

Performance and the Re-making of Bodies-Politic¹

Róisín O’Gorman

The poetic, performative, and political expressivity of Nêle Azevedo’s *Minimum Monument*,² an image from which serves as the cover to this volume of *Performance Matters*, resonates across this special issue on “Performance and Bodies-Politic.” It alerts us to our individual and collective histories (of wars, genocides, developments of mass culture), and to contemporary crises (people on the move as never before, populations and identities disappearing, the ice melting, the Human melting into a primordial puddle). And yet, even though each figure is similarly moulded, part of the performative magic of the work is seeing the individual differences emerge, as the rate of melt is variable. The work is both a memorial and a provocation; it has been made and re-made with collective labour around the world since 2005. Azevedo offers a repeatable minor register which, over time, space, and scale becomes monumental, creating a sense of global identity while attending to processes of disappearances. *Minimum Monument* gives us both the nameless multitude and the attention to individual process that reverberates across this issue, in which the articles and materials show the dynamics of performance working through bodily experience in a range of political contexts.

This special issue evolved from a series of events at University College Cork, Ireland in 2015 (“Performance & Politics & Protest”) and 2016 (“Bodystories”).³ The driving themes and questions in the first part of the series considered the intersections of performance and public political life, the efficacy and strategies of performance in that arena, and the ways in which performative actions enable protests and processes of political change to remain open and non-violent. Following this event, we sought to further explore the rich interplay of diverse sites of culture, performance and activism, focusing on how particular bodies intervene and invent new modes of expression, disrupting smooth systems of control, resisting the ever-narrowing confines of what is acceptable, and engaging a playful sense of possibility through creative arts research. Bringing together scholars, performers, artists and activists, we sought to expand understandings of bodies and embodiment, to address the violence of forgotten, elided, segregated bodies, and the repressed histories of bodies. Through a performance framework we see how the expressive, experiential terrain of the body meets, interrogates, and re-calibrates our understanding of ongoing questions of agency, action, and subjectivity in order to attend to the various ways in which bodies tell their own stories at the intersections of arts, activism, and scholarship.

This issue of *Performance Matters* continues to expand this conversation between the embodied individual and the collective, both as abstract concepts and lived complex realities. Performance offers ways to consider how the political refuses to stay put either within the throb of a collective gathering or in the thrall of the individual (all the while also knowing that getting lost in the thrall and the lure of the throb is half the fun). Performance also matters in that it gives us strategies and frameworks for survival and for creative political pathways that need constant renewal and reinvention. We know from performance that we must, again. We know the discipline, endurance, and play of the again, and the once again, and the once more, with feeling. We train and rehearse to make, re-make, and attune the one and the many. This special issue cultivates the traffic between these registers and foregrounds the ways in which multiplicities and particularities entwine through political performatives that play out on and through bodies. The range of work offers examples

Róisín O’Gorman lectures in the Department of Theatre at University College Cork.

where particular lives become either legible or overwritten through performative processes of political will, imagination, representation. This entangling of the individual experience and its collective political representations creates a framework epitomized here, where each contribution presents the dense lived complexity of a particular locale and specific bodies but where, in the overview and alongside each other, we see how bodily lived experience expresses, refines, and represents both a micro- and a macro-politics. As they range across geo-political frameworks, varying national boundaries, and identity politics, the works in this issue offer concepts for reassessing established norms and political efficacies, and modes of research and response that show the plurality of the body politic, which is continually renewed and re-made as *bodies-politic*.

Azevedo’s image also materializes Judith Butler’s views on the body politic, where the seeming solidarity (and solidity) is always already melting. In Butler’s argument, “[t]he body politic is posited as a unity it can never be. Yet, that does not have to be a cynical conclusion” (2015: 4). This special issue of *Performance Matters* resonates with and extends Butler’s recognition of the complexity and tensions of the body politic. The promise of seeming unity or smoothness, however, clashes with the complexity of lived experience. Each of the articles proffers a range of bodies-politic on the move, being made and re-made through performative everyday practices and encounters. In the materials section we see a lively array of performative scholarship, where creative methodologies offer modes of research in which, again, we see the fissures in the smooth surface of any presumed body politic resulting in bodies-politic—bodies, in other words, engaged in an ongoing exercise of re-invention, re-living and re-imagining possibilities of survival, and offering testimony to forgotten disposed-of lives, as well as bearing witness to creative new modes of existence.

The opening article from Helena Buffery, “Multiple Exposures: Moving Bodies and Choreographies of Protest in Contemporary Catalonia,” presents the complex imprinting between the individual and the collective across the mediums of street, stage, and screen. Ethnographically layering the impact and entanglement of street protest and performance in Catalonia, her writing stages the overlapping textures of history and the politics of minoritized culture, paying particular attention to social, political and aesthetic choreographies. As witness/participant, she carefully positions her spectatorship of unfolding events via screen media from abroad, and as an audience member and scholar on the ground in Catalonia, in order to assess the ways in which moving bodies register minoritized culture and language. She closely reads the complex political “scene” alongside three contemporary examples: Àlex Rigola’s adaptation of Joan Sales’s novel *Incerta Glòria (Uncertain Glory)*; Carme Portaceli’s staging of the testimonies of women victims of Francoist violence during and after the Spanish Civil War, as recovered and reframed by feminist historian Carme Domingo in *Només són dones/Solo son mujeres (They’re only Women)*; and Sol Picó’s collaborative, processual work with women dancers and musicians of diverse cultural origins in *WW—We Women*. Buffery reveals how the moving body is the site of emerging intensities of oppressed and minoritized experiences, which the moving body can therefore excavate and expose in unique ways. She traces the many rippling effects of the socio-political struggles, demonstrating how bodies register, enact, and remember and where dance and protest each offer us different layers in this landscape of multiple exposures.

Where Buffery maps the intensity of the presence of bodies in protest and performance, Nuala Finnegan’s work traces the accumulation of names without bodies as she maps the terrain of femicide, or *feminicidio*, as it is represented through theatre, performance, and translation. In “Translating Femicide: *Women of Sand* and the Performance of Trauma,” she focusses on the Mexican city of Ciudad Juárez as a kind of “ground zero” where the scale of the atrocities against

women persist unresolved. She examines the linguistic and performative strategies of Humberto Robles’s documentary theatre piece *Mujeres de arena* [Women of Sand], which draws us into to the scene of the crime, not as voyeurs but as witnesses who must in some way acknowledge and respond to the dead. Finnegan’s own response in part focuses on her position as a translator and outsider and offers a critical account of the potency of the aporia of translation processes as a platform of transmission for the stories of the violence of disappearance and murder. Finnegan’s essay explores the power of theatre and performance as a potential site for cumulative acts of remembrance that are particular and individual, and which also reach across borders, languages and terrains to interrogate the process whereby implacable unmitigated violence continues unabated.

The question of the performative and ideological reframing of borders is additionally seen in two other pieces in this special issue. Pieter Verstraete’s essay, “‘Acting’ under Turkey’s State of Emergency: A Conversation with Kurdish Artists about Theatre, the Dengbêj Tradition, and the First Kurdish *Hamlet*,” traces the troubled borders of language and cultural identity in his research on Kurdish theatre. Based on a series of interviews with Kurdish artists, his essay accumulates examples of strategies adapted by artists within ever-heightened political struggles. The respondents included costume designer Ismail Oyur Tezcanlı, playwright Yusuf Unay, actor and director Mirza Metin, instructor and director Rezan Aksoy, and director Celil Toksöz. By examining the performative possibilities and challenges of creating theatre, he shows how this becomes a significant act in and of itself in that contested region. The essay offers a context and framework for the work of Kurdish theatre artists and in this way his scholarship also addresses the dearth of research on this minoritized culture and censored linguistic border. His essay draws together cultural encounters that are readily overlooked, fragmented, and too easily dispersed in the ongoing mass migrations and exiles challenging borders in material and ideological ways.

Also attending to border politics as they are enacted through monuments that normalize existing borders and colonial histories, Shalon Webber-Heffernan looks at the performative potency of the monumental to interrogate territorial-based identities. In “Performing Monument: Future Warnings,” she focuses on two particular case studies. The first is a two-mile-long land art installation at the US/México border entitled *Repellent Fence* (2015), a monument erected by Postcommodity (a Southwestern United States-based art collective). Secondly, she examines an intervention and interrogation of a monument in Toronto—*King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River* (2017)—by comedy-art duo Life of a Craphead. Focusing on these examples, her essay shows how performative actions can set seemingly stable borders in motion, where elided colonial histories of disappeared Indigenous voices find resonant space, and how the mimetic dismantling of monuments re-writes other potential histories and futures.

The articles section draws to a close with Gillian Whiteley’s essay “From *being one* to *being-in-common*: Political Performativity, Proxemics, and the Joys of Provisional Unity,” which grapples with sites of protest as performative zones of assemblies, where even with the expansion of modes of communication across digital platforms there is still an intoxicating draw toward collective assembly. Whiteley examines the theoretical positioning of performance and protest alongside considered examples of how collective identities and political will are expressed in group actions. She is both wary of and drawn by the collective pull and potential joy of *being-in-common*. This attention to the affective is key in looking at both the provocative historical example of Dutch Provo and at the current struggles for borders and identities within the contemporary British political scene. She reframes the histories and genealogies of encounters with protest sites as possibilities for new performative actions alongside a consideration of contemporary British politics that is still very

much in flux. She questions the central role of performance in collective dissenting actions, as well as sites of coalescence of identity and political will. These questions lead us to the materials section, where the role of the body as the site of both the particularity of the one and the representation of the many comes to the fore.

The materials section offers a consideration of the body as the material and everyday locus of socio-political power, manifest either as repressive control or expressive agency. The ever-more prevalent neoliberal models of delimiting all within the values of a market-economy create an ever-more pressing need to articulate the ways in which bodies can resist and restructure the seemingly unending “measuring” mechanisms of control and organization, labelling, and coercion of bodies *en masse*, as well as the internalization of individual regimes of surveillance. The body continues to be the site of both oppression and agency: while, for example, we see the ongoing struggle of women to have safe and legal access to reproductive rights, or individual struggles with recognition and support for bodies who fall outside of the ever-narrowing “norms” of what is desirable (body size, ability, age, gender, sexuality, etc.), we also see the resilience of bodies on the move across borders (both literal and metaphorical) or playfully performing new modes of resistance or provocation.

In Eliza Steinbock’s interview with trans visual artist Cassils, “A Conversation with Cassils on Propagating Collective Resilience in Times of War,” we are witness to their discussion on the ways in which performance responds to the surge of violence on bodies blurring the normative binaries of gender and sexuality. Cassils works intensively at this border zone where the one and the many meld—where the body of the individual performer bears the intensity of the many bodies, a zone which reveals and revels in its multitudinous expressivity. The work opens attention to the spaces between bodies as both the border of violence and the site of joyful contact.

These tensions of policing pleasure and labour resonate with Ailbhe Smyth’s performative and affective response to the legacies of abuse in the Irish context, which is permeated with a particular form of Catholic Church control and domination. In “A Great Silence Lay Upon the Land: Ireland’s Secreted Histories,” she responds to a performance event staged in Dublin by the Performance Collective as a memorial to the silenced lives of those who were condemned to menial labour and confined to work within an intricate system of control orchestrated between Church and State and acquiesced to by a subdued or submissive public. Smyth asks us to hear the silences of those stolen lives. She does not attempt to fill the silences but to mark their traces and affective impact on the surviving generations in Irish cultural and political life, which resonates around the globe diasporically and the exporting of these regimes of confinement across other colonized zones.

In Ayaka Yoshimizu’s excavations of the stories of Trans-Pacific Japanese migrants who worked in the sex trade in Western Canada, she layers memories, archival research, and her own bodily experiences in that research journey. In this sensory ethnographic response, “Doing Performance Ethnography Among the Dead: Remembering Lives of Japanese Migrants in the Trans-Pacific Sex Trade,” she encounters traces of bodies deemed disposable or erasable, excluded from agency with a body politic which this piece haunts. She accumulates instead a texture of fragments which offer glimmers of liveliness and personalities beyond the archive alongside the toll of the work of remembering on her own body.

Also readily excluded from the body politic are bodies marked “disabled.” However, Kaite O’Reilly’s piece, “The Politicized Disabled Body,” provokes a re-thinking of the collective politics of disability and representation. She critiques the history and ongoing use of the so-called “disabled” body as a

sign of corruption and of the establishing of oppressive regimes of “normalcy.” She disrupts the hegemony of theatre practices which smooth out difference, resulting in arid and toxic monocultural zones. As a playwright, she takes that critique into practice, provoking us to think about dramaturgies of inclusivity as a platform for new modes and forms of performance-making and receiving. She alerts us to how bodies are used in signifying practices that need a radical rethinking and enable exciting new formal developments in playwriting and dramaturgy.

Each of these pieces is resonant and particular, inspiring new modes of thinking with and about bodies that culminate in a drive for a liberatory politics that aches for a rethinking of the processes of the making stable of the body politic, and that encourages a perception of the plurality that moves beyond Spivak’s “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 1985), or an acceptance of the limits of a “realpolitik.” Instead, in the processes of the remaking and ongoingness that is never done, we find that some forms of relief, appeasement, or release are possible, however momentary. And while that is exhausting, as these pieces also reveal, there is exhilarating connectivity possible that has yet to be exhausted in terms of imagination and desire.

This special issue of *Performance Matters* moves across terrains and histories: from traces of Japanese migrants to dispersed traditions and performance languages in Kurdistan, from the streets and theatres of Catalonia to the performance memories and legacies of laundries and industrial schools in the Republic of Ireland, from translations and transmissions of *feminicidio* in Mexico to borders and monuments across the Americas, from the daily political and politicized life of a trans artist to the lived experiences of disjointed multitudes in political protests and the histories of radical ways to re-imagine how we might live together peaceably, creatively, in lively networks of difference and acceptance. It is fitting, then, that we also include a review by Caoimhe Mader McGuinness of Paul Routledge’s *Space Invaders: Radical Geographies of Protest*, a book which looks at protest located across disparate geopolitical sites through a geographical framework. Assembling a wide range of sites and methodologies moving beyond boundaries and borders, Routledge’s book demonstrates a growing performative literacy in the complexity of social interactions, where collective activity and individual differences repeat on this macro scale. That is, as with this special issue, each site offers particularity and yet resonates across the other examples. This special issue does not fit within a border or national identity; there is no even route or historical framework to easily link and outline these interconnections. However, I invite you to read these rich and varied pieces as a compass for a map of the possibility of theatre and performance studies to attune and attend to where the margins crack, where there are pressure points on bodies, where mainstream culture wishes to smooth out lives and steamroll jagged painful histories.

Performance helps us take part in that magical and exhausting process of remaking; in performance we know we are never done, and if we make work, witness it, offer our spectatorship—as these pieces remind us to do—we remember not that we can be done, but that we can be open to being undone, and re-done, so that the body politic becomes articulate as bodies-politic in the ever-challenging work of remaking liveable lives on this damaged planet. Performance matters as a means and mode of remembrance and re-imagining. Across this issue, from performative practices of everyday life, performance structures, new dramaturgies and research methods, the work ruptures any neat and tidy sense of the notion of “the body politic.” We see the ways in which bodies-politic trouble, translate, and transform potentialities of lives of individuals and the gathering together of those material realities. Further, bodies-politic host the politics of the body that shape our experiential material living. Through the expressive rupturing, re-scripting and re-sculpting of bodies

as political platforms, the work across this issue foregrounds performance as central to the work of remaking bodies-politic.

Notes

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2. See: <https://www.neleazevedo.com.br/>.

3. See: <https://performancepoliticsprotest2015.wordpress.com/> and <https://bodystories2016.wordpress.com/>. The symposia grew from an on-going collaboration with Sandra McAvoy who was then coordinator of the Women’s Studies program, and who has since retired from university life, though not from her engagement with work as an activist, in particular for women’s rights. I sincerely thank Sandra for this rich collaboration and for her inspiring ongoing work. I also wish to thank all those who participated in these symposia for their energy and commitment to the intersections with these events. We are grateful to have had the support provided by the UCC University Strategic Research Fund in support of these events.

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Multiple Exposures: Moving Bodies and Choreographies of Protest in Contemporary Catalonia

Helena Buffery

Introduction: Multiple Exposures

The human is always the event of its multiple exposures—both within its relatedness to others and within its exposure to normative forces that arrange the social, political, and cultural matrices of humanness. (Athanasίου, in Butler and Athanasίου 2013, 32).

This is a story of multiple exposures that emerged initially from my witnessing in 2015 of a series of different performance acts and practices in a particular place: Barcelona. The performances in question—Àlex Rigola's adaptation of Joan Sales's novel *Incerta Glòria* (Uncertain Glory) at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, Carme Portaceli's staging of the testimonies of women victims of Francoist violence in *Només són dones/Solo son mujeres* (They're Only Women) at the Josep Maria de Sagarra theatre in Santa Coloma de Gramenet, and Sol Picó's *WW—We Women* at the Mercat de les Flors—are all characterized by the intermingling of dancing bodies with more or less narrative forms, in which the body of the dancer is primarily used to signal and disrupt intersubjective, intercultural and intersemiotic limits. The coincidence of such a performance trend with the emergence and increasing visibility of other disruptive bodily practices in the public sphere, in response to situations of marginalization, exclusion, oppression, and precarity, calls for wider and deeper attention to the diverse genealogies and repercussions of these multiple corporeal exposures. I understand these exposures as simultaneously marked by the different social, political, and cultural discourses that traverse the Catalan capital and shaped by the ways in which bodies intermingle and interact with the multi-layered materiality of that space. In this article, I have attempted to tease out the relationship between the different layers of bodily inscription and incorporation and the choreographies to which these give rise, focusing in particular on the dancing body as an interstitial nexus for negotiation of a sociocultural space often defined by language, above all by its commitment to protecting and transmitting a minoritized language: Catalan.

Turning my attention first to the genealogies of protest in the Catalan space, I will trace indicators of their transversality and multidirectionality, thus questioning the tendency to read their most recent manifestation, in the pro-Independence movement since 2012, purely as a product of top-down social choreography.¹ In this, I am both indebted to Judith Butler's *Notes towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015)—now so ubiquitous in analysis of contemporary urban social protest as performance—and recognize the need for careful contextualization of each of these performative processes in order to disentangle the operation, interpellation and reproduction of the normative from the more resistant, transgressive and transformative potential of bodily exposure to rehearse more inclusive and ethical ways of being together in place.² Going on to juxtapose the rich and complex map of social protest with a brief genealogy of twentieth-century dance in Catalonia, it

Helena Buffery is senior lecturer in the Department of Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin America Studies at University College Cork. Her main teaching and research interests are in contemporary Hispanic Theatre and Performance, Translation Studies and Catalan Studies, and she is currently completing a monograph on *Identities in Translation: Catalan Women Exiles in Mexico*

becomes possible to link the more visible presence of contemporary dance in cross-disciplinary performances on the stage to an increasing concern culturally with the conditions for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage, and to theoretical and choreographic exploration of dance's potential in embodying protest. The expressive potential of dance in marking the limits of mimetic representation through vernacular and visual languages has made the dancer's body particularly prevalent in works dedicated to on-stage exploration of experiences and effects of violence and conflict such as the three examples presented here. It will thus be argued that closer attention to what and how the dancer's body is made to remember provides valuable insights into the transmission, dissemination, reception and reenactment of experiences and narratives of individual, social and cultural vulnerability, precarity and trauma in the contemporary Catalan space.

Interminglings: October 1, 2017

On October 1, 2017, the eyes of the world were on Catalonia as they waited to see whether the region would be able to hold its disputed referendum on political secession from the Spanish state. Most of the discourse generated around the events was political and legal, relating to the unconstitutional nature of the vote, the threat to the rule of law, and the political irresponsibility of the Catalan government. It is not my intention here to enter into any of these questions, except to observe that the dehumanizing metaphors and metonymy used in the process, along with the Spanish government's continuing refusal to accept any form of dialogue over the Catalan claims, means that the conflict is unlikely to be resolved in the near future.³ The rule of law was, paradoxically, to be protected by police intervention in democratically constituted Catalan institutions. The deployment of thousands of additional armed police together with armoured vehicles (at a reported cost of 87 million euro) was presented as a form of deterrence (Jones 2017).⁴ Images circulated on the Internet of community encouragement of civil guards leaving their hometowns in other parts of Spain to join the amassed forces in Catalonia with cries of "¡A por ellos!" (Go get them!).⁵ In the Catalan capital, Barcelona, where most international observers and correspondents were stationed, the sense of emergency and exceptionality was heightened by the continuous rhythm of the helicopters circling the city—normally only audible for short periods, during marches, say—which slowly infiltrated the bodies and consciousness of local residents, and would continue to do so until the end of October. Plans went ahead to organize the vote anyway, with widespread support from local communities, who came together to share logistical details, arranged to occupy schools selected as polling stations over the entire weekend to ensure that they would open on Sunday morning, and later surrounded the same buildings from the early hours to prevent the ballot boxes from being seized. What characterized these tactics of collective civil disobedience was a sense of communities sharing and caring for each other in common everyday spaces, in which hope, apprehension and defiance intermingled in a primarily ludic atmosphere. Indeed, it was this very atmosphere that made the physical violence all the more shocking when it began.



Photographs of residents at two voting centres in Barcelona. Copyright Guillem Colom.

I watched the events of the entire day live-streamed on TV3, the Catalan news channel, while monitoring other representations on international and, above all, social media—an indicator of the key role of digital media throughout the day both in maintaining the vote and sharing information, and in manipulating, re-presenting and re-framing events from different ideological viewpoints. If my vision of what happened that day was mediated by different channels, it was also no doubt inflected by my particular mode of looking at bodies in motion: the training undergone over decades of attending to Catalan theatre and performance cultures in what Susan Leigh Foster (2008; 2011) has termed kinaesthetic spectatorship, referring to the particular ways in which audiences, as embodied spectators, respond to and identify with movement. Marvelling at the stoicism and commitment of bodies that remained up all weekend to protect the polling stations, that queued patiently for hours from before the centres opened, waiting for the voting systems to be functional, and that linked arms in positions of passive resistance when rumours of police intervention came, I witnessed the turning of these communities into flesh as the riot-police charges began and the images of violence proliferated: school doors smashed with sledge-hammers; civilians dragged away from their lines and attacked with batons; rubber bullets and tear gas deployed, even in small villages.⁶ And yet the commitment to resist remained, with voters continuing to turn out and wait at their own polling stations or moving on to the nearest functioning centre.⁷ Here were bodies that supported each other in presenting passive resistance; bodies that interlinked, pulled or swayed together to ensure there were no cracks; bodies that allowed themselves to be dragged and thrown; bodies that challenged the power of the riot police by standing together and advancing in defiance; bodies that raised their arms and held four fingers of each hand aloft as a symbol of affiliation to the Catalan flag and called for the freedom to vote (*Votarem—We will vote*). Here was the kind of “perceptive and responsive physicality” described by Susan Leigh Foster (2003, 412) as characteristic of choreographies of protest, “that, everywhere along the way, deciphers the social and then choreographs an imagined alternative. As they fathom injustice, organize to protest, craft a tactics, and engage in action, these bodies read what is happening and articulate their imaginative rebuttal.”



Voters at the Escola Industrial in Barcelona after hearing rumours that the police were about to arrive. Copyright Guillem Colom.

These often fragile and vulnerable bodies—including families with children, women, old people with zimmer frames, many of them openly crying when casting their votes—presented an ethical challenge to which the media and the largely political commentators called upon as “expert witnesses” struggled to respond.⁸ This was either because they were bodies that did not fit with the narrative that had been assembled over previous months—so that in the case of the mainstream Spanish media the focus was on the success of the police in quashing the vote and on scattered images of civilian violence⁹—or because, following society of the spectacle rules, visual primacy was reserved for the most shocking and impactful images: bloodied faces, ripped shirts, disproportionate police aggression, and even the more performative incident of the woman who “faked” having broken fingers.¹⁰ What was more astounding was that people who were seeing these events on their mobiles or via social media remained firm in their determination to turn out and vote. What was behind this behaviour? Was this a brainwashed population turned into a mass by populist politicians? Or an example of the kind of “multitude” proposed by Hardt and Negri (2004)? Were we seeing the kind of reflexive crafting of common tactics associated with choreographies of protest by Foster (2003), Juris (2014), Butler (2015), Pérez Royo and Aguiló (2016), among others? Or was it some form of restored behaviour, as Schechner (1985) first taught us? What were we seeing? How were we to respond? Many subsequent accounts of the day have been framed either in an epic, heroic vein, with titles such as *Dies que duraran anys* (Days that will last for years), *On eres el 1-O?* (Where were you on 1st October?) and *Operació Urnes* (Operation Ballot boxes) or in terms of critical evaluation of political (ir)responsibilities.¹¹ But my own thinking on what and how these bodies mean takes me back to other histories of bodies—the different bodies of protest that have occupied many of the same public spaces over the past decade, their relation to forms of bodily performance, and their disposition towards and mediation of other bodies: precarious bodies, vulnerable bodies, and the bodies of the dead.

Genealogies of Protest

Where did October 1, 2017, come from? Re-tellings outside Catalonia have often associated it with the kind of nostalgic, ethnocentric and exclusivist nationalist movement witnessed in other parts of Europe (like Brexit, say), the product of what Félix Guattari (1989) diagnosed as the triple ecological

crisis of neoliberal capitalism in reference to the collapse of social, psychic, and environmental security for individuals and communities. However, the only way of sustaining such a reading so far has been to associate it with the top-down political leadership and interpellation of centre-right politicians such as Artur Mas or Carles Puigdemont,¹² formerly of *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (Democratic Convergence of Catalonia) and now of *PDeCat* (Catalan European Democratic Party), when even the most critical historians of the so-called “Independence process” have traced a far more complex genealogy (see, for instance, Dowling 2018).

The demographic mix of people involved in the independence movement reflects both the territorial, social, cultural, generational and gender diversity of Catalonia and a long history of urban social movements in particular (see Molinero and Ysàs 2010; Nel-lo 2015; Andreu 2015; Garcés 2018; Padullés and Uribe 2017).¹³ Record of the same kind of broader, transversal social protest we have seen in 2017 goes back at least as far as the Barcelona tram strike of 1951 and was most persistently a feature of the final years of the Franco dictatorship and its aftermath, culminating in multitudinous marches on key dates such as September 11, 1976 (in Sant Boi) and 1977 (in Barcelona).¹⁴ Such major—million-plus—turnouts had not been repeated in Catalonia until 2010, with the march in favour of the “*dret a decidir*” (right to decide) in response to Spain’s Constitutional Court’s extensive curtailment of a new statute of autonomy ratified by legal referendum in 2006, and then annual September 11 mobilizations from 2012 onward (Dowling 2017). Indeed, the rise in pro-independence sentiment in the region not only pre-dates the international financial crisis which is often touted as its most immediate cause, as analyzed by Dowling (2017; 2018), but is linked closely both to the failure of Spanish institutions to sponsor democratic means of constitutional reform and to the increasing frequency of urban social protest in relation to other social, cultural and environmental issues.¹⁵

The same period has seen the development of civic republican alternatives to the traditional left (Cramer 2014; Barberà 2017)—many of which have restructured the face of Catalan local government with participative assemblies to ensure citizen participation in politics—as well as the centrality of cultural and neighbourhood associations, which have translated the performative modalities used in local street festivals to the more transversal demonstrations organized by major civic associations.¹⁶ The transversality of urban social protest has also been inflected by memory activism in the region, whether relating to questions of how to remember the victims of the Spanish Civil War and Francoist repression, as mediated institutionally by the *Memorial Democràtic* (memoria.gencat.cat) and Barcelona’s *Memory Programmes* (ajuntament.barcelona.cat/programesmemoria), to the commemorative events planned for the tricentenary of the 1714 siege of Barcelona,¹⁷ or to criticism of the perceived basis of Spain’s transition to democracy in a pact of forgetting (see also Resina 2000; Delgado 2015).

The multidirectionality of social, cultural, environmental and memory activism in this period was arguably at its height in 2015, the year after the aforementioned tricentenary commemorations, when municipal elections in many areas tipped the balance towards left-wing communitarian politics and the regional elections forced a coalition between the centre-right Catalanist and left republican platform *Junts pel Sí* (Together for Yes) and civic republican supporters of greater self-determination in the region. The move toward a more participative version of democracy that this appeared to signal was also reflected in the multiple activism of many of the leading political figures of that moment. The new President of the Parliament of Catalonia, Carme Forcadell, had never previously stood for political office but was a long-term civic cultural activist associated with key platforms on the Catalan language, Civil War reparation, democratic rights, and, most immediately,

the Assemblea Nacional Catalana (Catalan National Assembly), an organization created to channel increasing popular support for political independence in 2012.



Carme Forcadell (centre) campaigning for the Catalan language—*#jo em planto per la llengua* (I plant myself for the language)—, an example of overlapping cultural, environmental, and memory activism. Copyright Carme Forcadell 2013.

Raul Romeva headed the secessionist Junts pel Sí (Together for Yes) list in the 2015 regional elections, but had formerly served as an MEP for Catalonia’s Green Socialist Party, *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds*, with a long history of commitment to action on international Human Rights, conflict resolution and peace activism that included lobbying for European recognition of mass graves from the Franco period in Spain.



Exhibition on the excavation of mass graves in Spain for display in the European Parliament. Copyright Raül Romeva 2013.

Before being elected the first female mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau was a social activist, and the tactics of passive resistance and bodily protest she developed as leader of the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (Platform for People Affected by Mortgage Arrears) were visible in her corporeal movements and disposition at her investiture on June 15, 2015, when she took the decision to cross the crowded *Plaça Sant Jaume* from City Hall to the *Generalitat* without the bodyguards that usually protect public officers from the throngs.



Ada Colau crossing the crowded public square after her investiture as mayor of Barcelona in 2015. Reproduced by permission of Barcelona City Council. Compare with the widely disseminated image of her activism at a PAH protest in 2013, which received over twenty million reproductions on social media. See https://verne.elpais.com/verne/2015/05/25/articulo/1432531589_803393.html.

Moving to consider how such multidirectionality and transversality of social, political and cultural activism has been reflected in the development of contemporary dance cultures in Barcelona, I will explore how more recent intermingling of dance and theatre, in particular, draws attention to the continuities and discontinuities between different modalities of performance of protest, as well as calling for more context-sensitive modes of intra- and inter-cultural spectatorship.

Genealogies of Dance in Catalonia

As Langdon Davies's 1929 book *Dancing Catalans* already recognized, a particular dance form in Catalonia—the *sardana*—has enjoyed special symbolic importance since the end of the nineteenth century, with its proscription under the 1923–1930 Primo de Rivera dictatorship leading it to be enshrined as a tactic of transversal socio-cultural resistance.¹⁸ Yet traditional dance culture in the Catalan-speaking territories has been marked by a wider range of often hybridized forms and is most commonly linked to the raucous, and often fiery, street festivals that populate the festive calendar: the *Patum de Berga*,¹⁹ *Dansa de la Mort* (Dance of Death) at Verges, and swirling giants at each carnival-like *fiesta major* (annual local festival). The continuing vigour of these popular traditions and dance forms owes itself in part to another dictatorship, the near forty years of *caudillo* Francisco Franco's regime, when the public suppression of the Catalan language led communities to embrace non-linguistic forms of resistance and performance in order to maintain the social fabric.²⁰ As Esther Vendrell (2012) explores in an essay on the history of dance education in Catalonia, the postwar decades also saw a growing commitment to transmit a variety of traditions and forms of movement that meant that the same dancing bodies that incorporated the classical ballet training of their time might also be involved in the maintenance and revival of Catalan traditions via their local *esbarts* (dance troupes), learning to regard and value other dance traditions through their travels to national and international festivals.

Furthermore, the memory of Catalonia's early twentieth-century history as a cradle for innovation in dance performance was maintained in local archives and the creation of local dance schools, as well as through the international trajectories of a new generation of dancers.²¹ The story of twentieth-century Catalan dance reconstructed for an exhibition at the art centre on Barcelona's Rambla Santa Mònica in 2012 (Arts Santa Mònica-liquidmaps 2012; in particular, Raubert 2012) is one in which 1966 marks the turning point to its contemporary vitality, with a growing confidence and

hybridization of forms, an openness to civic society and social protest movements, and the increasing interpermeability of dance and theatre (Massip 2012), influenced above all by Pina Bausch. The list of dance and movement performers, choreographers and groups that have emerged from or based themselves in Catalonia since then—from Gelabert Azzopardi to Àngels Margarit-Mudances to La Veronal; Mal Pelo to Sol Picó, Simona Levi and La Caldera; Comediants to La Fura dels Baus—go a long way to convince of the unusual prominence of contemporary dance in Catalonia, as compared, at the very least, with the rest of Spain.²²

If the challenging nature of contemporary dance has meant it can be seen as a niche and elite form, its history and intermingling with other social forms is a strong indicator of its relationship to social protest movements as well as a more Gramscian, counter-hegemonic reading of the heightened importance of bodily over linguistic or text-based performance during a dictatorship that sought to silence the Catalan language. Dance constitutes a form of resistance and protest as well as of transmission and incorporation in the Catalan context that has a crucial, if not always visible, link to the importance of language for identity. It is as if bodily performance stands in for the silencing of language. What is more, the same transversality and multidirectionality of activism we have seen exemplified at the end of the previous section, can be traced here too, via Mal Pelo's collaborations with John Berger and commitment to environmental justice, Simona Levi and La Caldera's strong record of socially engaged work, Sol Picó's explorations of social and gender precarity, and Àngels Margarit's ongoing interest in choreographing contemporary urban flow. More recently, in collaboration with theatre directors in the Catalan space, dancers and choreographers have used the intermingling of dance with language and voice, bodily performance and textual theatre, to enact different modes of resistance and reflect on the problematics of cultural transmission. For instance, as well as the performances to be analyzed here, Àlex Rigola has a long history of engaging with dance practitioners in his work, above all since his tenure as director of Catalonia's Teatre Lliure from 2003 to 2011. Carme Portaceli's company La Factoria Escènica (The Stage Factory) was set up specifically to encourage inter-and cross-disciplinary collaboration between different creative practices. The internationally renowned Sol Picó has participated as a dancer in acclaimed textual theatre productions such as Sergi Belbel's adaptation of Irène Némirovsky's *El ball* (2009). Laia Duran's involvement in Marco Morau's dance company La Veronal since 2012 means she is imbued with a style—a co-created corporal language or code named Kova—that overtly places in often conflictual dialogue the semiosis of theatre with the emotional alienation of the choreographer's inexorably abstract forms. Catalan performers' embrace of a responsibility to social, territorial, and planetary ecologies often reveals questions of linguistic and cultural survival to be a significant concern.

The three manifestations of this intermingling of language and dance I want to explore in greater depth here, all of them first witnessed in 2015, are of interest because all three frame the body of the dancer within a wider text-based or narrative theatre and so are ultimately forms that draw overt attention to the presence of bodies in relation to the representational codes and limits of language, underlining their fleshy corporeality as explicit bodies. However, each also stands out because of the way in which the movements of the dancers engage with and bring to the fore particular modalities of bodily performance associated with the wider Catalan socio-cultural context, often assembling the different layers of performance of protest that have been touched on previously. Furthermore, they each draw attention to the multivalent subjectivation of bodies in context, thus encouraging further reflection on the conditions and effects of the transmission of corporeal practices between bodies, generations, and cultures.

The Dancer as Effigy—*Uncertain Glory* (2015)

Àlex Rigola's theatrical adaptation of the notoriously long, complex and challenging Civil War novel *Incerta glòria* (*Uncertain Glory*, 2014) by Joan Sales was first performed in the smaller and more flexible second auditorium of the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya between May 20 and June 16, 2015.²³ If the novel's translation into English by Peter Bush in 2014 was met with excitement by many literary reviewers, due to their encounter with what they saw as an entirely original, far more grotesque and far less heroic depiction of the Spanish Civil War, then in Catalonia and Spain the text continued to provide grounds for discomfort and dissent, due at least in part to the way in which it appears to pit Catalan interests against those of the rest of Spain (whether Republican or Nationalist). Indeed, its setting on the Aragonese front, as framed in video footage of the arid, depopulated Monegros within the adaptation, evokes a geography that, as Francesc Serès (2012) reminds us in the printed programme, articulates the natural, cultural and spatial frontier between Catalonia and the rest of Spain. The adaptation, directed by Rigola himself, involved an extensive team of actors, researchers and technicians, who helped to cut the long novel down to just over three hours, while nevertheless maintaining its tripartite structure and offering a variety of perspectives on the same landscape, events, and conflicts.

Elsewhere I discuss the plot and structure of *Uncertain Glory* before going on to explore its archaeological focus on excavating the space of the dead, in particular the haunting landscape of the Aragonese front, scene of the most intense battles of the Spanish Civil War (Buffery 2017). Here I am interested in exploring Rigola's use of dancing bodies in the play, primarily extradiegetically, in the first act's focus on Lluís's deeply alienated and, at times, hallucinatory experience of life at the front, although there are also instances where dance is employed diegetically. The principal extradiegetic dancers are Toni Mira and Laia Duran who are mainly used to choreograph the horror of the battle scenes, with Mira performing a slow-motion sequence involving a rifle that is very clearly indebted to war photography from the period, and Duran alternately mimicking Mira and performing the flayed remains of dead soldiers, slowly weaving in between the other bodies and objects on stage to suggest their inescapable ubiquity.



Toni Mira and Laia Duran perform the Aragonese front in *Incerta Glòria*, 2015. Copyright David Ruano. Reproduced by permission of Àlex Rigola.

Aina Calpe dances, too, in her portrayal of the praying mantis-like seductress, the *Carlana*, her impossibly erect and elegant glide across the raised platform at the centre of the stage redolent of both the dancing giants at Catalan street festivals and traditional cinematographic choreographies of an undead Dracula.

In Buffery (2017), there is cursory discussion of Laia Duran’s role as an effigy, in the sense explored by Roach (1996; 1998), as a form of surrogation, containment and reincorporation of the dead via live performance, in her doubling both as the body of the dead (soldiers) and as the Miller’s wife (la Molinera) in act 1. Her portrayal of the latter “involves an almost offensively stereotyped rendering of Aragonese peasant dialect and intensely distorted and spasmodic body work” whose grotesqueness could be read as a “monstrous effigy,” standing in “for that which lies beyond the limits of the desired nation” (Buffery 2017, 869). Interestingly, this very overtly expressionist portrayal was hardly mentioned in any of the reviews, in part due to the lack of critical consensus about the success of any of the dance elements, in part to a lack of familiarity with the original novel. The fact that the Miller’s wife’s speeches in dialogue with Lluís in the novel are excessively, if not cruelly, caricatured for comic effect is hardly mentioned in any extant criticism, as if such (mis)representations are either acceptable or need to be silenced. That Rigola decides to foreground the grotesqueness of the portrayal within his version of the text is, then, highly significant, indicating the function of the body of the dancer here to be to say the unsayable: that which lies beyond language, beyond polite society, beyond tolerable expression.



Laia Duran as dancing flesh in *Incerta Gloria*, 2015. With Toni Mira and Nao Albet (as Lluís). Copyright David Ruano. Reproduced by permission of Àlex Rigola.

Looking at Rigola’s career in retrospect, it is possible to trace a line of dancing bodies whose presence often indicates that we are soon to be in the presence of the dead. In his earlier works, such as his adaptations of Shakespeare—*Titus Andronicus* (2000), *Ricard 3er* (2005), *Juli Cèsar* (2003), *MCBTH* (2012), *European House (Prologue to a Hamlet without words)* (2005)—it was generally the bodies of non-professional dancers who were choreographed on stage to the tunes of a 1970s and 1980s rock soundtrack that generally signalled the unstoppable pull of Tarantinoesque violence, bloodshed and a melancholic desire for adolescent exuberance. In his acclaimed adaptation of Roberto Bolaño’s *2666* (2007), Alba Pujol is choreographed writhing in agony in representation of the multiple victims of femicide in Ciudad Juárez, with Beethoven playing in the background of this choral requiem for the countless dead (Finnegan 2018). Toward the end of his period as director of

the Teatre Lliure (2003–11), he began to work more closely with professional dancers and choreographers, culminating in the intricately choreographed trance-like chorus of ritualized bodies that constituted *Tragèdia* of 2011, based on readings of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Rigola's use of dance since then balances his engagement with inclusive curatorial work in repertoire with an almost obsessive quest to find ways of representing intense emotion and violence on stage without risking retraumatization and therefore doing violence to the audience. Indeed, the dancers in both *Incerta glòria* and *El públic* are used very overtly to engage with what Paco Ferrándiz (2014) has called dealing with a buried past, drawing on the images of mass grave exhumations that have become so much a part of contemporary memorialization of the Spanish Civil War (see also Renshaw 2011).

The forensic, archaeological tenor of the stage version of *Uncertain Glory* could, then, be read in terms of memory activism alongside the many recent plays dedicated to Catalan national memory, and its staging in the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya might confirm such a reading. Furthermore, the dancers are clearly employed to represent and contain the limits of violence, of the body, of life, of language and, in the case of Laia Duran, the limits of the national. The reduction of the female dancer's body to an effigy, alongside the fact that she is the only semi-naked body on display, might seem to reduce her agency, as in the case of Alba Pujol in *2666*. She stands out from the other characters also because hers is the only overtly non-realist performance in character, and significantly she is the only one whose relationship with language is problematized: she is inarticulate, her voice is distorted, as if to underline her abjection. However, the particular performance style she employs, as discussed previously, leaves some room for indeterminacy and even resistance. A member of La Veronal since 2012, Duran's abstract and frenetic shapings on stage within this play at times come across as if her body is mimicking the contortions of her stylized pronunciation, at other times suggesting a palsied form to reflect Lluís's and Sales's grotesque vision of Aragonese primitiveness. The forms she traces in fits and jerks do not suggest emotion; their impossibly precise and perverse placing in space in many ways mimics more effectively the monstrous skeletons of the defiled monastery and the contorted shapings and interminglings of remains in excavated graves than the haunted pacing of Mira's choreographies of the battlefield.



Laia Duran as La Molinera. *Incerta Gloria*, 2015. With Nao Albet and Aina Calpe (as La Carlana). Reproduced by permission of Àlex Rigola.

They are movements that evoke both the resistant movements we see in social protest—a jagged elbow here, a twisted shoulder there, to evade police clutches or ensure a path through a dense

crowd—and the uncomfortable and uncanny assemblages of intermingled bodies in Civil War and postwar mass graves.

The Dancer as Heteropathic Witness—*Només són dones/Solo son mujeres* (They are only women), 2015

The second mode of dance performance I want to look at is that of *Només són dones/Solo son mujeres*, which I first saw when it premiered on June 19, 2015, in the Teatre Josep Maria de Sagarra in Santa Coloma de Gramenet (Greater Barcelona), days after the investiture of the first woman mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, and in the presence of an audience largely made up of women. The play had begun life as a series of five short monologues written by the Barcelona-based writer Carmen Domingo, based on the testimonies of Spanish Republican women victims of political violence during the Civil War and Franco dictatorship.²⁴ Adapted and directed by Carme Portaceli, with scenography by Paco Azorín, choreography by Sol Picó and original music by Maika Makovski, it was later programmed for the autumn Temporada Alta festival in Girona, the 2015–16 season at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, and has toured to other theatres, including a run at the Teatro María Guerrero in Madrid in 2016. The three women performers of the piece were actress Míriam Iscla, musician and composer Maika Makovski, and dancer and choreographer Sol Picó, who together devised the final show from April to June 2015.

If the primary framing of the dancer's body in Rigola, whether intentional or not, is as an effigy, removing their agency, then in Carme Portaceli's *Només són dones* we are presented with a very different frame, in which processes of bodily relationality, contamination and intermingling are made visible on stage for the audience to engage with. In the programme notes for the initial showing Portaceli describes her intentions as having been to complement the work of emblematic actress Iscla in mediating the voices of the women in the play with the body of the dancer to stand in for the embodied experiences of all women and of the singer and composer to represent a disembodied, external observer, although later the dancer takes on a more universal role, as an Ariel-like "spirit" roaming across the stage, and it is the musician's role that is cited as providing emotional depth. Both framings suggest a vision of bodily performance as more universal than language, capable of transcending sociohistorical context; however, the intermingling of narrative, music and dance evokes and enacts a more porous relationship between archive and repertoire, with the dancer's body weaving in between documentary traces and material remains. The dancer in this case is Sol Picó, who had previously worked on a similar project related to the incorporation and transmission of violence and war, *El ball* (2009) with the great Catalan actress Anna Lizaran. Of Valencian origin, but a long term resident in Barcelona, Picó founded her own company in 1993 and has developed a recognizable style via acclaimed productions such as *Bésame el cactus* (Kiss my cactus), *El llac de les mosques* (Fly Lake) and *Memòria d'una puça* (Memoirs of a flea), and was awarded the Premi Nacional de Dansa de la Generalitat de Catalunya in 2004 and Spain's Premio Nacional de Danza in 2016. In *Només són dones* we witness the ephemeral presence of the dancer in the archive and are reminded of the performative quality of all engagement with archival remains.



Sol Picó in *Només són dones*, 2015. With Míriam Iscla and Maika Makovski. Copyright La Factoria Escènica. Reproduced by permission of Carme Portaceli.

As discussed in Buffery (2017) the main emphasis of the adaptation was on “the culturally invisible experiences of Republican women, seeking to overcome the silencing of what Neus Català (2013) has called the ‘oblidades entre els oblidats,’” the “doubly-forgotten” women among the forgotten dead. However, unlike the use of the dancers’ bodies in *Incerta glòria*, as surrogates to stand in for the dead, in *Només són dones*, the emphasis moves to the process of witnessing through listening and responding to the layering of narrative testimonies, objects, images, texts and music assembled archaeologically on stage. There are different modes by which this takes place. In sections of the play, perhaps in line with Portaceli’s intention for the dancer to stand in for “universal woman,” Picó is, like Iscla, simply a surrogate, standing in for the dead, fleshing out their words. Elsewhere, as in the opening section about a discovered mass grave, she listens to the different layers of the story: the narrative of a grand-daughter who endeavours to make sense of the story and to empathize with her mother who is moved to tears; the narrative of a daughter who barely remembers the mother who is taken from her; and that of an imprisoned, pregnant wife and mother (based on Amparo Barayón), taken out and shot with others from her village and buried in a grave marked by local children with bottles. The dancer translates these stories into her own choreography of the different layers, picking gingerly with the glass bottles on stage, before violently weaving between them, in order to represent in turn the experiences of the different corpses intermingled in the earth. The most effective of her responses to these documentary traces relates to the section re-presenting the experiences of the doctor Matilde Landa, who is psychologically tortured by her captors to force her to accept baptism, until she throws herself from the balcony, only to be baptized in articulo mortis. Sol Picó quietly observes Iscla recounting her experiences and anguish from her own corner of the stage, at first at least resisting identification.



Sol Picó in *Només són dones*, 2015. Copyright La Factoria Escènica. Reproduced by permission of Carme Portaceli.

In a process of kinaesthetic empathy, we watch her slowly incorporating the gestures of her fellow performer and gradually mimicking and repeating them, until finally she channels the violence of these movements, thrashing out her final death throes in a transparent elongated water bath on stage.



Sol Picó in *Només són dones*, 2015. With Míriam Iscla. Copyright La Factoria Escènica. Reproduced by permission of Carme Portaceli.

In line with Silverman (1996) and LaCapra (2001), we are exposed to a process of heteropathic witnessing and empathic unsettlement that does not simply mirror or reenact by identification but instead appears to incorporate an experience that is radically other. Picó, the dancer as eyewitness on stage, experiences and physically performs the erosion of the other's mental and bodily integrity, almost as a form of possession. Bound together through watching each other, yet separated by the disruptive techniques of Picó's explosive and expressionist choreography, and accompanied by the piercing and repetitive keening of Makovski, the performers together ensure the transfixion of the embodied spectators in the auditorium. Unable to look away, the audience is effectively unsettled by this excess, and thus cannot escape a sense of their own limitations in feeling, addressing and responding to individual, social, and cultural vulnerability, precarity, and trauma.

Bodies of Protest —*WW–We Women* (2015–17)

Around the same time that she was beginning to rehearse *Només són dones*, Sol Picó began the process of research for her *We Women* project,²⁵ advertising via theatre and performance institutes and forums for women collaborators from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and working in different creative disciplines. Picó held two months of workshops with dancers and singers from different performance traditions, including the French-Senegalese dancer/choreographer Julie Dossavi, the Japanese fusion performer Minako Seki, experimental violinist Adele Madau, flamenco musicians Marta Robles and Lina León, and the Kuchipudi dancer Shantala Shivalingappa (later replaced by Shreyashee Nag). The results of this intense process of sharing stories, experiences and aesthetic practices were first shown in Barcelona's Mercat de les Flors on July 6–8, 2015, during the annual summer GREC festival, directed by Picó with help from Roberto Fratini as dramaturg and Verónica Cendoya as assistant director. Presented as an investigation into the heterogeneous experience and realities of women in the contemporary world, even though the piece bears Sol Picó's name as director, there is an emphasis on its status as a site of intimate intercultural encounter between different worldviews, musical and performance cultures, and ways of choreographing the social. At times performing the same processes of subjectification but in different keys, at times coming together as a collective to respond to the space in which they find themselves, the spectacle in many ways felt like a rich and complex follow-on from the Portaceli-Domingo project in its dependence on kinaesthetic spectatorship and heteropathic witnessing between the performers. Furthermore, it was clearly influenced by the intermingling between theatre and dance characteristic of La Factoria Escènica, punctuated by the same processes of translation of narratives into movement, of dialogue between different forms, and above all of empathic attention to the stories and gestures of the others.



Image of creative process for *We Women*. Copyright David Ruano. Reproduced by permission of Sol Picó Cia de Danza.

Set on a sand-covered stage, occupied by an improvised encampment that evoked the nomadic, the refugee and also the ephemeral community spaces constructed in public squares by the 15-M protest movement (known in Catalonia as the *Indignats*) against government corruption and elite mishandling of the financial crisis,²⁶ the performers first entered the stage as individual women—their bodies exposed, semi-naked and vulnerable in heels—and posed under a sand shower, defiant and proud, before performing their individual performance styles. This vulnerability was reprised as

a collective moments later, with them re-entering the arena slug-like, rolled in sleeping bags, before slowly emerging to their new community as if from chrysalises, all of them wearing shiny shell-suits. Together in this new encampment on stage, the women tried out different ways of being together, whether through social processes of more or less violent subjectification such as the performance of a lapidation, a hyper-competitive aerobics class, and fighting over an apple, or through sharing individual stories of childhood (often moving between different languages) and social narratives of the treatment of women in their respective societies. Some of these stories were then translated into song or dance, before being mimicked by the others, either copying the style of the original or translating it to different performance languages: trance-like tribal African, Japanese butoh, Asian kuchipudi, flamenco, including Picó's own brand of impossible en-pointe *zapateado* (the often breathlessly rapid, percussive footwork characteristic of flamenco dancing).



The performers mimic Shantala's performance style. Copyright David Ruano. Reproduced by permission of Sol Picó Cia de Danza.

The most powerful of these translation processes was, perhaps, the triangulation of witnessing set up between Dossavi, Seki, and Picó, where the former's physical power was deliberately juxtaposed with Seki's vulnerability in order to enact extremes of violent dispossession that recalled the police violence against the *Indignats* in 2011 and foreshadowed that of October 1, 2017. Dangled like a puppet by her hair from one of the encampment's washing lines, the Japanese dancer's spasmodic and grotesque butoh-inspired movements called to mind the post-traumatic theatre of Grotowski and Kantor (see Romanska 2012). Picó's response to her witnessing of this vulnerable and precarious bodily exposure was to "translate" the movements into a frenetic and tortured version of her trademark *zapateado*, wearing her usual red pointe shoes, before draping herself in exhaustion over the washing line at the other side of the camp. In contrast, Dossavi replaces her previous violence with an attitude of loving attention, carefully cradling the body of the other.



Julie Dossavi and Seki Sano in *We Women*, 2015. Copyright David Ruano. Reproduced by permission of Sol Picó Cia de Danza.

If the performance was very much in keeping with Sol Picó's trajectory of blending dance with social protest, most memorably in her *Memoirs of a flea*, audience and critical responses were at first characterized by disappointment at the dilution of her brand, signalling that they had come to see her as a dancer and choreographer, whereas the others were at best surplus to requirement and at worst criticized as reproducing clichés familiar from other intercultural experiments. My sense upon watching it was that the project was in many ways very much of its moment, characterized by the endeavour to create a commons we find in Dardot and Laval (2014) or Pérez Royo and Agulló (2016), and by the kind of transversality of resistance and protest—across the psychic, the social and the environmental—propounded by Guattari (1989). This was, of course, a time when Barcelona had elected its first woman mayor, Ada Colau, whose “Barcelona en comú” (Barcelona in common) project represented a citizen platform in favour of an open, diverse, and just urban society, presenting a very prescient message to a globalized world. The processes of entanglement and intermingling reproduced on stage had clearly emerged out of a workshop experience of sharing languages, stories, music and dance practices between women of radically different cultural origins, yet whose own aesthetic journeys were characterized by openness, hybridity and transculturation. Staged in a nomadic space, with women sharing experiences, memories, everyday practices, customs and performance styles, sometimes watching each other, sometimes mimicking, responding or competing, sometimes dancing together, encouraging or comforting each other, sheltering one another, the show ultimately explored the place of women in a public space envisaged as multicultural, plurilingual and international, trying out different ways of interacting, resisting and confronting the matrices of dispossession.

Coda: October 28, 2017

The intertwined bodily and territorial forces of dispossession play out in the exposure of bodies-in-place, which can become the occasion of subjugation, surveillance, and interpellation. It [the intertwined bodily quality of not-giving-up as not-giving-in] can also become the occasion of situated acts of resistance, resilience, and confrontation with the matrices of dispossession, through appropriating the ownership of one's body from these oppressive matrices. Acted upon, and yet acting, bodies-in-place and bodies-out-of-place at once embody and displace the conditions of intelligible embodiment and agency. (Athanasiou, in Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 22)

On October 28, 2017, I travelled to Barcelona from Cork (via London Heathrow) on a pre-planned Erasmus mobility trip, not entirely knowing what I would find, given that the then Catalan president, Carles Puigdemont, had made a unilateral declaration of independence the night before after days of agonizing over whether to call elections and no doubt pressured by mass popular demonstrations on the streets in the previous forty-eight hours. The declaration had been followed by an overwhelming vote in the Spanish senate to apply article 155 of the Spanish constitution,²⁷ allowing the Spanish government to take direct control of Catalan institutions, which was met with rapturous applause for Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's very hardline speech. Barcelona was a city more subdued than usual, but shops were open, traffic at the usual level for a Saturday, and all airports, stations, and public transport appeared to be functioning normally (unlike at various points over the previous month). There was certainly no sign of the kind of mass demonstrations witnessed to protest against state violence in previous weeks. Theatres and concert halls were still open, if attendance levels were reportedly down, so I was able to get tickets that very evening to see Sol Picó's *We Women* again at the Mercat de les Flors. This both gave me the opportunity to refamiliarize myself with the piece and to confirm that in terms of programming, at least, Barcelona's cultural institutions continued to show a commitment to socio-cultural diversity and inclusivity.²⁸ If in many ways everything was the same as before, the difference in atmosphere at the performance hit me immediately. The auditorium was quite full, but groups were more guarded than usual, all checking social media before the start. In the seats next to me, two women were clearly discussing the pro-unionist Societat Civil Catalana (Catalan Civil Society) march the next day and the fact that attendees had been instructed to bring only "democratic flags" (i.e., no ultra-right, Francoist or Falangist emblems). As became more and more apparent in encounters of the following days, I had the sense of people living in parallel between what they were being and doing in the space around them in the everyday and their almost constant attention to the networks, tweets, and messages on their phones. Interestingly enough, then, in a show that depended to a great extent on kinaesthetic empathy, within my locale it was only the young child in front of me who was visibly moved by and engrossed in the movements on stage, to the extent that I became quite worried about how she would respond to the Dossavi-Seki interaction towards the end of the show, due to the level of violence they had transmitted in the initial production I had seen.

My sense was of a far colder audience than at the Festival Grec of two summers before, quieter and, perhaps, more circumspect in the moments before the show began. Even the applause was more subdued, although this could also have been a product of changes in the production, such as the removal of some of the more shocking images witnessed in earlier versions. Picó herself was more prominent in this version—but still not central to the piece—and the stand-in for Shantala Shivalingappa, while impeccable, clearly did not have the same close relationship of intimate co-creation and co-presencing with the others. Overall, the sense of an alternative, multilingual and pluricultural community presented in the performance, based on a diverse "we women," no longer appeared to be transmitted with the same force to the embodied spectators who shared the auditorium. Or perhaps it no longer spoke to the more fragile and uncertain socio-cultural space in which it was performed, a space where, according to many accounts, "convivència" (convivial co-existence) was now in crisis. If on the one hand this confirmed for me the multilayered interpermeability of the dancer's and the social body in its reminder of the roots of this particular performative process in the socio-political context in which it emerged in 2015, on the other hand, it brought home the ephemeral power of these women's bodily exposure(s) on stage. Based on a process of interlinguistic and cultural translation that involved the onstage translanguaging of narratives of vulnerability, precarity and trauma, in the sharing of women's stories and anecdotes, their representation of different modes of violence against and subjection of women, and the

heteropathic witnessing and care produced by their attention to each other, their dancing foregrounded their status as bodies of protest, reminding both of the forces and effects of bodily and territorial dispossession and of different means and modalities of resistance, resilience and confrontation.

The multiple exposures witnessed and assembled here range from the precarious and vulnerable bodies-in-place exposed by the world media on October 1, 2017, and their relationship to previous performance processes, social choreographies and genealogies of protest, to the trained, professional dancing bodies that have appeared on recent Catalan stages, and their affordances as bodies-out-of-place that are simultaneously continuous and discontinuous with the social body. Regarding these moving bodies helps to bring into focus the role of the corporeal in the articulation of Catalonia's contemporary political affects and multiple immaterial socio-cultural heritages. Their multiple exposure in this article was intended to stage both the motility, fluidity and porosity of bodies in motion on and off the stage and the ways in which such inter- and transcorporeal being, moving and knowing summons forth sites of ethical response to situations of precarity, vulnerability and violence. One of these moving bodies is, of course, my own: at times positioned at a distance and viewing other bodies as mediated by other frames and worldviews; at times as an embodied spectator sharing the same theatre space; at times intermingling in the social tactics of everyday life; at times incorporated—and moved—through the intensity of kinaesthetic spectatorship.

Notes

1. Such a reading has been most persistently a feature of external critique of the movement toward secessionism in Catalonia, attributing the latter to the political leadership strategies of figures like the former president of the Generalitat, Artur Mas. However, there has also been important internal critique of the role of the Catalan political classes and intelligentsia in leading the populace towards conflict with the Spanish state. See, for instance, the work of Jordi Amat (2015; 2017). In contrast, Júlia Fernández (2017) investigates the ways in which the apparently unitary top-down choreographies of mass pro-Independence events like those witnessed since September 11, 2012, are actually characterized by a range of more diverse, critical and resistant performance practices; whereas Elvira Prado-Fabregat (2017) provides evidence that the political organizers of these events are themselves never entirely certain either of the level of participation or the ways in which people will perform.
2. Andrew Hewitt's (2015) work on "social choreography" questions the problematic slippage between these two understandings in much contemporary work on the body in performance. With him, I recognize the generative potential of negotiating choreography to better apprehend the limits of what it is possible to be and do in a particular spatiotemporal context. In focusing on a minority or minoritized language context, I am adding an awareness of how this might interact with sociolinguistic hierarchies and linguistic difference, rather than just language.
3. Even after the fall of Mariano Rajoy's Partido Popular government following a vote of no confidence on May 31–June 1, 2018, it remained clear that there could be no dialogue about the terms of debate framing the disputed referendum of October 2017. Thus, notwithstanding some symbolic concessions by hard-line figures in the Spanish socialist party, such as Foreign Minister Josep Borrell, who in a BBC interview accepted the use of the word nation to refer to Catalonia (#Catalonia is a "nation" @BBC Hardtalk), the only kind of democratic consultation that so far appears to be on the table is a vote on the current terms of autonomy.
4. See, for instance, the Reuters report on Spanish Interior Minister Juan Ignacio Zoido's announcement in the *Cortes* on January 18, 2018: <https://es.reuters.com/article/topNews/idESKBN1F71MV-OEST/>. Documentary reconstruction of the impact of Civil Guard intervention in Catalan institutions on September 20, 2017, is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do5KQV5Qgow>.

Buffery

5. Video footage from different sources is available at https://www.elconfidencial.com/espana/cataluna/2017-09-25/referendum-cataluna-video-guardias-civiles_1449434/.
6. For a searchable, interactive map recording the events of the day, including images, see <https://catmemoria.cat/poble-a-poble/>. Record of the use of teargas can be found at <https://catmemoria.cat/lloc/aiguaviva>.
7. This facility was supported by the use of a “universal census,” that is, a single central online register that could be ticked off in real time.
8. See, for instance, Andrew Marr’s interview with Spanish Foreign Minister Alfonso Dastis on the BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-41712725/spain-fm-many-police-violence-pictures-fake>.
9. Comparison of Spanish newspaper headlines on October 1 and 2, 2017, shows that the main focus was on the political challenge to the Spanish state presented by the referendum, and on the effectiveness of the Spanish national police:
<https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20171001/431691782273/portadas-prensa-espanola-1-o.html>;
<http://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-portadas-periodicos-hoy-lunes-octubre-2017-capsulitis20171002012651.html>.
10. One of the most widely disseminated clips from the day was of a woman who claimed she had been groped and had her fingers broken by riot police at an electoral station. She subsequently admitted to TV3 that the injury had later been diagnosed and was being treated as a case of capsulitis; however, her perceived manipulation of the media was widely used to present all coverage of police violence as so-called “fake news.” See, for instance, https://www.reddit.com/r/catalunya/comments/77d2g6/violence_in_catalonia_needed_closer_scrutiny_in/.
11. See, for instance, the diverse list of titles announced for the 2018 Diada de Sant Jordi (Festival of the Book and the Rose) in Catalonia: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/especial/cultura/20180422/sant-jordi-llibres-proces/index.html>; <https://www.naciodigital.cat/noticia/153083/10/llibres/sant/jordi/entendre/1-o>.
12. Mas, who was president of the Catalan Generalitat from 2010 to 2015, is currently suspended from political activity due to his role in organizing the consultation on the future of Catalonia on November 9, 2014. Puigdemont, president of the Catalan Generalitat from 2015 to the end of October 2017, is in exile in Brussels.
13. In contrast with these more recent sources, for many international scholars Barcelona’s history of social contestation remains linked above all with the early twentieth-century prominence of the anarcho-sindicalist movement, via George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*.
14. September 11 began to be celebrated as a national day in Catalonia from the end of the nineteenth century, in commemoration of the end of the siege of Barcelona in 1714, which itself came to mark Catalonia’s legal, political and cultural absorption into Bourbon Spain. The main slogan at marches after the end of the Franco dictatorship was “Llibertat, amnistia, Estatut d’Autonomia” (Liberty, Amnesty, Statute of Autonomy).
15. From the state-wide protests following the Partido Popular’s handling of the 11-M terrorist bombings in 2004 and the 15-M anti-austerity demonstrations in 2011, to *cassolades* (kitchenware banging sessions, generally at night-time) in protest at local and national infrastructural failures; environmental protest against Spain’s national hydrological plan, urban remodelling and the eviction of squatter communities; marches in favour of greater hospitality for refugees, inclusive public education and women’s rights; and other forms of direct action and activism, such as the Argentine-inspired *esraches* outside banks to raise awareness about families affected by mortgage arrears.
16. The main civic associations involved in organizing pro-independence events have been Òmnium Cultural, which was founded in 1961 to contribute to the preservation of the Catalan language and culture, and the

more recent Plataforma per la llengua (Platform for the Language) and Assemblea Nacional Catalana (Catalan National Assembly).

17. This siege took place during the Spanish War of Succession, as a result of Catalan rejection of the Bourbon candidate to the Spanish throne. The defeat of Hapsburg resistance in Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands resulted in repression of Catalan legal, political, and cultural institutions.

18. It is this history which no doubt led to later determination to turn the *sardana* into a national symbol alongside the human towers constructed by *colles* (groups) of *castellers*, culminating in the former being put forward by the Catalan Olympic Committee as an Olympic symbol of communion, conviviality and community in the run-up to the Atlanta games in 1996.

19. Listed as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, the Patum is an annual festivity comprising a series of ritual dances by the townspeople of Berga in the province of Barcelona.

20. Extant historiographical approaches to the period have tended to place far more scholarly focus on the role of poetry and the protest singers associated with *La Nova Cançó* (The New Song).

21. Examples of the former include Tórtola Valencia, Raquel Meller, Joan Tena and Carmen Amaya; the latter include Ramon Solé, Vicente Escudero, Anna Maleras, and later Ramon Oller and Cesc Gelabert.

22. For a fuller list of contemporary dance and performance art practitioners, with images, see <http://liquidmaps.org/categories/view/artes-del-movimiento>.

23. *Incerta glòria* de Joan Sales. Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, Sala Petita, May 20–June 16, 2015. Directed and adapted by Àlex Rigola. Scenographer: Max Glaenzel; Costume designer: Sílvia Delagneau; Lighting: August Viladomat; Soundtrack: Nao Albet; Sound: Albert Mosoll. Video: Francesc Isern and Max Glaenzel. Documentation: Eleonora Herder. Body art: Alejo Levis. Cast: Lluís–Nao Albet; Commander Rosich / Trini’s father–Andre Benito; Cruells–Marcel Borràs; Carlana / Commander’s wife–Aina Calpe; Merceditas / Miller’s wife–Laia Duran; Picó–Toni Mira; Juli Soleràs–Pau Roca; Trini Milmany–Mar Ulldemolins. Three hours and fifteen minutes running time with two breaks of ten minutes each. Images of the play are available at <http://www.tnc.cat/ca/incerta-gloria> and http://www.alexrigola.com/Alex_Rigola/Photos/index.html.

24. These included: Amparo Barayón, who was arrested and executed in 1936; Matilde Landa, whose experience of psychological torture in prison drove her to suicide in 1942; and Tomasa Cuevas, whose own experience of imprisonment and torture between 1939 and 1945 led her to work on collecting the stories of other women victims.

25. See <http://www.solpico.com/produccions/we-women/>.

26. See Cameron (2014) for further discussion of the 15-M movement in Spain.

27. An English-language version of the Spanish Constitution can be accessed at <https://www.boe.es/legislacion/documentos/ConstitucionINGLES.pdf>.

28. In the same week, I was able to see Calixto Bieito’s adaptation of Bernardo Atxaga’s *Obabakoak* performed in the Basque language at the Teatre Lliure’s Sala Puigserver; *El metge de Lampedusa* (The Doctor of Lampedusa), based on the experiences of Pietro Bartolo, at the Espai Lliure; Lorca’s *Bodas de Sangre* (*Blood Wedding*) performed in Spanish at the Biblioteca de Catalunya by acclaimed Catalan company La Perla 29; the Spanish Centro Dramático Nacional production of Max Aub’s Spanish civil war classic *El laberinto mágico* (The Magic Labyrinth) at the Teatre Romea.

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ARTICLES

Translating Femicide: Women of Sand and the Performance of Trauma

Nuala Finnegan

From the early 1990s onwards, stories about women who had been mutilated, raped, murdered and abandoned in the desert surrounding the US-Mexico border town of Ciudad Juárez started to insinuate themselves into local, national and international public consciousness. Since then, a light has been shone on the crime of femicide, or *feminicidio* as it is called in Latin America,¹ and the murders of women from Ciudad Juárez have become something of a global *cause célèbre*. More recent cases in India, Canada, Argentina, and elsewhere have ensured that the horrors of *feminicidio* and what is frequently its very public, excessive nature remain internationally visible.² Something about the murders in Ciudad Juárez, however, struck a chord both within and beyond Mexico for reasons that are difficult to define. Indeed, the city has come to represent a kind of “ground zero” for the crime of *feminicidio* and, as such, it constitutes the paradigmatic case study for a phenomenon that is now demanding global recognition and action. More than twenty-five years since the crimes were first reported, there have been numerous human rights reports, a well-documented media frenzy and an outpouring of cultural responses that seek to remember and to mourn the victims of violent death in the city at the same time as they interrogate the political, legal and societal structures that produce the crimes. Steven S. Volk and Marian E. Schlotterbeck argue that “it is precisely because the state has failed so abjectly in stopping these murders that ‘fictional’ narratives have become both the site where victims are mourned and the means by which justice can be restored.” (2010, 121–22). Taking this as a starting point, I argue that the cultural expressions about Juárez—including theatre—present us with a suggestive lens through which structural, systemic and historical patterns of violence can be best comprehended and challenged.

Theatre and Performance about Femicide in Ciudad Juárez

It is difficult to summarize the dynamic body of theatre and performance that exists about *feminicidio* in Juárez, and there have been myriad plays, performances, and theatre pieces staged as a response to the Ciudad Juárez outrages, both within the city and beyond. They have been performed at theatre festivals in Latin America and elsewhere, as digital interventions, and in avant-garde theatrical expression and what might be seen as more traditional dramatic approaches. The rich tradition of community and other forms of theatre about femicide in the State of Chihuahua and the region surrounding the city of Ciudad Juárez have creatively reimagined the horrors of femicide while attempting to stage public acts of commemoration. Durango playwright Enrique Mijares’s collection of theatre, *Hotel Juárez: Dramaturgia de feminicidios* (2008) amply showcases the range of techniques and expressive forms utilized when exploring the inhumanity, pain and injustice associated with the crimes. Mijares’s own play, *Jauría*, uses a cast of animals to depict Ciudad Juárez’s underworld, and playwrights Virginia Hernández (*La ciudad de las moscas*) and Demetrio Ávila (*Sirenas del río*) effectively employ mythical, biblical and topographical symbolism to convey the deeper truths that sustain

Nuala Finnegan is professor in the Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies at University College Cork, Ireland, and the Director of the Centre for Mexican Studies. Her research interests lie in Mexican and Mexican-American cultural studies, with a particular focus on gender. She is the author, most recently, of *Cultural Representations of Femicide at the US-Mexico Border* (Routledge, 2018).

structural, economic and symbolic violence against women. The work emanating from Perla de la Rosa's company Telón de Arena through the plays, *Antígona: las voces que incendian el desierto* (2004)³ and *Justicia negada* (2013), has also been significant in projecting the complex, lived realities for women in Ciudad Juárez to audiences outside the region.

Susana Báez Ayala's scholarly work on theatre from the US-Mexico border region (2006) signals the way in which the work of Chihuahuan playwrights exposed the culture of fear that had taken hold in Juárez. She pays tribute to the contributions of regional or state-wide theatre and its impact on local grassroots' organizations, on policy and policing, and on public discourse. Focusing on the playwrights Victor Rascón Banda, Edelberto Galindo and Antonio Zuñiga,⁴ she emphasizes their role as part of a broader, "insurgencia civil" (civil insurgency), drawing attention to theatre's powerful political charge (2006, 261). In all of these examples, the expressive terrain of the body on stage works to recalibrate understanding of questions of agency and subjectivity. Taken together, they might be seen as a kind of collective civil insurgency in the way imagined by Báez Ayala. Perhaps the experiential quality of theatre, as well as its formal versatility, lent it a particular urgency in bringing home the "truths" of *feminicidio* in Ciudad Juárez.

Humberto Robles invokes the Brechtian term, "useful theatre" (teatro útil), as a way of drawing attention to the place of theatre within activism and the struggle for justice for victims of femicide. Following this, he names theatre as the modality through which the concept of emergency (emergencia) can best be transmitted. As actor Itari Marta, who plays Bety in the Zuñiga play, *Estrellas enterradas*, explains, "Allí en el teatro, somos testigos y cómplices. Los muertos nos piden que indagemos, que preguntemos y que no guardemos el silencio [In the theatre, we are witnesses and accomplices. The dead appeal to us to investigate, to ask questions; to not be silent]" (cited in Báez Ayala 2006, 267). The complex and politically fraught positioning of actors/characters as complicit witnesses to the horrors they reveal signals theatre's particular role in foregrounding the bodily horror invoked by a feminicidal violence that is all too often characterized by dismemberment and bodily defilement as well as rape. This statement posits the dead themselves as agents in the revelation of their pain and suffering, a concept that is vividly taken up by Robles in his work that is the subject of this essay. It is also the reverberating presence of death that concerns Joseph Roach (1996) when he identifies surrogation as a process that attempts to fill the gaps and "cavities" left behind by death, trauma and displacement through the forging of a shared social memory, or set of memories. It is clear that Robles partakes in this idea of building memory through performance and story-telling rooted in an embodied local history.

Women of Sand

Mujeres de arena [*Women of Sand*] is an award-winning piece of documentary theatre by acclaimed playwright Humberto Robles. It is probably the best known theatrical response to the crimes and has been performed in multiple locations nationally and internationally. It was first presented as part of a suite of activities for the Day of Non-Violence against Women and Children [Día de no Violencia contra las Mujeres y las Niñas] in April 2002 in Mexico City's main square. Other activities that day included a performance by musical group Mitrigo, the presentation of Sergio González Rodríguez's book of investigative journalism, *Huesos en el desierto*, a video installation by Canadian-Colombian artist Claudia Bernal, and paintings and poetry from Maritza Morilla. *Mujeres de arena* has since played extensively throughout many of the Mexican states. Performances outside Mexico include Uruguay, Germany, Argentina, Australia, Canada, the United States, Spain, Cuba, Costa Rica,

Colombia, the United Kingdom, Peru, Italy, and the Dominican Republic. It is also available in digital format in both Spanish and German and appears on the excellent project website in French, Italian, and English translations.⁵ The play integrates the testimony of four different femicide victims and their families. Written as ten distinct scenes, it attempts to breathe life into four real victims of *feminicidio* in Juárez: Natalia (scene 2), Micaela (scene 4), Lilia Alejandra (scene 6), and Eréndira (scene 9). It intersperses these stories with commentary on the context and other narratives about the crimes.

As Eugenia Muñoz points out in her extensive notes on the play, *Women of Sand* utilizes a variety of dramatic modes involving the insertion of poetic fragments, monologue, newspaper reports, letters, diaries, elegy, and music to create what she likens to an “orchestral score.” A series of leitmotifs and narrative devices are employed to crystallize the political messages, including a series of rhetorical “hooks” or words that signal entry into diverse scenarios that renarrativize the crimes. This happens, for example, when the audience is asked to “imagine” the horrors of the crimes inflicted upon Lilia Alejandra Andrade García. We see it too when the phrase, (“y si . . .”/“what if . . .”) is utilized as the opener in a repetitive cycle of questions to the audience that seeks to communicate the principal discourses of victim-blaming and neglect by both the authorities and society and that have surrounded the crimes from the outset. Through this use of the suggestive link “what if,” it is possible to discern how the text adopts a “subjunctive” modality, to use David Sterritt’s term in relation to Godard’s cinema (1999, 35) as a mode of access into other worlds and other experiences.

In this article, I concentrate on two of the testimonial sections of the play, and my objectives are twofold. First, I would like to draw out the ways in which the testimony and lament of Natalia’s mother (scene 2) synthesize certain key motifs which are central to any understanding of the discourses on *feminicidio* in Juárez as well as the representation of the crimes. These include the focus on darkness—both literal and figurative—with the scene’s multi-layered referencing of ethnicity as well as its engagement with the ontological nature of evil that pervades the crimes. Natalia’s mother’s lament also signals the play’s commitment to a process of rehumanization of the victim in order to counter the powerfully damaging victim-blaming narratives that circulated in society. Finally, the scene’s identification of the systemic nature of the femicidal violence in operation works to locate the crimes within wider narratives about neoliberalism, globalization, and rapidly changing gender roles. I argue that the foregrounding of certain motifs contributes to a particular way of framing the atrocities committed against women in Juárez.

In the second section, I turn my attention to scene 6 and the testimony of Liliana’s sister, Malú, which relates in raw, powerful terms the extent of Liliana’s ordeal at the hands of her three attackers. Here, I reflect on my own experience of translating the passage, arguing that the cognitive, political, and affective encounter with the words that name Lilia’s experience forces a recognition of the systems of violence foregrounded in scene 2. The play’s insistence on the connectedness of both subjects and systems then activates the imaginative potential for cross-cultural and transnational alliances that are pivotal in understanding and challenging these modes of violence. I will close with an argument for an increased attentiveness to translation as an ethical mode of access or entry into unlocking the traumas of others.

Darkness and Light: The Mother's Lament

The play opens with a brief introduction and contextualization. With this established, four actresses set the scene:

According to published statistics, since 1993 more than 900 women have been assassinated and more than 100 have been disappeared in Ciudad Juárez in the State of Chihuahua, Mexico. The climate of violence and impunity continues to grow until today and to date it is difficult to claim that any concrete actions have been taken to end the crime of femicide. The victims have been young, factory workers, migrants. The murdered women from Ciudad Juárez are more than a statistic. They have names, faces and stories that are often not taken into account.⁶

Four actresses then establish the geocultural and political scene in “real” terms, identifying the desert space as central to the emptiness (*la nada*) that permeates the crimes. The first scene of interest for my analysis concerns the lament of Natalia’s mother in scene 2:

FIRST WOMAN: ‘Bye my child, you weren’t one of those women, no way, get out of here.⁷ But the journalists told me that no, the majority of the victims worked in the assembly plants on the border, in the maquilas, that they were young things, even children as young as five. And when I saw the photos of those girls, I knew they were right. I saw my daughter’s face in the face of each one of them. Their dark, dark eyes. . . . Dark, dark hair. It was as though each one had a piece of Natalia inside them. Then yes, I said, my daughter is another case of the murdered women of Juárez. This truth came to me suddenly. For this reason, I’m here, to give voice to Natalia, to other voices that have been silenced by force. Sometimes I go up to my daughter’s portrait and look at her. And I stay there for hours looking at her dark, dark eyes and her dark, dark hair. *MUSIC*

I am a mother without her daughter.

I am a mother dispossessed of my daughter.

I am a mother whose daughter has been ripped from the garden in my heart. My daughter in the full bloom of spring, full of colour, beautiful, full of illusion, petals, fragrant, soft, loving, full of laughter, humour and grace.

I am a mother full of sadness, tears and darkness. Without my daughter, my friend, my companion, my hope, my pride, my light, my love.

I am a mother with muted lips unable to call my daughter, deaf to the music of her words, blind and unable to see the sparks of life in her eyes.

I am a mother, hollowed out, mutilated, paralyzed by the pain of having to live without my daughter, brutally, violently ripped from the garden in my heart. *MUSIC*

There are a number of elements worthy of further scrutiny in this passage. First, we should note the use of repetition (dark, dark) in reference to Natalia's hair and complexion. The physical profile whereby victims of femicide in the city were reported as similar in build and colouring led to the emergence of a certain femicide prototype and, indeed, tag-lines such as "las inditas del sur" (little "Indian" girls from the South) were commonplace in reporting about the crimes (Gaspar de Alba 2010, 2015). This idea—that the majority of the victims were physically similar and came from the poorer Mexican States in the south—became a powerful myth that contributed to the public's perception of the crimes as somehow not about them. In this way, the "othering" of the victims spawned a legion of other myths, like for example that all of the victims worked in the *maquilas* or the assembly plants that span the length of the US-Mexico border (a myth upheld here, it is interesting to note). The references to darkness are a telling reminder then of the pervasiveness of the myth around ethnicity that reinforced the idea that brown skin and dark hair were essential components of the crime scenes. They also gesture to the wider geopolitical context of migration, mobility and precarious existence of Ciudad Juárez's young population and contribute to the portrayal of Ciudad Juárez as a monstrous, dark place.⁸

The darkness has other resonances too, however, and the way it literally colours the mother's remembering of her daughter alludes to what is a second motif central to discourses about femicide, and that is illuminated by the passage. This concerns what we might see as the figurative darkness at the heart of femicidal violence and the levels of cruelty, sadism and the abuse of power that haunt the narratives more generally. Indeed I have argued elsewhere that many of the cultural responses to the crimes preserve this metaphysical notion of evil as their underlying "truth."⁹ In this regard, it is pertinent to remember that the other major axes of death in the US-Mexico borderlands involve the deaths of migrants and of (mostly) young men trapped in a cycle of organized crime predicated on the international drug trade. These death axes are, in many ways, classic examples of neoliberal violence in the sense imagined by Žižek (2008) who would interpret the multiple and ongoing slaughter of people in this way as the logical consequences of actions that somehow threaten the giant businesses that subtend them (drug trafficking and the security industry that polices the border).¹⁰

With femicidal violence, it might be argued that there is no comparative causal or systemic explanation. Indeed the notion that the victims of femicide were somehow collateral damage caused by the ravages of globalization has been resisted fiercely by a leading critic on the femicides in the region, Rosa Linda Fregoso (2003). According to this criticism, any explanation seeking neoliberalism as its source needs to take account of other factors and contextual issues, not just those relating to late capitalist structures. In femicidal crimes, there are frequently no motives nor obvious rationales to detect even if they are often explained away as crimes of passion. In reality, the recognized femicidal pattern of abduction, torture (including rape) and death are rarely the result of rage or momentary losses of reason but rather the result of meticulous planning and ruthless, clinical execution. In this regard, the passage hints at this question of evil that stalks the crimes.¹¹

The third major discursive arc that the play reveals—rehumanization—is illustrated by the final section which displaces the femicidal darkness referred to earlier, to insert the mother's voice bearing witness to the love, goodness, beauty, and joy in her life with her daughter. No longer dark but "full of colour," her daughter is illuminated in the passage through the moving evocation of her mother's love. The rehumanization of Natalia here through a portrait that foregrounds her goodness and beauty further serves to present a counternarrative to the victim-blaming and other discourses and mythologies that worked to undermine societal interest in the crimes and contributed to their

neglect at the legal level. Even if it frequently takes refuge in an overly sentimentalizing language, the passage ends with a reminder about the enduring pain of femineicidal violence as experienced by their families and loved ones. This emphasis on pain is another way in which theatre texts like *Mujeres de arena*—with its multiple iterations nationally and internationally—actively intervene to forge a regional, national and global consciousness around the crimes.

Finally, and as part of this forging of consciousness, it is critical to note the emphasis in this passage on the connectedness of the crimes exemplified by the mother’s linking of the death of her daughter to the photographs she has been shown of other victims. Stating explicitly that a piece of her daughter is in each of those portraits of pain, we can interpret *Mujeres de arena* as part of a wave of cultural representations that inscribes the idea of structural violence, first articulated by Galtung (1969), that circumscribes and curtails the lives of women in the region. In this way, the performance genealogy, following the well-known ideas of Joseph Roach points to “the rootedness of contemporary local performative behaviors in deep historic structures” (1996, 43). Furthermore, by emphasizing the nature of the structures (of female beauty, of destructive labour practices, of toxic models of masculinity), the play energizes feminist theoretical work on the idea of *feminicidio* led by the activist and politician Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos. As is well known, Lagarde y de los Ríos was at the forefront of efforts to define and situate the crimes as systemic and ongoing, and she reminds us that *feminicidio* is not just a word, but a whole theory

about crimes that enjoy social impunity, that are incubated in misogyny, machismo in the disrespect for women’s lives, in brutal inequality, in low salaries, in exclusion. All of that is a theory, a theory of femineicide. Femineicide is not a word, it is an entire theory. [se trata de crímenes que gozan de impunidad social, que se incuban en la misoginia, en el machismo, en el desprecio a la vida de las mujeres, en la desigualdad brutal, en los bajos salarios, en la exclusión. Todo eso es una teoría, la teoría del femineicidio. El femineicidio no es una palabra, es toda una teoría.] (El universal.com)

While there are different views as to the definition of femineicide (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010), the overwhelming emphasis on systems and structures, including the role and indeed the complicity of the state, is of paramount importance. In this way, the connecting of Natalia’s story to the other stories registers the structural and systemic nature of this violence against women as both predictable and inescapable. The trace of her daughter’s face in each one of the portraits inscribes powerful ideas of solidarity and communion, ideas that have been the bedrock of community resistance and grassroots organizing, including most particularly by the victims’ families. Other scenes from the play participate in this discourse too: the interlocking of Micaela’s story (scene 4) with that of victim Gladys Yaneth Fierro Vargas testifies again to the play’s commitment to the denunciation of femineicide as systemic violence in Mexican society. The section ends with attention paid to the interconnectedness of the deaths with another list of real names: “Lilia Alejandra, Berenice, Airis Estrella, Alma Mireya, Elizabeth, Gloria, Leticia, Perla. . . . They are all our daughters, these deaths belong to all of us.” Echoing ideas about complicity and belonging seen earlier in the statements by actor Marta, the play triggers the personal stories, thereby ensuring that their connectedness to the whole of the femineicidal narrative becomes embedded in public consciousness.

Lilia Alejandra: Voicing Horror

We can see, therefore, how the play displays a political commitment to revealing the systemic nature of femicide, insisting on the rehumanization of specific victims and presenting a rigorous contextualization. It is in the scene testifying to the murder of Lilia Alejandra Andrade, however, that the femicidal darkness powerfully expressed in scene 2 receives its most explicit theatrical treatment. Building on the testimonial segments of Natalia and Micaela that invested in stories of rehumanization and the identification of points of coalition through which families could find solidarity and comfort, the segment on Lilia focuses on the slow process of doing violence to the body. It records the progressive, escalating steps of pain commencing with her abduction, taking the audience slowly through her beating and the tying up, through the burning, the raping, the biting, and the torturing, finally to reach the killing stage. *Mujeres de Arena* has been staged many times and there have been multiple performative interpretations. In some, an explicit or naturalistic approach is adopted whereby the rape and ordeal of Lilia is graphically enacted on stage either through the figure of the actress herself or with other actors on stage in the part of the perpetrators.¹² In others, a more conventional storytelling mode is adopted with the actress reading aloud Malú's testimony. This particular performance history, or set of histories, might be seen to represent an archetypal example of Diana Taylor's powerful concept of the repertoire (2003). In this sense, it functions as an unregulated, unstable space through which the experiences of those historically marginalized are filtered. In whatever rendition, however, it is clear that this scene about Lilia represents the climactic moment of the play. Moreover, and in the same way as the real case of Lilia prompted a reassessment of the discourses of *femicidio* and society's reactions to it (of which more later), the testimony of Lilia in *Mujeres de arena* marks a shift in the play's register.

In some ways, the questions posed by the showing and telling of Lilia's ordeal epitomize the ethics of representation of femicidal discourse in Juárez and resonate in a wider frame. How can the experiences of bodily pain be conveyed through voice and movement? And how can the gulf between showing and telling—the time-honoured tension between the indexical and the iconic—be properly excavated? In an implicit acknowledgement of the difficulties, the author, Humberto Robles, makes the text widely available through assigning copyleft for any group/individual to utilize as part of a project of activism and the pursuit of justice. In this way, Robles sanctions any or all approaches to the showing of his text even if he demands that practitioners remain faithful to its original telling. This textual access ensures that a global audience can read the script even if they do not have access to its performative interpretations. In many ways, with its method of thick description, it foreshadows Roberto Bolaño's forensic style expounded in his 2004 novel, *2666*, in its famous section, "The Part About the Crimes" and which details the murders of more than one hundred women over an excruciating three hundred pages.

Mujeres de arena pre-dates *2666* by two years, but both texts draw from the forensic language of reporting and that flat police-mode of narrative used to reconstruct the horrors of the crimes. The limitations of such a form of storytelling have been well documented in relation to *2666* as well as in other arenas.¹³ Following Adorno's much-misquoted statement about writing poetry after Auschwitz,¹⁴ suffice to say, the debate about the limitations or the complete redundancy of language to mediate, translate or represent atrocities such as femicide is wide-ranging and is thrust into sharp relief in this passage. Mexican artist Teresa Margolles's exhibit on violence, "de que otra cosa podríamos hablar" [what else can we talk about?] at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009 aptly pointed to the aesthetic and political challenges posed by the current wave of violence in Mexico. Her title

captures the all-pervasiveness of violence, its diffuse and expressive nature, to borrow from Mexican writer Rosanna Reguillo's perceptive analyses (2011), as well as the challenge of naming it. In this regard, her display embodied the failure of words, of aesthetics, of representation, strikingly illustrated by her recourse to the use of the word, "cosa" or "thing," as allusive if wholly elliptical description.

In order to situate the analysis that follows, it should be emphasized that I have never been at a performance of *Mujeres de arena/Women of Sand* and it has never been performed in Ireland where I live and work. Instead, my experience of the play consists of viewing online performances of it in Spanish. My encounter with the text, therefore, involves a negotiation, a mediation, and a traversing of the necessary distances that lie between me and the narrated subjects and that are shaped by different lines of class, geography, ethnicity, language, and history. This is critical in the context of an aesthetic experience that occurs between a first world spectator and a subject from the "elsewheres of the world" (Butler 2011). It is not my intention to rehearse arguments around the ambiguities of transnational witnessing here in depth¹⁵ but simply to point out that the construction of any kind of empathic encounter is fraught with tensions around agency, victimhood, and the helplessness of a first world witness, also positioned as consumer. What follows, therefore, is an attempt to think through the negotiation of these tensions via the process of translation.

As a way of probing the nature of my own need to negotiate the distances that the text engenders, I commenced a process of translation without looking at the excellent translation of the text that is available online.¹⁶ My translated version shares many features with the published version, and though it differs from the published translation in terms of certain lexical and syntactical decisions, it is not presented here as some kind of superior version. Rather, I would like to examine the encounter with a description of violence done to the body by reflecting on my own bodily and affective experience during the process of translating that description. Through this, I would like to test the ways in which translation, seen through the lens of Spivak's famous description of it as "the most intimate act of reading" (2000, 398) projects you into an encounter with the source experience in a way that is different to spectatorial experience and in a way, to quote Nicole Brossard, "force[s] us on to the scene" (1989, 133, cited by Basile 2007, 7). For clarity, I will reproduce the translation of the scene in its entirety and commence the analysis immediately following.

Scene 6: Lilia Alejandra

ACTOR: Among many surprising aspects of the Juárez cases, even though many people have been detained and jailed for the murders, normally with fake evidence and confessions obtained via torture, not one single case of the 900 murdered women in Ciudad Juarez since 1993 has been solved. Not one. And now it has become the norm that the state government and local businessmen accuse those who seek justice of being unpatriotic and of trying to sully the good name of CIUDAD JUAREZ, a city that for two years running was declared to be the most dangerous city in the world. PAUSE. What follows is a letter written by Malú García Andrade,¹⁷ Lilia Alejandra's sister, disappeared on the 14th of February and whose body was found on Feb 21st, 2001.

SECOND WOMAN: I want you to imagine your daughter or your sister, or your cousin or your girlfriend or your wife. Imagine that they leave home to go to work

or to school. Imagine how nice they look as they go on their way, with their faces full of innocence. The light in their eyes reflects their desire for life but also their happiness. Imagine that on the way home, a car blocks their path and three men get out. One pulls her by the hair, the other by the feet and they push her into the car to kidnap her. Imagine that they take her to a house and force her into one of the rooms. There they throw her to the floor while the three men look at her terrified face. Imagine that one of the men ties her up and forces her onto a table. Imagine that she tries to resist, to defend herself. He raises his arm, clenches his fist and hits her on the nose. Then he raises his arm again to hit her on the mouth so that she can no longer say:

FOURTH WOMAN: “Enough, please!” “Mamá. Papá. Help me.” “HELP! Help, someone help!” God, why me? Please! No more. No. No. No!

SECOND WOMAN: Imagine this young woman saying these words while she is being beaten and raped, saying them in a voice that is broken and with tears rolling down her face. And imagine that when the rape stops, it doesn’t stop there, no the suffering continues because in the bedroom there are two more men. . . . One of them comes over to her and burns her arms with his cigarette. He starts to bite her breasts, to rape her and the three men torture her. When they finish, they throw her to the floor and start to kick her. After that, they leave her on the floor, covered in blood, raped and degraded in the cruellest most sadistic way you can imagine. She remains there in pain and agony for a day, two days, three days until they realize she can take no more and they decide to kill her. Imagine that one of them puts his hands around her neck and strangles her. In spite of everything that has happened to her she tries to resist but has no strength left and he achieves his goal: he kills her. But this is not enough for the other two men and one of them takes her roughly by the face and breaks her neck. And so there she lies, her nose broken, her lips swollen, her eyes bruised and beaten, her arms burnt with cigarettes, her legs full of scars, her wrists bearing marks from where she has been tied and her breasts gnawed as if by animals. They roll her body in a blanket and take it to the car. They drive to one of Ciudad Juárez’s many deserted wastelands and throw her body there. But the suffering and pain do not end there. Now her family must find out what she has suffered. Imagine what follows. No, no, we’re not looking for consolation or false government promises. We don’t want statistics or numbers that tell us nothing about the reality of women’s experience in Ciudad Juárez. No. Civil society and the NGOs implore the Mexican State to end the impunity around the deaths of women in the city. What is more we demand an end to the hostility that we the families continue to suffer as we seek justice and human rights. We ask for respect and we demand that they let us live our lives.

As can be immediately discerned, this passage attempts to narrate in testimonial, realist mode the horrors of the experience endured by real-life victim Lilia Alejandra García Andrade, as recounted by her sister, Malú. Returning to the subjunctive mode of engagement mentioned earlier (“Imagine if . . .”), some of the key motifs that characterized the framing of the narrative in scene 2, already examined, are mobilized here including, for example, the intense reconstruction of the darkness of feminicidal violence. According to Nancy Piñeda-Madrid (2011), the case of Lilia represented somewhat of a turning point in the narratives around femicide. Her body was found wrapped in a

blanket in an empty lot next to the Centro Comercial Soriano directly across from the headquarters of the Maquila Industry Federation, thus solidifying in the public's mind at least, the connections between the assembly plants and the deaths of young women in the city.¹⁸ She had been strangled to death, and her body displayed signs of torture and sexual violence including rape. Following this crime, her mother, Norma Andrade de García, along with the mothers of six other victims, founded the organization Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa to demand justice. A few weeks after the discovery of Lilia Alejandra's body, on International Women's Day, March 8, 2001, several women from Ciudad Juárez and El Paso carried wooden crosses and life-size photos of the murdered girls and women with them as they marched to and stormed the office of the Special Prosecutor for the Investigation of the Homicide of Women. Marisela Ortiz, one of the most internationally recognized of the activists associated with femicide in Ciudad Juárez, was Lilia's former teacher. With an unprecedented media furor surrounding the case of Lilia, the details around the condition of her body when discovered became of paramount importance. In other words, the specific nature of the violence enacted on her body became central to Lilia's story. As Lilia's mother noted, "when we found her, my daughter's body told of everything that had been done to her" (2003, 2, cited in Schmidt Camacho 2004, 36). Many audiences in Mexico were attuned to the details surrounding Lilia's case at the time, a case that seemed to epitomize the darkness and evil that lay beneath the crimes, and thus the approach taken in the play of revivifying Lilia's experience acquires a particular affective and political charge.

Trauma Words and Painful Encounters

We have seen how *Women of Sand* is located in a rich tradition of theatre that engages with the trauma of *feminicidio* as it is visited on the victims' bodies as well as focusing on the wider impact on family, community, and nation. The turn to trauma in the humanities has been well documented, and there is a body of work about the translation of trauma narratives (Parker and Mathews 2011) and indeed about the inherent theatricality of trauma itself (Duggan 2012). Parker and Mathew tease through some of the ethical dilemmas inherent in the translation of trauma narratives and consider "not only what is lost but what is traumatized in and by translation" (2011, 20). There is always a subject position in translation as Catherine Boyle reminds us (2015, 157) and, as Elena Basile asserts, the field of translation studies has witnessed an unprecedented foregrounding of the translator's subjectivity in both translation practice and theory (2007). According to Basile, given these recent shifts in thinking about translation, the translator has become "a self-conscious agent of cultural change, thoroughly aware of his/her political responsibilities and ideological positioning *vis-à-vis* both source and target languages" (2007, 1). As she points out, much emphasis has been placed on the visible signs of intervention in the process of translation, strategies for foreignizing, approaches to gender difference, and para-textual apparatuses (2007, 1).

Following Basile, however, and if I am to recognize that my position involves my solidarity with the content and message of the play as well as an appreciation of its politics, then it also involves grappling with what she evocatively names the "affective vicissitudes" that accompany the "*traumatic temporality* of the translator's defining acts of (re)reading and (re)writing the *message of the other* in an *other language/culture*" (1–2). According to her thinking, the affective work of the translator becomes akin to a process of "working through" trauma (to use LaCapra's terms),¹⁹ and "which constitutes the translator's inaugural mode of engagement with the other's text" (Basile 2007, 4). Thinking about my translation in Basile's terms as an inaugural mode of engagement with the other (the body of Lilia) positions me as an active agent in the process of meaning-making. Ultimately,

Basile says, the boundary between the text and its meanings when filtered through the translation process might “always need to be negotiated on the translator’s own thinking body” (2007, 7). If we take this as a point of departure, I wonder about the effect on my own thinking body when faced with the challenge of translating lines like,

En ese momento él termina de violarla; al acabar aún no termina el martirio de la joven, pues en la habitación hay dos hombres más. . . . Se acerca otro de ellos; está fumando y apaga el cigarro en uno de los brazos de ella. Él empieza a morder sus senos, empieza a violarla, y así los tres hombres la torturan.” [And imagine that when the rape stops, it doesn’t stop there, no the suffering continues because in the bedroom there are two more men. . . . One of them comes over to her and burns her arms with his cigarette. He starts to bite her breasts, to rape her and then the three men torture her.]

As a diligent and committed linguist, I spend time with these words, I look up the various ways that I might translate “él empieza a morder sus senos” (he starts to bite her breasts) or more abstract phrases like “aún no termina el martirio de la joven.” “Martirio,” meaning in its literal sense, martyrdom, interpreted here to mean suffering and pain. I also wonder about how my translation “he starts to rape her” can convey any of the weight of the experience and have similar concerns about the flat description “y así los tres hombres la torturan” (and then the three men torture her). We might reflect further on the ways in which the telling of the story of Liliana already participates in her erasure through the flatness of the pronouns, the third-person narration among other elements. In this regard, the translator further participates in this process of making her invisible, making her (more) dead, and perhaps it is here that we most acutely perceive the wisdom of Spivak when she talks about feminist translation “bludgeon(ing) someone else” (1993, 192). I continue to grapple with the text’s multiple challenges:

Ella, a pesar de estar golpeada, trata de defenderse pero no puede y él cumple con su objetivo: matarla. Pero a los otros dos no les parece suficiente, así que otro de ellos, la toma de la cara para girarla bruscamente y desnucarla. [In spite of everything that has happened to her she tries to resist but has no strength left and he achieves his goal: he kills her. But this is not enough for the other two men and one of them takes her roughly by the face and breaks her neck.]

I investigate the various translation possibilities for the verb “desnucar.” In the Spanish, the prefix “des” is already aggressive signalling the way the “nuca” [the neck] is violently broken away from the body. In comparison, “breaks her neck” seems a rather tame interpretation of the concept in English. This process also involves the translator looking at the positionality of these words in the sentence; at the way they make meaning on the page. I consider two, three, sometimes four different alternatives, checking in the dictionary, reading and (re)reading.

There is more: moving in, through, and around the words as they evolve on the page involves a certain kind of relationship with the experience they name (and contain). The conventional distance between words and the way our brains receive and mediate them is distorted, remapped. The distance remains but is configured differently. Like a series of cognitive synapses—or sparks inside my head—I am compelled to find ways to talk about the biting of breasts, the strangling, the multiple enduring rapes, the torture. The translator, forced to find suitable formulas of words, is inserted into a relationship with Lilia, not into her experience, but into a relationship with the words

that name that experience. The words resonate for me in a powerful way as I search for ways to render the experiences of Lilia Alejandra as legible but also bearable, in my own tongue. Throughout this time, my heart races and my body experiences the quintessential goosebumps: I feel sick and have to pause. Remembering Brian Massumi's words, "the skin is faster than the word" (1995, 86), I am conscious of an emergent irony in that my body's affective responses, though they are expressed in preverbal and prelinguistic terms (Stewart 2007) are caused by my proximity to as well as my engagement and encounter with words.

Boyle says of translating words, "naming them (in another language) makes them appear in our world and they start to come into focus" (2015, 156). Inspired by the process described by Boyle, I can attest to the ways in which the encounter with the words of Lilia's trauma manage to "make them appear" in my world to force a recognition of my own vulnerability and openness to the possibility of sexual violence. I say this not because the deep structures of patriarchy suddenly became apparent through the unveiling of their most extreme despicable practices (rape, torture, murder). Rather, I see how the words function as "end products" in the way Peter Brook imagines them and through which they begin as "an impulse" to become, "a small visible portion of a gigantic unseen formation" (1990, 15 cited by Boyle 2015, 157). I interpret this gigantic formation as the system that produces violence on Lilia's body which, following Boyle, comes powerfully "into focus." In this way, through the cognitive connections with the words that provoke the body's affective responses, the very systemic violence that begets feminicide, made up of its many complex factors including misogyny, hegemonic masculinity, and the grotesque extremes of late capitalism emerges into view and is felt on the surface (goosebumps) and interior of my body (heart-racing). This systemic violence is part of Lilia's story, but it is also part of mine. Indeed, connectedness is enhanced through considering this continuum of violence against women, which, of course, happens over "here" as well as over "there," a point made by Mary-Ann Franks in her discussion of Adorno's work. (2006, 198). I do not mean to suggest in any trite or problematic way that our worlds are the same nor to collapse those lines of difference delineated earlier that separate us. Rather, I argue that through the forced proximity to the words that name Lilia's erasure and degradation, the concept of violence against women as systemic, embedded (in both language and the body) comes into focus and is activated by and through the translation process.

This forced encounter with systemic violence and the bodily affects it produces in turn provokes fear, guilt, and indeed a certain paralysis. This paralysis is a feature of many cultural responses to feminicide in Juárez, explained by the simple, devastating realization that the subjects of which the art speaks are no longer with us. This fear surrounds the task of translation itself, the fear of what the words will do to you, expressed by Brossard when she says, "How am I to believe for a single moment that the landscapes in you won't erase those in me?" (1989, cited in Basile 2007, 6).²⁰ The fear of obliteration when one talks of gender violence is commonplace and unavoidable. It is the logical consequence of contemplating a body that is no longer there and, what is worse, bears the hallmarks of the attempt to erase it. The fear of erasure through immersion in the source text, however, makes us think about how translation hastens the merging of these verbal landscapes: "Because true landscapes loosen the tongue in us, flow over the edge of our thought-frame. They settle into us" (Brossard 1989, 133, cited in Basile 2007, 6).

Through this loosening of tongue, the experience of the mutilated othered body settles into the translator's body and effects an awakening, a new realization of that experience through the cognitive, bodily and affective process of transmission. It seems particularly appropriate to invoke Brossard here, given that she speaks also of desert landscapes (of Arizona) that are geographically as

well as emotionally contingent to the narrative being examined here. Through the tongue-loosening then, an encounter is enabled that, through the weight of the words that sustain it, somehow ruptures, if just a little, the distance between us as I am forced to use words that also apply to me; that also mean that I too am a vulnerable female subject to threats of sexual violence.

While it might be exaggerated to call this process of awakening a dialogic transformation, it is certainly akin to a dialogic shift through the forcing of intimacy with the words that name the trauma experienced by Lilia Alejandra. In this way, the process of translation itself forms part of what Diana Taylor (2003) famously termed the repertoire, that domain of shifting potential that here functions as a dynamic of exchange and transference of experience, words, and meaning. Following this, and returning to the point made earlier, translation does indeed “force” me “onto the scene” (Brossard 1989, 133) bludgeoning me—to use Spivak’s term again—to participate in a reframing, rereading, and rewriting of Lilia’s traumatic experience in a manner that positions me as an actor in that process. We might see this forcing onto the scene synthesized through Patrick Duggan’s idea of “being there” in his conceptualization of how trauma works in performance (2012, 115–50). Or, we might view it as a process of becoming co-owner of the traumatic event in the same way as memorably imagined by Doris Laub when she speaks of “the vicissitudes of listening” (1992). Perhaps it might be likened to the complicity felt by the actor whose words I quoted earlier, “en el teatro somos todos cómplices” [in the theatre we are all accomplices]—a theatre that also includes the role played by the translator as the wordsmith who determines the modes of naming.

While not wishing to overstate the power of translation to compromise or modify the spaces between first world subjects and the blood-stained bodies of feminicidal victims from Ciudad Juárez,²¹ it does enable us to be attentive to the political urgency of translation as a mode of entry into the experiences of those other bodies “made for violence” (Schmidt Camacho 2004). Judith Butler has written about the challenges of cultural translation in contexts such as this one when she says that, “We have to consider the demands of cultural translation that we assume to be part of an ethical responsibility . . . as we try to think the global dilemmas that women face” (2004, 49).²² In thinking through these global dilemmas and our own ethical responsibility, we can see the political importance of enabling connectedness as a pathway towards the creation of transnational and translanguistic alliances. The feminist potential of translation and both its method and process in enacting these alliances should not be underestimated.

Appendix

Extract from *scene 2: Natalia*

MUJER 1: ¡Adió, mi hija no era de esas, qué va, ni Dios lo mande! Pero los periodistas me dijeron que no, que la mayoría de las muchachas asesinadas eran trabajadoras de la maquila, jovencitas, hasta niñas de 5 años. Y cuando vi las fotos de esas muchachitas supe que era cierto. En la cara de cada una de ellas, vi la cara de mi hija. Los ojos negros, negros . . . el cabello negro, negro. . . Era como si todas tuvieran un pedacito de Natalia. Entonces sí, les dije, mi hija es un caso más de las asesinadas de Juárez. Así me cayó la verdad, de golpe, de repente. Por eso estoy aquí, para darle eco a la voz de Natalia, a otras voces que fueron calladas por el silencio, a la fuerza. A veces me arrimo al retrato de m’hija y me pongo a verla. Y así me quedo horas, viendo sus ojos negros, negros, y su cabello: negro, negro.

Música

Soy una madre sin su hija.

Soy una madre despojada de mi hija.

Soy una madre con una hija arrancada del jardín de mi corazón.

Mi hija en florecida primavera: colorida, bonita, llena de ilusiones-pétalos, fragante, suave, amorosa, llena de risas, gracia y encantos.

Soy una madre llena de tristezas, lágrimas y oscuridades sin mi hija, mi amiga, mi compañía, mi esperanza, mi orgullo, mi luz, mi amor.

Soy una madre con labios mudos para llamar a mi hija, con oídos sordos para oír la música de sus palabras, con ojos ciegos para ver las chispas de vida en sus ojos.

Soy una madre vaciada, mutilada, naufragada en el dolor de vivir sin mi hija brutalmente, violentamente arrancada del jardín de mi corazón.

Extract from *scene 6: Lilia Alejandra*

ACTOR: Entre otras cosas sorprendentes, aunque se ha detenido y encarcelado a gente por los asesinatos, normalmente con pruebas inventadas y confesiones obtenidas mediante torturas, no se ha resuelto ni uno solo, no ya de los 100 casos de asesinato en serie, sino de las más de 900 asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez desde 1993. Ni uno. Y ahora se ha vuelto habitual que el gobierno estatal y los empresarios locales acusen a quienes piden justicia de “vende-patrias” y de “ensuciar el buen nombre de Ciudad Juárez,” ciudad que en dos años consecutivos ha sido declarada la urbe más peligrosa del mundo. (*Pausa*) La siguiente es una carta escrita por Malú García Andrade, hermana de Lilia Alejandra, desaparecida el 14 de febrero y cuyo cuerpo fue encontrado sin vida el 21 de febrero del 2001.

MUJER 2: Quisiera que imagines a tu hija, o hermana, a tu prima, a tu novia, o a tu esposa. Imagina que sale de su casa para dirigirse a su trabajo o escuela. Puedes imaginar lo linda que se ve al caminar, con un rostro inocente. Refleja el deseo a la vida con un brillo en sus ojos que demuestra su felicidad. Imagina que de regreso a casa un auto le cierra el camino, se bajan tres hombres. Uno de ellos la toma del cabello, el otro de sus pies y la meten adentro del auto para secuestrarla. Imagina que llegan a una casa y entran a una de las habitaciones. Ahí la tiran al suelo mientras los tres hombres miran el rostro de ella que ahora refleja terror. Imagina que uno de los hombres se acerca a ella, la ata de las manos y la recuesta en una mesa. Ella trata de defenderse; él levanta su brazo, cierra el puño y le da un golpe en la nariz. Después extiende nuevamente su brazo para darle otro golpe en la boca, para que así ella no siga diciendo:

MUJER 4: ¡Ya basta, por favor! Mamá, papá: ¡Ayúdenme! ¡Auxilio! ¡Alguien que me ayude . . . ! ¡Dios, ¿por qué mí? !Por favor ¡Ya no! ¡No, no, no!

MUJER 2: Imagina a esta joven diciendo estas frases mientras esta siendo golpeada y violada, diciéndolas con la voz quebrada y con lágrimas que recorren su rostro. En ese momento él termina de violarla; al acabar aún no termina el martirio de la joven, pues en la habitación hay dos hombres más. . . . Se acerca otro de ellos; está fumando y apaga el cigarro en uno de los brazos de ella. Él empieza a morder sus senos, empieza a violarla, y así los tres hombres la torturan. Al terminar la tiran a el suelo y la empiezan a patear para después retirarse y dejarla en el suelo bañada en sangre, violada y ultrajada con la mas profunda saña y crueldad. Ella sigue sufriendo por un día, dos días, tres días, hasta que sus atacantes se dan cuenta que ella no resiste más y deciden matarla. Imagina que uno de ellos se acerca, pone sus manos alrededor de su cuello para estrangularla. Ella, a pesar de estar golpeada, trata de defenderse pero no puede y él cumple con su objetivo: matarla. Pero a los otros dos no les parece suficiente, así que otro de ellos, la toma de la cara para girarla bruscamente y desnucarla. Ahí esta su cuerpo sin vida, con la nariz fracturada, los labios reventados, los ojos

golpeados, los brazos con quemaduras de cigarros, las piernas con cicatrices, las muñecas muestran huellas de ataduras y sus senos están carcomidos. Ellos envuelven el cuerpo en una cobija la suben a el auto, se dirigen a un terreno baldío para dejar su cuerpo ahí. Pero el martirio y el dolor aún no terminan pues falta que la familia se entere de lo que acaba de sufrir la joven. . . . Imagina lo que sigue. . . . No, no venimos a buscar el consuelo, ni las falsas promesas por parte del gobierno. No queremos estadísticas, ni números que no reflejan la verdadera realidad de la mujer en Ciudad Juárez. La sociedad civil y las ONG's exhortamos al estado mexicano a que frene la impunidad en torno a los asesinatos de mujeres en Ciudad Juárez y que cese el hostigamiento que sufrimos familiares de las víctimas y defensores de derechos humanos. Pedimos respeto y sobre todo les exigimos que nos dejen vivir.

Música.

Notes

1. The debate on terminology around the murder of women in the region is extensive and beyond the scope of this study. Feminist scholars, most notably Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos (2014), have argued for the use of the term, *feminicidio*, or femicide, as a more appropriate cultural translation of the English term, “femicide.” This term takes account of the systematic nature of the crime but also factors in the responsibility and complicity of the State whose neglect, it is argued, enables the crime to continue. Taking my cue from this theoretical work, the article names the crime as femicide. For further discussion on nomenclature, see Fregoso and Bejarano (2010).
2. The case in India involved the gang rape and murder of Jyoti Singh on a Delhi bus in 2012, which garnered global headlines. In Argentina, the brutal murder of sixteen-year-old Lucía Pérez in 2016 attracted similar revulsion.
3. This play was selected for the National Programme of School Theatre [Programa Nacional de Teatro Escolar] and toured extensively around Mexico. See also my overview of theatre relating to Ciudad Juárez in Finnegan (2018).
4. Other examples include *Los Trazos del Viento* [Traces of the Wind] by Alan Aguilar; *Las muertas de Juárez* performed by Grupo Sinergia during V-Day celebrations in Texas in 2004; *Rumor de Viento* [Sound of the Wind] by Norma Barroso (2004); *La ciudad de las moscas* [City of Flies] by Virginia Hernández; *Sirenas del Río* by Demetrio Avila; *Justicia light* by Ernesto García and *Tlatoani* by Juan Tovar; *Antígona* by Perla de la Rosa; *Gritos de Justicia* [Cries of Justice] from Leopoldo Ibarra Saucedo; and numerous dance pieces including Rossana Filomarino’s *Ni una más*. In addition, the most acclaimed feature film to explore femicidio in Ciudad Juárez—*El traspatio* [Backyard]—had a screenplay written by established playwright Sabina Berman. For a good overview of Mijares’s anthology, see Misnemer (2009). Another dramatic work performed to national and international acclaim was *Mujeres de Juárez*, a one-woman show written and performed by Cristina Michaus. It was translated by Jimmy Noriega and began its production in 2011 with Teatro Travieso from 2014 onwards.
5. <https://mujeresdeareateatro.blogspot.ie/p/woman-of-sand.html>. There is an excellent website dedicated to the project which is frequently updated. See <https://mujeresdeareateatro.blogspot.ie/>.
6. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own. The original is accessible at <https://mujeresdeareateatro.blogspot.ie/p/woman-of-sand.html> and the relevant extracts from the original are reproduced at the end of this article.
7. The evidence for the systematic victim blaming was overwhelming in media reportage, oral histories, testimony from the victims’ families, and statements and pronouncements from Chihuahua government, the mayors of Juárez, and nearby towns. It was perhaps most effectively illustrated through the prevention campaigns that circulated in two local newspapers, *El Diario* and *Norte*, in Ciudad Juárez in 1995 and that

exhorted women not to dress provocatively (Tabuenca Córdoba 2010, 101) as well as through oral testimonies by the families that exemplify the moralizing, judgemental and in most cases wholly inaccurate assumptions brought to bear on the cases of the young victims. Activist Esther Chávez Cano, who accompanied many of the family members to meet with police and demand police action, summed up the attitude: “The police say the dead women and girls were hookers, or that they were heroin-users. Their whole point is that it’s somehow the fault of these girls. . . . We are supposed to believe these women are responsible for their own deaths” (cited in Wright 2011, 714).

8. See, in particular, Tabuenca Córdoba (2010).

9. See chapter four, “The Possibilities of Mourning: Resilience and Renewal in Documentary Film about *Feminicidio* in Ciudad Juárez” in Finnegan (2018).

10. There is a dynamic body of scholarship about the geopolitical complexities of the borderlands and extensive theorizations of feminicidal violence there. I explore many of the frames through which this violence has been conceptualized in *Cultural Representations of Feminicidio on the US-Mexico Border*. For illuminating analyses of the phenomenon, see Segato’s work on transcultural masculinity (2006) and Monárrez Fragozo whose pioneering work has tracked the patterns of globalization, precarity and poverty through the bodies of feminicidal victims in the city. Schmidt Camacho has also produced important reflections (2004) on the notion of denationalization insofar as it plays out on the vulnerable bodies of the urban poor in the borderlands.

11. I have argued elsewhere about the pervasiveness of nature references and presences in responses to *feminicidio* precisely as a way of drawing attention to its enigmatic, ambiguous nature. See Finnegan (2018), chapter four

12. To cite just three examples, see the “acting out” of the violence by the female actor in the performance by Teatro de Bolsillo, Santiago de Chile (2015). In the version performed by the Maru-Jasp Teatro from Alcalá de Henares at the Casa de la Cultura de Albolote, Spain (2012), there is a graphic performance of the rape and torture of Lilita with three male actors. The Compañía Desierto Teatro in Coahuila, Mexico (2016) conveyed the multiple rapes through the use of strobe lighting, along with a sound-track of screaming (victim) and grunting (perpetrator).

13. A large body of scholarship exists on the figure of Bolaño, much of which focuses on the significance of *2666*. Some of this locates his work specifically within the framework of “world literature” including Burns and de Castro (2017). I have found Sharae Deckard’s work on Bolaño to be particularly insightful; see Deckard (2012) and her contribution to Burns and de Castro (2017). On the place of Latin America within the paradigm of world literature, Ignacio Sánchez-Prado (2006) is indispensable. A special edition of the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesía* (2009, Vol. 18: 2–3) was devoted to the work of Bolaño, gathering studies by Alice Driver, Gareth Williams, Jean Franco, and Brett Levinson among others.

14. “to write poetry after *Auschwitz* is *barbaric*” (Adorno 1983, 34)

15. See, for example, excellent work by Oliver (2001), and on the specific context of Ciudad Juárez among others, Swanson Goldberg and Schultheis Moore (2011).

16. <https://mujeresdeareateatro.blogspot.ie/p/woman-of-sand.html>.

17. Malú García Andrade, an activist since her sister’s murder, was relocated by the federal government in 2017 following multiple death threats against her. See <https://www.sdnoticias.com/nacional/2017/05/12/trasladan-a-activista-malu-garcia-a-sitio-seguro>.

18. *Ni una más* is a documentary film directed by Alejandra Sánchez (2002) which features wideranging coverage of this particular crime. Lilita Alejandra García Andrade’s case remains open and continues to be the subject of attention. See, for example, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2003/11/29/038n1soc.php?printver=1&fly=>; <http://vocesporlaesperanza.blogspot.ie/2013/02/lilia-alejandra-garcia-andrade.html>.

19. A reference to the well-known work of Dominick LaCapra (2004) on trauma.
20. *Mauve Desert* by the Québécois writer Nicole Brossard is long considered a classic of Canadian and feminist fiction. Categorized as an experimental “fiction-théorique,” it comprises three parts. The first section follows fifteen-year-old protagonist Mélanie as she crosses the Arizona desert in her mother’s car, fleeing the awkwardness of life at her lesbian mother’s motel. The middle part (“Un livre à traduire”/A Book to Translate) chronicles the experience of Maudes Laures, who finds Mélanie’s story in a second-hand bookshop and charts her emotional journey through the translation process. The final section is Maudes Laures’s translation of *Mauve Desert*. In addition to Basile (2007), see Wheeler (2003).
21. For an introduction to work in translation studies that looks at practices of ethical translation and the relationship between First World translators and texts produced from within the Global South, see Bassnett and Trivedi (1998). For an examination on translation and emotion from a psychological perspective, see Hubscher-Davidson (2018).
22. There is an extensive debate about cultural translation within the field of translation studies. For a useful overview, see Buden et al. (2009) with input from major scholars in the field.

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“Acting” under Turkey’s State of Emergency: A Conversation with Kurdish Artists about Theatre, the Dengbêj Tradition, and the First Kurdish *Hamlet*

Pieter Verstraete

Although the recent coup attempt of July 15, 2016, resulted in a declared “state of emergency” in Turkey, Kurdish citizens, especially those living in the South East, have experienced what emergency legislation can do to their daily lives and cultural institutions long before (Demiröz 1990, 67) as this region was declared a permanent OHAL¹ region in 1987. For example, it is quite common that special security checks or occasional curfews stifle Kurdish theatre performances, thereby limiting audience attendance. It is also standard practice that theatre practitioners across Turkey perform self-censorship in order not to be targeted by verbal attacks in the media or by closure (*Siyah Bant* 2012).

In this essay,² we explore what is at stake for Kurdish theatre artists who develop their theatre praxis in this difficult socio-political setting, and why it matters to *act*, both in the general sense and in the theatrical one, in a language that is neither the accepted one of the nation nor of the majority culture. This essay discusses interviews with five prominent Kurdish theatre artists, some based in Turkey and others currently in exile in Europe. The respondents included costume designer Ismail Oyur Tezcanlı (based in Turkey), playwright Yusuf Unay (in Turkey), actor and director Mîrza Metin (in Germany), instructor and director Rezan Aksoy (in Germany), and director Celil Toksöz (in the Netherlands, though not in exile).³

The following is explicitly not a set of interviews but a contextualized “staging” of a debate between voices in the Kurdish artist community. We say *staging* since we do not go entirely unmarked in the ways we try to establish a narrative on the basis of, in essence, fragmentary and translated responses⁴ by our “informant-interlocutors.” The latter are scattered in different locations and even language contexts and are part of a diverse art scene that is under constant pressures, which include hostility on social media and in the press, the constant threat of dismissal by decree, police investigations, closure, arrest and false indictments.⁵ So despite any coherence our essay seeks to resemble, the reality is quite incoherent. We observed throughout our research several ambivalences and even conflicts between aesthetics and ideological or political standpoints. The outcome, however, of our critical stance is that we are focused on offering a framework that allows for these contradictions to play out while documenting this overlooked area of research regarding contemporary dramaturgies of Kurdish theatre artists at risk. This, we sincerely hope, would allow the reader to get a critically nuanced reading of the topic.

By providing context that is fully attuned to situated knowledge production, we aim to dialogically untangle some of the intricacies between current aesthetic practices and politics in Turkey’s Kurdish theatre scene. In part, the essay offers documentation, description, and insight into the history of

Pieter Verstraete is a lecturer in theatre studies at the University of Amsterdam and, until recently, Honorary University Fellow to the University of Exeter. He previously worked at several Turkish universities, including Hacettepe University, Bilkent University, Atilim University, Sabanci University, and Bilgi University Istanbul. He conducted preliminary research for the current project as a Fellow at the Istanbul Policy Center (Stiftung Mercator Initiative).

theatre practices in the Kurdish language in Turkey from a Kurdish identity perspective, which is currently a difficult subject position to maintain due to Turkey's nationalist agenda. Due to the special political circumstances and history, we limited ourselves to discussing Kurdish theatre in *Turkey* and thereby omitted theatre practices in other Kurdish speaking areas, such as Syria, Iraq and Kurdistan, or by the diaspora in Europe (with the exception of the first Kurdish *Hamlet* which was produced by Kurdish-Dutch director Celil Toksöz in Turkey's Diyarbakır).

The notion of "Kurdistan" in some of our interviews introduces the complexity of a contentious political matter regarding territory. The area where Kurds live today covers parts of present-day Turkey (about half of the population), Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Armenia. When our interviewees refer to "Kurdistan," they mostly mean the regions of Turkey's eastern and southeastern Anatolia where Kurds form the predominant ethnic and cultural group, sometimes also referred to as a "Kurdistan of the North." It is often believed that one of the Kurdish (micro)nationalist ambitions is to form a Greater Kurdistan that would include northern Iraq (Southern Kurdistan), northwestern Iran (Eastern Kurdistan), and northern Syria (Rojava or Western Kurdistan). Most Turkish Kurds, on the contrary, do not see independence as a necessity, and many Kurdish grassroots movements are today inspired by the idea of a "democratic confederalism," rejecting the nation-state as *sine qua non* for their autonomy. In our essay, we will critically address the influence and problems that arise from nationalist agendas within Kurdish cultural production, which affects (the perception of) Kurdish theatre in Turkey as well. Since this is a very sensitive issue, particularly in Turkey's current domestic and war politics, we feel the need to stress that we do not intend to support any ideological agenda and that responsibility for the phrasings in the statements and quotes remains solely with the respective interviewee. The final goal is to document the complex relations that define the contested space of Kurdish theatre practices in Turkey in order to develop a broader understanding of the entwined operations of theatre and politics in this context.

Due to our interviewees' specific focus and understanding of Kurdish theatre as primarily "drama," we also restricted ourselves to a dramatic tradition (henceforth referred to as "Kurdish drama"), which requires the presence of a dramatic theatre text in the Kurdish language. With that, we actually actively resist a common view on Kurdish theatre by the state and other researchers as merely a traditional form of folklore by an "ethnic" or "traditional folk" community that exists besides other ethnic identity-marked theatres in Turkey, such as Laz and Circassian theatre (in contrast to, for instance, Ezici 2017, 66). We do acknowledge more traditional performance forms that are specific to Turkey's Kurdish cultures and that are not necessarily dramatic, such as *dengbêj*: the Kurdish "sung-speech" tradition that is transmitted by Kurdish "bards" who are also called *Dengbêj*. Other forms that we briefly touch upon include storytelling practices by *çirokbêj* (storytellers) and *stranbêj* (minstrels), always performed with music and songs. We, however, excluded Kurdish dance traditions, such as handholding dances (*helperkê*), since they are not strictly seen as theatre.

We do aim to facilitate recognition of the complexity surrounding the transcultural positioning of "Kurdish theatre"—while challenging what that category really is—and of its contributions with regard to nationalism and identity politics. In order not to fall into partisanship and to be critical of the ideological underpinnings of our interviewees' statements, our methodology is informed by concerns of postcolonial theory (transculturalism), Jacques Rancière's "politics of aesthetics," and cultural materialism, which help us to uphold a "rigorous attention . . . to the realms of the historical and the social" (Knowles 2004, 13). As such, we aspire to be sensitive to historical processes and power dynamics that are still at work. Within this interdisciplinary research outlook, we argue that

performance studies could be troubling some of the tensions around identity, territory, and nationality, which have been underrepresented in studies of the Kurdish question so far.

Given the tension between the openness and fluidity of what “Kurdish” represents today despite our concrete sense of and attention towards the topic, we organized our discussions along three foundational questions that we posed to our interviewees and allow us to map the complex terrain of this study:

1. What is Kurdish theatre, according to Kurdish theatre practitioners, and what makes it “Kurdish”?
2. What is their relation to the “political”?
3. What is the influence from Turkish contemporary theatre and other “Western” (political) theatre forms as opposed to assumed “Kurdish” performance traditions?

The use of the Kurdish language and the necessity of “reimagined” cultural forms like *dengbêj* were a significant concern. We hope that our contribution sparks more interest in Kurdish drama (studies) in particular, since it is largely underdeveloped and unknown to Turks, even Kurds, and the international research community. However, we do wish to present the current case as a particular example that allows us to consider questions of theatre, representation, and politics in ways that extend the field more broadly.

Towards a Definition: What is “Kurdish Theatre”?

The context in which we identify our research is plagued by a history of oppression and ongoing violence. In Turkey, theatre in the Kurdish language (Kurmanji⁶) was long banned from the public arena, and it still knows the stigma of prejudice. There seemed some cautious improvement during the Kurdish-Turkish Peace or “Solution” Process starting with the March 2013 truce. However, the country has recently again been plagued by internal war in the South East ever since the pro-Kurdish, leftist HDP (Peoples’ Democratic Party) had unprecedented electoral success in the general elections of 2015, causing the ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party), the party of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to lose its majority. This war has wiped out Kurdish cities and has been particularly damaging to the perception and “rebirth” of the Kurdish cultural movement in the public domain.

We are committed to finding out how Kurdish theatre artists define their own praxis in this complicated social and political setting. During our research, we noticed a lack of literature on this very issue. If we are to understand the “source culture” in which this theatre operates, beyond authority figures⁷ that may have shaped a “heritage” in its short existence, it is a pertinent question to look at artists’ current definitions. In a second step, if we want to engage with it as a form of transcultural theatre, namely as a form that both includes and exceeds Kurdish and Turkish cultural practices, we need to find out how Kurdish culture defines (and continuously redefines) itself through its theatre praxis, particularly in relation to existing theatre traditions as well as national cultural policies in Turkey that affect its current development.

When asked to define “Kurdish theatre,” one of Turkey’s innovative Kurdish theatre artists, Mîrza Metin, starts off by laying out the historical contours that define Kurdish theatre today:

Kurdish drama has started to become institutionalized in between the late 80s and early 90s. This correlates to the years when the Kurdish freedom movement, which began functioning before the 1980s coup, started to develop in the political, social, and cultural sense. Kurdish (Kumanji) is among the languages that are banned with the Orient Reformation Report [“Şark Islahat Raporu,” sometimes referred to as the Plan] which was enacted in 1925. Law No. 2932,⁸ which banned conversing and singing in Kurdish, was abolished only in 1991. And all prohibitions were lifted during the Ecevit government. However, the ban still continues in the minds of the people.

The ban on spoken Kurdish was not lifted directly by Bülent Ecevit⁹ but by President Turgut Özal and Prime Minister Yıldırım Akbulut in January 1991. It is generally believed that this was part of Turkey’s strategy to get closer to integration in the European Union in the 1990s. Yet most of our interviewees testify that it was not until the 2000s, under Ecevit as prime minister, when Kurdish drama started to flourish. More traditional cultural forms had already survived—by way of an expedient cultural tactic—in the private sphere, despite the censorship.¹⁰

Notice how Mîrza Metin sets out to talk immediately about “drama” instead of “theatre.” Kurdish theatre in Turkey did not start until very late in the twentieth century, after the 1980s, really flourishing from the 1990s. By that time, it was completely defined by the production of written play texts because of the earlier extensive language policy repressing the Kurdish dialects and hampering playwriting. Therefore, due to the sudden softening of the prohibition to speak Kurdish in public, and because of a previous lack of modern play texts under the long, extensive ban, the artists of the 1990s focused on rapidly producing new texts, many of them highly political in content. The ban was never entirely/officially lifted, though.

There seemed to be an initial momentum for Kurdish literature before the ban in 1925, including early theatre plays, costume designer İsmail Oyur Tezcanlı tells us. But they were not play texts—“drama”—in their own right and complicate what is really Kurdish:

First of all, there is no Kurdish drama, but drama in Kurdish. It would be wrong to indicate a certain idea or characteristic about a play or performance that belongs to Kurdish theatre; however, when we look into the historical texts, we see that the first Kurdish plays were titled *Memê Alan* and . . . *Mem û Zîn*. . . We cannot regard these pieces as stage plays or performances in Kurdish drama since they were adapted for the stage later on.

Most of the early Kurdish plays were written as literary prose and poetry, and Kurdish drama is a rather recent development.¹¹ The main reason is that, historically, Turkey’s nationalist language policy meant to “Turkify” large numbers of Kurds, repress their culture, and consequentially ban their languages (Zeydanlioğlu 2012; Arslan 2015; Hassanpour 2018). This “linguicide” was significant in diminishing the potential for a Kurdish culture to develop and an ethnic identity to be expressed publicly. So it comes as no surprise that theatre as drama plays an indispensable part in the social and political lives of educated Kurds in the urban middle classes of Turkey today.

In their work on intercultural theatre, Gilbert and Lo (2002) have stressed the importance of the choice of language on the stage and in the rehearsal room, since the “wide-scale imposition of

imperial languages” brings forth an “insidious form of epistemic violence” (46). Kurdish-Dutch director Celil Toksöz, based in the Netherlands since 1986, explains the impact of epistemic violence on the theatre as a result of the imposition of the Turkish language and the prohibition of Kurmanji:

Until 1990 there wasn't that much theatre because Kurdish activities were literally forbidden. The Kurdish language was forbidden in those days. There were Kurdish-language theatre activities in the then-former Soviet Union, Iran and Iraq. There was relative freedom over there. . . . Only from the 1990s things started to change [in Turkey]. It was very difficult because the censorship was enormous, especially in Diyarbakir. It began with the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre in İstanbul. They made their first theatre production, which later came to the Ankara Festival. This festival exists now twenty-two years.

Established on September 28, 1991, the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre¹² (MKM) played a significant role in educating new Kurdish theatre artists in the Kurdish language. As an independent institution, its primary motivation was to enhance Kurdish cultural and artistic production. It has led to a partial recognition of Kurdish theatre productions in Turkey's theatre festivals.¹³ The Ankara Theatre Festival was progressive in programming *Teatra Jîyana Nû* or “New Life Theatre,” a work produced by their own theatre company since 1992, despite threats from municipalities¹⁴ like Çankaya in the centre of Ankara. The reference to “Mesopotamia” in its name does, however, point to a Kurdish nationalist agenda (more in the next section) since, as Çağlayan (2012, 6) writes in a study about ideological and political discourses of the Kurdish movement through “myth,” it may “emphasize the historical continuity from the pre-historic peoples of Mesopotamia . . . and thereby allow the construction of a continuous identity of Kurdishness” (Smets and Akkaya 2016, 86).

Mîrza Metin, who got his theatre training from the MKM (beginning at age thirteen), explains how the stigma of the Kurdish language created an impediment to the development of Kurdish drama:

As for Kurdish drama, as a result of it being forbidden and a lack of a government (for its own nation's sake¹⁵), it is a type of drama that couldn't familiarize itself with Western drama, and sometimes didn't want to do so. . . . Its relations with the West started later on. While Kurdish drama was flourishing in the 1920s, the birth of Turkish drama dated back to pre-Republican Turkey. While Kurdish drama could find no financial support, Turkish theatre groups can find government and municipality funds, as well as sponsorships by various institutions.

Metin places the birth of Kurdish drama in the wake of the early Republican period before its repressive language policies. He (re)imagines a past for Kurdish culture that was initially not influenced by Western and/or Turkish traditions. This is an interesting question for Kurdish drama studies and even more so for the history of Kurdish nationalism, starting only after the Great War, that claims a genuine Kurdish culture unspoiled from Western (drama) traditions when the Turkish state was not yet formed after the collapse of the Ottoman state. Later, of course, Kurdish theatre had to negotiate with Western cultural practices, to which Metin's work also contributed.

The role of cultural institutions and structural funding is crucial here too. Metin's private theatre in İstanbul, Şermola Performans (since 2010, originally founded as DestAr Tiyatro in 2008 by Mîrza Metin and Berfin Zenderlioğlu) did partially gain legitimacy from the Turkish state by obtaining

government funds, though it was a long struggle.¹⁶ It is generally seen as “the first producer of Kurdish theater in the history of the Turkish Republic to receive a grant from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism” (Kaya 2012, n.p.).¹⁷ Private theatre groups in Turkey (the so-called independent scene) had already been developing since the 1950s. They have been taking the role of performing more progressive plays in Turkey’s cultural landscape (Council of Europe Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape 2013, 56). However, it took half a century before Kurdish private theatres like DestAr Tiyatro and Şermola Performans in cities followed.

At the Ministry, where Numan Kurtulmuş presided from 2017 until recently, policies have been changing, but not always for the better. Under his ministry, we have seen the systematic closure of Kurdish institutions under emergency law and the latest “harmonizing” move which, as of July 15, 2018, puts all state and municipal theatres directly under control of the presidency rather than the Ministry.¹⁸ In fact, except for a few laws, there is no written policy for the theatre arts, and funding opportunities for private theatres, separate from the heavily subsidized State and Municipal Theatres that perform in Turkish, have always been dependent on an ad hoc approach. By default, Kurdish theatre groups cannot count on the same financial support as Turkish theatres, since the state does not officially provide structural help in promoting Kurdish culture or any other ethnic minority for that matter. In an otherwise weakly articulated national cultural policy, there is no equivalent to positive discrimination in Europe or affirmative action in the United States.

Given the absence of state support, the existence of private theatres¹⁹—a structure outside of the institutional framework of subsidized state theatres that is copied from the Turkish independent theatres—is noteworthy. Director and playwright Yusuf Unay, however, is critical of the idea of imitation when it comes to Kurdish theatre’s topics, aesthetic, and tradition:

I think it would not be wrong to say that Kurdish theatre is an imitation of Turkish theatre. Though it was feeding off the pain the Kurdish cities had to bear in terms of atmosphere and subject, it is similar to the conventional Turkish theatre in an aesthetic sense. And this is inevitable for two ethnicities that live together for so many years; however, Kurdish theatre is also dragged into a big mistake, as Turkish theatre could not go further than imitating the Western theatre canon. The rejection of the idea of a “national” theatre, the removal of boundaries, and the increasing pace of interaction that we see in today’s world also show us the spread of alternative theatres and the transgressing of mainstream traditions of drama in both cultures. I found this change very positive but I think that we should not ignore the fact that we still have a long way to go in order to create our own traditions.

The last point is highly significant: Unay talks about an effort, which is on the one hand politically motivated but on the other is a necessary cultural development. Politically, the birth of a Kurdish theatre is relatively new, so to expand it Kurdish artists would need institutions, universities, and conservatories that would situate and accommodate Kurdish drama. However, under the current emergency state, this is impossible. For Kurdish theatre culture to shape itself in Turkey, it would first need stability, which in the current political situation is merely an aspiration.²⁰

Here we also encounter a first significant ambivalence in the amount of influence Kurdish artists want to ascribe to Turkish (and by implication, Western) theatre in their art praxis, given the context of enduring epistemic violence. Whereas Metin strongly believes in a pre-Turkish history of Kurdish drama, though embedded in non-Western oral storytelling traditions and a corpus of poetic texts

that are not dramatic in the literal sense, Unay directly links Kurdish theatre to the Turkish model for independent theatre but highlights the significance of its own topics and traditions. Metin's position could be seen, in essence, as a quasi-nationalistic²¹ one, whereas Unay holds on to what some would describe as a position to assimilate to Turkish culture.²²

By way of finding a middle ground, director Rezan Aksoy explains how contemporary Kurdish drama has difficulties coming to terms with its traditions precisely because of Turkey's adoption of Western culture:

If we talk about the traditional Kurdish visual arts such as dengbêjlik, çîrokvanlık [similar to "çîrokbêj" or folk tales, *PV*], laments, folk dances etc., while each and every one of them is a vast category in its own right, we can say that it is not only different from Turkish drama but also other visual art traditions in the Middle East. However, the essential differences between Kurdish and Turkish drama are nomadism and sedentarism. Turkish communities, with their ability to establish governments, absorbed the customs and values of the lands they migrated to, excluding their partly nomadic traditions. While they were sovereign in authority, they never had one dominant culture. The culture that is left after the establishment of the Republic is only the crumbs of "genocide" cultures. Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk] and his brothers in arms only created a cultural Frankenstein by accepting the Western culture as the dominant one with their Occidental tendencies. This artificial culture mostly affected those who are exploited such as Kurdish, Armenian, Rum (i.e., Greek-Turkish), Alevi, Laz, etc. cultures. That is why there couldn't be a Kurdish drama with certain aesthetic rules although we have produced a few Kurdish plays on the soil of the Turkish Republic so far.

Aksoy explains precisely the epistemic violence of the Turkish nation-building and modernization processes under and after founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, but he locates it in an imagined Western culture, with all its Occidentalism putting Europe in the centre. His argument reinforces Unay's idea that Turkish theatre is a copy of that imagined culture, and that contemporary Kurdish drama is then a copy of that copy. His argument of "nomadism" as the defining feature of an early Republican Kurdish culture, however, also agrees with Metin's point of view and explains why Kurdish as a minority culture within the newly established nation from very early on defied the more "sedentary" forms of culture that were in the process of establishing what was the new "Turkish" culture, and by implication, the state.

Unay adds yet another sociological reason for Kurdish theatre artists following Turkish theatre trends:

The Kurdish territories are culturally ransacked places. After the attempts to alienate the culture, from that point on there had been no funds or sources offered for any improvement. This picture that is created shows that the newer generations who live in the metropolitan cities to which their families were forced to migrate due to several reasons, get to know theatre and try to be involved. That is why Kurdish theatre was more active in metropolitan Western cities, although for many years now, we see Kurdish theatre in Eastern Turkey as well, which is exciting.

Thus the development of a Kurdish theatre in Turkey is shaped in accordance with forced migration routes—again, nomadism—of Kurds who moved to the cities, which were part and parcel of the urban transformations of the 1990s (Gambetti and Jongerden 2015, 16; Stefanovic, Loizides, and Parson 2015). They are dependent on the “superstructure” that Turkey’s social transformation has established. But due to the relative peace of recent years, paradoxically under the permanent state of emergency in the South East, Kurdish intellectuals²³ and artists in the cities are also increasingly aware of their history as a dispersed community with distinct traditions.

Here we see a historical and cultural materialist process at work, which has planted the seeds for a contradiction in which Kurdish artists are living today. On the one hand, for decades they were forcefully absorbed into the Western project of the Turkish Republic and strained to employ its remnant structures and institutions copying European models. On the other, they felt forced to define their art practices as different from the Turkish and Western models as a way to escape the cultural policies that tried to repress their earlier traditions of oral/musical storytelling and visual art aesthetics. Within that tension of imitation and authenticity, any definition of Kurdish theatre as genuinely separate from Turkish theatre is contentious and may suggest a political or ideological positioning within the Kurdish struggle. Given the complexity of the matter, we suggest entangling these *political* implications of making theatre in the Kurdish language before delving deeper into the question of authenticity and an imagined past of Kurdish theatre.

Is Kurdish Theatre “Political”?

In the previous section, we hinted at a micro-nationalist positioning in some of our respondents’ statements. This nationalist tendency can be explained by sentience among Kurds of a differentiation between notions of society and community in the social sciences. Anthropologist Maurice Godelier (2010) unpacks this distinction, which brings him to refer to the territorial question of the Kurds:

We see from this that it is only the “tribe” that is a “society” . . . , while the ethnic group constitutes a “community” of culture and memory, but not a “society.” This sheds light on the fact that, in order to become a society, an ethnic group today must sometimes manage to form a state that will ensure sovereignty over a territory. This is one of the demands of the Kurdish groups that are dispersed over several states. . . . Furthermore, in some cases, an ethnic group seeking to appropriate a state and a territory for itself alone decides to carry out ethnic cleansing. (Godelier 2010, 7)

In this somewhat simplified dichotomy, Turkey is a society that has claimed existence through political (and also religious) relations after the establishment of the Republic in 1923, thus enabling them to establish sovereignty over territory, whereas the Kurds are a community seeking to become a society by forming a state of their own. The claim of “ethnic cleansing” also haunts the Kurds in Syria today who are beleaguered by the Turkish army’s Operation Olive Branch, though the term is highly controversial in this context and disputed by both sides.

Within today’s nationalist context of a “New” Turkey (a phrase used by the governing AKP-government), “Kurd” is often used as a negative identifier by (ultra-)nationalists, even a “threat” because the utterer may believe Kurds are “backstabbing the nation” (Leyla Neyzi, qtd. in Krajewski 2013). So it is not hard to imagine ethnic allusions resurfacing on the side of the opposition when

arguing against the closure of Kurdish cultural institutions²⁴ as part of the state of emergency. Mehmet Emin comments in this regard:

There was a censorship system that worked according to the content of the plays before. Now it revolves around the ethnic beliefs and mindsets of all those that oppose the head of the state and denying them the right to exist. They try to extinguish certain communities by taking their tools and places away from them. There is only one exit from this and that is solidarity and resistance. Unfortunately, Kurdish artists cannot find a theatre to put their plays on stage anymore, nor do they get invitations for the festivals where they were invited before. In this struggle, we will go through this process with few of the artists *of Turkey* [he actually refers to these artists as *Türkiyeli*,²⁵ *PV and GLA*].

Kurdish theatre's cultural history of repression has come full circle with today's perception that the Turkish state has reverted to its previous stance of "rejection and denial" regarding Kurds and Turkey's historical assimilation project (Bozarslan 2017). Emin refers to theatre as a "tool" and a "place" for the Kurdish communities. The suggestion here is that of a postcolonial power dynamic between "oppressor" state and "oppressed" community, in which theatre has a symbolic function. We concentrate more closely on the issue of theatre as a political tool in this subsection.

There are actually two issues here. First, in Turkey in recent years, AKP supporters (instigated by President Erdoğan) fostered a general contempt for theatre artists, as they are historically related to the Kemalist project and therefore stand for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's educational policies. The Kemalists are today often associated with intellectualism and condescending elitism, particularly during election campaigns that use anti-intellectualism as a conservative form of populism. Second, Turkey has a long-term account of intolerance, division, polarization, and repression of cultural and ethnic minorities, which is deeply rooted in Turkey's history of nationalism,²⁶ even at times advocated by that same Kemalist political culture. Both issues have only become worse under recent nationalist political agendas, affecting public perceptions of everything Kurdish.

In this polarized climate, Kurdish theatre is always somehow seen as having political meaning. Actor, author and TV personality Aydın Orak²⁷ summarizes this perception in the left-wing newspaper *Evrensel*:

I think Kurdish theatre is political, every play has a political message with no doubt and even if you don't try to convey any political message, you'd be seen as someone intervening with politics if you made theatre in Kurdish like us. Because Kurdish is banned and under oppression since the day it started existing. As you know, today is very much the same. (Orak, July 19, 2016)

Orak's claim is at first similar to, for instance, Chantal Mouffe's emphasis that every artwork has a political dimension. But the point here is that Kurdish theatre's political perception complicates its distribution and reception. Historically, this may date back to the first plays performed in the 1900s, which, according to Orak, were always expressing political struggle in some way or another. Orak mentions the Kurdish "oda" (room) plays, which were privately shown in houses before the 1990s: "These plays were political in nature. Besides this, there were village 'seyercik' plays performed in urban and metropolitan areas. They were often about social and political problems of those days" (Orak, July 19, 2016). These historical practices have continued until the 2000s. These historical

plays indicate a rich cultural background for Kurdish drama today. Yet it is a tricky exercise for Kurdish artists to balance the social issues they often want to address through their plays and a wish not to be seen simply as a tool for politics because of the preconceptions that exist regarding Kurdish cultural production and identity politics.

We asked our interviewees how they keep a balance between aesthetic preoccupations and the inevitable struggle against preconceptions about their art, given nationalist frames on either side of the Turks and Kurds. Mîrza Metin starts by unpacking the complicated relation to nationalism and territory in his artistic development:

I started contributing to Kurdish drama in order to support the struggle for the freedom of Kurdistan. However, during the process, it became more than a tool. It turned into a profession. It became a job and a field of expression that foregrounds humane values and took the narratives of the society that I live in upon the stage. I believe that the more I perform my job well, precisely and with an aesthetic sense, the more my humanistic sensibilities will live in this profession. I don't deal with drama to contribute to something or someone anymore. It would only make me happy if it is beneficial. What everybody needs in this country is a pluralist democracy.

Metin's statement demonstrates very well the duality in Kurdish theatre's relationship to politics, which poses challenges to young theatre artists in cities like Istanbul. Metin voices a concern for instrumentalization of his theatre praxis, though his primary aim to contribute through theatre to a political struggle that is much determined by territorial contestation has moved into the background. For Metin, a way out of this confining dichotomy lies in a wider political vision of humanism, pluralism, and democracy for all rather than a single-issue political agenda for Kurds in and outside of Turkey. Moreover, Metin questions the ability of theatre to be "beneficial" to one or the other in a goal-oriented way. As he continues, his main concern is an aesthetic one rather than serving any political agenda:

I really like the idea of Rancière. He suggests that art is political as much as it is cleansed from the interferences of politics. Art should create its connection with life by creating its own agenda, not by being influenced by the politics. Kurdish drama will increase its own value so long as we make it about our own agenda.

Metin's reference to Jacques Rancière is not surprising since Kurdish intellectual circles, as much as the Turkish Left, have in recent years engaged with *The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004) and *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2006), particularly in the wake of the Gezi movement. For Rancière, aesthetics and politics are inseparable, but the political power of art lies rather in perceptibility and the "sensible" than in its contents per se.

This is true for Metin's own productions, which are highly aesthetic and full of social commentary but in most general or "sensible" ways. For instance, although his "Disko 5 Nolu" was a direct reference to the Diyarbakir Prison (with "Disko" standing for *Disiplin Koğuşu*, i.e., disciplinary ward), which after the 1980 military coup d'état turned into a military prison systematically torturing prisoners until 1984, the theatre play is a strong denunciation of cruelty through multiple perspectives of a spider, a mouse, a dog, a prisoner and a guard, all personified on stage in a monologue by Metin.²⁸ The political commentary operates rather between the perceptible and the

imperceptible, the “sayable” and the unsaid, the imaginable and the unimaginable. Indeed, the performance “interrupts the distribution of the sensible” with those voices that have normally “no part in the perceptual coordinates of the community” (Rockhill in Rancière 2004, 3), which lies at the heart of Rancière’s notion of *the political*.



Mirza Metin in *Disko 5 Nolu*. Used with permission.

What Metin alludes to with art’s own “agenda” may be understood in a double sense: On the one hand, he seems to confirm Rancière’s modernist understanding of a political dimension of art that answers only to its own logic, although there is no autonomous art as much as there is no “pure” politics. So, in Rancière’s terms, Kurdish theatre should aim to connect with life and strive for a communal distribution of the sensible in the Kurdish experience without wanting to imitate any of its political discourses. On the other, he does seem to suggest that Kurdish theatre’s agenda is only meaningful if it is tied to the Kurdish struggle.

To do so, most of our interviewees adopt an apolitical stance by separating current political discourses from their theatre praxis, as Kurpiewska-Korbut observes, “to achieve independent status resulting in, among others, an effort to free themselves from the tutelage of a political trademark of PKK” (2016, 97). This is certainly the idea in which most private urban theatres like Metin’s DestAr Tiyatro and Şermola Performans operate. The flight from over-politicized tutelage of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) is very similar to what Rancière names the “aesthetic regime” of the arts as developed through a—for Rancière questionable— notion of modernity that makes art an “autonomous form of life,” thereby identifying it “with a moment in life’s process of self-formation” (Rancière 2004, 26). In the case of Kurdish theatre, one might similarly think of the Kurds’ wish for self-formation as a community within Turkey, a reality where life and politics coalesce on a daily basis.

This double stance towards politics may be seen as somewhat ambivalent. Indeed, Mehmet Emin also agrees with the argument of theatre having its own logic, but the emancipatory—and therefore, political—agenda of the Kurdish movement is never far away:

Drama always has an agenda of its own. During new meetings and while solving execution problems, this is always one of the topics that are discussed. However, sometimes the political agendas suppress the connection that it has with the society. I do not think that there are any plays that do not try to convey a political message. There is always some truth hidden under a sub-plot in a play. That is why I think actors and artists should be braver. Even the plays that avoid meddling with the current politics can be threatening by means of numbing people under the rule of an oppressive government. In this regard, I think HDP's ideology of voicing the oppressed ties with the ideals in our drama.

Emin's comment actually holds for all artists in Turkey, as any play contains political meanings, and they may be more apparent in an environment like Turkey's. But his reference to HDP's political program is telling. HDP had recuperated Gezi's call for all those who do not feel represented by the present regime, not only the Kurdish people, but in name, HDP was clearly tied to the Kurdish political tradition of the HEDEP²⁹ in the Kurdish region. Celil Toksöz explains this theatre's ambivalent connection to party politics in the southeastern provinces, particularly in Diyarbakir, more clearly:

Artists and politicians know each other already from outside the party. In any case, such a party [like the HDP] stands by the Kurdish people, so they want to address all aspects of their people, including music, art, culture and also theatre. What is interesting is that during the better times, the HEDEP did not intervene in the repertoire of the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipal City Theatre or in any other city. They were autonomous, also from the mayor; he didn't interfere in the choices of the repertoire. . . . The repertoire was set in intimate circles. So I think that even before the HDP wrote their party program, the Kurds knew what to do. . . . And it works the other way around too: the HDP observed that Kurdish theatre is doing well since the '90s while they were showing aspects of their program; so they naturally want to stimulate it.

In city theatres where the Kurdish party until recently was in power, it seems that the sought-for autonomy of theatre does not only apply to content but also any influence by the political establishment.

Nevertheless, as Toksöz alludes to, political culture and ideology are bound to drip into the repertoire choices since a select circle, namely a board appointed by the state, selects all staged plays a year in advance. This is standard practice in all state and municipal theatres in Turkey. Although this may be seen as a form of self-censorship induced by the state but organized by the cultural sector itself, this may play out beneficially to those theatres in areas where the BDP³⁰ is at its strongest. Moreover, Toksöz seems to suggest that the HDP (BDP's fraternal party in the rest of Turkey) supports those theatres that have contributed to the recognition of the Kurdish language and culture since it fits their political agenda. So in the BDP-controlled municipalities, the political influence exists instead in the similar mindset, and in the informal politics of appointments and connections between artists and politicians, than in enforced boundaries on what one can say and what not. However, during the state of emergency, many of the state cultural institutions were shut down in 2017 (see note 19), even when the government-appointed trustees are from the BDP. In this sense, creating theatre in Kurdish in the southeast of Turkey, despite its predominantly cultural and artistic aims, often reveals a complex relationship to who is in charge.

Because of that complicated relation, depending on one's political stance, there is also dissatisfaction among Kurdish artists with the current politics as influenced by the BDP and HDP, voiced by Tezcanli for instance:

Kurdish theatre got its share from the current political process in Turkey. In this time, in this oppressive environment that we are going through while HDP is supposed to be the voice of the oppressed, Kurdish theatre is brought to the point of extinction instead of staying active like it is supposed to.

Such an unforgiving statement needs contextualization, however, as it may reflect a Turkish assimilative standpoint that puts more blame on Kurdish party politics for voicing the oppressed than on the oppressor regime. Such a reversed postcolonialist viewpoint seems to correspond with mainstream explanations of the current political crisis in Turkish media that refer in one breath to the PKK and HDP as the agitators. What it also shows, beyond its ideological ambivalence, is a point of desperation due to the targeting of the institutional structures that were helpful to Kurdish culture. And it certainly demonstrates that there is much more incoherence and ambivalence regarding the predicament of theatre and politics among Kurdish artists than we can discuss within the scope of this essay.

Related to our question, “is Kurdish theatre political,” one could also pose the question how much Kurdish theatre *can* contribute to the politics of the Kurdish struggle when its political and social message, however obscured that may be, poses threats to its existence in Turkey. Yusuf Unay proposes an initial answer:

Theatre allows you to connect with the audience by looking into their eyes, making you feel their breath drawn. That's why, when you try to convey social messages through theatre, you put the aesthetic obligations in danger. . . . However, when you look into someone's eyes in the audience and say, “Look, there is someone sitting next to you. His village was burnt down too, and he had to migrate to somewhere else like you,” it means more to me emotionally than any political message. . . . In the past, the Kurdish dramatists made the mistake of becoming the spokesman of a political party. . . . Theatre may be weak regarding the mass influence, but it has a great power to change things.

Unay takes further Metin's earlier point that politics should not influence theatre in a somewhat reductive understanding of the theatre-politics dichotomy. He states clearly that theatre should not aim to be a mouthpiece for politics but that the emotions (Rancière's distribution of the sensible) theatre can evoke are political when they are communal. It is in this shared aesthetic space of the theatre touching the *demos* (the people, the citizens, in Rancière's thinking) through the senses where most independent Kurdish theatre artists, like Unay and Metin, find political expression without intending to make political theatre.³¹ Yaşam Kaya gives the example of Tiyatro Avesta's staging of Gogol's *Diary of a Madman* as an exploration beyond immediate political significance for the Kurdish question: “Being able to engage with the non-political universal topics of theater is a great achievement on the part of urbanized middle-class Kurds” (2012, qtd. in Baş 2015, 333). DestAr's staging of the Kurdish play *Bûka Lekî* is yet another example of how Kurdish theatre can narrate and reflect on psychosexual notions of love, loss and desire, within a context of the Kurdish urban middle class and without any overt political references. Kaya suggests that these notions “distinctly

describe humanity” (2012, n.p.). In order to underscore the play’s interweaving of Kurdish and Western narratives, it blended traditional Kurdish with modern Western music.

Following Unay’s positivist stance towards theatre’s ability to “change things,” Metin believes it must be the theatre practitioner’s foremost attitude to aspire artistic independence through which progress and recovery can be achieved:

We should be independent, equalist, capable of resisting against all kinds of censorship, not engaged in any kind of ideology as artists who never cease to study, analyze and deepen the understanding of the equation between art, politics, life and aesthetics. If we can be this way and continue this attitude as a tradition—and we have artists like that—we can talk about positive progress. I think there are some developments in this sense. And yes, I think drama helps the social healing process.

Social healing, as through reconciliation and recovery, is undoubtedly also a political goal within the Kurdish movement. But whether or not theatre can achieve this for the “masses,” whether or not Kurdish artists seek to convey social messages through a play to address this, Kurdish theatre does “act” within a political space that influences people’s lives. It is in this context that we should understand Metin and others’ plea to equate art (the aesthetic regime), politics and life while avoiding interference by a political agenda and instrumentalization of the theatre for that agenda, which may be felt as oppressive, reductive, restrictive, and counterproductive to their message. It does of course not rule out a nationalist frame of perception that is looking inwardly within the Kurdish community as this theatre is still seeking legitimacy in a very politically volatile environment.

Finally, as was touched upon by the end of the first section, although it is highly relevant to the question of how theatre produces and troubles Kurdish identity and community, we propose a closer look at the discussion of authenticity in how Kurdish theatre artists position their theatre praxis against “Turkish” and “Western” aesthetic practices. Language and the reinvention of the *dengbêj* performance tradition are central to this debate. Before we dig into this last issue, one remark on the political nature of the authenticity debate is, however, in order:

Debates about hybridity in postcolonial theory tend to go hand in hand with discussions of authenticity. Griffiths reminds us that “authenticity” is a politically charged concept rather than a “natural” or preexisting attribute. While it may be politically exigent for non-Western peoples to deploy discourses of authenticity in order to bolster their cultural authority, in the hands of Western critics and commentators, the sign of the “authentic” can easily become a fetishized commodity that grounds the legitimacy of other cultures “not in their practice but in our desire” (Griffiths 1994, 82). (Gilbert and Lo 2002, 46)

Likewise, it could be said that Kurdish theatre’s insistence on either a claim of hybridity or authenticity is politically charged. We will have to question if the claim of authenticity of Kurdish theatre culture is genuine or fetishized as a common desire on the part of Kurdish artists, or of Turkish or Western commentators. We will see in the following subsection a small case-study of how Kurdish theatre artists, in their search for cultural representation and acknowledgment in Turkey by claiming authenticity through *dengbêj* aesthetic practices, may fall into the trap of fetishization and perhaps even (self-)orientalization in the eye of the Turkish and/or “Western” critic.

Reimagining Performance Traditions, (Re)-Imagining the Future?

So far, we have focused on the role of state and private theatres in the production of Kurdish theatre in Turkey. Yet, if we want to address the Kurdish “theatre” performance traditions fully, one important institution has not been mentioned: the *Mala dengbêjan* (House of Dengbêj), which opened in Diyarbakir in May 2007 as a forerunner to the brief reform period called the “Kurdish Opening” or “Kurdish Initiative” in 2013 (Council of Europe 2016, 12). This EU-supported organization³² is significant to mention within the discussion of authenticity and Kurdish theatre’s relation to an “imagined” past.

Rezan Aksoy already mentioned the *dengbêjlik* as a performance tradition that is separate from Kurdish drama. It is nonetheless theatrical since it depended on highly trained musical storytellers or *dengbêj* (from “deng” voice, and “bej” say) who travelled from village to village, recounting stories and singing songs. As Toksöz explains, “they did something before an audience so they needed to get prepared, to rehearse. There are theatrical aspects to that.” It is historically understood that these travelling artists had an important social role as they performed in people’s houses, illuminating pre-eminent members of the community while rearranging their *kilam* (i.e., musical story) at each destination. Their stories often contained information about other villages they visited or important historical events that over time became ingrained in the Kurdish collective memory. As the *dengbêj* trade was passed on from master to apprentice over centuries, a rich tradition of oral literature (folktales, stories, and *çirok* or fairy tales) was established and preserved until the twentieth and now twenty-first century (Kaya 2012). Today, this oral tradition is reinvented and understood as a discursive sphere for freedom that makes up the “staple” of the Kurdish society and culture (Kurpiewska-Korbut 2016, 99–100). The *dengbêj* are also often regarded as “the first practitioners of Kurdish narrative theatre” (Baş 2015, 318). Related narrative forms like “*çirokbêj*” and “*vebêj*” also represent a vast resource for Kurdish theatre (318).

The foundation of the *Mala dengbêjan* could be seen as an attempt to commemorate and rediscover the Kurds’ cultural memories, fostered by official narratives, of a multicultural past. But there is also something anachronistic or pastiche-like in reinventing traditions at a time when they seem out of practice. Scalbert-Yücel (2009) relates this to a “nostalgia industry” that started roughly in the 1990s, which one can also observe in other parts of the world:

EU-funded projects that openly aim at developing a “cultural dialogue” promote an image of Turkey as a peaceful “cultural mosaic.” But these cultures and this diversity, in the way they are exhibited and displayed, may also be frozen and innocent representations of a lost but also imagined past (De Certeau 1993). The way memories are remembered, traditions reinvented (as in the *dengbêj*’s case) often confirms this. (Scalbert-Yücel 2009, 3)

Indeed, in *The Writing of History* (1988; 1993), Michel de Certeau’s vision of history-writing is that history is always in the process of making and, therefore, *remaking* which is inevitably impinged by a level of “fiction,” “the repressed other of historical discourse” (White 2005, 147).³³ This idea also rings through Benedict Anderson’s notion of the “imagined community” (1983) that participates and finds legitimacy for its existence in a historical discourse that often claims national continuity where there is none. Scalbert-Yücel’s argument about the reinvention of *dengbêj* as part of a lost but imagined past seems to fit de Certeau’s notion of the “return to origins,” which paradoxically “states

the contrary of what it believes, at least in the sense that it presupposes a *distancing* in respect to a past . . . and a will to *recover* what in one fashion or another seems lost in a received language” (1988, 163). One can see a similar paradox in the seemingly “innocent” representation of Kurdish identities and their past through a return to the origins of dengbêj. As de Certeau suggests, this return is based on the fiction that the tradition—and its nostalgic belonging to a simpler, perhaps more multicultural and politically innocuous past—has already been lost.

The relationship between dengbêj and Kurdish theatre finds its apex in Celil Toksöz’s *Hamlet* adaptation in 2012, translated by Kawa Nemir and staged in Kurmanji, with the subtitle “Hebûn an nebun” (*to be or not to be*). Toksöz adapted Shakespeare’s revenge tragedy with elements of the dengbêj tradition. We want to briefly focus on this play to exemplify one way of reclamation and reinvention of the dengbêj tradition in a performative context, particularly because of the unique historical momentum in which it was conceived. However, we should not overemphasize its importance as a sole example of the so-called nostalgia industry surrounding dengbêj.



Left, Gülseven Medan (Ophelia); right, singer Rojda (Getrude); rear, Yavuz Akkuzu (Hamlet). Used with permission.

The play opens with a narrator and a conversation on how Shakespeare, due to its etymology, should be Kurdish. In the final scenes, Ophelia would also only sing dengbêjlik.³⁴ The production was a co-production between the Amsterdam-based RAST Theater and the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipal City Theater, which had already a history of repertoire building in the Kurdish language since 2003. Toksöz explains his choice for a Kurdish *Hamlet* as well as the political circumstances in which the production took place:

It was very relevant to us that a Turkish minister had once said, regarding the question if the Kurdish language could be accepted in schools and if a course in Kurdish should be implemented, that Kurdish is not a language because “you can’t even play Hamlet in the Kurdish language.” That really hurt me. That is why I thought: if we are going to go for it, it should be *Hamlet*. And then, crisis times started. There were the hunger strikers. Three days after we arrived in Diyarbakir, the hunger strike had stopped by Öcalan³⁵ and it looked like a gesture towards rebalance was coming from Ankara. We would play in Ankara later on and we heard that perhaps the then-President Abdullah Gül would come to see our opening night. How would he respond? Do we give him a hand? All the HEDEP people wanted to talk with him. So there was this constant doubt: yes no yes no. . . . Eventually the Minister of Culture, Ertuğ Günay came. And when he comes, all the highest ranked employees of the state theatre (*Devlet Tiyatrosu*) come and the whole shebang around

it. So many big names of the theatre world came. That was then a gesture of balance. And that is why we didn't get trouble.

Despite the rehearsal process being hampered by air and hunger strikes and not being sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Ankara, the play became the poster event for the Kurdish “opening” with subsequent broadcastings of the play on television. Shakespeare’s tragedy was chosen as an authoritative cultural mediator to raise international visibility and awareness for Kurdish theatre and culture and its historical circumstance, particularly concerning the recognition of the Kurdish language in Turkey, which was and still is an incomplete process. The quintessential question, *to be or not to be* (“hebun an nebun” and later in the play, as “Ya herrü ya merrü,” i.e., even if for the worst, let it be), is directly posed to the Kurdish community, as Toksöz suggests in an interview with *NRC Handelsblad*: “Do we need to forget our culture or to keep on struggling to keep it alive?” (Beekmans October 16, 2012; my trans. *PV*). But due to the performance’s hybridity and the choice of *Hamlet* as a marker of cultural standard, one could question here: which culture?

One could argue that the success of this first Kurdish *Hamlet* was precisely the reinvention of traditions in a double sense. First of all, it offers the Kurdish audiences, inside and outside Turkey, a confirmation that their language (and culture) can produce serious drama on the stage just as any other language. It could also be seen as a strong signal to policy-makers in Ankara that any cultural policy regarding the Kurds should evolve away from conflict management towards cultural diversity management. For this purpose, the Kurdish adaptation of *Hamlet* emphasized the commonalities between Kurdish culture, such as the Kurdish tradition of marrying a sister-in-law and a kinship-oriented revenge called *kan davası*, and common themes in Shakespeare’s tragedy. Second, the reimagining of the dengbêj culture through this *Hamlet* production could be seen as feeding the nostalgia for this storytelling tradition in a time when even some of the actors had to (re)learn how to pronounce certain words in Kurmanji. The dengbêj tradition was evoked by means of folkloric elements, such as Gertrude wrapped in a scarf and Claudius with a nargile (water pipe), accompanied by Kurdish songs in the dengbêj tradition. Near the end, Ophelia’s soliloquies are purely sung.

Despite this unique exchange of artistic *know-how* within the devising process, the play could, however, fall into the trap of “cultural promotion” or even worse, a “native-representative” aesthetic that would lower spectators’ viewing expectations. Indeed the production was presented and supported by the Dutch government in the context of its anniversary of four hundred years of diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Netherlands. Within that framework, it toured in 2012 in seven Dutch city theatres. Such support programs, however, do call for our caution against the prejudice that non-Western “others” would produce *culture* (where artistic expressions are often seen as collective ethnic markers) vs. the “West” *having* culture and producing *art* (Karaca 2010, 131). Toksöz comments fervently:

I have fought in the Netherlands to prove that I don't make culture but theatre. This is an important difference. I have worked thirty years for this. When you make something, they may say: this is your culture; we make space for your culture, but I say: no, you are just giving museum space for culture as you do for folkloric dances. I make theatre. This is art. I have fought to make these changes in the Netherlands.

As Scalbert-Yücel (2009) suggested above, this commemorative act of the “nostalgia industry” around dengbêj plays an important part in the exhibition of culture. Kurds and Turks might even reproduce this bias and frame of looking when they regard modern drama as a predominantly

“Western” art form instead of an authentic art form within Turkey. The reinvention of *dengbêj* as an alternative performative form to drama, despite the cultural legitimacy it claims and receives, demonstrates yet another ambivalence Kurdish (theatre) artists will need to come to terms with.

Concluding Remarks

Our interviews with Kurdish theatre practitioners in Turkey suggest that their art praxis is marked by much ambivalence regarding their relationship to current politics. They give us at least three key insights into the relationship between theatre, culture, identity politics, and reconciliation for Kurdish audiences and communities.

First, it is problematic to speak of a “Kurdish theatre” proper. Rather, in Turkey we should speak of theatre in the Kurdish language, which is predominantly dramatic and dependent on a play text. As a contemporary form, it is also a rather recent, urban phenomenon and should not be isolated from the Kurdish Opening with significant policy changes in 2002 and 2013. This policy climate was expected to safeguard certain fundamental rights, freedoms, and democracy for Kurds in the southeast region in the long run, where imaginings of political autonomy and sovereignty are gradually realized through art and cultural production. The partial recognition of the Kurdish language Kurmanji in artistic domains, such as literature, criticism, drama, and dramaturgy, is indispensable in this process. It is, therefore, inevitable that the Kurdish art scene shares “nationalist” political tendencies.

Second, despite this micro-nationalist context, politics is seen as a burden to the artist. On the one hand, the perception of Kurdish theatre is unavoidably political, whether it expresses aspects of the Kurdish struggle deliberately or not. On the other hand, there is a perceivable link with the political agenda of Kurdish political parties who have recuperated those feeling underrepresented and oppressed, such as the BDP and HDP, which have been increasingly successful in breaking AKP’s majority and influence in the Kurdish region and other urban areas in Turkey. Groups like DestAr Tiyatro / Şermola Performans are believed “to provide solutions to relieve the uneasiness of Kurdish social life” (Nurtsch 2014). And indeed, some of the artists believe in a Kurdistan as an unrealized territory and nation for Kurds. However, Kurdish theatre artists struggle to make theatre for its own sake, beyond a political agenda, in an attempt to find larger audiences. This “apolitical” stance fits in a reconciling and rebalancing gesture to reunite Kurdish communities in the southeast, and Kurds and Turks in cities like Istanbul. Yet it is also part of a broader identity politics, and hence, part of the same nationalist myths the artists struggle against since they might lead to further bans and censorships. This is a vicious circle that Kurdish artists share with other nationalist movements demanding cultural revivals of local communities in the world.

Third, in contradiction of the ensuing reimagining of traditions that help to separate Kurdish theatre aesthetically as an art form from its Turkish relative, intercultural theatre in Western Europe has taught us to be wary of treating ethnically “other” artists as native informants or representatives of a different culture that would either fatally end up confirming the cultural frames, aesthetic practices, and epistemes of theatre of “the West,” or fetishize otherness as a selling point and commodity. International artistic collaboration and exchange are necessary for Kurdish theatre to keep its momentum and existence, particularly in times of crisis like now, but Kurdish artists and international stakeholders should be aware of the possible asymmetries and power dynamics in the collaboration and perception of the work. By the same token, Kurdish artists are confronted with

the inescapable Western aspects of their artwork in their relation to Turkish theatre history and theatre education. Higher education and theatre training, informed performance studies, and mature art criticism in the Kurdish language are vital in this. Turkey's unresolved Kurdish conflict, a widespread fear for Kurdish separatism fed by mainstream media as well as mechanisms of institutionalized racism, however, limit such developments.

All of the above dilemmas show us that being a Kurdish theatre artist in today's Turkey is a difficult subject position to occupy and maintain. Despite all this, many do continue, and others make it abroad. It is in this currently conflictual space that Kurdish theatre moves in. We end this article with a final inspirational note by Mîrza Metin who, despite the current (self-)censorship and controlled repression, still has a hopeful message:

Kurdish drama was born into censorship. It knows how to deal with it and find new solutions about this problem. Censorships continue to live in different versions. Kurdish drama is not only about producing plays. It is about finding ways to defeat censorship, as well as strength and resistance. Resistance keeps going on.

Through theatre's resilience, we can perhaps start to imagine a brighter future for Kurds in Turkey.

Artist and Translator Biographies

Rezan Aksoy studied scenic arts and worked as an instructor and director in Izmir while contributing to the organization "Halkların Köprüsü" (The Bridge between Peoples), which supports refugees. Discussions in this group with researchers from Berlin's Alice Solomon Hochschule led him to Berlin in November 2016 to give a lecture on "the relationship between immigration and art." At the same time, he was asked to give another speech at the Rosa Luxemburg Association on the political developments in Turkey. When Turkish police started to investigate him, he decided to stay in Germany. He sees himself as part of the Kurdish movement. He is now trying to establish his own theatre group in Germany.

Mîrza Metin started out as an actor in Mesopotamian Culture Centre where he got most of his training. He won several prizes for his successful play *Disco 5 No'lu* in 2012. He was also on the big screen in several movies. He played a role in a Kurdish short movie called *Pera Berbangê*. He established DestAR Theatre group in October 2008 with Berfin Zenderlioğlu after which they founded Şermola Performans in 2010. He is currently residing in Cologne (Germany) as part of an *artist at risk* program.

Ismail Oyur Tezcanlı comes from a family of artisans and tailors. Through his studies at 9 Eylül University in Izmir, he developed from a tailor at Diyarbakir State Theatre to a costume designer. He became a permanent staff member of the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality City Theater. He also recently worked at Amed City Theatre in Şişli, Istanbul.

Celil Toksöz is a Turkish-Kurdish director, based and working in the Netherlands. As a leftist activist, he was in prison for four and a half years. He came to the Netherlands as a political refugee in 1986. While in prison, he read classical theatre plays, among which *Hamlet* left a great impression. In 1995, he founded the Turkish/Kurdish organization Tiyatro Kina in the Netherlands, with

collaborating Turkish actors and directors. In 2000, he was one of the founders and artistic directors of the intercultural Theatre RAST.

Yusuf Unay studied dramatic writing at 9 Eylül University in Izmir. He taught applied theatre, worked as a dramaturge and director, and wrote several plays (including for children) as well as scripts for radio and TV. He works for Tiyatro Kalemi and Theatre Deng û Bêj, of which he is one of the founding members.

Gülcan Irmak Aslanoğlu is a graduate of Hacettepe University in Ankara. Her preparatory research, communication with the interviewees, and translation of the interviews were indispensable to this project.

List of Abbreviations and Key Terms

AKP: the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This party has been in power since 2002.

BDP: the Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, or in Kurdish, *Partiya Aştî û Demokrasiyê*), Kurdish political party, which existed from 2008 to 2014 when it changed its name to the Democratic Regions Party and its parliamentary caucus joined the HDP. BDP would then exclusively operate at the local or regional administrative level of government.

Çîrok: fairy tales, and related to that, *Çîrokbêj*: storytellers. In Kurdish cultural traditions, storytelling is performed through songs. Their (classical) music culture is thus intertwined with oral literary traditions. Besides the *Çîrokbêj*, two types of musical performers recite stories while singing: *Dengbêj* (bards) and *Stranbêj* (minstrels). The *Dengbêj* were travelling artists who, from generation to generation, have delivered the most significant historical events of the Kurdish people, as ingrained in their collective memory, through epic songs (*keîlam*, musical stories). *Vebêj* is yet another word for narrators.

Dengbêj: the Kurdish advanced “sung-speech” tradition (oral literature) that is transmitted by Kurdish “bards” who are also called *Dengbêj* (from “*deng*,” voice and “*bej*,” say, so literally “to convey words verbally”).

Gezi (movement): the waves of insurgency—some call it a civil rights movement due to the input from civil societies—in the summer of 2013 that started as an environmentalist and anti-capitalist concern against the demolition of Gezi Park near Taksim Square in Istanbul.

HDP: the pro-Kurdish, leftist Peoples’ Democratic Party. Due to the ten percent threshold in Turkey’s electoral system, which in the past forced pro-Kurdish parties to run candidates as independents, the AKP was able for a steady period to gain the majority of parliamentary seats from the Kurdish southeastern region. The HDP challenged that in the general elections of June 2015 by running as a party list. To the surprise of many, the HDP won with thirteen percent of the national vote and blocked AKP’s parliamentary majority.

Halperkê: (also known as “halparke” or the Kurdish “halay”): a collection of handholding round or circle dances in traditional Kurdish culture. Its present-day, modernized performance is known to be deeply symbolical of solidarity and resistance.

Kurmanji: a main group of dialects spoken in the southeastern region of Turkey. Other main Kurdish dialects are Zazaki (Kirmanckî or Kirdki, from Iran, spoken by the Zaza community in Turkey’s eastern Anatolia), Gorani (spoken by Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan and the Hewraman mountains between Iran and Iraq), and Sorani (mainly spoken in Iranian Kurdistan, but also in Iraqi Kurdistan).

Mesopotamia: the reference to a mythologized “Mesopotamia” of ancient times—as in MKM’s name—often serves a political argument to claim back a part of Turkey’s territory. According to Casier (2011), it plays a role in a larger reimagination by the Kurdish Movement (and Abdullah Öcalan) to move focus from Kurdistan towards “Mesopotamia” as the lands once populated by the Kurds, now a political space to be (re-)appropriated and transformed. The reference fits in a larger, micro-nationalist narrative (and myth-making) that emphasizes the Kurdish relation to an ancient, wider Mesopotamian region and culture against what is imagined today as “Anatolian” within Turkey’s national(ist) literary history. It thereby supposedly locates today’s Kurdish movement in an overlooked Kurdish golden age in ancient Mesopotamia in 2000 BC, which contributed to the West and Anatolian civilization long before “Turks” arrived in the region (Schäfers 2017, 9).

MKM: the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre (*Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi* in Turkish, or *Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya/MÇM* in Kurdish). Its first office was established in Istanbul in 1991 just after the ban on the Kurdish language was lifted, both for print and recording (law 2932) (Stansfield and Shareef 2017, 263). The influence of its founder, the Kurdish author and journalist Musa Anter, who wrote his first play in the Kurdish language in the 1990s, is not to be underestimated. The Tigris and Euphrates Cultural Centre was the Diyarbakır branch of the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre, but it is closed today due to the state of emergency.

OHAL: literally, “Governorship of Region in State of Emergency” (*Olağanüstü Hal Bölge Valiliği*), which originally referred to the permanent state of emergency in Turkey’s southeastern Kurdish region, created in 1987 to curb the developing Kurdish-Turkish conflict. This OHAL was officially discontinued on November 30, 2002, but special Turkish security forces kept monitoring the region. After the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016, a nationwide OHAL was declared on July 20, 2016, with renewals every three months until midnight on July 18, 2018.

PKK: the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*), which is a militant organization in Turkey and Iraq that started as a radical leftist political organization to liberate the oppressed Kurdish people from national and class oppression. It was founded in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan, who was hunted down and captured in Kenya in 1999 and is now serving a lifelong prison sentence in solitary confinement on Imrali Island in the Turkish Sea of Marmara. From 1984 onwards, the PKK has been involved in ongoing armed conflict with Turkish security forces. It is listed internationally as a terrorist organization by NATO, the US, and the EU, among other allies of Turkey.

Notes

1. OHAL stands for *Olağanüstü Hal Bölge Valiliği*, meaning “Governorship of Region in State of Emergency.”
2. We would like to thank Dr. Görkem Akgöz for her support throughout the research and writing process.
3. Gülcan Irmak Aslanoğlu provided all communications with the interviewees and translations. Our interviewees all consented to the use of their names. Biographical notes and information on their exilic situation can be found at the end of this article.
4. We conducted the interviews in Turkish, except for one interview in Dutch, by e-mail and Skype between September and December 2017, on the basis of ethical consent and objective translation, and with prior assurance of confidentiality and privacy when needed or desired. The choice of language was conscious in order to avoid uncertainty about meanings when the interviews were translated into English.
5. In this context, it is also significant that neither the author nor the translator received financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this essay. They are aware of the risks of publishing, which makes them politically vulnerable given the sensitivity of the topic. They had no other reasons than academic ones to compile the data and process it according to academic standards and methodology.
6. When we refer to the Kurdish language spoken in Turkey, we actually mean Kurmanji as a main group of dialects spoken in the southeastern region in addition to Zazaki, Gorani, and Sorani.
7. In contrast to Kurdish cinema, where for instance Yılmaz Güney is always referred to as an authority figure, Kurdish theatre in Turkey does not seem to yield such a historical figure as a role model or “heritage,” which makes our choice to focus on “source culture” even more pertinent.
8. Law No. 2932 was enacted in 1983 after the military coup of 1980 as part of the junta prohibiting a separate Kurdish identity, including the use of Kurdish languages.
9. Bülent Ecevit was prime minister of Turkey in 1974, 1977, 1978–79, and 1999–2002. He claimed that his paternal grandfather was of Kurdish descent, but for most of his career, he opposed any proposal to legalize education and television broadcasting in the Kurdish language (Kinzer 2006).
10. Despite a general lack of linguistic knowledge and grasp of Kurmanci in the last decades, Kurdish folk music and stories have been traditionally passed down from one generation to the next (Kinzer 2010). Music traditions survived the bans, particularly after the 1980 military coup, up until the 1990s by means of underground recordings, pirate radio and illegally copied tapes sold on the black market (Kimmelman 2011). Theatre traditions such as Kurdish “village plays” (similar to Turkish “Köy Sehirlik Oyunları”), particularly those associated with the yearly Newroz festival (the Kurdish new year), weddings and other rituals, survived in the private sphere through performances inside homes. We should, however, remain vigilant of any particular frame which risks Orientalizing and/or romanticizing these forms as a kind of lesser, non-professional, peasant drama based on folk rituals.
11. Author of the classic—and nationalist—love poem *Mam and Zin* (originally “Mem û Zîn” or “Memî Alan û Zînî Buhtan,” written in 1694), Ahmad Khani (1651–1707) is perhaps the best-known Kurdish poet and most popular until this day. Some see the publication of *Mam and Zin* in the Kurdish literary journal *Jine* (Life), published in Istanbul in 1919, as the beginning of modern Kurdish drama.
12. The Mesopotamia Cultural Centre (*Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi*/MKM in Turkish, or *Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya*/MÇM in Kurdish) constitutes a vast network of regional offices and cultural centres in urban areas in Turkey, such as Diyarbakir, Van, Sanlıurfa, Mersin, Adana, Izmir, Mardin, and Siirt.
13. In fact, most Kurdish plays of this early period were performed first in non-professional contexts, such as at union meetings, in makeshift theatres in basements, and at protests or strikes (Bas 2015, 315). As they were often political (mostly agitprop) and underground, it was still difficult to stage plays in Kurdish in the 1990s.

14. The government did forbid one of their plays, so the actors took it to the European Court of Human Rights. In *Ulusoy and Others v. Turkey*, the Court decided on May 3, 2007 that the ban on Kurdish theatre production in municipal buildings was a breach of the freedom of expression (ECHR Report, January 17 2017).
15. Note that Mîrza Metin refers here to the inability of the Kurds to create their own nation, often referred to as “Kurdistan” due to historical circumstances and repressed rebellions like those between 1925 and 1938 in Turkey, when the Ottoman sultanate and caliphate were abolished (in 1922 and 1924, respectively) (Özkırımlı 2018, n.p.).
16. In Turkey, the theatre infrastructure consists of three segments: First, there are the state theatres, operas, and dance institutions based in the big cities. They are funded through the General Directorate of Turkish State Theatres by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism but now fall under the jurisdiction of the presidency. Second, there are municipal theatres funded by the municipalities. And third, there are numerous private or independent theatre companies, which are self-sufficient (some more commercial than the other) and/or partially dependent on government subsidies. Şermola Performans belongs to the third category. As a theatre space, they also shared their facilities with different Kurdish groups. Recently, they moved out of their spaces in Beyoğlu (Istanbul), but they continue to tour as a company while performing in other private theatres in Istanbul, such as Moda Sahnesi, Oyun Atölyesi, and Kumbaracı50.
17. Other, notable support from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism included a grant of two consecutive years for *Ar Tiyatro*, a TL 21,000 government grant for the production of *Cert* (The Experiment) in 2009–2010, and a TL 30,000 subsidy for *Buka Leki* (The Plastic Bride) in 2010/2011. “Both plays opened to audiences in Istanbul and Anatolia with both Kurdish and Turkish surtitles. The financial support provided by the ministry marked a real milestone” (Kaya 2012).
18. The Minister of Culture and Tourism changed to Mehmet Nuri Ersoy as part of the new cabinet under the newly installed executive presidential system.
19. Among the independent theatres that stage Kurdish plays, there is Teatra Jiyana Nû (which produces under the MKM), Seyri Mesel Theatre, Theatre Avesta, Theatre Bakur, DestAr Theatre, Şermola Performans, Mezopotamya Theatre, Theatre Evîna Welat, and Arsen Poladov Theatre. They are promoting the Kurdish language, culture, and art throughout Turkey (Kurpiewska-Korbut 94).
20. We would like to thank Dr. Özgür Çiçek for her helpful comments on this matter.
21. We are refraining from making any judgmental statements regarding nationalism on either side. We are also not suggesting any ideological profiles of our respondents. We are merely observing such positions from an informed and situated point of view, as it is important to be sensitive to the ideological underpinnings of the debates regarding politics and aesthetics in Kurdish theatre, however ambivalent they are in themselves.
22. We should, of course, stress here that we limited our outlook to Kurdish theatre in Turkey. In Armenia, one could obviously find aesthetic approaches in Kurdish theatre that are more varied and differentiated from its Turkish counterpart.
23. Ever since the 1960s, in spite of the then rather nationalistic 1961 (post-coup) constitution, which included a new bill of rights in accordance to the European Convention of Human Rights, Kurdish activist intellectuals took a leading role in Kurdish cultural and political activism (Güneş 2012, 49; Arslan 2015, 40).
24. Among the Kurdish cultural institutions closed down in the wake of the post-coup witch hunt are the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality City Theatre (*Diyarbakir Büyükşehir Belediyesi Şehir Tiyatrosu*, DBŞT), Batman and Hakkari’s municipal theatres (Ince and Siyah Bant 2017), the NGO Kurdish Institute of Istanbul (Bozarslan 2017), the Feqiyê Teyran Arts and Culture Centre in Hakkari (Ince and Siyah Bant 2017), the Seyr-î Mesel in Istanbul, and various other branches of the Mesopotamia Cultural Centre.
25. *Türkiyeli* is an umbrella term that encompasses all subidentities in Turkey. As Oran (2011) explains in a policy brief for the FPC: “*Türkiyeli* is a term that is just like the term ‘British’—that is the supra-identity of the people who live in Great Britain. The term Turkish, on the other hand, corresponds to ‘English.’” . . . The

term *Türkiyeli* caused a huge turmoil in Turkey, but its use is nowadays considered as normal. In fact, the term has been in use since the 1960s to identify those people who went to Europe for work, or to distinguish the Cypriot Turks from those who went there from Turkey. Yet, the history of the term goes much further back. It was in use before the republic was established. Kurds of Turkey used the term between 1967 and 1969 before they had established the Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Societies (DDKO) in 1969. The term would be forgotten again as “Peoples of Turkey” was used instead as Kurdish nationalism soon developed” (n.p.). Note that reintroducing this term may depend on its use by the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, but it is uncertain if Mehmet Emin meant the term here in any politically revisionist sense. We think he probably wanted to simply draw a line between Kurds of Kurdistan and those living in Turkey who are supportive of Kurdish theatre.

26. One needs some caution for historical generalizations here, since Turkey’s nationalist traditions were also entangled with Kurdish nationalist ambitions in the Early Republican Period.

27. Until a couple of years ago, Aydın Orak used to run his own one-man, independent theatre, Theatre Avesta in Istanbul.

28. Video excerpts can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grScRGdniLo>.

29. The HEDEP (1997–2005) brought forth a series of pro-Kurdish parties that sought political representation in the Kurdish districts: DTP (2005–2009), BDP (2008–2014), and HDP (2012–today).

30. Fifty-one out of 106 municipalities in the Kurdish region were recently controlled by the BDP.

31. This idea is similar to Deleuze and Guattari’s in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986) that with a minor literature, everything is political (17).

32. Its support included the EU, the Ministry, and the municipality (Scalbert-Yücel 2).

33. In this light, we are wary of any implied “coherence” of our essay where it not only looks for logical consistency between our interviewees’ responses but also takes part in an “imaginative” consistency that history writing inevitably requires. Our contextualized and situated outlook is then not just another subjective “bias” pushing a complicated debate on Kurdish cultural production in a certain direction, but an attempt to unearth the ambivalences in that debate.

34. Many video clips can be found on YouTube. See, for instance, samples of the *dengbêj* parts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czxbBIELyn4>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpP5klypTwk>.

35. Abdullah Öcalan is the imprisoned leader of the PKK.

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ARTICLES

Performing Monument: Future Warnings

Shalon Webber-Heffernan

*there is
no linear time
only strategic
remembering¹*

This article explores two disparate, yet similar case studies that both disrupt linear versions of history through temporal and performative counter-monument interventions. It traces how two public art works re-write particular historical scripts by intervening into public memory and through complicating historiographical national narratives. First, I examine a contemporary socially engaged land art installation at the US/México border entitled *Repellent Fence* (2015), which drew critical attention to the Indigeneity upon which borders and trade policies have been built in the first place. I examine the performance of this large-scale, short-term, two-mile-long collaborative monument erected by the interdisciplinary art collective Postcommodity, based in the United States Southwest.² Second, I highlight an even more recent monument intervention by Toronto-based comedy-art duo Life of a Craphead³ and their performance action entitled *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River* (2017) which sent a simulated colonial monument of King Edward VII and his bronze horse floating down the Don River. Through a comparative analysis of these two case studies, and a discussion and contextualization of historical monuments more broadly, I examine the ways in which public monuments perform hemispherically,⁴ and how interventionist performances create counter-narratives to dominant colonial histories, creating space for decolonial imagining.

Both monuments in this essay interact and perform with material expressions of colonial power manifesting in distinct geographic locations (US/México border; Toronto/India). I illustrate how the monuments in each case perform as “scriptive things”⁵ of/for the nation, while also scripting human actions and beliefs about and around national narratives. The site-specific performance interventions in this article disrupt historical narratives via public monuments (both metaphorically and figuratively) and open up alternative discourses around the meanings and memories that make up and come to define the nation-state over time. Both examples problematize monuments which continue to memorialize violence and domination as well as ongoing colonial and imperial power. I also consider the ways in which these counter-monument interventions perform by producing traces of memory, circulating and documenting themselves within cultural memory, creating new ways to think of the future.

Hauntings

I begin by looking at monuments themselves to consider what possibilities they hold for future memory and for performance. Typically, monuments are statues, buildings, or other structures erected to commemorate famous or notable people, and events or sites that are of historical importance or interest. The term “monument” originally (etymologically) denoted a structure placed by, or over a grave in memory of the dead⁶ (*note: a memory of the *dead*). Interestingly,

Shalon Webber-Heffernan is a PhD student in Theatre and Performance Studies at York University.

“monument” also has etymological links to the verbs “remind,” “advise” and “warn.”⁷ This term is also popularly used to refer to something that is large in scale and importance as in “monumental”—something of extraordinary size and power. United States Library of Congress historian John Y. Cole wrote in his book on the architecture of the Thomas Jefferson Building in Washington, “a monument allows us to see the past thus helping us visualize what is to come in the future” (Cole and Reed 1997, 16). This is an interesting premise since so many monuments *continue* to celebrate and memorialize colonial figures (of the past). In this way, we do see one fragmented *piece* of the past circulating within the present, but we certainly do not see the whole historiographical story being memorialized or commemorated. Rather, a linear (colonial) story is remembered and perpetuated.

As for Cole’s next point, how do monuments allow us to visualize what is to come in the future? There is an element of prophecy in his statement which leads me to believe that to see what is to come we must truly consider the agency and implications that these monuments have, and what they represent. Let’s return to the early etymological root of the word “monument”: “to advise or to warn.” Could monuments be performing a warning for the future? How do we come to recognize these historical spectres, these things that as Derrida claims, “elude us as spectators, most of all because we believe that looking is sufficient?” (1994, 11). What if we consider the ghostly reverberations of colonial monuments, following Tuck and Ree’s understanding of haunting as the “relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society’s assurances of innocence and reconciliation” (2013, 642)? Haunting, they argue is “both acute and general; individuals are haunted, but so are societies” (642). How can we come to recognize these hauntings through the re-working of memories through interventionist performances with monuments?

Derrida writes that a spectre “is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*” evoking a practice of “being-with ghosts.” This “coming back” involves a politics of memory, inheritance, and generations that call for speaking of certain others who are not present nor presently living, in the name of a justice that exceeds the law. In this way, to be just is to be responsible “beyond the living present in general—and beyond its simple negative reversal” (Derrida 1994, xix). Likewise, Avery Gordon remarks that “ghosts are never innocent: the unhallowed dead of the modern project drag in the pathos of their loss and the violence of the force that made them, their sheets and chains” (2008, 22). What, why, and for whom do monuments perform? What stories do they tell us about the past, and how can relating to them (heeding their warnings) challenge linear historical narratives and future historiographies? Performances and rituals also occur *around* the objects/things/monuments which can become representational of colonial desires and hunger for particular knowledge;⁸ these customs perform history’s colonial residues through celebrations and ribbon cuttings, and they generate energy, respect and honorary status to past relics. The monument then becomes a kind of de facto archive from which history is projected and perceived, but history according to whom?

Deep Time

Jill Lane’s understanding of deep time frames how historical formations are articulated through complex geometry and temporality across geographies. Deep time becomes a way to “make visible the competing tensions—moving on a north-south and east-west axis of imperial settlement, anticolonial struggle and neocolonial domination that inform the histories of nation, community and identity” (2010, 115) and a way to reduce the thick conditioning of linear, cartographic thinking.⁹

According to Lane, the Americas (or the hemispheric) “may be usefully engaged as a set of connected practices in deep time rather than as continental mass in uniform shape” (2010, 113). Reconnecting the Americas in this way reintegrates multiple national players into the neopolitical regimes of power and implicates Canada as well, since border crossing is the project of capital, labour, and imperialism.¹⁰ Hemispheric thinking around counter-monuments challenges our perception of the geographies that underwrite both the historical and the present in the Americas; specifically, making visible the “competing tensions . . . of imperial settlement, anticolonial struggle and neocolonial domination that inform the histories of nation, community and identity in the Americas” (Lane 2010, 115). Ruth Phillips asserts that a monument is a “deposit of the historical possession of power” (2012, 340), but that its memory cannot maintain a stable form over time. Similar to my analysis of the two examples outlined below, Phillips is also interested in the processes of how meanings and narrations of history around monuments alter over time, examining the ways in which monumental works of art become focal points for Indigenous peoples’ contestations of settler narratives of history. Both counter-monument performances outlined below intervene in settler constructions of monument and memory by revising “specific Canadian historical discourses that have silenced Indigenous memory” (Phillips 2012, 340). I travel now into my first example, a socially engaged land art monument at the US/México border.

Postcommodity—Repellent Fence

For three days in October 2015, the interdisciplinary arts collective Postcommodity launched their socially collaborative, temporary land art installation, *Repellent Fence* (*Valla Repelente* in Spanish). In collaboration with local communities on both sides of the border, institutional and government organizations, volunteers, and publics, the project culminated in the establishment of a fleeting, large-scale outdoor monument located near Douglas, Arizona and Agua Prieta, Sonora. The two-mile-long ephemeral monument perpendicularly crossed the US/ México border and highlighted the politics of the border’s division of Indigenous nations, illuminating the Indigeneity of many of the people who are crossing the border daily as well as those individuals whose lives have been informed by living and working in the borderland regions. The work now lives on through online photographs, interviews, articles, and conversations, and has been memorialized through Sam Wainwright Douglas’s documentary about the project, *Through the Repellent Fence*, which provides a glimpse into the arduous process behind creating and leading up to the three-day monument performance.¹¹ Border crossing projects have become more relevant and urgent than ever with the Trump Administration’s proposed wall, immigration policies, and legislation which forcibly separates migrant families caught attempting to cross the Southern border.¹²

Repellent Fence incorporated twenty-six giant scare-eye balloons (made of PVC), each ten feet in diameter, evenly spaced, filled with helium, hovering high in the sky, literally intercepting the contested Frontera—reaching one hundred feet above the desert floor, creating a two-mile-long visual link between Douglas, Arizona and Agua Prieta, Sonora. These scare-eye balloons are typically intended for the commercial purpose of repelling birds from fruit trees and gardens—usually inefficiently. The vibrant inflatable balloons were spherical and red, blue, yellow, black and white in color, emblazoned with an “open eye” in the centre. At Toronto’s Creative Time Summit¹³ in 2017, members of Postcommodity discussed how the balloons represented Indigenous medicine colours and connoted an Indigenous iconography and consciousness that exists throughout the Americas—jokingly calling these balloons “consumer-product Indigenous ready-mades.” The *re*-appropriation of this orbic iconography visually demonstrated a more expansive historical interconnectedness of

Indigenous peoples throughout the hemisphere—from South America to Canada—that reached beneath and beyond the temporal limits of linear historical narratives of the hard, physical border which divides nation states. The scare-eye balloons visually and metaphorically indexed a deeper history at the particular border site and a “long view history of trade between Indigenous peoples” before European arrival (Chacon, Martínez, and Twist quoted in Irwin 2017, 6).

While Postcommodity’s counter-monument was temporary, the project itself was more long-lasting and processual (ten years in the making)—given the geopolitical site specificity and complexity of *Repellent Fence*, many individuals were involved in manifesting the project. It included the participation of “borderlands stakeholders, across diversity and interests, in generative conversations—as a means of broadcasting complex approximations about the complexity of movement (peoples, cultures, ideologies and capital) of U.S./México trans border systems” (Postmodernity 2017) and knowledges. *Repellent Fence* highlighted discourses of race and immigration beyond the logic of partisanship, illuminating how both Canada and US political-economic nation-states are settler colonial societies premised upon Indigenous genocide, imperialism, and immigrant labour. As a counter-monument, *Repellent Fence* performed shared, complex remembering across time—it became a harbinger of the memories and dreams of others, signalling the approach of a future. Bring to mind now the meditative, dreamlike quality of the large, luminous wavering scare eye balloons drifting high in the warm desert breeze, dancing in the wind, traversing the border: at once their own ghost-like apparitions and autonomous objects imbued with culturally specific meanings and memories. Viewers were asked to deeply listen to (and to *feel*) what teachings these transitory objects were offering. The tethered balloons exerted their independence while rebelling against utilitarian instrumentalization. They did not signify a border-as-usual politic but rather a transcendent and complex reimagining of national narratives, histories, and belongings.

This ephemeral monument temporarily resisted contemporary spells of genesis amnesia—the systematic forgetting of colonial and imperial histories—and attempted to complicate geopolitical discourses beyond the logics of divisive us-and-them politics. Through *Repellent Fence*, Postcommodity performed what they have termed an “Indigenous reimagined ceremony”¹⁴ meant to temporarily reindigenize the borderlands and complicate discourses between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Irwin 2017, 6). The land in this ceremony¹⁵ became a mediator and a means for re-building public memory and recovering knowledge in a trans-border context. Postcommodity’s performed border line functioned through an Indigenous lens¹⁶ to probe hemispheric questions of the global market, as well as public perceptions and individual actions that “comprise the ever-expanding, multinational, multiracial and multiethnic colonizing force that is defining the 21st Century through ever increasing velocities and complex forms of violence” (Postcommodity 2017). The goal of this project, the group has stated, was to:

shift trans border discourses away from dehumanizing and polarizing constructs of nationalism and globalization, and to reposition discourses into a dialogue that is respectful of the Indigeneity upon which borders and trade policies have been fabricated using the borderlands as a metaphor to acknowledge and honor the Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere—both those who are experiencing diaspora, and those who are coping with the militarization of their ancestral homelands. (Postcommodity 2017)

The group asserts that *Repellent Fence* “recognizes all Indigenous peoples that are intermeshed in the theater of the contemporary immigration crisis of the Americas” (Postcommodity 2017). It bi-

directionally reached across the US/Mexico border—symbolically demonstrating the “interconnectedness of the Western Hemisphere by recognizing the land, indigenous peoples, history, relationships, movement and communication” (Postcommodity 2017). This metaphoric gesture demonstrated how hemispheric understandings of time and history might complicate linearly constructed knowledge assumptions about cultures, languages, and communities in the area and gave voice to the land and people who exist and live within the borderland regions.

Repellent Fence performed a metaphoric border crossing, symbolically stitching together the US and México, encouraging discourse that challenges the political and economic processes that are destabilizing local communities and geographies at the frontier. It asked: How have Indigenous people living on their ancestral territories become “illegal aliens” in their own homelands, unrecognized by the state? It challenged viewers to consider the monuments (and monumental remains)¹⁷ of colonialism *beyond and beneath* official statues and erected memorials and how these colonial phantoms may inform the future. In her book *Mohawk Interruptus: A Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (2014), Audra Simpson writes about border crossing from the perspective of the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke (part of the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacies) who live on either side of the Canada-US border. Simpson illuminates how Iroquois crossers perceive themselves as members of a sovereign nation while the state and settler law do not. Simpson makes clear that not all border crossers are “transgressors” because of their temporal and rights-based relationship to the nation-states of the United States and Canada (2014, 124). She clarifies that these relations are “temporal because the Haudenosaunee predate both political regimes” and, in fact, the “geopolitical boundary of the United States-Canada border actually transgresses *them*” (124). Similarly, *Repellent Fence* haunted and intercepted the ongoing colonial present by illuminating the systemic erasure of Indigenous peoples while simultaneously inscribing a different historical narrative upon the land, as well as memories and stories around the México/US border. In this new instance, the group created a temporary bridge of interconnectedness between nations within the Americas versus a “hard” line that divides.

The group claims that this temporary monument acted “as a suture that stitches the peoples of the Americas together” (Postcommodity 2017), a mission I connect to Lane’s understanding of hemispheric deep time as outlined above. *Repellent Fence* sharpened and brought into focus the “deep and textured relationships and practices” (Lane 2010, 113) that have sewn the Americas together, providing a temporal experience that exceeds the lineament of European monochronic temporality. It brought those who encountered the zigzagging monument into a dizzying understanding of the physical geographic boundary and the implications and complex histories that lay beneath the material structure. *Repellent Fence* temporarily and visually integrated deep time into a geopolitically contested, militarized area within the western hemisphere by acknowledging the Indigeneity of the people who are crossing the border to recover memory of the land at the border which divides “nations.” Relatedly, Tracy Davis has troubled ideas of linear time (past, present, future—or chrononormativity) by examining performative time’s ability to traverse one’s relation to time, space, and place—allowing us to understand the world in different ways.¹⁸

Archiving Memory

Performance is often described as that which disappears—the ephemeral—only to occur or be experienced once.¹⁹ In thinking through monument as performance, what does it mean for these objects to act in ways that extend beyond memorialization? What are their deeper meanings when

they act autonomously and how do individuals come to attach themselves relationally, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually to these monumental things? Because *Repellent Fence* was a fleeting and short-lived installation—ephemeral—it too disappeared. But it did not disappear for those who encountered it as it lives on in memory, in ideas, in writing, in conversations. It left traces and residual imprints for all who were involved with its dissolvable existence and provided a temporary, imaginative alternative to linear thinking and being, offering a hemispheric way to relate to space and time. *Repellent Fence* temporarily exceeded the limits of “fact” as well as colonial and imperial histories by offering a moment to dream alternative realities, demonstrating the deeper interconnectedness of the hemisphere. Postcommodity momentarily interrupted the particular methods by which the colonial world-system maintains power through the “structures of identity, ethnicity, race, experience, and knowledge production while directing attention to the ways in which border people live outside of the confines of the nation-state” (Irwin 2017, 6).

The veritable act of “disappearing” troubles the notion that performance can be only once occurring—that it is lost, un-archivable, vanished.²⁰ Performance is the antithesis of disappearance—it is the sensorial impressions, memories, traumas, and spirit that hold a more profound and holistic understanding of the past, present, and future. Sherene Razack has stated that we must “uncover the hierarchies that are protected and the violence that is hidden when we believe such spatial relations and subjects to be naturally occurring” (2000, 128). Referring to the case of Pamela George, an Indigenous woman who was beaten to death by two white university students in Canada, Razack states, “race, social position, and . . . gender were indeed made to disappear” (2000, 155). Systemic forces perform these invisible actions constantly through repeated patterns—we cannot necessarily *see* the law functioning, or always visualize structural violence while it occurs, but we know these structural repetitions inform daily life, leaving residual traces. What does it mean (as an individual or as a nation) to not be able to remember—or even know for that matter the legacies of imperialism and colonial violence? If the monument is “what remains,” what is the legacy of the disappeared? The affective remains of these unimaginably violent colonial disappearances—through an assaultive failure to care and even death—transmit a larger more troubling knowledge: that of systemic erasure.

Rebecca Schneider troubles the idea that performance is destined for disappearance. From the Greek definition of “archive,” we can understand that the word/tool is linked to the “achron” (head of state)—one who represents the law and upholds “system of its enunciability” (Schneider 2011, 97). It is precisely *forgetting* that the representative powers of the archive would have us *remember*: that colonialism is a historical issue. To continually remember/embody/know threatens archival and systemic forgetting. Embodied knowledge transmissions haunt the colonial present and refuse an overlooking of the disappearance of Indigenous histories. As an ephemeral monument, *Repellent Fence* performed an act of transfer (see Taylor 2007); physicalizing the spirits of past injustices while creating a space for sharing embodied knowledge situated within a living archive.²¹

In considering new materialist relationality to/with objects, Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy suggest that focusing on the agency of the object “trouble[s] traditional Western hierarchies that place humans at the top of a ‘great chain of being by insisting on the dynamic collaborations that occur daily between nonhuman and human entities’” (2014, 5). The agential force in these monuments is inherent in their ability to challenge and make porous dominant national scripts as “activated objects.” Likewise, Erin Hurley explains how thing theory and new materialism consider the relational ways matter and objects can and do (inter)act as active participants with a lively, “performative force,” rather than being “inert and determined” (2017, 265). This is significant for a monument’s status as an agential object enables its ability to “do” things—as actants with the

potential to affect human and nonhuman worlds (Schweitzer and Zerdy 2014, 2–4) and help formulate human subjectivity. It is important not to overlook that Indigenous communities and worldviews have considered the nonhierarchical relationality with nonhuman entities long before the creation of “new materialism” as a “field” of knowledge. I navigate north now to a different monument performance that took place in Toronto, Canada in 2017, which similarly renegotiated the ways in which stories are told within geospatially contested histories.

Life of a Craphead—King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River

Through their performance action, Life of a Craphead literally (and metaphorically) floated a symbolic colonial relic down Toronto’s Don River while viewers watched a performed version of history drift away (and at times outright sink). The performance art pair created a life-sized replica of a real King Edward VII equestrian statue that is currently situated in Toronto’s Queen’s Park, pulled it upstream by kayak, and floated it back down. This anti-monument performance series, lovingly entitled *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River*, was performed during four Sundays between October 29 and November 19, 2017. It could be seen by walking along the Lower Don Trail in Toronto and was designed to float as if the statue had been toppled. This performance series emerged around the same time as the controversies and protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, around the removal of Confederate statues.



Life of a Craphead, *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River* (2017). Image: Chris Helgren.

In the wake of Canada’s supposed 150th birthday, Life of a Craphead’s performance series actively asked viewers to question Canada’s colonial past and further, to consider why Canada, and Toronto more specifically, is so intent on celebrating its intimate colonial/imperial ties. The performance

raises the rather strange question of why Toronto would want to continue to celebrate a discarded and outright rejected relic of *India's* colonial history—a monument already been removed in another national historical and colonial context. India no longer wanted to house this continuing symbol of British Empire; yet, Toronto accepted it, giving it new life as a public monument to be remounted and to live on again in a public park—it even still bears a plaque reading “The Emperor of India.” Life of a Craphead’s performance highlights Canada’s complicity in its own violent colonial histories, its desire to mask, and hemispheric and transoceanic imperial connections via South Asia. It brings attention to the often-violent translational global flow of material circulation and appropriation required to produce such works and transcontinental flows of uneven systems of exchange. The performance created a counter-historical narrative bringing to light another side of Canada as not simply a friendly, multicultural, refugee-accepting nation. It highlighted the uneasy settler Canadian relationship to the nation-state.

On their website, the duo explains that this project intended to explore the histories and decisions that continue to shape Toronto’s public space and public art, and they wanted to create the illusion that the statue had been toppled, “dumped” and discarded into the Don River. The Don River became a stage. The site-specific project addressed the “persistence of power as it manifests in public art and public monuments—symbols that are often preserved in perpetuity, even when the stories we want to celebrate change” (Life of a Craphead 2017). The actual King Edward VII statue was originally erected in Delhi, India, in 1922 to commemorate King Edward VII’s historic role as the Emperor of India. After independence, the British imperial symbol was cast off and set to be destroyed—a memory of colonial rule no longer desired by India’s people. Years later, however, a prominent Toronto resident and art collector brought the statue to Toronto in appreciation of its craftsmanship.²² After being shipped across the Atlantic, it was placed in Queen’s Park in 1969 despite public outcry and criticism (Warkentin 2010, 77). The performance tackled the ongoing glorification of colonial genocide through public monuments, and does so at a moment when the relevance of such monuments is being called into question.²³ The group state that they use humour as a methodology²⁴ to examine how abuses of power and authority are used in culture and society. They started planning for this public piece before the protests and violent events of Charlottesville occurred around the removal of Confederate monuments²⁵ (also known as the “Unite the Right” rally). It became clear to the pair that the project would have new, unanticipated resonance given the contemporary political context surrounding historical monuments.

The artist-dyad’s employment of site specificity on/in the Don River is an important consideration here. The performance location was central in drawing attention to another time—1958—when Princess Margaret was visiting Toronto, nearing the end of an extensive Royal Tour of Canada. The city was determined to show off the beauty and wonder of Toronto; however, at the time, the Don River was “heavily polluted and laden with scum, its banks littered with all varieties of filth, and the whole sending up foul odours” (MacGregor 2017). With Princess Margaret’s fast approaching visit, the city panicked over the putrid smell and allegedly decided to mask the stench by dumping chlorine and gallons of perfume into the river (MacGregor 2017). I take note of this funny historical anecdote because of the city’s eager action to “cover,” and I consider the ways in which certain national monuments continue to “cover” or “mask” ongoing colonial truths in Canada. Again, we might ask: Whose histories are we celebrating with these colonial monuments, and whose histories are actively erased in these memorializing commemorations? Life of Craphead’s performance gesture keeps the colonial monument intact (the original statue can still be found mounted in Queen’s Park, Toronto) while unsettling its historiographical, imperial journey through the performance.

Monumental Opposition

The *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue* performance also had its protestors—illuminating the blurry demarcation between performance art interventions and live protest. Canadian Conservative commentator and recent Toronto mayoral candidate Faith Goldy interviewed George Hutcheson, Director of Students for Western Civilisation (SWC)²⁶ in Toronto who, with a couple of other members of the group, were thought to have been present at one of the *Life of a Craphead* performances to “peacefully protest.”²⁷ Throughout the interview Goldy and Hutcheson reveal that they are both invested in protecting “European heritage” by exposing what they call “ethnocide” via the supposed “erasure of our culture whether it be prime ministers off our banknotes, our founding father of confederation off of our public schools, his statue being defaced and what have you” (Goldy 2017). They share the belief that there is a deliberate destruction of European culture happening in Canada vis-à-vis multiculturalism and through the removal of historical Canadian monuments. It is fascinating that these two are so intent on “exposing” this supposed destruction of European culture and people with zero acknowledgements of the histories of ongoing cultural destruction and genocide of Indigenous people of Canada, or the criminal and racist logic of dispossession imposed upon these communities by the Canadian nation-state. SWC’s website states that the group closely identifies its cause of white nationalism with the glorification of local colonial monuments, and their latest eerie poster campaign shows white men standing next to three Toronto statues juxtaposed with the slogans “Europa Forever” and “Europa Eternal,” among others.²⁸



Armed police surround a Confederate monument during a protest to remove the “Silent Sam” statue at the University of North Carolina (2017). Image: Chuck Liddy.

In Canada, colonial monuments celebrating the first Canadian prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, abound, and artists “talking back” to statues is not new.²⁹ Macdonald is revered in the Canadian national imaginary, but not often remembered for his role in the systematic erasure of Indigenous peoples.³⁰ Métis writer and performance artist David Garneau³¹ has performed a piece

entitled *Dear John, Louis David Riel* in Kingston, Ontario in which Garneau, performing as Riel, holds a silent conversation with the statue of John A. Macdonald. In an interview, Garneau claims, “there’s a recent tradition with a number of artists, Indigenous artists . . . who have been working with statues” (CBC News 2017). He continues, “Indigenous folks do believe that material objects actually have spirits, have some sense of communion. And it’s not just Indigenous people—non-Indigenous people erected this statue because they believe the same thing, that there’s something there. It’s not just a hunk of metal” (CBC News 2017). Garneau is reflecting the power of monument interventions in unsettling historical narratives. Through live artistic intervention, these monuments become concerned with the symbolic realm and with reshaping our individual and collective imaginaries, helping envisage futures beyond colonial commemoration.

This relates to Biljana Jancic’s statement that through “shifting the monument’s traditional signification of historical continuity and permanence, to a temporality favouring contemporary ideas around immediacy and ‘presentness,’ the artist allow[s] the inscriptions accrued on [the] monument to be in a constant state of renewal.”³² Jancic (2010) states that “monumentalisation of social interventions interferes with the incessant mobility of contemporary life and places a question mark before the habitual stream of everyday consciousness.” Monument interventions provide a moment of rupture in otherwise structured, linear historical narratives and in this way are a “welcome derailment that can cause conflicting feelings of discomfort because they require a readjustment within an otherwise structured, familiar situation” (Jancic 2010).

Heeding Future Warnings

Contemporary renewal of subjective historical meanings has occurred with both *Repellent Fence* and *King Edward VII Equestrian Statue Floating Down the Don River*. Through these works, we learn that the meanings of monuments are not fixed: both interventions allow a glimpse of the past while engendering visions of new futures. Onlookers who engaged with either of these counter-monument performances were summoned into a temporal experience outside of the given historical narrative or the formulaic arrangement of linear time. Through both of these monument performances, viewers were gifted the opportunity to reflect on the past, asked to be curious about the present, and prompted to wonder about the future; they were asked to remember, and to listen to different stories—perhaps in a new way.

Naturally, each viewer’s affective reactions toward each “new” monument would differ significantly based on subject positionality (race, class, gender), ideology, historical beliefs, and political viewpoints; however, both *Repellent Fence* and *King Edward VII* accomplish a temporary disruption in linear stories. These in-the-moment, live interventions of/with performance monuments challenge the habitual stream of everyday historiographical consciousness and perform temporal fissures for spectators by challenging the chrononormative organization of serial time, reframing the cultural and historical meaning of the monument in question. The performances in this article both created alternative and decolonial imaginings for disrupting chronological norms and challenged certain bodies of knowledge and fixed temporalities of heteronormative, colonial, capitalist narratives (Ahmed 2013) through creating new and different temporal ontologies. For the various publics who engaged with these monument performances there was a kind of temporal and embodied (un)learning on offer that occurred in the moment of encounter; or, at the very least, there was an embodied experience. Considering relationality as a temporal practice means cultivating relations between everything around us (human and non) and ourselves. Considering temporary monuments

as having power to queer linear temporalities can reject enforced normative social “truths” and singular narratives of time and history.

In moving forward and perhaps heeding monumental warning, let us consider the “implications” of multiple histories that move across, beyond, and through time, which undergird the messy relationship between colonialism and its monuments. With Donald Trump’s recent announcement of the proposed political removal of two environmentally and culturally significant national land monuments in southeastern Utah—Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante³³—as well as ongoing tensions and mounting controversies surrounding the removal of historical monuments throughout the Americas, it becomes clear that now more than ever, we need to continue to “talk back.” We need new methods for “doing” political transgression that consider the body as a location for epistemological discovery and as a site of knowledge, creating new metaphors and spaces for new political memory. Beyond talking back, we also need to learn to listen and struggle to truly hear and to heed the warnings that monuments offer by broadening understandings and complicating historiographical narratives. Perhaps we might begin to let monuments remind us of the past and advise us of new futures. Both site-specific public monument performances discussed in this article opened space and time for rethinking and reimagining cartographies of power and alternate, longer, deeper trajectories of history. Both works encouraged a hemispheric *re*-thinking of monuments and inspired ongoing reflections on similar colonial monuments across the Americas through the temporal unveiling of the unsettling colonial legacies that bind us.

Notes

1. Excerpt of poem by Gean Moreno and Postcommodity in *Art in America* artist feature (2017).
2. Postcommodity currently consists of two members: Cristóbal Martínez, and Kade L. Twist. The creation of *Repellent Fence* included a third and previous member of the collective, Raven Chacon. Their website states that their art functions as a shared Indigenous lens and voice to engage with the multiple and complex forces of twenty-first century violence.
3. Life of a Craphead consists of collaborators Amy Lam and Jon McCurley, both currently based in Toronto, Ontario. Their work spans performance art, film, and curation.
4. Jill Lane proposes that hemispheric approaches to performance studies challenge scholars to re-conceptualize geographies that underwrite histories and geographies of performance in the Americas by delineating shared historical experiences (2010, 114).
5. Robin Bernstein considers a “scriptive thing” an object that “like a play-script, broadly structures a performance while allowing for agency and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable” (12).
6. Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “monument.”
7. Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “monument.”
8. I am thinking of Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson’s use of the word “xwelitem” as a term used to describe settlers who have colonized the traditional territory of the Stó:lō people. This word, as Robinson notes, has deeper etymological meanings when we consider that it also means “the hungry ones.” To situate a conversation about colonial monuments within the context of the violence of literal settler/colonial consumption of land sets up space for truly considering what it *means* to accept and take responsibility for the past (and present, ongoing colonialism).

9. I link this also to Leanne Simpson's explanation of "transmotion" in *Dancing on our Turtles Back* (2011), 87–104. Transmotion is described as "pre-colonial movement patterns, wherein 'movement, change and fluidity were a reality' for Nishnaabeg people." In her discussion of transmotion, Heather Davis-Fisch elaborates that transmotion addresses "not only physical movement across the land but also the cultural, political, and spiritual implications of these patterns" (2017, 11).
10. Additionally, controversies currently surround Canada's "Smart Border Action Program" which requires that refugee claimants request refugee protection in the first safe country they arrive in—but under Canadian law, the United States is the only country designated as a safe third country.
11. I have only experienced *Repellent Fence* through images, videos, texts, and in-person artist talks delivered by members of Postcommodity.
12. Since April 2018, the Trump administration has adopted a "zero tolerance" policy and decreed that border-crossers should be criminally prosecuted. Criminal defendants cannot have children with them in jail, so parents and children are separated. Trump made it a political issue in the November 6, 2018, midterm congressional election, threatened to cut off regional aid, close the US/México border, and deploy troops there if México failed to halt migrants entering the US.
13. The Creative Time Summit is a US-based arts organization that supports and promotes politically engaged art.
14. The group stated this during their talk at Creative Time Summit 2017.
15. In Agua Prieta during the launch of the balloons, participants shared stories and prayers around each balloon, Martínez said, resulting in an unexpectedly emotional and spiritual event (Irwin 2017).
16. Postcommodity are careful in distinguishing that their work applies an Indigenous *lens*, rather than a focus on Indigenous *people*.
17. Performance theorist Rebecca Schneider (2011) has suggested that remains (through disappearance), too, perform their materiality. Schneider resists the temporal logic of the once occurring.
18. In problematizing this mostly unconscious process of making sense of the self through a historical past, Tracy Davis applies Judith Butler's description of performativity as "the forcible reiteration of norms, which links us to the past yet also enables inauthenticity, masquerade, and parody" (Davis 2010, 144).
19. Peggy Phelan has written about performance as that which occurs always "at the vanishing point" or that which "cannot be saved, recorded, or documented" and is always and only in the present. See Phelan (1993), 146.
20. I am certainly not the first to take issue with the idea that a performance can only be once occurring. Other scholars such as Diana Taylor, José Esteban Muñoz, Joseph Roach, Rebecca Schneider, and Julie Nagam (to name a few) have troubled this theory as well.
21. Julie Nagam refers to the "living archive" in her discussion of Christi Belcourt's project *Walking with Our Sisters*. Nagam acknowledges "forms of knowledge that reside in individual bodies, in communities, and in the spaces that they daily inhabit" (2017, 119). She states, there are "ways of knowing that have a much longer history and are significantly bound to Indigenous geographies, concepts of space, and stories of place" (117).

22. This was an affluent Toronto citizen and former MP for Rosedale named Henry Jackman. Jackman acquired the equestrian statue from the Government of India for \$10,000 and also paid for it to be shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to Toronto. See Warkentin (2010), 76–78.

23. I am referring here to protests over monuments being removed in Charlottesville, Virginia, and in downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia, where a statue of British military officer Edward Cornwallis was taken down. In Halifax, members of the alt-right group known as the “Proud Boys” interrupted a Mi’kmaw ceremony during the protests. On Facebook, the group describes itself as “a fraternal organization of Western Chauvinists who will no longer apologize for creating the modern world.” Most recently, protestors on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill forcibly pulled down a bronze statue of Confederate soldier “Silent Sam.” In New Orleans, Louisiana monuments of Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard have been removed as well as a monument honouring the White League, a Reconstruction-era organization of racial militants.

24. https://video.vice.com/en_ca/video/this-comedy-art-duo-dumped-a-controversial-statue-in-a-river/.

25. Charlottesville, Virginia, saw an outburst of protests in the summer of 2017 by white nationalists spurred by the removal of a statue memorializing Robert E. Lee from Emancipation Park. The protests were initially led by far-right leader and white supremacist Richard Spencer. The “Unite the Right” rally was attended by protesters including white supremacists, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, and Klansmen. Marchers chanted racist and anti-Semitic slogans and carried rifles, Confederate battle flags, and anti-Muslim banners. The rally was also attended by hundreds of counter-protesters. During the protest a vehicle drove into a crowd of counter-protesters marching through the downtown area before speeding away, resulting in one death and leaving more than a dozen others injured.

26. <https://www.facebook.com/StudentsForWesternCiv/>.

27. “White Supremacists Target Anti-Monument Performance.” *Canadian Art*, November 15, 2017.

28. <http://studentsforwesterncivilization.com>.

29. In 2015 in Kingston, Ontario (traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory) a performance series took place entitled *Talkin’ Back to Johnny Mac* in which Métis curator Erin Sutherland invited artists to respond to the Canadian celebration of European settler history and nationalism. Artists included Leah Decter, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Peter Morin, David Garneau, and Adrian Stimson.

30. Macdonald introduced the Indian Act in 1867, making Indigenous people wards of the Canadian state. He is also responsible for introducing residential schools.

31. Garneau also performed in *Talkin’ Back to Johnny Mac*.

32. Jancic is referring here to Sydney-based artist Astra Howard’s 2007 series *Action Research / Performance Project*.

33. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-proclamation-modifying-bears-ears-national-monument/>.

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From *Being One* to *Being-in-Common*: Political Performativity, Proxemics, and the Joys of Provisional Unity

Gillian Whiteley

Introduction

Over the last couple of decades or so, ever-expanding digital platforms have offered extensive possibilities for individuals to re-present and curate the actions and interventions of the “performed self.” Facilitated by mobile technologies and social media, artists, transnational activists and citizens across the globe have responded creatively to occupations, insurrections, and uprisings as well as smaller-scale local campaigns, sharing tactics and practices. Protests, demonstrations, and interventions have produced a plethora of new forms of collective “political performativity.” This interaction of political activism and performance has received sustained critical analysis and the “performative turn” has become endemic across a range of disciplines.

In 2012, Richard Schechner identified the emergence of “performance activism” as a phenomenon which crosses not only geographic but emotional, ideological, political and personal borders, using play and experimentation to effect *new social relations*.¹ Having generated discourses of “performativity” in the 1990s, Judith Butler, in her analysis of Occupy in 2011, subsequently consolidated in *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), combined embodied performative acts with radical politics. Moreover, collective political performativity has been documented in a range of recent publications and exhibitions such as Liz McQuiston’s *Visual Impact, Creative Dissent in the 21st Century* (2015) and Georges Didi-Huberman’s *Uprisings* (2016), staged at the Jeu de Paume in Paris and accompanied by a substantial publication with specially commissioned essays by key theorists including Judith Butler, Antonio Negri, and Jacques Rancière.

But exactly what form of new social relations, or more precisely, what kind of emancipatory political engagement is facilitated by acts of political performativity? What happens subjectively and affectively when individuals come together in collective actions of performative protest and dissent at particular historical and located conjunctures? How, if at all, does a group of dissenting individuals become beings-in-common? And is performance a key element?

To answer these questions, I make some preliminary comments on performance, the performative turn, the discourse of performativity, and its relationship to political activism. I then consider three distinct historically and culturally situated acts of collective political performativity, viewed as “improvisational forms of public assembly” (Butler 2015, 22). Diana Taylor articulates performance as “vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called ‘twice-behaved behavior’” (Taylor 2003, 2–3). The selected acts of collective political performativity explored here are “vital acts of transfer”; they share a “repertoire” of practices across place and time. In each case, an agentic image or utterance is produced, circulated and re-enacted or re-iterated elsewhere by strangers congregating in encounters, occupying space, forming transitory improvisational assemblies.

Gillian Whiteley is senior lecturer in Art History and Visual Culture and coordinator of the Politicized Research Group at Loughborough University. Current projects include an edited book, *Art, Politics and the Pamphleteer*, for the RadicalAesthetics–RadicalArt series at Bloomsbury.

The three acts will be examined through ontologies of “being plural,” addressing the shift from “being singular” to “being-in-common” (Nancy 2000). Acknowledging Lauren Berlant’s troubling of utopian perspectives on “commoning” activities, I conclude that public participative modes of performance, in particular, facilitate the development of alternative subjectivities through affective bodily encounters between strangers. Congregations of bodies as vehicles of affectivity (Butler 2015) become encounters of incipient commoning (Stavrvides 2016). They produce a provisional unity, resonating with what Jeremy Gilbert refers to as the boundlessness, the “infinite relationality” (Gilbert 2014) of the human condition. There is something irresistible about activities that involve coming together in common endeavour for mutual benefit and in a spirit of co-operation. In an era of radical populist politics of both the right and the left,² though, becoming enamoured of provisional alliances needs a dose of skepticism and that needs to be kept in mind through the following sections.

Performance and the “Performative Turn”

Simply and succinctly, Elin Diamond notes that performance has two elements: it is always “a doing” and “a thing done.” For her, it encompasses

certain embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others or by the watching self . . . and the thing done, the completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted and passionately revisited across a pre-existing discursive field. (Diamond 1996, 1)

Diamond’s definition is useful, but it confines performance temporally to being a “completed event.” Lisa Goodman provides a more fluid interpretation of performance, describing it as an act of embodiment, “translating ideas through physicalisation as well as intellectualisation” (Goodman 2000, 7). However, using the term “performative” as a descriptor offers a further extension to an understanding of performance, enabling an emphasis on performance as an ongoing event, an activity in which something happens through time. It holds the possibility that a performance might oscillate temporally between past, present, and some point yet to come. Performativity allows us to think about performance not only as a “mode” of social activity, but also as an ongoing processual process rather than a completed one.

Now, it almost goes without saying that, hackneyed as the rhetoric of successive “turns” within contemporary critical and arts theory has become, the performative turn has become endemic across a range of disciplines.³ Although the term is rooted in the linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin’s earlier theorizing of the “speech act” as a “performative utterance,”⁴ Judith Butler played a major role in theorizing the performative in the 1990s (see Butler 1990; Butler 1993; Butler [1988] 1997; Osborne and Segal 1994), leading Diamond to exclaim, “performance discourse and its new theoretical partner—performativity—are dominating critical discussions almost to the point of stupefaction” (Diamond in Goodman and de Gay 2000, 67). Twenty years on, with new digital and social media playing a key role in engendering DIY cultures of performativity, the trope and practices associated with performance are thoroughly embedded in the domain of the visual arts. Within the field of contemporary art practice, “performance art” is no longer a subsidiary niche, exemplified perhaps by the opening of *The Tanks* at Tate Modern in 2012⁵ (billed as the world’s first gallery dedicated to performance and live artists): performance art has become part of the experience of the London cultural tourist. In his piece written on its inauguration—“How Performance Art Took Over”—the

Guardian's art critic Adrian Searle remarked that the art of performance had now reached its apogee. Highlighting the proliferation of performance, enactments and immersive installations in contemporary practice, he remarked “performance, in fact, is now where it’s at; it’s hard to think of much recent art that isn’t, at some level, performative. And who cares about genre any more, anyway?” (Searle 2012). Indeed, neither is performativity confined to human activity, as posthumanists (see Barad 2003) and new materialists (see Lange-Berndt 2015; Coole and Frost 2010) underline the agentic properties of materials and objects, and projects such as Gavin Grindon’s exhibition *Disobedient Objects*, staged at the Victoria & Albert Museum (Flood and Grindon 2014), demonstrated how objects play a performative role in resistance and revolutionary narratives.

Political Performativity

Showing up, standing, breathing, moving, standing still, speech, and silence are all aspects of a sudden assembly, an unforeseen form of *political performativity* that puts livable life at the forefront of politics. (Butler 2015, 18. My italics)

The engagement of “performance art” *with* radical politics has its history, exemplified by the extensive oeuvre of an artist such as Suzanne Lacy who, since the late 1960s, has worked on large-scale collaborative performance-based projects which have explored women’s lives and experiences from intersectional perspectives, gender and social class inequalities, race, ethnicity, ageing, violence, rural and urban deprivation and labour (Lacy 1995; Lacy 2010). Indeed, in 2012 the newly opened Tanks chose to re-stage Lacy’s *Crystal Quilt*, originally a three-year-long project first presented in 1987 in Minneapolis involving 430 women over the age of 60 sharing their views on growing older. The resulting performance was broadcast live on television and attended by over 3,000 people. In 2012, Lacy re-visited and re-worked the project, inviting hundreds of women over the age of 60 from across the UK who had taken part in significant activist movements and protests from the 1950s to the 1980s. They shared their personal stories in a series of workshops, culminating in the new participatory artwork *Silver Action*, a day-long public live and unscripted performance of staged conversations at the Tanks.

Equally, the sphere of radical politics itself has a long lineage of performative activity in urban and rural settings as its histories of pageants, parades, and processions over centuries are well documented.⁶ However, with the recent performance turn in social activism identified by Friedman and Holzman (2014), among others, it is the melding of the two into something we might call “political performativity” that is particularly interesting here. The live-streamed spectacle of marches, processions, demonstrations, occupations and various manifestations can be viewed as not theatre and not simply “life” but powerful performative acts.

These have been galvanized theoretically by Butler’s analysis of Occupy’s challenge to power through the performative body in “Body Alliance and the Politics of the Street” (Butler 2011) and, more recently, through her book *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Butler 2015). Working with Hannah Arendt’s ideas on the street as a stage or “space of appearance,”⁷ Butler asserts that when bodies congregate, they lay claim to public space and to the demand for a “livable life” and that this, in itself, constitutes a political act. While these acts of “plural action” can have divergent or convergent demands and may not be reducible to a single emancipatory claim, the gathering of gestural moving bodies and their acting in concert amounts to an expression of will: “*the*

assembly is already speaking before it utters any words, that by coming together it is *already* an enactment of a popular will” (Butler 2015, 156–57. Italics in original).

Having established some contextual understandings of what is meant by political performativity, I move on to consider the kinds of performance tactics employed in particular cases, the first being the Dutch Provo which briefly enacted mayhem in public in the mid-1960s as, I argue, a transitory “improvisational form of public assembly” (Butler 2015, 22) and to ask, what kind of politics was produced?



Opening ceremony of the exhibition *Because My Bike Was There* on the Prinsengracht in Amsterdam, March 19, 1966. The exhibition included photographs of police action during Provo demonstrations a few days before. The opening led to a confrontation with the police when the crowd did not comply with the order to spread. Photograph by Joost Anefo Evers. Dutch National Archives collection, Creative Commons image.

The Dutch Provo: Performative Utterances and Joyous Mayhem

When the electric clock by the Lutheran Church on the Spui pointed to the zero hour of midnight, the high priest appeared from an alleyway in full pontifical, sometimes daubed with paint, sometimes masked, and began walking magical circles round the Nicotine Demon while his disciples applauded and sang the Ugge-Ugge song. Sometimes there were hundreds listening to his sermons from the pedestal. They handed him paper, which he placed round the Lieverdje and wood, alcohol and matches. (Mulisch 1967, 67)

The White Bicycle Plan of 1966, involving the commandeering and free distribution of bicycles in the city of Amsterdam, was just one of the imaginative initiatives of the short-lived but highly influential movement known as Provo.⁸ Between 1965 and 1967, they issued manifestos on squatters’ rights and blueprints for social and car-free urban utopias, staged anarchic performances, directed anti-war and anti-Royalist riots in the streets, and created spontaneous happenings and

public spectacles.⁹ Presaging the post-Seattle amalgamation of performance and activism, the Provo's political performativity of public pranks, theatrical stunts and a gamut of playful strategies amounted to a politics of unruliness as a form of cultural resistance. Their activities align with Jan Cohen-Cruz's definition of "radical street performance" as that which "potentially creates a bridge between imagined and real action . . . responding directly to events as they occur spontaneously" (Cohen-Cruz 1998, 2).

The Provo's self-organized chants and impromptu slogans—and even the emblematic visual graphic of the "apple sign"—could be described as performative utterances in that they were not only affective but generated countercultural activity and constituted a kind of ramshackle political rhetoric. Provo voicings and acts were rapidly adopted and ritualized by a mass of unrelated strangers in public congregation in Amsterdam. Strangers paraded together singing the "Ugge-Ugge" song or chanting the ritualistic "something must happen," an agitational slogan and call for public participation incanted by the "high priest" Robert Jasper Grootveld. While the flamboyance of the Provo gave it high visibility, simultaneously, it was their *invisibility* which also appealed to youth *en masse*. Frequently appearing from nowhere, it often seemed that maybe Provo did not really exist; perhaps it was merely an "imago" (Fenger and Valkman 1974, 22). With a relatively small core of around thirty or so activists in Amsterdam and no formal membership (de Jong 1970, 14),¹⁰ a key Provo strategy was to utilize transience and contagion, fleetingly bringing strangers together in street acts of mass participation. With no formal vertical or hierarchical structure, the organization was rhizomatic;¹¹ ideas were spread through the viral motif of the apple image (with the dot representing the "magic centre" of Amsterdam), which frequently appeared overnight, and the use of "whiteness" as a ubiquitous form of insurgent branding. Smoke bombs were a common feature creating a ghostly "smoke-screen" through which people would appear on the streets and evaporate into nothingness.¹² The invisibility of Provo, underlined by the "whiting" out prank they practised, had all the characteristics of an audacious vanishing act, a magic trick.

Provo practices were not just contagious across the Netherlands but also spawned groups across Western Europe, in Scandinavia extending to the Eastern Bloc. They generated temporary assemblies that were active and creative. Pertinently, while they made efficacious use of distributing leaflets and posters (in itself a performative form of pamphleteering), participative performance—bodily encounters, "translating ideas through physicalisation" (see my earlier reference to Goodman 2007, 7)—was absolutely central to their activities.

Provo left a legacy of political performativity, not only in the Netherlands-based Kabouter movement which followed but in the later activities of groups such as the Polish underground protest movement known as the Orange Alternative, characterized by its signature graffiti of an emblematic "dwarf" (Grindon 2014; Kenney 2002; van Duyn 1972). Led by Waldemar Fydrych, the Orange Alternative staged happenings and absurd events, attracting mass participation on the streets from accidental passers-by. In 1988, in alliance with the broader Solidarity movement, it culminated in the manifestation of a mass counterpublic, a spontaneous assembly of ten thousand people processed through Wroclaw wearing orange dwarf hats, in opposition to the Soviet-supported regime.¹³

An analysis of the specific ideas of the Provo suggests that their politics were characteristically disorderly and disruptive, anarchist rather than Marxist, horizontal rather than hierarchical, operating on a series of plateaux, connecting rather than directing. In 2015, the Amsterdam graphic design studio Experimental Jetset referred to them as "part art movement and part political party . . . a

loose collective, consisting of individuals with very different ambitions: subversive agendas, artistic motives, utopian ideas, concrete plans” (Experimental Jetset 2016). Clearly, with an amorphous set of ideas with no consistent line and no organizational structures, Provo was not, nor ever could be a homogenous political movement. Rather, it was a fluid entity which drew on a range of creative strategies: essentially and, notably, without the assistance of web-based media, it brought individuals together in close physical proximity, creating a provisional unity based on performative street action and the generation of spontaneous improvisational assemblies elsewhere.

Standing Up, Standing Beside: Passive Acts of Collective Dissent

In the moment of uprising, they gather a certain strength or force from one another, from alliance itself, one formed by a shared rejection of the unlivable, emerging now as bodies whose political strength lies in its growing numbers. (Judith Butler in Didi-Huberman 2016, 25)

Provo strategies of creative dissent, melding an unruly politics with cultural activism, interchanging *political performativity* with *performative politics*, continue to resonate.¹⁴ The interchange with contemporary artistic practices has become so embedded that, on occasion, on a superficial reading at least, it is impossible to disentangle the two: exemplified by Jeremy Deller’s joy-full *faux* procession, staged at Manchester International Festival in 2009 (Rugoff et al. 2012).¹⁵ Pranksterism, tricksterism and participative forms of play have become *the* commonplace oppositional activity, contagious even, on the streets, across the Internet and in the public sphere with groups such as the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) and the black bloc countering political hegemonies by staging havoc in the spirit of joyous disobedience. Indeed, the marriage of mass choreographed performance and agitational political protest at the G20 Summit in Hamburg in July 2017, culminating in a joyous explosion of energy and togetherness,¹⁶ was a perfect exemplification of what Martin Patrick has elucidated as the performative and choreographic “reinvention” of public space (Patrick 2011).

Although often associated with it, political performativity is not exclusively applicable to Provo-style activities of physical mayhem and playful praxis in public space: passive acts of togetherness are just as likely to bring about unity of political endeavour. The 1960s witnessed the development of nonviolent acts of mass political protest and civil disobedience which do not involve violence or physical agitation, relying instead solely on the affective power of the coming together of inert bodies that are silent and still. On November 14, 1969, hundreds of supporters lay prone in protest at US involvement in the Vietnam war at the “moratorium” held in Sheep Meadow in New York’s Central Park, releasing thousands of black and white balloons (black for those who had died under Nixon and white for those symbolizing those who would die if the war continued). Borrowing from countercultural street theatre,¹⁷ by the mid-1970s the “die-in,” essentially, the taking over of a public space by inert bodies as an oppositional act,¹⁸ was part of the established repertoire of protest activities across North American and Europe. In the following decade, the die-in was a staple tactic of women protesting against nuclear weapons at Greenham Common,¹⁹ and it has been adopted to spectacular effect more recently by the Black Lives Matter campaign. At Harvard University in 2015, students staged a mass die-in for precisely 15½ minutes: 4½ to represent the number of hours unarmed Ferguson teenager Michael Brown’s body lay on the ground, and an additional 11 minutes to represent the 11 times Eric Garner, the man killed in New York, told police he could not breathe before he suffocated.²⁰



Erdem Gündüz, *Duran Adam*, protest performance, Taksim Square, Istanbul, 2013. With kind permission of Erdem Gündüz and Italo Rondinella. Photograph © Italo Rondinella, 2013. www.italorondinella.com

Before moving on to consider the ontology of beings-in-common and querying the nature of the political unity which is produced, I want to highlight one of the most powerful single performative acts of recent times which engaged with histories and currencies of passive political protest: the Turkish choreographer Erdem Gündüz's lone eight-hour *Standing Man* protest on June 18, 2013, in Taksim Square, Istanbul.²¹ Following the brutal suppression of the mass protests that had taken place through May and June in Gezi Park, Gündüz stood motionless, staring at the giant portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, a figure admired by the protestors. Initially ignored, he was joined throughout the day by thousands of anti-government protestors in this defiant act of silence in the Square, facing the Atatürk Kültür Merkezi cultural centre, a building due to be demolished under the president's plans to redevelop the Gezi Park area. In this context, the seemingly innocuous act of staring amounted to a political act of dissent.²² Such a dignified act resonated not only with indigenous cultures of spiritual and religious practices within the region but also with Western genealogies of performance art as endurance. Notably, when interviewed about the event, Gündüz claimed the act as a protest, while emphasizing that the artistic aspect is precisely what made the political statement even possible.

First of all it was not a performance. It was a protest. It was an individual activity which did not contain any violence within itself. . . . If you cannot perform political actions, you can start performing artistic actions. Because your political actions will be interfered with by the police and you will be beaten by the police, but you can perform an artistic action. (Gündüz interviewed by Banu Beyer and Sarah Maske in Weibel 2014, 586)

His silent vigil in the Square, disseminated through a set of powerful photographic images, went viral on social media, subsequently spreading to other cities in Turkey and beyond. Gündüz's affective moment of drama produced a memorable, iconic tableau which was rapidly re-produced, not just digitally but physically in spontaneous gatherings elsewhere. In his recounting of inactive resistance practices such as lie-ins, die-ins, and public fasts, of the Harvard students and others in the Black Lives Matter campaign, Iqbal notes the uniquely affective significance of this kind of performative form of communication: "The group performance that is the 'die-in' protest attempts to make a distinct *emotional imprint* on the spectator in a way that other communicative forms cannot" (Iqbal 2015. My italics).

Indeed, the *inaction* enacted by Gündüz highlights the kind of symbiosis and reciprocity that takes place between embodied political performativity and the *emotional imprint* produced by the image. With circulation, the image becomes agentic, it acts, it "performs" and leads to its physicalization and re-enactment elsewhere by strangers congregating in other performative encounters, occupying space, forming transitory improvisational assemblies elsewhere.

So, bodies come together in acts of political performativity, but what kind of sustained politics can possibly emerge from this? Is there something inherently emancipatory about bodies coming together in public space? What is the potentiality for oppositionality when strangers come together in public proximity?

Being One, Beings-in-Common

The plurality of beings is at the foundation [fondment] of Being. A single being is a contradiction in terms. (Nancy 2000, 12. Italics in original)

In addition to Butler's valuable insights into the political implications of bodies coming together discussed earlier, I want to draw on the work of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, whose extended essay *Being Singular Plural*, a lengthy philosophical rumination on being, offers pertinent thoughts on the very impossibility of singularity (Nancy 2000). While acknowledging Marx's apprehension of humanity as "social" and Heidegger's association of *being* with *being there*, Nancy supplements this with his claim to be the first to radically thematize *with* as the essential trait of being. Arguing that individual subjectivity can only be grasped "in the simultaneity of togetherness," a key aspect of his thesis is that, rather than *with* standing in addition to some prior being or as some kind of supplementary, it is at the very heart of being. Hence, being *with* is being's "proper plural singular essence" (Nancy 2000, 34). Furthermore, in relation to the arts, he also notes that what really counts is art's capacity to provide "the exposition of an access to an opening" (Nancy 2000, 14). Although his notion of "the arts" is not well-defined, this could be perceived as highlighting the capacity for art practices (including performance) to facilitate "being-in-common" and to open up utopic spaces of possibility and potentiality.

Deceptively, Nancy's dense ontological analysis of togetherness emerges from a deep concern with "the political" and especially with the nature of the distinction between politics and the political, which harks back to his work on this in the 1980s.²³ In a recent examination of how we might theorize artistic collaboration with reference to dance, Rudi Laermans conceptualizes it as "commonalism" and turns from Nancy to the ideas of the Italian autonomist political theorist Paolo Virno (Virno in Laermans 2013), putting forward an explicitly political perspective on what happens

when bodies congregate in public contexts. While there is no space here to elaborate at any length on the complexities of this political term, working with the term “multitude,” Virno argues that whereas the concept of “the people” is passive, the multitude is essentially active, creative, and agentic. Virno says rather than dulling the process of individuation (an indirect reference to a common socio-psychological line of argument that the crowd obliterates individual difference), “it radicalizes it . . . the collective of the multitude establishes the feasibility of a non-representational democracy” (Virno 2004, 79).

The concept of the multitude may be helpful in thinking through how terminology informs and shapes political discourse around public assemblies. Equally apt in thinking through what happens when people congregate is Michael Warner’s concept of the “counterpublic,” which he identifies by a number of key features: it has a self-organizing discourse and is contingent on members’ self-activity; it is an act of attention (Warner 2002, 89). Moreover, he gives particular prominence to a counterpublic as “a relation among strangers” remarking: “The development of forms that mediate the immediate theatre of one of ‘stranger relationality’ must surely be one of the most significant dimensions of modern history” (Warner 2002, 76).

However, there is no guarantee that being-with, identifying with the multitude or counterpublics will *not* generate an oppositional alt-right radicality.²⁴ The idealistic political assumptions about the coming together of individuals in spontaneous public congregation need to be problematized and further contested. Lauren Berlant’s troubling of the ambiguous and contingent nature of collective encounters of “becoming common” is particularly pertinent and enlightening here. Pointedly, in her essay “The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times” (Berlant 2016), she expresses suspicion about the current rush to claim acts of “commoning” as uncontestably positive, arguing that there is a preponderance of positivist political fantasizing associated with “being in proximity.” As she says,

Just because we are in the room together does not mean that we belong to the room or each other: belonging is a specific genre of affect, history and political mediation that cannot be presumed and is, indeed, a relation whose evidence and terms are always being contested. (Berlant 2016, 395)

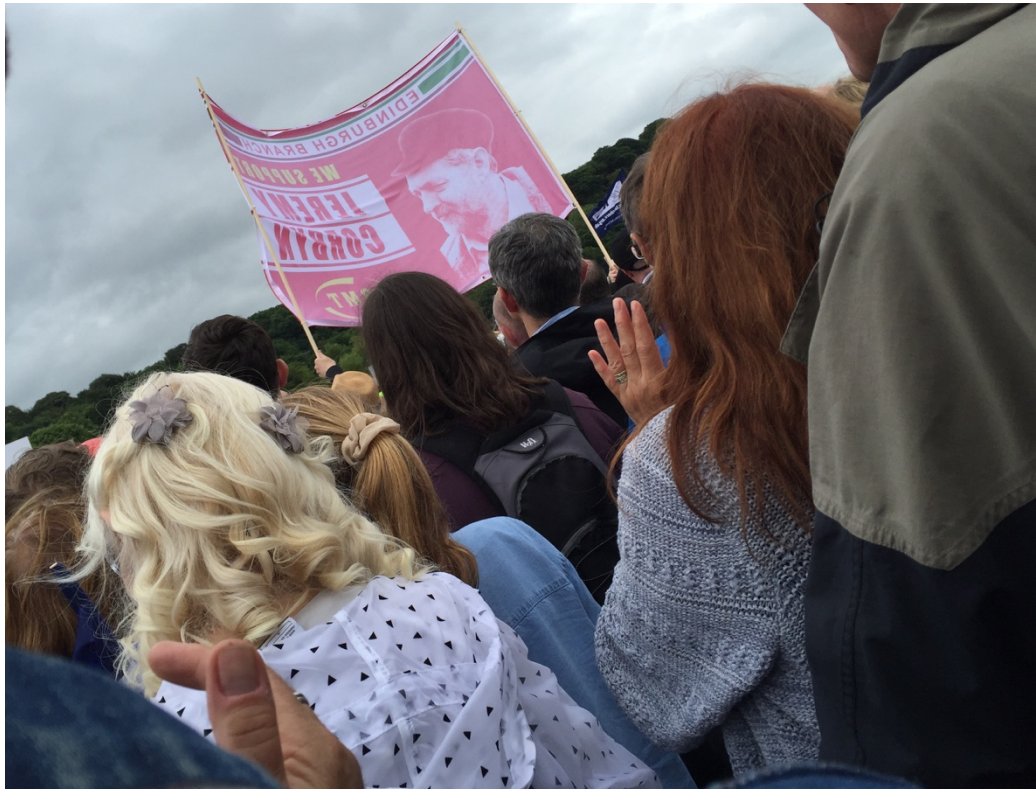
That said, utopian fantasizing, difference and antagonisms do not lead Berlant to abandon the idea of the commons or commoning. Indeed, her work has led her to focus on the terms of transition to the commons and managing being in proximity, referring in passing to Jeremy Gilbert’s conceptualization of this as fruitful (Gilbert 2014), she notes that he “adapts Georges [sic] Simondon’s concept of *provisional unity* or metastability for this matter, allowing us to see transitional structure as a loose convergence that lets collectivity stay bound to the ordinary even as some of its life forms are fraying” (Berlant 2016, 394).

Now, staying with his reflections on collective encounters and his interrogation of the neoliberal assumption that the “isolated, competitive individual is the basic unit of human experience,” Gilbert argues that the concept of sociality is a condition of dynamic multiplicity and complex creativity (Gilbert 2014, 93). Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s ideas, he articulates what he calls “infinite relationality” as constituting both the condition of possibility and the inherently limiting factor of all human agency (Gilbert 2014, 2139).

It is precisely the endlessness (boundlessness, infinity) of the meetings (relationality, joyous affect) in which we participate that is the only true index of a freedom that can never simply be “ours.” (Gilbert 2014, 3890)

Hence, for me, Gilbert’s references to the boundlessness, the infinite relationality of the human condition offer some hope for the value of temporary unity. While collective acts of political performativity may be fugitive in their convergent emancipatory politics, they engender a provisional unity *toward* being-in-common, a foundational ontological state to which individuals are already predisposed.

I end by recounting an anecdote from my own field notes regarding a mass event of political performativity drawn from lived experience. This not only engages with the boundlessness of the human condition to *be-with*, it illustrates a range of elements discussed in this paper: the Durham Miners’ Gala may have a superficial semblance of structure, dominated by the organized structures of the trade union and labour movement, but it is saturated with affective carnival, a subordinate disorderly unruly politics, and spontaneous performative utterances.



The Big Meeting, Durham Miners’ Gala, July 2017. Photograph by Gillian Whiteley.

The Big Meeting, Durham Miners’ Gala, July 2017

The “true” collective is the shift that turns the heaviness and unbearableness of life into the choice of rising up, into the effort and *joy* of doing it. (Negri in Didi-Huberman 2016, 38. My italics)

We alight from the Unite coach to a chaotic logjam of traffic, deafening human chatter and chanting, the unfurling of banners, stapling of placards and clicking of mobile phones as images are uploaded to Twitter. We expect to join the same kind of mass public gathering as a couple of years ago, but with a crowd of over two hundred thousand, the biggest since the 1960s, its composition feels different this time.²⁵ Ex-colliery villagers, associated working-class communities and assorted labour and trade union movement organizations are here in droves, but the stage is set for a much broader congregation of bodies: post-Brexit, post-Grenfell, post-general election, the gala is a showcase for a diverse range of oppositional publics who have come together in a popular front across a wide social, ethnic, and class spectrum. Following tradition, the carnivalesque procession of banners, a ramshackle spectacle of performative politics, parades through the town and into the park. The crowd heaves forward to hear lengthy political speeches that are intermittently rousing, poignant, and tedious. At the back of the podium, everyone is packed in close together, bodies touching, looking and listening intently. Behind us, amid this massed hushed spectacle of political performativity, a group of local youths clamber noisily to the top of the helter-skelter and perform a minor irreverent act: they chant “Oh Jeremy Corbyn.” After Glastonbury, maybe it was expected, but it’s bad timing. Even here, initially, this is received as non-conformist dissent. Nervously, everyone expects someone to shut them up. But they carry on regardless, posing for selfies to post on Facebook.

Since the killing of twelve staff members of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in retaliation for lampooning radical Islam, and the subsequent *riposte* of solidarity, *Je suis Charlie* (McQuiston 2015, 151, 184–86), performative utterances have proliferated across transnational borders and in different geopolitical contexts. Such acts have activated individuals to join up in various forms of alliance, bringing strangers together in Nancy’s foundational sense of being-with. However, facilitated by Twitter and social media, the reiteration of *Je suis Charlie* by all and sundry (from politicians of all parties to red carpet celebrities)²⁶ meant that it quickly became a vacuous statement. Hence, while providing a semblance of being-with, it actually masked difference and did little to reveal the cultural and ethnic complexities of the situation.²⁷ Doubtless, the Corbyn chant masked a diversity of political differences and class antagonisms but, superficially at least, it motivated some to political action and generated a *provisional*, if fractious, unity across generations and social class.

Concluding Remarks: Becoming Common

In alliance with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “de-territorialisation,”²⁸ I concur with modes of art that attempt to de-territorialize categories between art, action, and social and political practice. In this vein, Susan Kelly celebrates practices that create “temporary mutant conjunctions and coalitions” (Kanngieser 2011, 129), asserting that it doesn’t matter anymore if it’s art or life, it’s about participants and constituents in performative encounters (Kanngieser 2011, 131–32). Evaluating the efficacy of performative acts in effecting social and political change, though, is complex and fraught with problems. As Berlant suggests, it is as easy to lionize “togetherness” and partner it with anticapitalist oppositionality as it is to be cynical and melancholic: to see, as Schechner puts it, popular carnival inevitably reassigned as entertainment, the decay of festival into “dirty politics” and the “inevitable end to spontaneous communitas” (Schechner in Cohen-Cruz 1998, 205). Or, to focus on neoliberalism’s recuperation and commodification of even the most radical multitudinous moments: paradoxically, in a Situationist-style *détournement*,²⁹ Occupy memorabilia, Standing Man t-shirts, and *Je suis Charlie* merchandise are sold back to us.³⁰ Indeed, the speed at which (with apologies to Gil Scott-Heron) the revolution will not just be televised, but

monetized, is sometimes staggering.³¹ Equally, it's vital to acknowledge that the performative mode is a powerfully affective form of embodied communication, so powerful that the seduction of being-with needs tempering with a critical head. In a period characterized by Begum Firat and Aylin Kuryel as a time of “decentralised struggle,” when understanding of “victory” is highly contested (Firat and Kurel 2011, 11–12), the transition of performative encounters from the semblance of a politics to real praxis is the tricky thing. That said, the briefly lived moments of provisional political unity which have been facilitated by performative acts—such as Erdem Gündüz's collective silent protest—should be prized. Joyously, they demonstrate the infinite relationality and boundlessness of the human condition and the potential for beings to *become* common, not merely in terms of physical closeness but as a stepping stone to furthering a kind of politics based on resistance, co-operation, and the development of mutual understanding and compassion for all beings.

Notes

1. Much earlier is Schechner (1993). The origins of “performance activism” are outlined in Friedman and Holzman (2014).
2. On the political opportunities and challenges presented by the current “populist moment,” see Chantal Mouffe, 2018.
3. See O'Neill and Wilson's analysis of the rhetoric of “the turn” in O'Neill and Wilson (2010, 11–22).
4. See Austin (1962). Salih notes that, although Butler doesn't directly reference Austin and Derrida's deconstruction of Austin's ideas in his essay “Signature Event Context” (1972), she implicitly draws on them in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and she also refers to them explicitly in an interview in 1993; see Salih, “On Judith Butler and Performativity,” available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.527.8862&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, originally part of Chapters 2 & 3 in Salih (2002).
5. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern/tanks>.
6. Reiss (2007) examines the evolution of protest marches and parades with specific case studies.
7. On Arendt, see Salih (2002) at note 3 and Tavani (2013).
8. Van Duyn and the group of anarchists around him adopted the term “provo” from a reference in a doctoral thesis written by Dr. Buikhuizen. An editor's note in *Anarchy 1966* refers to Buikhuizen's comments on Amsterdam's discontented youth, noting that he called them “provocateurs” for the way in which they “pinpricked” authority. When van Duyn's group of anarchists appeared in 1965, they took the name Provo. The editor's note attributes the information to the *Manchester Guardian* of June 18, 1966, but this reference is constantly recounted in contemporaneous and retrospective accounts.
9. Useful sources include van Duyn (1966) and Kempton (2007), which includes an annotated bibliography. Extensive Provo archives are held at the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.
10. Additionally and more internationally, de Jong lists the following: Robert Jasper Grootveld, Fred Wessels, John van Doorn, Wolf Vostell, Ben Vautier, Simon Vinkenoog, Simon Posthuma, Thom Jaspers, Joop Dielemans, Gerrit Lakmaaker (alias Gerrit de Danser), Marijke Koger.
11. Provo activities spawned “underground” roots in multiple directions, spreading a kind of anarchistic mayhem: they were rhizomatic, in the theoretical sense outlined by Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 2004).
12. The first issue of *Provo* magazine (which declared “no copyright” to further facilitate the “contagion” of ideas) gave details and diagrams of how to make a white smoke bomb using a pineapple.

13. In turn, their playful tactics of civil disobedience were influential on activists in Ukraine in what was termed the Orange Revolution of 2004. See Popovic 2015.
14. Many examples could be cited, e.g. the Pussy Hats response to Trump.
15. “Joy-full” because Deller’s retrospective exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 2012 was entitled *Joy in People*.
16. The broadsheet-style newspaper, *Protest Reader*, included a two-page spread entitled “Protest Choreography” which listed a week of performative interventions such as “I’d Rather Dance Plenty than G20” event and another calling participants to a “Night Dance Demonstration.” Another broadsheet, *Il Giornale*, produced daily through the G20 summit, was entirely dedicated to previewing and reporting on performative interventions. The spectacular crowd-funded project 1000Gestalten involved hundreds of volunteers from eighty-five cities covered in clay silently walking through the streets in an attempt to awaken people to the “destructive evils of capitalism.” See <https://1000gestalten.de/en/>. There are many reports, images and video clips on the Internet, for example at <https://www.designboom.com/art/1000-gestalten-protest-g20-summit-hamburg-07-08-2017/>. The International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam has an archive collection of ephemera, photographs, and documents: COLL00313 Events G20 Summit Hamburg 2017 Collection.
17. Founded in 1968 by John Fox et al., the British performance collective Welfare State International were profoundly influenced by the work of countercultural theatre groups such as San Francisco Mime Troupe, Bread and Puppets, and those associated with Augusto Boal. The ever-changing group of artists, musicians, writers, engineers, and community participants continued to practise a form of “performance activism” and “political performativity” through to 2006. See Whiteley (2010) and Whiteley (2016).
18. An early example was le Monde à bicyclette “die-in” in 1976, inspired by a news reports of a 1972 Philadelphia protest in which 420 people simulated death to protest against nuclear weapons testing. On the recent history and revival of the practice, see Ross (2015).
19. Greenham Common women staged a “die-in” at the London Stock Exchange to coincide with President Reagan’s visit to the UK in 1982 (see Quille 2016); 24 July 1983 women staged a “die-in” in front of politicians, public, and military hardware buyers at the Greenham Air Tattoo (see *Guardian* 2006).
20. Adriano Iqbal reported on this and other Black Lives Matter protests in the student magazine the *Harvard Crimson*.
21. This event, its appropriations and re-enactments were reported widely across the Internet in print, on video, and on social media, e.g. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/18/turkey-standing-man>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8HQxwMQ6B4>; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_27OVwEtPs.
22. The Standing Man inspired other activities such as the “Taksim Square Book Club” involving protestors taking up the same stance while reading subversive texts (see McQuiston 2015, 74–75). Interviewed by Banu Beyer and Sarah Maske in 2014, Gündüz asserts that this was a protest and not a performance; nevertheless, he emphasizes that *artistic* action made the political protest possible.
23. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe set up the Centre de Recherches Philosophiques sur la Politique in 1982 as a space for “the *philosophical* questioning of the political” and “the questioning of the philosophical *about* the political” (rua Wall 2013). See also Nancy (2014).
24. On the Alt-Right see Michael (2016).
25. See <http://www.durhamminers.org/gala> and reports at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-40544096> and <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jul/08/jeremy-corbyn-helps-draw-record-crowds-to-durham-miners-gala>.

26. Within two days of the attack on January 7, 2015, the slogan (first used on Twitter) had become one of the most popular news hashtags in Twitter history and was being hoisted onto banners, stickers, and handmade placards across the world, used in music, print and animated cartoons (e.g., *The Simpsons*).
27. In France, mass performances of the slogan were posited as the fundamental foundation of a new national unity and a renewed patriotic self-confidence, but from the perspective of many Muslims, constituting around 10 percent of the French population, to declare oneself “Charlie” was to affirm a national identity of exclusion. Consequently, it was quickly contested and challenged by rival slogans from Islamist sympathizers from Europe and beyond (McQuiston 2015).
28. Deterritorialization/reterritorialization is understood here as a movement which produces change as well as “a coming undone”; see Parr (2010, 69–72).
29. The familiar Situationist idea and practice—“détournement”—was a deliberate appropriation, alteration or re-contextualization of an existing image, cultural object, practice or commodity, often taking something out of its original context and using it in opposition to the very context that produced it. See “Definitions,” in *Internationale Situationniste #1*, 1958, available at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/definitions.html>.
30. See merchandise at <http://www.cafepress.co.uk/+occupy+gifts> and an RT News report in 2011 on the fast pace of merchandising and marketing of Occupy at <https://www.rt.com/usa/occupy-wall-street-revolution-361/>.
31. Gil Scott-Heron’s much-quoted “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised,” first recorded in 1970, is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnJFhuOWgXg&list=RDqGaoXAwI9kw&index=4>. On merchandising and social activism, see Nicholson (2017).

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MATERIALS

On Propagating Collective Resilience in Times of War: A Conversation with Cassils

Eliza Steinbock

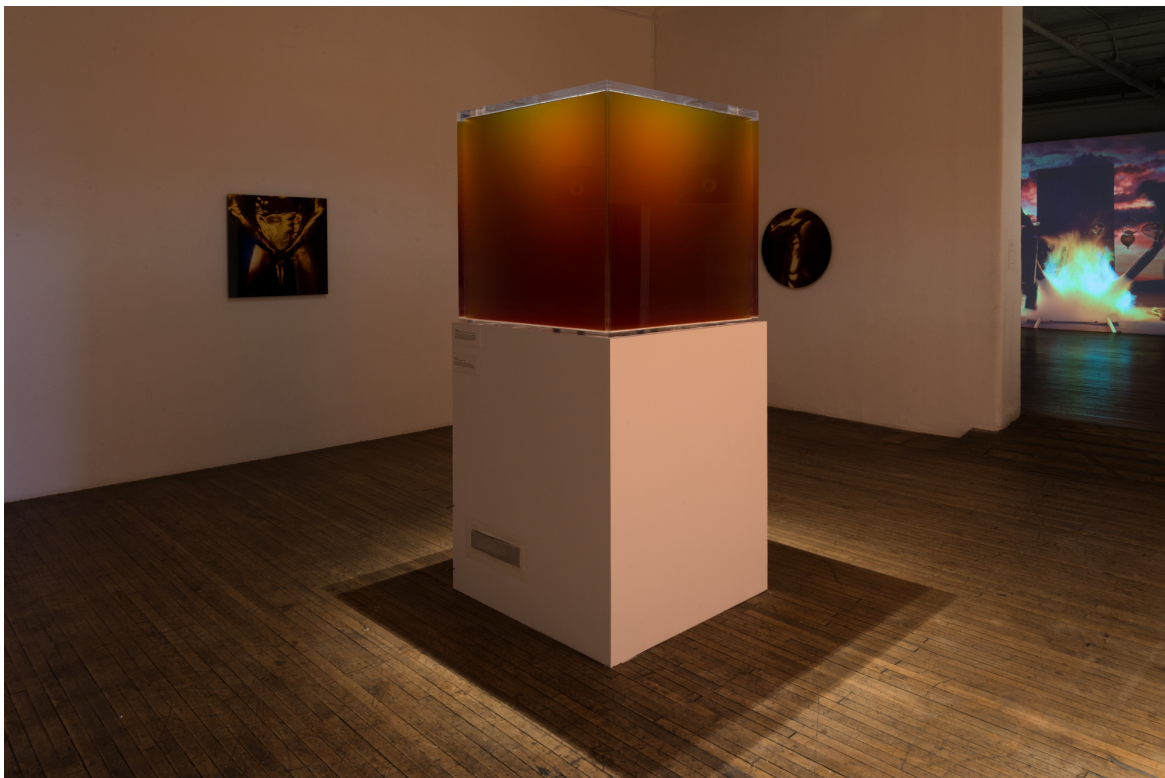
In the early Amsterdam evening and the Los Angeles morning of Friday October 27, 2017 I had the following conversation with trans visual artist Cassils, each of us installed behind laptop computers at our respective homes.¹ Looking into the Skype window, I recognized Cassils' front porch from the recent [VICE video documentary](#) about the complicated installation procedure of their minimalist clear cube sculpture "PISSSED," containing 200 gallons of their urine collected over 200 days since the current US President rescinded Obama-era protections for transgender people to use the toilet facilities of their choice.² Cassils' preserved urine was stored in refrigerators across Los Angeles in one-gallon jugs, then transferred into biohazard drums and shipped across the country to New York City to be put on display to protest the cruel material consequences of this ruling for all gender variant people.

Supported by funds from their recent Creative Capital and Guggenheim fellow grants, Cassils' "PISSSED" is at the centre of a series of archly political performances that become visual works, each of which tackles a dimension of the violences LGBTI people currently face. Together they comprise the elaborate solo exhibition entitled [Monumental](#) at the [Ronald Feldman Gallery](#) (which had an extended run from, September 16–December 9, 2017), where Cassils is a represented artist.³ All the formal sculptures, photographs, and videos on display there derive from durational performances, each of which require specialized artistic, physical, and mental training. For instance, the bronzed sculpture "Resilience of the 20%" (2016) is a cast of the remnant bashed clay from a "Becoming an Image" performance, and was polished by the collective hands that pushed the 1300-pound bronze, mounted onto a plinth, around to five LGBTI sites of trauma and resilience in Omaha, Nebraska—as shown in the exhibited video of the action, "Monument Push" (2017). The performance of Cassils' stunt that involved being lit on fire for fourteen seconds (the length of a controlled, elongated exhale) is documented in the fourteen-minute extreme slow-motion loop of "Inextinguishable Fire" (2015), and is accompanied by amorphous blown-glass sculptural forms made by a single exhale. "Alchemized" (2017) is a new photographic series, created with Robin Black, which exalts the self-determined transgender body gilded with thick gold paint, abstracted into striking shapes by torqued poses, while the opening night performance "Fountain" (2017) draws attention to the medicalized trans body by transferring Cassils' live urination to the glowing aesthetic cube filled with the urine mix. These monuments of precious metals and bodily waste, of sound, flesh, and glass speak to the precarity of the commons, the vulnerability and strength of trans bodies, the crisis of political speech, and the ways in which formal exercises can become recast with political urgency.

Cassils is a visual artist working in live performance, film, sound, sculpture, and photography. They received their bachelor's degree from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and a Masters degree in visual arts and integrated media from the California Institute of the Arts. Cassils has adjudicated exhibition selections at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions and currently is a lecturer in the Art Department at Stanford University. **Eliza Steinbock** is assistant professor of Film and Literary Studies at Leiden University's Centre for the Arts in Society. Their book, *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment and the Aesthetics of Change*, is forthcoming from Duke University Press. They are completing work on a manuscript comprising interviews with twelve contemporary trans visual artists and analyses of their art practices.



Cassils, *MONUMENTAL*, 2017. Installation view. Photo. Megan Paetzhold. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.



Cassils, *MONUMENTAL*, 2017. Installation view. Photo: Megan Paetzhold. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.



Cassils, *Fountain*, 2017. Performance still from Cassils's closing action of 200-day durational performance, *PISSSED*. Photo: Vince Ruvolo. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

In our conversation, Cassils explained to me that since the *Monumental* show, and especially since the released VICE documentary, they began receiving jarring volumes of hate mail, particularly upsetting because people direct messaged them through their artist page on Facebook (i.e., the correspondence with “trolls” was live). Examples can be found on their artist [Facebook page](#) of the kinds of misogynistic, transphobic, and hurtful language used.⁴ One ploy used by trolls was to first send a warm, friendly message saying thank you for producing this important work, and then once Cassils responds in kind, to then blast back with hateful comments. In the midst of this latest ramped-up culture war against transgender rights, intensified by anonymized social media trolling and doxxing, Cassils shared that they are “just trying to get my bearings” through working creatively and to be “as generous as I possibly can” towards everyone. In the following conversation, I am reminded again and again of this generosity as it translates into big-heartedness, to paying it forward to other artists, and into acts of homage towards previous artistic works that Cassils lifts up as touchstones for cultural activists today. A second affective stream in our conversation is a sense of vigilant awareness, developed perhaps as integral to being a long-time durational artist whose training for each performance series requires a sense of hyperawareness of one’s bodily comportment. But this keen attention is not only internal, anchored in their bodily capacities; Cassils’ artistic practice also involves tuning into the political landscape, taking the temperature of one’s queer community, and considering how their created images circulate and stick. They want to know what their audience might need, right now. Thus, in what follows, we also discuss a number of crises and the kinds of antidote performance/image combinations that Cassils creates, alongside the odd sensation of the surprising, unanticipated ripple effects from how the works move in the fast-paced media world.

Your artistic series largely start by responding to different issues and artists. Could you describe in detail your practice of developing work in this way, as a practice of responding, and taking responsibility? What effect is wrought from your historical recontextualization of other artists into the contemporary moment?

In being queer or trans, there aren't many moments to pass on intergenerational knowledge. Growing up in the pre-Internet era there weren't many queer or trans artists working openly that I could easily approach or learn about. So, I practiced self-schooling to find political messages and tactics that have worked for others. From them I take on these tactics and innovate and update them for our current, new socio-political climate. This results in retaining the ethos, or the platform, or the form, and changing the other components in order to extend this message as it relates to a trans body versus only a binary male/female dynamic. I am also interested in how the dialogue circulates differently online versus in published art journals. Since my early teens, and in the years I was with the performance collective Toxic Titties (2000-2009), I have been working with references, anchor points, and touchstones from other like-minded artists. My starting question is "How can we hold onto those life lessons?" In doing this kind of archival research, I find a source of comfort and inspiration. I think, "If you lived through that then I can live through this."

An example of this archival practice as a method in my work is when I created the *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture* (2010) series for the Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions' contribution to the "Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A., 1945-1980" initiative, which invited artists to engage in the lineage of performance in Southern California. I wanted to respond to the interventions of Eleanor Antin and Lynda Bengalis, who are feminist artists of influence. In different ways they both responded to the limitations of the glass ceiling for women's careers and especially art-making. In turn, my response to their work—I realize more clearly now—was to think about the limitations placed on trans, non-binary and gender-nonconforming artists, a precise gender knowledge that I didn't have at the time, but have gained in part through making this work.

Recently you became an American citizen, in addition to being Canadian, and have spoken out that it was important for you in this time to be a "citizen artist." What is the responsibility of a citizen artist in particular? How do you perform this role? What kind of threats and opportunities do you see for artists (especially yourself) who engage with digital media as a platform, and means of communication?

The term "citizen artist" refers to artists who have direct conversations around politics. It spoke to me post-election when I felt a sense of impotency. I wondered, since I work with images and metaphor, what can I do? I wanted to take these feelings of uselessness in the face of crushing real world problems, and rethink my own artistic practice. In a way, the hate mail I'm receiving in response to the *Monumental* show, and especially "PISSSED," means that the work is generative—it has an effect. It might feel bad [to receive live hateful messages], but at least the artwork is enabling a set of relationships and reactions to take place.



Cassils, *Pissed*, Station Museum, 2018. Photo: Alejandro Santiago. Image courtesy the artist and Station Museum.

At the risk of hyperbole, I feel I am going to war every day. I mentioned this to a friend who said that makes sense because we are in the midst of a culture war. This means that it is time for me to do my job. I feel entrusted with figuring out what justice and freedom look like by sharing my ideas, having the work facilitate generative dialogue. This sense of a raging culture war is more prevalent since “he who shall not be named” took the highest office of the land. Especially in Los Angeles you can live in a bubble, you can curate your own existence because of how transportation and commercial interactions are privatized. And, on the whole, it is a friendly city. However, this means that when your bubble is punctured—for instance, this has started to happen in the last year in my day-to-day working and social life—it feels especially violent. I think people have become emboldened by someone who not only symbolizes racism and misogyny, but who actively puts it into practice and is able to legitimize it through legal means.

Personally, I have felt more overt misogyny because despite not identifying as a woman, many people see my presence as a gender non-conforming person as an attack on so-called God-given gender norms. In my workspace at a gym I experience extreme negative behavior from white men. With friends of colour I’m witnessing deeply racist, xenophobic and transphobic remarks and behavior that are more frequent and more unabashed than ever before. I have had two different friends from North America call to talk with me about being gay-bashed. People are acting out in ways that I couldn’t imagine before. Of course, I might be naïve and others would say, it was always this bad. I mainly want to stress that in the context of being an artist I am keeping track of how my real world, in real time, is being altered. My work as a citizen artist is invested in extending art beyond the frame of the gallery. I believe it is essential to consider how the press, public relations,

and the Internet can be utilized as amplifying devices. For better or worse, putting myself out there as an explicitly trans and explicitly politically left artist has made me a target. Perhaps I was a bit naïve, but I did not expect it; I was not emotionally ready for the onslaught of extremely violent messages. It is alarming that this is happening to me, an educated, white Canadian who is being targeted, when others who are far more vulnerable likely are receiving far worse abuse. I'm not asking for pity; I'm offering this as an observation on the new horizon within today's iteration of the culture wars.

*When you were making the series Cuts you circulated the *Homage* image online. How did this decision for this kind of distribution come about, and what were the repercussions? Namely, how did this lead to you making "The Resilient 20%" series of collages in which hate speech is incorporated into a non-digital print version of the photograph? What is the importance of resilience for you, for your audiences? How do you try to cultivate it as an aesthetic practice, specifically in performance? Is there a difference for you between performing violence, namely the (re)enactment of violence against queer and trans people using your own body, and representing it?*

My series *Cuts*, a result of collaborating with photographer Robin Black, included circulating images of myself posed with semiotic citations for gay male leather culture. We wanted to circulate these images of myself as a trans masculine person in gay male magazines to question who passes as male and the policing of who is male and what is masculine. Interestingly, some websites removed the image when someone realized that my "pecs" might in fact be "tits." In this way, the performance of the image continues to query how desire might be seen as being "mislead" by a body, or tricked in some way. Our point is that a body is a body. Further, we intimate that desire, empowerment, and freedom work best when they can transcend the boundaries of a binary sex/gender system.

When the *Cuts* series went up on the *Huffington Post* Gay Voices site back in 2011, including a video showing my bodybuilding transformation to become "cut," I experienced extreme forms of transphobia, homophobia, and misogyny through the comments on the article.⁵ First of all, the anonymity of the online comment form encourages trolling. But now that someone in the White House supports these ideologies and is committed to a daily rolling back of protections, this feels ten-fold worse. It now feels like my work is yelling into white noise...

Six years ago, yes, there was push back, but thousands of people needed to hear that queer and trans bodies exist, and my exaggerated physique being put to extreme tests was an empowering visualization. I wanted the sensations my work elicits to contribute to growth, and now it feels like just a means to survive. Now I feel my work needs to act as a balm to the deplorable intolerance that politics is applauding, or at least rewarding.



Cassils, *Advertisement: Homage to Benglis*, 2011. C-print, 40 x 30 inches. Photo: Cassils with Robin Black. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

Yes, with reference to the works titled “Resilience of the 20%,” I am interested in modifying negative affects. You ask about the practice of collaging on the print version of that digital image from *Cuts*, “Advertisement: Homage to Benglis” (2011), which substitutes my ripped masculine physique for her double-ended dildo in the famous December 1974 *Artforum* ad. Well, my works aren’t super clean, they are not only empowering. By collaging I am harming the image, using a razorblade to cut into it, slicing then burning the surface of the emulsion. I make these collages as a gut reaction to the online hateful commentary directed at me, my body, this image of my body. The collages were a way to write back, to slow down the pace of online communications that often are knee-jerk, flippant responses. The analogue processes of slicing, burning, and drawing put to the photograph allowed for my experience of the digital onslaught to become carefully rendered.



Cassils, *Disfigured Image: The Resilient 20%*, 2013. Photo paper, marker, gouache, razor etching, 17 x 11 inches. Photo collage: Cassils with Robin Black. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

These collages take their title from the Amnesty International statistic that worldwide hate crimes against trans and gender non-conforming people had risen 20% in 2012. I wanted to inscribe the resilience it would take for those added 20% to survive our time. Also, I was reading Cynthia Carr's biography of David Wojnarowicz, *Fire in the Belly* (2012), and thinking about his powerful image of a mouth being sewn shut in reference to the AIDS crisis.⁶ The touchstone element I took from Wojnarowicz was to consider, "What does it mean to perform the violence one feels on the image?"

I use liveness and real materials in order to bring our bodies back from the divorced reality of screens. I want to give an emotional sensation. I try to create jarring images that solicit moments of empathy that will work as recalibration tools. Resilience might be built up from the jarring moments when violence is shown, that is, when we *see* what that violence looks like when it shows up on a body. This is not about eliciting a shock, neither from the frightening image of the sewn mouth, nor from the burns into my body or slices across my throat. The image remains a jarring one because this is how my body is perceived before or after the alteration of the collage. It is jarring to the gender norms for a man or a woman.⁷

Rupture is prevalent in my live works, too. Working with liveness I am able to take over the bulk of a person's body by infiltrating their senses, much like music is able to do. Through sound, imagery, tone, and performative energy I have the ability to permeate the audience. I need to do this to break through our privatized experiences, the ways we are removed from each other's direct existences. Live performance brings people into contact. Before the election this was key to my desire to wake people up, but since then this is important because it creates a space for solidarity to form, to bring people together. My performance of the "Monument Push" in Omaha, Nebraska (April 20, 2017) involved the simple action of having people from within this one community participate in moving a heavy monument around to sites in order to commemorate unmarked and therefore invisible locations of pain and resilience, and to do it together.⁸ In this group of over 100 people there were huge differences in life experience. At the sites selected by Amy Schindler, Director of Archives and Special Collections at the University of Omaha, Nebraska, a young queer man of colour talked about when he was incarcerated in the prison and placed in solitary for his "own safety," while an older white gay man shared memories of the first gay parade, when people wore paper bags over their heads for safety. In each context the lingering fear and shame attached to those sites could be transformed into empathy between people who enacted effortful means to reach that location in order to listen to each other. Moreover, from the shared solidarity enacted by pushing the monuments for each other my hope was that coalitions would form that lasted beyond the finite performance on the streets of Omaha. It raises further durational questions about the precise temporality of performance when not only one-time gestures, but also the sustaining of relationships, mark solidarity.

"Monument Push" was conceived and enacted before the major media moment erupted around the movement to tear down racist monuments and to reclaim queer spaces through monuments. It was right on the cusp of what is now a national, and more far-reaching global dialogue. I read just this morning that there was an action to throw red paint on the statue base of Teddy Roosevelt that is standing outside the American Museum of Natural History. (Roosevelt is on horseback, flanked by subservient Native peoples.⁹) These kinds of actions are jarring because they ask us to rethink history to see who has been left out or denigrated, to be critical about how communities memorialize, and consider what it means to make art in this time. For me, making art is a way to bring these coalitions together rather than just waving my own fist in the air. How can I use my position of privilege as an artist who gets a grant to make a work and pay it forward? In gathering

together people to make these participatory works I'm thinking strategically about giving the platform of art creation over to those groups who need an opportunity to gather, to come together.

The creation of 103 Shots as a response video to the massacre of forty-nine persons and fifty-four critically wounded persons at the queer Florida nightclub called Pulse also came from a gathering. When the mass shooting at Pulse took place many of us experienced it as a highly mediated and yet immediate "breaking news" event. Did you want to capture a similar kind of "liveness" when you had Pride festival go-ers perform the balloon-squeezing crush? The work also echoes the social media grammar of "that feeling when" (TFW) memes that picture the reaction shot of someone as they experience something specific. How did you and the team come to decide on the cinematography? The sound of the Foley balloon popping on the soundtrack replays the confusion of what people were experiencing (a live shooter or a celebratory Pride party). Could you describe how people responded to the sounds on the set of the shoot, only a week after the Pulse massacre? 103 Shots was released on the HuffPo Queer Voices page. In what ways does this videos' circulation into other (digital) publics build resilience, do you think?

Interesting that you connect this gathering to other performance gatherings; I hadn't realized that thread through these works before. Yes, we made *103 Shots* (2016) in the Mission's Dolores Park in San Francisco, the epicenter for the free, community-based Pride celebrations. We used a white backdrop and first wanted to film it with an extreme close-up and slowly zoom out from the abstracted composition of the bodies pressed tightly together to bring attention to the lens of information being given to you. I was interested in how the power of telling the truth is controlled through the framing of an image (similar to how we shot the video of *Inextinguishable Fire* in a studio as a slow zoom-out that reveals its own production context). First, you'd see the balloon and bodies, then the white backdrop, then the park setting, and the crowds of people, and the police at the perimeter. But it was too windy and the scrim was tearing, and moreover, some people interpreted the sound of the balloon popping as a gunshot because they did not see what was actually happening behind the backdrop (a balloon pressed to bursting between bodies). Out of respect we shut down the shoot after 2.5 hours because it was re-inscribing the trauma of the Pulse shooting, in which survivors recalled their confusion of the gunshots with champagne corks popping, balloons bursting, or fireworks. The act of generating the work was to create a moment where mass participation of strangers coming together might create a moment of familial bonding.



Cassils, Still from *103 Shots*, 2016. Single channel video with sound. Runtime 2:35 minutes. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York



Cassils, Still from *103 Shots*, 2016. Single channel video with sound. Runtime 2:35 minutes. Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

For those who participated in the video,¹⁰ the reenactment of this confusion (at Pulse) was taken on as a playful exercise rather than a sad or bad experience. They treated it more as a game, of how to

contort their bodies to press together the balloon and make it pop, resulting in some very intimate embraces, kissing and surprised faces that register the sting of the latex balloon's skin as it ruptures. I should also add that people were really up for it, and excited to see an artist from their community engaging with the topic. In this way, I felt encouraged that I was making art for my people, which is another definition of performing as a citizen artist. This desire to create engaging art for the people, and particularly "my queer people," has a long history: when I was in art school and the stuff I made wasn't fully understood by my peers there, I'd be encouraged by non-art educated queer folks who felt I was on the right track. I want to make work that has multiple entry points. It should be accessible and real for someone with and without formal training for art.

The urgency of making this response to Pulse was also personal. I was on the Lucas Artist Residency over June 12–13, at the time tucked away into an isolated retreat near San Jose with my wife Cristy Michel, so we were away from our friends in Los Angeles during Pride weekend.¹¹ It turned out that this residency required its participants to dine with the rich benefactors, and the night after Pulse we were seated with a woman who made it very clear she made the same amount of money in one day that I might hope to make in a year. In this context of the unfolding events of Pulse, including extremely violent anti-Muslim rhetoric because the shooter wanted to be seen as acting on behalf of ISIS, this woman also dismissed our pain and sadness about Pulse. She said it would be a mere blip on the social media radar. We knew that the tragedy of Pulse was foremost for the people of colour in Florida whose community was targeted, yet out of empathy for those who are marginalized, Cristy and I were outraged. At this point neither of our families had called to ask how we were either. This compounded our sense of isolation, and my response was to try to connect to my community through art. I also wanted to make a response to the fast-paced mediated rhetoric of violence, to cut through the waves of mass shooting news reports that make it hard to keep track of any one act of violence. Now that it is more than one year later, it does feel dated to think of Pulse, but that does not make it any less relevant to want to remember, or to try to create a work that would expand our capacity for empathy. And, personally, I wanted to surround myself with the blanket of my community, and offer that blanket for us all to gather under.

103 Shots was created then with the impetus to puncture the homonationalist media attention on Trump's fake support for gay and transgender Americans by using them as props to fight terrorists (marked as foreign, brown, black, or non-Christian). I knew that I had to make it fast in order to distribute it on social media by the Monday after Pride. I decided to work with my long-time collaborator from the Toxic Titties performance group, Dr. Julia Steinmetz. She agreed to write the contextualizing essay about the response video, and place it into the socio-political sphere of xenophobia and queerphobia. I would make a response through image-making and address the visual, visceral, and sonic elements of the event. With my team, we produced the images and sound in a weekend by working 14–16 hours a day for three days, driven by a sense of urgency. Together we made a combined front in order to create a space for dialogue around the Pulse tragedy, and even for experiencing joy within the unfolding tragedy of ongoing xenophobic and queerphobic violence. The rich woman was right in that the speed of the constant unfurling of horrific events creates a strata of trauma, each burying the other. This may produce a kind of scar tissue on our bodies, in that we lose our sensibility, but I refused to believe that no one would remember the Pulse victims within a few weeks. I kept thinking of that saying, "They are coming for you in the morning, and for me at night."

Although it is sometimes a conundrum to be boxed into only being a trans community member, and I wish I could more often discuss the formal aspects of my work with interviewers, the First Nations

artist James Luna, whom I recently saw give a docent tour of Jimmie Durham's exhibition at the Hammer, reminded me of this unique responsibility. He said someone from his community once said to him, you might feel like you are boxed in, but to us you are on a pedestal, in a position to speak for us. Though I do find it frustrating to only have my work read in relation to identity politics, if ever there was a time to claim this mantel and speak out, the time is now.

I never speak alone though; these works are always inspired and formally guided by the art histories of those hard-fought social movements and freedoms that find new contexts in my work. For example, in *103 Shots* I borrow the exact font from Queer Nation's graphics that were used in the 1980s and early 1990s. With this design choice I want to pay their work forward to a younger generation who can also feel inspired by Gran Fury's tactics of issuing subversive "public service announcements" (PSAs), like in "Kissing Doesn't Kill."¹² I also used black-and-white in the video for the same reason, to echo their formal choices. The video was meant to circulate online, for free, and to engender discussion, but it has also been shown on a huge screen at a Creative Capital event. I was overwhelmed by the video's cinematic capacity being tapped in this way. It also seemed to work—most people were crying by the end of the three minutes. I was glad to see that it worked equally well whether via the delivery system of the computer to nodes of linked individuals, or a cinema theatre screen around which we are all gathered. The point for me in either case was that *103 Shots* would complicate the discourse at the time about safety, precarity and show a means of finding your joy in the midst of trauma. I wanted to pay homage to that heady mix by inverting the sounds of celebration that were confused with the sounds of death. In fact, in all the images I make, I want to try to hold together the struggle of both sides: the endless inversion of celebration into violence, and empowerment into harsh realities.

This is also the case with *Becoming an Image* (2012–present), wherein I'm punching and kicking 250 pounds of animation clay until I "gas out," which runs around twenty-minutes of full-out fighting time. Clay has the unique property of pushing back exactly what is pressed into it. So, as I punch into it, it also forms me just as much. This represents—no, actually literalizes—the constant inversion of empowerment and violence. Or, in *Inextinguishable Fire*, I wanted to invoke the absolute terror of being lit on fire, but I do so in a controlled and consensual act that is not clearly indicated at all times. I play on the known and unknown about this act of immolation. Is it a final act of someone who is at their wit's end and this is the last form of protest? This quandary about agency is what I wanted to enact in real life. Being burned alive is also associated with witch burnings and the KKK, but also with Vietnamese monks protesting the war. My question is, "How can we make acts of violence generative?" Yet I am also cognizant that what I create is a representation. Like Harun Farocki's film *Inextinguishable Fire* (1969), in which he puts out a cigarette on his arm to index the burning of napalm on the body, I can only show the gross violence at the remove of a representational index.



Cassils, *Resilience of the 20%*, 2016. Bronze cast of clay from a *Becoming an Image* performance. Bronze Sculpture: 1,300 lb. Steel Plinths: 900 lb. Photo: Vince Ruvolo Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

But these works I discuss have connected to gross acts of violence unexpectedly, which open them up to new readings. I performed *Becoming an Image* in Zagreb, Croatia and the audience's experience was filtered through the living memory of the Yugoslavian genocide, which invokes a very different history than when it was first performed in an empty basement room of the ONE archives of LGBTI culture (in California) to signify the lack of historical transgender representation.

Inextinguishable Fire was performed live in London at the British National Theatre, and the video projection ran continuously outside on its wall, which could be seen for free by any passer-by walking there along the Thames. After the Paris attacks they decided to pull the public screening because, according to the producers, my act of being lit on fire no longer seemed respectful to those who lost their lives in the bombing.



Cassils, *Inextinguishable Fire*, Station Museum, 2018. Photo: Alejandro Santiago. Image courtesy the artist and Station Museum

In your work you balance showing the celebration of transqueer love and life, while also attending to the unrelenting threats against it. Since Pulse, how have you continued to work with resilience and responsibility, as themes, concepts, or practices? With regard to responding and being resilient/enacting resilience, are there limits to what we can respond to, in order to persist? What is your assessment of the current climate towards trans/non-binary persons? In your collaborative work, do you see other horizons and presents that we should and could build towards? What sustains you, feeds your resilience?

I recount these different contexts [above] because the work should not be limited to being about this or that, nor can it be read in a right or a wrong way. As a citizen artist I still identify more as Canadian, but now that I'm a legal US citizen I have the ability to speak out about the country in which I live. I am legal, and that gives me more rights for my expression, or at least the freedom to

exercise these rights. At this moment I have tried to move my work towards the centre of the country, and focus less on the coastal cities, because I think it is more generative to be where queer and trans lives are under constant attack and yet where they have less resources and infrastructure to respond to these attacks.

With “PISSED” I learned a lot, for instance how urine is weaponized by the state when it considers trans people’s pee to be a potential criminal offense. But also, in shipping urine, I had to take precautions because it was considered a biohazard. I am trained as a painter and retain this love of materials. I was trying so hard to figure out how to sustain the material of urine, but it is ephemeral in its form. Already it is darkening in the cube as the proteins unravel and bacteria growth clouds the liquid. As a performer I know you can’t ever catch a live performance entirely either. I’m teasing out this red thread through both performance and seemingly materially solid artworks, of how a complete capture of its experience, or fixing it for eternity, is impossible. (I play on this impossibility with the breaths encapsulated in glass, included in the *Monument* show.) The cube of urine is contextualized by audio recordings from the Virginia School Board hearings of the young transgender man Gavin Grimm’s plea to use the toilet of his choice at his high school and the ensuing proceedings of the Fourth Court of Appeals. These voices on the soundtrack articulate the ignorance and biases that run through every level of judicial proceedings about trans bodies and the right to public facilities. In support of Gavin Grimm and all the others his case represents, my response is to ask, “Whose lives are deemed worthy and whose do you flush?”



Cassils, *Pissed*, Station Museum, 2018. Photo: Alejandro Santiago. Image courtesy the artist and Station Museum.

For an upcoming event as part of a City of Los Angeles Grant at the Barnsdall Art Park and Museum I'll have an opportunity to show a work in a public park. It opens in April 2018 exactly 400 days after the president took office. I'm thinking about filling a tank with 400+ gallons of urine, one gallon for every day that passes since the Obama executive order was rescinded on February 27, 2017, and hosting a drive for people to donate their urine to this statement piece. Collectively we'd speak about how the oppression of one person whose ability to urinate in public facilities is policed thus limits their ability to participate in public life, but we'd do it together.

I'd also say that I practice resilience in being scrappy. For example, it is expensive to ship monuments, but I'm not going to let resources and practicalities limit my ability to make creative work. There is a joy in hacking the system; thinking of ways I can manage to get around seemingly set limitations excites me. I also consider resilience as a personal trainer and bring the knowledge of how to not overextend oneself. I work with the training concept of periodization in which over 4–6 weeks the body adapts to one kind of training, and then needs to change. During that time, you can rest the body in certain ways, and encourage growth in other ways (speed, force, etc.). I'm also reading about how Kathy Acker would write intensively for six months a year, and then would take an entire six months off.¹³ I'd love to do that too!

This isn't just about a flat understanding of self-care being important, it is about recognizing the finitude of what one can do, and making space for joy. I stretch myself to think about what I can do to give back, to diligently allow space for regeneration. Thus, self-care is a strategy that we must take into mind. If this is a marathon, not a sprint, how do we train for that?

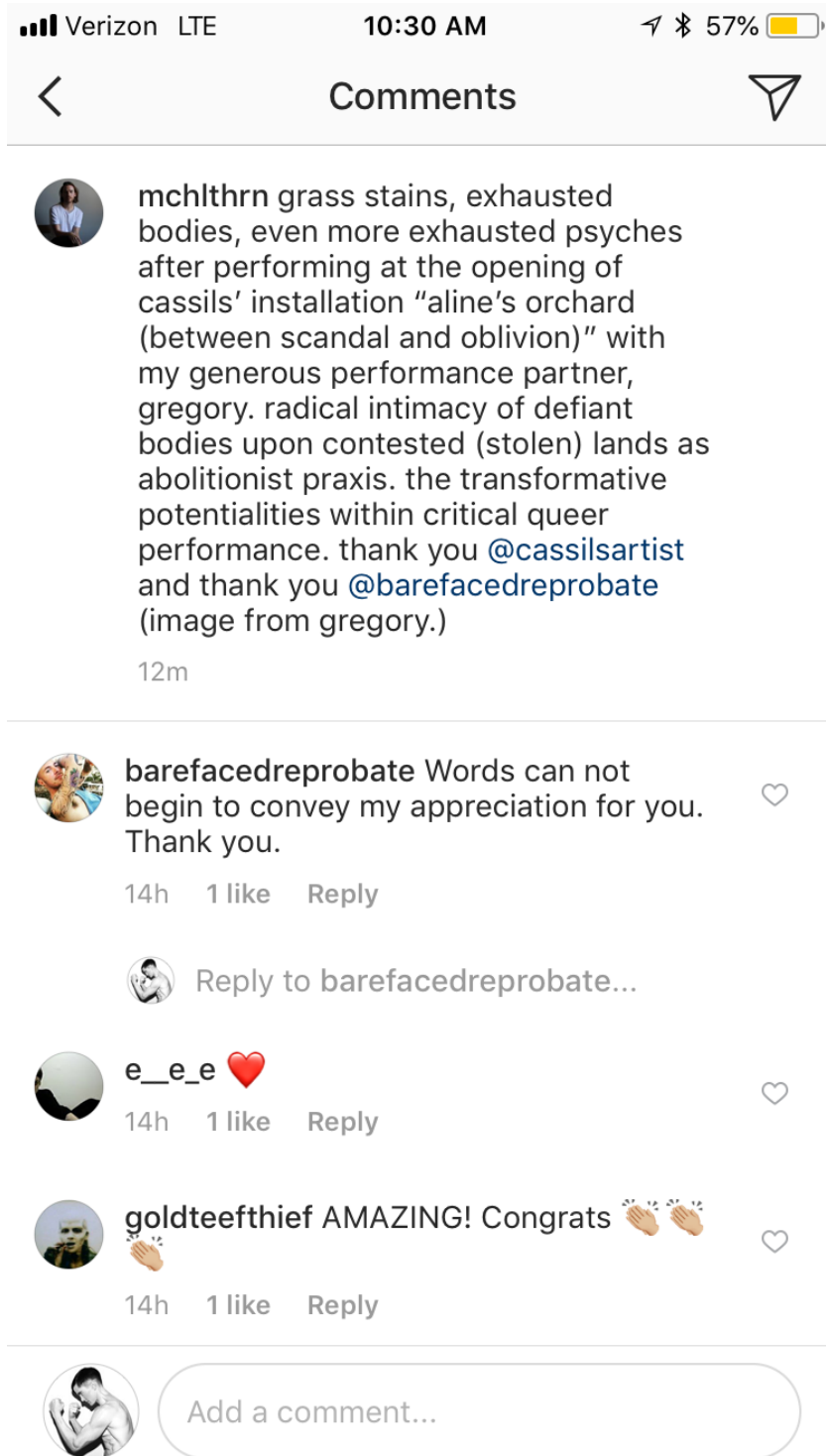
Coda: Through the Darkness, Together

Since this interview, over February 22–23, 2018, I had the chance to visit in person with Cassils in Los Angeles and discuss their plans for the City of Los Angeles (COLA) Artist Fellowship Grant at the Barnsdall Art Park and Museum exhibition. The show was ultimately titled, “Aline’s Orchard (Between Scandal and Oblivion),” opening April 29 and running until June 24, 2018. This specific land site in Silver Lake belonged to the never-married oil heiress, Aline Barnsdall, who was interested in feminism, radical causes, and progressive theatre. Surrounding her Frank Lloyd Wright home, the Hollyhock House on “Olive Hill” (now the art museum and park), she planted an extensive olive tree grove that was later frequented by queers cruising for sex. The olive grove has since been thinned to deter people from using the public land for a sexual community meeting space. This act of homophobic “cleaning up” that also increases surveillance of sexual activity finds echoes in the recent US “Fight Online Sexual Trafficking Act” (FOSTA). As Cassils’ publicity statement says, this bill is predicated on protecting women and girls, but is written so broadly that it effectively targets the use of online sites by sex workers who can more safely screen clients, and in general any website that might be used for dating. Responding to this erotophobic and whorephobic bill that went into effect on April 11, 2018, “Aline’s Orchard” recreates the sound, smell, and sensory feel of cruising in the dark amongst olive trees in order to engender opportunities in public for sexual expression amongst consenting adults. Hence, the visitor who joins others in the dark experiences firsthand the dynamics of group formation, and the potential for art to become the platform for erotic and political alliances and connections—however lasting. It was successful in that an orgy in a civic art gallery was self-documented by visitors, taking place on a Sunday afternoon no less. This latest Cassils exhibition also recalls the history of the Mattachine Society, the earliest LGBT rights group in the US, founded by the communist Harry Hay in 1950 on steps leading up an

epic hill nearby. Holding open this once and possible future, via a wander in the dark, together, “Aline’s Orchard” reminds visitors that struggles for empowerment are always bound into challenging systemic violence and surveillance. The generative actions of Cassils’s current series of projects lie foremost in art experiences that are given over to the needs, desires, and agenda of the moment, dragging forward in time the dark power of the creatively generative past to foster resilience in the now.



Self-documentation image of Outdoor Sex during *Aline’s Orchard* exhibition. Screenshot from participant, courtesy of Cassils.



Self-documentation text of *Outdoor Sex* during *Aline's Orchard* exhibition. Screenshot from participant, courtesy of Cassils.

Notes

1. This conversation has been edited for clarity. The “About” page on Cassils’ website (<http://cassils.net/about-2/>) provides the following information about their trans identity: “Cassils is a gender non-conforming trans masculine visual artist. Cassils uses plural gender-neutral pronouns (they, them, their) and a single name (as opposed to first and surname) and asks that journalists do likewise when referring to them. This singularity of name and plurality of gender reflects through language the position Cassils occupies as an artist. For guidelines on writing about gender non-conforming people, please reference the GLAAD Media Reference Guide on Transgender Issues: <http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>.”
2. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-TI7GoJ2iw&t=11s>.
3. See <http://www.feldmangallery.com/pages/exhsolo/exhcas17.html>.
4. See <https://www.facebook.com/cassilsartist/>.
5. See https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/a-traditional-sculpture_b_983384.html.
6. See Cynthia Carr’s *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* (2012).
7. See my article (2014) on how Cassils’ performances foreground the trans spasm streaking across a transphobic nervous system.
8. See <https://vimeo.com/234074713>.
9. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/26/arts/protesters-deface-roosevelt-statue-outside-natural-history-museum.html>.
10. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpEyQVKif_k.
11. See <http://montalvoarts.org/programs/residency/>.
12. See <http://creativetime.org/projects/kissing-doesnt-kill-greed-and-indifference-do/>.
13. See Chris Kraus’ *After Kathy Acker: A Literary Biography* (2017).

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MATERIALS

A Great Silence Lay Upon the Land: Secreted Histories of Ireland

Ailbhe Smyth

Explanatory Note

In 2013, Liz Burns¹ was invited by the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) to curate an art event on the theme of Memory and Testimony in the historic but now run-down building housing the DIT's Fine Arts department, located on the site of the former St. Joseph's Convent, an "Asylum for Aged and Virtuous Single Women." The DIT wanted to commemorate the Institute's twenty years in the building, before a major move to a new location, and to extend and support artistic frameworks and programs around the idea of contemporary art debates and the period of commemorations Ireland was entering into at that time. In light of the shocking revelations since the 1990s of widespread and brutal clerical and institutional abuse of children, young people and women in Ireland, the curator was interested in exploring how artists respond to the themes of memory, testimony, silencing and redress. The event included an exhibition and live performances by members of the Performance Collective (Pauline Cummins, Sandra Johnston, Frances Mezzetti, and Dominic Thorpe) entitled *It Has No Name*. I was asked to participate in a panel discussion with artists, academics and activists during the event, and Liz Burns later asked me if I would write a reflection on *It Has No Name*.

The exhibition and performances affected me deeply. The artists have widely differing practices, preoccupations and personal histories, and each performance in its own way was unsettling and disturbing. I felt exposed somehow, jagged, uncertain. They demanded direct engagement, but I wasn't sure I knew either what or how. Maybe trying to write my way through to some sort of understanding—however inadequate that would be—was what I needed to do. The writing unnerved me. Re-reading it is still unnerving.

Ultimately, the key, it seemed to me, was that what happened so brutally, criminally, and scandalously to so many for so long, was about all of us. The Catholic Church must bear the brunt of responsibility for the abuse of thousands of babies, children, young people, and women by individual clerics and nuns and in institutions run by the Church on behalf of the state. But there is no hiding place: at some level of our collective being, we knew. We must all bear witness. That is a moral imperative.

A Great Silence Lay Upon the Land was how I responded in 2013. I'm writing this now just after the papal visit to Ireland (August 2018). Pope Francis encountered a very different country to the Ireland of the last papal visit in 1979. In 2018, Catholics paid their respects to the head of their Church, although in far smaller numbers than anticipated, and with more questions and reservations than adulation. The people's anger was upfront and palpable during the two days of what was promoted as a "historic occasion." Our anger at the shameful history of countless wrecked lives and the Catholic Church's contemptible failure to accept its primary responsibility for the evil wreaked upon the vulnerable. Expressions of sorrow and shame by the Pope and members of the

Ailbhe Smyth is an activist and former academic who has been involved in feminist, LGBT, and radical politics for a long time. She set up and was head of Women's Studies at University College Dublin from 1990 until 2006, and she has published widely on feminism, politics, and culture in contemporary Ireland.

ecclesiastical hierarchy were noted. But they cut no ice. *Hollow words from the hollow men.* The Taoiseach (Irish prime minister) was explicit, the people were explicit: words are not enough, they are never enough. They must be backed up by full acknowledgement of responsibility, and above all by concrete and time-specific action to root out the evil of abuse and punish all those, without exception, who betrayed the people's trust, hurt them, and concealed the truth. In the Ireland of 2018, there is nowhere for the Catholic Church to hide.

The damage, the sorrow, the shame, and the anger are with us still. How could they not be? Resolution comes haltingly, and for those who have been severely hurt, may not come at all. All the same, I think it was a "historic occasion." We made it clear to the Pope and much more importantly to ourselves that we would no longer tolerate silence to lie upon the land.

A Great Silence Lay Upon the Land

Turn away now, this is not a pretty sight. This contains disturbing images, unsuitable for the fainthearted, for charlatans, Corinthians or Pharisees, sophists, sophisticates, tricksters, dissemblers.

Leave now if you will, because this does not—even—bear the patina of scholarship.

The balm of oubli can descend with stunning totality on those who have abandoned the academy.

This is about secrets and silence and bodies and sex. It's about lies and cruelty and cover-up jobs, all intricately interwoven—merged and submerged, depending.

It's about people, children and women, and about what happens to them when the powerful eschew humanity, decency, and truth.

At the end of the day it is, to be sure, about power: how it is wielded, denied, hidden, where and how it lies, and where and how its force is felt and lived.

It is also, I hope, indirectly at least about how it may be reimagined when its sequelae are uncovered, its secrets exposed.

Fear

How are we to do it? Can it be done at all?²

The fear of getting it wrong, of misunderstanding. Fear of omitting, misrepresenting. Fear of our failures of observation, interpretation, empathy. Fear of the false note, the false gesture. Fear of not enough and too much. Fear of our own petty vanities and the intrusions of ego. Fear of hurting the very ones we seek to honour and cherish. Fear of betraying those whose trust was so profoundly violated. Fear of betraying a trust we have no right to assume

Who am I to be trusted?

Can I be trusted, can I trust myself, to bear faithful witness to histories gathered, as all histories must be, after the fact? Histories that come to us as fragments of lives, shards of pain.

How can I bear witness to histories almost beyond bearing, beyond belief?

He befriended me. . . . I felt very secure . . . he was a friendly figure . . . that's all he did that night . . . each night he did more and more . . . he told me not to be ridiculous, he wasn't doing anything wrong, priests couldn't do something wrong. I turned from being a happy-go-lucky little girl to one who didn't trust anybody my life spiralled out of control. (Collins 2009)

The work is “to fit the pieces together, piece by piece.”³ Taking pains to feel the weight and shape, the heft and reach of each and every one. Staying true to the detail of the fragments that survive. Peeling back the decades of denial, secrecy, shame, horror. Taking great care in the laying bare of what is uncovered.

Labour of love.

Truthfully, I don't know if I can do that, or if it could ever be enough. Why should it be? Cruelty can never be erased. So much suffering. Words, gestures, images, sounds, all the compassion, all the wishing in the world—nothing can ever take it away. It is unbearable because we can't change it.

But there is nothing else; *agape* is what we have.⁴ We have to try to bear it, to listen, to understand. We cannot leave those who have borne the suffering all their lives to carry it alone for posterity. It's our human responsibility, our love's labour, those of us who were safe, those of us who were spared that suffering, to bear witness.

Love—is anterior to Life—
Posterior—to Death—
Initial of Creation, and
The Exponent of Earth—
(Emily Dickinson, Number
917, 432)

Silence I

In the dead quiet of these bare rooms, I hold my breath, feel the power of a silence broken only by the necessary choreography of gesture and movement: chisel scraping wood, dripping tap, hands shaping some strange matter, faint rasp of spooling lengths of tape, scrape of chair swivelling across the diagonal, brush swishing through a mane of hair, screaming madness barely contained, the echoless weight of intense concentration.

In the dead quiet, I hold my breath, listening, waiting, suspended, outside time.

Listening out for myriad untold stories, or if told as yet unheard, making their halting way to the surface of memory.

I hold my breath, waiting.

This is not the silence of those reduced to speechless terror, cowering under the monstrous brutality of those in whose care they had been placed.

Nor is it either the “really dangerous silence”⁵ of prohibition, denial and secrecy, self-serving and vainglorious, wreaking havoc with tender lives, ravaging and devastating.⁶

We will not stand for that.

This, we hope, is the silence of possibility, making way for understanding, a silence which usurps no voices.

It is our responsibility to listen out for it, and to hold it when we find it.

We need to know how to bear what has not yet been spoken.

A young woman sits quietly listening as we talk about the work we have seen. After a while, she joins the circle and begins to speak about what she has learned, what she hadn’t known before. The pain inflicted, the damage done, year after year of cruelty, so many children injured, so many lives blighted. The young woman stops speaking and weeps. There are times when sorrow and shame are beyond words.

It has no name.

There are times when silence is necessary so speech can begin and myriad stories can be told.⁷

That silence may be a kind of balm for the soul.

Silence 2

It was not done in our name, we say. No, but it happened within living memory, within shouting distance.⁸ All done behind our backs, discretely turned to keep well out of it. We closed our eyes, closed our ears, turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to the cruelties done to others.

Not guilty M’Lud, Sir, Mrs, Father, our Lord who art in Heaven.

And we saw
What we saw
And we didn’t see
What was hidden.

Rita Ann Higgins

Oh we have our reasons and excuses alright.

“We never knew,” we say, “we had no idea, not an iota of what was going on, sure how could we?”

So where did we think they went, all those boys and girls, secreted away from family, community, society, out of sight, out of mind? Who did we think lived in those dark forbidding places? What did

we think happened to the people behind those closed doors and high walls, down the road from where we lived or over beyond? Did we dream of them having high jinks, balloons and streamers with cake for tea, contentedly doing their sums and their spellings, taught by kind teachers, nuns and priests, who smiled at them, patted them gently and gave them sweets, bathed in sunlight every day, and tucked up tenderly every night in their little beds?

No, truly, what did we think became of those children sent, taken, sequestered? Who did we think took care of them, did we care who took care of them, and did we care if they didn't? Did we ever go looking for them, ever ask the odd question?

What of the girls and women who worked in servitude—slavery a more precise word—in middle-class homes? Where did we think they came from and did we wonder where they went when they left? Did we ever ask why they chose to work in “domestic service”? Did we think it was strange, when we employed them, that mothers had to leave their own babies behind to come and look after ours? Did we ever think it was cruel? Did we ever notice how they cried as they fed our bonny babies?

Did we ever wonder how they lived, if they were warm, if they felt safe, if they had enough to eat, if they were paid, if they had hope, if they were sometimes happy, those girls and women who washed our sheets and pillowcases, our table cloths and napkins, our shirts and underwear?

“The nuns,” we said, “the nuns have the laundries. Sure aren't they great, and all they do for those poor girls, no better than they should be.”

What in the name of all heaven were we thinking of?

We never looked, so we never saw. We never asked, so we never knew. If we had, we would have known, we could have known. We would have known about the cold, the hunger, the hard labour, the hard beds, the physical punishments and psychological torments, the sexual onslaughts, the cruel indifference, the loneliness, the desolation of the spirit, the despair.

If we thought about those things and more, we never talked about it, never said it out loud, never named whatever it was we thought. Perished the thought as soon as born. We learned our lessons so well. We were taught never to question, never to probe, never to answer back or speak up for ourselves. We were taught to obey, to curtsy, to bow, to take it on the chin. We learned fast to stay silent in the face of authority, whatever was said or done. We learned that bodies and sexuality were shameful and unspeakable.

But deep down, we knew about the dark places, knew them from our history and in our bones. We knew what was going on. We knew very well and we buried the knowledge. Just as we buried their bodies in unmarked graves.

Unmarked, uncounted, unremembered. Tender thin bodies of the hungry, the ill, the exhausted, the abused, the beaten, the violated, the tortured, the always vulnerable and powerless. Because their lives didn't count. You don't give a name to what doesn't count.

A great silence lay upon the land.

A silence of hiding lives, hiding suffering, hiding brutality, sadism, cruelty, indifference, hiding what didn't fit the image of valiant victimised holy Ireland, hiding all we didn't want to acknowledge.

Great pools of silence into which we were careful never to gaze.

The institutional abuse of children and young women and men was a national secret, a collective crime committed behind closed doors, pushed down by fists of iron beneath the register of official records and histories.⁹ We were all complicit.

And it isn't over. Our criminality and complicity are not confined to the safety of history. Every day, news trickles through of present risks and dangers to those who are most vulnerable and most in need of our love and care.

"Each new discovery," he said, "a stunning blow."

The wrong done to people whose only sin is to seek refuge, asylum. The inhuman treatment of those who are too young, too old, or too infirm, too incapacitated to defend themselves. Wilful, scandalous neglect, abuse, and cruelty. Outrage after outrage. We are a cruel people, at best indifferent. Which is unforgivable.

But we will guard silence no longer, we will break it, using every means at our disposal. No more secrets, no more lies.

We will not stand for it.

"True evil lies not in the depraved acts of the one, but in the silence of the many."¹⁰

Martin Luther King

What is Left

I am the hollow woman
 Husk scraped bare
 Shorn, sheared
 exsanguinated
 defleshed
 flayed
 chiselled bone
 scaffolding
 I am space where nothing rests
 Only the deepest pain

What have they done with my heart?

During the Middle Ages, defleshing was a mortuary procedure mainly used to transport human remains over long distances. It involved detaching the head, arms and legs, and removing skin, muscles and organs until only the bones remain. The process leaves telltale cuts on the bones.¹¹

We will work, then, with the bones. We will scrutinize the scars, the telltale cuts. We will hold them up to the light. Nothing will be left behind.

We will proceed with due care and attention.

When you dig into the experiences of others, you can hurt them.

We will attend lovingly to what we find. We will mind it, in every way we can.

It will never be enough, but it will be something, it will be heard, it will be seen, it will be held, it will be named.

“The guilt that cannot be assuaged for one generation will haunt the next.”

Darian Leader¹²

Remembering

First, we will refuse the casual brutality of our unremembering, of all we were taught to ignore, deny, suppress, avoid. We will dig deep within ourselves and bring to the surface what has been secreted for so long. We will feel it in our bodies, in our bones, in our hearts. The fear, the shame, the guilt, the appalling pain. Every blow, every assault. Every act of spite, malice, and sadism. The rejection, the coldness, the cruelty, the brutality. The disempowerment, the disdain, the disrespect. We will not flinch, deflect, or turn away.

Then we will set about the slow meticulous work of re-mem-bering: scrupulously retrieving and reassembling, repairing where necessary, every detail, fragment, shard, and iota. We will cherish every scrap we find, treat it as a treasure beyond compare. We will hold it close and take it deep into our hearts, until there is no more “I,” no more “You,” no more “They,” only the one.

We will go on until we believe we can do no more because it hurts. And then we will begin again for the work of remembering is never truly done, once and for all. It is a life-long task.

We will do it separately, each one to our own remembering, and we will do it together, hand in hand, refusing the obscurity of mass amnesia, until we have an intricacy of imbricated memories. And then we will begin again.

We will do the work of remembering to honour those in the past to whom great wrongs were done by people who had the power, the privilege, and the knowledge to do better.

We will do it for those who remain, in the hope of bringing them some small comfort and balm.

We will do it for ourselves, in atonement, because we are not now and never were innocent.

Our work will be strong, firm and constant, but, in the nature of all things, it will also be fragile, mutable, and ephemeral.

“Nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect.”¹³

Notes

1. Liz Burns works as an independent curator. She worked for the Fire Station Artists' Studios in Dublin where she curated the visual arts program. She curated the exhibition *It Has No Name*.
2. In the aftermath of the horror of the Second World War death camps, Theodor Adorno wrote of Paul Celan's poetry that it was "permeated by the shame of art in the face of suffering that escapes both experience and sublimation" (Adorno 1984, 444).
3. This was the phrase used by the late Mary Raftery, whose pioneering work unearthed these cruel, tragic histories (Raftery 1999).
4. Agape: Greek word meaning love in the spiritual sense. In its original meaning, it had no particular religious connotations.
5. "The demand for obedience translated regrettably into clerical child abuse and was translated into a really dangerous silence." Mary McAleese, cit. Mark O'Regan, *Irish Independent*, October 22, 2012.
6. "The [Ryan] Commission's report said testimony had demonstrated beyond a doubt that the entire system treated children more like prison inmates and slaves than people with legal rights and human potential, that some religious officials encouraged ritual beatings and consistently shielded their orders amid a 'culture of self-serving secrecy,' and that government inspectors failed to stop the abuses." "Irish Church Knew Abuse 'Endemic.'" *BBC News*, May 20, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8059826.stm>.
7. For all the reports we have had over the past several years, so many stories have still not been told, may never be told indeed.
8. Child protection policy was slow to develop in Ireland. Public awareness of clerical child abuse did not surface until the early 1990s, with the revelations of the Brendan Smyth case. See Keenan 2012.
9. See Smith (2001) for a discussion of what he calls "Ireland's architecture of containment," a system comprising both legislation and official discourses which effectively conspired to suppress information about the incarceration of so many vulnerable people.
10. Quote attributed to Martin Luther King Jr.
11. See the entry on Excarination in Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Excarnation>.
12. Darian Leader, "Bi-polar memoirs: What have I done?," *Guardian*, April 27, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/26/human-touch-in-bipolar-times>. See also Leader (2009).
13. "Wabi sabi is the beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete, the antithesis of our classical Western notion of beauty as something perfect, enduring, and monumental" (Koren 1998, 7).

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Doing Performance Ethnography Among the Dead: Remembering Lives of Japanese Migrants in the Trans-Pacific Sex Trade

Ayaka Yoshimizu

Preamble



Figure 1: Cranbrook Old General Cemetery. Photograph by Tadafumi Tamura.

What follows is an account of my performance ethnography on an elusive history of Japanese migrant women involved in the trans-pacific sex trade at the turn of the twentieth century. While this is a single-authored paper, it is inspired by works of a number of women who have engaged this history in the past and guided my journey. They include Japanese women writers from the late 1970s through the early 1990s, including Yoko Yamazaki (1972, 1974, 1981) and Miyoko Kudo (1989, 1991), who excavated stories of Japanese migrant sex workers abroad. This involved archival and fieldwork research, and travels across the Pacific, visiting cemeteries, looking for their graves, and praying for their spirits. The picture on the left, which includes myself standing by a headstone that belongs to a Japanese migrant, echoes a photograph of Kudo captured exactly at the same location in the Cranbrook Old General Cemetery during her research in Cranbrook, British Columbia.¹ This image also implicitly makes a reference to a photograph of Yamazaki at a cemetery in California,

produced during her research on the life of Waka Yamada, a feminist writer in Japan who once worked at a brothel in Seattle at the turn of the twentieth century.² My research is also built on my joint work with my former research partner Julia Aoki. This photographic image is an outcome that points to one of many, different possibilities of how this research might have evolved. Because I once imagined making a research trip to the interior towns of BC with Julia, the image, to me, is a powerful reminder of her absence and her past contributions to our research.³

My work is enabled by what is not immediately visible here—critical practices of women writers and researchers from the past and in the present.

Ayaka Yoshimizu is an instructor in the Department of Asian Studies and the UBC-Ritsumeikan Programs at the University of British Columbia. She completed her PhD in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University. Her areas of interest include transpacific studies, cultural memory, women's transnational migration, postcolonialism, and critical and creative methodologies.



Figure 2: Shohei Osada, *Tairiku Nippo*, March 18, 1930, p.5. Image published courtesy of the University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections.

and theatre enthusiast. After all, he comes from a family of the *samurai* class. After he was cremated at the Mount View Cemetery in Vancouver his ashes were sent back to Japan and properly buried in his family grave in Tokyo (Usuda 2010).

But I am mainly interested in him because he was the author of “Exploration of Devil Caves,” a newspaper column series published over seventy-one installments between 1908 and 1909, and which was followed up by a second part consisting of thirty-two installments in 1912. The series presents an elaborated account of the lives of Japanese men and women involved in the sex trade in Canada at the turn of the twentieth century. Osada’s intention in

publishing this series was to cast moral aspersion on such individuals, shame their behaviour, and ultimately eradicate prostitution among the Japanese in Canada. The presence of Japanese “devil caves,” referring to brothels, was perceived as a contributing factor to the anti-Japanese sentiment that existed among people who believed in a “White Canada” and supported racist, anti-immigration policies at that time. The series exposes the identities of what Osada calls “shameful men and women,” providing their names, nicknames, and their hometowns. Stories were written in a tabloid style, with hyperbolic language, highlighting individuals’ names and some sensational phrases in a big and bold font. His style is quite theatrical and provides dramatic descriptions of violence, internal conflicts, and relationship scandals. The series proved very popular with readers. The first part was re-edited and reorganized into a book with a new title, *Kanada no makutsu (Brothels in Canada)*, and published in 1910 in Vancouver. The book version includes a map of Canada, which indicates locations of Japanese brothels, and portraits of women in photographic images.

I would like to draw your attention to one death, which happened on March 14, 1930 at 474 Pender Street, Vancouver. The name of the deceased is Shohei Osada. His death registration states his “racial origin” is Japanese; occupation, newspaper editor; residence, 300 Jackson Avenue, Vancouver; the cause of death, asphyxia due to obstruction of larynx; age at death, 52. He was single and had no family in Canada. His death was reported by his employer, Yasushi Yamazaki, the owner of a local Japanese language newspaper *Tairiku Nippo*.

Archival documents show that Osada’s passing was a great loss to the Japanese community in Vancouver. A series of obituaries were published in the newspaper for six consecutive days following his death.⁴ In these documents, he is remembered as a diligent and talented editor and writer, haiku poet, music records collector,



Figure 3: “Exploration of Devil Caves (1),” *Tairiku Nippo*, November 19, 1908, p.5. Image published courtesy of the University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections.

Ironically, however, Osada's writing on women in the sex trade remains one of the few, and perhaps the most detailed, archival documents available today that resists the historical erasure of their presence in the past. Stories of sex workers are still repressed in official Japanese Canadian history, but I want to shed light on them. By re-appropriating the Caves Series and using it as a starting point, I excavate the traces of these women in archives and places they lived and died. This paper offers one account of my ethnographic research process, which involved performative archaeological work at cemeteries and archives. Instead of trying to fill the gaps of the archive, however, I seek another way to engage the past through performance, paying attention to the embodied knowledge that was produced in my encounter with the material traces and the evocation of the untraceable past, and sharing it in an evocative way. I use images not simply to illustrate my written narrative but as part of my performance, which re-enacts and recreates my experience. My goal here is not to reconstruct the past as an objective history using knowledge preserved in archival documents. Rather, I attempt to orient myself and my readers to a neglected past that sometimes produces effects in our material world and that stretches, or unsettles, our imaginations about things that might have happened, and how they might still be part of our lives in the present and the future.

Performing the Archive

In her essay entitled "Future Future," Flora Pitrolo (2015) reflects on archives of performance and discusses the impossibility for them to fulfill their mission as what Jacques Derrida calls "house arrest." From the institutional point of view, the archive ought to be a permanent dwelling place for historical documents, in which they are systematically classified and filed, physically secured and guarded. The archive also bestows the meaning of the documents "in privilege" and renders their initially private secrets public and non-secret (Derrida 1995, 10). However, archives of performance, Pitrolo writes, "thrive on the very unavailability of the material they are meant to safeguard" (para. 3), because performance consists fundamentally of movements and their disappearance. Performative moments are often found in "bodies, gestures, glances, sighs" that are impossible to *arrest*. In these archives, therefore, "absence is particularly present" (Pitrolo 2015, para. 2). Instead of showing us the truth about what is archived, the archive of performance overwhelms us with the impossibility of truth.

Doing archival research on migrant sex workers, I also encounter absences. Just like performances, lives of migrant sex workers are difficult to arrest in documents.⁵ Osada's writings suggest that most of Japanese migrant sex workers in North America from the turn of the twentieth century were transient migrants who did not settle in any one specific region or even country but continued moving on across borders, escaping from regulations, seeking new opportunities, or being traded by brothel owners. This also meant that they moved across multiple jurisdictions that might or might not have documented their transitory presence.



Figure 4: Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver. Photograph by author.



Figure 5: Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver.
Photograph by author.

It is also difficult to follow their movements by relying on official documents because they lived and worked in the underground economy. They usually had nicknames, sometimes more than one, and changed them according to the situation. Some women used forged passports. In general, official archives do not tell us much about the lives and deaths of “Oriental” women. When they do, those documents are erroneous, negligent, and above all, racist. On their death registrations, for example, these women’s names are spelled wrong, the last and first names are reversed, sections are often left blank, and their religious denomination can simply be “Jap.”

I know, I believe, these women existed but the archive tells us little about their lived experiences. As stated, perhaps the richest documentation of their lives in brothels can be found in Osada’s book *Brothels in Canada* (1910), under the section “Everyday Life of Prostitutes.” By cross-referencing the sex worker called Maple within his writing, I can infer that his descriptions of her illustrate a day in a brothel in Nelson, BC. This writing is ambivalent. While biased and disdainful, his detailed description of a moment of women’s lives in the brothel attests to the presence of a vibrant community of those who survived the underground.

She would wake up at around noon, rubbing her sleepy eyes almost closed. Her oversized flat face is white-spotted with face powder from the previous night, making her look like a child deer. “What’s with you, Ms. Maple? Wake up, it’s already noon,” she would run across her neighbour guestrooms to recruit cleaning helpers though not necessarily force them to get up. She’d rather roll an extra amount of Durham cigar powder and have a smoke before going to wash her face with a towel in her hand. As she gazes vacantly at the course of smoke, another woman would approach her on tiptoe from behind, yelling, “Boo!!”

“Stop romping around! Go wash your face now,” yells a pimp, who has been working hard to prepare a meal in the kitchen for a while. Pimps are responsible for all the work in the kitchen.

They would stamp into the kitchen just like ducklings chased down by a bully along the stream outside the back door. They would then wash their faces, do all the regular cleaning and sit at the table still with their pajamas on.

“I made my Chinaman treat me chow mein last night and it was good,” “Me like egg foo young better,” “I’ll report that to your Cantonese man,” “Who cares? I rather want to go back to Japan and eat okame soba noodle and unadon rice bowl.”

Talking big. Sensing the pimp’s disapproval, the women would stop talking and gobble down their chazuke bowl soup.

They'd have half an hour of idle chatter, leave behind laughter that is so loud that it'd pierce through the ceiling, and move back to their guestrooms. One would start her shamisen practice, just like the rain drops, and then continue reading Mamushi no Omasa (Omasa the Viper). Another would look for a mystery novel she has started. There is a greedy one who would send a pimp off to town to get candies or fruits and fill her mouth full. There are yet others who would put thick make-up on their shameless faces behind the doors and go out to town for shopping.

(Shohei Osada, *Brothels in Canada*, *Tairiku Nippo*, 1910: 19-21)

But the archival documents produced by members of the Japanese community in Canada, such as the *Tairiku Nippo* newspaper, are often male-authored and sexist, reflecting the patriarchal structure that regulated the community then.⁶ How do we start remembering lives of sex workers without reproducing sexist and racist discourses that frame existing archived documents?

Diana Taylor, in *The Archive and the Repertoire*, compares two economies for transmitting historical knowledge: the archive and the “repertoire” of performance. She suggests that traditional archives, which privilege Western epistemologies, are in fact limited as repositories of cultural material. She studies embodied practices of memory and argues: “by taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge” we can expand our way of engaging the past (2003: 16). Benjamin D. Powell and Tracy Stephenson Shaffer critique Taylor’s oppositional view of the archive and repertory performances, asking: “What are the ways that embodied practice is enacted in the archival process itself? How can archival texts and narratives be produced as extensions of the processes of embodied practices?” (2009: 9). What if we treat an archive as a critical site of performance, instead of a repository from which to extract historical “facts”? What if I orchestrate available archival materials differently through my performance? Perhaps, then, I can point to an alternative way to remember women’s lives.

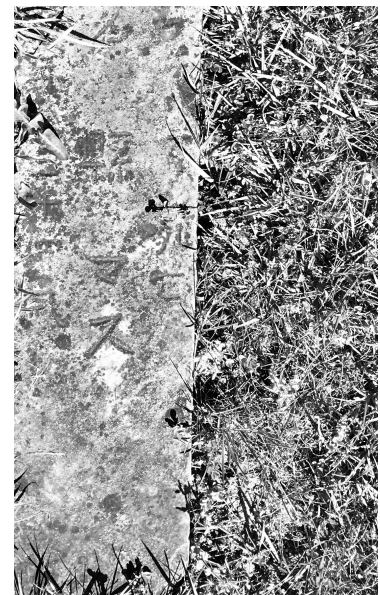


Figure 6: Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver. Photograph by author.

In Pitrolo’s essay, she develops a notion of “unhappened event” to describe the performances that the archive fails to arrest. An “unhappened event” is not the same as an event that never happened; “it is not an absence but an almost, a never which feels like a might have been” (2015: para. 13). If an “event” is a process of “coming out” or a “becoming” of something, and understanding based on a Latin etymology, then an archive “sucks the event back into the formlessness it came out of at the same time of its coming out, posits the event as real and then drags the event out of the sequentiality of the real, out of maps, calendars, annals, that is, out of the very stuff of the archive” (Pitrolo, 2015: para. 7). If we approach it critically, we can reappropriate the archive to activate our imagination of the event in its multiplicity of possibility, its becoming. The task of a performative approach to the archive would be to turn these possibilities into another event, or an unhappening-in-becoming. I follow Powell and Shaffer, in their adaptation of Peggy Phelan, and argue that performance here is not “a discrete object that disappears,” as suggested by Pitrolo, but rather “continually produc[es] systems, sites, and modes of critical inquiry” (Powell and Shalffer, 2009: 2).

How do we remember unarrested lives?

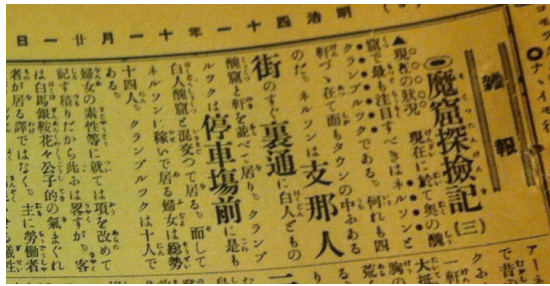


Figure 7: “Exploration of Devil Caves (3),” *Tairiku Nippo*, November 21, 1908, p.5. Image published courtesy of the University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections.

Currently, the interior caves that most deserve our attention include Nelson and Cranbrook. Each has four caves, and they are located inside the town. Nelson has them stand side by side with white caves on the backstreet of Chinatown; Cranbrook has them also mixed with white caves in front of the CPR station. In total of 14 women work in Nelson, and 10 in Cranbrook. (Shohei Osada, “Exploration of Devil Caves,” 21 November 1908)

Japanese brothels developed along the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) stations and in interior mining towns in the last decade of the nineteenth century and were quite vibrant for approximately two decades. To write the Devil Cave series, Osada left Vancouver for interior towns on September 2, 1908, to collect stories. He stayed in these towns until he returned to the *Tairiku Nippo*'s office in Vancouver on November 14, 1908. During this two-month period, he spent most of his time in Cranbrook and Nelson, the places that he identifies as the two major towns for Japanese prostitution.

I followed his footsteps and visited these two cities with a hope of finding something more about the history of Japanese sex workers. At the very least I would be able to get an embodied sense of the places in which they once lived and worked. As it turned out, I found myself spending most of my time in cemeteries, looking for graves that might have belonged to Japanese sex workers, putting flowers on them, and praying for their spirits. This was not an improvised decision, but is in fact a conventional practice that has been done by previous Japanese women writers, including Yamazaki and Kudo.

The process of my embodied engagement with the unarrested lives of Japanese sex workers started with my encounter with the presence *and* absence of Japanese headstones in cemeteries in Cranbrook and Nelson, and was followed by my archival research of official death records back in Vancouver. While archives tell me more about the elusiveness of the past I am studying than anything else, they do provoke further imagination. Pitrolo writes: “Weak, in essence, by being devoid of past or of past present, the unhappened event has nowhere to go other than the future” (2015: para. 15). It’s the very realization that “there is always a lot that we’re not seeing” (Pitrolo 2015: para. 14) that enables us to keep remembering the lives of the neglected and marginalized of the past, present and future.

Below I re-enact my research process as I performatively mimic, as I cite, the voices of archival documents—Osada’s reportage and official death records—although in my iteration they make a different gesture. By juxtaposing them with photographic images, excerpts from my fieldwork journal, and a reflective account of my encounter with Japanese headstones in the cemeteries, I

explore a way to remember, as I actively create a memory of the lives of women in the underground, trans-pacific world.

I use pseudonyms for all the women I encountered at the cemeteries and in death records, following the conventional nicknaming practice of people who lived in the underground economy.

Cranbrook

Cranbrook currently has four devil caves and in total about ten prostitutes. Cranbrook has a well-known cave district, which is often spoken together with Nelson, and its pioneering history is also complex. However, its way of doing things is very different from that of Nelson and Cranbrook is relatively more open. Of course, Cranbrook acquired such an open attitude because there are stores run by straight Japanese people nearby, which have their workers mixed with vagabonds, and they went through a number of troubles because of these relations. This is the primary difference from Nelson. The wives in Nelson only serve alcohol and never get involved in prostitution, but in Cranbrook everyone has their clients. In Nelson some hired prostitutes do not have their own men, but those in Cranbrook all have men. These men can vary from the lovers they made in this country, devils brought from Japan, to their actual husbands. Simply put, there are no women who are single. In Cranbrook many straight business people visit caves. They are rarely embroiled with each other. (Shohei Osada, "Exploration of Devil Caves," 24 November 1908)

*April 17, 2018.
The first night in Cranbrook turned out disastrously.
I was lying on the bed,
hearing Tad's snoring coming from right beside me,
and could not fall asleep for some reason.
Something was wrong with my stomach but I couldn't immediately tell.
Finally, I felt like vomiting and headed to the washroom.
I made two trips and everything I ate that evening,
the entire Bison burger,
was out and gone.
(Ayaka's journal)*

The General Section of the Old Cemetery in Cranbrook has a little section at the northern edge where Chinese and Japanese people were buried in the early twentieth century. I found three graves with Japanese women's names inscribed on them. But Osada writes that the Japanese community in Cranbrook had both "cave fellows" and "straight fellows" intermingled with each other. There is no way for me to tell which group these three women might have belonged to. If they were indeed sex workers, I find it is in fact incredible that there are individual graves erected for them. In Japan during the same time period women in the sex trade could have easily become *muenbotoke* or, literally, "spirits without (family) ties." They would be abandoned, remain unclaimed, and buried in collective graves without their names identified.

Grave #1

Being familiar with the modern, “invented” tradition of Japan and its patriarchal family system, I automatically expect an unmarried woman to be buried together with her father’s family or a married woman with her husband’s. Either way, one would normally see only one last name in a family section, because children always inherit their father’s name and the last names of all incoming women are converted to their husbands’ family names upon marriage.



Figure 8: Grave #1, Cranbrook, BC. Photograph by author.

I am perplexed by one of the graves I found in Cranbrook. “The grave of Sadayo Murata,” the inscription reads in Japanese. What confuses me is an English inscription below, which reads, “T. Fukuda.” What can this mean? Is this person a man or a woman? Is T buried together with Sadayo? Or is T the one who erected this grave for her? What is T’s relationship to Sadayo? Her lover? Employer? Co-worker?

I also realize that I had before never visited the graves of strangers in my life. Graves are supposed to be familiar and intimate sites, where visitors are

supposed to say to the deceased, “Thank you for looking after us, ancestors!” The grave visit affirms and reinforces family ties defined by blood relations.

At the same time, these graves do not feel alienating. Why would they? I meet strangers all the time in my life. Most of them are alive, and some of them happen to be dead.

Now, what shall I say to her?

Hello, nice to meet you.

Death Registration

Name of the Deceased: *Sadayo Murata*

When died: *January 14, 1905*

Where died: *Cranbrook, BC*

Sex: *Female*

Age: *20 years*

Rank or profession: ***House Keeper***

Where born: *Japan*

Certified cause of death, and duration of illness: (blank)

Signature of informant: *W. R. Beatty, Undertaker*

When registered: *January 16, 1905*

Religious denomination: *Methodist*

Medical Certificate of Death

I hereby certify that I attended Sadayo Murata of Cranbrook BC, who was apparently aged or was stated to be aged twenty years: that I last saw her on the 9th day of January, 1905, that she died on the 14th day of

January, 1905 at Cranbrook; that the cause of her death was tuberculosis of lungs and that the disease continued about six weeks.

Signature: S.W. Connelly, Cranbrook BC.

April 18, 1918.

Weather in Cranbrook is winter cold.

*A bit of shower,
dark.*

According to a brief report in Tairiku Nippo,

*Osada had fever while he was in Cranbrook
and was hospitalized in St. Eugene Hospital as of September 21, 1908.*

*Is my sickness
a coincidence?*

*Dave went through Dr. King and Dr. Green's Day Book,
which the Cranbrook Archives had just recently acquired.*

*He could not find anything
that might be related to Osada's hospitalization.*

(Ayaka's journal)

(*Dave is an archivist at the Cranbrook History Centre)

Grave #2



Figure 9: Grave #2, Cranbrook, BC. Photograph by author.

Some headstones have additional inscriptions that indicate the date of death, the age at death and even the hometown of the deceased. The Japanese inscription of this grave reads, “The grave of Toku Iketani.” Below, the English inscription reads, “Native of Wakayamaken, Japan; Aged 32 Yrs; Died 16 Dec. 1909.”

According to her death registration, she had an alias, although both her “official” first name and the other first name do not sound rightly Japanese. Perhaps these were mis-transcribed by the person who was

filling out the form. It seems that the official record decided that she had two last names, as well: one which sounds a little bit more western (and thus must be official); another which is in agreement with the name inscribed on the headstone, and accurately Japanese (or “alien,” and thus must be an alias).

Osada always identifies men by their last names and women by their given (nick)names. Quite frequently, he calls women so-and-so's (men's family name) Omitsu, Ochiyo, Otama, and so forth, informing us which man the woman belongs to. This, of course, reflects the Japanese patriarchal family system, which only recognizes men as heads and treats women as their possessions.

Thus, women's identities were made unstable, tentative and unidentifiable in oppressive ways, but women themselves also used multiple names tactically to disguise their identities. Osada writes about a woman who went by Okan in the pleasure district back in Yokohama, and upon arrival in Canada, started using another nickname, Omine. Besides, she has her “real” name given at birth. He

describes her as an “experienced and crafty warrior prostitute,” who deftly “hides” and navigates her life amongst regulative social entanglements (“Exploration of Devil Caves,” 29 January 1909).

Death Registration

Name and surname of deceased: ***Aiano Iketain alias De Iketani***

When died: *Dec 16, 1909*

Where died: *Cranbrook Hospital*

Sex: *Female*

Age: *32 years*

Rank or profession: ***House Keeper***

Where born: *Japan*

Certified cause of death: ***Shock following operation***

Duration of illness: *24 hours*

Name of physician: (blank)

Signature, description and residence of informant: *Hospital Record, W. R. Beatty Undertaker, Cranbrook BC*

Signature of registrar: *J. F. Armstrong*

*April 18, 1918.
I just realized
that the Old Cemetery
was located
right across
from our hotel room
over
the CPR tracks.
(Ayaka’s journal)*

Grave #3

I am struck by the name inscribed on this grave: Misao Kimura. In Japanese “misao” means chastity. How transgressive would it have been for a woman whose name meant chastity to get involved in the sex trade? Osada’s Devil Cave series briefly mentions a woman whose nickname was Misao. “How foolish is it to name a prostitute Misao,” Osada writes, amazed that her pimp would have apparently given her this nickname. In fact, sex industries make a profit by selling contradictions. Virginity appeals. Women perform purity. Each sex act is special.



Figure 10: Grave #3, Cranbrook, BC. Photograph by author.

Apparently, “Oriental” women had their own appeals. Osada is mortified by explicit displays of brothel signs that say, “Japanese House” or “Tokyo House,” which also sometimes include

nicknames of women in Japanese or English, such as “Hana,” “Ito,” “Maple,” or “Josie” (“Exploration of Devil Caves,” 21 November 1908). Elsewhere, he notes that Japanese women were so rare in Moose Jaw that there would be an “endless line of clients even when they charged 15 dollars for overnight stays after 2 AM” (10 December 1908).

“Misao” also means dignity.

Again, the name on this headstone does not match the name that appears on Canadian official documents. After some database searching, I found a death registration in the BC Archives that is linked to the grave of Misao Kimura. Her name on paper is Sato Kimura.

Death Registration

1. Full Name: *Sato Kimura*
2. a) Sex: *Female*, b) Color or race: **Yellow**, c) Single/Married/Widowed/Divorced: *Single*
3. a) Birthplace: *Japan*, b) Date of Birth: (blank)
4. Age: *21 Years*
5. Died on the *15* day of *Nov*, *1914* at about *2 AM*
6. Last occupation: **Home keeper**
7. Former occupation: (blank)
8. a) Place of death: *St. Eugene Hospital*; b) How long at place of death: *2 weeks*
9. Former or usual residence: *Cranbrook*
10. How long resident in city: **3 months**
11. How long in district: **3 months**
12. How long in Canada, if foreign born: **1 year**
13. a) Name of father: *K. Kimura*, b) Birthplace of father: *Japan*
14. a) Maiden name of mother: *Miki Kimura*, b) Birthplace of mother: *Japan*

The Foregoing Stated Personal Particulars are True to the Best of My Knowledge and Belief:

15. Informant: *J. Otsuji*, Address: *Cranbrook*
16. Place of burial: *Cranbrook*, Date of burial: *Nov 17, 1914*; Hour: *3 PM*
17. Undertaker: *W. R. Beatty*, Address: *Cranbrook*

Physician's Certificate of Cause of Death

I hereby certify that I attended Sato Kimura from Nov 3, 1914, to Nov 14, 1914; that I last saw her alive on the 14 day of Nov, 1914; that she died, as I am informed on the 15 day of Nov, 1914; At about 2 o'clock AM; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief the cause of her death was as hereafter written.

- a. Remote or Earlier Pathological or Morbid Condition: **Malignant Endocarditis**
- b. Immediate or Final Determining Cause: **Embolism**

Witness my hand, this *16* day of *November, 1914*

Signature: *H.W. Green*

Address: *Cranbrook*

*April 19, 2018.
Caught cold.
My throat hurt throughout the night.
This is a bad sign.
(Ayaka's journal)*

Nelson

*Compared to the situation in Cranbrook, those in Nelson have their lives in order. There is no other Japanese in the first place and the wives of the cave owners do not prostitute themselves, but instead they only serve alcohol on clients' demands, and during the daytime, they supervise the domestic economy. Prostitutes take turns and do mopping and laundry, and use the remaining time for their own studies. They were able to come to this state after the four caves had a discussion and formed something like a union and worked hard, but previously they had many women who visited gambling places. Well, it does not mean that I am eulogizing current situation of Nelson caves. I am simply introducing general facts. (Shohei Osada, "Exploration of Devil Caves," *Tairiku Nippo*, 24 November 1908)*

*April 21, 2018.
I discovered
a Japanese-owned hip ramen bar called
"Red Light"
and ordered a half-size pork ramen with a half-size caesar salad,
but this beautiful purple kale variation,
which nicely represented the contemporary culture of Nelson,
had too much garlic in it
for my stomach (still in recovery)
to digest successfully.
I feel like vomiting
again.
(Ayaka's journal)*

According to Osada, no Japanese person except for "cave fellows" lived in Nelson at that time. If this is true, there is a very high chance that women who died in Nelson back then were involved in the sex trade. Grave searching in Nelson, however, was a little more complicated than in Cranbrook. At a local archive I was given a burial index of the Nelson Memorial Park, which enabled me to locate burials of Japanese people in specific sections in the cemetery. However, there were two problems. First, some burials that appear in the index had never been marked in the cemetery; second, some early burials were not recorded or their records did not survive, and so they do not appear in the index that is available today. Nonetheless, I was able to find two graves that belong to Japanese women with the help of the index and thanks to a city worker whom I met at the cemetery. He remembered and kindly showed me the location of other Japanese graves from the time period of my interest. He told me that his wife was Japanese, implying that he is more cognizant of Japanese names.

Grave #4

In Nelson, Japanese graves from the early twentieth century were found either in General Section #1 or #2. While these graves were not pushed toward the edge and segregated from the rest like in Cranbrook, they were clustered together in the same blocks.

This grave was found in General Section #2, but unlisted in the index. The inscription of this grave reads: “Japanese, Chika Noguchi; Born in Shizuoka-Ken, Japan; Died Oct. 30, 1904; Aged 24 Yrs.”



Figure 11: Grave #4, Nelson, BC. Photograph by author.

This headstone stands side by side with another, smaller grave. According to its English inscription, she died on May 18, 1906 and was aged one day. The headstone does not indicate her first name, suggesting that she probably did not get to be named before she died. The Japanese inscription reads: Japanese, Girl Urabe. Assuming that Chika’s headstone had already been here when the baby was buried, I wonder what brought the baby’s remains to be buried right next to Chika’s. It might have been institutional racism (to assemble or lump together “Japs” into the same location), a mother’s wish (so the baby stays close to a member of her own people), or something else. Whatever the circumstance was, the pair of Japanese headstones does look like that of a parent and a child.

Osada’s series has a digression where he briefly describes the lives of mixed-race children born of relationships between sex workers and their clients. Owaka in Cranbrook, for example, has a daughter whose biological father is an unknown “white” man. The child lives with a white foster family in town but the child visits Owaka every Sunday and calls her “mama.” In Calgary Konagaya’s wife, whose (nick)name is not indicated, gives birth to a boy whose father is a black man. Konagaya is in a rage that his wife had an “alien child.” In a different section, Osada writes about a child whose mother dies due to alcoholism and is raised thereafter by her brothel employers. There were different forms of family, full of “aliens” in the household according to the idealized and racist standards of the modern nations of both Japan and Canada. These families had extended networks that went beyond blood relations.

Chika, too, continues growing relationships in her afterlife.

Death Registration

Name and surname of deceased: ***Noguchi Chika***

When died: *Oct 30, 1904*

Where died: *Nelson BC*

Sex: *Female*

Age: *Twenty four years*

Rank or profession: (blank)

Where born: *Shizuoka Ken, Japan*

Certified cause of death, and duration of illness: ***Brain tumor, 3 weeks***

Name of physician: *W.O. Rose M.D.*

Signature, description and residence of informant: *D. J. Robertson Co.*

Undertakers, Nelson BC

When registered: *3 Nov 1904*

Religious denomination: *Buddhist*

Signature of registrar: *C.D. Blackwood*

April 23, 2018.

*I used up the entire box of Kleenex
that I stole from my hotel room.*

*My nose is
red*

like a clown.

(Ayaka's journal)

Grave #5

According to the burial index, Japanese people who died in Nelson in the early twentieth century were all buried without being cremated—the standard practice in Japan today. The index indicates cases of cremation from more recent years, and I wonder if crematory services were not available back then or if these people chose burial over cremation. I did some quick research and learned that cremation was not then as widespread as it is today in Japan. To have a grave erected was also a privilege reserved only for people of a high class. Otherwise bodies were normally buried under the earth, in the river, or the ocean, unmarked.



Figure 12: Grave #5, Nelson, BC Photograph by author.

An unnamed gravedigger in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* tells the eponymous Prince, in Act 5, Scene 1, that bodies decay differently, reflecting their lives before death. (I remember this scene so vividly, because I acted the gravedigger's role in my high school English class in Japan and was forced to memorize his lines in Old English by repeating them over and over during my commute to school. But I also remember that I did not dislike my role.) I do not have the kind of archaeological

knowledge that gravediggers would have, but I can at least attend to the inscriptions on the headstones and tell something about the women's lives before death.

This grave was found in Block #30 in the General Section #1. The inscription reads: "In Memory of Waka Furuta; Died April 11, 1907, Age 28 Yrs; **Erected by her friends.**"

In his Devil Cave series, Osada highlights internal conflicts between brothel managers over popular sex workers or money, and relationship conflicts over adultery. One exception might be when he mentions how women in Nelson have "union"-like, cooperative working relations. Otherwise, both men and women in his writing generally appear deceitful, greedy and self-centred. What he does not say is the fact that such conflicts also exist among what he calls "straight fellows," who can also be as destructive as their "cave" counterparts.

A grave like this, however, proves the presence of relationships and solidarity that women constructed and were part of.

Hello Waka, bello friends.

Death Registration

Name and surname of deceased: *Waka **Furta***

When died: *April 11, 1907*

Where died: *Kootenay Lake Hospital*

Sex: **Female Japanese**

Age: *25 years*

Rank or profession: **Sport***

Where born: *Japan*

Certified cause of death: **Abscesses Broad Ligaments Abdomen**

Name of Physician, if any: N.H. Wilson

When registered: *20 May 1907*

Religious denomination: **Jap**

Signature of registrar: *Perry G. (illgible)*

(*In those days, the phrase "sporting ladies" was used to refer to women who sold sex. "Sport" as an occupation category probably was equivalent to sex work.)

*April 23, 2018.
Temperature 20 Celsius,
weather pleasant.
My runny nose wouldn't
stop.
(Ayaka's journal)*

How do we remember Aki?

I found the name Aki Masunaga in the burial index of the Nelson Memorial Park. According to this record, she died on the October 26, 1914, buried on the same day in General Section #1. The block

number is unknown. The same record indicates “N” for the presence of a marker, which means that there is no grave erected for her.

I still searched for her grave several times in the cemetery...



Figure 13: Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver. Photograph by Tadafumi Tamura.

but had no luck in finding it.

My archival database search gave me no result for the death registration of Aki Masunaga. Instead, I found a marriage certificate of a woman whose first name is Aki and a man whose last name is Masunaga. This marriage took place in Nelson, but it is dated August 17, 1917, three years after Aki Masunaga’s death according to the above burial index. The same database found a death registration for Aki Furuta, who has the same last name as Waka Futura, mentioned above. She died in Nelson at the age of 29 on October 23, 1914, only three days before the date of death of Aki Masunaga indicated in the burial index.

So is Aki Furuta on this death registration the Aki Masunaga I found in the burial index? Or are they two different Akis who happened to have died in the same month in Nelson? Or was Aki Masunaga’s date of death mis-recorded in the index and was she in fact the same person as the newly-wed Aki Masunaga on the 1917 marriage certificate?

I cannot deny my desire for the “truth,” but I give in to the incompleteness of the official records of “Oriental” women. I encounter an unarrested death.

Hello, Aki. Are you there?

How do I tend to her remains if they cannot be traced to a specific location within the cemetery? Where exactly should I place flowers when there is no headstone? The absence of the marker of Taki makes me wonder about other bodies that may lie underneath without having markers that establish their locations. I also recall a number of unnamed burials that I saw in the index. How do we remember those unnamed spirits? Unrecognized and indistinguishable lives?

I am reminded that many Japanese women in “caves” in Canada were transient migrants, who did not have the privilege to settle permanently and produce offspring in a “legitimate” way, to institutionally mark their past presence. Taki continues to be unsettled in her afterlife, and also unsettles our ways of remembering the deceased and the past.

Instead of trying to pin down their locations, I prefer to attend to the space in between graves, an ambiguous space from which I imagine Taki and other women escaping, in death, institutional arrest.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge that the places on which I conducted my research are the unceded traditional territories of the Ktunaxa and Kinbasket peoples, and of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and that I am an uninvited guest in their lands. I would also like to acknowledge that my current research builds on my collaborative work with Julia Aoki, which included Japanese-English translation of Shohei Osada’s “Exploration of Devil Caves” series, among other work we did together. Many thanks to Tadafumi Tamura for his photographic work, including photo-documentation of my research in Cranbrook, Nelson, and Vancouver, and post-production work. I am grateful to two archivists, Dave Humphrey at the Cranbrook History Centre and Jean-Philippe Stienne at the Touchstone Nelson Museum of Art and History, who kindly assisted me with searching relevant archival materials and locating former red-light districts and old cemeteries in town. Many thanks to Heather De Forest for deciphering old English handwriting on official records. Thank you very much to Dara Culhane for being my inspiration for performative writing and for advice on ethics, and to Josh Trichilo for reading my earlier drafts and making editorial suggestions. I would like to extend my gratitude to my friends and colleagues, Novia Shih-Shan Chen, Casey Collins, Yiwen Liu, and Sho Ogawa, for their intellectual and emotional support. I also appreciate Róisín O’Gorman, this issue’s editor, for her constructive feedback on my earlier draft, which helped me strengthen the framing of this paper. Last but not least, this research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Notes

1. See Kudo (1991, 125) for this image.
2. See Yamazaki (1981, 161) for this image.
3. See Aoki and Yoshimizu (2015) for our collaborative research outcomes.
4. Osada is also included as a key member of the Japanese community in Jinshiro Nakayama’s *The Great History of the Development of the Japanese in Canada* (Kanada doho hatten taikan), published in 1929.
5. For an elaborated discussion of “non-arrested” documents of women and the gendered nature of the archive, see Linda M. Morra, *Unarrested Archives* (2014).
6. See Yoshimizu (2018) for more discussion on the role of *Tairiku Nippo* as a site in which patriarchal discourses of women in the Japanese community in Canada were produced.

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The Politicized Disabled Body

Kaite O'Reilly

Theatre could be defined as the study of what it is to be human. For millennia we have come to sit communally—a group of human beings watching another group of human beings pretending to be other human beings. We are endlessly fascinated with each other, yet a place purported to be about the range of human possibility has for too long been circumscribed and limited, especially towards a large proportion of the population.

As I have discussed at length elsewhere (O'Reilly 2017a, 2017b), for millennia in the Western theatrical canon, the atypical body has been used to scare, warn, explain and explore human frailty, mortality, and the human condition. Disability has been a metaphor for the non-disabled to explore their fears and embedded societal values. Although disabled characters appear in thousands of plays, seldom has the playwright been disabled, or written from that embodied, or political perspective. The vast majority of disabled characters in Western theatrical tradition are tropes, reifying the notions of “normalcy.” Some strange untruths have therefore been created and recycled in our dramas for stage and screen: the rich, rewarding reality of our lives replaced with problematic representations which work to keep us different, “special,” and apart. This “othering” of difference (which also includes gender, sexual preference, belief system, cultural heritage, and so on) provides a “useful” slide-rule against which notions of “being normal” and “fitting in” can be measured. These distorted ideas in our entertainment media legitimize the negative attitudes that can lead to discrimination and hate crime.

As a multi-award-winning playwright and dramaturg who identifies culturally and politically as disabled, I have been exploring this territory for several decades, informed by the Social model of disability, working across and between so-called “mainstream” culture and what I coin “crip” culture. I consider disability a social construct—I am a woman with a mild sensory and a degenerative physical impairment, but it is society’s attitudinal and physical barriers which are the disabling factors, not the idiosyncrasies of my body.

In my work I am interested in creating new protagonists, with different narratives, and with different endings, and in challenging and expanding the actual theatre languages at play in live performance through my engagement with the aesthetics of access. I believe re-imagining disability opens up possibilities in content, representation, aesthetics and form—changing the stories we tell, how they are told, and by whom.

Paul Darke (1997, 2003) and other disability performance scholars such as Carrie Sandahl (2005) have written at length about the limited plot lines for the disabled character. Often, as seen again with the 2016 film version of JoJo Moyes’ *Me Before You*, it is emphatically “better dead than

Kaite O'Reilly (www.kaiteoreilly.com) is a playwright, radio dramatist, writer, and dramaturg who works in disability arts and culture and so-called mainstream culture. She has won many awards for her work, including the Peggy Ramsay Award for *YARD* (The Bush, London), Theatre-Wales Award for *peeling* (Graeae Theatre company), and the Ted Hughes Award for new works in poetry for her reworking of Aeschylus’s *Persians* for National Theatre Wales in their inaugural year. She works internationally, with plays translated/produced in thirteen countries worldwide. *Atypical Plays for Atypical Actors* and *The d Monologues* are published by Oberon

disabled.” In films and plays stereotypes rule—the blind wise “seer,” the evil and twisted mastermind, the hero who overcomes her impairments to “pass” as non-disabled. From Tiny Tim to Richard III to Oedipus, we have been the personification of uselessness, or evil incarnate. These stories and characters are so prevalent, Paul Darke claims the audience believes they understand and know disabled experience, even though it is through a filter that isolates, individualizes, medicalizes or finally normalizes the character. What the audience is experiencing are not the “truths” of our lives, but the long cultural and linguistic practice of ascribing meaning to the atypical body. We are metaphors—something the disabled and Deaf actor-characters in my metatheatrical play *peeling* (2002) deconstruct, subvert, and ultimately rebel against.

As a playwright, I try to present different protagonists and different stories, often challenging contemporary representations of disability. The survivors of TBI (traumatic brain injury) in my 2008 play *The Almond and the Seaborse* subvert notions of brain injury splashed across the media and question who the real “victims” are—if indeed there are any. Protagonists, their journeys and outcomes can be subverted and changed, offering more possibilities and rich, engrossing drama that avoids stereotypes.

This reconsideration of narrative and “protagonist” is just one element in what I coined “Alternative dramaturgies informed by a D/deaf and disability perspective” while Arts and Humanities Research Council Creative fellow at Exeter University’s drama department (2003–06), and latterly while affiliated with Freie Universität’s International Research Centre “Interweaving Performance Cultures” (2012–18). “Alternative” to what? To the mainstream, ableist, hearing perspective. By “alternative dramaturgies” I mean the content, processes, structures and forms that reinvent, subvert, or critique “traditional” or “conventional” representations and routes.

A further example would be the “aesthetics of access”: using access “tools” creatively, and from the start of the process rather than as an “add-on” for a particular stratum of the audience, identified through impairment (“audio description and touch tours provided for the visually impaired...”). I’m interested in a holistic experience, where the entire audience engages with the theatre languages at play through their individual modes of communication: embedded audio description; bilingual work in visual and spoken/projected languages; creative captioning integrated into the scenography design as a central element of the set.

These devices make the work more accessible, but most importantly they challenge the ingrained assumptions and hierarchies in contemporary theatre and culture. When we change the bodies who perform, design, direct, create, and commission the work in our pleasure palaces, when we change the theatre languages used, the processes and practice are inherently changed as well. We can then truly be a place that celebrates all the possibilities of human variety, challenging notions of “difference” and revoking the old stories and their predictable endings.

Change is coming, with more disabled and Deaf artists coming to the fore across artforms. This is partly owing to the fruits of the UK and US disability civil rights movements, out of which disability arts and culture grew, and the disability arts forums, organizations, and festivals that supported and still encourage this growth. In the UK it is also down to initiatives such as Unlimited,¹ keen to promote, commission, and embed the work of disabled and Deaf artists in the so-called “mainstream” cultural sector on a level never experienced before.

Inclusivity and *diversity* are currently buzz-words internationally, and although I applaud initiatives that aim to integrate more Deaf, disabled and neuro-diverse practitioners into theatre productions, I have a caveat: the atypical body is not neutral, and placing a disabled figure on stage is not necessarily a radical act in itself. Much relies on the framing, and the controlling artistic perspective, for the atypical body can be used dramaturgically by the director/choreographer to express content and meaning beyond the actuality of the body—and sometimes without the actor's awareness or participation. My Unlimited/National Theatre Wales production, *In Water I'm Weightless*, part of the official Cultural Olympiad celebrating the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics, is a case in point. Featuring six of the UK's leading Deaf and disabled performers, and directed by John E. McGrath, the actors chose the content they performed from my authored collection of monologues and also controlled how they were placed and represented on stage. Several of them had had bad experiences of previously being used as a dramaturgical tool to express subtext or create additional material and meaning beyond the content of the performance text.

For me, this is central: having a politicized disability perspective informed by the Social model of disability brings a broadening in attitude, in values, and enables an avoidance of narrow definitions of “normality.” This perspective, when disability-led, encourages impairments not to be viewed as something to be cured or overcome. Rather, it embraces diversity and multiple modes of communication, used artistically.

Perhaps in the aesthetics of access we can begin changing the experience of theatre along with its languages, and start escaping the tyranny of normalcy.

Note

1. Unlimited is an arts commissioning program that enables new work by disabled artists to reach UK and international audiences. See <https://weareunlimited.org.uk>.

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BOOK REVIEWS

***Space Invaders: Radical Geographies of Protest*, by Paul Routledge. London: Pluto Press, 2017. 192 pp.**

Reviewed by Caoimhe Mader McGuinness

The core proposal of Paul Routledge's *Space Invaders* is a reading of protests through adding a spatial perspective to Rancièrian articulations of dissensus, defined by the author as "the appearance of subjects in a refigured space so as to be seen and heard in it" (13). The author proposes to consider an impressive range of protest practices through six distinct spatial strategies, presented as separate chapters: place, making space, staying mobile, conveying words, extending reach, and changing assumptions and beliefs. The breadth of protests considered is extensive, especially with regard to geographical locations, as the author discusses strategies spanning from Nepal to Palestine and Chiapas to Scotland. Routledge positions himself as an activist scholar and radical geographer, and some of his most vivid accounts of protest are those he has participated in himself, but this book is generally compelling due to its discussion of a huge variety of modes of resistance which have emerged throughout the world. His diverse accounts of modes of resistance take us from urban commons in Athens to land occupations in Bangladesh, from Black Lives Matter in the US to barricades set up in the town of Patan in Nepal, to instances of international mobilization and coordination, for example through the People's Global Action Network which emerged in the 1990s.

A major strength of the book is how the author's methodology, organizing his discussion across the aforementioned spatial strategies, allows him not only to offer a diverse range of material, but also to draw similarities across vastly different sites across both the Global South and the Global North. For example, in the fifth chapter dedicated to how activists communicate their demands, Routledge begins by discussing the power of testimony in the ongoing struggle of the Save the Narmada Movement (NBA), a campaign by Indian *adivasi* (tribal) subsistence farmers to halt the construction of dams which would see their homes and livelihoods submerged, and their people displaced. Framing this as a strategy of "discursive resistance," he goes on to compare the effectiveness of NBA's use of slogans stressing the detrimental effect of the dams to the "motive force of communiqués" deployed by Mexico's Zapatista movement in Chiapas as "an integral part of their struggle" (86). The pairing of material protests with powerful political declarations, a cornerstone of Zapatista strategy, is then further framed by Routledge as a direct inspiration for culture jamming in Western activist movements. The distinct modes of activist propaganda discussed are analyzed both in terms of their specificity and the ways they might inform each other across vastly different social and geographical contexts. More broadly, the author's choice to discuss the question of social reproduction up front—both in the introduction and the first chapter on place making—adds a welcome focus on modes of resistance which centre questions of the home and gender, as well as pointing to the types of labour necessary for the maintenance of protests which often go unnoticed.

The chapter most strongly grounded in a performance studies approach is the seventh one, which analyzes "feeling out of place," as the author considers how activists have challenged "the feelings and meanings of particular place" (113). Drawing from Gramsci's understanding of hegemony and culture as a means of "transforming consciousness within society" (113), Routledge argues that "performance and the performance of emotions have become increasingly important in the practice of politics" (114). This framework leads him to focus on three heterogeneous case studies: the Clandestine Rebel Clown Army, instances of Western LGBT activism in the US and the UK, and

the actions of the Russian feminist activist punk band Pussy Riot. All three examples are in themselves protest strategies that deploy performative elements such as clowning, kiss-ins, dress up, and live music, but it is also the way Routledge understands their effectiveness that might offer a useful contribution to the growing work on protest in performance studies. Focusing on emotion, the author describes his examples as “ethical spectacles,” drawing attention to how “emotional dimensions of activist experience and (inter)action remains a potentially compelling intervention in the repertoire of political performance, particularly when combined with the confrontational approach of direct action and the subversive power of humour or the mobilising force of anger” (128).

The methodology and clarity of *Space Invaders* make Routledge’s arguments easy to follow overall, and while the case studies are analyzed via separate spatial categories, these are more often than not read alongside each other rather than understood as distinctly separate modes of organizing. This is stressed in the author’s concluding remark that as protest practices are constantly adapting to the future, there might be a growing need to develop “relational, compositional and organisational powers across multiple sites of intervention in order to refigure space” (149). Whereas Routledge is careful to consider his chosen examples as linked across spatial categories, a minor aspect which occasionally appears to contradict this choice is the way he appears to separate specific identity categories from each other and from political affiliations. For example, he describes the 1969 New York Stonewall riots as an event started by “gay people, . . . drag queens, people of colour and young people” (123). This seems to suggest that the identity categories listed here—“young people,” “people of colour,” and “drag queens”—are wholly independent of each other, and not attributes which might be shared by the same person, despite Routledge’s own comments about intersectionality in the conclusion. These aspects of the book do not, however, stand too much in the way of the author’s otherwise detailed examination of case studies which, as well as serving as potent examples for Routledge’s case for a radical spatial understanding of protests, have the immense benefit of documenting such a broad range of worldwide instances of resistances as they emerge and adapt across local and global sites.