1990s have become more broadly visible in and beyond the country. The Pacific Sisters, an Auckland-based queer feminist collective worked through fashion and art in the 1990s, and their maverick work (which crossed over design, art, performance, and the queer club scene) was featured in a show curated by Nina Tonga at Te Papa Tongarewa (Museum of New Zealand) in Wellington while I was in the country, in 2018, called *Pacific Sisters: Fashion*

*Activists.* I discuss work by Rosanna Raymond, a Pacific Sister, below, and recently, Pacific Sister Lisa Reihana (who is Māori) produced images of takatāpui such as the singer Ramon Te Wake, in her ongoing work to explore contemporary Māori sexualities.<sup>24</sup>



FIGURE 7.3 *Pacific Sisters: Fashion Activists* exhibition, 2018, Te Papa Tongarewa (Museum of New Zealand) in Wellington; photograph by Amelia Jones

Most interestingly, unbeknownst to me during my time in Auckland (not a single person I spoke to or interviewed mentioned this key figure), the Māori performer Mika—known as the “King of Kabaret”—has for over 30 years produced works involving drag queeneriness, BDSM performance, and traditional Māori dance in a dynamic national and international career, which peaked in the 1990s into the 2000s (he now has a television career and has been featured in several series).<sup>25</sup> Viewing works such as the two versions of *Ahi Ataahua* (beautiful fire), from 1998 and 2000, two short music videos both featuring Mika, deepens my productive confusion over the syncretism of forms and bodily gestures across Western queer and Pasifika/Māori traditions in productive ways.

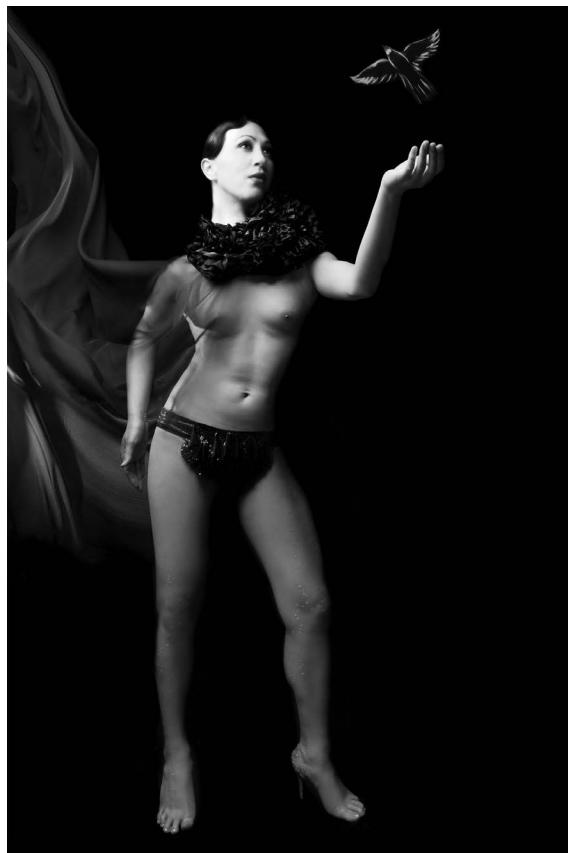


FIGURE 7.4 Lisa Reihana, *Diva* (portrait of Ramon Te Wake), 2000; crystal flex on aluminum, edition of five, each 78 x 49 x 1 in.

The 1998 version of *Ahi Ataahua*, featuring the Pacific drumming rhythms of the group Strike, stars Mika in queered versions of “native” Polynesian clothing designed by the Pacific Sisters.<sup>26</sup> His face and body covered in Pacific tattoos (painted on), Mika turns gestures common to the haka, including the tongue thrust, into a sexy queer come-on. In one scene he stands at least 8 feet tall in a lurid red plastic hula skirt (which itself is at least 6 feet from waist to floor), dancing amidst the drummers. In the 2000 version, Mika stands on a beach and next to a river (presumably in Aotearoa) with a group of male and female dancers performing moves from the haka (including the open-legged stance, turns, and hand fluttering) but softened by elements from classical Indian dance.<sup>27</sup> The body adornments here are far more traditional than in the earlier version: Mika has Pacific tattoos painted on his chest (by moko artist Te Rangikaihoro Laurie Nichols), and at one point wears a feathered cloak and headdress in muted colors,

singing the anthemic lyrics of the song “Ahi Ataahua” fiercely while standing on the shore. As Sharon Mazer argues, “the surf crashing behind him, [he becomes] a rangatira, chieftain,” leading the other dancers into an indigenous future (but one queered with curvy versions of haka moves). With Mika singing the words in te reo, the music combines a traditional song with Māori words and electronic music and the video overall becomes more of a reclaiming of Māori tā and vā than the 1998 version.

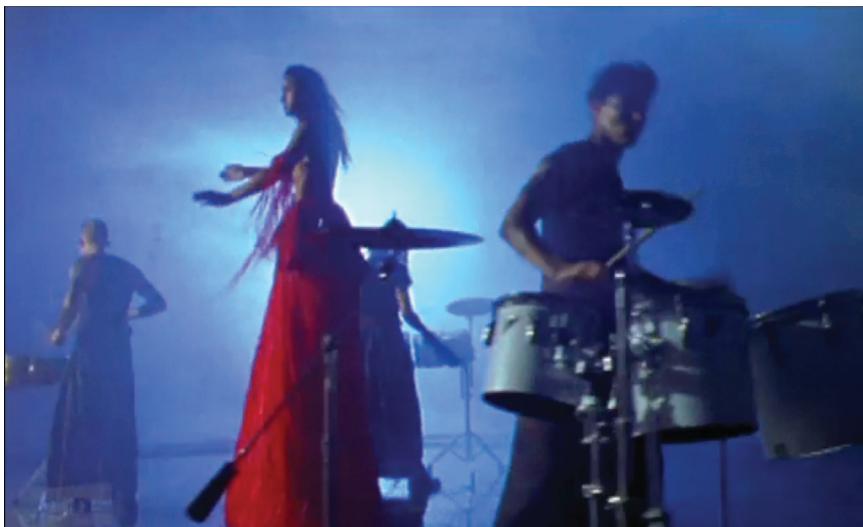


FIGURE 7.5 Mika in *Ahi Ataahua*, 1998; featuring the drumming group Strike, directed by Warrick “Waka” Attewell; screenshot from video



FIGURE 7.6 Mika in *Ahi Ataahua*, 2000 version, directed by Whetu Fala and Sharon Hawke, and produced by Mika and Mark James Hamilton; screenshot from video

Mika was to go on to mash up more forms of performance in works such as the various song and dance routines with his group Torotoro in the Mika Haka Show in 2003 (again garbed by Pacific Sisters), and in works where he collaborated with young performers and channeled extreme forms of touristic performance as what he calls “Plastic Māori”—re-taking these now stylized modes that so often lapse into a kind of New Zealand version of minstrelsy in official national events through overt and exaggerated but also queerly updated modes of embodiment. And the 2014 Auckland Pride Parade featured Mika leading a squadron of young queers down Auckland’s posh Ponsonby Road, all dressed in absurdly flamboyant versions of “native” garb (including his “Caged Māori Temptress” costume by Kiri Nathan)—I am deeply sorry I missed this one!<sup>28</sup>

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These previous exclusions but also this lineage of genderfuck in 1990s Auckland Māori and Pasifika culture help contextualize FAFSWAG’s appearance at Auckland Art Gallery (with its fairly predictable, mostly white audiences). Clearly FAFSWAG works within this lineage to further Akashi’s stated goal of “fucking up the patriarchy,” in the extended sense that would include all state power structures, which have been so crushing to the Māori spirit and well-being since the beginning of crown rule. If, in the 1990s, the Pacific Sisters and Mika worked largely in marginal spaces, FAFSWAG’s work is dynamic because of their willingness to infiltrate mainstream institutions. As Akashi put it in a recent interview, “[i]nstitutions need us, and not the other way around.”<sup>29</sup>

The art gallery is one place to infiltrate—particularly since it was built for “art” (i.e., things made by Europeans). Another venue in Auckland—the War Memorial Museum (WMM) or Auckland Museum, originally named after the memorial at its grand neo-classical front entry—is the city’s major natural history museum (the venue built for the “artifacts” made by indigenous people).<sup>30</sup> In both venues the dramatically “live” bodies of FAFSWAG performers made an impact, negotiating European/Pākehā constructions from different directions. The FAFSWAG event in the WMM, also part of Pride Week, was staged after a panel called “Explicit Inclusion Identity” (February 14, 2018)—which included queer Pasifika, Māori, and Pākehā spokespeople such as the first trans mayor in the world, the Māori actress, former sex worker and drag queen, Georgina Beyer.<sup>31</sup> Visitors were introduced to the lecture hall by drag queen hostesses, and then the panelists discussed the rights of trans or gender liminal people; after the panel, we were lead through the darkened halls of the WMM, where reside impressive Māori monuments, such as an entire marae (meeting house) and a waka (large canoe) as well as Māori and Pasifika ritual objects—all presented as artifacts. Voguing in the

space of the dead artifact at this second event, FAFSWAG makes Pasifika/Māori bodies aggressively “live” and in the present.

It is in this context that FAFSWAG’s live bodies can be seen as truly radical, arguably combining non-normative sex/gender modes of embodiment with the differing temporalities assigned to cultures in European time: European culture (forever progressing, its subjects capable of making “art”) and Pasifika and Māori culture (forever in the “past,” producing only never-changing “artifacts”). FAFSWAG shifts the meaning of culture, shaped in Pākehā New Zealand via these dichotomized sites of display, drawing them together through their live bodies and thus in relation to the space (*vā*) and time (*tā*) of oceanic Pacific Island imaginaries, concepts introduced in Chapter 6.



**FIGURE 7.7** Akashi Fisi’inaua performing at FAFSWAG vogue event at War Memorial Museum, Auckland Pride week, February 14, 2018; photograph by Amelia Jones

FAFSWAG’s performing bodies at the WMM among “artifacts” of indigenous culture felt exciting, energized, and assertively *hybrid*. This hybridity constitutes their (queerness), from an American point of view, which encompasses and is expressed through their (tongue-in-cheek? sincere?) performance of Māori and Pasifika rituals (some of them entered first in grass skirts and facial markings) side-by-side with voguing.<sup>32</sup> At the very least, they “fuck up the patriarchy” in the sense that they combine (arguably through an activation of *tā-vā* as an alternative theory of lived time and space) very living bodies, unfolding in time/space, in the reifying spaces of the art and natural history museums.

Tēvita O. Ka'ili, 'Ōkusitino Māhina (Hūfanga), and Ping-Ann Addo have defined tā-vā in relation to the fact that, in contrast to Western linear and rational narratives of time and space,

In historical but circular ways, the knowledge and skills from the past ... are situated as guidance in front of people in the present, and the future, which is yet to take place, is put in the back of people in the present, informed by the refined experiences of the past ... [In] most Moana [Pacific] cultures, artists mediate/reconcile conflicting times-spaces by symmetrically or rhythmically marking time (tā) in space (vā) to give rise to ... beauty.<sup>33</sup>

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As I suggested in the previous chapter, it is dangerously tempting to fold the complex concepts of tā and vā into Anglophone theories of queer time and space. They are not commensurate. Nonetheless, again, Elizabeth Freeman's argument about temporal "drag" (linked to the US sense of queer)—and particularly her warning about the privileging of drag (queenery) in US-based queer theory—might apply in interesting ways to FAFSWAG's insertion of hybrid, of color, gender/sex liminal bodies into the time and space of Western museums:

theoretical work on "queer performativity" sometimes ... undermines not just the essentialized body that haunts some gay, lesbian, and feminist identity-based politics but also political history itself—the expending of physical energy in less spectacular or theatrical forms of activist labor done in response to specific crises. This may be one way that drag, as thought by queer performativity theory, actually occults the social rather than creating it.<sup>34</sup>

Freeman offers an explicit, appropriately cautious framework through which we can question the translation of New York voguing and drag culture (from one place) into the Māori and Pasifika cultures of Aotearoa (another place). As noted, FAFSWAG members (Gago in particular) have often expressed an awareness of the dangers of their appropriation of Black and Latinx modes of US queer club performance from the 1980s and early 1990s (another time, another place). But the asymmetrical structures of power make my translation far more politically fraught than FAFSWAG's—I must not simply take FAFSWAG's versions of voguing and force them back into Freeman's North American model of queer time. At the same time, how can I avoid not thinking their work through her provocative framework, through which I viewed the performances in Aotearoa? Freeman continues:

Moreover, to reduce all embodied performances to the status of copies without originals [per Judith Butler's theory of the iteration of all performatives] may be to ignore the interesting threat that the genuine *past-ness* of the past ... sometimes makes to the political present. Might some bodies, by registering on their very surface the co-presence of several historically contingent events, social movements, and/or collective pleasures, complicate or displace the centrality of *gender-transitive drag* to queer performativity theory? Might they articulate instead a kind of *temporal transitivity* that does not leave feminism, femininity, or other so-called anachronisms behind?<sup>35</sup>

In this way, FAFSWAG clearly cannot be understood as simply extending or mimicking (without change) as "copy without original" US forms of drag queenery or voguing culture—to reduce the group's work to this formulation would be fundamentally to misunderstand the different valences of the time and space (*tā* and *vā*) of Māori and Pasifika ways of living and performing in Aotearoa. Attending to the "time" of queerness, however, Freeman at least opens the door for a critique of the obsessive deployment of "*gender-transitive drag*" as a keystone of theories of queer performativity—a deployment that clearly becomes disjunctive if one attempts to apply it wholesale to performances by FAFSWAG in the context of Aotearoa.

The performances of FAFSWAG and the theory of *tā-vā* move our understanding even further from the linear temporalities and US-centric presumptions about geographic locale that still linger in any Euro-American concept of queer.

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I attend another Auckland Pride week performance by Fine Fatale's *Geish Tuiga* on February 10, 2018, at Q Theatre downtown. Here, a range of dance moves and styles animate a group of self-identified Pasifika fa'afafine, glorious in their range of movements, bodies, and gender expressions. As the press release proclaims: "The fa'afafine of the Queendom bring you a unique experience of the collision between ancient and urban Polynesians worlds"—once again, bodies mobilized to create non-linear temporalities in space (*tā-vā*).<sup>36</sup> The moves are hybrid, as are the bodies and sexualities; they are Sāmoan as well as (queer) Western in their signification: the Q Theatre website notes "their elusive style combines Pacific motifs and Street (Hip Hop) finesse." The energy is galvanizing, not only among the dancers but among fellow audience members, who appear to be largely Pasifika and seem to know the dancers personally or at least as performers: they stand, shout out the names of dancers, stomp and clap in their own repertoire of appreciation for these gender liminal cultural warriors. This

relational exultation, with the audience almost as active as the performers, shifts the experience of the work to one of mutual or shared time/space, even though the performing bodies are on a traditional proscenium. This is a new version of Aotearoa-style (queer) temporality, flirting with the expansiveness offered by a lived understanding of tā-vā.

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### **Trans/feminism and performance**

The question of transsexual, transgender, gender fluid, cross-gendered, gender-nonconforming, gender non-binary, gender liminal, or otherwise transitional identifications has gained enormous cultural visibility in twenty-first-century North American culture, not the least through the increasingly public roles of trans people in media, politics, and other forms of social life. Susan Stryker, in her important 2008 *Transgender History* points out, however, that trans people and politics have been at the center of gender/sex liberation movements since at least the 1960s—we need only remember the indelible image of Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson marching at the front during the Stonewall protests and in subsequent queer activist and gay pride events. Stryker also notes here that, for her, transgender is fluid and indeterminate: “it is *the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place*—rather than any particular destination or mode of transition.”<sup>37</sup> And of course, as we have seen, the question of gender liminality is not new at all, nor is it even “modern,” particularly obviously in Pacific and North American indigenous societies.<sup>38</sup>

As transgender people become more visible in the US, inevitably the question of their rights and freedoms becomes politicized. There have been two major sites of resistance to trans people or even the *idea* of trans in US discourse, both crystallizing around transwomen: one is the largely theoretical arena of transphobic feminist theory; the other is that of public space, specifically crystallizing in the 2010s in debates about the usage of public bathrooms. As is well known in histories of trans theory, Janice Raymond’s 1979 book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* asserted an early version of transphobic feminism, driven by essentialist understandings of gender/sex and anxieties around “real” women losing out to masquerading transwomen. Raymond notoriously claimed:

All transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves. However, the transsexually constructed lesbian feminist violates women’s sexuality and spirit, as well. Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception.<sup>39</sup>

Radical trans-positive feminists Sandy Stone and Kate Bornstein have countered such rhetoric with pro-transfemale, feminist arguments in important c. 1990 texts—

Stone's foundational, fierce and generous essay, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" (1987), and Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw* (1994).<sup>40</sup> And, as Paisley Currah has argued, the broadening of gender—and particularly feminist—theory to embrace trans issues (still largely referring to the US context) owes much to the "intersectional version of feminism" laid out primarily by Black feminists such as the members of the Combahee River Collective (and of course Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who invented the term "intersectional" in relation to feminism around 1990).<sup>41</sup>

Trans plays a role in an investigation of queer performance through the challenge that trans experiences, theories, and performance practices pose to some of the assumptions embedded in even the most sophisticated versions of queer theory, such as Butler's. Trans theory aligns in some cases with the more essentializing versions of feminism (I have already noted via Prosser that some trans theorists and people seek to fix gender as "authentic," even if it is not in accord with birth anatomy) and in other cases with de-essentializing, poststructuralist feminist theories of gender as fluid, performed, and contextual. In turn, trans theory has a complex relationship to queer theory. We have seen that queer has been largely aligned with openness, flow, and nonfixity of gender/sex identification (often through an explicit or implicit notion of the performative nature of gender identity).

Interestingly, trans in some of its forms challenges this reliance on a model of gender performativity from both sides. Trans thus manifests in debates and experiences of sexed/gendered embodiment—as well as in performances—as either *more* fluid than queer (often as *epitomizing* but also *transcending* queer in its elasticity) or *less* fluid than queer (as relying on the attainability of an authentic, fixed, gendered body). Although there are myriad forms of trans as an identification, experienced subjectivity, rhetoric, and/or theory, it has tended to linger in these two very different modes—so different, they appear oppositional: one extreme opens gender and sexuality to a flux that enacts gender/sex as indeterminate, attaching to and performed by bodies that simply refuse to align with gender and sexual object choice as these have been defined in the past; the other extreme tends toward claims of "essential" or "authentic" gender and toward avoiding questions of sexual object choice, orientation, or sexuality tout court. The latter is epitomized, as discussed in Chapter 5, by conservative media figures such as Caitlyn Jenner (the transwoman previously known as male Olympian Bruce Jenner), who documented her transition on her 2015–16 reality TV show *I am Cait*. Here, Jenner repeatedly insisted that becoming a woman has allowed her to exist in her "authentic" womanhood; she also coyly deferred questions posed by her new transwomen friends regarding whether she would shift her sexual object choice from women to men, with her newly public identification as a woman.<sup>42</sup>

Taking two arguments as exemplary of a range of critiques of queer feminist theories of gender performance from the point of view of trans identifications will be instructive in showing the tension between queer feminist and trans as these have been elaborated in theory and performance since the late 1980s

emergence of queer performance as a nexus of arguments about the gendered/sexed subject. Jay Prosser's 1998 book *Second Skins*, cited above, argues against a particular version of poststructuralist feminism defined by a model of gender/sex as fluid and unfixed (one reading of Butler). Prosser notes that some trans people seek to transform the materialities of their bodies in a gesture of relative fixity, seeking to align with the perceived attributes of the gender that corresponds with their felt identification. Prosser situates trans—he uses the term transsexuality—as what Jack Halberstam calls (in evaluating Prosser's work much later) a “nonperformative relation to materiality.”<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, in relation to Butler's tendency (from *Gender Trouble* to *Bodies that Matter* to the 2004 *Undoing Gender*) to claim the trans person or drag performer as constitutive of a progressive version of gender performativity, Prosser and Viviane (sometimes called Ki) Namaste have also argued strongly against Butler's erasure of the contextual specificity of violence against trans people (usually transwomen) in her particular mobilization of trans.<sup>44</sup> For example, in *Bodies that Matter*, as we have seen, Butler focuses an entire chapter on the voguing balls featured in *Paris is Burning*, with attention fleetingly paid to the violent death of Venus Xtravaganza, one of the voguers in the film and a transgendered Latinx. Feminist trans theorist Talia Bettcher has summed up the arguments of Prosser and Namaste against Butler: while the philosopher celebrates Xtravaganza's “transubstantiation of gender” and briefly notes the roles of racism and transphobia in her horrific demise, Butler's version of Xtravaganza “involves allegorizing her life and death as a way to generate theoretical mileage for her own views while failing to make room for her as a person who lived and died as a transsexual” (and I would add one multiply marginalized by her effeminacy, trans status, role as a sex worker, poverty, and perceived ethnicity as a brown person).<sup>45</sup>

In *Second Skins*, Prosser offers a powerful corrective to Butler's psychoanalytic model, largely by rethinking what he argues to be Butler's concept of gender as a surface appearance through the work of Didier Anzieu on the “skin ego” in relation to phenomenological experience.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, in order to interrogate Butler's “use” of trans people and drag queen culture to illustrate gender performativity, Namaste draws on loosely Marxist concepts, foregrounding the issue of the labor (often sex work) and ethnic/racial identifications of trans people who are subjected to violence. In two major articles, Namaste draws on the empiricism of social science research to point out that, while Butler asserts an interest in trans cultures in general as dislocating fixed models of gender, the philosopher in fact focuses largely on transwomen and drag queen performances.<sup>47</sup> And, while Butler professes her concern for the violence perpetrated against (in Butler's words) “trans persons of color,” and (as Namaste argues, citing Butler) “locates that violence as ‘part of a continuum of the gender violence that took the lives of Brandon Teena, Matthew Shepard, and Gwen Araujo’,” Namaste insists that we must attend to the fact that this violence is not a “continuum,” but, rather, is vastly disproportionately wielded against transwomen: “Not only are most of the trans people murdered sex workers but they are nearly

100 per cent male-to-females. And that very crucial aspect is completely erased when people frame the issue as one of ‘violence against transgender people’.”<sup>48</sup>

Namaste in turn notes the abstracting tendencies of Butler’s queer theory, with its erasure of the actualities of transgender people’s experiences (particularly transwomen and their common roles as sex workers and as performers in LGBTQ-friendly bars and clubs). She calls for attention to social sciences approaches to exploring gender/sex formations in relation to specific bodies and specific communities: while “[q]ueer theory demands that readers infer the entire Western sex/gender system from specific examples of drag,” social scientists begin from the specific contexts of particular communities.<sup>49</sup> Noting that Butler in particular “fails to account for the context in which these gender performances occur,” a social science approach, Namaste argues, would note the fact that drag queen performances tend to occur in urban spaces created and defined by gay male culture, which, Namaste points out, sometimes otherwise denies entry to women, including transwomen, unless they are performers:

Even when genetic women, transsexual women, and males in drag are permitted entry into gay male establishments, they remain peripheral to the activities at hand. Drag queens, for example, are tolerated as long as they remain in a space clearly designated for performance: the stage ... The relegation of drag to the stage is a supplementary move which excludes transgenders even as it includes us.<sup>50</sup>

This paradoxical inclusion/exclusion, she points out, is carried through in LGBTQ Pride parades and versions of queer in mainstream culture (with “the relegation of drag queens to the stage”), which might embrace drag queens for a laugh, as entertainment, but rarely respect them as people.<sup>51</sup>

Extending these arguments and calling for new methods, Namaste suggests that an attention to “indigenous knowledge” formations might correct some of this blindness—specifically citing Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s influential 1999 book (discussed in my previous chapter) *Decolonizing Methodologies*.<sup>52</sup> This call for attention to indigenous people’s interests asserts the usefulness of my attending to the materialities of FAFSWAG members’ home environment in South Auckland, inasmuch as I could understand this context through talking to them, visiting the suburb of Māngere where some of them are from and/or live, and listening to my Pākehā partner describe growing up in that specific working-class neighborhood. I would eschew, however, Namaste’s assertion of empirical evidence as more revealing or (she implies) more truthful than abstract theory; rather, I would stress that any form of “indigenous knowledge” can only be understood relationally and extremely partially by a visitor (or interloper) like me. As well, I would insist on the reliance of any “empirical” study on theoretical and conceptual frameworks, whether acknowledged or not. And finally, I would assert the inextricably intertwined nature of indigenous and Pākehā

knowledge formations at this point in the history of Aotearoa. Decolonization is an important utopian political concept but not a final state that could actually be attained.

I attempt to attend to FAFSWAG's specific cultural environment here from my "fieldwork" (as an amateur ethnographer), by noting comments made by individual members of the group regarding their formation of a collective, and through impressions I received in viewing some of their work in that context. Tanu Gago in particular has been explicit about his role in forming FAFSWAG as an alternative family for the queer- and trans-identified Māori and Pasifika members who have been mistreated both by their own communities in South Auckland and by the normative white culture of Auckland's mainstream art and performance worlds.<sup>53</sup>

The specific concerns of Pasifika and Māori queer and trans people are nuanced depending on specific community, the part of New Zealand they live in, and whether their original families are relatively recent immigrants from the Pacific Islands, more established in Aotearoa, or Māori and thus considered indigenous. In addition to these variations, as I noted in the previous chapter, the people colonized as well as those of recent immigrant status and people of color in general have higher rates of unemployment, poverty, and incarceration in New Zealand. The faculty and students at institutions such as the top-ranked universities (the University of Auckland, for example, which was my institutional affiliation while there on a Fulbright) are vastly disproportionately white or, in the case of students, white and East Asian.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, gaps between the median income of whites/Europeans and that of Māori as well as Pacific Islanders are increasing with late-capitalist forms of globalization (notably, Pasifika peoples' median income is lower than that of Māori people, and just over half that of Pākehā New Zealanders on average). In New Zealand, in short, Māori and Pasifika communities suffer disproportionately in terms of life standards in relation to the European (in this case Pākehā) population.<sup>55</sup>

These statistics and the epistemological framework through which I deploy them are absolutely based on European modes of knowledge, as Tuhiwai Smith would no doubt point out. But, naturally, Māori and Pasifika activists also draw on them to promote activist causes. In the case of Māori people, these have increasingly, since the explosion of the Māori rights movement, revolved around the right to speak te reo (the Māori language) and to practice their customs, as well as around land claims. Needless to say, Māori people also inevitably work from their own modes of embodiment—from the language, customs, and ritual known to them through their family and community environments—to promote causes.<sup>56</sup> In many cases, these forms of protest are explicitly performance based (one is tempted to say "performative," but for the arguably colonizing nature of that term, as Namaste's arguments point out).



**FIGURE 7.8** Tame Iti shooting a New Zealand flag, protest at the 2005 meeting of the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal

The Māori activist and performer Tame Iti, for example, participated in or spearheaded a number of protests from the 1970s forward, sometimes for general Māori causes, sometimes for his own tribe, the Tūhoe people (Ngāi Tūhoe) from the North Island, promoting their land claims (which were successful in prompting restitution in 2014).<sup>57</sup> In one famous protest at a meeting of the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal (the political group responsible for hearing land claims) in 2005, Iti exposed his ass in a gesture the Māori call “whakapohane” (exposure of the buttocks to an adversary with the intention of expressing contempt) and shot holes in a New Zealand flag.<sup>58</sup> Iti in this way was drawing on Māori warrior tactics, which involve making use of the full range of corporeal power in ritual gestures aimed at intimidating one’s adversaries (viz., the fierce stamping, rhythmic chanting, protruding tongue gesture found in the kapa haka, a ritual form of collective militaristic challenge), making his aggressive actions clearly readable to a broader public via the mainstream media and general public.<sup>59</sup> Humorous as well as belligerent, Iti’s various public performances show both aesthetic and political sophistication. He is in fact experienced both as an activist and as a theater performer.<sup>60</sup> Not overtly sexualized or seeking to foreground issues of sex/gender oppression, the performances nonetheless register as potentially (queering) the “proper” behavior required by the white-dominant, British crown-backed New Zealand government of its citizens.

More complex in concept was Tame Iti’s protest at an earlier 1995 meeting of the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal, wherein he mounted a ladder in the meeting room and unveiled a giant banner with a list of dates and descriptions of moments when the government (always referred to as “the crown”) broke the terms of the treaty by stealing land from the Māori and violating and harming them. Unfurling his banner, Iti shouted out “Here are our grievances ...” in te reo. As described by his son Toi Iti, the ladder was conceived specifically to raise Tame Iti over the height of the officials on the dais, who were adjudicating issues surrounding the treaty:

through his theater he exposed the theater. They put themselves at the top table, which is this place of authority, symbolism we just accept ... by him climbing up the ladder to put himself on par, it exposes the fact that they are performing theater.<sup>61</sup>

A video of the protest shows a middle-aged white official tellingly holding his head in his hands as if in despair at Iti's action.<sup>62</sup>

Affirming his savvy as an activist who knows how and when to draw on the drama of performance rituals that mesh Māori with European strategies, Iti is no novice. He is well versed in the ideology of international revolutionary movements from European Marxism to Maoism and the African National Congress.<sup>63</sup> He was also involved in a famous case involving the Tūhoe reenacting a serious incursions into their land whereby "the Crown destroyed crops and homes, starved, killed and arrested people and confiscated lands in the 1860s."<sup>64</sup> Iti was arrested for his participation in this performed reenactment, during which shots were fired. This and his involvement in a Māori youth training camp involving guns in 2007 lead the government to arrest Iti as one of the "Urewera four" and to label him a "terrorist," in the classic European state reversal of claims of violence whereby indigenous people are disempowered. Jailing Iti on firearms charges, the government, however, ended up dropping its terrorism charges and, due in part to the publicity Iti had garnered, the police were forced to apologize to the Tūhoe later for their violent incursion into their land and homes.<sup>65</sup>

The effects of Tame Iti's style of performance are profound—playing a role in major concrete political victories for the Tūhoe people, and for Māori in general. As Māori studies scholar Ranginui Walker noted, Iti's gestures are theatrical:

What you see depicted in the media time and time again is the shooting of the flag. That's all theatre; that's all consistent with Maori culture. It looks spectacular on TV and Pakeha get intimidated by it because they don't understand it's theatre.<sup>66</sup>

And as media studies scholar Julie Cupples has argued, Iti has (along with others) been successful in using Māori forms of performance and activism in relation to the country's mainstream media to shift the tone and attitudes around Māori activism such that, by 2017,

[i]t is the Crown and the Government, rather than Tūhoe, that are now represented in the media as violent entities, refigured partly as a consequence of Iti's activism. The lack of civility so often ascribed to Iti is now ascribed to the Crown and agents of the state.<sup>67</sup>

This brief discursis out of queer and trans issues into Māori activism gives a (but definitively not *the*) context for the work of FAFSWAG, both its production

out of Pasifika and Māori communities (whose members, as Iti's activism shows us, have been since the 1980s increasingly poised to challenge the white-dominant government and media), and its reception by an Aotearoa audience already deeply familiar with forms of political activism through performance. While Iti's social performances have not been discussed by scholars of queer theory or foregrounded by indigenous/Pasifika gender liminal people, his protests are always already gendered and deeply coded in terms of his specific mode of embodiment. He is a small, intense Māori man covered in "tā moko," or full-body Māori tattoos (which are carved in the flesh as well as inked; in Iti's case, these include stunning and highly visible facial markings, which signal his projection of fierceness).<sup>68</sup> From a white visitor's point of view, he seems to draw on tropes of Māori masculinity to make his points—and yet, to some degree, these are available to Māori women as well (particularly the chin moko). In general, Māori women are and have been quite powerful—in some tribes they have long acted as leaders, retained rights to ancestral lands, and held the right to speak on marae.<sup>69</sup> In this case, Iti is willing to make use of perceptions of his specifically masculine, Māori-coded body, clearly well aware that his combination of anti-government action with the appearance of his heavily tattooed face (in particular) produces a fear factor among un-self-reflective whites and members of the white-dominant media, which until recently portrayed him as either terrifying (a "terrorist") or as clownish and silly (dismissible).<sup>70</sup>

Drawing on indigenous/Māori modes of bodily comportment (most notably whakapohane and tā moko) and taking advantage of a very contemporary range of New Zealand media, Iti has performed himself as a political being fighting for Māori rights, and not to be ignored. Gender roles and perceived sexual identifications are always central to such performances, whether they are rendered explicit or not. To this end, in a genealogy such as I sketch here, it is essential, regardless of the dangers of appropriation, to bring together American/Western and indigenous (in this case Māori) theories and ways of thinking to understand the complex effects of performances such as those of Iti and of younger generation performers—such as the members of FAFSWAG.

FAFSWAG performers draw on tactics and signifiers from media such as American film, television, and YouTube but they also channel modes of embodiment and activism from their own cultures along with performance tactics linked to global social media platforms such as Facebook (FAFSWAG was founded out of early social media posting on the site by members) and Instagram (on which Akashi Fisi'inaua is a fierce and ubiquitous presence). They are very connected in terms of global social media networks, but also grounded in their community in South Auckland. As Gago has noted, his initial role in co-founding FAFSWAG with Pati Solomona Tyrell and others came out of his discomfort with the oppressive, heteronormative structures of masculinity in Pasifika (Sāmoan) culture in Aotearoa. As a young man, he notes that he saw "a lot of young men struggle with their emotional literacy," and with being forced into manual labor professions

that are “masculine”; motivating him to form arts collaborative in South Auckland is the fact that “art saved my life because it let me have feelings.”<sup>71</sup>

Performing energized and proud brown bodies that are, in Gago’s words, queer, empowers. Gago makes clear that, in the case of FAFSWAG, the empowerment afforded by voguing and other forms of performance is a key part of the formation of a supportive collective. Complexly interrelating cultural forms from Pasifika, Aotearoa Pākehā, Māori, and US contexts, (queer), queer, and trans performance in this case saves lives.

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### *Trans Performative Dislocations, II*

It’s now mid-April and Pride week is long over. I’ve immersed myself in the Auckland queer performance scene as much as I can. I haven’t been feeling well. I seem to experience the disorientation of living in foreign countries somatically, feeling “queer” in the old-fashioned sense of unwell, ill, queasy ... My mind is my body and vice versa, and I am not digesting the atmosphere (my stomach hurts, and my brain starts racing with anxiety and a longing to be home). I feel thoroughly out of time and space, in a queered relationship with the synchronicities around me, a metaphor for the impossibility of my ever fully comprehending the tāvā of Pasifika/Māori or even Pākehā experience.

Nonetheless, I’ve committed myself to attending an all-day event at Q Theatre called “Attack the Block!,” featuring FAFSWAG members on a series of panels and afternoon workshops. The two morning panels—on “Representation and Agency” and “Community and Collective Practice”—are illuminating on the group’s collective desire, as Gago put it, to create an alternative “shared space” to counter isolation among queer young people in Auckland’s Pasifika and Māori communities. Gago explains that the group started out of a Facebook page that was nurturing an alternative community—one characterized by what panelist Elyssia Wilson Heti describes as “collective dysfunction but also collective joy,” wherein the vogue balls became a means of creating an “ethos of community building.”<sup>72</sup> FAFSWAG’s family mentality leads to performances defined by a “group consciousness or distributed agency,” in the words of Auckland-based dance scholar Carol Brown.<sup>73</sup> This is apparent in the fact that all performances by members of the group are listed as FAFSWAG-authored, with individual personnel usually noted only in the programs for the works.

On the panel, Gago notes that the word “queer” and other “Western” terms are used by the group because “otherwise it doesn’t make sense,” seemingly implying that, without these appropriations, their work wouldn’t translate to the white-dominant communities of Auckland and beyond. He describes the group’s interest in the Pacific concept of

"Talanoa," a Fijian and Pasifika word for being in dialogue or "hashing things out"—and other participants on the panel elaborated this point: rather than "gatekeeping," fighting over terms and turf, the essence of FAFSWAG is "sharing."<sup>74</sup>

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After lunch, I attend the workshop lead by Akashi Fisi'inaua and Elyssia Wilson Heti. I wait with anticipation outside the designated room; there are only four of us participants: myself, two University of Auckland art students, and another FAFSWAG member, Jaycee Tanuvasa. I am seriously intimidated by the latter, as she *knows what to do*; I am also the oldest by decades. The two leaders come out and bring us into a large open room, where the only noticeable item is a table at one end covered with objects, the significance of which will be revealed later.

We start by standing in a circle, and Akashi asks us to describe our relationship to our bodies, in private as well as public spaces. We learn that Akashi and Jaycee self-identify as Pasifika and as transwomen; Elyssia as a "fat" cis Pasifika woman; Ara describes herself in terms of her Māori background and sense of empowerment in relation to that space. Honor and I, as the only white-identified women, seem to be the most self-conscious, almost cringing as we convey a sense of not belonging. Given the context and my consciousness of Akashi's virtuosic performance of femininity, I speak of being an older woman who has gone through menopause and suddenly becoming invisible in public spaces, dismissed as no longer signaling sexual potential to heterosexual men—this generates sympathetic comments from Akashi and Elyssia.

We then warm up with a series of physical exercises with Elyssia, and then ritually build an "altar" by placing objects from the table—including plastic flowers, candles, several superhero posters, and pieces of paper framed as pictures with the names of inspiring women of color written on them, including Kimberlé Crenshaw, Queen Latifah, and Audre Lorde—all from the US as far as I remember. We then all hold hands before the completed altar and Akashi leads us to breathe in the power of us women standing in the space, to breathe out self-doubt. I am breathing, and feel joined in solidarity to these women. Akashi's kindness allows me momentarily to get over my shattered sense of vulnerability in this foreign place.

We move into Akashi's part of the event, where she mentors us through a series of voguing movements, and my sense of connectedness collapses. I have never felt so old, confused, and incompetent—not the least at performing a kind of hyper-femininity to which I have never felt I have access. I might get one gesture, albeit only in a mechanical sense, but then find myself increasingly lost as I tried to remember it well enough to string it together with the next. Then when Akashi accelerates and has us put the moves together in a sequence, instructing us to

exorcise our rage toward someone who had mistreated us as women, I get completely flummoxed and flustered—I cannot combine feelings with bodily gestures that multiply one on another.

I keep it together and just keep going, even when we face each other for a dance-off and I am hopeless ... failing to keep the moves in time, or in sequence. My sense of complete disorientation from being in Aotearoa, seemingly at the literal (geographical) end of my known world, is suddenly actualized in my utter failure to perform as a woman in relation to Akashi's gorgeous and accomplished modes of rage-fueled feminine embodiment.

Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* writes: "heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy."<sup>75</sup> I am very attached to Butler's explanation here—a spark of theory that allows for my sense of displacement.

Akashi is concerned for me, but mistakenly thinks my failure is due to my being physically worn out (I am possibly in the best aerobic shape of anyone in the room other than Akashi, although my 56-year-old body is decidedly creaky). I simply cannot successfully embody Akashi's feminine gestures, mimic her brash and sexy mojo. However, far from seeing Akashi's womanliness as a travesty, an unfair appropriation of the feminine, as some trans-exclusionary feminists have unfortunately tended to view transfemale subjectivities, I envy her and celebrate her triumph. She fully possesses this version of the feminine: she does it so much better than I. (Although without a doubt, as she described to us, she continually has to navigate social spaces that are dangerous for her, whereas, an aging white woman, I can get by as particularly invisible now that I have gone through *the change*).<sup>76</sup>

There is a huge disjuncture between the mode of femininity FAFSWAG members are iterating out of their range of Pasifika or Māori sexed and gendered identifications (most of them are triply if not quadrupally marginalized by New Zealand society as brown (queer), and feminine, as well as economically disadvantaged) and the identifications that I reproduce through the habitus of my embodiment. My experience of failure and fragility, physical (my injured hip hurt for days after trying to mimic Akashi's fluid voguing moves) and mental, taught me something profound about my insecurities, my inability to deal with not being able to do something (especially athletic), my disorientation in foreign cultures.

By putting myself in the position of attempting to do what I had been ethnographically studying from afar, I dehabituated myself from my bodily habitus, bringing on acute discomfort. As Pierre Bourdieu notes of the habitus, it "tends to favour experiences likely to reinforce it," tending to "protect itself from crises and critical challenges by providing

itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible ... tending to reinforce its dispositions.”<sup>77</sup> This was a personal lesson, but also on reflection has wider ramifications, encouraging a look at what it means for a person identified with the habitus of the dominant ruling class (in this case, white, not trans-identified, educationally upper-middle-class, American) to be put in an environment where she/he is vulnerable, subordinate, and potentially irrelevant to the cultural experience at hand.

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I am also thinking about FAFSWAG’s relationship to white scholars—members, including Akashi and Gago, have all been extremely kind and respectful to me when I have talked to them individually at events, but they have not leapt to make use of me or to engage with my project (they were certainly super busy the entire time I was in Auckland). Too, Gago is clearly well aware of the dangers of FAFSWAG going “global” (among other things, I think he senses that Americans would likely not see the particular “Pacific” elements of their work, potentially assuming their performances to be simply second degree echoes of *Paris is Burning*.

I have come to believe that the reluctance of members of FAFSWAG to follow through on promises of meeting with me directly was linked to their awareness of the dangers of white appropriations of Brown/Black bodies and voguing culture. In the US context, madison moore points out that the New York ballroom community is “wary of the production of another *Paris is Burning*,” making it difficult for researchers seeking to understand the complexities of the voguing scene; moore also notes that Jennie Livingston’s film has been controversial, and she was sued by “nearly all of the film’s participants.”<sup>78</sup> Now that voguing has become almost mainstream in the US, as proven by the 2018 release of the FX television series *Pose*, with Livingston a key advisor on the series, these dangers of colonization are ever more present if also equivocated by the fact that the lead roles are played by transwomen of color.<sup>79</sup> Marcos Becquer and Jose Gatti note of the performers in *Paris is Burning*, “voguers explicitly seek out the media and attempt to conquer it by using it as it uses them,” which seems equally the case with FAFSWAG, as noted.<sup>80</sup> Pati Solomon Tyrell, founding member, asserts that part of the motivation behind forming the group was that “[w]e want to control our own image.”<sup>81</sup>

In discussion with scholars from Auckland such as Caroline Vercoe, however, I have also come to see that their reluctance to talk to me is also surely due to the gift culture in Aotearoa. As noted in Chapter 6, the cultural tendency among Pasifika and Māori people to be reserved in relation to requests or demands until they perceive the person asking to be giving of themselves—cultivating trust around this kind of exchange unfortunately requires more than five months on the ground in Aotearoa. Relationality must be developed and honored.

Given the brevity of my time there, I'm anxious about what this inevitable colonizing function of my interest means for my writing about FAFSWAG's work here. But it seems impossible (and dishonest) *not* to, given how much it has reshaped my relationship to ideas about queer, performance, and performativity. I can only hope by taking on FAFSWAG's work in a personal way, marking the relationality and investment of my interpretations and engagements, and my inevitable scholarly aggressions and failures fully to understand or (in the case of the workshop) to embody their practice, I am not falsely unifying or making (white, academic, American queer theoretical) sense of FAFSWAG. I hope to be avoiding what Bequer and Gatti see *Paris is Burning* as doing to the ballroom scene in New York: "By (re)encoding a system of self-same differences as its interpretive grid, [the film] ... in effect delimits the ideological terrain upon which voguing may operate," bridging a gap "by a civilizing filmmaking, always in search of exotic, authentic phenomena ... [grouping an] entire heterogeneous community ... into a unified, homogeneous Other," an effect arguably compounded by Butler's "use" of the film for her gender performance arguments.<sup>82</sup>

My attempt to look at FAFSWAG's work in order more fully to dislocate US theories of queer performance from their unquestioned dominance might also be inevitably doomed because I inevitably write from inside of these theories ... My radical failure at approximating even one of the voguing moves Akashi seemingly effortlessly enacts parallels my profound failure to *embody* what I am seeing and experiencing when I see Akashi or her colleagues perform. In turn, these echoing layers of confusion map my sense of profound disorientation—in terms of the myriad concatenated identifications that constitute my feeling of being "myself" at any one time.

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I saw very little Pākehā queer performance while in New Zealand as it was apparently the *moment* for FAFSWAG at Auckland Pride. I did enjoy the one-night performance and exhibition event "Under Your Skin You Look Divine," curated by Daniel John Corbett Sanders and also featured during Auckland Pride week.<sup>83</sup> Here, my partner and I witnessed val smith's *Sex on Site 1*, 2018, at the BDSM Basement Sex Club and Adult Shop, Auckland; smith, a Pākehā who identifies as gender non-binary, performed a deep excavation of the bowels of this sex club just off K Road, as noted a funky strip of queer, transsexual, and alternative bars, strip clubs, sex shops, galleries, and cabaret-style eateries in central Auckland.<sup>84</sup> The artist was dressed in a neon yellow hazmat suit and we could see them only by craning our necks out of a window partially blocked by a bathtub auspiciously placed in a corner of one of the club's "dungeon" rooms. We see them digging, poking, manipulating a mess of earth and piping and possibly electrics in a dark interstices of the building, dull early evening light filtering in ... smith's performance was a successful enactment of the spatial politics

of BDSM practices, here as is often the case, seemingly buried in the “bowels” of the city, by a trans/queer body itself deliberately marginalized on the spatial fringes of the event.



FIGURE 7.9 val smith, *Sex on Site 1*, February 13, 2018; performance as part of “Under Your Skin You Look Divine” evening curated by Daniel John Corbett Sanders at Basement Sex Club and Adult Shop, event for Auckland Pride Week; photograph by Josh Szeto, courtesy of the artist

I am trying to learn from the sense of disorientation in time, space, and embodiment, rather than react out of it to project onto those I am engaging in Aotearoa. As with the other times I’ve lived abroad, it’s as if the relationality through which (as Erving Goffman pointed out) I attempt to secure myself in engaging with others periodically goes haywire because the relational “other” does not fully make sense to me (I am sure this is typical of a diasporic mode of being?). My failure and disorientation are interesting, and difficult, and crystallize for me why the common temptation in such cases is to remove this sense of uncertainty by *defining*, *cohering*, or otherwise *unifying* the other—usually by projecting one’s failure, confusion, and weakness outward in negative terms that help one reciprocally retrieve a sense of agency by defining oneself as superior. Such a dynamic arguably underlies every social evil from white supremacy and its corollary racisms to misogyny to homophobia and transphobia. Still, this weakness is so difficult to inhabit and acknowledge.

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## Trans theory

Trans theory has, as noted, been around for as long as second-wave feminist theory, and (arguably) longer than queer theory.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the previously mentioned foundational texts—Sandy Stone’s 1987 “The Empire Strikes Back” and Kate Bornstein’s 1994 *Gender Outlaw*—produced key arguments crystallizing a radical theory linked to feminism that many in the US now call “trans feminism.”<sup>86</sup> Stone resists medicalized versions of trans theory and self-identification, arguing that trans people “currently occupy a position which is nowhere, which is outside the binary oppositions of gendered discourse.”<sup>87</sup> Bornstein also stresses gender as a construction with a range of gendered embodiments in the trans community. As Julie Nagoshi and Stephan/ie Brzuzy sum up the subtlety brought to trans theory from this moment in the 1990s:

Transgender theory encompasses and transcends feminist and queer theory by explicitly incorporating ideas of the fluidly embodied, socially constructed, and self-constructed aspects of social identity, along with the dynamic interaction and integration of these aspects of identity within the narratives of lived experiences ... Transgenders differ widely in their degree of belief in the fluidity of gender identity.<sup>88</sup>

Clearly, while many trans theorists are understandably suspicious of Butler’s model (for reasons Namaste has clearly outlined), they often mobilize at least some of the same language—including concepts of gender as a construction and gender as process, performance, or otherwise “fluid.”

Reciprocally, transfeminist theory has inflected Butler’s later reworkings of her theories. In her 1999 “Preface” to the anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble*, for example, she emphasizes the importance of feminist precursors to her theory (Esther Newton, Gayle Rubin, and Monique Wittig) as well as citing Bornstein’s work for stressing the “‘in-betweenness’ [of trans] that puts the being of gendered identity into question.”<sup>89</sup> In her 2004 *Undoing Gender*, Butler makes use of the fluid connotations of the prefix trans, lauding Bornstein for pointing out that the transsexual desire to be a man or a woman “can be a desire for transformation itself, a pursuit of identity as a transformative exercise, an example of desire itself as a transformative activity.”<sup>90</sup>

Gender fluidity and trans identifications have thus become major tropes and structural factors in trans, feminist, and queer theory as well as publicly embodied identifications in the US since the late 1990s. Talia Bettcher has been a key figure in consolidating a model of transfeminist theory in recent years. In a *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry “Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues,” writing about her own work in the third person, Bettcher argues that there are two models of transsexuality: the traditional “wrong-body account of transsexuality (in which gender identity is taken as innate, allegedly determining one’s ‘real’ sex) and the newer, beyond-the-binary vision that emerged with the

new transgender politics of the nineteen-nineties.” She continues, along the lines of Namaste, noting that:

While beyond-the-binary politics tend to marginalize trans people who position themselves within the binary, and therefore fails as a complete account of trans oppression and resistance..., the wrong-body account fails to secure trans identity claims to belong to their preferred gender categories ... Bettcher’s aim ... then, is to provide an account of trans politics that does not marginalize trans people who situate themselves within the binary and that successfully grounds their self-identity claims.<sup>91</sup>

In the end, however, Bettcher asserts the need to go beyond the general claim (in queer theory) “that all gender is socially constructed,” because it doesn’t “address the specific ways in which trans people are constructed as fraudulent.” Trans people (such as, I would note, the voguers in *Paris is Burning* or FAFSWAG events) who claim “gender realness” can also be seen as “resisting gender oppression, thereby undermining the tendency (present in Butler) to dismiss such individuals as merely gender reactionary or conservative.”<sup>92</sup> I would add to this only that Bettcher might be missing some of the irony and humor in some of the claims of realness: with Sylvester, and certainly by the time we arrive at the television show *Ru Paul’s Drag Race*, with assertions of “mighty real”-ness, we are not dealing with the sincere belief in body styles that accurately express a deep, true, “real” gender—at least not in a simple way.<sup>93</sup>

Realness or sincerity is at least no longer the issue for two feminist scholars—Paul (formerly Beatriz) Preciado and Jack (formerly Judith) Halberstam—who have recently elaborated theories of trans subjectivity that are also feminist and queer. Both, not incidentally, have since the early 2000s transitioned their gender/sex identification (from f-to-m) as well as their relationship to theory—beginning as feminists and now asserting their work within the frame of a hybrid trans/queer/feminist theory that they have helped to define. Both theorize while they enact a nuanced version of what used to be called queer performativity but with sustained attention to the complexities of trans bodies and experiences in relation to twenty-first-century vicissitudes. Their theoretical move thus brings the discussion of the genealogy of queer performance to around 2020, as this book is being finished.

Preciado’s *Testo-Junkie* (2013) is a crucial rejoicing of a critique of late capitalism with a sexual politics, moving in its feminist way through queer/lesbian (“Beatriz”) to trans (“Paul”). In the book, Preciado (a Spaniard who studied in France with Derrida) seeks through theorizing to figure out whether they are a “feminist hooked on testosterone, or a transgender body hooked on feminism?” and to articulate “a *somato-political* analysis of a ‘world economy’” that is “pharmacopornographic” and operates through “performative feedback.” This analysis takes into account the centrality of the biopolitically managed gendered/sexed body in late capitalism, as part of the “invention of a subject” to serve the

global reproduction of pharmacopornographic business.<sup>94</sup> Needless to say this bio-managed subject is profoundly commodified in its assumption and/or contestation of sex/gender mappings.

Halberstam, in parallel, has moved from a cultural studies mapping of “female masculinity” as “Judith”—involving a queer feminist hijacking of drag for trans-men in their analysis of “drag kings”—to a radical embrace of trans\* as “Jack.”<sup>95</sup> While in their 1998 *Female Masculinity* they felt comfortable asserting or at least implying “female” to be an identity one could assume as foundational (defining a drag king as “a female (usually) who dresses up in recognizably male costume and performs theatrically in that costume”<sup>96</sup>), by 2005, with the book *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, they were arguing for an understanding of queer subjectivity via the notion of a “queer time” and “queer space” (again, it is tempting but would be a mistake to link these directly to tā/vā). Citing Foucault at the opening of the book (“[t]o be ‘gay,’ I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual, but to try to define and develop a way of life”), Halberstam offers this work as an elaboration of ways of living that are queer *because* they are trans or trans\* and feminist/female, or at least—taking up the wound of the annihilating violence of the AIDS crisis—embracing of (citing Charles Baudelaire) “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent.”<sup>97</sup>

By 2018, with the publication of *Trans\*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, Halberstam is able elegantly to sum up almost three decades of queer feminist work on trans theory (including their own) by calling forth the old duality haunting all gender/sex-related theory. Explaining their decision to deploy the “asterisk” form of trans for its capacity to “open the term up to unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance,” Halberstam asserts: “the term ‘trans\*’ puts pressure on all modes of gendered embodiment and refuses to choose between the identitarian and the contingent forms of trans identity.”<sup>98</sup> The substantial achievement of this book is to present accessible versions of the complex theories of transgender and a helpful summation of their development, as well as successfully merging these with attention to popular culture examples of trans representation such as those of *Ru Paul’s Drag Race*, addressing controversies surrounding the host’s use of the word “tranny,” popular among Ru Paul’s generation.<sup>99</sup> Halberstam also, crucially, addresses head-on the potential pluses and minuses of the “new visibility” of trans people in American culture in particular.<sup>100</sup>

Questions of “visibility” often hover around the desire to assert “authentic” identity, which some trans people, from Caitlyn Jenner to some members of FAFSWAG, find crucial to be able to do as they transition.<sup>101</sup> In this way we can see that trans, queer, and/or feminist discourses to this day are haunted by questions about whether gender is “essential” or “performed” (constructed), and about what it has to do with sexuality and other identifications. As attending to FAFSWAG’s work foregrounds, the limits of dominant (white, North American) trans, queer, and feminist theory in acknowledging the myriad other

identifications that condition how gendered/sexed subjects and modes of being manifest in particular individual and social contexts are crystal clear. FAFSWAG's work makes it impossible to ignore the formative role of the performers' range of identifications, including their ethnicity, struggles coming from working or lower class families, and community and family ties to a specific location in South Auckland.

As Katrina Roen has asked, specifically in relation to Māori trans-identified, takatāpui, and/or gender liminal people in New Zealand and the Pacific in general, “[w]here are people of racial ‘minorities’ situated in queer and transgender theories?”<sup>102</sup> Roen addresses Susan Stryker’s important 1994 article “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” in which Stryker draws on Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel to acknowledge the transsexual body as “the product of medical science,” an “unnatural body,” and criticizes the medical profession for its conservative motivations in addressing trans-identified bodies.<sup>103</sup> Highlighting the complexity of translating Euro-American concepts of gender/sexuality into other contexts, Stryker theorizes trans in terms of gender fluidity, contending that transgender is culturally diverse because “it includes, but is not limited to, transsexuality, heterosexual transvestism, gay drag, butch lesbianism, and such non-European identities as the Native American berdache or the Indian Hijra.”<sup>104</sup> Addressing Stryker’s profession of rage, Roen acerbically notes, “[t]hat she is coloured by rage is explicit. How she is coloured by race is not.”<sup>105</sup> In this way, Roen convincingly criticizes Stryker’s conflation of completely disparate cultural phenomena (from Native American to South Asian) within the grab bag of (still European) concepts of non-normative gender identifications.

Just as Namaste demands (and just as the takatāpui voices I cited in Chapter 6 call for), Roen also insists that attending to the voices of gender liminal people (in this case Māori and Pasifika) by interviewing them and/or otherwise directly including them in one’s research is an answer to this blindness about how race, ethnicity, class, nationality, and other factors condition the experience and meaning of people seeming to align with what Westerners call trans identities.<sup>106</sup> Roen also notes a key point I have alluded to in interpreting FAFSWAG performances—the way in which gender liminal Sāmoan people (*fa’afafine*) in particular often “come to think of themselves more in terms of Western transvestite and transsexual identities, rather than according to traditional understandings of *fa’afafine*” when they move to urban areas such as Auckland or Sydney, Australia. She concludes, as I cited before, by arguing that “a discussion of transgenderism would benefit from further consideration of the effects of westernization on gender liminality.”<sup>107</sup> Most importantly, Roen clearly asserts the narrowness of most transgender and queer theory in relation to the New Zealand context (this would apply equally to feminist theory): “perspectives of whiteness echo, largely unacknowledged, through [this] transgender (and queer) theorizing.” She concludes by arguing that we must “inspire more

critical thinking about the racialised aspects of transgender bodies and gender liminal ways of being.”<sup>108</sup>

Edward Cowley, the Auckland-based Pasifika performer of Sāmoan heritage known in the clubs on K Road as drag queen “Buckwheat,” discussed with me the complexities of navigating urban Aotearoa versus his ancestral Sāmoa. He considers himself fa’afafine in Auckland, but he does not in relation to the fa’afafine tradition in Sāmoa; he has also distanced himself from the “pressure to be one thing or another” (gay or transgender).<sup>109</sup> Yuki Kihara also addresses the complexity of living in Auckland as a fa’afafine, noting “I’m a transsexual,” but also identifying clearly as a fa’afafine both in Auckland and now in Sāmoa, to which she has returned.<sup>110</sup> And Moe Laga, of FAFSWAG, reinforces this point about the differences between living as a gender liminal person in Aotearoa versus Sāmoa: “There’s a stereotype in Samoa where the fa’afafine, they’re like super-humans, they can do anything … We aren’t really brought up in that traditional way in New Zealand …” Discussing sexuality in some Pasifika families is “taboo,” Laga notes; “My family wouldn’t talk about the fact that I was transitioning [to a woman] … My mum still calls me son.”<sup>111</sup> The case of Pasifika and Māori gender liminal or self-identified queer and trans people in Aotearoa reminds us of the limits of dominant US-based models of queer and feminist theory in addressing questions of cultural difference attached to ethnicity.

## Coming home

In the US context, as noted, trans theory has been adopted and creatively meshed with critical race theory in work by emerging scholars over the past decade. Following the example of José Esteban Muñoz and E. Patrick Johnson, scholars such as Riley Snorton appropriate trans not only to accommodate race, racism, and ethnicity in the study of performative cultures but (one could say) to queer it by performing it, in turn, as a critically racialized trope. An example of this is Snorton’s assertion that we read the “transitivities of blackness and transness within the logics of exchange,” in order to “think about the intersubjectivity of subjection and subjectification within racial capitalism” wherein “exchange rarely expresses an idealized reciprocity but articulates a logic of accumulation and interchangeability.”<sup>112</sup>

Snorton’s version of trans is paralleled by that of L.H. Stallings in their radically innovative 2015 book *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures*. Stallings draws on Susan Stryker’s important mobilization of the word trans as a verb (“transing”) as (in Stryker’s terms) “an escape vector … or pathway toward liberation,” to (Stallings argues) “trans” Black cultural studies—effectively using a term of sexual/gender identification to open up how African American cultural forms function to engender a range of meanings across concatenated modes of subjective experience.<sup>113</sup> Inventing the term “transaesthetics,” but eschewing a fixed definition of it, Stallings nonetheless offers that transaesthetics “require a reorganization of senses and the sensorium, which [African American]

funk offers,” and argues that Black writers and artists find ways to reorder senses through their work, “shifting signs and signifiers into touch, hue, tenor, tone, performance and emotion” thus transforming commodified, white-dominant culture through eroticized modes of creativity.<sup>114</sup> Like all great research inspired by the mutual interests of cultural studies, feminist and queer theory, and histories and theories of race/ethnicity (including critical race theory), Stallings in this way activates a utopian method they call “funky erotixxx”:

we critique the very ways in which what is profane and obscene has been gendered as masculine and made violent and excessive in the West. We recover sacred-profane androgynies, or what I term *funky erotixxx*, that create identity and subjectivity anew and alter political and artistic movements.<sup>115</sup>

These arguments of Snorton and Stallings return us to mobilizing force of concepts of queer (in this case trans queer) and performativity in relation to US-generated critical race theory—developing as they do the sharp, performative evocation of explicitly sexed/gendered bodies and texts that are inherently and inescapably always already experienced and positioned and understood through a range of other identifications. It is in this spirit that I performed, perhaps clumsily, the very personal interpretations of the range of performances presented in this book. These interpretations are also intended to suggest an alternative genealogy to the usual lineages of queer performance art and theory—in particular by including the raucous, sexy, sharply political, and variously hilarious and/or angry performative urban theatricalities of groups from the Disquotay queens and Asco in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s to, at this moment, the FAFSWAG collective in Auckland. These works are not in any way the same: their temporalities, energies, sites, and historical frameworks are vastly different, and their political, aesthetic, and personal significances vary profoundly in relation to their different times and places of articulation as well as to those who experience and interpret them. Nonetheless, through my very specific, relational engagements, I have brought them together here, lovingly, through this critical genealogy of queer (of color) performance. The tension lies in the fact that I have done so in order to *question* the assumptions within the dominant forms of research sketched in this genealogy, which I nonetheless also inhabit and perpetuate to some (destabilized?) degree.

### ***Trans Performative Dislocations, III***

My partner and I head to Silo 6, Wynyard Quarter, Auckland to see the *Acts of Passage* performances, programmed by Gabriela Salgado of Te Tuhi Gallery (queer community came through: I got to know Gabriela because my dear friend Guillermo Gómez-Peña told me to contact her when I moved to Auckland for my Fulbright). This industrial area—entirely based on landfill since the city’s initial development (with the explosive

growth of Pākehā immigration to the country starting in the 1840s)—lies along Auckland's harbor just west of downtown. It is now renovated into a gentrified neighborhood of luxury yachts, condos, and (as here) arts spaces.<sup>116</sup> As one enters and looks up into the massive tubular towers, devised to store cement and themselves made out of concrete, one perceives receding funnels of velvety black void, lit only in the lower regions by video and art installations, which will set the stage for various performances.

The first on this evening (May 24, 2018) is *Ia TuKu* by the legendary Rosanna Raymond, of Pacific Sisters fame (as noted earlier, a radical group of Pasifika and Māori feminists producing costumes and anarchic cross-gendered fashion shows in Auckland in the 1990s). A powerful soundtrack of sirens and rhythmic beats accompanies Raymond as she bursts into the door of the exhibition space from a chilly, wet, late fall evening, her strong body dressed in a giant mu mu (which Pasifika people call a mu'umu'u) made of army camouflage; she wears a headdress seemingly made of garishly blue fake grass and dangling white beaded necklaces; she holds a patu (Māori club-like weapon) in her hand and sports a drawn-on version of a facial moko (carved facial tattoo). Her hands flutter as she looks right and left, grasping the patu aggressively, and squats with legs spread, as if to take up maximum space—she shouts powerfully; she threatens several of the audience members with the patu (in one case she shifts from openly threatening a man to stroking his face, menacingly, with it); she sticks out her tongue, echoing a gesture of the Māori haka. The camouflage mu'umu'u crosses over Pasifika culture (echoing the camouflage fabric clothing forced on Pacific peoples by Westerners shocked at their partial nudity), and Māori elements such as the patu, her drawn-on moko (facial tattoo), and haka gestures.<sup>117</sup> I am relieved not to be confronted directly by this terrifyingly energized figure of choreographed Māori belligerence.

(At the same time, I am confused because I know Raymond to be Pasifika-identified (with Sāmoan and Pākehā ancestry)—and I have been told that appropriating Māori customs, language, or gestures is forbidden without some kind of negotiation and exchange, whereby, as noted, the borrower must indicate her vulnerability and generosity in return. I am later informed, on discussing this work with Pacific Islands art historian Caroline Vercoe, that Raymond had performed for years in London with a self-designated “tribe” of Māori-identified expatriates, called the Ngāti Rānana and this provided an acceptable context for Raymond’s performance of Māori gestures.)<sup>118</sup>

Raymond moves slowly out of the entry hall toward her installation, which includes a camouflage uniform standing at attention, with thick red smoke engulfing it. On the way she gets in the faces of other audience members, challenging with her intense stare but also connecting



**FIGURE 7.10** Rosanna Raymond, *Ia TuKu*, May 24, 2018; performance at Silo 6, Wynyard Quarter, Auckland, for “Acts of Passage” performance event, Te Tuhi, Aotearoa New Zealand; photograph by Amelia Jones

with them through the sharing of breath or “ha” in the official Māori greeting of the hongi, her nose touching theirs.

Once in the installation (we can barely see her through the bloody fog) she strips down to indigenous Pacific clothing, including a grass skirt, extensive body tattoos now visible (see cover image of this book). Raymond notes, “the shedding of the garment is important to me, getting it off my body and standing in my own skin, my own mana [energy or strength of character], to present my own sovereignty.”<sup>119</sup> Even as Iti claimed a kind of “terrorizing” yet clownish masculinity in his performances, his full-face moko signifying fierceness, so Raymond enacts a powerful, confrontational mode of embodiment that would (in Māori, Sāmoan, as well as Pākehā cultures) surely be more commonly associated with men. In this way, Raymond powerfully merges feminist and anti-colonial statements through her body language, gestures, markings, and clothing.

Raymond then leaves the venue, the echoes of her powerful cries as a Māori-Pasifika woman warrior still ringing, the smoke seeping out to permeate the other spaces in Silo 6.

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We then re-gather in the foyer of Silo 6, the air thick with anticipation and still roiling with Raymond's fierce feminist energies ... we are waiting for *Subordinate Tissue*, billed as a FAFSWAG performance, in this case a solo piece by Akashi Fisi'inaua (choreography and conceptualization



FIGURE 7.11 Akashi Fisi'inaua (FAFSWAG), *Subordinate Tissue*, May 24, 2018; performance at Silo 6, Wynyard Quarter, Auckland, for "Acts of Passage" performance event, Te Tuhi, Aotearoa New Zealand; photograph by Amelia Jones

by FAFSWAG impresarios Pati Solomona Tyrell and Tanu Gago). Akashi enters the room through the outside door, her stupendously lean, gorgeous, athletic, feminine dancer's body slicked with oil, wearing only a bikini (the waistband and straps of which read "WATER PRINCESS"—probably just a logo, but I can't stop reading the text meandering around her waist, shoulders, and torso). She slinks and cavorts through the other artists' installations, her phone in hand, ceaselessly in an intimate relationship with herself, filming her every move in an endless stream for her Instagram account; here and there she seems to be video-conferencing friends on the smartphone, smiling and gesturing and saying hello.

Akashi ends up in the FAFSWAG installation, where she is immersed in the middle of three large-screen videos (featuring a filmed version of her dancing in a kaleidoscope of images, often vertiginously paired like moving Rorschach tests) and pumping techno music. She puts on the outfit that had been carefully laid in the center of the round room—clear plastic gaucho pants and jacket, a blond wig, and spike-healed stretch boots.

Once she starts handing her smartphone to audience members to get them to help her film her movements I can see (in the hands of the woman standing next to me) that the phone is indeed set to Akashi's Instagram feed. She is insistently enacting and expanding the networked relationality of bodies/selves in the work.<sup>120</sup>

Akashi dances on and on, mobilizing her body in the complex hybrid movements of her voguing performances, including several moves she had tried to teach me a few weeks earlier (crouching, flipping the hands, and the pugilistic sparring with the arms and clenched fists). She gets hotter and hotter, more and more tired—takes off the claustrophobic plastic outfit and the blond wig, ending finally in an exhausted crouch, before leaving the room and ending the performance.

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Most amazingly, my predisposition to attach my interpretive ardor to this piece was furthered by the inclusion in the program notes of a reference to Goffman, bringing us almost full circle in this genealogy. Here there is again a literal connection to the US theory I have traced. Tanu Gago's description of the work on the program reads:

Inspired by sociologist Erving Goffman's exploration of the "ritualization of subordination" in his text *Gender Advertisements* (1976), FAFSWAG present *Subordinate Tissue*, a new performance proposing the articulation of the body as a text. In this work, the collective examine the use of female bodies to validate the broader social classification of "feminine" as subordinate cultural definitions of "masculine" ...

compromising the stability of traditional gendered power structures ... [and] resisting with force the colonial imperative of white, heteronormative and gendered subordination.<sup>121</sup>

This erudite (even academic and fairly esoteric) framing of the work—the body as a continually represented and performed, gendered “text”—makes me self-consciously think back to what must have been for Akashi a very strange concatenation of signifiers in my older white butch-lady routine for her at the workshop I attended, when she so patiently sought to teach me voguing moves. Otherwise put, Akashi tried to teach me to perform as feminine through attitudinal bodily gestures I cannot master. *My* failure (which I felt as abjection) is and was not *Akashi's* failure.

Far from abject, Akashi's performance in *Silo 6* is spectacular—her fatigue is choreographed into the work as part of its meaning. Akashi seems bowed but not broken (she sashays out with sass). I find myself all the more in awe of her extraordinary efforts, the combination of grace and staged “violence” with the punching sequence, the extraordinary limberness and strength of her preening floor movements, performed with willed, self-empowered, performatively effeminate yet muscular bravado ...

Too, Akashi's entire performance is resolutely staged for representation—it is at once “live” and “recorded,” in real-time on Instagram. I drop my mind into the echoing depths of internet space/time as I watch her perform on the phone screen next to me while she performs in the “real” space-time of the silo, in its creepily beautiful post-industrial splendor. (The black void that sucks ever upward from the grounded space of the galleries taking place on floor level now seems to mimic in dematerialized spatial terms the virtual black hole of social media ...)

Ultimately, in her exhaustion, she seems to punctuate the vicissitudes of gender performance—or queer performativity—in all of their complexities. Femininity is ineffably hard—in fact impossible—to attain for any embodied subject. I was not the only one caught in this difficulty. Akashi just does a better job of making the gender I have negotiated all my life, to varying degrees of success, seem if not effortless then at least purposeful and seductive. In Akashi's—and FAFSWAG's—hands, however, the call to perform and re-perform femininity iteratively seems like a mode of empowerment rather than a sign of failure.

Akashi's practice itself is productively confusing in articulating new concepts of queer/trans/feminism (as she announced in the FAFSWAG piece *Bionica*: “I get the boys with this dick [thrusting her crotch] and these tits [grabbing her breasts]”).<sup>122</sup>

And, after all, her Instagram handle is “queen\_kapussi.”



## Final word, inconclusive

Queer performativity—as a thought pattern, a mode of embodiment, a theoretical model, a historical formation—might be giving way in some sites and contexts in Euro-US and beyond to the promising flowering of trans as a concept, identification, mode of situating the self-experienced as fluid or queer or “otherwise” to gender/sex norms (as Prosser puts it, a being rather than performing). It might also be—certainly is—in danger of being commodified. Such are the vicissitudes of the success of coalitional claims for recognition.

Complementary to this, we might view FAFSWAG—as crystallized in the virtuosic performances of Akashi Fisi’inaua—as offering a different range of possibilities in terms of understanding and experiencing gender and sexuality in the context of performance or performativity. FAFSWAG is (per their insistence) motivated by the desire to engage with performance as a way of creating space for alternative modes of family and community, and “saying” so as to “do” their fa’afafine, takatāpui, trans, queer, gender liminal bodies in public space. FAFSWAG is perhaps a quintessential example of (queer?) performance as potentially decolonizing practice (which does not save it from its own relationship to colonization, and from dangers of being re-colonized).

Rather than allowing members to be consumed with rage at colonizing violence, FAFSWAG embraces the interrelations among settler and indigenous cultures, as well as inhabiting and forwarding the Pasifika and Māori versions of Polynesian ritual, belief, and social formation common in Auckland in particular. Rather than focusing all attention on the brutalities of colonial warfare and the imprisonment of colonized bodies, or even obsessing over the mistreatment of gender fluid, gender liminal, gender-queer, gay, and lesbian people within their own communities (often due at least in part to the christianization of their people by missionaries, as in the case of Sāmoan culture), FAFSWAG exemplifies the way in which contemporary Māori and Pasifika performance cultures exploring sexuality and gender make spectacles (in the best way) out of the situation of their bodies existing liminally, *in between subjects*, in terms of all aspects of their ever mutable identifications. They offer themselves to anyone who cares to engage their practice, but hold themselves back from being fully incorporated into—swallowed up by—Western narratives of queer performance. I hope I have honored that reticence here.

As far as this genealogy has elaborated, queer is a felt experience that has to be shared (relationally). It is felt but also interpretive. Its perceived theatricality is what gets our attention. It is always already embodied, but never in determinate ways. Queer seems performative because it is relational. Performativity seems queer because it puts identification and meaning in process, across bodies, art/performance works, spaces and times. Queer and performativity, in this

genealogical unfolding, work *in between subjects*. They also work by promoting a feeling of realness that is always already performed, non-ontological, but simultaneously based in embodied experience.

There is something to learn here and as we move forward continuing the genealogies of queer performance discourse and practice it is worth forcing ourselves (especially those of us fairly squarely situated in what are still nominally the most dominant and privileged sites of this discourse as white North American academics) to accept the discomfort of finding ourselves *in between*. In this way we might even find ways to understand how European models of subjectivity historically and today, models that insist upon a fantasy of unified, fixed, autonomous, individual subjectivity, can no longer be justified even in the abstract—particularly given that they were forged *out of* colonial encounters as discussed in Chapter 6. We might then embrace, rather than disavowing or occluding, the continual failures that have compromised these models (if covertly in much queer and performance theory) even as powerful people (conceived and performing as straight white men) still benefit from them on the global stage. Then we might truly find ourselves *in between subjects*, just enough to listen, learn, and relinquish some of the things we thought we knew, in relational dialogue with other bodies, sites, performances.

## Notes

- 1 Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 136, 137; Chen is citing Hird, “Animal Transex,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 21, n. 49 (March 2006), 37. This paragraph is drawn from my introduction, “Trans-ing Performance,” to the special issue of *Performance Research*, “On Trans/Performance,” ed. Amelia Jones 21, n. 5 (October 2016), 1–11.
- 2 Julie L. Nagoshi and Stephan/ie Brzuzy, “Transgender Theory: Embodying Research and Practice,” *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 25, n. 4 (2010), 431. A more extended definition can be found in Talia Bettcher’s excellent “Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (first published September 26, 2009; revised January 8, 2014); available online at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-trans/>; accessed July 19, 2020: “Transgender is often used to refer to people who ‘do not conform to prevailing expectations about gender’ [here she is citing the Nagoshi and Brzuzy text] by presenting and living genders that were not assigned to them at birth or by presenting and living genders in ways that may not be readily intelligible in terms of more traditional conceptions of gender. Used as an umbrella term, it generally aims to group several different kinds of people such as transsexuals, drag queens and kings, some butch lesbians, and (heterosexual) male cross dressers.” And Viviane (sometimes called Ki) Namaste defines transgender as “an umbrella term used to refer to all individuals who live outside of normative sex/gender relations—that is, individuals whose gendered self-presentation (evidenced through dress, mannerisms, and even physiology) does not correspond to the behaviors habitually associated with members of their biological sex,” in *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.
- 3 Jack (formerly Judith) Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 105.
- 4 Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), 32; Prosser’s emphases.

- 5 Katrina Roen, “Transgender Theory and Embodiment: The Risk of Racial Marginalisation,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 10, n. 3 (2001), 258.
- 6 The event took place February 7, 2018. Some members of FAFSWAG use the terms “trans” and “queer” in interviews and both terms appear on their website (see <https://FAFSWAG.com/FAFSWAG/>); this does not mean that every member of the group is comfortable with the terms. The group is primarily Pasifika—in this case Tongan and Sāmoan New Zealanders—but Jacob Tamata, a key dancer and choreographer, is Māori. When the group mentions “Pacific” power, they include Māori implicitly. The information on FAFSWAG throughout this chapter is from a variety of sources, including: Tanu Gago, Akashi Fisi’inaua, and FAFSWAG members speaking at “Attack the Block,” Q Theatre (April 14, 2018) and a workshop I attended with Akashi Fisi’inaua at the same event, as well as brief conversations with Gago and Fisi’inaua on the occasion of this and other FAFSWAG events (including FAFSWAG, *Subordinate Tissue* opening at Silo 6, Te Tuhi Gallery “Acts of Passage,” May 18, 2018). FAFSWAG events I have attended include a voguing competition and film launch at Auckland Art Gallery, Pride Week, February 7, 2018; FAFSWAG voguing and performance event “Explicit Inclusion Identity” at Auckland War Memorial Museum, Pride Week, February 14, 2018; Akashi Fisi’inaua performance at “Acts of Passage” installation, Silo 6/Te Tuhi Gallery (May 24, 2018); and FAFSWAG, *Bionica*, performance at the Pacific Dance Festival, Māngere Art Centre, June 21, 2018. The FAFSWAG website: <https://FAFSWAG.com/FAFSWAG/> and documentary clips and videos including “Pacific Bodies: Tanu Gago,” interviewed on the occasion of “The Body Laid Bare: Masterpieces from Tate,” at Auckland Art Gallery, August 10, 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNOWq6Xs7xs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNOWq6Xs7xs); “Zealandia: New Zealand’s Underground Vogue Scene,” *Vice* video documentary, which includes video imagery of FAFSWAG members being interviewed during their residency at Basement Theatre, Auckland, and at a voguing ball, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOeAU66IRPk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOeAU66IRPk), posted May 7, 2017. See also, Wendy Syfred, “FAFSWAG is the Auckland Collective Celebrating Queer Pacific Islander Culture,” *Vice*, including an interview with Tanu Gago (June 20, 2016), available online at: [https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_au/article/59ga5d/FAFSWAG-is-the-auckland-collective-celebrating-queer-pacific-islander-culture](https://i-d.vice.com/en_au/article/59ga5d/FAFSWAG-is-the-auckland-collective-celebrating-queer-pacific-islander-culture); and val smith, “Down the Throat of a Megaphone: On NEON BOOTLEG, FAFSWAG, bodies, spaces, agency and decolonisation,” *Yellingmouth* performance review, Auckland (January 25, 2018), available online at: <http://yellingmouth.blogspot.com/2018/01/?m=1>. All websites accessed June 7, 2018. And conversations with other gender fluid, queer, or trans artists based in or visiting Auckland (Yuki Kihara, April 1, 2018; Edward Cowley aka “Buckwheat,” April 7, 2018) and scholars and curators familiar with FAFSWAG’s work, in particular Caroline Vercoe, Lisa Taouma, Gabriela Salgado, and Nina Tonga. I am extremely grateful to all of these generous people.
- 7 Akashi identified herself as trans at “Attack the Block.”
- 8 For a series of photographs and description of this event, see FAFSWAG’s website, <https://FAFSWAG.com/FAFSWAG/>; accessed June 7, 2018. For the terms I am indebted to “Los Angeles-Lists: A GIF Guide to Voguing (+ Short History),” [www.standardhotels.com/culture/a-gif-guide-to-voguing-short-history](http://www.standardhotels.com/culture/a-gif-guide-to-voguing-short-history); accessed June 7, 2018. The moves described here are consistent with many of the moves in FAFSWAG voguing events. See also madison moore’s evocative “What’s Queer about the Catwalk?,” *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 167–216, which includes a description of classic voguing moves, 181.
- 9 As moore argues, the 1980s development of voguing itself came out of the 1960s drag ball scene in New York City, in turn linked to earlier (late nineteenth-century) drag contests in Harlem and Greenwich Village such as the Hamilton

- Lodge Ball; in “What’s Queer about the Catwalk?,” 184, 188; see also Marcos Becquer and Jose Gatti, “Elements of Vogue,” *Third Text* 5, n. 16–17 (Fall 1991), 65–81. The authors note that the appropriation of poses perceived as being linked to Egyptian hieroglyphs (described and performed by Willie Ninja in *Paris is Burning*) is linked to “an assertion of the heritage claimed by Africanism in the diaspora,” 74. See also Peggy Phelan’s theory of voguing in relation to the “theater” of everyday life with its “racial, sexual, and class bias,” *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 98–9.
- 10 Tavia Nyong’o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018), 38.
  - 11 moore, “What’s Queer about the Catwalk?,” 173, 179, 170, 185. moore’s positive take on voguing resonates with the visibility claims linked to the foundational stage in coalitional politics; in contrast, the editors of the recent *Trap Door* volume on trans culture argue against the “trap of the visual”: “we know that when produced within the cosmology of racial capitalism, the promise of ‘positive representation’ ultimately gives little support or protection to many, if not most, trans and gender nonconforming people, particularly those who are low-income and/or of color...,” Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton, “Known Unknowns,” *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, ed. Reina Gossett, Eric Stanley, Johanna Burton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), xv.
  - 12 Becquer and Gatti, “Elements of Vogue,” 74.
  - 13 moore, “What’s Queer about the Catwalk?,” 186; citing Muñoz’s overall argument from *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2009).
  - 14 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2009), 1.
  - 15 Tanu Gago in “Pacific Bodies: Tanu Gago.”
  - 16 Tanu Gago at “Attack the Block.”
  - 17 Moe Laga at “Attack the Block.”
  - 18 Laga and Roy Aati, in “Zealandia.”
  - 19 Akashi Fisi’inaua, in *VICE* documentary on FAFSWAG.
  - 20 Akashi Fisi’inaua at “Attack the Block.” On the habitus as theorized by Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu in relation to performance bodies, see my essay “Habits are Hard to Break: The Habitus and Performance,” in Amelia Jones and Marin Blazevic, ed., special section “The Voice of Death, Rupturing the Habitus,” *Performance Research* 19, n. 3 (2014), 140–3.
  - 21 *Femslick*, The Aftermath (posted on August 2, 2017), <https://FAFSWAG.com/FAFSWAG/website>; accessed February 20, 2018.
  - 22 See Nigel Gearing, *Emerging Tribe: Gay Culture in New Zealand in the 1990s* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997), which indirectly illustrates the dominance of white middle class concerns by almost exclusively focusing on this demographic.
  - 23 On Fiona Clark and the general LGBTQ art scene, see the invaluable *Re-Reading the Rainbow*, ed. Steve Lovett and Pepper Burns (Auckland: RM Gallery and INKubator, 2017); two FAFSWAG members have work in this catalogue, Pati Solomona Tyrell and Tanu Gago. Clark’s moving 1988 “HIV-AIDS” series can be viewed on her website at: [www.fionaclark.com/gallery/HIV-AIDS.html](http://www.fionaclark.com/gallery/HIV-AIDS.html). For Ann Shelton’s K Road series see her *Redeye* (Auckland: RIM Publishing, 1997); I am grateful to her for giving me a copy.
  - 24 Lisa Reihana’s photographs of Ramon Te Wake were exhibited at the Milford Galleries in Dunedin, New Zealand, in 2016; see [www.milfordgalleries.co.nz/dunedin/exhibitions/10325-Lisa-Reihana-3-x-4](http://www.milfordgalleries.co.nz/dunedin/exhibitions/10325-Lisa-Reihana-3-x-4); accessed August 31, 2018. On Pacific Sisters see also Caroline Vercoe and Robert Leonard, “Pacific Sisters: Doing it for Themselves,” *Art Asia Pacific* n. 14 (1997), available online at: <http://robertleonard.org/pacific-sisters-doing-it-for-themselves/>; accessed May 9, 2019.

- 25 Mika was born Terrance John Pou to a Māori family and adopted and raised by a Pākehā couple, who changed his name to Neil Gudsell. For a full account of Mika's career, see Sharon Mazer, *I Have Loved Me a Man: The Life and Times of Mika* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2018). I was fortunate to meet Mazer at the "Ka Haka, Māori and Indigenous Performance Studies" symposium in San Francisco in 2019 and a poster of Mika was featured there as well.
- 26 The 1998 version was directed by Warrick "Waka" Attewell and includes performance elements from other works by Mika; the group Strike included Garteth Farr, who had worked with Mika to produce the original song in te reo (Māori) and English; see Mazer, *I Have Loved Me a Man*, 144–6, and the film is available at NZonScreen: [www.nzonscreen.com/title/ahi-atahua](http://www.nzonscreen.com/title/ahi-atahua), accessed April 22, 2020.
- 27 This version was directed by Whetu Fala and Sharon Hawke, and produced by Mika and Mark James Hamilton; Mazer, *I Have Loved Me a Man*, 160–2. Mazer points out that in part of the video the haka moves are softened by elements from classical Indian dance or Bharatanatyam because Hamilton specialized in the form (see Ibid., 152). The video is available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFF1E1mput](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFF1E1mput), accessed April 22, 2020.
- 28 See Mazer on these various performances in *I Have Loved Me a Man*, 180–237.
- 29 Emmaline Matangi interview, "FAFSWAG's Akashi Fisi'inaua: 'Institutions need us. And not the other way round,'" *The Spinoff* (February 7, 2018), available online at: <https://thespinoff.co.nz/music/07-02-2018/FAFSWAGs-akashi-fisiinaua-institutions-need-us-and-not-the-other-way-round/>; accessed June 22, 2018.
- 30 For a discussion of the complexities of European colonizing approaches to the made objects of the Pacific Islands and New Zealand (wherein objects were gendered as well, with woven objects, made by women, seen as less valuable than carved ones, made by men), see Caroline Vercoe, "Art," in *The Pacific Islands: Environment and Society*, ed. Moshe Rapaport (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 236–47. Vercoe points out that the European categories are incommensurate with creative practices in the Pacific: "Western fine art objects are generally made to be displayed in art galleries or museums. They are seldom touched or worn. The majority of art forms produced within the Pacific, however, are made specifically to be functional within particular ceremonies, events, or performances," 237. She goes on to note the central role of *performance* and oral traditions in Pacific arts, an intersection celebrated by anthropologists and performance studies scholars and bringing these two disciplines together in the 1960s and 1970s (for example through the work of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner).
- 31 As identified in the program, the other participants were Victor Rodger (a gay playwright of Samoan and European descent), Lexie Matheson (a Pākehā trans person), Nikolai Talamahina (a transgender musician of Niuean and Sāmoan descent), and Aych McArdle (who identifies as a "gender diverse person" per the article "Having the Chat: Aych McArdle, Interview," *Gay Express* (2016), available online at: <https://gayexpress.co.nz/2016/05/having-the-chat-aych-mcardle/>; accessed June 19, 2018).
- 32 On interpreting hybridity as queer, and the dangers of this move from a decolonizing point of view, see Becquer and Gatti, "Elements of Vogue," where they state in a footnote: "In gay-affirmative contexts, the analytical use of hybridity may appear as a particularly bold and ironic appropriation, since, archetypically, hybrids are marked by their sterility and unnaturalness (e.g., the mule as the sterile offspring of the horse and the donkey). Yet, the hybrid is most often produced (conceptually, and for its 'utility') in and by a relational system that not necessarily is, but defines itself and exerts its power, in opposition to the homosexual," 66. I understand hybridity, however, much more in the sense promoted in postcolonial theory, such as the work of Homi Bhabha, where it designates not a "genetic" sense of two "stable" original "parents" begetting a mixed "hybrid" (or as Becquer and Gatti put it "the specific logic implicit here, that two contrasting entities 'come'

- together to produce a third, masquerades as both universal and transhistorical," 68), but rather precisely as they describe voguing (as "syncretic," challenging "heterologics," and a "politicized and discontinuous mode of becoming" in relation to "partial" identities, 69).
- 33 Ka'ili, Māhina (Hūfanga), and Addo, "Introduction: *TĀ-VĀ* (Time-Space): The Birth of an Indigenous Moana Theory," in *Pacific Studies* special issue, "Tā-Vā (Time-Space) Theory of Reality," edited by Tēvita O. Ka'ili, 'Ōkusitino Māhina, and Ping-Ann Addo, 4, 5.
- 34 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 63.
- 35 Ibid. Also relevant to this discussion is David Román's discussion of "archival drag" as critical framework to analyze queer US performances that "[set] out to rebody and revive a performance from the past," in *Performance in America: Contemporary US Culture and the Performing Arts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 140. On intergenerational temporality and drag see also Peter Dickinson, "'Still (Mighty) Real': HIV and AIDS, Queer Public Memories and the Intergenerational Drag Hail," in Dirk Gindt and Alyson Campbell, *Viral Dramaturgie: HIV and AIDS in Performance in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Palgrave, 2018), 113–32.
- 36 See the press at Q Theatre website, [www.qtheatre.co.nz/geishtuiga](http://www.qtheatre.co.nz/geishtuiga); see also the group's FaceBook page on the show: [www.facebook.com/FineFatale/videos/2092037644372489/](https://www.facebook.com/FineFatale/videos/2092037644372489/). Both accessed June 10, 2018.
- 37 Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York, NY: Hachette Press, 2008; reprinted 2017), 31. Stryker argues that the 1960s were "the era of 'transgender liberation,'" due to the increased visibility of a range of gender/sex identifications during this period in the US; see Chapter 3, "Transgender Liberation," 59–89.
- 38 On versions of gender liminal figures in Native American societies, see Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang, ed., *Two Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997).
- 39 Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (New York, NY: Beacon Press, 1979), 104. For another hostile feminist attack on transgender, see Sheila Jeffreys, *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014). These accounts are exceptions within feminism but have unfortunately dominated debates due to their extremely transphobic arguments.
- 40 See Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto" (1987), continually revised at <https://sandystone.com/empire-strikes-back.pdf> (accessed September 2, 2018); and Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 1994). For excellent overviews of these debates in feminism, trans theory, and trans feminist theory, see Bettcher, "Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues"; Paisley Currah, "General Editor's Introduction," and Susan K. Stryker and Talia M. Bettcher, "Introduction: Trans/Feminisms," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* (May 2016), special issue on "Trans/Feminisms," 1–4, and 5–14; and Jack Halberstam, *Trans\*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2018).
- 41 Currah, "General Editor's Introduction," 8–9; Combahee River Collective Statement (1977), from Combahee River Collective website, <https://combaheerivercollective.weebly.com/the-combahee-river-collective-statement.html>; accessed May 18, 2018; and Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, n. 6 (1991), 1241–99.
- 42 I address these cases and the issue of trans essentialisms in "Essentialism, Feminism, and Art: Spaces where Woman 'Oozes Away,'" *Companion to Feminist Art and*

- Theory*, ed. Hilary Robinson and Maria Elena Buszek (Oxford: Blackwell, 2020), 157–80.
- 43 Prosser, *Second Skins*, 16; the phrase “nonperformative relation to materiality” is from Halberstam, *Trans\**, 121.
  - 44 Prosser, *Second Skins*, 31–55; Viviane Namaste, “Undoing Theory.”
  - 45 Bettcher, “Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues.”
  - 46 Prosser, *Second Skins*, especially 65–7.
  - 47 See Ki [Viviane] Namaste, “‘Tragic Misreadings’: Queer theory’s erasure of transgender subjectivity,” *Queer Studies: Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology*, ed. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York, NY and London: NYU Press, 1996), 183–203; and Viviane Namaste, “Undoing Theory: The ‘Transgender Question’ and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Theory,” *Hypatia* 24, n. 3 (Summer 2009), 11–32. In Butler’s later volume, *Undoing Gender* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), the philosopher asserts: “my own thinking has been influenced by the ‘New Gender Politics’ that has emerged in recent years, a combination of movements concerned with transgender, transsexuality, intersex and their complex relations to feminist and queer theory,” 4 (and cited in Namaste, “Undoing Theory,” 15).
  - 48 Namaste, “Undoing Theory,” 15, 18; she is citing Butler on a “continuum” in Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 6.
  - 49 Namaste, “Tragic Misreadings,” 194.
  - 50 Ibid., 186, 187. Namaste is also assertively critical of Butler’s gesture of celebrating drag queens by implying that they “expose compulsory sex/gender relations” while denigrating transsexuals as only offering an “uncritical miming of the hegemonic [sex/gender system],” 188. Butler herself has recently addressed the issue of trans identifications, but has focused primarily on the problem posed to the poststructuralist theory of gender performativity by the “essentializing” form of it: “If ‘queer’ means that we are generally people whose gender and sexuality is ‘unfixed’ then what room is there in a queer movement for those who understand themselves as requiring—and wanting—a clear gender category within a binary frame? Or what room is there for people who require a gender designation that is more or less unequivocal in order to function well and to be relieved of certain forms of social ostracism? Many people with intersexed conditions want to be categorized within a binary system and do not want to be romanticized as existing ‘beyond all categories’ ... [S]ome people very much require a clear name and gender, and struggle for recognition on the basis of that clear name and gender. It is a fundamental issue of how to establish and insist upon those forms of address that make life liveable.” Butler in Sara Ahmed “Interview with Judith Butler” (September 2014), *Sexualities* 19, n. 4 (2016), 9.
  - 51 Namaste, “Tragic Misreadings,” 187.
  - 52 Namaste, “Undoing Theory,” 23–4. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, and London and New York, NY: Zed Books, 1999).
  - 53 Gago comments at “Community and Collective Practice” panel.
  - 54 For statistics on the ethnicity of students and academic staff at University of Auckland, see <https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/auckland/about-us/equity-at-the-university/plans-reports-reviews/2016-equity-profile-report-final.pdf>; accessed August 31, 2018. My impressions of it being a clearly white-dominant institution were confirmed by these statistics and by talking to the rare Māori faculty such as Michael Parekōwhai and to Rebecca Hobbs, an Australian who acts as a liaison between the university and the Māori community.
  - 55 For statistics on these points, see Stats NZ, at [www.stats.govt.nz](http://www.stats.govt.nz). For example, “Māori unemployment rate at nine-year low, but twice New Zealand rate” (February 6, 2018), at [www.stats.govt.nz/news/maori-unemployment-rate-at-nine-year-low](http://www.stats.govt.nz/news/maori-unemployment-rate-at-nine-year-low)

- low-but-twice-new-zealand-rate. On income gaps, see: <http://archive.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/quickstats-income/personal-income-ethnic.aspx>; accessed June 11, 2018.
- 56 For an excellent overview of Māori activism, see Mary Ellen O'Connor, "We Will Work With You, Not For You," *We Will Work With You: Wellington Media Collective 1978–1998*, ed. Mark Derby, Jennifer Rouse, and Ian Wedde (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2013); the WMC was a group that worked with artists, activists, and cultural organizations to provide media to promote their causes. I am indebted to Chris McBride, who was a member of the group, for sharing this catalogue with me.
- 57 Having not signed the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, the Tūhoe were in a highly disadvantageous position vis-à-vis the crown, which subsequently assumed sovereignty over much of their tribal land. For a history of the tribe's land and the crown's actions, as well as the successful case against the crown, see Vincent O'Malley, "Tūhoe-Crown Settlement—Historical Background," *Māori Law Review* (October 2014); available online at: <http://maorilawreview.co.nz/2014/10/tuhoe-crown-settlement-historical-background/>; accessed June 21, 2018.
- 58 On these gestures, see Lawrence Smith, *Sunday News/Stuff NZ* (January 31, 2009), available online at: [www.stuff.co.nz/sunday-news/latest-edition/38310/I-quit-It-is-shock-confession-to-partner-from-prison](http://www.stuff.co.nz/sunday-news/latest-edition/38310/I-quit-It-is-shock-confession-to-partner-from-prison); accessed June 11, 2018. Whakapohane is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* at <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/wha-kapohane>; accessed June 11, 2018.
- 59 University of Auckland dance theorist and historian Carol Brown suggested to me that Iti and other Māori performers (such as the dancer-choreographer Charles Koroneho) explicitly draw in their work not only on bodily gestures from Māori warrior culture, but also on larger aspects such as martial tactics (for example, the Māori historically were able to overwhelm lines of British soldiers by surrounding them in 360 degree formations). She also suggested the connection between Iti's tactics and Maui, the trickster figure or mischief maker of Polynesian lore. This latter resonates with Iti's powerful combination of clownishness with serious activist actions. Brown to me in a series of conversations, March–April, 2018 in Auckland. I am deeply grateful to Brown for sharing her expertise with me.
- 60 Iti performed internationally with the MAU contemporary dance company from New Zealand in the *Tempest* in 2008, for example; see Moana Nepia, "About the Artist: Lemi Ponifasio," *The Contemporary Pacific* 28, n. 1 (2016), vi.
- 61 Toi Iti is interviewed on "Anika Moa Unleashed," *TVNZ* (June 6, 2018); [www.tvnz.co.nz/shows/anika-moa-unleashed/episodes/s2018-e12](http://www.tvnz.co.nz/shows/anika-moa-unleashed/episodes/s2018-e12); accessed June 10, 2018.
- 62 See *Ibid.*
- 63 On his role in the communist party, see Trevor Loudon, "Who is Tame Iti?," *New Zeal* (October 15, 2007), available online at: [www.trevorloudon.com/2007/10/who-is-tame-iti/](http://www.trevorloudon.com/2007/10/who-is-tame-iti/); accessed June 11, 2018.
- 64 Catherine Masters, "Tame Iti: The Face of Maori Nationalism," *New Zealand Herald* (May 28, 2005); available online at: [www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10127889](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10127889), accessed April 22, 2020. This article gives a general overview of Tame Iti's upbringing and career and mentions the range of opinions about his methods from within his tribe as well as among New Zealanders in general.
- 65 See Marika Hill, "Tame Iti's Place in the Maori Revolution," *Stuff NZ* (March 21, 2012), available online at: [www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/6608607/Tame-Iti-place-in-the-Maori-revolution](http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/6608607/Tame-Iti-place-in-the-Maori-revolution); and Julie Cupples, "Tame Iti's Media Journey Flips Notion of Violence," *Future Learning: Newsroom New Zealand* (June 21, 2017, updated June 26, 2017); available online at: [www.newsroom.co.nz/@future-learning/2017/06/20/34878/tame-iti-vic#](http://www.newsroom.co.nz/@future-learning/2017/06/20/34878/tame-iti-vic#); both websites accessed June 11, 2018. Cupples examines Iti's career in relation to the "celebritisation" of activists via media

- attention, in the past largely white but now expanding to include indigenous activists.
- 66 Walker, cited by Hill in “Tame Iti’s Place in the Maori Revolution.”
- 67 Cupples, “Tame Iti’s Media Journey Flips Notion of Violence.”
- 68 For a detailed discussion of tā moko, see “Maori Tattoo: The Definitive Guide to Ta Moko,” *ZealandTattoo*, available online at: [www.zealandtattoo.co.nz/tattoo-styles/maori-tattoo/](http://www.zealandtattoo.co.nz/tattoo-styles/maori-tattoo/); accessed June 11, 2018.
- 69 See Anne Salmond, *Tears of Rangi: Experiments Across Worlds* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2018), 400.
- 70 On his tattoos, and their affects, see “Tame Iti: the Ngai Tuhoe Ambassador,” available online at: [www.ngaituhoe.com/Folders/Tameiti.html](http://www.ngaituhoe.com/Folders/Tameiti.html); accessed June 21, 2018. See also Cuppers, “Tame Iti’s Media Journey Flips Notion of Violence,” on the media interpretation of Iti; Cuppers notes that some Māori also struggled with and criticized his tactics.
- 71 Gago, cited in Olds, “FAFSWAG.” Here as well, per Namaste’s earlier cited critique of queer theory’s fetishization of drag queerness, Gago notes the tendency, in FAFSWAG’s early days, during which bars and nightclubs would want to commission the group to perform as pure entertainment—repeating an observation central to US-based trans histories and theories, that (even as in Butler’s work) trans cultures often get reduced to drag queen acts, which are embraced as a funny, lovable, and ultimately dismissable element of popular culture.
- 72 Elsewhere, Gago elaborated on the earlier steps before the Facebook page made a broader community aware of FAFSWAG, as cited in Jeremy Olds, “FAFSWAG: The Artists telling Queer Pacific Stories,” *Stuff Entertainment* (August 9, 2015), available online at: [www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/70898666/FAFSWAG-the-artists-telling-queer-pacific-stories](http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/70898666/FAFSWAG-the-artists-telling-queer-pacific-stories); accessed June 22, 2018. Here (based on discussions with Gago and others) Olds points out the origins of FAFSWAG around 2010, when Gago developed a photography series (*Avanoa O Tama*) based on getting to know local Pasifika people by engaging with them around their potential queerness (his term) and questions of gender and taking pictures of them in sets he designed. Finishing the series, he had established intense creative rapport with ten people, including Pati Solomon Tyrell, with whom he founded FAFSWAG.
- 73 In conversation with me June 13, 2018.
- 74 Tanu Gago and curator Ema Tavola and FAFSWAG member Jermaine Dean on “Community and Collective Practice” panel.
- 75 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 122.
- 76 Akashi’s Facebook posts are full of mentions of the struggle of a transwoman to walk freely in public space, and assertions of her pride in doing so nonetheless (my favorite recent post: “my presence only becomes controversial and an issue to you because you refuse to see me until I’m right down the barrel purring at you like a kitty kat. Meawww,” September 10, 2018; her kitty/pussy identification is revealed in her Instagram handle: “queen-kapussi.”
- 77 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (1934), tr. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 61.
- 78 moore, “What’s Queer about the Catwalk?,” note 36, 241; and 190.
- 79 The series, produced by Ryan Murphy of *Glee* fame, a gay white Hollywood mogul, is pleasurable to watch and normalizes the trans-of-color ballroom scene by interweaving the voguing vignettes with melodramatic plot lines.
- 80 Becquer and Gatti, “Elements of Vogue,” 77.
- 81 Pati Solomon Tyrell, in Jeremy Olds, “FAFSWAG: The Artists telling Queer Pacific Stories,” *Stuff Entertainment* (August 9, 2015), available online at: [www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/70898666/FAFSWAG-the-artists-telling-queer-pacific-stories](http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/70898666/FAFSWAG-the-artists-telling-queer-pacific-stories); accessed June 22, 2018.

- 82 Becquer and Gatti, “Elements of Vogue,” 78, 79.
- 83 For press on the show, see “Under Your Skin You Look Divine,” online at: <https://aucklandpride.org.nz/events/under-your-skin-you-look-divine/> (accessed July 13, 2018); I am indebted to val smith for help researching this event.
- 84 For an excellent history of K Road and Auckland’s queer scene, see Julie Hill, “Dark Side of the Rori,” *North & South* (November 2015), available online at *Noted*: [www.noted.co.nz/life/life-in-nz/dark-side-of-the-rori/](http://www.noted.co.nz/life/life-in-nz/dark-side-of-the-rori/); accessed May 14, 2019.
- 85 If we consider the former to be any theory dealing with issues facing transsexual or transgender people and if we date the latter with the rise of the explicit articulation of theories relating to nonnormative, nonbinary gender-sex identifications around 1990, when Teresa De Lauretis invented the term queer theory.
- 86 Including Jack Halberstam in their recent *Trans\**. Transfeminism can mean something very different in non-US contexts, such as Spain, where it refers to radical pro-porn feminists doing activist street performances; on this context, see Juan Vicente Aliaga, “And the Altar Started to Moan and Groan! Transfeminist Artistic Practices in Spain, a Taxonomy,” *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories*, ed. Amelia Jones, Erin Silver (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2013), 236–55.
- 87 Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto.”
- 88 Nagoshi and Brzuzy, “Transgender Theory,” 432.
- 89 Judith Butler, Preface to 1999 “anniversary edition” of *Gender Trouble* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), xi.
- 90 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 8; she is making this argument based on Bornstein’s *Gender Outlaw*.
- 91 Bettcher, “Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues”; Bettcher is here expanding on her own earlier articles: “Trans Women and the Meaning of ‘Woman,’” *Philosophy of Sex: Contemporary Readings* (sixth edition), ed. Nicholas Power, Raja Halwani, Alan Soble (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 233–50; and “Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Re-Thinking Trans Oppression and Resistance,” *Signs* 39, n. 2 (2014): 43–65.
- 92 Bettcher, “Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues.”
- 93 I have explored facetious sincerity, which parallels ironic claims of “realness,” in my essay “Archive, Repertoire, and Embodied Histories in Nao Bustamante’s Performative Practice,” *Artists in the Archive: Engagements with the Remainders of Art and Performance*, ed. Joanna Linsley and Simon Jones (London and New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2018), 151–76. See also J.L. Austin’s ruminations on the difficulty of ascertaining “sincerity” in relation to performatives; see “Performative Utterances,” in *Philosophical Papers*, ed. J.O Urmson and G.L Warnock, 3rd edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 239.
- 94 Paul (formerly Beatriz) Preciado, *Testo-Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacophorographic Era* (New York, NY: The Feminist Press, 2013), 22, 25, 35–6.
- 95 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, and Halberstam, *Trans\**.
- 96 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 232.
- 97 Jack (formerly Judith) Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2005), 1, 2. They are citing Foucault from his 1981 interview “Friendship as a Way of Life,” without a footnote. Halberstam repeatedly implies that women and transpeople—and particularly queer people of color—are the subjects who most radically live the alternative subcultural temporalities and modes of emplacement that define queer times and places. These subjects function as the antithesis of the “white male subjects theorizing postmodern temporality and geography” who propose universal theories that, in fact, privilege white men (4).

- 98 Halberstam, quotes from, respectively, Chapter 1, “Trans\*: What’s in a Name?,” and “Preface,” *Trans\**, 4, xiii.
- 99 See Halberstam, Chapter 1, “Trans\*: What’s in a Name?,” 12–13.
- 100 They argue: “With recognition comes acceptance, with acceptance comes power, with power comes regulation … New articulations of the experience of gender ambiguity, in other words, will make lots of people’s lives easier (transgender adults, but also their parents or their children, their friends, their lovers), but it could also have unforeseen consequences in terms of exposing people who were passing in one gender or another to new forms of scrutiny and speculation,” *Ibid.*, 18.
- 101 The claims of authenticity on the part of some FAFSWAG members appear on their website (<https://FAFSWAG.com/FAFSWAG/>) and in some of their statements in “Zealandia.”
- 102 Roen, “Transgender Theory and Embodiment,” 253.
- 103 Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” *GLQ* 1, n. 3 (1994), 238.
- 104 *Ibid.*, 251, note 2; cited in Roen, “Transgender Theory and Embodiment,” 255. The term “berdache” is a colonizing term applied to Native American gender liminal or “two spirit” people; the Hijra are feminine gender liminal and/or intersex people in South Asia.
- 105 Roen, “Transgender Theory and Embodiment,” 265.
- 106 See Jessica Hutchings and Clive Aspin, ed., *Sexuality and the Stories of Indigenous Peoples* (Wellington: Huia, 2007); this important book presents the voices of Māori people on their takatāpui status.
- 107 Roen, “Transgender Theory and Embodiment,” 257–8.
- 108 *Ibid.*, 261–2.
- 109 Edward Cowley, in conversation with the author, April 8, 2018; and as speaking in *Nothing to Declare: Fa'aFafine in Transit*, a film directed by Lisa Taouma and available at “Coconet,” [www.thecoconet.tv/know-your-roots/pacific-documentaries/faafafine-documentary/](http://www.thecoconet.tv/know-your-roots/pacific-documentaries/faafafine-documentary/); accessed June 10, 2018; I am indebted to Cowley and Taouma for their generosity in addressing these points, Taouma in person May 10, 2018, in Auckland.
- 110 Kihara in *Nothing to Declare*, and in conversation with the author April 1, 2018.
- 111 Moe Laga, in Jeremy Olds, “FAFSWAG: The Artists telling Queer Pacific Stories,” *Stuff Entertainment* (August 9, 2015), available online at: [www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/70898666/FAFSWAG-the-artists-telling-queer-pacific-stories](http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/70898666/FAFSWAG-the-artists-telling-queer-pacific-stories); accessed June 22, 2018.
- 112 Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 2, 6.
- 113 L.H. Stallings, *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures* (Urbana, IL, Chicago, IL, and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 10; Stallings is citing Stryker from Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore. “Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 36, n. 3–4 (Fall/Winter 2008): 13.
- 114 Stallings, *Funk the Erotic*, 11, 12.
- 115 *Ibid.*, xii, xv. See also Ashon Crawley, *The Lonely Letters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).
- 116 For a brief history of the silos and the Wynyard Quarter where they reside, see “History of Wynyard Quarter,” *Silo Park at Wynyard Quarter* website, [www.silo-park.co.nz/history/](http://www.silo-park.co.nz/history/); accessed June 13, 2018.
- 117 As the program notes for *Acts of Passage* explain, the mu’umu’u was “brought into Samoa from Hawaii by the missionaries to clothe the heathen naked body,” and is to this day a common element in Pacific region dress. Raymond’s militaresque mu’umu’u signals (as she describes in these notes) “the loss of our sovereignty in

terms of land but also our body ... with the travesty of the dress I am attempting to masculinise the hyper masculine organisation of the armed forces.”

- 118 Che Wilson, the Māori “protocol advisor,” in relation to a show of work relating to this group called *Pasifika Styles*, described the communal relationship of those in Ngāti Rānana as having “shared ancestry” back to the original Islanders who found their way across oceans; in his essay “Tikanga Māori [correct Māori way of doing things] and Art,” in *Pasifika Styles: Artists Inside the Museum*, ed. Rosanna Raymond and Amiria Salmond (London: Gazelle Books and Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2008), 108. Thanks to Caroline Vercoe for providing this source and information about Raymond’s London context in a conversation of June 13, 2018; for more information on the Ngāti Rānana, see their website: [www.ngatiranana.co.uk/](http://www.ngatiranana.co.uk/); accessed June 13, 2018.
- 119 Program notes for *Acts of Passage*.
- 120 According to those who attended the second and third nights of the performance, Akashi became more and more assertive with the audience members, having them call out moves that, in turn, exhausted her. This is a very interesting extension of the relationality she was enforcing on the first night. Thanks to Carol Brown and Gabriela Salgado for their reflections on the other nights.
- 121 Program notes for *Acts of Passage*.
- 122 *Bionica* was performed by FAFSWAG, choreographed by Jacob Tamata, and produced by Tanu Gago at the Māngere Art Centre as part of the Pacific Dance Festival, June 21, 2018.

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