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KEGELS FOR HEGEL

Sexing Up Social Theory

Giving Brain/Getting Brain

Commodity Fetish

The Interdisciplinary School of Raunch

Performance Anxieties

Hooking Up

Power Play, Power Tops, Power Bottoms

Death Drive

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P A S T E L E
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KEGELS FOR HEGEL

Sexing Up Social Theory

Kegels For Hegel is an open collaboration of artists, academics and other creative, clever, disreputable types founded by an art historian and an anthropologist. This project -- compiled by Pastelegram in collaboration with Kegels for Hegel in 2015 - 2016 -- builds a community of queerly ambivalent songs, music videos, and writings that both revere and mess with the intellectual production of philosophers.

The full archive of videos, sounds and interactive articles is available at:
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Please explore and Keep Kegeling!!

Contents

Giving Brain / Getting Brain

KEGELS FOR HEGEL	Kinsey Grade Killers ft. Biz Vicious (stills)	5
KEITH MCNEAL	Dear Dr Ruth (a love letter)	6
WILLIAM MAZZARELLA	A Most Zizekian Dream	31

Commodity Fetish

LAURA LETINSKY AND SARAH LUNA	Better Products? Feminism, Sex, Work, Art, and Commodities	34
KEGELS FOR HEGEL	Thing (Love Song to Karl Marx and Friends) (stills)	57

The Interdisciplinary School of Raunch

KEGELS FOR HEGEL	I Wanna Fight You to the Death (Love Song to G.W.F. Hegel) (stills)	59
CHRISTIANA LARAGUES	Reflections on Amorous Relationships with Avant-Garde Media Dream	60
JILLIAN HERNANDEZ	Raunch Aesthetics as Visceral Address: (MORE) Notes from a Voluptuary	61
KEGELS FOR HEGEL	[REDACTED] Grant application	91
KEGELS FOR HEGEL	Manifesto de la Invaginación / Invagination Manifesto	99

Performance Anxieties

MICHELLE HYUN	Letter to the visitor	102
KEGELS FOR HEGEL	Live at the University Art Gallery, UCSD, 2013	108
JULIO MURILLO GARCIA AND ELOÍSA MORA OJEDA	Logbook of an Error	109
CAROLYN CHERNOFF	Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life: Goffmanian sounds from the inside	117
MS. VAGINAL DAVIS AND ROSE SALSEDA	Canto infantil: Emugging with Ms. Vaginal Davis on ¡Cholita! The Female Menudo	127

Hooking Up

KEGELS FOR HEGEL FT MCTYTE + KLOTZY	Obviously (Love Song to Jacques Derrida) (stills)	146
ANDY CAMPBELL AND LUIS-MANUEL GARCIA	Video Chat	147

Power Play, Power Tops, Power Bottoms

LILY HOANG	Me, Selah Saterstrom, and Everyone We Violate	154
KEGELS FOR HEGEL	Aztlán (Love Song to los Conquistadores) (stills)	161

Death Drive

KEGELS FOR HEGEL	Chicken Himmel (Bite Me Nietzsche) (stills)	163
AN PAENHUYSEN	Chicken Himmel and Other Stories	164
AMY SARA CARROLL	The Day José Died	166
KEGELS FOR HEGEL FEAT. LAUREN KLOTZMAN	Death by 1000 Fucks (Love Song to Georges Bataille)	169
JULIA BARBOSA LANDOIS	Star-Crossed II (2013) and Don't Explain (2015) (stills)	170

PASTEL GRAM

Kegels for Hegel

Giving Brain/Getting Brain

KEGELS FOR HEGEL Kinsey Grade Killers ft. Biz Vicious (stills)

KEITH MCNEAL Dear Dr Ruth (a love letter)

WILLIAM MAZZARELLA A Most Zizekian Dream



Kinsey Grade Killers ft. Biz Vicious



Dear Dr. Ruth

(a love letter)¹

Keith E. McNeal

Dear Ruth,

We haven't met, but I love you. This may sound strange since you died in 1991 at eighty-two years of age when I was but twenty-one and only first heard about you several years later in graduate school studying anthropology. I have to confess that the first thing I heard was the in-house gossip about your having had lovers in the field, but that just made me like you more – not less. It turns out we're kindred spirits of sorts and the word in the biz about you rang prudish and small-minded. But what a shame that's the first – and often only – thing people know about you, if they know about you at all: a sign of the mid-20th century smear campaign against you and your subsequent professional marginalization within the discipline, your pioneering work sidelined and you reduced to a scarlet-lettered caricature in academic lore. It took some years to actually learn about you, to really get to know you, but now that I do, I can't help loving you. Not romantically, of course – but love nonetheless. Like your platonic love for Ruth Benedict, perhaps. Only you and I never met. I never had the chance to hear you lecture, visit your office, shoptalk over coffee, or give you drafts of material to read, comment upon, criticize. Yet I still desperately love knowing you existed. I love that your work withstood the onslaught and is still with us, still speaking somehow. You're such a badass. I love having you to turn to in this brilliant, inscrutable, unforgiving vocation – “this very recondite discipline,” as you once put. You're there for me now and I love you for it.

The first substantive thing I learned about your anthropological work

1 My information about the life of Ruth Landes is almost entirely dependent on Sally Cole's biography, *Ruth Landes: A Life in Anthropology* (2003, University of Nebraska Press). I have enormous respect for Cole's research and analysis and want to acknowledge at the outset how indebted I am to her work here. However, as this is a letter and not a conventional academic article, per se, I have dispensed with the usual scholarly conventions; yet I am deeply beholden to Cole's work throughout even when not entirely evident on the surface of things. This letter represents my first attempt to write reflexively about both Landes and my own experience as an anthropologist in connection with a much larger forthcoming project, *Sexing the Citizen in the Shadows of Globalization*, an ethnographic study of men and the postcolonial politics of sexual citizenship in global Trinidad and Tobago, auspiciously funded by the Ruth Landes Memorial Fund. In addition to Cole, I want to also extend my most affectionate and gracious thanks to Kegels for Hegel for the opportunity to express myself in a more creative and personal way, to Sarah Luna for having helped midwife this letter, and to Esra Özyürek for the original provocation. Thanks as well to the National Anthropological Archives at the Smithsonian Institution for permission to reproduce the images from Ruth Landes's fieldwork in Bahia.

came several years into graduate school as I begun plunging into Black Atlantic religious studies in pursuit of a doctoral project on African and Hindu religions in the southern Caribbean. As a gay man with a budding interest in queer studies too, I soon learned of your groundbreaking study of Candomblé as a subaltern space for female solidarity and alternative sexual and gendered expression. I even considered studying sexuality and spirituality in Afro-Trinbagonian religion as my own doctoral research topic for a time, but my background in South Asian religious studies and a formative year in India as an exchange student in my early twenties (that would have been around the time of your death) demanded something more broadly comparative. I always knew I would get to the queer stuff later, after having established a broad and deep grasp of the history and anthropology of Afro- and Indo-Caribbean religious cultures, something I can more or less now claim to have. I encountered you further then, closer than before – yet still at some distance, mostly through the scholarly recitation of others. But you were there for me from then on, guarding a threshold.



Ruth Landes in Brazil, August 1938.
(Credit: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Ruth Landes Papers)

It was some years later, however – after a decade completing the doctoral project, entering the profession, and finishing my first book – that our paths crossed again. And though way overdue, only then was I truly ready to *really* take you in. I read Sally Cole's biography of you in San Diego while on a mid-Winter break during my year as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad. That would have been early January 2012. It was a weird, difficult time for me, since my assistant professorship at the University of California-San Diego had just come to an unhappy end the year before and I was unsure of what would come next, if anything. You also got a Fulbright in the midst of difficult transitional years. Would it take another twenty-five years for me to find a secure, permanent position, as it did for you? Would I too become an academic gypsy, stubbornly trying to keep a foothold in the profession? Reading your story and truly taking it all in *at that time* in my life really blew me away. Little did I know beforehand how much your story would resonate with me! You became a much-needed new friend. Yet while comforting to better know you, it was also unsettling. I began this letter to you then, in fact, but couldn't finish it. I recognized some of myself in you and my impulse was to look up to you as a role model. But what did that mean? Would it really take decades to acquire another position that would enable me to continue doing research, scholarship, and teaching, all of which I so passionately love. We're both stubborn idealists, you and I. Yet as Cole (who knows you much better than me) concludes, perhaps you're not so much a role model as a companion. I never had imaginary friends growing up, but now I do. You're like a colleague, cool aunt, and friend all rolled into one – part-role model, part-companion. How astonishing that our resonances turn out to be not only intellectual, but also personal as well.

Anthropology turned you on more than anything else, so you took the risk of pursuing it since you couldn't imagine anything else, a decision that promised "a very difficult if interesting life," as you once put it in a letter to Benedict. Anthropology was a plunge into the meaning of everything and yet also an escape. An escape from the conventions of marriage and housewifery, which you'd already come to know firsthand, and from the proletarian immigrant Jewish-American urban enclave into which you were born. Which isn't to say that you were ashamed of your origins – on the contrary, you came from a proud, feisty, principled lineage and you idealized your father, an organic intellectual whose contributions to 20th-century Jewish Socialism and American labor politics were monumental. But your natal turn-of-the-century New York City household was also rather conservative in terms of gender and you were profoundly ambivalent about your mother and the arc of her life. You took the surname of your first husband in 1931 because it was "less Jewish sounding" when separating from him at twenty-three years of age in order to pursue doctoral studies in anthropology at Columbia. You had found your way to anthropology through your father's friend,

Alexander Goldenweiser – who some claim to have been Papa Boas’s favorite student – but this was motivated by a fascination with the newly proliferating Black Jewish sects of Harlem. That your dad was friendly with one of Boas’s students is almost unimaginable to me. So cool. A blonde rabbi-turned-lawyer you met at a Gershwin show on Broadway had introduced you to the congregation called Beth B’nai Abraham. West Indian migrant women made up the bulk of this Barbadian ex-Garveyite choirmaster’s synagogue, which interpreted Judaism in Afrocentric terms and identified as descendants of ancient Hebrews.

Cole argues compellingly that your emergent anthropological sensibility grew out of intimate experience with acculturation in a highly dynamic and tumultuous era. You became transfixed by the peculiar patterns of transculturation and subaltern creativity exhibited by Afro-Judaism and it became the focus of your Masters thesis from the New York School of Social Work (now Columbia University) in 1929, a year after receiving a Bachelors degree in sociology from New York University in 1928 at the age of twenty! Once a badass, always a badass. Your early preoccupation with Black Jews foreshadowed a lifelong interest in new religious movements and subaltern ritual innovation spanning field-based research in four separate North American Amerindian societies and among Afro-Brazilians of Bahia. It’s amazing how much fieldwork you did in one decade! You also deserve some credit for having helped pioneer urban fieldwork in anthropology with your early Black Jewish work followed a decade later by research in Salvador da Bahia. Which you might have gotten to even sooner, had Ruth Benedict – then your advisor – not argued against further study of Afro-American culture, despite your budding passion for it. She encouraged you to focus on Native Americans instead, as was the convention in American anthropology at that time. Black Atlantic studies and the full implications of Caribbeanist ethnology have yet to be fully digested by anthropology to this day, but no one would now privilege Amerindianist over Afro-Americanist work. *Au contraire*.

My own deeper engagement with your work initially fixated on the later, Brazilianist research on sexuality and gender in Candomblé, I must admit, and it is only now – upon further study – that I more fully grasp the breadth and depth of your Native Americanist fieldwork and scholarship. Indeed, in my first reading of Cole’s invaluable biography of you, I focused much more on your preparation for and experience in Bahia studying Afro-Brazilian religious expression in terms of race, class, gender and sexuality; your tender, lively, productive, loving and lusty field relationship with Edison Carneiro – a smart, feisty, middle-class mulatto Marxist, journalist, and folklorist – that scandalized the intellectual establishment and academic gate-keepers both there and in the US; and the subsequent smear campaign by Melville Herskovits and Margaret Mead that disparaged you as “loose” and un-“lady”-like, thereby making it even more difficult for a woman to secure a permanent position and develop a full-fledged

professional career as an anthropologist. I also finally read *The City of Women* from cover to cover at that time – not the pitchy-patchy way I'd read around in it before – in which you not only document and analyze the development of Candomblé as a subaltern sphere for female solidarity, as well as alternative male sexual and gendered expression, but also write yourself into the account as another actor within the scene, rather than as an “objective” scientific observer in a domineering analytical voice. Your work inaugurated a small, but steady stream of inquiry concerning sexuality and spirituality in Afro-Atlantic religious traditions that continues into the present. All of this I came to know then. Yet only now have I more fully explored the astonishing range of your Amerindianist work in the first half of the 1930s and the intellectual strides you had already made in terms of the anthropology of gender, cultural creativity, social change and human resilience, which prepared you for the Afro-Brazilianist inquiry.

Benedict not simply steered you into Native American work, but suggested that you investigate the religious practices of Canadian Ojibwa in particular, since little was known about their religion and they were less assimilated than the Chippewa (Ojibwa) on American reservations. This was happening in what was really just the second real generation of in-depth fieldwork in anthropology, in the wake of Malinowski's Trobriand research and Mead's Samoa study. Benedict herself worked in several Amerindianist contexts, but you soon outpaced her accomplishments as a field-worker and she came to depend on you for fresh ethnographic information from and perspective on indigenous North American societies and cultures. She consulted several others in preparing for your doctoral project – including A. Irving Hallowell, who was pursuing research with the Berens River Ojibwa in Manitoba – all of whom recommended that you go to Manitou Rapids, in southwestern Ontario, to work with Mrs. Maggie Wilson, a renowned visionary as well as proficient interpreter. And what a collaboration that turned out to be! Wilson became not simply your focal informant and a key to local Ojibwa culture, but she was also something of an ethnologist herself and taught you much of what you came to know. Indeed, Cole says Wilson was your third great teacher, after Boas and Benedict. Maggie's reportage and own storytelling emphasized the variety of women's experiences, their creativity and resilience in the face of many challenges, hardships, dilemmas and inequalities without idealizing them or romanticizing their resistance, their struggles for agency and some kind of autonomy within webs of changing social relations overdetermined by encroaching colonial politics and insertion into a capitalist economy. It was Maggie who also taught you to appreciate narrativity itself as a vital resource in people's struggles for coherence and well-being. And she would later write you letters too! You gave her full credit as anthropological collaborator. “The ethnography was a product of her genius and my conscientiousness,” you once observed. You also wrote to Benedict about Wilson in a letter from the field: “I consider her a gem and believe that we will have her with us till she gives up the ghost. I think that by now *she*

is as good an ethnologist as any of us. I gave her some instruction this summer, which she snapped up. She gets the real point of what we want” (my italics).

This collaboration and your overall fieldwork experience led you to what turned out to be a lifelong interest in the interplay and disjunctures between dominant ideologies and social processes and the complex actualities of experience manifest within the machinations of everyday life. Yet this was your first extended fieldwork-based project and you were still quite young (twenty-five years old in 1933), with a doctoral committee of strong characters to contend with. Your dissertation – published in revised form a few years later in 1937 as *Ojibwa Sociology* – was a fairly conventional ethnological report, written to fulfill the requirements for your PhD. You dealt with classical topics, yet you weren’t overly preoccupied by precontact cultural forms, a dominant theme of Native Americanist “salvage” ethnography at the time; indeed, you were more concerned with change, conflict, contradiction and acculturation in the fullest and most complex sense of the term. You had the temerity to diverge from Hallowell’s analysis of Ojibwa cross-cousin marriage – emphasizing more sociocultural dynamism and female agency in the equation – which he endorsed in reviews of your work. You challenged Mead’s concept of “atomism” in so-called primitive societies and brought critical attention to ethnocentrism embedded in social scientific categories. You showed yourself to be an iconoclastic observer and tireless fieldworker.

As Cole shows, you had an acute eye, an open heart, and the audacity to record what you saw and felt. There were some striking resonances between you and Maggie despite insuperable differences, and she figures largely in *The Ojibwa Woman*, published in 1938. This work introduced to anthropology the possibilities that gender offered as a theoretical frame for sociocultural analysis, demonstrating the heterogeneity of female experience, the complex dynamics of gender in relation to production and reproduction, the fraught interplay between norms and praxis, and the resilient creativity of women as historical actors and culture-makers. And it was Maggie who helped you attain this perspective. You respected and related to her, especially regarding your shared ambivalences about romantic ideals of companionate marriage. “Marriage is a very limited social experience, especially for a monogamous couple,” you wrote. Yet despite continued approval from Hallowell, your contributions took hold neither within the prevailing paradigm of “salvage” Amerindianist work, nor in an anthropology preoccupied by values, norms and functions in an era of conventionalizing professional consolidation. You navigated tensions between Boasian particularism and Benedictine configurationism while faithfully relaying Maggie’s stories and storytelling. She spoke of Ojibwa women she knew through her own autobiographical lens, as did you – in turn – through your anthropology. *Ojibwa Woman* was rejected by several trade presses for being too specialized, as well as by Oxford

University Press (which claimed it was already overcommitted), so Benedict arranged for publication in a series she edited for Columbia University Press. Here's how Sally Cole summarizes your contribution: "In *The Ojibwa Woman* Ruth Landes, through her insistence on recording the contradictions and constraints in women's lives, tapped the microcultural politics in the interstitial zones of Ojibwa culture. In *Ojibwa Woman*, she confirms that it is not Benedict's patterns [of culture] but the cracks in the patterns that really concern her in anthropology. The cracks symbolized the social spaces where she felt she led her own life, and they motivated her observations in the field." Mazeltov, Ruth. This is an anthropology that would take many more decades to develop at-large. You were such a badass. I love you.

But I'm getting ahead of myself here. You had no sooner returned from your doctoral fieldwork among Canadian Ojibwa than you found your way back to the field with the Chippewa of Red Lake, Minnesota, in order to study an Ojibwa group that had experienced more assimilation and cultural attenuation. You were shocked by the poverty and destitution on their reservation, yet still identified everyday forms of resilience and creative sociocultural action. Again, you worked closely with a key informant – an eightysomething shaman known as Will Rogers in English and *Pindigegizig* ("Hole-in-the-Sky") in Chippewa – whose collaboration proved fruitful, as well as personally meaningful for both of you. You spent many productive months doing fieldwork and working closely with Rogers before you'd even begun dissertating based on the first fieldwork! You were precocious and your ethnographic impulse insatiable. Your eyes opened early on to the challenges and payoffs of comparative work. Though this and subsequent Amerindian work would not be published until many decades later due to unforeseen circumstances I have only alluded to thus far, your Chippewa study and work with Pindigegizig proved productive. It generated important insights into the psychocultural operations of Ojibwa spirituality across a range of stratified and gendered contexts. Your field relationship with Rogers was so tender that he even asked you to marry him, which he claimed would consolidate your relationship and enable him to divulge more esoterica. But you were neither in a position, nor had the inclination for a relationship with an old Chippewa shaman more than three times your age! Yet you seem to have negotiated the situation skillfully and the relationship continued in earnest. When you left, he stood by the car door, shedding tears and reaching for your hand, already longing for your return. He promised then to look after you upon his reincarnation as a Thunderbird spirit upon death, which came several years later. You and he corresponded in the meantime and you had the humanity to write about the fullness of your relationship in your ethnography.

Then in the fall and winter of 1935-36 – just after earning your PhD based on the Ojibwa work – you were off again for new ethnographic

adventures throughout the American Midwest: among the easternmost Siouan-language speakers near Red Wing, Minnesota, whose way of life closely resembled their Algonquian-speaking Ojibwa neighbors, as well as the southernmost Algonquian-speakers, the Potawatomi of Kansas. This third major season of fieldwork deepened your understanding of Native North American spirituality, the kaleidoscopic range of Ojibwa religious variability, the complexities of sociocultural change, inspired innovation in kinship theory, and further expanded your analysis of gender, power and culture in Amerindian life. Again, you worked with key informants in each society with whom you developed meaningful relationships, as well as collaborated with a spinster Episcopalian ethnomusicologist whom you didn't especially care for, but nonetheless came to respect. And we know all of this because you wrote about it! You expressed enthusiasm and respect for many of those you knew and worked with, not only documenting their resilience and creativity, but also their idiosyncrasies and imperfections. You pursued fresh new lines of comparison and refused any impulse to dehistoricize.

You were also one of the first to focus anthropological attention upon institutionalized male-to-female transgender roles in Native American societies. Indeed, you analyzed contrasting patterns of male-to-female versus female-to-male transgender praxis across Native America, asking why some indigenous societies developed such traditions, as among Sioux, whereas others did not, such as Ojibwa. Though it had been a challenging and exhausting period of fieldwork up and down the American Midwest (including diplomatically fending off an episode of sexual predation from the brother-in-law of your Santee Sioux interpreter, which you wrote about too), you returned to New York in the spring of 1936 all jazzed about returning to Kansas again as early as possible. But you were soon sidetracked by the possibility of research among Afro-Bahians in Brazil and finally returning to Black Atlantic studies, which had sparked your interest in anthropology in the first place, almost a decade earlier. So you didn't make it back to Kansas until the 1950s, and your subsequent scholarship on Ojibwa, Chippewa, Sioux and Potawatomi culture and history wasn't able to be published until the late '60s, after you'd finally secured a permanent academic position at McMaster University in Canada in the wake of a long and difficult sojourn in the professional wilderness. Yet you persevered and eventually published three important Amerindianist monographs that were somewhat anachronistic and yet still quite valuable contributions nonetheless.

How did you persevere so long – almost thirty years! – doing contract research and teaching part-time, crisscrossing the country over and over again for each temporary next gig? What on earth happened in Brazil – and what did you have to say about Afro-Bahian culture – that caused such a stir? So much so that Melville Herskovits and Arthur Ramos closed international ranks on you, suppressing your provocative

analysis of Afro-Brazilian religion and culture in Salvador. Herskovits was by then ensconced at Northwestern University, where he had started North America's first African Studies Program, and was fast becoming the "father" of Afro-American anthropology; Ramos was then "dean" of Afro-Brazilian Studies from his perch within the Department of Education and Culture in Rio de Janeiro, under an appointment within the Vargas regime. Both proved incapable of dealing honestly and substantively with your anthropology, no doubt intimidated by an independent, smart, attractive, young, female colleague. Meanwhile, Mead disapproved of your "insouciance" so much, she even told you so while still dissing you behind your back. Focusing on homosexuality and what you called "matriarchy" in urban Bahia in the second quarter of the 20th century was difficult for anthropology in both Brazil and the US to digest. The fact that you developed a romantic relationship with a key informant and your guide to Bahia – Edison Carneiro – only added fuel to the fire, making you an easy scapegoat for anthropology's sexism, coloniality, and prudery. Your fieldwork and ethnography were ahead of their time in ways few appreciate, but which inspire me to sing your praises in the form of this letter and confess how much you mean to me now.

The opportunity for Bahian study came about because of a big Rockefeller grant to Columbia University supporting South Americanist research, and Benedict brought you in on the action. You spent the 1937-8 academic year at Fisk University in Nashville reading widely in its extensive African and Afro-American collections, as well as teaching part-time for the sociology department. Nashville was segregated at the time and Fisk located on the "colored" side of town. You lived in a co-ed faculty dorm and had a brief, yet meaningful affair with a handsome older black physics professor named Elmer Imes. The distinguished sociologist, Robert Park, had retired there and his student, Donald Pierson, had just returned from a two-year study of race in Bahia and was working on his forthcoming *Negroes in Brazil* (1942). Indeed, it was Pierson who informed you about the spiritual power of *mães de santo* and suggested you focus on Candomblé, which turned out to be a perfect project since it so nicely brought together so many of your interests, representing a continuation of your earlier work in an entirely different context. You arrived by boat in May of 1938 along with several other young Columbia colleagues – all men junior to you who were focused upon indigenous groups of the Amazonian interior – and spent several months in Rio practicing Portuguese and readying yourself for fieldwork in Bahia. The '30s were a time of early nationalist fervor, an era in which an ideology of Brazil as a "racial democracy" had gained traction and a tradition of Afro-Brazilian studies had already taken root. And though you paid your respects to all the gatekeepers of Brazilianist anthropology of the time – not only Ramos, but also Dona Heloisa Alberto Torres, then director of the Museu Nacional, among others – your impulse was toward the streets and away from elite social circles. Little did you know how much you were to be

an “American she-bull in Brazil’s china closet,” as you put it many years later. Indeed, you conducted unconventional fieldwork and developed an analysis of gender and sexuality in Afro-Brazilian religion that proved too controversial for your anthropological colleagues at the time. All of this was quite consistent with your earlier trajectory and can be seen as a sort of culmination of your developing intellectual and methodological orientations. Your emphasis on the heteroglossic and contested dynamism of Afro-Brazilian religion and culture charted a middle path between the assimilationism of Frazier, Park and Pierson and the African retentionism of Herskovits and Ramos. And you developed a lively and reflexive narrative ethnographic style that was way ahead of its time. Yet you managed to please no one except yourself. As Brazilian historian of anthropology Mariza Corrêa has observed, you had entered a “minefield of theoretical, methodological and political dissensions.”



View from Landes's hotel room in Salvador da Bahia, August 1938.
(Credit: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Ruth Landes Papers)

Salvador captivated you from the start, and despite initial anxiety about whether you'd have something fresh or important to contribute to Brazilianist anthropology, you soon realized how much more there was

to document and analyze regarding Candomblé despite its centrality in Afro-Brazilian studies. Previous work had adopted medicalizing, Afro-retentionist or functionalist perspectives, was dominated by men, and none of it based on in-depth fieldwork. You came to see Candomblé as a generative Afro-creole ritual innovation and not as a “survival” fated to disappear. You focused on two of the oldest and most distinguished *terreiros* – Engenho Velho and Gantois – during an era of heightened government surveillance and repression several decades after the end of slavery that took its toll on you too. Indeed, government authorities forced you to leave Bahia earlier than planned, in late February of 1939 – they even tried to confiscate your field diaries, data, and photography! WWII was breaking out in Europe and the military dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas at its height. Despite nationalist mythology lauding Africa’s contributions to Brazilian culture, it was a sanitized version of Afro-Brazil domesticated for national consumption. Ramos was one of the central stewards of this state-friendly folklorization of Afro-Brazilian culture, which simultaneously obscured labor unrest and the declining non-white standard of living at the time. Blacks and homosexuals were both criminalized and scapegoated as obstacles to Brazilian modernization. As Cole observes, your “portrait of women and homosexuals as ritual leaders and culture builders in Afro-Brazilian Bahia threatened to emasculate the larger project in which Ramos was engaged.”

Indeed, you had no idea about the complicated chessboard you joined, yet you became far more than a simple pawn in the game. You witnessed vibrant spiritual matrilinealities within Candomblé and developed an analysis of *terreiros* as gynocentric mutual aid societies that were especially meaningful for poor black women as subaltern spheres of social solidarity and economic support. You also charted the emergence of innovative new *caboclo* *terreiros*, which introduced Amerindian spirits into Afro-Brazilian tradition and competed with the more established, Yorubacentric cult houses. These novel *caboclo* groups were staging grounds for an influx of gay devotees and the emergence of a new category of queer male spirit mediums who not only achieved prominence within arenas of trance performance, but also attained the status of ritual leadership as well. You brought attention to developing vectors of tension and contestation over tradition and modernity within the Afro-Brazilian religious field overall. All of this would prove too much to countenance for the status-conscious guardians of Brazilianist and Afro-Americanist anthropology and beyond. The point is not whether you got it all perfectly. Whose anthropology is flawless? No, the point is that you got a lot right, asked important questions, pursued fresh lines of analysis, and wrote compellingly about your fieldwork experience and the lives of your interlocutors. And you inaugurated a critical stream of inquiry concerning sexuality and spirituality in Black Atlantic religions that continues to this day, with many having confirmed and extended your findings, while others criticized them, fostering productive discussion and debate.



Ruth and Mãe Sabina in Bahiana ceremonial dress, September 1938.
(Credit: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Ruth Landes Papers)

I love that you threw yourself into fieldwork all over again in Salvador, though it presented a number of new challenges as compared with your Amerindianist research. As a single white foreign woman, everyone made it loud and clear that you could not live alone or travel at night unaccompanied. Ramos also strenuously advised you against any fieldwork in the Bahian interior, which further restricted your movements; though you loved Salvador's lush vibe and were quite happy focusing yourself there, within its immediate environs. You also – I'm finally getting to the elephant in the room now! – developed a relationship with Edison Carneiro, a young mulatto journalist and self-taught folklorist with Marxist inclinations who had no elite patronage or academic status. He not only became your colleague and key informant, but also your lover and companion. The experience was joyous and stimulating on both of your accounts. "All my opportunities and all that I know I owe to a young mulatto named Edison Carneiro," you wrote to Benedict: "He is all of 26, and has already written three books on the Bahian Negro [and is] co-

editor of one of the two important newspapers here and editor of the one 'cultural' periodical....He is extremely intelligent and modest, and is intensely devoted (but in a curious 'scientific' and aesthetic manner) to the Negro life here. He knows all about everything Negro (that is, folk Negro) that is going on, and I am getting the benefit of it. Being a foreigner, a woman, and with a language handicap, I would be in difficulties without him in this country. There will be no way I can think of to thank him" (22 Sept. 1938). Carneiro took you all over, introducing you to many of the religious leaders and devotees you came to know and write about, and it was he who prompted the analysis of terreiros as subaltern spheres for female solidarity and queer spirituality. Indeed, your association with Edison was so close that he was arrested and jailed for a week when the authorities, which had been surveilling the Candomblé scene and the suspicious foreign researcher all along, declared your research permit invalid and told you to leave Brazil in February of 1939. You got yourself out of Bahia before the police were able to take possession of your research materials, but this also meant a rushed, unsatisfactory goodbye with Edison. Good thing the government didn't also know about your being Jewish, given rising anti-Semitic sentiment and Nazi sympathy in the country at the time!



Edison Carneiro, late 1938.

(Credit: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Ruth Landes Papers)



Carneiro at João Moreiro Hospital in Brotas, Bahia, September 1938
(Credit: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Ruth Landes Papers)

You managed to orchestrate another three and a half months in Rio, during which you began developing your analysis of Candomblé's cult "matriarchy," writing your first article on the topic while trying to find ways for you and Edison to regroup and be together somewhere, somehow – if not Brazil, then possibly the US or UK. Malinowski had even welcomed him to pursue a doctorate in anthropology at LSE, but the job with the BBC that was to fund the trip and help support his studies there failed to come through. Meanwhile, the international tides of WWII rose high and, Ruth, you had to return to New York City to pursue the only academic opportunity that presented itself: paid research assistance for an ambitious Carnegie Foundation-funded project on "race relations" in the US under the direction of Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal. You and Edison wrote passionately to one another for the rest of 1939, and – as Cole's meticulous examination of what's left of your correspondence shows – you even discussed marriage and the possibility of raising a family together. I must say I really get your thing for him: Edison was no hunk, but I can well imagine crushing out on that cute, lively face and

dapperly-dressed, lanky brown body accompanied by a feisty intellect and sociable disposition. Yet the distance soon got the better of you two. Edison recoupled and married a teacher acquaintance, eventually relocating to Rio. You kept in sporadic, yet fond touch over the years and even saw each other again during a brief trip to Brazil in 1966, by which time Carneiro had been appointed first director of the Ministry of Education and Culture's new National Agency for the Protection of Folklore. He had made arrangements for *City of Women* to be translated into Portuguese and published in Brazil, so you went to consult on the translation and reconnect.



Edison seated in boat, November 1938.

(Credit: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Ruth Landes Papers)

All of this was yet to come upon your return to New York City in 1939, however. Indeed, at that point you were exceedingly enthusiastic about the Afro-Bahian material and gearing up to write *The City of Women*; the circumstantial separation from Carneiro had not yet turned into a permanent end to the relationship. What happened to you then, Ruth? You

were becoming an anthropologist to reckon with. I would have loved to be your student or colleague. What was anthropology up to and why did you not “fit” in? What I know about all of this comes from Sally Cole, of course, though it gels with how I came to know about you in anthropology myself, corroborating Cole’s take.

In the fall of 1939 you found yourself taking up contract work for Myrdal’s “Negro in America” project in New York, freshly back from a head-spinning and heartfelt time in Brazil. Work was not only necessary, but also a meaningful respite from loneliness and uncertainty. You spent seven months working diligently and coming through on time with your assignment to prepare a “Memorandum on the Ethos of the Negro in the New World” – an impossible job, really, given that what was meant by ethos remained unspecified and the bodies of literatures relevant for the topic wieldy and inconsistent. Moreover, there was little sense of a shared enterprise among the huge team of scholars, researchers and staff involved in the project; Myrdal himself tended to side with the Frazierian failure-to-assimilate position, which aligned with his liberal social engineering agenda. Your sixty-eight-page report ambitiously compared and contrasted what was then known about Jamaica, Haiti, Dutch Guiana, Brazil, the United States, and West Africa, though you expressed explicit concern about comparability in relation to the diversity and mixed reliability of the sources, none of which focused analytically on “ethos,” per se. I haven’t read the report myself, but based on Cole’s account, you seem to have done a more than adequate job given the task at hand, including articulating the makings of a precocious crypto-creolization model of Black Atlantic transculturation and history. Yet Mead and Benedict got into a little pissing match over your use of ethos, central terminology of the so-called Culture and Personality school over which they reigned. And Herskovits, who should have been one of the most enthusiastic and supportive commentators upon your pioneering Afro-Brazilian work, forwarded Myrdal a bitchy, unfair critique of your report even while acknowledging he hadn’t really read it, only paged through it! Really? My head spins at the shittiness of it all.

You had expressed your respect and deference for Herskovits all along, keeping him posted about your Afro-Bahian work and the progress of your memorandum, asking for important or up-to-date citations you might have overlooked, and so forth. Yet you had the audacity to be your own person and think for yourself. “Evidently,” you later reflected in one of your diaries, “one can’t be an individual, even if harmlessly.” You did impressive fieldwork under the circumstances and had something provocative and important to say. Yet Herskovits brushed it off, claiming you needed “more background” and hadn’t been to Africa! Academic power-players can be unbelievably shameless. Never mind all the work you did preparing the report or the fact that you’d spent a year reading and teaching at a black university, unlike Herskovits – not to mention the fact that *you’re* the one

who did in-depth fieldwork in Brazil, though *he* had the hutzpah to publish several pieces about Afro-Brazilian religion based solely upon a brief trip and bit of armchair-style research. Herskovits unfavorably reviewed your Carnegie report, as well as *The City of Women* several years later, faulting you for neglecting men and having a “skewed” view toward women – even though you were making a sort of Herskovitsean point about Afro-Atlantic “matriarchy” in Brazil! The ironies are poignant in the extreme. The final blow came from Ramos, who allied with Herskovits by nitpicking a few details as well as objecting to your account of emergent queer male Candomblé activity despite citing nothing substantive in rebuttal except himself! Never mind Ramos and Herskovits were both elite straight dudes and all previous studies had been done by men with little knowledge or experience of women, much less queer folk. Yet Ramos had the nerve to actually publish his critique of you as a chapter in his *Aculturação Negra no Brasil* (1942), whereas your Myrdal report itself got shelved. Generous soul and lover of intellectual debate that you were, it took years for you to fully grasp how these self-serving scholars closed ranks around you and marginalized your anthropology. Herskovits didn’t even have the integrity to cite you in his *Myth of the Negro Past* (1941).

But you persevered, Ruth. By the end of 1940, you’d published “A Cult Matriarchate and Male Homosexuality” and “Fetish Worship in Brazil” in established scholarly venues, as well as completed a draft of *City of Women*. You documented terreiros as subaltern spheres of female solidarity and support, explored trance performance and spirit mediumship as fertile ritual grounds for personal growth and transformation, and described new groups that empowered queer men within religious parameters, all testament to vernacular resilience, human agency and cultural dynamism. Indeed, you’ve helped me see how gay Candomblé came to benefit from what women had already pioneered in terms of ritual praxis as a locus of oppositional subaltern social action. Never mind that you used the problematical terminology of “matriarchy” to capture in a word what you were getting at or you struggled with the ethnocentric language of “passive homosexuality” in your analysis. No one had a coherent queer analytical lexicon at that time; still you had the inclination and courage to witness what was happening around you that most outsiders knew nothing about. You were aware of the overall patriarchal context – indeed, that’s the only way your “matriarchal” analysis makes sense. Thus critique based on quarrel with the terminology of matriarchy strikes me as a cheap shot. Five publishers turned down the manuscript claiming it too academic, despite your effort to hew close to the contours and textures of personal experience, including your own as a stranger in a strange land. So you rewrote the entire manuscript in the summer of 1941, but *The City of Women* wasn’t published until 1947, by Macmillan. You considered it your masterpiece. Here is Cole’s deeply studied assessment: “The book is written in a deceptively simple style intended to draw in the general reader. Its themes are those that always

intrigued Landes: the flow, flux, and lustiness of the cultural production of people who seize the cracks and contradictions in acculturation processes as opportunities to create new cultural experiences and interpretations, and the possibilities of alternative gender relations and identities. Through description and dialogue, Landes also addressed theoretical issues at the heart of the discipline: scientific objectivity; race, class, and gender; romantic primitivism, tradition, and modernity; ethnography and the representation of experience" (p. 204). Now that's an anthropology that's worth its meddle!

Long before "dialogical" or "multivocal" ethnography came into vogue, your *City of Women* gave voice and face to a wide range of interlocutors, characters, leaders, colleagues, friends, followers, workers, soothsayers, maids, and rascals, implicitly recognizing the intersubjective nature of anthropological knowledge. Indeed, you should be seen as a pivotal mid-20th century figure in the development of what later became known as person-centered ethnography. You adopted an experiential and participatory approach in fieldwork, resisting any overly objectifying conventions of contemporary social science and refusing the conceit of ethnographic naturalism. Heck, you even recognized your own multiplicitous subjectivity, which unsettled your view of anthropology as science. Yet you didn't think everything was entirely subjective, either. Indeed, you highlighted how Afro-Bahians operated in a sociopolitical world of highly unequal relations shot through with contradictory discourses and imagery. You struggled to account for the intertwining of racial and class dynamics, emphasizing socioeconomic status and class relations as the low chord in the daily orchestration of inequality and discrimination in Brazil. This led you to criticize the folklorizing Afro-Brazilianists for mystifying an ugly present with an idealized past. You recognized and represented Afro-Brazilian cultural heteroglossia and debate in relation to differently positioned perspectives and never sought closure on the tensions and contradictions of actual life. Indeed, you highlighted contestation among Candomblé practitioners and cult groups over tradition and modernity as played out vis-à-vis the micropolitics of orthopraxy and orthodoxy. Martiniano is the tired old traditionalist who looks down on queer men in the tradition; Sabina plays the innovative caboclo modernist who embraces and exploits change; Mãe Meninha criticizes Sabina as Machiavellian while approving of flamboyant Bernardino, a queer medium and leader of his own new terreiro. You also constructed a searching, productive ethnographic dialogue between Edison and yourself in the narrative, through which you explore a range of perspectives upon and interpretations of the experiences and materials being documented. And you pursued an early anthropology of the body: admiring the fullness and diversity of women's bodies, dignifying black women's lack of daintiness, and highlighting the entranced body as a locus of transformation, emphasizing embodiment overall as a complex, critical vehicle of expression, agency and innovation.

Yet *City of Women* went mostly unappreciated by scholars and was sensationalized in the lay press. Herskovits reiterated his small-minded and disingenuous litany of criticisms in his review in *American Anthropologist*, the flagship journal of the discipline: skewed focus on women, not enough Africanist training, misrecognition of homosexuality, and misinterpretation of your own fieldwork-based data! He also chastised your "field methods" in print: "Students of acculturated societies must be...taught how to conduct themselves in the capital as well as in the bush, told how to turn the corners of calling cards, when to leave them, and how to 'sign the book,'" revealing more about himself than you. Cole shows that Herskovits's critique of you was motivated in no small measure by his own pretensions and privilege, as well as a veiled attack on your "comportment" in the field. Daring to be vulnerable in fieldwork, loving a brilliant mulatto organic intellectual who also thumbed his nose at elitist academia, and writing about it all to boot! Never mind the double-standards of single men in the field or of married men whose wives provide them unsung emotional and logistical support. What's more, you'd in fact deferred to the parameters set out for you regarding your residence and movement as a woman in Salvador, but you did it in your own beautifully creative way that turned setbacks into opportunities by befriending and falling in love with Carneiro, who enabled your movements far and wide together and showed you the ins and outs of Afro-Bahian culture in ways you would never have otherwise accessed. Once a badass, always a badass. This arrangement supremely benefitted your research, but there is no evidence that it was purely strategic on your part or your affection was in bad faith. On the contrary, everything suggests quite convincingly otherwise. You and Edison were grown, consenting adults who shared adventure, intellectual camaraderie, romantic passion and sexual pleasure with one another. Nonetheless people in the biz were scandalized and disapproving, making it easier to scapegoat you and malign your work. Some twisted combination of disciplinary sexism and racism had reared its ugly head. Cole surmises: "That neither Landes nor Carneiro had money or employment made their reunion impossible. That the American scholar was unemployed and an attractive divorcee and the lover a Brazilian 'man of color' allowed colleagues to construct their affair as a short-term liaison and not as a relationship that, under different conditions, might have led to marriage" (p. 177). Oh, Ruth, how I love you so. You really lived. Yet you also really suffered, facing unjust treatment by your colleagues and the discipline at-large, which quickly neglected the work you were so proud of, in which you'd pursued a passionate and less colonial anthropology. The kind of work I aspire to myself.



Photographic Negative of Landes walking with Carneiro, Salvador, September 1938. The inscription in Carneiro's handwriting on the back says: "This photo will serve Miss Landes as proof of her adventures in the loyal and heroic city of Salvador, capital of Bahia, in the company of Edison Carneiro, Writer and Candomblézeiro. 14-Oct-38"

(Credit: National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Ruth Landes Papers)

And so it went, dear Ruth. After the Carnegie project, it would be another *twenty-five* years before you secured a permanent academic position at McMaster University in 1965. But during that loooong stretch as an itinerant academic, you remained tenacious, committed and zealous about anthropology in the midst of your difficult, demoralizing and not infrequently depressing professional fate. I wonder if I would have been able to last so long and resiliently if I hadn't been able to land on my feet after my own transitional year – admittedly quite brief compared with your experience – during which I gazed into the professional abyss and tried to contemplate the uncontemplatable. I honestly don't think I would have lasted as long as you doing contract research and picking up teaching gigs here and there. But badass that you were, you kept on. First working the Brazil Desk at the State Department during the war, followed by several years as a consultant on various contracts for FDR's Fair Employment Committee working on African American and Mexican American affairs. You had a brief engagement in 1944 with an activist lawyer from Mexico whom you'd met in LA, Salvador Lopez Lima, which saw you spending time in Mexico City and then New Orleans while waiting for him to clear his docket in preparation for matrimony. You even conducted an informal study of French shrimp fisheries in NOLA that excited you. But

the engagement soon fell through and you found yourself back in New York looking for the next thing. You took up legal activist work for a time before relocating to LA to conduct research on Mexican American and African American youth and gangs for the Los Angeles Welfare Council, representing continuity with the FEPC work. But that came to an end too, so you moved back to NYC and your *City of Women* was finally published in 1947, at last. You had also kept writing of your experiences and various researches along the way, publishing papers in US anthropology, a comparative analysis of multiracialism in the US versus Brazil, and co-authoring a paper on immigrant Ashkenazi kinship and family forms. Next came a two-year period as a contract researcher for the American Jewish Congress, though it was demoralizing to be living again with your parents in the Big Apple.

It was during this time that your cherished maternal figure in anthropology – Ruth Benedict – died in September of 1948. Yet on Cole's account, you were not in fact that upset. Indeed, strangely, you felt stronger and more independent. Benedict had disengaged from you some years earlier in the aftermath of the Brazil work and she never seems to have commented – in or out of print – on anything about your masterpiece. Yet you were thrilled with *City of Women* and its publication had reignited your hope for a proper career. Thus you applied for a Fulbright fellowship to the UK in the fall of 1950 to study Caribbean migration there. Given your tumultuous history with her, you only turned with hesitation toward Mead for one of your letters of support, given that Benedict was now gone. And though she more or less supported your application – we know this because the actual letter survives in her papers archived at the Library of Congress – Mead also took the opportunity to make this barely-veiled dig at you: "I should add that Dr. Landes is considerably better looking and more attractive than many of her sex who seek academic careers and that this circumstance may be looked upon not without acrimony by both male and female colleagues." You found out about this and were understandably incensed. So much so that you wrote Mead several weeks later expressing your discontent, to which she responded by telephoning you, saying: "Why you've made a three-ring circus out of life! ...it's known all over the country...you've lived your own life!...and when you live dramatically, and look dramatic, and aren't married...why you've told me things that make one's hair stand on end...the things you told Ruth [Benedict]!" Cole records what a revelation this was for you, prompting you to reassess your enduring transference with Benedict. Fortunately, however, the Fulbright came through and you spent a marvelous year in England doing research and even wrote a 310-page manuscript on "Color in Britain" that went unpublished, as well as made fresh new academic connections and friendships. This included Sir Raymond Firth, who commented upon your censure by the American academy in an interview with Cole in 1997: "Britain could handle high-mettled women like Ruth Landes better than America. ...American anthropology was very naïve: it worked a lot in

stereotypes and Landes challenged those. I was very fond of Margaret Mead, but it was unfortunate for women in the US. I think it would be fair to say that Mead may have been a difficult barrier for Landes because Ruth was an individual – she wanted to be independent – and Mead required dependency, control.”

With the Fulbright fellowship finished, you returned to New York in 1952 and spent several more years teaching part-time at the William Allanson White Psychiatric Institute, the New School for Social Research, and the University of Kansas. All of this flux and uncertainty aroused renewed longings for love and companionship, thus in 1954 – in your mid-40s – you announced your engagement with Ignacio Lutero Lopez, a Mexican-American journalist you had met ten years earlier in LA. You wrote in your diary: “I need a partner – there seems to be no one but ILL. Now he also wants a companion, he says. This will be similar to a business deal, which neither of us will admit to the other. ...If we marry, perhaps we can make something out of it, with caution.” Thus you married in 1955, relocating to Los Angeles to be together. And you gave it a brief go, but then soon separated and you decided to stick around, as you were teaching in the School of Social Work at the University of Southern California. This inaugurated an engaged and productive next period of your career in SoCal, where you developed a program on culture and education at the Claremont Graduate School, culminating in the publication of *Culture in American Education* (1965), of which you were also very proud. In it, you present a reflexive pedagogical methodology that proved fruitful in your own teaching and within the field of education more broadly. Yet your contract as director of the Claremont Anthropology and Education program came to an end in 1962, prompting you to visit New York City and Kansas over the following two years in order to teach summer school. And it was at that point – ever unemployed – that Mead wrote in early 1965 informing you that the American Anthropological Association had just initiated a professional employment service. Had she mellowed by then, or perhaps felt some remorse about interfering with your career earlier on? Whatever the case, you registered with the AAA and soon landed the academic appointment you had sought for so long.

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada was developing its anthropology program and focusing especially on Native American studies, therefore the possibility of hiring an experienced senior scholar in this area with an intellectual pedigree under Boas and Benedict proved attractive. You received letters of recommendation from Jules Henry, Conrad Arensberg and Margaret Mead, who finally sung your praises without engaging in any character assassination. These proved to be very productive years of your life, in which you finally got a chance to publish your three outstanding manuscripts based on the earlier Amerindianist work with Ojibwa, Sioux, and Potawatomi, as well as publishing your Masters thesis work on Black

Judaism in late 1920s Harlem. Yet you described life in Canada as drab and your time there a sort of exile, far away from the centers of intellectual action elsewhere. You had no personal life aside from anthropology, treating the department chair, staff, and students as quasi-family, from whom you demanded all sorts of tasks and favors. Your reception at McMaster was apparently mixed, though you garnered respect from all quarters for your hard work, high standards, love of debate, and sharp tongue. It was early during this period that you revisited Brazil and Carneiro in preparation for your *City of Women* being published there in Portuguese (1967). You also spent a decade doing comparative research on the cultural politics of state multilingualisms that took you to South Africa, Louisiana, New Mexico, Spain, Switzerland and Quebec, upon which you composed a book manuscript "Tongues That Defy the State" that also never reached publication.

Badass as ever, you kept going and going. As Cole writes about you: "Despite her marginalization, she continued to cling to the lifeline of anthropology in order to keep from falling or being washed away into the world of the mundane, the orthodox, the conventional." Oh, Ruth, I understand all of this only too well. A final cruel development came about when you were forced to retire in 1973 when you reached the age of 65, according to Ontario law, despite having been at McMaster for less than a decade. Yet you managed to teach part-time for several more years, then became professor emerita in 1977. You kept your office a few years more, working on an autobiographical memoir that also never saw the light of day in print. Interestingly, Mead's death in 1978 troubled you much more than Benedict's. You wrote in your diary she "had so much vitality, such a zest for combat, that she made anthropology seem important." Perhaps, despite your troubles with her, you identified more with Mead than Benedict in the end. You received a bit of professional recognition in the late 1970s and 80s, but nowhere nearly enough. It has taken Cole's magisterial biographical study of you to reintroduce you and your work to an anthropology more congenial to your pioneering interests, passionate inclinations and independent spirit. You died in early February 1991, hard at work yet discouraged by your inability to publish several remaining manuscripts. Your former student and friend, Ellen Wall, found you lying beside your bed where you apparently passed while doing your morning sit-ups, a picture of your parents prominently displayed on the night table. Sit-ups at eighty-two years old, for God's sake! How could I not love you? Ellen believes that you died lonely, with a broken heart. So understandable, and yet such a shame. I wonder what was on your mind that morning.

Cole describes you as a lonely figure in the history of anthropology. Yet she also dubs you a trickster, showing how your marginalization beats surreptitiously at the heart of the discipline. The attacks on and critiques of you signify not just the buttons and boundaries you were pushing, but the sacrifices you were willing to make for your chosen vocation –

in an important sense, the only enduring relationship in your life. Cole examines your life as a case study in the deeply poignant and troubling complexities of disciplinary professionalization: "It reveals the erasure of early work on race and gender, the rejection of experimentation in fieldwork, and the silencing of personal experience in ethnographic writing. But more positively, it also reveals continuity and the enduring interests that motivate the discipline itself. For the irony is that Ruth Landes's work has stood the test of time. The reasons she was chastised and her work denounced are the very reasons we have for reconsidering it today. A careful rereading of her work now places her at the very heart of anthropology, working with issues that define the most important debates in our discipline at the dawn of the 21st century." Cole's study of your life is an important effort to anthropologize anthropology itself. You were a transitional figure in a transitional discipline during a transitional time.

Getting to know you has not only been comforting and inspiring, if also unsettling, as I have said, but it has also helped me better understand my own life and experiences as an anthropologist. At first it was the parallels and resonances between our experiences that moved me and fixated my attention, but as I have gotten to know you deeper and in more detail, I've come to relish our differences as well as our similarities. We're both dyed-in-the-wool fieldworkers. We both find Black Atlantic studies compelling. We both work betwixt-and-between the developments and faultlines of psychological anthropology. We're both agnostic, yet fascinated by religion and spirituality – instead finding a compensatory sort of secular devotion in anthropology itself. We're both stubborn idealists who underestimate the competitiveness and will-to-dominance of many of our colleagues. And last but not least, we both love men! Indeed, both passionate about the diversity of men's minds and bodies, which has included sex, love, and romance in the field. I am only just now gearing up to finally write reflexively about my own erotic ethnographic experiences as I pen this letter. Yet you are a heterosexual Jewish-American woman who grew up during an incredibly different historical era, in an intensely urban context dominated by radical politics and organic intellectualism, quite unlike myself. You were expelled from Brazil for "questionable" activities and – despite your precocious ethnographic reflexivity – you didn't actually anthropologize your erotic relationship in print. Indeed, you kept to a rather conventional heteronormative model of couplehood with Carneiro in Bahia and weren't entirely forthcoming about it in *The City of Women*. I'm not faulting you for this, just saying. And as compared with your experience, I have consistently insisted on having a personal life outside of anthropology – including a personal life in the field – which I've paid for in certain ways in that it has slowed me down, deepened my engagement with and knowledge of life in Trinidad and Tobago from the professional to the personal, and made me considerably less quick to objectify and publish.

I respect you, Ruth Landes. You persevered, pioneered, tried to do good even if you weren't always given to "be" good. I know that feeling. Your curiosity, your restlessness, your yearning for some sort of stability too, your need to connect, your love of men, your attempt to chart a middle path between convention and transgression in fieldwork and in life, your sensuousness combined with your undying need for anthropology, your willingness to stick to your guns combined with your appreciation for growth and change, your joie de vivre, your courage, your persistence, your optimism and idealism – so many things I respect about you. You kept the anthropological torch burning through thick and thin for longer than I can imagine or most people would endure. And now you're funding my first real period of research sabbatical leave. I'm finally completing my long-incubated book on sexuality and citizenship in TT and beyond, in which I seek to grapple with what you called anthropology to do a long time ago. This one's for you, Ruth. I love you.

Keith E. McNeal is an Associate Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Houston. His first book, *Trance and Modernity in the Southern Caribbean: African and Hindu Popular Religions in Trinidad and Tobago* (2011), is a comparative historical ethnography of African and Hindu traditions of trance performance and spirit mediumship in the southern Caribbean and his forthcoming book project, *Sexing the Citizen in the Shadows of Globalization: Queer Dispatches from Trinidad and Tobago*, is a person-centered ethnographic study of the politics of sexuality and citizenship in the Caribbean and beyond. McNeal is a 2015-6 Fellow of the Landes Memorial Research Fund.

A Most Zizekian Dream

William Mazzarella

In the winter of 2008, I taught a graduate seminar simply titled 'Zizek.' The stated purpose of the class was to work out what Zizek was 'really up to' on a conceptual level, to provide an in-depth space in which to read and explore some of his core theoretical works.

Now it so happened that at the same time as I was teaching the Zizek seminar I was also teaching in a large undergraduate social science core class called 'Self, Culture, and Society.' During the first few weeks of this class, we were reading Emile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). This would not deserve a mention here were it not for the fact that about two weeks into the quarter, I had a most Zizekian dream, a dream that seemed to open up a kind of short circuit between the two classrooms.

In the dream, I was reading an academic article. As I read, I was at first baffled and then increasingly irritated by my impression that the author's argument was overwhelmingly Durkheimian in orientation, yet nowhere did he cite Durkheim. Finally reaching a point of exasperation with this masquerade, I turned back to the beginning of the article and discovered that its author was in fact...Emile Durkheim.

Of course my students were most amused when I offered them the story the following Wednesday morning. But for whatever reason, having told the story of my dream, I moved quickly on, forestalling any attempts at interpretation that may have been forthcoming from the class. I wanted the dream to sit senselessly, as it were, to do its collective work unobtrusively in order that I might return to the task of interpretation later.

Now on one level the logic of the dream seems to correspond to one of the Marx Brothers jokes that Zizek is fond of quoting. In this case, taken from *Duck Soup* (1933), it is the one that has Groucho Marx playing a lawyer 'defending' his client in court by telling the judge 'This man looks like an idiot and acts like an idiot – but this should in no way deceive you: he is an idiot!' In *Looking Awry*, Zizek uses the joke to make the point that only human beings are able to deceive by feigning to deceive. But there is also a much simpler interpretation. In contrast to the retroactive magic of the subject's interpellation where the subject 'miraculously' turns out 'already' to be precisely what the symbolic-ideological order assumed

him to be,¹ this joke seems to suggest the opposite: my starting point in engaging with the article in my dream was that whoever its author might be, it could certainly not be Durkheim. And the guarantee for this assumption was precisely the intensely Durkheimian quality of the text. The fact that the article turned out to be by Durkheim was at once a roundabout affirmation of my instinct about its orientation and a 'slap in the face.'

William Mazzarella is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago. He is currently writing a little book called *The Mana of Mass Publicity*

1 Zizek uses another Marx Brothers joke to illustrate this point: 'You remind me of Emanuel Ravelli.' 'But I am Emanuel Ravelli.' 'Then no wonder you look like him!' (1989: 3).

PASTELE GRAM

Kegels for Hegel

Commodity Fetish

LAURA LETINSKY AND SARAH LUNA Better Products? Feminism, Sex,
Work, Art, and Commodities

KEGELS FOR HEGEL Thing (Love Song to Karl Marx and Friends) (stills)



Better Products? Feminism, Sex, Work, Art, and Commodities:

A Reciprocal Interview Between Laura Letinsky and Sarah Luna



Anthropologist Sarah Luna and photographer Laura Letinsky met at the University of Chicago in 2004. We conducted this reciprocal interview over email, telephone, and google docs between several cities between August 2015 and February 2016.

SL: It's kind of great to begin an interview with a fine art photographer with what's probably the most disparaged kind of photograph—a poorly lit and super pixelated selfie!

LL: Perfect, really! Brings to the fore how photography is used, and by inference, what it is!

SL: In my Intro to Gender Studies classes, I have taught you as one of a handful of feminist artists. I'm curious to know about how you became a feminist and how you became an artist.

LL: I'd wanted to go into art school after high school but my dad, an architect, felt it wasn't solid or secure enough. In not wanting me to be dependent on someone else, he nudged me into Interior Design. I embraced the role donned in slim shift dresses, heels, makeup, nicey nice in what I now understand as another kind of aggressivity albeit under the surface. In my first month he died in an accident. Suffice to say the rug

was pulled out from under me. I made it through the year doing A's in the "art" component and C-'s for the customer fulfillment portion. Increasingly conscious of the male architect and female interior designer, I moved into architecture but was no more satisfied there although at least didn't feel constrained. I was still frustrated by much of the training that seemed to encourage a hierarchy of creativity still ruled by patriarchy. I decided to switch to art school. It was a kind of bargain with myself as I decided that this, my one-time-on-earth, I'd aim to do what I really wanted to do, daring to support myself by whatever means necessary, hoping it would be teaching. I'd begun to work with kids, figuring that while I might not become the best at art or teaching, I was going to be hell of a lot better than the majority of those who were presently employed as faculty. I threw myself into a scramble of art school that, after the two years prior, felt like I'd found my people.

Simone Signoret and Gloria Steinem were kinds of manuals for me and my friends, along with the relative non-presence of women in the art world beyond the student level where females outnumbered males. As students, we rallied against the status quo at the same time we explored our sexuality, girls, boys, trying to figure it out. Long underarm hair the sign of co-conspirators. Identifying as a feminist was a no-brainer and we were proud and being young, had a sense that we could affect real change.



Untitled, Hallendale Beach, 1989, silver gelatin print

SL: Yeah, I think that the only thing I miss about being young is the feeling that one could be part of changing the world for the better. One of the nicest things about teaching is being exposed to young people who still have that kind of hope. My friends and I also stopped shaving our armpits and legs when I was in college! We also co-founded a feminist student organization with a pretty heavy-handed name: "Ladies" Incensed by Patriarchal Society (LIPS). I guess we weren't afraid of being seen as angry feminists.

LL: Yes, the swagger of being young! I recall being at a party where a fellow male student was covertly but boastfully sharing bestial porn magazines with his bros. We got in a heated argument and later that evening after attention had turned elsewhere, I slipped the magazines out the door, depositing them to a garbage can. My indignation was twofold; the content but also the bad behavior amongst my male peers who were so little-boy titillated by this degradation of women. Porn wasn't necessarily the issue rather the gendered theatrics that excluded women except as the objects of humor, disgust, and abuse.

SL: And porn has changed so radically since the time in which it primarily circulated in magazines! I'm not anti porn in theory even though most of it in practice I find pretty depressing. The saddest part is that I think a lot of young people are not getting any real sex education (at least not here in Texas!) and so they're just learning from porn. If the industry were run by feminist sex educator porn stars like Nina Hartley, it would not be such a sad state of affairs.

LL: Or, as my now 17 year old informed me when he was 13, he'd learned everything he needed to know from Southpark. Which actually led us into some interesting conversations. For example, "is it true all women have to be prostitutes when they are young?" ("well, let's talk about power and who has access to it historically and why women might turn to this as a profession, as well as how marriage itself can operate as a kind of contract within patriarchy"). I want for my sons to be aware of sex as pleasure, fun, and all that, but also as power and control. Responsibility being hand in hand with certain kinds of freedoms.

SL: Yeah, sex workers' rights activists have pointed out that both housewives and sex workers have in common that they both make a living from men's earnings. And you can see in many different contexts throughout the world where women who are working outside the home in contexts where they did not historically will also be subject to the whore stigma. Especially poor and/or racialized women. Melissa Gira Grant suggests that "whore" might be the original intersectional insult, and I think she might be onto something. My last 12 years or so of education and research have been in great part motivated by trying to understand why it is that women who are believed to be sex workers or otherwise marked with the whore stigma aren't treated as full human beings.

LL: In your work with sex workers have you come to think they carry the stigma? That is, do they experience their work as this kind of subjugation or is it empowering?

I think of the bit I know about prostitution in Canada and their fight to control their trade, as well as the earlier work I did with strippers. Without getting into some of what I found to be peculiar distinctions amongst those I knew, I was amazed by their gloriousness, their fearlessness, and bravado. But that was a different place and time. As you said earlier, the internet has changed much of the interaction around sex work, although I'm reminded of a scene in *A Touch of Sin*, when a customer at a bathhouse is asked what he wants and replies that the youngsters have not come up with anything new.



Untitled (Stripper Contest), Winnipeg, 1984, silver gelatin print

SL: Ha!! Yeah, I doubt there's been tons of innovation in sexual technique, but I can't really speak to what the youngsters are doing these days. I do know that there is very often a big disconnect between what makes a "good" shot in pornography and what actually feels good to a body, which is one of the **many** reasons I think mainstream pornography isn't the best form of sex education. And easy access to pornography is only the tip of the iceberg of how technology has changed sexual and other kinds of intimate relationships. So many people are using the internet or telephone

aps to find hookups or sugar daddies or marriage partners. I also think that more young people are more open to the fluidity of gender and sexuality and more open to non monogamy, and many of them claim to have learned most of what they know from tumblr!

Yes, the sex workers I worked with definitely had to grapple with the whore stigma. I'm working now on a book manuscript based upon ethnographic field research in the Mexican border city of Reynosa, Tamaulipas in 2008-2009. It is focused upon sex workers and missionaries who met in the city's *zona de tolerancia*, several city blocks surrounded by walls where sex work was allowed and sex workers were regulated.



Some of the sex workers led what they called double lives and kept their occupations from their families. The information management took a lot of effort, but I argue that managing a “double life” was a form of agency.

Within the prostitution zone, the Good Mother/Bad Whore distinction was fractally reproduced among sex workers. And the only way to sort of soften the whore stigma in that context was to claim that one was working out of obligation to one's family--preferably one's children. So part of what I write about is the politics of respectability in Reynosa's prostitution zone. Many sex workers policed each other's performances as mothers to posit themselves as more respectable.

For some women, sex work was empowering. Several said they enjoyed the work because it made them feel desirable and allowed them to buy things they otherwise wouldn't be able to buy. Some suggested that they felt more empowered having temporary relationships with many men to earn money than they did when they had one (often jerkface abusive) husband. Most of the women were working to support families and many were single mothers.



But I was also doing research during a period in which people were afraid to die in gun battles on the streets or to be tortured and murdered and their bodies dumped in public space. That, and poverty, were probably their two biggest problems. So while I tease out these moments of agency, it's always within the context of great constraints.

It wasn't necessary to have a pimp in *la zona*, but many of the women did have pimps. Some chose their pimps and some were violently coerced into working for their pimps, but most all of the women who had pimps expressed being in love with them. I build my analysis around the

vebobliger, to obligate, which is often used to describe the relationships between sex workers and their pimps, and see these kinds of dynamics of non-sovereign love and obligation in any number of relationships I examine: relationships between sex workers and their children, sex workers and missionaries, as well as missionaries, their christian publics, and God. All close relationships have both enabling and disabling dynamics.

But plenty of feminists believe that there's something inherently exploitative about the exchange of sex for money. I disagree. Did the Feminist Sex Wars ever end?

LL: The Feminist Sex Wars will never end.

My understanding is that so many of these women have to deal with the threat, too often realized, of violence. And certainly this population you study has a different relation to violence than, for example, I do. Switching the conversation somewhat, there are also questions of power and control within sexual/social dynamics. I am conflicted as power and control in fantasy can indeed be pleasurable. I do not wish to suppose or impose my metric on others. Yet, I'm disheartened at times by the way that power and control are way too often exercised. The gender dynamics that in so much of their expression are empowering for the usual suspects. For example, thinking about the way we use language in which "fucking" is seemingly mutual, but getting "fucked" is to be taken advantage of, while fucking someone over is, well, you know. It's a tangle of issues related to patterns reinforced that link seemingly disparate arenas. Pleasure and labor? Who gets rewarded for what kinds of activity? That so many women around the world have limited options other than the sex trade, be it prostitution or, obviously more polemically, marriage, is another kind of ownership that can be a safe haven or enslavement. It's depressing. Women's proximity to poverty increases significantly as they are in their child bearing years and when they get older, and it's even worse for women of color, and this across all strata of socio economic classes and in all countries. Who's getting fucked—not in the fun way?

SL: Yeah, it's a bummer the way that our language and our understandings of sex acts are already so infused with gender and power dynamics that are difficult to escape. It reminds me of Catherine McKinnon's famous phrase, "Man fucks woman; subject, verb, object." I disagree with Catherine MacKinnon about almost everything, but I do kind of see her point about how we can't completely escape from the way that sex, power, and gender are intertwined.

LL: Who were or are your models? Are you able to bring your students into a conversation with former and present feminists?

SL: In college, my feminism was one part riot grrrl, one part influenced by second wave feminist anthropologists, and one part very pussy-centric (that was a moment in which Inga Muscio's *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence* was big as well as the *Vagina Monologues*). I don't think I really GOT intersectional feminism until graduate school, and I get it more and more through teaching it and practicing it and living it.

Yeah, my students can relate to feminists of different eras. I REALLY love teaching Gloria Steinem's *If Men Could Menstruate*, and they (and I) have recently gotten excited about Cathy Cohen, Audre Lorde, the Combahee River Collective, Kate Bornstein, Holly Wardlow, Kate Frank, Mireille Miller-Young, and Jillian Hernandez. Jillian also is a contributor to this issue of *Pastelegram*. Her work and her friendship gave me some of the tools with which to better articulate issues of racialized sexuality that are helpful to my teaching, research, and artistic practice. The feeling of Bikini Kill's "Rebel Girl" is playing in the soundtrack of our intellectual friendship, but it's more to the beat of hip hop music.

I'm really interested in intergenerational feminist conversations as I find myself teaching gender studies to a bunch of students who have a completely different set of assumptions and references. Knowing that Simone Signoret and Gloria Steinem were signposts for you, I wonder what your thoughts are about how feminism and feminist art have changed since you have been a practicing artist.



Untitled (Charlotte and Larry), *Venus Inferred* series, 1995, Archival Ink Print

LL: Bikini Kill, oh ya. I grew up fighting my way in mosh pits and had some ambivalence for that particular scene. Once I found Throwing Muses, the Slits, and other girl bands, so much happier.

For me, once out of art school and into life as artist and teacher, the shifting tide of gender issues were such that my students did not want to identify as feminists cuz, y'know, now that things were all equal and stuff, there was no need to be "shrill". Sigh. The attention to gender, along with sexuality, class and race is unavoidable, at least for those of us with any consciousness. Given our current global economic and political world, Issues of salary equity, labor--in and out of the home, child-rearing, sexual violence...impossible to not recognize as problems we wrangle with as individuals within the collective we call society.

Today, as a middle aged (eek) woman, the change in how I'm perceived—or not—is a bit of a surprise, despite having read fiction of such accounts. Being inside a body that changes, but also, how I'm viewed; it's as if I were only partially visible. Has me re-thinking Mulvey's 1978 "Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure," and other's reexamination of these ideas including Kobena Mercer's "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary" and Winnocott's work on childhood addressing the gaze and its mutuality as important to developing positive bonding. Adding old age to the gender, race, class trinity? Art-wise, it's notable that in these years when their male peers' presence and prices continue to grow, women in their middle years seem to disappear, only emerging much later for their rediscovery in major retrospectives that highlight the work they've been doing all along. This, hopefully arriving while they are still alive to celebrate finally being acknowledged. The art world, like the film/hollywood world written about in last week's NYT magazine, is unfortunately way similar to the world at large in terms of gender. One of the issues I find so frustrating is that those in power don't necessarily feel compelled to change the structure as it's so tightly aligned with the market and to go against this would be too great a risk. But how else to change the world?

SL: I have a hard time imagining you **not** being looked at, Laura! But yes, I've also read these accounts, and what you're describing is something that we can see evidence of in so many realms. I've read about women suddenly getting a fraction of the attention in their online dating profiles when the clock strikes between their 29th and 30th birthdays. And of course, in Hollywood, most of the roles are for young women. It's a shame that most of the attention given to women is for youthful beauty though, because most of us become more interesting as we get older. Do you think that some of the changes in your work have to do with your changing experiences of and conceptualizations of desire and the visual in relation to age?

LL: Definitely! Most recently, *Stain*, my collaboration with John Paul Morabito, an artist who works in textiles, is about just this. *Stain* is a set of 8 variations of a stain pattern woven in sustainably grown unbleached cotton napkins that are meant to continue to accrue stains as evidence of life lived. The stain patterns are woven into napkins so as to discourage the use of bleach and instead appreciate the stain as a sign of life, hopefully well lived. The intent was to align my aesthetics with my ethics, eradicating the need to use harmful environmental detergents just so that I could maintain white napkins and towels. It's not so much of a stretch to realize how the aesthetic of whiteness goes beyond simple décor. From the totalitarianism of minimalism as a bookend of modernism to issues of race, class, and gender, white as the ideal demands a lot of labor to uphold, literally and ideologically. Then, there's the body that ages. Scars, wrinkles, gravity...



Photograph of *Stain*: 8 napkins; collaboration with John Paul Morabito, 2015 (stain pattern woven in fabric)

How does age affect the population you work with? I'm guessing that the younger one is the higher their demand? If old athletes invest in restaurant franchises, what do old sex workers do?

SL: Women could make more money when they were young and especially when they were new in *la zona*, but older sex workers had clients, too. Most of the sex workers were in their early twenties, but I spent most of my time with women who were between 35 and 55—they tended to *not* have pimps and to be working either to support families or drug habits. Some sex workers saved money to invest in a business or a piece of land. Unfortunately, at the time I was in Reynosa, very few were able to meet their financial goals because a variety of factors like the swine flu, the economic crisis, and fears of drug violence made clients scarce. Many sex workers of all ages went back to their places of origin

and worked in the informal economy. I knew a few sex workers in their fifties who retired from sex work either due to health problems or because they didn't want to do it anymore, and they tended to make money working as bartenders, selling food, or doing odd jobs for the younger women in *la zona*--running errands, washing their clothes. Occasionally, a woman would be able to convert her sexual labor into more durable forms social value by saving money to invest in a business. Or occasionally a woman who left *la zona* because she said that God healed her from vice (crack and prostitution). What sex workers did was only a part of the project, though--the other key component was looking at a small group of foreign missionaries who hoped to build relationships with sex workers.

But I want to hear more about your work. Can you talk about the trajectory of feminism in your art?



Untitled #55, Hardly More Than Ever series, 2001, Archival Ink Print

From the early days in which making pictures gave permission to stare --girls always being told not to look. I thought a lot about romance and gender roles in mainstream depiction but wrestled with, as Lauren Berlant affectionately chided me, wanting to have my cake and eat it too in that I knew the promise of mainstream romance was designed to fail but loved it regardless. I shifted to the table as a site that contracts the personal and the political. Home being where politics come to roost. Making pictures is a way of using the language of the mainstream so as to shift the terms, destabilize expectations, cause a hiccup that questions what and how we see and know.

As I worked on "Hardly More Than Ever" I began to feel that the conversations around this work were not the ones I was having internally. Art historical references, narrative, beauty in the decrepit, sure, but I am interested in the conceptual, theoretical, and political framing of these issues. Using pictures to ask questions. In 2009 I stopped making pictures so as to figure out what the hell I was doing and what I really wanted to be doing. For some time I'd felt growing ambivalence about how photographs are used. Not that the medium can be blamed for its complicity within hegemony! I'd run out of optimism. I was nauseated by the resoluteness of it all. During this year's pause I felt like I was starting at ground zero. I needed new, to me at least, strategies for living in this world and then to figure out who and where and how I wanted to try to engage a world.



Untitled #26, The Dog and the Wolf series, 2010, Archival Ink Print

Oddly, I returned to ceramics. I say "oddly" because it was a medium I hadn't worked in for over 30 years. I joke that it was a form of therapy. but seriously, it was! The condition of making, of physically mauling clay--another kind of indexicality!--to coerce and cajole into shapes I

wanted, the quest for a perfect bowl for one-dish meal fish soup. Molosco, the porcelain dinnerware I made was for me, a way to counteract the onslaught of CB2-Ikea-DesignWithinReach-JCPenny-Macy's-CrateandBarrel-WestElm! BETTER! MORE MORE MORE.



Between making dishes, I was looking, reading, and writing. Another thing I did is a set of stories that I still haven't finished. An avid reader, I always wanted to write, along with singing, an ambition still to be achieved. At that point these other materials and strategies to jolt myself, my senses and knowledge. I didn't know the outcome only that I couldn't do what I had been doing.

More organic was my turn to textiles. I grew up with a Baba, my grandmother, who worked as a seamstress and was surrounded by fabric as well as its relationship to potentiality. Its relationship to gender, fashion, and technology is powerful for me. Or, less high-falutin', I lovelovelove fabrics and fashion.



Post-fleur Bangalore, Ecstatic, even series, 2014, silk chiffon

SL: I love the way you style yourself, Laura! --says the woman who just told a room full of students today, "Please don't write that you love my clothes on my teaching evaluation." But you have tenure and this is not a teaching evaluation, so....

Have you ever considered designing clothing?

LL: That would be so amazing. I'm challenged though by a lack of training that sometimes can result in innovation, i.e. how to make a flat piece of cloth wrap a body with lumps and bumps, or sometimes, absolute flops. Over the last year or so, I've been trying to slow down my wanting for new clothing by making almost everything (shoes and underwear excluded! And running clothes). By doing this, it's made the decision to have another shirt a lot more of a consideration.

SL: Oh, so you get to make your cake and eat it, too! You know, it seems to me that in your new work, *III Form and Void Full* is also cake-having and cake-eating in that it's in part about an ambivalence of normative fantasies. This work seems to come of and perhaps is generative of not only a criticality of how photography shapes desire but that also IS shaping desire as well. In this interview with Lauren Berlant that you're referring to that was part of your *Venus, Inferred* book, you also noted that your work there was in part about the desire of your subjects to live out the dream of being normal, which they could never completely succeed at. Do you think of your newer work as having a similar relationship to normativity? It seems to me that perhaps one of the major threads that connect your various projects is an ambivalence toward various normative fantasies?



Untitled #24, Ill Form and Void Full series, 2012, Archival Ink Print

LL: Hmmm. Certainly in the earlier still live work, *Hardly More than Ever*, I was trying to pull out of what I had, of what had come before, some semblance of possibility for a set of pleasures that were resuscitative rather than a demand for new/better/different. A pleasure in what was in all its marks, blots, and fissure. In 2010 after my picture-making hiatus I started making pictures built from others' pictures. *Ill Form and Void Full* still references the genre of still life as I want always to trouble Home as a place and as an idea. Because I am always troubled by just that. It's a site that demands a lot of work, literally and ideologically, hence all of the material, culturally, around its components. Cooking magazines, renovation shows, decorating blogs; the photograph teaches us how to look in the De Lauretis, "how do I see as well as how am I seen?" Out of the knowledge we glean from pictures, more pictures are made--chicken and egg problem! How to change how we understand what we see, and

the relationship between how visual culture shapes ideas. Can we unpack how perception is shaped and shapes the world? Our world?

Relating both to the specifics and generalities of home, as well as ideas about perception, we know these categories are never neutral but mired in social circumstances. Ideas about the world are evident in the images we make. By using existing images culled from Martha Stewart, penny flyers, and Art Forum, to name a few, I want for my pictures to propose, provoke, and destabilize how we understand what these mainstream images "do." There is no stable uniform perspective in their viewing. As I've continued, the work becomes more abstract and architectural, as I think about building a world I can live in, or, turning this on its head, living in a world I build. Building as knowledge?



Untitled #57, Ill Form and Void Full series, 2014, Archival Ink Print

Photography's specific relation to sight, with its privileged relation to desire, and presumptions of knowledge...this confluence is why photography is so omnipresent. It is a language from which we cannot, or can we? escape. And mostly, we don't want to. Like language, how to communicate without? In my recent work, using mainstream media, albeit at different socio-economic levels, I am on the one hand alluding to there being no outside, but also, the conflicts of what is proposed within that image world. That "Normal" IS as a lot of work, and in its constructedness is super precarious and fraught.

I'm not enough of a fundamentalist to draw a line between normal and not. Obviously there are certain polemics but the in between areas are of the most interest to me because this is often where we must, at some level(s), be complicit. For example, as we all operate within language, we are all subject to some degree of normativity. Lorde wrote about the inefficacy of using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house but it's complicated.

I want, need to be honest, to deal with my, our, complicity, the pleasures taken and the costs associated with these pleasures. I (and most everyone I know) participates, even gets their thrills from transgressing norms and classifications. Guilty pleasures?

SL: Yeah, I agree that normative/non normative aren't stable and laminated onto anything but are instead shifting and context-dependent. And I think Audre Lorde's statement about the master's tools is often taken out of context and applied too widely in ways that aren't terribly useful. The point she was making, I think, was directed toward white feminists academics who were speaking on behalf of "women" without seriously engaging Black, lesbian, and Third World women. Lorde suggested that they were critiquing patriarchy but also living in the houses of and from the paychecks of white men and not taking into account how they benefitted from white heteropatriarchy that very differently affected the lives of less privileged women (whom they were only inviting to feminist conferences as afterthoughts).

LL: Yes, totally! I was struck though by that assertion followed by Yvonne Rainer's "You can (dismantle), if you expose the tools." The issue of race and class, while it circulates within the images I use and might not be at the foreground, but is there nonetheless.

SL: Speaking of intersectionality, Your *III Form Void Full* work makes me think about how these depictions of the home that get circulated in magazines are arguably racialized and classed, as well. They are often in great part about selling a fantasy of a kind of home and the objects that inhabit it that probably aren't attainable to most readers of these magazines. Does your work inspire or require a contemplation of the relationship between these fantasies that are being sold and the way

people construct their homes and selves vis-à-vis these fantasies?

LL: Absolutely. I'm struck by the way these images function as a fantasy, with fetish being operative both in the Freudian and the Marxian sense. Metz's essay, "Photography and the Fetish" is such a great articulation of this. The way that bits and pieces are extracted. In my images there's a mash up from the high and the low, the home-specific to art, fashion, and craft. It's not only that the home and objects aren't available because of class, although that's certainly true. It's that the fantasy depicted of Home and Object aren't available except as photograph. Building my pictures from these is, for me, a reference to the fracturing of perception.



Untitled #44, III Form and Void Full series, 2014, Archival Ink Print

SL: Moving from your photography to your object-making, how has your training and experience as a photographer influenced your design work? Has working in design in turn influenced your photography?

LL : As we've been saying, home is a site that is not natural or given, but highly produced. In my photographs, how the photograph is present as an object is really vital, as are the objects of home. My photographs are very specific in their material presence, intended for physical one-on-one reception—the digital representation always needing compensation to get to the gist of the work. I'm afraid that Benjamin's prediction about the loss of aura with photo mechanical reproduction is both spot on and completely off!

Making objects that belong in the home, the porcelain dishes and large vessels, as well as textiles is a way to make real my ideas about this place. There's a part of me that wishes I could make everything, the building itself!



Untitled, Molosco urns, 2013, porcelain

In addition to the fore-mentioned *Stain* collaboration with John Paul Morabito, he and I are working on a series of jacquard weavings of photographs I made while in India of various grounds resplendent with flowers, and sheets printed with erotic “nasty” graffiti. And there’s also printed fabrics, scarves for lack of a better word. Rude florals.

SL: I totally want to hear more about the nasty graffitied sheets, but that’s probably not surprising. You mentioned once that these “stained” textiles are also in part to discourage people from bleaching them. Do you seriously **not** bleach your white napkins and sheets? Are you totally cool with living with the patina of blood and lipstick and sweat and pen and chocolate stains?



ta'lsandthemuptosapaidar, Telephone Game: A collaboration with John Paul Morabito, Jaquard Weaving, Wool and Cotton, 2015

LL: I couldn't not bleach white sheets and napkins so yeah, I wanted to make these objects out of materials and patterns such that not only is bleaching not required but it would destroy what is beautiful about the linens. I dyed my white towels various shades of gray, and before *Stain* napkins, only used patterned napkins that camouflage stains. I want to shift the aesthetic and ethic that privileges white as pure, ideal.

SL: You should totally have an Instagram contest to encourage people to post pictures of the cool stains they accumulate on your napkins. Hey, what's next for your photographic work?

LL: Oh! I love that idea!!!

Photographically, I'm working on pushing various aspects, still culling from magazines to think about interior and exterior, backing further and further away from the table to address form and narrative in architecture. Mark Wigley's writings on gender and space are particularly informative, as is writings on decoration and minimalism from Loos's "Ornamentation and Crime" to Beatriz Colomina's work on Corbusier and modern architecture.

SL: Speaking of art as commodity, it's interesting that it was in part this kind of oversaturation of images and advertisements that first started you on this series of projects that has in part led you to design objects that might very well be advertised in these same magazines that both overwhelmed you and that you're deconstructing in your photographs. I wonder if the design work is also kind of like participant observation—

it must give you another view of this phenomenon that your work interrogates. I was going to say something about how now you're creating commodities for people to desire, but I guess you were already doing that by making photographs.

LL: Hah! Yes, indeedy. I couldn't afford to buy my photographs or my objects. Thank goodness for artists' bartering and trades.

But hopefully the objects I'm designing have a longevity vs. a built in obsolescence. At least this is my agenda. Products made well to last long and not needing continual updating at an ever escalating pace. There is a concern though about making objects that are sought after by the very system that I am critiquing but I suppose that my claim is that there is no outside. Only benign resignation and a trying to recalibrate, to make some wiggle room if you will, to shift demands and expectations. To change the world even if just a little?



Untitled #51, Ill Form and Void Full series, 2014, Archival Ink Print

SL: The objects that you've designed that I've seen and touched have certainly felt well-made. I'm curious about the relationship between your work and bodies. I know you're thinking about the viewer's body when you make photographs, and that's one of the reasons you print so large, right? How has your design work changed the way you think about bodies? You're now making objects that will have contact with peoples' lips and hands and laps and necks. Does it feel more intimate to you, or intimate in a different way?

LL: Interesting. I hadn't considered that but it makes sense. The move from *Venus Inferred*, the photographs of (mostly) heterosexual couples to the still life work was, for me, a shift from the omnipotence of the camera's gaze, or, I joke, explorations of the primal scene a la Freud, to identifying a first person point of view. I try to set up an invitation to enter the described scene such that one's perspective is tweaked, ever so slightly, to question their sight. The sense of sight is akin, as Aquinas said, to touch. As I wrote, this sense of material perceptual presence is super important for viewing my work. And with the objects I'm making, the distance is further compressed such that bodily engagement is entirely necessary to experience the pieces.

SL: I agree and disagree. I agree that bodily engagement is an important aspect of taking in your work. But I wouldn't discount the effects of your work mediated through technology. I've seen a few of your works in person, but most I have viewed on the screen of my 11 inch macbook air. It's not the same. But it still has corporeal effects even when one's body is not in proximity to the work. The thick tension of your photographs can penetrate an 11 inch screen. It's like taking a breath that takes several seconds to register because the brain is lagging behind in that moment of perceived breathlessness. I would argue that work can still have these bodily effects without an unmediated proximity to a body. And actually we have these kinds of debates in faculty meetings about if our classes which teach students new ways to think about gender, sexuality, race, class, etc can lead to productive and transformative discussions in online courses in the same way that they do in face-to-face courses. And of course it's different. For some, it won't be as powerful. But I'm always trying to make a case to my colleagues that this generation that we are educating learned how to be social in the world and developed their senses of self mediated through technology. Many of them determined their gender or sexual identities from reading tumblr pages or looking at porn on tiny screens, in addition to face-to-face encounters. There are even people who can engage more comfortably and learn better if they have a screen between them and the person they are engaging with. So it's different, yes. But there is still something powerful that can happen in these spaces mediated through technology, and sometimes maybe even things can happen that wouldn't happen face-to-face.

On the other hand, I would have much preferred to do this reciprocal interview with bodily engagement unhindered by spatiotemporal limitations and unmediated by technology. But still, it was a pleasure.

LL: I'm super happy to hear that for you the images translate. I am responding to comments I've heard so often by curators and other artists who tell me that they often don't like or "get" my work until they see it in person. Evidence of the pictures' making such as fingerprints, tape, drips, etc, are rendered antiseptic by the backlit screen of the computer. And I've had the experience with art works where on the computer, the work is hard to engage, whereas in person, it can be terrific--as well as the opposite experience. I've a pet theory that often when work looks amazing in a photograph on one's computer, it is disappointing in person.

Gives a different resonance to being a materialist, perhaps. And yes, more talk in person!!!!

Laura Letinsky is a photographer, designer, and Professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago. Recent exhibitions include the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, The Photographers Gallery, London, and Denver Art Museum, CO.

Thing (Love Song to Karl Marx and Friends)



PASTELEGRAM

Kegels for Hegel

The Interdisciplinary School of Raunch

KEGELS FOR HEGEL I Wanna Fight You to the Death (Love Song to G.W.F. Hegel) (stills)

CHRISTIANA LARAGUES Reflections on Amorous Relationships with
Avant-Garde Media Dream

JILLIAN HERNANDEZ Raunch Aesthetics as Visceral Address:
(MORE) Notes from a Voluptuary

KEGELS FOR HEGEL [REDACTED] Grant application

KEGELS FOR HEGEL Manifesto de la Invaginación / Invagination Manifesto



I Wanna Fight You to the Death (Love Song to G.W.F. Hegel)



Reflections on Amorous Relationships with Avant-Garde Media

Christiana Laragues

Such naughty girls. There's something of a sweet perversion in the Kegels for Hegel project, which is the sweetness and perversion of the duo that forms its core. The rest of the K4H contributors orbit this nucleus, offering valences of meaning that color and penetrate the core project, shifting its gravitational force in at least four dimensions. There's the undeniable attraction and attractiveness of the two units—a fusion which teases fission, but only ever teases. All that is solid melts into air. Add to this ether the charged atmosphere of pioneers who posited subversive affinities. Jack Smith, Bruce la Bruce and YouTube. Each in their way radical forces. Queer to the core.

Jack Smith the first. Who else would play with androgyne identity while flaunting his bits in a tangle of flesh and hair and pubes and silk organza? Persona is on display, not as strident individual, but as blurred identity, enmeshed in the confusions of the other and the self. Where do I stop and where do you begin? It's hard to know, when all the players on the stage could claim the title Queen of Technicolor. Maria Montez, eat your heart out.

Bruce la Bruce continues the thread, but gives Smith's delicious camp a punk bite. Here we have the dopplegängers to K4H, an uncanny twosome that confound our ability to distinguish. Are there really two? Or is it just the same in nuclear fission? An identity replication, or a personality crisis? You're a prima ballerina on a spring afternoon / change on into the wolfman / howlin at the moon. Everything's starting to blend / back to one. Fashion of a friend of a friend of a friend of a friend of a friend. While the fashion is fierce, it's the flesh that fixes the ga(y)ze. A little jiggle here, a little bounce there. And one final squirt. Thesis. Antithesis. Synthesis. All over your face.

YouTube. Breaking all the distribution and copyright rules. Subversion par excellence. The mass disseminator sowing the queer seeds of Kegels for Hegel. We must cultivate our garden.

--Christiana Laragues 2015

Christiana Laragues began (s)his artistic career as a child virtuoso in the classical piano-cum-circuit party. Laragues currently orchestrates design and material culture interventions between NYC, São Paulo, and Miami.

Raunch Aesthetics as Visceral Address: (MORE) Notes from a Voluptuary

Jillian Hernandez

VISCERAL

Deep / inward / feeling / emotional / crude / elemental / bodily

~~NOT~~-intellectual / ~~NOT~~-logical / ~~NOT~~-reasoning

AESTHETIC

Principles of beauty / appreciation / philosophy

~~NOT~~-crude / ~~NOT~~-elemental / ~~NOT~~-bodily

Music is a potent, visceral site for the expression and elaboration of sexual politics. Beats, sounds, and vocals not only communicate and provoke desire, pain, and pleasure—but also present mappings of new sexual formations and socialities. My work theorizes how music and performance do this. In the 2014 essay “Carnal Teachings: Raunch Aesthetics as Queer Feminist Pedagogies in Yo! Majesty’s Hip Hop Practice,” I note how the term and concept of “raunch” is often deployed to simplistically describe so-called “vulgar” sexual expressions. Raunch is rarely defined or *fleshed* out in critical analysis. Thus, I presented several of my own conceptualizations with the aim of expanding the theoretical and interpretive tools available for engaging with sexually explicit cultural productions. I offered the term *raunch aesthetics* to describe:

- *Performative and vernacular practices that employ explicit modes of sexual expression that transgress norms of privacy and respectability;*
- *Creative practices that blend humor and sexual explicitness to launch cultural critiques, generate pleasure for minority audiences, and affirm queer lives;*
- *Expressions that stem from and/or aim to incite arousal while often simultaneously generating laughter.*
- *Creative works that do not search for or affirm the truth of sexual subjects but rather, celebrate, often through hyperbolic excess, multiplicities of bodies and pleasures (Foucault 1978);*
- *Stylized forms of crafting that are not confined to the realms of elite cultural production. Raunch aesthetics get low, and live in the low.*

The article used the concept of raunch aesthetics to address how the black lesbian hip hop group Yo! Majesty transmits teachings to their audiences about safe sex practices, techniques for achieving sexual pleasure, and critiques of homophobia, sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression through sexually explicit expression.¹

Since that work was published I have continued to think about the impulses that drive raunch aesthetics and their potential effects, and I offer a direct, intuitive (undisciplined) and necessarily speculative exploration of how raunch aesthetics are forms of visceral address, and how raunch interacts with and stems from the visceral. An extension of my previously published theory, here I explore raunch aesthetics beyond the confines of the sexually explicit, while also acknowledging that it is one of its central foci. I want to address how raunch aesthetics articulate "raw" references to the body and in particular things like excrement, blood, and ejaculate, those hypermaterial manifestations of our carnal lives that are rarely discussed in polite conversation.

In the introduction to their special double issue "On the Visceral" for *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*², Sharon P. Holland, Marcia Ochoa, and Kyla Wazana Tompkins frame viscosity as "a phenomenological index for the logics of desire, consumption, disgust, health, disease, belonging, and displacement that are implicit in colonial and postcolonial relations. Emerging from the carnal knowledge of (colonial) excess, viscosity registers those systems of meaning that have lodged in the gut, signifying to the incursion of violent intentionality into the rhythms of everyday life" (2014, 395: emphasis in original). Following the invitation of these scholars to attend to how systems of inequality function through the marking of particular bodies (women, people of color, queers) as hyper-visceral (animalistic, sexually depraved, dirty, and irrational), I present a new engagement with the raw of raunch aesthetics that centers particularly on the visceral nature of processes of racialization and gendering that make the body, and more specifically, the flesh, the point of application of power (Spillers 1987, Foucault 1977).

I suggest that raunch aesthetics channel, redirect, and/or divert these power relations back through gendered/racialized bodies and flesh to incite pleasure for subjected subjects. The authors of raunch practices often address the visceral power relations that hail them without any particular political aims. Raunch aesthetics do not value legibility or legitimacy nor do they need these to be understood or appreciated. They are. But that does not mean that they don't perform different kinds of work that we might identify at a (loving) remove as political.

1 Although raunch aesthetics are not confined to minoritized populations, my particular interest is in examining the ways in which these cultural modes are mobilized by people of color and queer folks.

2 The double issues of *GLQ* are Volume 20, Issue 4 and Volume 21, Issue 1.

The analysis I offer here does not always paint a politically progressive picture of raunch. There are paradoxes to confront. Therefore, I address the ways in which some of the most powerful artists of raunch aesthetics sometimes reaffirm racist and sexist ideologies. If I am to treat these practices with the complexity and honesty that marks them, even with their potential problems, I must make a way through this intentional mess to get as deep as raunch aesthetics demand me to go.

Lighting my path here is a group of cultural producers who spark my thinking on the politics of raunch aesthetics and the visceral. They include the musician Blowfly (Clarence Reid), artist/scholar Anya Wallace, and the artist/academic collective Kegels for Hegel. I will center on Blowfly, and in particular the politics of the visceral narratives he speaks on race and sexuality in the documentary *The Weird World of Blowfly* (2010, Jonathan Furmanski). My thoughts on Blowfly lead me to readings of Wallace's series of paintings titled *Eat Purple Pussy* and some videos and songs produced by Kegels for Hegel. I write from my position as a creative Latina voluptuary dedicated to pleasure, eros, and all kinds of (excess) consumption as I let the raunch aesthetics give me the words.



The voluptuary as a little girl.

If Western philosophy, which has undergirded modernity and the Manifest Destiny of "civilization" through colonization, is disrupted because what counts as truth-making is subverted, does "disorder" chip away at its power? As opposed to abstracting, (literally medicalizing, and monitoring sexuality), expressions of sexuality for the UVAs³ women are an opportunity for merriment and deactivation of a rational disembodied view of sexuality and perhaps other things.

--Rosario Carrillo, "Expressing Sexuality with Vieja Argüentera Embodiments and Rasquache Language: How Women's Culture Enables Living Filosofía"

Building on the concepts of raunch aesthetics I have outlined above, I want to provoke us to think about these practices as stemming from deep, visceral bodily feelings that are principled, that interact with and engender filosofías (Carrillo 2009). I propose that raunch aesthetics *think* as carnal and performative forms of *fucking with* processes that Alexander Weheliye, drawing from black feminist theorists such as Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, describes as racializing assemblages.

Racializing assemblages are "a set of sedimented social relations" that utilize political violence to hierarchically order bodies "in a domain rooted in the visual truth-value accorded to quasi-biological distinctions between different human groupings" (2014, 68 and 40). He elaborates, "Even though racializing assemblages commonly rely on phenotypical differences, their primary function is to create and maintain distinctions between different members of the Homo sapiens species that lend a suprahuman explanatory ground (religious or biological, for example) to these hierarchies" (ibid. 28; emphasis in original). Racializing assemblages often rely upon marking particular bodies as *flesh*, thus making them subject to exploitation and violence. As I have been writing this piece, the racist massacre of nine black congregation members by a white supremacist occurred at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and the government of the Dominican Republic threatens the mass deportation of Haitian migrants and those of Haitian heritage who were born in the DR but have no documentation. These are racializing assemblages at work, and they work upon bodies deemed to be flesh.

In exploring the potential of thinking the flesh as *habeus viscus* (*you shall have the flesh*), Weheliye offers a notion of flesh as a "gash in the armor of Man" (ibid. 44) that can offer pathways to "new genres of the human" (ibid. 45) that are not contained by the violent hierarchies of racializing assemblages. He argues that racializing assemblages activate a "fleshy surplus that simultaneously sustains and disfigures said brutality" and also "reclaim[s] the atrocity of the flesh as a pivotal arena for the politics

3 Translated as Union of Argumentative Broads.

emanating from different traditions of the oppressed" (ibid. 2; emphasis added). I suggest that raunch aesthetics are one such tradition of the oppressed that are related to a constellation of others such as rasquache (Ybarra-Frausto 1989), wreckless theatrics (Brown 2014), camp (Sontag 1964), Blues (Davis 1998), funky erotixx (Stallings 2015), sexual-aesthetic excess (Hernandez 2009), lo sucio (Vargas 2014), and what Yessica

Garcia calls "intoxication as feminist pleasure" (2015).

...we might come to a more layered and improvisatory understanding of extreme subjection if we do not decide in advance what forms its disfigurations would take on (Weheliye, ibid. 2).

Raunch aesthetics do not appear to be the kind of disfigurations of extreme subjection that would be set upon as a resistant agenda in advance, which is evidenced by the manner in which such cultural productions can elicit censure or shame even in politically progressive antiracist, queer, and feminist circles. Thankfully this is changing due to a recent surge of sex-positive work on race produced by scholars such as Mireille Miller-Young (2014), LaMonda Horton-Stallings (2007; 2015), Juana María Rodríguez (2003; 2014), Celine Parreñas Shimizu (2007), Ngyuen Tan Hoang (2014), and others. But we can do *more* to come into contact with the flesh that raunch aesthetics stems from and stimulates, often in spaces outside of the academy. This essay is an invitation for such an encounter.

As a flesh politic, which I am referring to as visceral here, drawing from Wehilye, the aesthetic philosophies that undergird raunch aesthetics don't rely on Enlightenment notions of the rational, though it is reasoning. This is thinking that knows but that you can't *know*, unless you feel it (King 2001). Raunch aesthetics have roots in a variety of creative, communal, sexual, and spiritual traditions that are now diasporic.

*See this is ain't something new, that's just gonna come out of nowhere!
No!
This is something OLD and DIRTY,
And Diiiiirrrrrtyyyyyy, yeah.....*

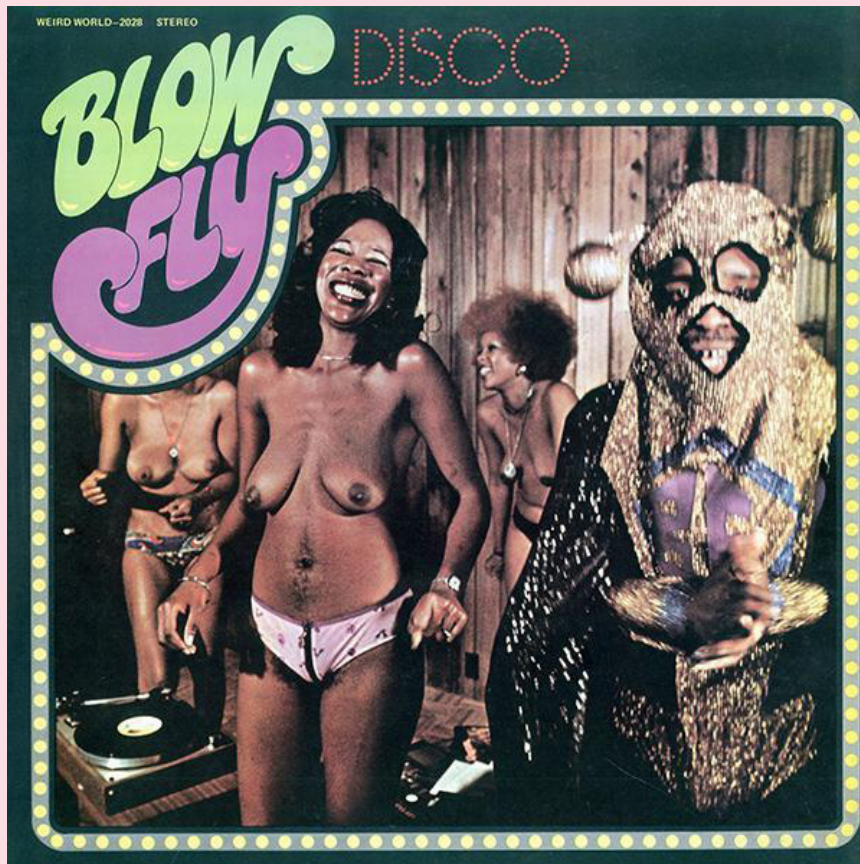
--Ol' Dirty Bastard, "Raw Hide"

Blowfly's Pornotropes*

Hip hop artists are some of the most expert crafters of raunch aesthetics. Their beats, lyrics, and movements express the pleasures, pains, philosophies, carnalities, and irrationalities that mark racialized/gendered existence. Even when fantasies, raunch aesthetics are always truths.

Although Wu-Tang clan member and solo artist Ol' Dirty Bastard (Russell Tyrone Jones, b.1968-2004) would say that there is no father to his style,

he has acknowledged his inspiration by the Miami-based raunch musician Blowfly (Clarence Reid), who dubs himself the first rapper, citing his 1965 song "Rap Dirty" as hip hop's inaugural work.⁴ Reid initially achieved success in the Miami funk scene, co-writing and producing hits such as Betty Wright's "Clean Up Woman" in 1971. While the Miami funk boom declined as the 70s progressed and disco became a more marketable sound, he engaged in an independent solo practice based on his unique alter-ego character named Blowfly, who parodied popular American songs by infusing them with raunchy and vulgar lyrics, along with composing original dirty tunes. His songs have titles like "Porno Freak," "Too Fat to Fuck," and "Girl Let Me Cum in Your Mouth."



Although most of Blowfly's records were released in the 1970s and 80s, he continues to tour in punk and alternative venues across the U.S. and Europe, in which he has a cult following among primarily white audiences. However, earlier in his career Blowfly records were collected in black households and circulated in black circles, as described by rappers such as Ice T, Chuck D, and other artists who have claimed Blowfly as a significant influence during their youth. I became interested in Blowfly after attending his performance at Churchill's Pub in Miami with an audience of

⁴ Blowfly's work is commonly categorized as comedy, rather than music. I reject this description as it undermines and denies his creative practice as music making.

punks and rudegirls/boys of color in the summer of 2014. I was inspired by the no-fucks-given performance persona (a long finger-nailed middle finger held high in the air) of the aging masked and costumed artist who emanated an energy that was simultaneously funk, hip hop, and punk. He made us move and got us funky.



Blowfly performing "Spermy Night in Georgia" at Churchill's Pub, July 25th, 2014

In the documentary *The Weird World of Blowfly* (2010), directed by Jonathan Furmanski, the camera follows the artist, who at the time was approaching 70 years of age, to an interview with *Hustler* magazine, where he was asked about the origin of his name and rap practice.

Interviewer: How did you become Blowfly?

Clarence Reid: At 7 years old my granddaddy died in Vienna, Georgia. So, white people told us the truth. You had to get you a place to go because nobody worked. My grandmother was old and my mother was down here in Miami. So I told them I could plow a mule, so they said, "Get your little nigger ass over there and sit down and shut the fuck up."

So, I started plowing a mule at 7. And for my revenge I'd wait till the white people get around me and I said, (in a screechy, comical voice as he enacts a dialogue);

"Ernest!"

"Yeah Minnie Pearl"

"Do you love me?"

"Why you keep asking me for that shit?"

"Why don't you love me?"

"You know what I'm doing?"

"What?"

(sings) "I'm jerkin' my dick over you. I keep telling myself it ain't true. I jerked it so much till it turned black and blue. Jerkin' my dick over you."

So the white people would go, "Oh, he's a nasty little fucker! Do another one!"

Blacks, if you're good, making \$2 a day [at the time]. That's what you make in a day. I'm a little kid so I'm making a dollar a day, I go home with about \$30. My grandmother didn't know where it come from, she think I robbed the whites. [Enacting the whites] "Oh, he didn't rob us. We gave it to him."

[Enacting the grandmother] "Why?! You don't give us money!"

[Enacting the whites] "Oh, he's a nasty little bastard but he's funny."

I told what I do to my grandmother and she said, "You're a disgrace to the human race. You're no better than a blowfly."

Blowfly is an apt name for reflecting the dirt mechanics of the young Clarence Reid, whose raunch aesthetics were a visceral address to his subjection and exploitation by whites in Vienna, Georgia. Blowflies are quintessentially visceral creatures. They are attracted to blood, feast on carcasses and infect the open wounds of animals. They are pests, troublemakers, signals of death. Although Blowfly's intended visceral agitation backfired, in that it incited white pleasure, rather than white disturbance or disgust (or perhaps it was disgust that generated the

pleasure), he was able to generate value from his performance, making much more money in a day than many of his black counterparts for his creative labor. As an object who spoke by “rapping” Blowfly performed what Fred Moten describes as “the always belated origin of the music that ought to be understood as the rigorously sounded critique of the theory of value.” (2003, 18)

Virulent white racism and in particular the Ku Klux Klan are recurring topics in Blowfly’s practice and in the informal conversations captured in *The Weird World of Blowfly* documentary. His hooded sequined costume loosely recalls Klan regalia, and the lyrics of his legendary song “Rap Dirty” includes, along with jokes about dick size, a story about an imagined altercation with the Klan in an Alabama bar.

*Those rednecks in the corner started getting up outta their seats
Carrying big clubs, wearing white sheets
He said, "Listen nigger man
I'm the grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan"
He said, "There's no nigger badder than me
Motherfuck you and Muhammad Ali"
I threw my drink in his face and I started to run
As I felt the lead from his shotgun
I got in my rig and covered up my face
And I drove my truck through that motherfucking place
Hoes started to run with glass in their hair
And the crackers' ass was flying everywhere
The grand dragon was on the ground with his ass bloody
And I looked at him, I said, "10-4, good buddy, yeah"
I reached in the seat and grabbed a bottle of wine
And I looked in the mirror and said, "I can't stand myself sometimes,
huh"*

The racial revenge fantasy narrated in “Rap Dirty,” a song which Blowfly regularly performs live to this day, is complicated by commentary he makes in the documentary that disparages black folks and displaces white racist violence with narratives of black-on-black crime. For example, while riding in a bus with some of his white band mates he talks about how if black people didn’t kill black people they’d be in control of the world, declaring, “niggers kill niggers, whites don’t need to kill no niggers.” Blowfly blames black leaders for being “stupid” and not “telling the truth.” He rejects the narrative of blacks being subjected by white supremacy, but at other moments in the film shares stories of racial injury, such as how the first time he performed he was heckled by whites on stage who shouted racist epithets.

After a performance in Germany in collaboration with Miami-based Cuban-American electronic music artist Otto Von Schirach, they had the following

conversation:

Otto Von Schirach: You were pretty disgusting [said as a complement].

Clarence Reid: Thank you. You born in Klu Klux Klan territory and you see people hanging and it wasn't by the Klan you need to tell people.

Here, Blowfly invokes lynching in the South but troubles the narrative by suggesting that at times this violence was not enacted by white supremacists. It appears that he theorizes his raunch aesthetics as a form of truth telling that addresses violences he believes are ignored or erased in larger discourses of black oppression. Later in the film, while having a business meeting with his white manager that turned to the topic of his upcoming 70th birthday he said:

Clarence Reid: If I was reincarnated I would wanna be a Klu Klux Klansman.

Tom Bowker: I think that's proof, you really do hate Black people don't you?

Clarence Reid: I sure do! [laughs] You got that right.

My interest in critically engaging Blowfly's work and desire to use the film as a pedagogical tool in undergraduate and graduate classes on race, gender, sexuality, aesthetics, and hip hop, have urged me to theorize Blowfly's contradictory rhetoric regarding race. In watching the faces of Blowfly's liberal white band counterparts cringe as he speaks, I can't help but feel that is a kind of raunch aesthetics at work. If trying to be disgusting by using profanity and sexual explicitness doesn't disturb white folks—maybe the paradox of a black artist hating other black people does. I am not fully persuaded that these are Blowfly's truths, and speculate that his performances of anti-blackness may be motivated by a desire to make white people face the grotesquerie of their own racism. Especially as throughout the film I find *myself* cringing at the savior narrative often articulated by his white manager Tom Bowker, who appears to want to take full credit for Blowfly's continuing survival and cultural relevance, despite the fact that the ill and aging Reid is still living under financial duress with no healthcare or stable income.

Deploying a narrative of hating other black people might provide Blowfly with an effective avenue for *fucking with* white people. This *fucking with* is a creative project rooted in (but uncontained by) visceral experiences of racialization.

Raunch Spirituals*

The Weird World of Blowfly features a scene in which Reid is hanging out with his mother Annie Collins in her bedroom. She lies on her side on the bed, covered with a floral comforter, in a housedress while she

fingers a thick, worn bible that is cracked open. Reid is seated close, right next to her in a chair by the bed, and they exude a palpable warmth and tenderness toward each other (*mama's baby*). The camera moves away from the pair at times to focus on the religious decorations in Collins's bedroom—a ceramic cross festooned with roses, a framed portrait of Jesus Christ—as if to juxtapose Blowfly's "dirty" identity with his mother's respectable religiosity. But the narrative she expresses about her son soon complicates the predictable comparison.

In discussing her reactions to Blowfly's raunch aesthetics, she argues that they do not make him a bad person, testifying that he never became a drug addict, for example. She finds that, in the larger scheme of things, dirty talk is nothing compared with the evils of being a truly immoral person. With her open Bible posed right close to her face for added authority, she declares, "So I'm claiming that, even with the disgusting stuff he do, that I don't agree with, that he is saved."

Reid follows with, "And I can't understand why a lot of them don't agree with it, because there ain't nothing more disgusting than the bible! The original bible, it tells the truth." Citing Old Testament content such as the commandment not to covet another man's wife and Sodom and Gomorrah, Blowfly argues that what he does in his music is no different from the legitimated visceral content found in the Bible. The Bible is an erotic.



Erotic also are artist/scholar Anya Wallace's series of paintings titled *Eat Purple Pussy* (2013-2014) that celebrate the flesh of black church women in states of sexual/religious ecstasy. These are pretty works that also traffic in raunch aesthetics through visceral address. The figures she

crafts are soul and body—simultaneously voluminous and ethereal. Dressed in Sunday best but also deliciously nude.

It is significant to note that, like Blowfly, the inspiration for Wallace's raunch aesthetics in the paintings were also sparked by a childhood experience in Vienna, Georgia. Both artists speak the South as foundational, visceral, and carnal ground. In a 2013 personal reflection she wrote following a visit to church, Wallace notes:

The first time I saw someone catch the Holy Ghost I was a girl of eight years old in the desolate country of Vienna, Georgia. My mother, stepfather, stepsister and brother were attending a family reunion. The five of us were obligated to church service as it was one of the main functions on the reunion itinerary. My mother looked to be painfully irritated (this was NOT what we were used to), and my stepdad looked to be a bit uncomfortable having subjected us to such a sight. But, I was mesmerized, a bit scared, but mostly mesmerized.

Women, only women, were letting loose in ways that I had never witnessed outside of a moment of tragedy. Hollering mouths, flailing arms and sprawled legs, and fainting bodies were ignited in various corners of the church. I asked my mom what was going on, and she politely whispered, "They caught the spirit." Though I still did not know what that was, I committed myself to taking careful note. While in church today I thought of the women that I had witnessed "catching the spirit" in Vienna that day. In fact, I often times think of those flailing bodies as reference for not just my spirituality, but as a reference for my philosophies about freedom and pleasure.

Wallace was seduced by the body and spirit work on display by the women in the church, which was a then novel experience given that she was raised Catholic and attended Catholic school as a girl in her hometown of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Although Wallace's primary mode of image production is photography, she felt that the most appropriate medium for capturing these erotics was via the gestural and immediate form of watercolor painting ("*tu tiene la forma, yo tengo la manera*").⁵ The small size of the *Eat Purple Pussy* paintings, measuring 7x10 inches, also offer an intimacy when viewing.

A triptych of paintings from the most recent iteration of the series (above, 2014) were included in an exhibition I organized at the alternative art venue Space Mountain in Miami, Florida in an altar-like tableaux that included stained-glass patterned wallpaper, women's hat boxes, and dozens of lit religious votive candles. The sexualized forms on display were in a space crafted for more than a passing glance; the tableaux invited the viewer to stop and think their/their bodies. Marked

⁵ Lyrics from Rita Indiana's "Jardinera."

by the black aesthetics of the church hat instead of black skin, the flesh tones of the figures are the colors the artist associates with various facets of sanctity, but a sanctity that does not entail the valuation and policing of women's sexual purity. The forms do not aim to transcend race, but to evoke a particular form of racialized pleasure through a feminized and divine logic of color. Thus, the images incarnate what L.H. Stallings describes as black *funky erotixxx*, a "Sacredly profane sexuality [that] ritualizes and makes sacred what is libidinal and blasphemous in Western humanism so as to unseat and criticize the inherent imperialistic aims within its social mores and sexual morality" (2015: 10-11).



Eat Purple Pussy (Study 5), 2014

This lady in blue has her ass poised and ready, to be felt, to be penetrated. We may imagine that her pussy is leaking juice. Either waiting to be or having been fucked, or preparing for another round. Breasts perked, nipples hard in expectation. Hat firmly in place. Sex heightens her being. She brings herself fully to the encounter, which may involve no other person or thing at all. She is no one's other.

The work's soft and exacting application of paint gives form to her tumescence as the figure almost bleeds back into the page in her be-

cumming/un-be-cumming.

*"You gotta move it slowly
Take and eat my body like it's holy
I've been waiting for you the whole week
I've been praying for you, you're my Sunday candy"*⁶

For the artist, the hat signifies both the physical space of the church and "Black womanness." In drawing from her girlhood witnessing of black women's ecstasy she notes that the rituals of black funerals and church gatherings taught her how to "woman." Girl. Woman. Back to Girl. Sometimes somewhere in between. Memory. Flesh. These come together in other spaces for Wallace such as her Vibrator Project where she engages young black women in the South in workshops and discussions around the topic of sexual pleasure (for themselves). These are interrelated practices with porous boundaries. Porous as the skin of the women in her paintings.



Eat Purple Pussy (Study 4), 2014

These figures have been disciplined in academic spaces. When proposing a paper based on a discussion of the series for the Black Portraitures

6 Lyrics from Donnie Trumpet & the Social Experiment's "Sunday Candy," performed by Jamila Woods.

Conference organized by New York University in Florence, Italy in May 2015, Wallace was asked by the organizer to remove the title of the works, *Eat Purple Pussy*, from the description of her talk that was to be published in the program. More than a pithy feminist blog on black pleasure politics, these small, quiet paintings and the carnality they declare is in fact threatening to established orders. *Watch them do*.

Ass and hat do equal *werk* in the image above.

*"Drippin' on that work, trippin' off that perc
Flippin' up my skirt and I be whippin' all that work"*⁷

She, the figure, like hip hop artist Nicki Minaj, feels herself so much it makes her flesh teem. She does not need a face for personhood, neither does she need symmetry—these are not ideas, embodiments, or notions that excite or make her. See HER for body. The pleasure-woman figure often called upon in current woman of color pop feminism but so rarely evoked as enticingly and lovingly as she is here by Wallace.

SHE can be me, or my mom, or what my daughter becomes.

SHE can be as pregnant as I am now or choose never to mother.

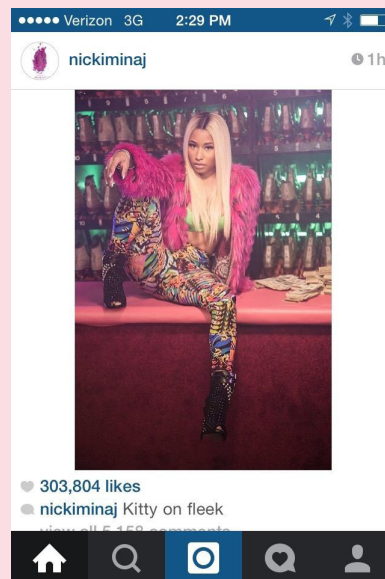
SHE may very well like to eat, food as well as pussy.

*"He can tell I ain't missin' no meals"*⁸

And in Study 6 below we get the pussy.

The flesh that is Irigaray's not one.

*"Kitty on fleek"*⁹ & *"When our lips speak together"*



7 Nicki Minaj featuring Beyoncé, "Feeling Myself."

8 Nicki Minaj, "Anaconda."

9 Nicki Minaj featuring Beyoncé, "Feeling Myself."

*"Put it in his face like a cop badge"*¹⁰

Plump, like the fat pussies admired and coveted by the young Nevisian girls discussed in Debra Curtis's book *Pleasures and Perils* (2009).

There is Caribbean light and taste here.

Anya Wallace comes from a Bahamian family and is attentive to the hat-wearing, cooking, and erotics of her women relatives. She also shares an erotic spirit with the Trinidadian-born Nicki Minaj, and loves lyrics like *"if he shoot it up Imma bust back"*¹¹

*"DEM ISLAND GIRLS IS THE BADDEST"*¹²

Raunch aesthetics as visceral womanist address.

This is when we see/feel how gender makes a difference, because Blowfly doesn't have great things to say about pussy.

Gendered and Racialized Raunch Body Politics*

Interviewer: How many women have you fucked?

Clarence Reid: I'm being conservative. But I probably got less pussy than anybody on earth. Cuz I check that shit out. If it smell like fish, bye!

A man can sit in shit, up to his neck for two months, and take a shower, and he's clean.

But a woman has got nine different places where shit get left behind and you have to take a douche every two days or that shit will turn into some shit that will make buzzards say, "Uhhhh!"

--Blowfly interview with Hustler magazine

When I screened *The Weird World of Blowfly* in a freshman seminar on Hip Hop, Race, and Sexuality, one of my students, who was a young white woman, mentioned these comments in particular in a discussion of what she felt was Blowfly's misogyny. When I first saw the film myself at home I didn't make much of these particular statements, I just saw them as more of Blowfly's raunch disturbance antics. But the response by the student prompted me to think on it further. I wanted to have a response when similar commentary arose from students because I wanted to trouble the often knee-jerk pathologizing of black men's sexualities, especially by white women.¹³ To process I wrote a journal entry on April 24th, 2015. I reproduce a segment of it here to maintain the (hopefully useful)

10 Nicki Minaj featuring Lunchmoney Lewis, "Trini Dem Girls."

11 Nicki Minaj featuring Lunchmoney Lewis, "Trini Dem Girls."

12 Nicki Minaj featuring Lunchmoney Lewis, "Trini Dem Girls."

13 For excellent analysis on the framing of black men's sexualities as deviant see Nobody Is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low by C. Riley Snorton (2014).

improvisation of the thinking:

thinking about Blowfly's thoughts on religion, his talk about women's vaginas, the reek they have, disavowed, just like he disavows other black folks, he smells the fuckery around them too much and can't stand it, it's almost like they remind him too much of subjection. the woman's body is open, vulnerable (thinking about how he described a man covered in shit is still cleaner than a woman's pussy), as is the black body to ku klux clan penetration-I read his disgust with them as a disgust with their subjection, or vulnerability to visceral forms of subjection.

he might love pussy and black folks so much it makes him sick.

he can't fuck with them anymore.

Though earlier in this essay I posit that Blowfly's comments on hating black folks are a form of raunch aesthetic that incites white disturbance, I still think there might be something to the conjunctures I recorded in my journal (these ideas don't need to be mutually exclusive). Weheliye's discussion of Hortense Spiller's concept of *pornotroping* as the "enactment of black suffering for a shocked and titillated audience" (Ibid. 90), which he extends to describe "the becoming-flesh of the (black) body" (Ibid. 91) that converts human beings into bare life, is helpful here. In assessing the sexuality/depravity that attends the brutalizing violence directed towards racialized, and in particular black bodies, Weheliye reads several scenes from the 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* to highlight a hitherto unexamined sexuality at play in Douglass's ultimately triumphant struggle with the sadistic overseer Covey, the subject of Chapter 10 of his narrative, which tells the story of his "transition from slave to man (Ibid. 93)," from (flesh) object to (impenetrable) subject through a Hegelian fight to the death.

Weheliye notes that one of the beatings Douglass recounted was spurred by his refusal to undress upon Covey's command as the overseer prepared to beat him as punishment for his delay in completing the task of retrieving wood from a forest with some untrained oxen.

He [Covey] then went to a large gum-tree, and with his axe cut three large switches, and, after trimming them up neatly with his pocket-knife, he ordered me to take off my clothes. I made him no answer, but stood with my clothes on. He repeated his order. I still made him no answer, nor did I move to strip myself. Upon this he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time after. This whipping was the first of a number just like it, and for similar offences (Narrative 59-60).

Douglass's *Narrative* opens with a recounting of the whipping of his Aunt

Hester, in which she is rendered flesh (with bared breast and back), and is followed by narrations of his own becoming flesh by beatings such as the one he endured Covey upon his refusal to undress. While Weheliye is interested in the libidinal urges of Covey's desire to beat Douglass nude, and in the erotic nature of a later struggle between the men itself,¹⁴ the description of Douglass remaining clothed reminds me of Blowfly's comments:

A man can sit in shit, up to his neck for two months, and take a shower, and he's clean.

The male body, even in the basest conditions, can possibly remain uncontaminated and impermeable (at a considerable cost), unlike the woman's, which is tethered to an ontology of flesh (Spillers 1987).

Blowfly's regalia begins to make sense now. Covered head to toe in a shimmering costume of gold and purple sequins, he presents a body that protects him from consumption and violation by the visceral racializing assemblages of (white) MAN. (This also makes me think of artist Nick Cave's elaborate sound suits, which are crafted to camouflage and protect the black body.)



This strategy works for Blowfly, but it comes at the expense of denying the goodness and pleasures of pussy. And I don't note this to bemoan or critique his queer rejection of women as objects of desire, but to

14 See Narrative, 71-72.

acknowledge the overlooked ways in which woman of color *flesh*, in its openness and impossible claim to the corporeal "integrity" of MAN-may offer different and possibly more gratifying modes of disturbing white supremacy. As Sara Clarke Kaplan argues, "If the material and ideological conditions for the reproduction of chattel slavery--the social death of the slave--were reproduced literally on and through the enslaved woman's body, then the enslaved concubine embodied not only the necessary precondition for the maintenance of black subjugation, but the system's most profound threat" (2009, 787). The sensuous line, gesture, and voluptuousness of the open ladies in Wallace's paintings provide a picture.

...without yielding their openness, and at times because of that openness, these subjects defy, resist, repulse, and negate. They push back against a world that wishes to flatten and atomize them, and in doing so they rethink the cartography of bodily being (Holland, Ochoa, and Tompkins, 2014).

But does the suit indeed keep Blowfly from feeling good? Is it possible to situate and stage the flesh to, from, and in-between openness and enclosure?

I think of Nicki Minaj's plasticized body as the kind of layered and indigestible nudity that Anne Anlin Cheng reads in Josephine Baker (2010). So cladding is also a strategy employed by women of color--but with a difference--as the camouflage/armor they employ is often a constructed flesh, the seemingly nude display of a flesh that may not be flesh at all. Clothed or unclothed, plastic or sequins, what *matters* is that there is (always) time and space for black pleasures.

"Fucking with Philosophers"*

Womanist. Feminist of color. One need not reject the white man's philosophies. Fuck (with) him.

In reflecting on the writing that informs her conceptualization of the Eat Purple Pussy paintings Wallace notes:

George Bataille's Eroticism: Death and Sensuality connects the ways in which the body functions with sanctity. He challenges the common discourse surrounding the erotic through his investigation. He considers through this work prostitution, mystical ecstasy, cruelty, and organized war as methods for arriving at the erotic. Ultimately, he argues that eroticism is "a psychological quest not alien to death."

Bataille's evoking of the philosopher as the stakeholder in the erotic relies on one's ability to speak what she feels. He argues the untruth in the silence of the erotic but rather that it is the experience of sanctity that vocalizes the erotic. And that the experience of the erotic is closest to that of sanctity. Not wanting to confuse erotic and sanctity as one

in the same, Bataille delicately provides that both experiences have an extreme intensity and ability to completely overwhelm humanness. While eroticism is silence and sanctity voice, both senses evoke the highest, most intense expressions of human presence.

Wallace's comments inspire me to think of raunch aesthetics as sanctified forms of speaking "intense expressions of human presence." Her words echo my April 2015 journal entry where I continue my thinking on Blowfly's commentary on race, gender, sex, and religion, and extend it in other directions:

He [Blowfly] cited the bible as an erotic (already in the tales told of sodom, etc), that is his genealogy for the nastiness in his own music, and Yo! Majesty emcee Shunda K has very passionately articulated spiritual beliefs, despite her raunch music, about black women's virtue via [racially] authentic body aesthetics and knowing that they are more than their bodies. the bad, oversexualized influence of famous female rappers on young black girls. these seem like contradictions but in fact they are just distinct iterations of visceral address to visceral processes of racialization and gendering.

Philosophy is a similar erotic, hence why it makes sense for hegels for kegel. in order to fuck with hegel you have to FUCK WITH hegel. There is an intimacy with the thing that is necessary in order to understand, and there is a slight attraction to it as well, which is what makes it dangerous.

Although these expressions [Blowfly and Shunda K's thoughts on gender and race outside of their music] can be easily pathologized under many frameworks of secularism, feminism, and anti-racism, I don't want to counter such views by attributing a politically radical intention to their thinking. however, these are not pathologies. I would argue that they are forms of address that reveal the madness of the "normal" of racism and sexism by reveling in and disrespecting it.

I have had to tarry with the fact that although I celebrate Yo! Majesty's raunch aesthetics as queer feminist pedagogies in my 2014 *Women and Performance* article, I side-step the issue of emcee Shunda K's Instagram feed, which often features memes admonishing black women to perform integrity by presenting racially authentic bodies (dreadlocks not weaves) and sexual respect (not raunchiness). At the time I really didn't want to fuck with the contradiction. But seeing Blowfly engage in other seeming paradoxes opened a path for me to face it.

The thinking took me to philosophy. Wallace notes that Bataille marks the philosopher as the stakeholder of the erotic and I am compelled by this.

To think of Hegel's master/slave dialectic in Douglass/Weheliye/Blowfly.

To think of Hegel again as he is invoked by the Latina feminist art collective Kegels for Hegel, who deploy raunchy visceral address through their songs, performances, and videos.

Kegels can help women achieve orgasm. They work the pelvic floor muscles. Viscus. Viscera. Anus, vagina, urethra.

Improving bladder and sexual function.

In suggesting that they “kegel for Hegel” the collective employs a creative strategy they term “fucking with philosophers” that “rehearse, reference, pervert, and pay homage to the ideas of philosophers and other thinkers.”¹⁵ This fucking with is decidedly gendered and articulated through a raunchy woman of color feminist intellectual/comedic style that brings the body, and in particular the hypermaterial woman’s body to the encounter. Their lyrics and imagery evoke feminized flesh and flesh worlds at every turn, while they hail, flirt with, and tease the über-men of the Western philosophical canon.

For example, in “Bite Me (Love Song to Frederick Nietzsche)” they sing, “God is dead, but I’m still here, so eat me sexy beast.” In the video for the song titled *Chicken Himmel*, which Kegels for Hegel created in collaboration with the collective Korean Studies Department, such lyrics are accompanied with shots of raw chicken flesh evoking vaginal openings, cartoonish voluptuous lips, legs in fishnet stockings, and gold slippers. The video has a decidedly “low” rasquache aesthetic, with cartoonish digital effects, handmade costumes, and campy performances. The electronic beats of the song recall the sounds of musician Peaches’s early albums: simple, low-fi, and bass heavy, activating the guts.

Bite me Neitzshce
Eat me up
Assert your will to power
...
Will you be my superman?
Oh bite me Nietzsche please

The simple, nursery rhyme-styled lyrics (which start with an ominous invocation of “Mary Had a Little Lamb”) are accentuated in the video by sing-a-long animation that displays the words of the chorus on beat.

Open up those chom-pers
Oh-Niet-zsche-let-me-in

¹⁵ This quote is derived from Kegels for Hegel’s bandcamp page: kegelsforhegel.bandcamp.com.



They implore Nietzsche to open up, for their own pleasure.



Kegels for Hegel recite the chorus “bite me, bite me, bite me Nietzsche” with the camera in extreme close-up to their faces, which are pressed up against each other. This doubling of women’s voices and bodies is an aesthetic that runs through their practice. A gendered, creative strategy of multiplicity that in previous writing (2013) I have theorized as a mode through which women artists express plural subjectivities beyond the confines of the singular, stable, knowable self that philosophers such as Nietzsche elaborated as the dominant, dominating, masculine (and thus valued) model for subjectivity. Close-ups of the artist’s mouths are featured in several of their video works, which focus on their rouged lips in

particular. In “When Our Lips Speak Together,” feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray writes,

Open your lips: don’t open them simply. I don’t open them simply. We—you/I—are neither open nor closed. We never separate simply: a single word cannot be pronounced, produced, uttered by our mouths. Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth. One is never separable from the other. You/I: we are always several at once. And how could

one dominate the other? impose her voice, her tone, her meaning? One cannot be distinguished from the other; which does not mean that they are indistinct (1985, 209).

Carolyn Burke (1980) has framed Irigaray's "When Our Lips Speak Together" as an imagined discourse for female lovers that troubles the status of men as self-same and the standard of sameness at the expense of female self-knowledge. In conjuring the sensuous lips that inspire her essay, Irigaray performs female self-affection--a consistent touching, one to another that does not erase specificity but rather engenders the expression of multiple subjectivities. The performance of woman of color self-affection and queer desire runs throughout *Kegels for Hegel's* practice, bringing the visceral of the plural lips and the porous woman's body to soften and make flesh (marinate) the masculine of Western continental philosophy, through an (edible) erotic. After all, when Irigaray played with Freud in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) she framed it as a form of lovemaking, no?¹⁶ *Fucking with. A different strategy than fighting against.* "I want to fuck you to the death, I want to fight you to the death."

...eating conjoins violent, linguistic, erotic, and gustatory appetites into a lexicon with purpose (Holland, Ochoa, and Tompkins, 2014).

Chicken Himmel concludes with a scene of four women seated at a dining room table with hoods over their heads. They are stripped down to their underwear, in a frenzy they feast upon the body of a human-sized chicken (which is played by artist kate hers RHEE in a costume).

Eat [him] ladies, until you're satiated.



16 This draws on my notes from the seminar on Irigaray I took with feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz in graduate school at Rutgers University in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies.

*"You're Mexican, right, so you like a good corn cob," she said,
approaching me with a maize-shaped vibrator.*

Fuck respectability.

--Kegels for Hegel

The gendered orality and erotics of eating appears again in Kegels for Hegel's 2013 song and video "Atzlán (Love Song to los Conquistadores)." The short composition and video, running at 0:27, channels the depraved position of Spanish colonizers. The artists wrote it while visiting the Border Patrol Museum in El Paso, Texas and thinking about capital-driven political reforms in Mexico and attacks on Ethnic Studies programs in the U.S., in particular Arizona House Bill 2281, which banned the offering of established Mexican-American studies classes in public schools in the state. These courses were outlawed because they were believed to "promote the overthrow of the U.S. government; promote resentment toward a race or class of people; be designed for pupils of a particular ethnic group; and advocate ethnic solidarity instead of treating pupils as individuals."¹⁷ These political realities demanded a response through raunch aesthetic pedagogies, those that indeed promote ethnic solidarity and overthrow.

The artists write:

*We present it now, ready for the re-conquest.
We present it now, rooting for the revolution: #BlackLivesMatter and
#Ayotzinapa*

Kegels for Hegel answers dirty to deform politics as they recite lyrics in Spanish that articulate the conquistador's desires...

*Te quiero conquistar
como las Américas.
Te quiero saborear
como un elote.
Y vas a trabajar--
No hay beneficios.
Y te va a gustar.*

*I want to seduce/conquer you
Like the Americas.
I want to taste you
Like corn on the cob.
And you're gonna work--*

¹⁷ I cite language here directly from the House Bill which is available online, see <http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/hb2281s.pdf>

*There are no benefits.
And you're gonna like it.*

Teeth tearing into a phallic elote. A lucha libre mask on a voluptuous lady body.

Pink and red fabric.

Hips sway saying, "you can't have this."



In "Bite Me (Love Song to Nietzsche)" sexual fetish is evoked through references to erotic biting. In the Kegels for Hegel video "I Wanna Fight You to the Death (Love Song to G.W.F. Hegel)," sadomasochistic imagery and narratives are even more pronounced.



"I wanna fight you to the death, I want to fuck you to the death, I want to fight you to the death, I want to fuck you to the death." The lyrics to the song recall Weheliye's assertion that Covey's desire for Douglass's flesh was libidinal, that the struggle between master and slave was sexual/depraved. But does a fight to the death make *woman (of color)* MAN? Or does she need to *fuck HIM (the master)* to get over?

The video for "I Wanna Fight You to the Death," which was created in collaboration with Christiana Laragues, features close-ups of the artists' flesh and lips as they slowly and deliberately utter their lyrics.

*I want to synthesize synthesize synthesize
all over your face*

K4H appear as doubles once again and make restrained and dispassionate choreographed and synced movements (deadpan, calm, "rational"). In one scene they are dressed in ordered Victorian-styled button-up shirts and glasses. In others they wear short black dresses with fishnets, leather, lingerie and heels. At times the camera lingers upon their thighs, open legs and breasts. They don paper masks of Hegel's face as they wear hand restraints and brandish whips.



The video is interspersed with black and white footage from Bruce La Bruce's film *Super 8 ½* (1994), in particular a scene of two punk women in leather fucking in a cemetery. One woman eats the other out as she spreads her legs while sitting upon a headstone. The video also utilizes short clips from Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963).

Kegels for Hegel perform the multiples that Irigaray imagines the lips/feminine subject(s) to be. The lesbians in the cemetery are another pair. The bodies in *Flaming Creatures* are an added amalgam of ecstatic bodies that cannot be parsed into individuals or genders.

A proliferation (feast) of flesh is presented in the encounter with Hegel. To seduce him. To undo him. Perhaps to entice him to undress and allow himself to become flesh.

To open. To eat.

Open up those chompers-oh Nietzsche let me in.

The video ends with a shot of one of the artists lying on the floor with a Hegel mask on. It gets soiled with ejaculate.



The women and queer subjects in "I Wanna Fight You to the Death (Love Song to G.W.F. Hegel)" are harvesting pleasure.

Only two MEN can fight it to the death in the Hegelian sense.

He doesn't speak for flesh beings (maybe he just longs for them, in a phallic sense). But the master does depend upon the slave, and Susan Buck-Morss (2000) reminds us that Hegel was reading about the slave revolt in Haiti in the 1790s when he elaborated the master/slave dialectic.

*You are my master, Hegel
I am your slave
I am the free one, Hegel
cuz I can work work work all my fears away
work work work all my tears away
work work and change the world
in my mind in my mind in my mind*

Blowfly at his mule plow writing music
Black women in church service and making art
Latinas fucking with philosophy

Raunch aesthetics is visceral work.

Work that speaks its address from the position of the flesh
And that labors to open and en flesh the seemingly concrete and stable
structures of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy
While giving and taking pleasures that exceed Western (ill)ogics

And it is always also MORE.

The authors I love here are cultivators of pleasure, sowing mangos for us to eat, happy in our guts. I let Rita Indiana have the last words;

*jardinera, jardinera
yo tengo la tierra, pa' tu semilla buena
tú tiene la llave, yo tengo la manguera
tú tiene la forma, yo tengo la manera
vamo a sembrarle mango en todita la acera
vamo a sembrarle mango todita la acera*¹⁸



Jillian Hernandez, Ph.D., is a dedicated voluptuary who works as an Assistant Professor of Ethnic and Critical Gender Studies at the University of California, San Diego. She curates exhibitions, makes art, teaches art to girls and young women of color in Miami, Florida along with her friends, and bumps Nicki Minaj and reggaeton in the car with her mother and teenage daughter as they navigate hot and congested Miami streets to reach Cuban pastry shops. She is currently pregnant and extra voluptuous, expecting her son in late December of 2015.

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This essay is dedicated to Blowfly/Clarence Reid, Ol' Dirty Bastard/ Russell Tyrone Jones, and Erzulie Freda.

*y quien es que dice lo que yo voy a sembrar
y quien es que dice como lo voy a regar
y quien va a decirme lo que yo voy a crecer
ay dios, pero tú te crees,...
y quien va a decirme donde yo hago los ollitos
y quien va a decirme donde yo la deposito
si ella son mía, soy yo que digo
y lo digo bajito*¹⁹

¹⁸ Translating the lyrics of Rita Indiana's "Jardinera" here would too dramatically distort the meaning and affect of the song's language. To get the sense, you can listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gK87ekqIJ2I>

¹⁹ Rita Indiana, "Jardinera."

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Grant Application

Kegels for Hegel

Describe your project as you really envision it to be instead of the way you have to present it for grant funding. (200 words)

Kegels for Hegel is an open collaboration of artists, academics and other creative, clever, disreputable types. The Kegels for Hegel founding foremothers aren't sure if we want to have children, but we are pretty sure we can't afford them. After all, we went to college.

But... neoliberal capitalism be damned! We will make forms of connection that are family-like and corporeal – queer temporalities and queer kinship. We want to expand in space and time and be part of your bodies and the bodies of others.

We're all inside of each other, because we have discussed things and read or seen each other's work and have intellectual and intimate attachments. We make things with our friends, and that's about as close to reproduction as it gets. We're making things that will go inside of other people, and they, too, will be infected with some of the gooey, dynamic creative intimacy and collaboration and stimulation that cums with it.

Kegels for Hegel is somewhere between work and play, somewhere between participating in an academic panel and participating in an orgy.

Work/play with us.

A (250 word) description of your project

242 words.

Straddling philosophical smutcore and tongue in chic, Kegels for Hegel is a conceptual art project that makes queerly ambivalent songs, music videos, and art objects that both revere and mess with

the intellectual production of philosophers. We are a "band" fronted by two academics. We perform songs that we write as a means to engage with the thinkers that have inspired our academic work.

Unlike our academic training, which consisted of specialized study over decades, Kegels for Hegel is based in the emancipatory potential of a lack of expertise. We make songs using simple computer programs, cellphone apps and loops of noise that we find or create.

We are interested in the "work" that an artwork performs: we take the language of academic discourse and make it speak in the dialect of music. As our artwork comes to werk, it engages the subversive possibilities of drag culture and performance spectacle.

The impregnating power of thought and theory is oursui generis. While our project is not pedagogical in a strict sense, it is a comment on the conditions of intellectual, and more so, institutionalized academic production. It is informed by our work teaching at universities and our interest in igniting dialogues about theory and power relations. In the Italian autonomist feminist Marxist tradition, we invaginate the politics of riproduzione. We transform reproduction from the birthing of children to social and political breeding of ideas in bastions of power such as the university.

Current and Future Production

For the album "Fucking with Philosophers," we have released songs, videos and corollary projects. In this Pastelegram issue, we include X new songs and X new videos and X new projects. The Pastelegram issue assembles our team of collaborators and melds their projects – from poems to music videos to academic essays – into an online archive.

We plan for our "Fucking with Philosophers" album to include 16 love songs, with a music video for each song. But we don't just fuck with philosophers! We have begun working on a second album, "The Conditions of Academic Production," which will work/play with

educational debt, adjunct labor and structural racism in the academy.

How does your project take an original and imaginative approach to content and form? Please be as specific as possible. (100 words)

81 words

Conceptually, Kegels for Hegel is based on a dialectic of sex: the back and forth transference of energy where participants can arouse excitement, spread seed, delight, form relationships and even create new beings, should they choose. In musical genres ranging from electro pop, chanson, corrido norteño and polka music, we pay homage to and poke fun at feminism, class politics, cultural theory, and colonialism. Whether dressed in BDSM, H&M, or high femme, we work both the brain and the pelvic floor.

What kind of impact—artistic, intellectual, communal, civic, social, etc.—do you hope your project will have? What strategies will you employ to achieve the desired impact? (100 words)

98 words

In a time of what has been described as enormous intellectual peril, Kegels for Hegel extols the sexiness of thought. Our project transmits essential principals of theories while questioning the way that certain worldviews are normalized, naturalized and unmarked while others are anthropologized, othered and questioned. With playfulness and humor, we mix up the lines of high theory and low culture; low theory and high culture. Our work is a raunchy affront to respectability politics. It is a means to take structures of power to task with critical thought, all set to a beat and in florescent colors.

How might your proposed project act as a catalyst for your artistic and professional growth? In what ways is it a pivotal moment in your practice? (100 words)

92 words

Thus far our project has been funded by us, academics indebted by their education, and through Kickstarter. It has also been made possible by the generosity of talented friends who have donated their time and energy to the project. In order for Kegels for Hegel to realize its potential, we need to finish the art objects, songs and videos for our first album, "Fucking with Philosophers" and create exhibitions with the material that we are producing. This requires more editing, musical and computer equipment as well as costumes, props and sculpture supplies. We also need an expanded online presence as well as more comprehensive documentation.

Biography (200 words)

48 words

██████████ was born in San Antonio, Texas and was socialized to be a nice Christian girl. She didn't become a disreputable Latina until feminism and anthropology corrupted her at the university. Dr. ██████████ now spreads the corruption in courses on Women and Gender Studies as well as Queer and Sexuality Studies as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the ██████████ and is working on her first book project entitled, ██████████ at the ██████████. Her academic research focuses upon sexual labor, migration, and the US/Mexico relationship.

██████████ is trained as an art historian and an artist. She studied art practice at the Universität der Künste in Berlin and at California Institute of the Arts in California, both at the

Masters of Fine Arts level. At those institutions she studied photography, sculpture and design, working with costume as well as plastics. [REDACTED] is currently the [REDACTED] Curatorial Fellow [REDACTED]. She is also collaborating on several curatorial projects and finishing her PhD. [REDACTED] has published and taught on contemporary art and design in Latin America, Europe and the United States.

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] founded Kegels for Hegel in 2011 when they were snowed into a rat-infested dirty hippie co-op in Rochester, New York. Their Kegel within was awakened as a conceptual art project when they realized that they should squeeze all of their interdisciplinary creativity together and synthesize with their super smart friends. Kegels for Hegel has been squirting sexed up social theory all over the faces of academics, artists, and fanboys and grrrls and non-gender conforming people as they have migrated between Berlin, Mexico City, Austin, San Diego and Houston.

**Provide a short history of your work together as a collaborative team.
(200 words)**

197 words

We began composing lyrics for ambivalent love songs to philosophers under the name Kegels for Hegel in 2010. This was the start of the album "Fucking with Philosophers," which we will finish with support from the [REDACTED]. Soon after, we began using computer programs such as GarageBand to compose the music for the songs. Since then we have performed songs, made videos and merchandise, as well as authored texts. Thus far we have released three videos and four songs, performed internationally at art galleries, music festivals, and dance parties as well as presented our texts as readings in museums and as experimental art writings in art publications.

Because our life as academics facilitates many moves to different academic institutions around the world, the project functions as an open chain letter that allows us to work with colleagues near and

far who have similarly complicated relationships with intellectual ontologies. Taking on an ethos of D.I.Together (instead of DIY), other intellectuals, be they academics or artists, contribute material and labor and the project has taken on the venues from classrooms to blogs.

Education

██████████ holds a Doctorate and Master's degrees in Socio-cultural Anthropology ██████████ and an undergraduate degree in Anthropology from the ██████████.

██████████ is finishing her PhD in ██████████ Art ██████████. ██████████ holds a Master's in Art History from ██████████ and an MFA in Art Practice from California Institute of the Arts. Her undergraduate degree in Art History and Spanish Literature is from ██████████, and she studied Art Practice at Universität der Künste in Berlin.

Selected Bibliography (200 words)

Experimental Art Writing and Publications

Kegels for Hegel, Pastelegram, invited guest artists, Fall 2015 issue, "Sexing up Social Theory."

Kegels for Hegel, La Misión (Berlin), The Brown Corner : "Notes on Aztlán," 'zine 3, print and online late March 2015.

Kegels for Hegel. Bi-annual online magazine, The Destroyer, curated by Andy Campbell, "Landscape/ Body" issue 4, online January 2015.

San Diego Reader, "Kegels for Hegel," print and online

Public Presentations or Publications of work
(exhibitions, festivals, books, journals, etc.) (300
words)

Exhibitions and Performances

+ PASTELEGRAM AT VORTEX

+ AUSTIN HEMI INSTITUTE (Hemispheric Institute of
Performance and Politics, Austin November 2015)

Dykon Fagatron Queer Dance Party at Crocker Bar,
Houston, TX February 28, 2015.

"Aztlán (Love Song to HB2281)" at Video Snack, curated
by Lauren Francescone and Zeynab Izadyar, 56 Bogart
Studios in Brooklyn August 25, 2013, (link)

"Bitácoras de un equívoco" (Logbook of An Error) at
Estación Cero, Pueblo Nuevo, Oaxaca, Mexico. Curated
by Julio Garcia Murillo and Eloisa Ojeda. August 24,
2013.(link)

"La Envaginación del conocimiento: Un manifiesto" (The
Envagination of Knowledge: A Manifesto) at Museo de
los Pintores Oaxaqueños in Oaxaca, Mexico during the
"Conferencia de prensa: Bitácoras de un equívoco."
August 21, 2013. Documentation available at: (YouTube)

"Performative Incorporations: Extravaganza de films,
telepatía, y poesía (infrarrealista)" at SOMA, Mexico
City, Mexico. Organized by Mariana Botey, Amy Sara
Carroll, and Ricardo Dominguez. July 17, 2013.

"Fucking with Philosophers: A Performance with Jello
Brains and Male go-go Dancers" at University Art
Gallery, University of California San Diego. Part of
the exhibition "We'd love your company: A project with
Ethan Breckenridge." Curated by Michelle Y. Hyun.
April 19, 2013.

Online Exhibition of Videos

"Aztlán (Love Song to Gloria Anzáldua)", "Thing (Love
Song to Karl Marx and Friends)," "Bite Me (Love Song
to Friedrich Nietzsche)," "I Wanna Fight You to the
Death (Love Song to GWF Hegel)"

Awards and Honors 200 words

75 words

Work reviewed at Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporaneo (MUAC), Mexico City, Mexico during the "Revision de Portofolios" Sessions.

Accepted at SOMA Summer School, Mexico City, Mexico with full scholarship for one member of Kegels for Hegel (declined due to insufficient funds).

Accepted at Vienna Sommerschule (declined due to insufficient funds).

Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, NYU, "Encuentro 2013" in Mexico City (event cancelled) and "Encuentro 2014" in Montreal (unable to attend due to funding).

Manifiesto de la Invaginación

Al carajo con el síndrome impostor. La academia requiere un ejercicio de conocimiento seminal e impenetrable. Kegels for Hegel responde a esta exigencia: nuestra respuesta es la evaginación del conocimiento. En lugar de entender que los textos filosóficos nos penetran, entendemos que los jalamos hacia adentro. En el transcurso del proceso, parte de ellos se convierten en parte de nosotros. El encuentro entre los dos cambia a ambos. A través del cerebro y el suelo de la pelvis, hacemos mas potentes los músculos necesarios para poder aferrarse a algo. Al igual que el ejercicio Kegel, exploramos las pequeñas acciones que pueden engendrar grandes cambios.

Kegels for Hegel desea una cultura popular más inteligente y más crítica. Buscamos crear objetos de baja cultura impregnados de alta teoría, y objetos de la alta cultura impregnados con baja teoría. Los estudios visuales y culturales recurren a la cultura popular para crear discursos académicos; nosotros recurrimos a la filosofía para crear una cultura popular que consta de ideas complejas. Kegels for Hegel elige el medio de la música y los videos de música porque son difundidos y accesibles.

Kegels for Hegel se interesa por las posibilidades radicales de la imaginación. La educación posibilita la liberación tanto como reproduce la desigualdad racial y de clase. La producción y la reproducción académica son cada vez mas controladas por la iniciativa privada y cada vez menos económicamente apoyadas por el estado. Es en el interés de ciertos sectores en el poder de mantener a la población sin la capacidad de imaginar cómo ellos pueden cambiar el mundo.

Mientras que todos intentamos cambiar el mundo, **Kegels for Hegel chorrea la filosofía en toda tu cara.**

Invagination Manifesto

Fuck imposter syndrome. Academia requires a performance of seminal and impenetrable knowledge. Kegels for Hegel responds to that demand by invaginating it. Rather than penetrating, we pull in philosophical texts and let parts of them become parts of us. The encounter between the two changes both. Through the brain and the pelvic floor, we build up the necessary muscles to be able to hold onto something. Like the Kegel, we explore small enactments that can beget great changes.

Kegels for Hegel wants a more intelligent and critical popular culture.

We seek to create objects of low culture infused with high theory, and objects of high culture infused with low theory. Visual and cultural studies swoop into popular culture to create academic discourse; we fly up to philosophy to create a popular culture that incites engagement with complex ideas. Kegels for Hegel choose the genre of music and music videos because they are easily disseminatable and accessible.

Kegels for Hegel is interested in the radical potentialities of imagination facilitated by a critical population. Just as much as education is a site of liberation, it is the site of the reproduction of racial and class inequality. Academic production and reproduction is increasingly corporatized and defunded. It is in the interest of certain constituencies in power to keep the general population uneducated and uncritical, unable to imagine **how they can change the world.**

While we all try to find a way to change the world, we squirt philosophy all over your face.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a bright pink short-sleeved top and an orange skirt, is seated on a red plastic chair with a perforated backrest. She is holding a silver microphone in her right hand. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. A semi-transparent pink banner is overlaid on the image, containing text about a performance. In the top right corner, the word 'PASTEL' is written vertically in a serif font, with 'GRAM' written vertically below it.

PASTEL
GRAM

Kegels for Hegel

Performance Anxieties

MICHELLE HYUN Letter to the visitor

KEGELS FOR HEGEL Live at the University Art Gallery, UCSD, 2013

JULIO MURILLO GARCIA AND ELOÍSA MORA OJEDA Logbook of an Error

CAROLYN CHERNOFF Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life: Goffmanian sounds from the inside

MS. VAGINAL DAVIS AND ROSE SALSEDA Canto infantil: Emugging with Ms. Vaginal Davis on ¡Cholita! The Female Menudo

Letter to the visitor

Michelle Hyun

In 2013 at the (legendary yet now shuttered conceptual art space) University of California San Diego University Art Gallery, artist Ethan Breckenridge and curator Michelle Y. Hyun organized "We'd love your company." The project was an open invitation to present work in a public university space that was increasingly subject to neoliberal capital; a diminishing of the commons in tandem with an increasing of the "participatory" imperative. The project both accepted and pushed against these conditions. It lasted eleven weeks and included over twenty projects. Incidentally, it was Kegels for Hegels' first performance. Below is a series of letters, "Letters to the Visitor," sometimes exhibited as posters affixed to university common spaces as well as circulated on social media, that the curators sent to their publics as part of the project. The last is a more recent letter to Kegels for Hegel, thinking about both the "We'd love your company" curatorial project and Kegels for Hegel's performance retrospectively.

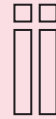


We'd love
your company

A project with Ethan Breckenridge

February 21–May 10, 2013

University Art Gallery, Mandeville Center
University of California, San Diego
9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0327
Tel: 858-534-2107 / Fax: 858-534-3548 / uag@ucsd.edu / uag.ucsd.edu
Tuesday & Thursday 11am–5pm, Wednesday & Friday 11am–7:30pm
Free Admission



FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 6:30PM

FUCKING WITH PHILOSOPHERS

**A PERFORMANCE BY
KEGELS FOR HEGEL**

Straddling philosophical smutcore and tongue in chic, Kegels for Hegel is an open collaboration of academics and artists that works the brain as well as the pelvic floor. During this one hour event, K4H will host live singing of love songs to philosophers, a book exchange, go-go dancers, music videos, and a brain eating contest. We'd love your company; arrive punctually and bring a philosophy book to exchange or give away if you can.

Fucking with Philosophers is an exhibition-related program for *We'd love your company*, with Ethan Breckenridge (February 21 – May 10), at the UCSD University Art Gallery.

K4H Collaborators:

kate hers is a visual artist and cultural producer who works in the field of social art practice. Her work seeks to rethink and reshape notions of transnational and cultural identity, often through different modes of communication and public/private interventions. www.estherka.com

Christian Laragues began (s)his artistic career as a child virtuoso in the classical piano-cum-circuit party. Laragues currently orchestrates design and material culture interventions between NYC, São Paulo, and Miami.



Curated by Michelle Y. Hyun, UAG Curatorial Fellow 2012–14
A project organized by the University Art Gallery: uag.ucsd.edu



We'd love your company

A project with
Ethan Breckenridge



Dear Valued Participant,

We'd love your company... As an invitation, the phrase precedes, explicitly and implicitly, a variety of participatory arrangements. The invitation is made in a gesture of openness, inclusion and hospitality, with the promise of meaningful engagement, enhanced experiences, vested input and possibly, in the future, emancipation.

Are you all too familiar with this invitation? Have you participated in these formats and programs before? Does the Invitation today seem more like an imperative rather than an invitation?

Certain boundary conditions give shape to these formats—a program designed for the performance of a particular function or task. This invitation comes from a place of infinite hospitality, but as soon as you cross the threshold you must comply with our conditions of hospitality. Paradoxically, you can hold us hostage in this place of infinite hospitality when you enter without invitation or flout these conditions.

As part of an academic entity, we're compelled to enter into both horizontal and hierarchal relationships of learning, teaching, research, and being researched, or even to go beyond the campus to participate in our community as a responsible and engaged public institution. Perhaps less selective than academia, culture is something in which anyone can participate. Whether it is in "high" forms of art, music, and theater, where you're asked to interact or collaborate with the artist and/or institution, or in forms of popular culture on television or Web 2.0, where you can choose tonight's winner, respond or enter into debates in the comments section, or generate your own content, you participate. If you're lucky enough to be a citizen in a liberal democracy, you can take part in such formats as the infamous California initiatives and referendums or even petition the White House online.

So, why does it feel like we really don't have much agency at all?
Why even participate?

Perhaps you will respond to our request, like Bartleby, "I would prefer not to."
That's fine too.
Thanks for your participation...

Nevertheless, we'd love your company.

Yours truly,
Ethan Breckenridge & Michelle Y. Hyun

P.S. There will be refreshment!

Curated by Michelle Y. Hyun, UAG Curatorial Fellow 2012–14. Design by Stephen Serrato.



UC SAN DIEGO DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS

A project organized by the University Art Gallery: uag.ucsd.edu



We'd love your company



A project with
Ethan Breckenridge

February 21, 2013

Dear Valued Participant,

Welcome! We are pleased that you have joined us!

The question of hospitality has been a topic of note in philosophical and political debates in the last few decades, not only in the art world, but on a macro level with regards to the movement of populations (e.g., an expanded "Europe," immigration reform in the U.S.) and commercial globalization, tourism, and travel—the "hospitality business" or the "experience economy." Specific to our context here, localized in this particular space, we encounter the question of hospitality in the relationship between the artist as both guest (of the institution) and host (of this project and to you), as well as the relationship between the institution and its publics. In these sets of relations, it is very well possible that our roles as host or guest can easily be interchanged, blurred, challenged, and transgressed.

In our earlier letter of invitation, we mentioned the paradox of hospitality and participatory formats—the structural contradiction of impossible, infinite reception needing certain boundary conditions to create and maintain our positions as "host" and "guest." What is hospitality but "a name or an example of deconstruction"?¹ It is always about crossing boundaries or thresholds, including those between the inside and outside, private and public, individual and collective, personal and political, as well as the self and the other.

As you enter and temporarily inhabit this space and the many event-based programs we've organized, we ask that you consider the various codes that overlay this structure of hospitality: its politics, moral-social decorum, physical practice (encompassed by certain gestures and elements of labor), affective dimension, and regulation of economy (reciprocity and non-reciprocity).

We've tried to be generous here, with the architecture of the space, as well as with the program of events, in order to accommodate you. See our invitation "Your Program Here."

In our next correspondence, we can discuss further the implications of these architectural provisions. (Fetishize much?) For now, please make yourself at home.

Yours truly,
Ethan Breckenridge & Michelle Y. Hyun

1. Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality," in Gil Anidjar (ed.),
Jacques Derrida: Acts of Religion (New York: Routledge, 2002), 364.



UC SAN DIEGO DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS

A project organized by the University Art Gallery: uag.ucsd.edu



We'd love your company



A project with
Ethan Breckenridge

March 11, 2013

Dear Valued Participant,

Can an institution bend over backward? For the next twelve days, we welcome our guests, the UCSD Public Education Coalition (PEC), who will host a 24/7 study space. The PEC is a loose umbrella group for students fighting against the privatization of the university and its effects. In 2011, they "reclaimed" CLICS, a library at Revelle College that was closed as a purported cost saving measure for students and one of the few places on campus where you could study at any hour of the day or night. But, what happens when you are *invited* into a space, rather than trespassing?

In our previous letter, we said that we would discuss the implications of these architectural provisions before you. Perhaps we've fetishized the built space and what it can do? What do we mean by "fetish"? As we understand it, fetish displaces the agency of the subject onto the object. The created becomes creator; creator as created. As a fetish object, architecture creates the subjects who inhabit it; it configures the sensorial experience of space and produces the social relations to take place within it. Architecture, like participatory formats, is made with a particular program (pedagogical, commercial, cultural) for certain action and a function (teaching/learning, manufacture, retail, presentation/distribution) for certain use. The made space is now given. So, what happens when the built space is made with the intention of open use, without a particular program when the agency of built space is again displaced onto the users, now architects themselves, of the space?

And what about built space that is invisible, e.g., an institution and its structures of support, organization, and administration that delineate the limitations and possibilities of its actions? The fetish object can be abstract, as well as concrete. The abstract form may become concrete, habituated through programmatic intention and functioning. Our intention here is to be generous hosts, welcoming you into the space to do whatever you want. Nevertheless, your participation in this open program will be or already has been negotiated by certain conditions (money, labor, time, resources, etc.). Perhaps this negotiation allows us to tread new expanded contours of the institution – a new form, a new built (albeit invisible) space? Another concretization. A new fetish object.

Is there something wrong with this? Although the fetish implies a *misplacement* of agency onto objects, is there not also agency in the experience of fetish? This object is given the ability to create a situation in which it is possible to reflect on the experience (of fetish), as well as enable it. It's a way to examine our context of visible and invisible built spaces, but also a way to think and act beyond them. Built space could be both made and given. We'd like to think that we're both the host and hostage to these fetish objects. What about you?

Yours truly,
Ethan Breckenridge & Michelle Y. Hyun



UC SAN DIEGO DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS

A project organized by the University Art Gallery: uag.ucsd.edu



We'd love your company



A project with
Ethan Breckenridge

August 13, 2015

Dear Valued Participant:

It's hard for me to believe that more than two years have passed since we collaborated with Kegels for Hegel to participate in one of their first public performances, "Fucking with Philosophers," at the UCSD University Art Gallery. This letter is long overdue. I apologize for not writing to you sooner, or before the event as I'd intended with our previous correspondence.

Thinking back on that performance, I remember being introduced to the term "yankin'," which is slang for sexual intercourse from an anatomically female centric perspective. It was the title of a song on their playlist of intermission music between sets (Lady, "Yankin," Big Gates Records, 2010). I had no idea what it meant at the time, but was introduced to it, i.e., the notion of sexual intercourse as other than penetration rather as invagination, by Kegels for Hegel. Years later, I've realized that the Kegels for Hegel project was and is a project of invagination in toto.

What exactly is invagination – perhaps we might also call it yankin' – if it could be something more than just "the action of sheathing or introverting; the condition of being sheathed or introverted: intussusception"¹? The term has also been used by philosopher Jacques Derrida to describe a certain way a written text inverts upon itself, folding back or turning inside out, creating a space and infinite structure for new questions to emerge. The boundaries of the written text, what's inside and outside of it, become unstable. It's this notion of belonging and not belonging – Derrida called it "a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy"² – which you might identify in the artwork, or art that works, of Kegels for Hegel. Philosophical texts or theory are so often employed in a masculinist way, as penetrating insight, akin to the figure of the phallus, which we associate with logocentric thought, positivist assumptions, and methodological distinctions between the "inside" and the "outside" of systems. But, as Derrida writes, "What happens when acts or performances (discourse or writing, analysis or description, etc.) are part of the object they designate? When they can be given as examples of precisely that of which they speak or write?"³ What if texts, or maybe both reverent and irreverent songs, could perform the work of invagination? These sorts of things seem to happen best at the margins, or where it seems to be outside the boundaries of the text or the institution, but are actually also embedded quite within it, deep inside of it. That's why the performance of Kegels for Hegel, then and in retrospect, was both poignant and celebratory: the act of two academics, performing raunchy and erotic love songs to and about philosophers, literally within the architecture of an academic institution, yankin' on philosophical texts and theory. By folding and refolding up the edges of the discourse by which their academic work is inspired and upon which the academy is founded, the value of such discourse are questioned and inscribed into new contexts, theirs and our "reading" of these texts become writing.

By the way, don't you wonder why Derrida used so many figures of the feminine (the track, sign, furrow, hymen, invagination) in his texts? Perhaps that could be the baseline for a new Kegels for Hegel song?

Yours truly,
Michelle Y. Hyun

1. Oxford English Dictionary

2. Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre" in W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *On Narrative* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 55.

3. Jacques Derrida, *La Carte Postale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), p. 140.



UC SAN DIEGO DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS

A project organized by the University Art Gallery: uag.ucsd.edu

Michelle Hyun is a curator and researcher working with the conditions and interrelationships of publics, space, discourse, and pedagogy. Most recently, she co-curated the Gwangju Biennale 20th anniversary exhibition, "Sweet Dew- Since 1980" and was the 2012-2014 Curatorial Fellow at the University of California San Diego University Art Gallery; she is currently an assistant curator for the Shanghai Project.

Live at the University Art Gallery, UCSD, 2013



Logbook of an Error

Julio Murillo Garcia and Eloísa Mora Ojeda

Sucesos de Bogotá / Bogotá events

In memorial of Juan Diego Razo Oliva

Fernando Gamboa rescued the Mexican artworks when the city downtown was set afire during the 1948 Bogotazo riots after the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, and his actions became a mythic tale. Upon his return to Mexico, Fernando Gamboa, the curator and exhibition rescuer, was celebrated in many ways, one of which was the recounting of his great feat through a *corrido*, or ballad. Isabel Villaseñor, a young artist and *corrido* composer, wrote it to commemorate the Bogotá event. At that time, *corrido* sheets (*hojas de corrido*) featured lyrics often accompanied by images. In this case, the *hoja de corrido* included an engraving by Mexican artist José Chávez Morado. In 2013, as part of the artwork *Pantomime Operation* by Eloísa Mora Ojeda, the artist worked with a *corrido* band from Pueblo Nuevo, Oaxaca called Los Mineros del Progreso. Los Mineros del Progreso played and recorded Isabel Villaseñor's amazing piece of Mexico's musical archive as well as their own *corridos*.

The musical project was a section of *Pantomime Operation*, which is an index of the archival intervention done by Eloísa Mora Ojeda as a blog: volumen13.wordpress.com



Bitácoras de un equívoco

Intervención curatorial



Bitácoras de un equívoco. Catálogo de la exposición con el mismo nombre

En el mundo del arte contemporáneo se han establecido una serie de roles que van más allá del binomio artista-público, siendo uno de los agentes más controvertidos en los últimos años el de curador o comisario. Este agente se ha tornado en muchas ocasiones problemático ya que adquiere un carácter protagónico en las exhibiciones, una rémora o un interlocutor, un agente del mercado o un mediador; empero esta realidad, del vox pópuli, es necesario marcar que nuestra intención no es lanzar una diatriba más. En buena medida, la complejidad que ha tomado el campo del arte, desde su autonomización¹ hace indefectible plantear la necesidad de suspender el movimiento dialéctico que la relación artista-curador pone de manifiesto, haciendo evidentes sus consecuentes contradicciones. En esta diagramación debemos considerar que el campo del arte a su vez se establece, en la lógica neoliberal, como un activo en términos financieros; es necesario reconocer que el artista, en muchas ocasiones de manera inconsciente, acepta su papel de productor en una economía creativa. De esta manera su labor ya no se limita al trabajo de producir obras de arte, sino que requiere travestirse de gestor, administrador, project manager y, un sinnúmero de papeles que la tecnocracia ha designado al dismantelar los fundamentos y estructuras que ubicaran al arte y la cultura como un patrimonio que alimentaba, en buena medida, el espíritu de los nacionalismos que dieron coherencia y cohesión a los discursos de los estados-nación.

Bitácoras de un equívoco es un proyecto que, por supuesto, no escapa a esta realidad y no intenta salir de ella. En lugar de esto propuso ponerla de

¹ Algunos autores fundamentales para profundizar en el tema son Pierre Bourdieu, Larry Shiner, Rosalind E. Krauss y Matei Calinescu, por mencionar algunos.

cabeza e intentar, a través de un método de dialéctica suspendida², tener momentos de autoconsciencia: uno que es central mencionar es la figura planteada como intervención curatorial.

A finales de enero de 2013 recibí (Julio García Murillo) una particular llamada telefónica, inusitada en los usos y costumbres actuales del arte contemporáneo. Un grupo de artistas –conocidos por líneas de amistad y trabajo– me convocaron para curar una muestra que ellos habían proyectado como una lectura crítica de –a mí parecer– la estructura *posnacional* del estado-nación, y por la que obtuvieron una beca proveniente de recursos oficiales (la reiteración temática y administrativa nunca fue pasada por alto). La inversión, en términos de lógicas de trabajo en el campo del arte –y por tanto de su administración de poder– se hacía patente al invitar a quien generalmente convoca, diseña, traza y saca el mayor provecho simbólico de una exhibición. Esa inversión, aparte de particulares (y azarosas) afinidades electivas, suponía un momento de experimentación (así como subordinación a lógicas, no siempre exitosas, de trabajo horizontal: una de las debilidades capitales de la administración de discursos actuales y que se encarnó en *Bitácoras*).

Algo ya sabía al momento de la invitación: que habían leído a Achille Mbembe y que ése había sido el punto de partida de las discusiones sobre la dirección que debería llevar el proyecto; que también se había hecho patente que el argumento no cuajaba al superponer conceptos *necropolíticos* en desarrollos históricos de una región ni transparente ni oscura de nombre Latinoamérica y, en particular, de dos países, México y Colombia, cuya relación era efectivamente puesta en acción por la proveniencia de miembros del equipo y desplazada, discursiva e históricamente, para desmontar estrategias generadas en los medios de comunicación mexicanos tales como la “colombianización de México”, así como las diatribas indignadas y cínicas de la llamada guerra contra el narcotráfico –tan obscena hace un par de años y tan encuartelada actualmente–.

Los artistas generaron una estructura de organización administrativa con actividades y funciones muchas veces encarnadas por el curador o sus asistentes: administración, gestión de espacios, producción de contenidos, edición, etc. ¿Qué labor podría levantarse bajo la ficción de la curaduría? Probablemente intervenir esa estructura, transgredir nociones petrificadas de formas de exhibición, incluir artistas que problematizarían

2 Cfr. Benjamin, Walter, *El libro de los pasajes*, tr. Luis Fernández Castañeda, Isidro Herrera y Fernando Guerrero, Madrid, Akal, c.2005. Buck-Morss, Susan, *Dialéctica de la mirada : Walter Benjamin y el Proyecto de los Pasajes*, tr. Nora Rabotnikof, Madrid, Visor, 1995 y el texto de Margaret Cohen, “Benjamin’s phantasmagoria: the Arcade Project” en David S. Ferris (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

y dialogarían con la constelación de proyectos iniciales, e intentar hurgar en la producción de la obra hasta donde los artistas lo permitieran (la privacidad del estudio, en términos de discusión de ideas, me produce la figuración de que mientras se intentaba subvertir una figura de autoridad, se pretendía permanecer bajo la misma noción de artista, con sus afortunadas excepciones). En otras palabras, una figura anómala de la curaduría –en términos de su lectura tradicional y con todas las consecuencias operativas que esto implicaba– supondría lo mismo para con las del artista, el gestor, el editor (lo cual no sucedió y produjo, tal vez, una curaduría fantasma). Al final, parece que el título *Bitácoras de un equívoco* desencadenó mucho más de lo que todos esperábamos o, al menos, una cosa diferente si es que las expectativas profesionales no se cumplieron, lo cual es digno de celebración (o sacrificio).

El punto de partida (fallido) fue intentar ahondar en el estado de la cuestión, para lo cual levantamos un “laboratorio de pesquisas curatoriales”, denominación arrogante para una serie de cuestionarios que se entregaron a los participantes y en los que –en vez de mirar a la obra y sus referencias– se hicieron evidentes los marcos de lectura desde los que se activaron las propuestas y en los que irremediamente estábamos inmersos. Muchas de ellas, inconscientemente, incluían apropiaciones contemporáneas de cierto modernismo latinoamericano de posguerra (panamericanismo y soviétización de la región) desde una lectura en extremo crítica mientras que, por otro lado, se ocluía la revisión de ejercicios experimentales de arte de la región durante los años en pugna (tema tan en boga en la historia del arte); polos que, en última instancia, reforzaban la ficción de una renovación en todos los ámbitos de la vida (incluidos la cultura y el arte) en los años posteriores a 1989. Guerra y posguerra, nación y *posnación*, fueron términos que –tal vez mal empleados y diluidos por lógicas que no alcanzábamos a entender– se convirtieron en nuestros comodines ¿Era posible sopesar unas diacronías frente a otras sincronías?

Por otro lado, nociones comunes en el argot artístico –mismas que presuponían escuelas y discusiones muy particulares en el campo y que ahora no son más que abstracciones de libro de mesa de sala– emergían como por arte de magia, muchas de ellas sin pronunciarse, *fantasmagóricamente*. ¿Qué pasaba con el llamado *giro historiográfico* en las artes, con la pugna por los usos y desusos del *arte relacional*, con los desplazamientos acrílicos acerca del activismo en el arte? ¿Los ídolos post-1989 también sostenían nuestros prejuicios y modos de hacer, por más críticos que (quisiéramos) parecieran? ¿Reproducíamos ideológicamente en términos de mimesis platónica o aristotélica?

Bitácoras de un equívoco, ya como exhibición, se desarrolló bajo la noción de un laboratorio de producción artística. Prácticamente nos dejamos seducir por las ficciones *pentagonales* de la guerra fría y sus centrales de inteligencia; intentamos analizar las dinámicas de producción contemporáneas en el ámbito industrial; incorporamos a la investigación de formas de representación la activación de la creciente necesidad de organizarse como resultado de la falta de atención gubernamental a la violencia desatada en distintas comunidades; y se pretendieron analizar las políticas de representación de algunos movimientos sociales.

La figura del laboratorio de producción permitió extender el arco temporal de la investigación histórica y crítica de los proyectos emprendidos al tiempo que ponía, en muchas ocasiones, a los productores en situaciones ajenas a sus espacios habituales de producción generando que ese espacio de experimentación –sea Bogotá en El Parqueadero o Pueblo Nuevo en Estación Cero Lab y los momentos de tránsito entre ambos– abrieran la posibilidad de poner a prueba cada uno de los *habitus* que el campo del arte contemporáneo ha fomentado y de los cuales los artistas integrantes de la muestra son partícipes.

Las variaciones que –casi en sentido musical– fueron adquiriendo las obras en sus múltiples escalas y trayectos generaron un entramado plural y complejo. Desde la distancia podría decirse que los hallazgos (tanto en archivo como en taller) y los espacios de producción constituyeron un binomio constante en el que los equívocos históricos y estructurales, que fundamentan las hipótesis de trabajo de cada proyecto, fueron configurando posiciones críticas claras de nuestras realidades y poniendo en crisis la mera visualidad y visibilidad del trabajo.

Merece aclararse que, si bien la lógica de producción es la de un laboratorio, siempre con un método experimental básico como el de prueba / error, los espacios sedes fungieron como catalizadores; uno desde la institución, con la rigidez que caracteriza al el Museo del Banco de la República, concretamente El Parqueadero (Bogotá, Colombia) –un laboratorio de garaje o al menos esa fue la ficción, ya que es el garaje de un banco– mientras que Estación Cero Lab (Pueblo Nuevo, Oaxaca), espacio independiente, fuera del circuito cultural y turístico de la capital del estado, brindó un horizonte que generó las condiciones para que cada integrante de BdUE llevara sus investigaciones hasta los límites que cada uno decidiera.³

3 Las ficciones de institución e independencia no pueden pasarse por alto, un punto de quiebre que podría ubicarnos en la disyuntiva –más allá de la perogrullada hippie de la independencia y la autonomía– es la crítica de los fondos que sostienen ambas instituciones (sí, Andrea Fraser nos enseña a caer en cuenta que las dos son instituciones) y las operaciones que éstas activan: está la que es sostenida por recursos estatales y financieros (y que refuerza en sus prácticas la persistencia de estatutos jurídicos y morales para que todo siga como está), mientras que otra es sostenida por los recursos personales, familiares y algunas veces estatales (y que contribuyen con sus prácticas a poner en cuestión y generar una crítica radical del sistema). Cfr. Andrea Fraser, “L’ 1% c’est moi”, *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 83, Sep, 2011.

Fueron dos caras de una misma moneda, lo cual se expresó en dos acciones claves en la gestión de exposiciones: en primer término, la rueda de prensa en El Parqueadero se mantuvo en la lógica institucional, entre el terror por abandonar las formas –y eso sirva sobre todo para el lenguaje y manejo artísticos– y la generación ficticia de riesgo; mientras que en Oaxaca (tras la experiencia bogotana) se articuló a partir de la lógica de un guión *performático* realizado en el Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños (MUPO), en ésta participaron: Los Mineros del Progreso (Pueblo Nuevo, Oaxaca), Kegels for Hegel (Chicago-Austin, EE.UU.), Guillermo Fricke (MUPO), Emanuel Santos “Cer” (ECLab), y el equipo de *Bitácoras de un equívoco*.

Por otra parte, el momento de inauguración (cuestionable ya que se trataba de una lógica de laboratorio) fue diametralmente opuesto. En Bogotá se siguió con los protocolos de abrir el espacio al inicio del proyecto con la inclusión de escritorios burocráticos casi vacíos en espera de ser activados, al momento de inauguración todavía trabajadores del banco ajustaban líneas de comunicación de la sala (aunque nunca sirvió plenamente el internet) y terminaban detalles de montaje. En cambio, en Pueblo Nuevo, la lógica se invirtió: los proyectos se desarrollaron a partir de contacto comunitario para generar colaboraciones y, al cierre –en el cual se realizó un montaje de los proyectos de todos los artistas– se realizó una fiesta. En este último proceso, la inauguración hizo visible, como un guiño, el extenso trabajo que cada participante generó, en un marco que lo sobrepasaba: un espacio para compartir experiencias al ritmo de la música, la bebida y comida con el ‘festival’ *Por mi raza hablará el equívoco*. En éste participaron: Los Mineros del Progreso, Kegels for Hegel, La Golden Acapulco, Rebelión 19, Fucking Dogs, Los Molcajete y la Independiente Banda de Pueblo Nuevo.



La edición de este catálogo no podría escapar a la lógica detonada por el proyecto en su inicio. Nuevamente, los roles y actividades para su realización fueron subvertidos; su identidad gráfica emula una identidad institucional descentrada; sus escritores se constituyeron por una parte, con el equipo en pleno de BdUE trabajando a varias manos. El texto que sigue a esta presentación es el proyecto original con el que se participó en la convocatoria para *Proyectos de Inversión en la Producción de Pintura Nacional. Artes Plásticas y Visuales* –gracias a este apoyo fue posible la producción de las piezas y edición del presente catálogo–. La siguiente sección está constituida por las propuestas que cada artista trabajó, acompañado con un breve texto en el que se describe los procesos, problemas y objetivos que cada uno desarrolló tanto en Bogotá como en Oaxaca. Para finalizar con un texto comisionado que reflexionara sobre los problemas que el proyecto pone de manifiesto al interior de las discusiones del arte contemporáneo (*Error entre equívocos*). Las imágenes que lo componen intentan mostrar, de manera individual, el proceso de cada una de las investigaciones constituidas en piezas y los momentos en los que la intervención curatorial se hace patente espacial y textualmente.

De esta manera, la horizontalidad pregonada en un inicio fue claramente transformada en un trabajo de confrontación entre varios planos, desde la *afección* (Spinoza) y la *imagen dialéctica* (Benjamin), hasta la reafirmación de un modernismo que, obviamente, no corresponde a su clasificación histórica de “alto” sino a su carácter escatológico de “bajo modernismo”; la desilusión intelectual por la Academia es provocada no por su carácter elitista, generado por su extrema especialización en los métodos y marcos teóricos, sino por su insufrible necesidad de seguir las modas en el uso de ciertos cajones-estancos –utilizados como herramientas de análisis en un inicio– y por su *retinopatía* (la de ciertos académicos y agentes del campo del arte) terminan como argumentos explicativos de tendencias artísticas que, en última instancia, caen en la misma trampa, irónicamente la de un *topus uranus*.

Lo que encontrará el lector en las páginas de este catálogo es una reelaboración de nuestras bitácoras que, si bien no de manera protocolaria, intentan materializar lo *fantasmático* de los procesos mismos, es decir, su estructura dada por un *ghost writer*, que ofrece una crítica a la prácticas que se han establecido como hegemónicas en el campo del arte, al tiempo que presentan la articulación de distintos proyectos de investigación que tienen como salida la práctica artística. Esperamos que sea posible provocar en cada lector ese momento de extrañamiento por el que cada uno de nosotros pasamos en alguna fase del proyecto, el cual abre la posibilidad de permitirnos ver con cierta claridad la sintomatología que presenta el campo artístico

contemporáneo. Este objetivo, de haberse planteado en un inicio, hubiera sido irreal por lo ambicioso de su carácter, sin embargo, la discontinuidad que produjo la imposibilidad del trabajo horizontal y las alteradas "pesquisas curatoriales" permitieron que en el proceso editorial esto pueda ser presentado como una reflexión a posteriori. Como exclamación final, y conjurando al espíritu de Robespierre y al mole de guajolote de los estridentistas:

¡Los estilistas a la guillotina!

E.M.O + J.G.M

Eloísa Mora Ojeda, artista y académica trabajando transdisciplinariamente en el campo del diseño. Vive y trabaja en la ciudad de México. / Eloísa Mora Ojeda is an artist and academic working transdisciplinarily, primarily in the field of design. Mora Ojeda lives and works in Mexico City.

Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life: Goffmanian sounds from the inside

Carolyn Chernoff

The Presentation of CC
as a Generalized Other

Because I had the temerity to
be born a girl, I have long
been subject to other people's
opinions of who I am.

Or rather, that my purpose in
life is to be a sex toy. A
purpose at which I fail,
gladly.

Other people have a lot of problems, real and imagined. For me, just *being a girl* has been enough.

And when I forget, strangers are more than happy to remind me. That's what this piece is about.

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life is a pioneering work of sociology by Erving Goffman*. In it, Goffman outlines *dramaturgical theory*, including the concept of *impression management*

*Goffman, Erving. (1959). The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Impression management is about trying to influence how other see you—

but it's not totally up to you. Other people, their perceptions and beliefs, play major roles in making sense of your self.

Other people are key. They give feedback.

Helpful tips.

Usually tacitly—

But in my case, often explicitly. Usually about *what I do wrong*, which is basically just my state of existence.

The most helpful tips about what I do wrong, besides *everything*, comes from strangers in public places:

City streets, parks, at a lake

All places where I recorded audio fragments of my surroundings that I use to create the audio piece here.

The actual words are actual comments, mostly from actual strangers, which have helped me become a Generalized Other.

The *generalized other* is a concept developed by the sociologist George Herbert Mead*.

It's one of the social processes by which we develop a self.

*Mead, George Herbert. (1934). Mind, Self, and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

I use the term *generalized other* in a way different than Mead intended, of course. I'm interested in the idea of becoming a stranger to myself, or a generalized Other.

I tried to leave out the really hurtful stuff, but what is *sex, social theory*, or a *sexed-up social theory* without trauma?

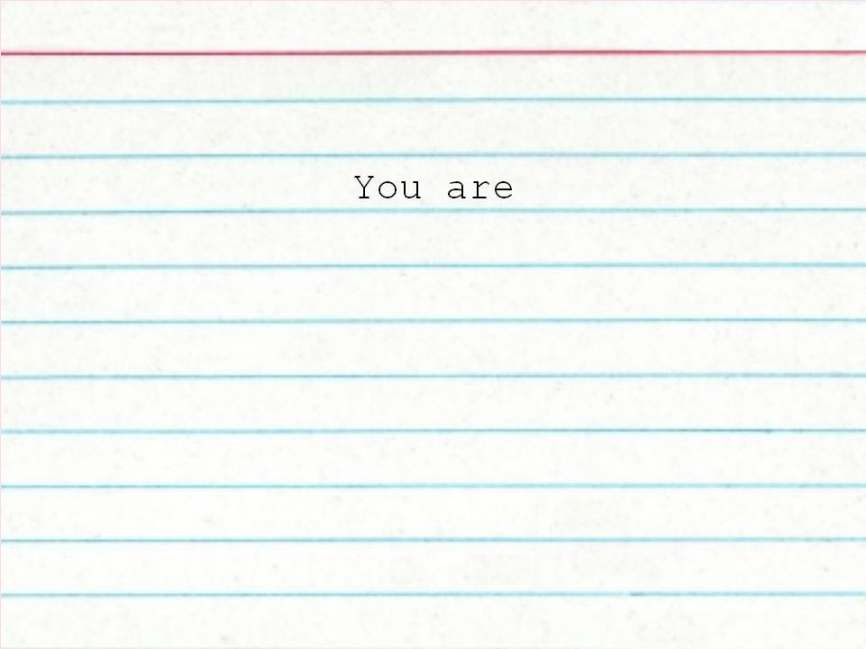
I have plenty. You probably do too.

This piece mostly documents
how it is I walk through the
world, and the things I learn
about myself from comments
shouted by strangers.

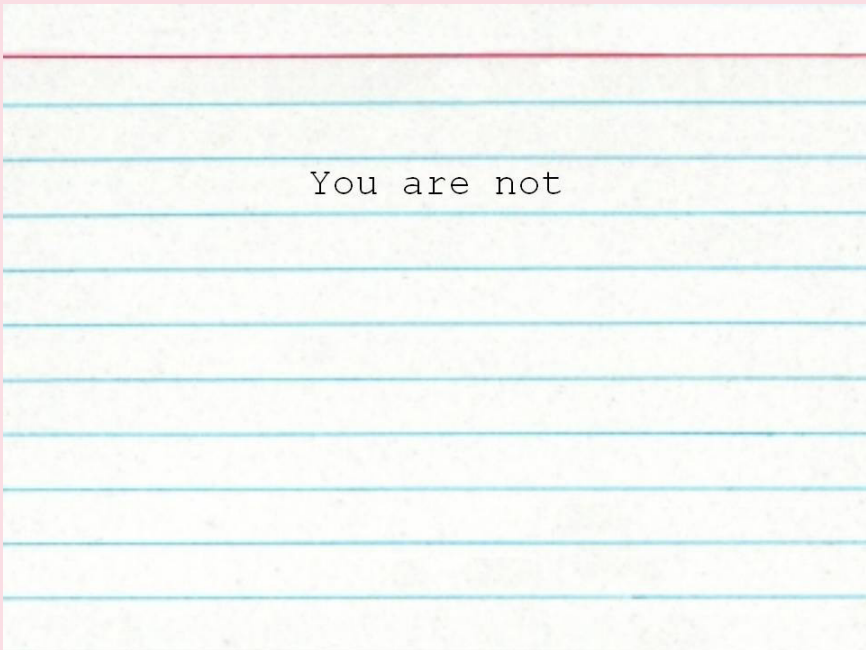
It is about social theory, too—
What it helps us see and know.

But it's also about you:

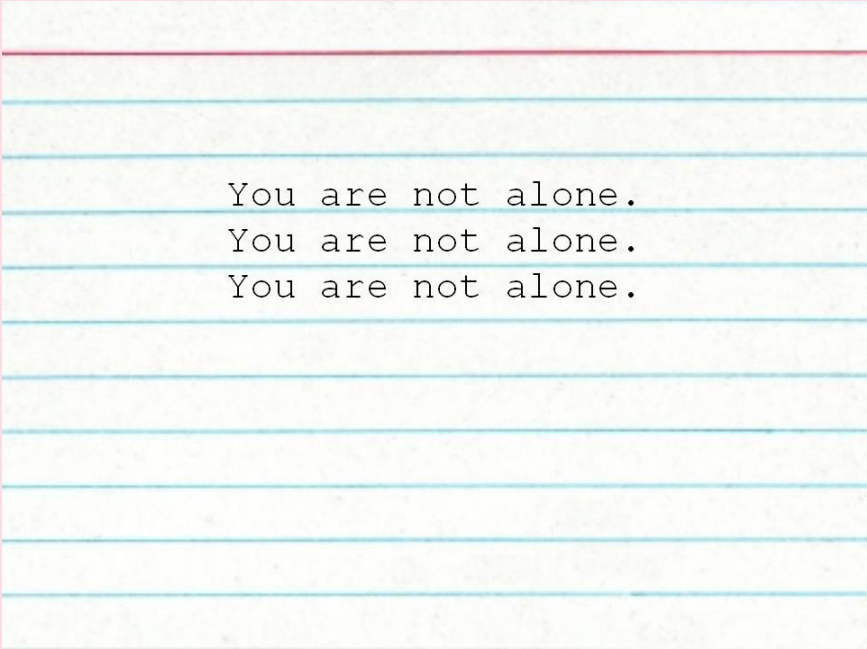
You



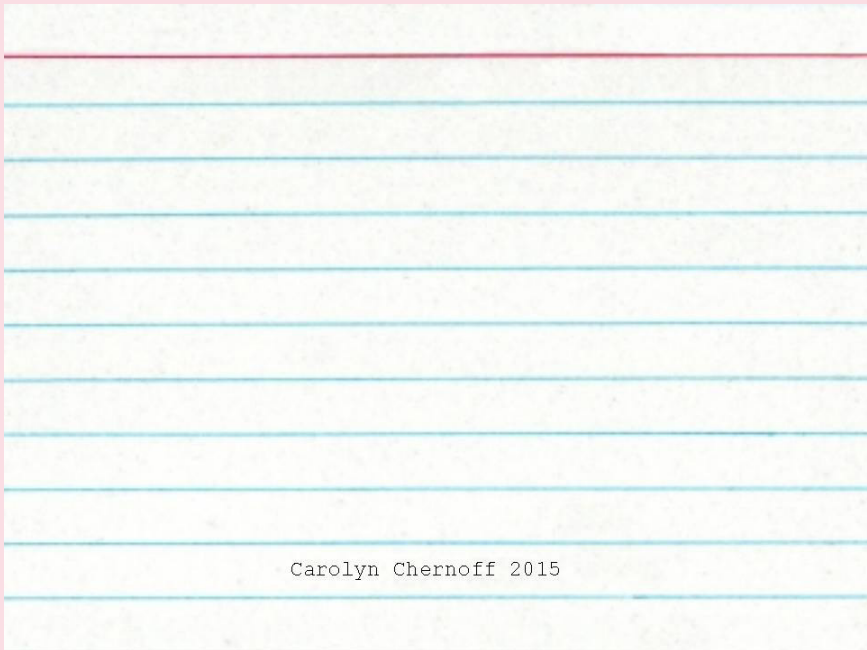
You are



You are not



You are not alone.
You are not alone.
You are not alone.



Carolyn Chernoff 2015

Carolyn Chernoff is a cultural worker and sociologist. The co-founder of Philly's Girls' DJ Collective, she has long been active in performance and punk rock and sits on the Board of the Leeway Foundation, which funds women and trans* artists working for social change.

Canto infantil: Emugging with Ms. Vaginal Davis on ¡Cholita! The Female Menudo

Ms. Vaginal Davis and Rose Salseda

Thu, Jun 25, 2015 at 2:02 PM

Dear Dr. Davis,

My name is Rose Salseda and I'm a PhD Candidate in Art History at the University of Texas at Austin. I focus on contemporary American art, specializing in art by African Americans and Mexican Americans. I'm interested in learning more about the performance group ¡Cholita! The Female Menudo and your work during the early 90s in general. I spoke with fellow collaborator Alice Bag about ¡Cholita! a couple of years ago. I'm embarrassed it's taken me so long to contact you and I hope we can connect and talk about ¡Cholita! either via phone or email.

Please let me know if you're available. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rose

Fri, Jun 26, 2015 at 4:24 AM

Dear Dr. Salseda,

Thank you so much for your interest in ¡Cholita! The Female Menudo. I have a lot of warm memories from performing as Graciela and from all the fun collaborating with Alicia (Sad Girl) and Gregorio (Lupita).

Yes, it would be nice to have an emug exchange as I have been based in Berlin, Germany for the past ten years. Feel free to send me any questions that I can ponder over and answer at leisure.

All the best,

Ms. Vaginal Davis

Mon, Jun 29, 2015 at 5:00 PM

Dear Ms. Davis,

Thank you for your reply and thanks in advance for answering my

questions. I'm a fan of your work and have always lamented the fact that I have never had the chance to see you perform, especially before you left the States for Berlin. I'm a native Angeleno; I grew up in South Central. I keep hoping that I can catch you next time you're in LA, but I seem to always miss my chance.

Attached are my questions about ¡Cholita¡ (and a couple about Afro Sisters). I've also pasted the questions below in case that's easier for you to peruse.

Thank you, again, for taking the time to answer these questions. I hope it's not too overwhelming. I look forward to hearing back from you!

Sincerely,

Rose

1. Before you formed ¡Cholita¡ the Female Menudo, you performed with Fertile LaToyah Jackson and others as the Afro-Sisters. When did the Afro Sisters first form? What was the general concept behind the group?
2. The members of Afro Sisters included Fertile and Alice Bag— and I love Alice's story of how she came to be included in the group. According to her, Fertile was her teaching assistant at an elementary school where she taught. After partying together at a faculty get-together hosted at their principal's house, they both left, a bit tipsy, to a venue where Fertile was slated to perform with you. When they arrived, Alice says that you talked her into going on stage, putting her in a wig and christening her "Pussi Washington." Was the participation of other members as improvised and serendipitous as Alice's? How does such improvisation characterize Afro Sisters?
3. You, Fertile and Alice then went on to form ¡Cholita¡ the Female Menudo. For this band, the three of you adopted Latina teen personas that satirized conventional ideas of gender, race and ethnicity and challenged stereotypes of Latinas through pop and punk music. What was the impetus behind the formation of ¡Cholita¡? Why was it important for the group to perform as Latina teens?
4. At first, ¡Cholita¡ performed acapella or with taped music, similar to Afro Sisters. Then, the three of you began to write music together. In general, you mostly sang and Fertile and Alice played bass and guitar, respectively, and contributed their vocal talents as well. All three of you wrote lyrics. What spurred the desire to write original music as a group?
5. I find many of the song lyrics of ¡Cholita¡ funny and empowering! From the giggle-accented pop song devoted to the "butts that go boom!"

in “Nalga Maniaca” to the punk anthem critical of white supremacy in “Chinga tu madre,” ¡Cholita! wrote songs that uncompromisingly expressed their sexuality and self-agency. Remembering that this group performed as young Latina teens, the songs, to me, seem to present an even greater politics and possibility for intervention. What was your hope for the group, your music, and your performances? What was ¡Cholita! reacting against or trying to accomplish?

6. On YouTube, one can find a ¡Cholita! music video in which the band lip-syncs to “¡No controles!” by Flans, a Mexican all-girl pop group from the 1980s. The song’s rebellious lyrics demand autonomy and self-expression with a hint of teenage angst through a catchy chorus and dancey synthesizer sounds. I can see why ¡Cholita! would want to perform this song! What encouraged you to make a music video, though? Who was the intended audience? And, was there any significance to the MacArthur Park location besides the fact that you lived nearby and Alice and Fertile taught a few blocks away?

7. What I also find interesting is that in Flan’s music video for “¡No controles!” the members dress in men’s clothing to display their self-agency. Yet, ¡Cholita! adopts an aesthetic that overly emphasizes feminine fashion, albeit versions of girl-wear that seem to satirize notions of glamour through haphazardly applied make-up, ratty wigs, etc. Was this ultra-feminized, over-the-top, DIY fashion of ¡Cholita! an intentional criticism of mainstream beauty conventions or traditional drag? I also understand that Rick Castro sometimes styled ¡Cholita! and that ¡Cholita! went through several fashion transformations from a 80s Madonna aesthetic to a Japanese schoolgirl look and even to a banda style. Could you talk about the look of ¡Cholita! and the band’s fashion evolution?

8. In some live performances and songs from the album *Chorro de Exitos*, your persona, Graciela Grejalva, seems to slip in and out of a Spanish accent. Am I just imagining the accent? How would Graciela identify ethnically and racially? What is Graciela’s origin story and how did she become the lead singer of ¡Cholita!?

9. ¡Cholita! envisioned itself as an international pop powerhouse. They graced the covers of *Sassy*, *Jet*, *Italian Vogue*, and *Vanidades* and fought frenzied mobs of fans. But once the members grew too old to be members of ¡Cholita!, a band that like Menudo had to forever stay fresh-faced and crush-worthy, what did they go on to? Where do you imagine Graciela, now, as well as the rest of founding members of ¡Cholita!?

Wed, Jul 1, 2015 at 2:38 AM

Dear Dr. Salseda,

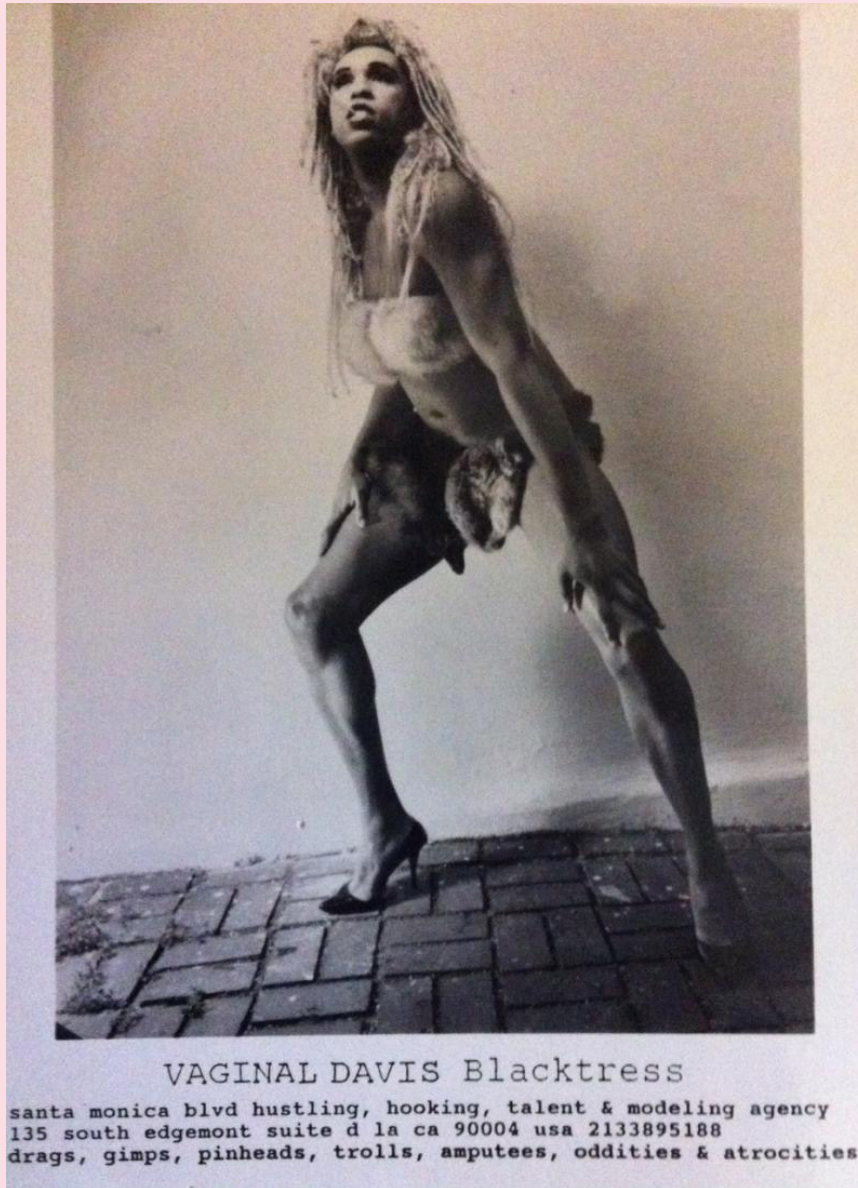
I am at the American Bibliotech (Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek) this lovely summer morning working on some research for my upcoming project that will premiere in New York in the fall, which is an insane version of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* where I replace the libretto with one of my own concoctions that infuses texts by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Kathy Acker, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, and Eldridge Cleaver. I am off this week for an art congress in Lisbon on the African Diaspora and Afro Futurism, but I thought I would start answering some of your questions now and then finish when I get back to Berlin on July 8th.

The Afro Sisters was first formed in the late 1970s, maybe around 1978 when I was still in high school. We went under the name the Maxi Pads at that time. Fertile La Toyah Jackson and I have been friends since we met at Berendo Junior High School in the Mid City area of LA, near the historic Pico Union. Under the name of the Maxi Pads, Fertile and I would do spoken word rants bitching about all things we found offensive politically, sexually—you name it. We were full of ourselves and full of opinions. Fertile and I would use the low tech method of creating a soundscape from various record album instrumentals to go with our rants and we would make cassette tapes of the rants to give out to friends. Fertile, whose real name is Gregorio Estefano Hernandez, is originally from El Salvador and he had a friend who lived in East LA named Julia Julia. We would go out with her to punk rock shows and also to the disco clubs of East LA, like La Casa and Bandstand at 1st and Soto, and East LA party crews, such as La Pegasus and Elecktra. Julia was part of a crew called the Pink Ladies. At one particular club in East LA, we were in the parking lot drinking Olde English from a straw and getting our buzz on. Walking past our car were three Blatino girls with big Afros and Julia yelled out at them, "Hey it's the Afro Sisters!" So, from that moment I changed our name from the Maxi Pads to the Afro Sisters. The Afro Sisters started off just making tapes, not performing live. It was just me and Fertile.



The ultimate Goddess 13 earth mother Fertile LaToyah Jackson Early 1980s photo by Beulah Love

While still in high school, I led a double life. I was the editor of my high school newspaper, but I was also writing for the *LA Weekly*. I wrote for the *LA Weekly* using my legal name and also the alias of Kayle Hilliard. I also wrote for the *Weekly's* competition, *The LA Reader*, under the name Denning Taylor. I was the youngest of the *LA Weekly's* writers at that time. I also had my own zine called *Crude*, which later became *Fertile LaToyah Jackson* and spearheaded the Queer Zine Movement, and I also wrote for a small music magazine called *TwisT* and became its Features editor. *TwisT* was a magazine devoted to the burgeoning mod/post-punk scene. It was very unusual at the time to be so young and make money from writing.



I felt very fortunate that at a young age (2nd grade) a teacher noticed that I wasn't completely retarded as my reading and comprehension skills were way above average. She had me tested and I was put in a program called MGM, or Mentally Gifted Minors, that the LA Unified School District had at that time. If it hadn't been for the MGM program, I would have wound up dead or in jail, like most of the kids I grew up with in the inner city. The program saved my life and led to me becoming an internationally recognized artist.

Of course, at the time, I didn't know that what I was doing was performance art or art at all. I was just doing things organically and expressing myself in the manner that felt right. I never even considered myself punk rock back then. My older cousin Karla Duplantier, who was the lesbian drummer for the early punk band the Controllers, had

introduced me to punk. I was an opera queen and, after opera, I loved Tin Pan Alley standards and songs from musicals made during the Golden Age of Hollywood. I wasn't even that interested in pop music.

I was writing original songs that I considered "showcore," or hardcore show tune music, but because of my lack of musical ability these songs sounded punky and I got thrown in with that genre. The actual writing of songs was accidental as my spoken word rants were more like a cantata. So, from the beginning, the Afro Sisters were singing acapella chant-like ditties mixed with spoken word manifestos about the Black experience, living in the inner city, and feeling like we had no voice. Fertile, coming from war-torn El Salvador, really infused a lot of the rants with his political fervor as well.

The Afro Sisters didn't start performing for a live audience until the early 1980s when Harry Gamboa, who had a small art gallery/performance space at the Sunset Junction, heard one of our tapes and asked us to perform at the launch of *Emigre Magazine*, a spoken word magazine put out by a Dutch guy. For the first performance, I included two genetic girls that I named Urethra Franklin and Clitoris Turner. Urethra, aka Helen Bed O'Neill, owned the Melrose Avenue punk boutique Retail Slut where I did window displays and Fertile designed original clothing. Clitoris, aka Leslie Beatty, worked down the street from Retail Slut at this dead stock boutique Cowboys & Poodles, aka CowPoo. From the very first performance we were a hit and I began to get calls asking me to perform. I never believed in trying to sell myself and, because I didn't have a sense of business, I just took gigs that felt right. Of course these were the days before careerism. What made the Afro Sisters unique was that we mixed Blaxploitation and punk rock. A lot of the too-cool punk rockers of the time didn't like us. Our early 1970s looks were a little too weird for even the punk in-crowd. You have to remember that people were still dressing like the 1970s in the early 1980s, so we were doing retro before retro had time to kick in. Also, the looks we did were 1970s styles that were popular only in urban areas; they weren't your typical 1970s fashions. Fertile designed most of our looks and he had a great sense of style that was very fashion-forward.



Cholita! "The female Menudo," led by Vaginal Davis (second from left), is one of many acts slated for Spew 2, "a carnival-like convention of queer scribes" sponsored by Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) at Park Plaza Ballroom (607 S. Park View) and at LACE (1804 Industrial St.), Friday and Saturday, Feb. 28 and 29. Convention includes readings and displays from over 60 underground publications, including Amnesia and Mudflap. Call 624-5650.

From LA Times, 1992

Alice joined the Afro Sisters at a time when she was sort of in hiatus from performing. She and Fertile worked at the same elementary school and I had always loved Alice as she was a pioneer of performing on stage with lots of rage and passion. I think her first time as an Afro Sister was pretty spontaneous. Alice has quite the work ethic and doesn't like to be on stage unrehearsed. Of course the mythology of my work is that it's all from the top of my head and I just go out on stage and act crazy. But, in reality, I usually work from a loose outline. So, Alice most likely did go on stage knowing what she was getting herself into, somewhat. I don't like things to be too scripted as that removes the possibility for whimsy. With Alice in the group the singing got better as she is such a powerhouse. We also started to add music and work as a live band. Alice had a boyfriend named

George Woods when she started the band the Swing Set. George and Alice would work with me and Fertile, refining the Afro Sisters songs and tightening things up a bit. The songs started to resemble more of a pop-oriented structure. Of course the songs were still very twisted and quirky, like "Wet Lesbian":

We're Lesbians, uh huh, we think lesbian
We don't need a man messing up our system
You can't do me you ain't no superstar. . .

"Tighten That Hole":

Don't honk, I ain't no honky
I'm a peckerwood from the dirty woods . . .

"Magnificent Product":

All we meet, walking down the street
Ten days a week without any sleep
And shackles on our feet
Black power, Black power, destroy White boy...

When I came up with the concept of Cholita it was during a period in the mid to late 1980s when I was fed up with so-called "alternative culture." I was going through a bit of an identity crisis. I stopped going to punk and post-punk shows and only listened to the station K Love Radio Amor, or KLOVE, which played Spanish pop music. My favorites were songs like "Soy un desastre" and those by the immortal Vicki Carr and Flans.

Robert Lopez, before he was El Vez, the Mexican Elvis, was a curator at La Luz de Jesus Gallery, which was part of WACKO and the Soap Plant on Melrose Avenue. I had known Robert forever and Paul "Whitey" Glynn, the owner of CowPoo who had moved to Guatemala in the 1980s, was having a show of his Central America influenced paintings. Robert and Whitey wanted the Afro Sisters to perform at the opening, but I didn't want to do the Afro Sisters as I was getting tired of them and I felt that we needed to do something that was more Latin-flavoured.

I had never explored my Latin roots, of having a Mexican-born father whose own father was a German-Jewish immigrant in Mexico. My father's heritage is very similar to Frida Kahlo. My mother is a Choctaw Indian/Black Creole from Louisiana. So, influenced by K-LOVE and my background, I wrote in one sitting "I Am Not a Puta, I Am a Princess" and came up with the concept of Cholita, The Female Menudo—like the Puerto Rican boy band, but with girls between the ages of 11-15. Once you turned 16, you were kicked out of the group, but of course we never aged. As Graciela, the lead singer of the group, I was 13 1/2 years old forever. I named myself Graciela after Fertile's mother, who was like a second mother to me.

Our first show was in 1987 at La Luz de Jesus Gallery and, like the Afro Sisters, it immediately clicked with people. Being Latina teens is important as Latina teens rule the world and have such amazing sassy styles and defiance. In junior high at Berendo there was a cliqa of girls, Elva Novarra, Leticia Corral and Lisa Montelegre, who had such incredible style. They were my inspiration for Cholita. I wanted to be as powerful as they were in junior high, the queens of the school.

So, Cholita first started as a concept, but then kept developing when Alice and Fertile wanted to take the songwriting more seriously and become a real band. At first, Fertile didn't know how to play an instrument, but Alice taught him how to play bass. He got so good at one point that when the bass player of the British indie band Elastica left the group, they asked Fertile to join them for a tour with Beck. They didn't even know that Fertile wasn't a biological woman. Alice even taught me to play the keyboard, which was probably one of the hardest things I ever did. But I was so glad Alice pushed me in that direction. No one says "no" to Alicia.

Ok I will stop here and let you ponder this before I continue with more.

Kissy,

Ms. Davis

aka Scrampa

Fri, Jul 10, 2015 at 4:45 PM

Dear Ms. Davis,

Thank you so much for your generous reply. I've read through it several times over the course of the week. It's so exciting to learn about Afro Sisters and ¡Cholita!.

I've lectured about ¡Cholita! a couple of times at my university. The first time was for a graduate seminar organized by Dr. Deborah Paredez called, "Divas: Performance, Race, Sexuality and Gender." I presented ¡Cholita!—YouTube clips, photographs, and music—to doctoral students in Theater, Art History, American Studies, and English. One of these students said that the music made her feel empowered as a person of color. They really appreciated the way ¡Cholita! dealt with racism and stereotype through queerness, humor, music, and stage banter. I also presented ¡Cholita!, as well as your zines, to undergrads in a course I wrote with Dr. Cherise Smith called "Black Art, Brown Art: Contemporary African American and Mexican American Art." I spoke about your work in a section dedicated to Chican@ art and punk rock. In addition to your work, I talked about that of Diane

Gamboa and Shizu Saldamando, and we watched a film by Jim Mendiola called *Pretty Vacant*, which is about a Chicana from San Antonio who uncovers how Tex-Mex music influenced the Sex Pistols. I also showed Shizu's drawings of the San Anto punk band Girl in a Coma. Mendiola made a music video for them that incorporates a sort of cut-and-paste aesthetic that allowed me to bring the students back to your zines. How wonderful it would be to add Afro Sisters to future lectures, especially how show-tunes influenced the songs. I also now understand that I need to correct future ¡Cholita! lectures by discussing the influences of K-LOVE and Vicki Carr (I've made sure to include the Flans connection when I show your music video, though).

I first came to know of your work when I was a teenager via Le Tigre. When I was an undergrad at CSU Fullerton, in a contemporary art theory course, I read an essay by Jennifer Doyle about your performances at Bricktops. When obsessing over videos of you on the internet many years ago, I found one where you identify as Blatina. Then I read Jose Munoz's book, which mentioned your Mexican American heritage. As I've discussed your work over the years or talked about you with friends, many of them are surprised that you're Latina. I guess I was, too, when I first learned. I've been interested in the intersections of African American and Mexican American history since an undergrad. It became a topic of study for me as I began to really reflect on growing up in South Central, a place that had historically been Black but had, especially during the 80s, begun to experience an influx of brown people.

What was it like for you to grow up Blatina in LA? If scholars are to mention your identity, do you prefer that they recognize your Mexican roots as well as your Black ancestry?

I can't believe that ¡Cholita! got their start at La Luz de Jesus in WACKO! That store is pretty amazing. What other venues did ¡Cholita! perform at besides WACKO and Troy Cafe? Alice told me about a San Diego gig that, unbeknownst to you all, was a "family" event. Do you remember this?

How was the Afro-Futurist conference in Lisbon? How are you influenced by Afro-Futurism? In the Black Art, Brown Art course, we lectured on Afro-Futurism in music, film and art. Last year, I became consumed by Octavia Butler's novels and read them all, one after the other. People really love *Kindred* and I do, too, but I continuously find myself thinking about the *Parable* series. I think this is due to the sheer number of people of color in the book and the religious aspect. Firstly, I had never read a book with so many POC—and there are even Afro-Latino characters! I'm not religious, but some of the passages written and discussed by the main character, like the phrase, "God is change," registers with me in a way. I wish Clay's *Ark* would be made into a film. Her other book, *Fledgling*, really made me uncomfortable.

I hope we can continue our conversation and you'll share more history about ¡Cholita!. Thank you, again.

Sincerely,

Rose

Mon, Jul 13, 2015 at 2:54 AM

Dear Dr. Rose,

Back from a spirited time in Lisbon at the *Are You For Real?* art/film/music congress. My first time in Lisbon, which is a beautiful city. I was so shocked that I got such a big audience to hear my performative lecture, "Sassafras, Cypress & Indigo-Black Screen Images and the (E)motive Notion of Freakiness."

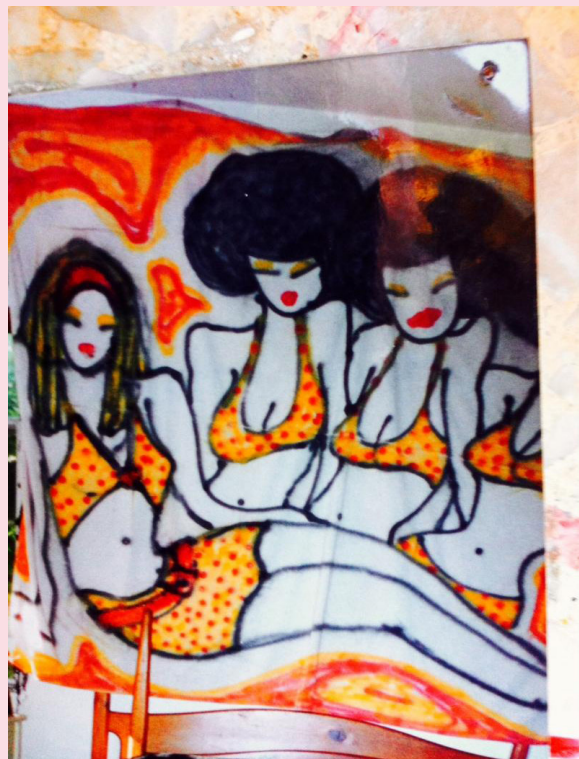
In terms of Afro Futurism, I am glad you mentioned Octavia Butler. When I teach at colleges, art schools and universities her *Lilith's Brood* is part of my syllabus. Her books are so cinematic. It's a shame none have been made into films. They would be so much better than the crap that Hollywood is producing these days with its cartoon-like CGI output of dullard movies.

As you know, LA is a city where lots of the residents have bi-racial identities. There has been lots of Black/Latino mixing since before the days of the pachucos.

Getting back to Cholita. One of the songs that emerged from Cholita, which I am most proud of, is the song I initially wrote the lyrics and music for, "Essays de la mujer." I took the title from a book of the same name that I had read as part of a Chicano Studies class at university. I didn't grow up speaking Spanish in the home, although my mother was a language chameleon. She was fluent in many tongues, though French was her native language being a Black Creole woman from Louisiana. I never learned to speak fluent French as my mother never spoke it to me and she wanted a language to talk to my older sisters that I, the youngest child, couldn't understand. This is a very Black Creole thing to do. My father and his family spoke Spanish and German. My father sounded like Ricardo Montalban crossed with a vampire. I had very little contact with my father after the age of 4 as my father and mother were never married. I had more contact with my abuelita and tia, and they spoke to me in broken English, Spanish and German.



Cholita flyer 1990s drawing by Michele "Mmeesh" Mills graffiti logo by Vaginal Davis



Afro Sisters backdrop designed and painted by Fertile LaToyah Jackson

I took Spanish, French, Italian and German in school, but I feel like I have never been able to master any language, including English. That's why I am known for subverting language in the way I speak, write and perform. With the song "Essays de la mujer," I tried to write Spanish lyrics in my limited way and, of course, Fertile and Alice corrected things as they always stressed that the Spanish used in the songs be grammatically correct.

I think our goals with Cholita was to present our politics in a humorous fashion without being dogmatic, to show that women's humour is playful and whimsical, and that the message doesn't have to be all soap-boxy, Sturm und Drang, and pretentious.

The music video for "No controles" was very spontaneous, though not completely. We had Rick Castro, aka Beulah Love, doing the fashion styling. A popular drag performer of that time named Gender, aka Fred Boege, who worked full-time as a make-up and hair-stylist in a mall, was our make-up and hair person for the video, which was shot and edited by Quasi O'Shea of the collective Amoeba Records and Filmworks. I had been working with Quasi since the early 1980s producing my video films and recorded musical output. Amoeba Records and Filmworks is no relation to the store that came later called Amoeba Records. Amoeba was formed by Gomorrah Wednesday and Quasi and became a collective comprised of working class malcontents and omnisexual queers. A lot of the films I made under the Amoeba banner were lumped under the Trespass Cinema moniker, which was the west coast answer to New York's Cinema of Transgression scene.

The location of MacArthur Park was chosen because Gender, the make-up artist, lived close by and I had always wanted to film something at that park as it has quite a history for me. The nearby cheap clothing outlets, at 7th & Alvarado, were where I did my back-to-school shopping as a very poor child.

Fashion was always very important for Cholita and all my projects. I worked with Rick, who was a professional fashion stylist at that time, and through the Afro Sisters and Cholita he got to do more things that were funky and in-line with his off-kilter aesthetics. I was definitely trying to disassociate from the more commercial aspects of normative drag and mainstream fashion. Madonna wasn't really an influence as she was already very well established in the mainstream. Our looks were just our versions of what teenage Latina girls were wearing at that time; only we exaggerated things a bit. As my relationship with Rick soured in the 90s, we went back to basics. Fertile returned as the main costume design supervisor with help from Michele Mills who was part of the Cholita ensemble, which sometimes numbered as many as 20 Cholitas on stage depending on the particular gig. Fertile was a graduate of the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in Downtown Los Angeles and created original clothing for Retail Slut.



Fertile LaToyah Jackson as Frida Kahlo pic by Beulah Love 1983

Yes, we did appropriate a banda style when that became a recognizable trend in LA Latino communities, but our schoolgirl look wasn't referencing Japan but Latina girls who attended Catholic High Schools like Bishop Canady on Pico Blvd. We liked our criticism of mainstream fashion to be subtle. Sometimes people got it and sometimes they didn't and that didn't matter. You took from Cholita what you wanted and we wanted people to form their own opinions.

Yes, I remember Cholita performing at a big cultural center in San Diego in the 1990s. The event was curated by the members of the old East LA punk band Los Illegals. I think we called the piece "Canto Infantil" and we did a salute to Gloria Trevi. By that time we were a tight band because Alice is

quite the slave master when it comes to rehearsing. People were shocked that we actually became a slicker performing group with matching outfits and simple but nicely choreographed dance moves.

I always saw Cholita as continuing with younger people, eventually taking our place so that there would be newer generations of Cholita. Cholita never formally disbanded, so perhaps they can re-emerge in this new century.

My other art band PME actually re-emerged over a decade after our last performance, as part of the Performa Biennale in New York City in 2009, with a piece called "Reparations and Retardations". So, who knows? Maybe Cholita will see the light of day again, but I don't think I can fit the frilly socks. I am not much for nostalgia, so if Cholita does come back it would have to be its own thing that reflects now and not the past.

Kissyz,

Ms Davis.

Jul 25, 2015 at 8:39 AM

Dear Ms. Davis,

Thank you for your last reply and I apologize for my late response. Since I last wrote, I've been helping several artists digitize slides and photos and organize their archives. Have you given any thought about where your archives will be placed in the future? Will they be donated to an institute in Berlin or do you think you'd like them to be returned to the States?

It's interesting to learn how MacArthur Park became chosen as the music video location for ¡Cholita! Historically, it was a Jewish community, but in the 80s, especially, it became mostly Latino and Latin American. Given all the anti-immigration rhetoric of the late 80s and early 90s in LA, your music video and lyrics are very relevant.

I didn't realize so many languages were spoken in your family. Learning other languages is rather difficult for me, too. My family only speaks English, but having grown up in a Latino and Latin American immigrant community in South Central, of course I heard Spanish. Perhaps not surprisingly, as a kid my grasp of Spanish mostly consisted of profanity and insults. Although I'm Latina, I'm fourth generation American and Spanish language skills ended for my family during my grandparents' generation. For instance, one of my grandmothers, who grew up in East LA, simply didn't hear Spanish in the house by the time she, the baby of the family, was born; English was the primary language at that point. One of my grandfathers, who grew up in Watts, was physically punished at school by his teachers for speaking Spanish. So, at a very young age, he learned

to suppress it for safety and acceptance. He consciously didn't teach my mother or her siblings Spanish because he didn't want them to be discriminated against. So, I learned Spanish in college and now my family has been experiencing a sort of rebirth of Spanish in the family. Through school and marriages with first and second generation Latinos, we and our kids are acquiring the language. It's pretty cool.

Sincerely,

Rose

Tue, Sep 8, 2015 at 2:27 PM

Dear Ms. Davis,

I recently listened to the Rising Stars, Falling Stars podcast and learned about the course you'll be teaching. I wish I could attend! How was your last film screening at the Arsenal in August? Are you doing new screenings for this month?

To clarify, when you stated that you had thought of Cholita being reemerging, did you mean that you'd imagine it with a whole new slate of band members—a new generation of performers (without you as Graciela)? Or did you mean that Cholita could reunite with the original line-up?

Sincerely,

Rose

Tue, Sep 8, 2015 at 10:31 PM

Dear Dr. Rose,

Yes, the last screening was lovely. I showed a Polish musical animation short, two short subjects from the Republic of Georgia, and an episode of the 1960s American TV variety revue show *Shindig*. I received a lot of emails requesting that I post the opening text I wrote to my blog at vaginaldavis.com. There is already a description of the evening and who showed up.

I have been curating this event every month for almost 8 years now. The next screening is Sept. 27th and I will present the concert film *Stop Making Sense*, featuring The Talking Heads and directed by Jonathan Demme.

Very busy at the moment finishing these sculpture panels for my solo visual art exhibition that will open Nov. 20th in NYC at Invisible-Exports Gallery called "Come on Daughter Save Me."

If Cholita did re-appear it would most likely be a whole new generation groomed by me and Alice Bag as a reunion of original members would prove to be too daunting of a project. But who knows . . .

Kissy,

Ms. Davis

Sent from my analog 1920's landline Kierkegaard phone.



Rare pic of Alice Bag at famed punk club The Masque late 1970s with X8, Al Flipside, Ines de la Fressange, and Carla "maddog" Duplantier Ms. Vaginal Davis' cousin who also grew up a Jehovah's Witness setting up drums in the back

Rose G. Salseda is a Ph.D. Candidate in Art History at the University of Texas at Austin.

Vaginal Davis is the grande dame of intermedia arts and sciences. Her beat is galactica at www.Vaginaldavis.com

PASTE GRAM

Kegels for Hegel

Hooking Up

KEGELS FOR HEGEL FT MCTYTE + KLOTZY Obviously (Love Song to Jacques Derrida) (stills)

ANDY CAMPBELL AND LUIS-MANUEL GARCIA Video Chat



Obviously (Love Song to Jacques Derrida) ft. Mctyte + Klotzy



Two Ships Passing: Andy Campbell and Luis-Manuel Garcia

Art historian Andy Campbell and ethnomusicologist Luis-Manuel Garcia met for the first time over video chat. They discussed their research, their interests and their thoughts on the current state of academia. Below is a selection taken from their recordings.



AC: ...Is this because you were finding yourself on the dance floor often? Sometimes the things that we study are and are not related to how we express ourselves, so I'm curious to know if that was part of the genesis of your interest in the [electronic music] scene.

LMG: I certainly would describe myself to some degree as -- what do they call it now -- a "native ethnographer?" [...] It wasn't really until I was going through my master's that I transitioned from doing more classic music history to this sort of ethnographic stuff. That was when I realized I could do a project on electronic music if I wanted [...] There was something really nice about realizing that I already had a whole series of expertises that I had built up in a very unsystematic way, in a very indirect way, but also in a very profound way that I could actually access and make use of, and try to formalize and make explicit.



LMG: So tell me what's your story, especially as your research project is concerned.

AC: So, I'm a pretend anthropologist. My academic disciplinary house is art history, so it's for me about visual codings and how the visual helps to create meaning. Unlike you, though, I'm a cultural outsider to the historical communities that I've studied. That was predicated in some ways on the fact that when I first started I was doing a project on historical leather communities, so it was about archival appearances or disappearances of this particular community.

[...]

What it started out as was a very historical project, but what it became was about contemporary artists who mined the documents of leather history to propose contemporary alternatives to queer politics. So thinking how artists used historical antecedents to speak to the present. That seemed to be something a lot of queer artists were doing -- mining specifically what they felt were radical or anti-assimilationist histories from the past.



AC: You were ensconced in the academic world in the United States. Is it similar to what's going on in Europe in academia? Is there a rise in adjunct labor pools?

[...]

LMG: The introduction of neoliberal management logics, especially corporate management logics, into university management is very much to be seen all over the place. It's really advanced in the UK, less so but still going in that direction in the Netherlands. You're seeing the quantification of performance, a certain set of top down corporate management that functions well for certain disciplines – generally the physical sciences do well under that management, but the humanities never do.

[...]

AC: That's disheartening to hear. The view from here, for me, is that it's a sinking ship. It's now become a moral and an ethical choice as to whether to tie yourself to those models. It's always the activist question, which is, how do you effect change? In the face of neoliberal corporate logics, there is no burying into them and making them into something that's worth saving.



LMG: This partially relates to some of the theory that I work with for my PhD. I was very interested in metaphors of liquidity, partially as an alternate metaphor for forms of solidarity that could work in dance floor situations. But the more potentially problematic side of that is the kind of liquidity you see Zygmunt Bauman expounding on, where the stable structures of high modern life are being liquefied through neoliberal practices. This increasing acceleration and flexibilization – liquidation in the financial sense.

I think that's something I'm seeing more and more in the academic sphere. What's pernicious and perverse about it is that on the one hand, these

highly flexibilized and accelerated systems are so nimble that they can capture and co-opt forms of resistance. It's really hard to rearticulate or somehow hinder these sorts of flows, because they're so fast they can move around you. There's also a way in which all of this endless mobility, which becomes then a thing that you as a subject have to enjoin and have to be part of – you have to become an entrepreneur for your own career, constantly be reapplying for new positions – that kind of destabilization creates a kind of exhaustion that also precludes political action. It becomes harder and harder to organize any kind of resistance if you're constantly scampering.

AC: Political action, yes. And also just work. Just seeing a multi-year scholastic project through to completion becomes a detriment to living. It becomes a thing that precludes you from making rent. At least in my discipline, a lot of what I do is image based. Even when I do publish something that includes images, rarely are those images covered by publishers. So oftentimes I go into the hole producing scholarship, which becomes a liability for me. If I'm an independent contractor, or an entrepreneur as these liquid systems suggest I should be, I'm literally decreasing my ability to pay my rent. And I think that's problematic to its core.



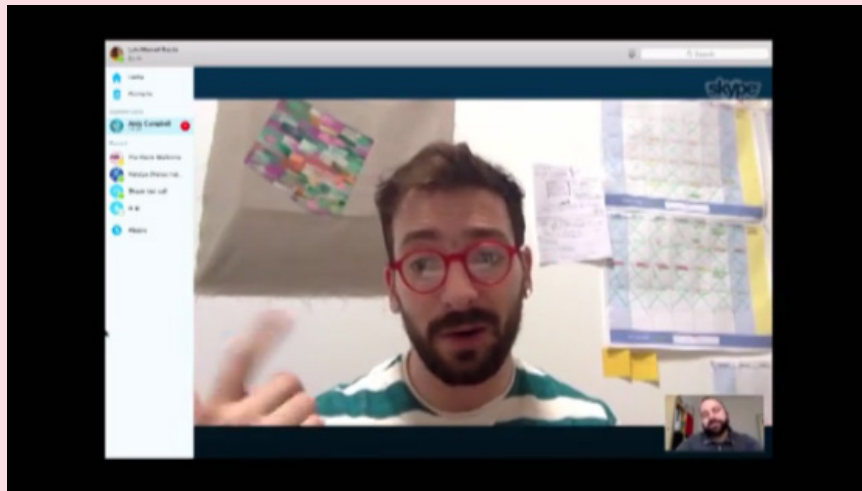
AC: I'm also interested in what you're reading, what are you watching and listening to. I'm interested in what makes up even your non-academic research list.

[...]

LMG: I'm part of a little artist collective here, La Mision, that puts out records every once in awhile. The records come with zine-style DIY magazines and we occasionally put on performance art things that are related thematically to the releases. That's been a really nice experience.

[...]

One of the main concerns of the whole project is this music, from disco onwards, has its historical roots in the nightlife world of marginalized peoples, whether its sexually or racially marginalized. As this has grown through the rave years and into the early 2000s, audiences have shifted, things have gone more mainstream at times. It remains an open question: how much are those original actors still involved in those scenes, or has the focus shifted away? [...] There's almost a revisionist history to be written about how electronic music, especially dance music, developed from disco onwards, paying more attention to the threads of sexuality and race, instead of the more standard music historiography of great artists and their albums.



AC: As you were talking about broaching history from a fragmentary place, that was something that's been really important to me too, in my projects. It's really important to leave history undone, in a sense. I think that allows for other people to come in and play, instead of cementing a narrative, but intimating connections or affinities. Methodologies for moving through content is so much more valuable [...] I think that, politically, it is more useful to have a history that is generative rather than a history that one has to be deferential towards.

[...]

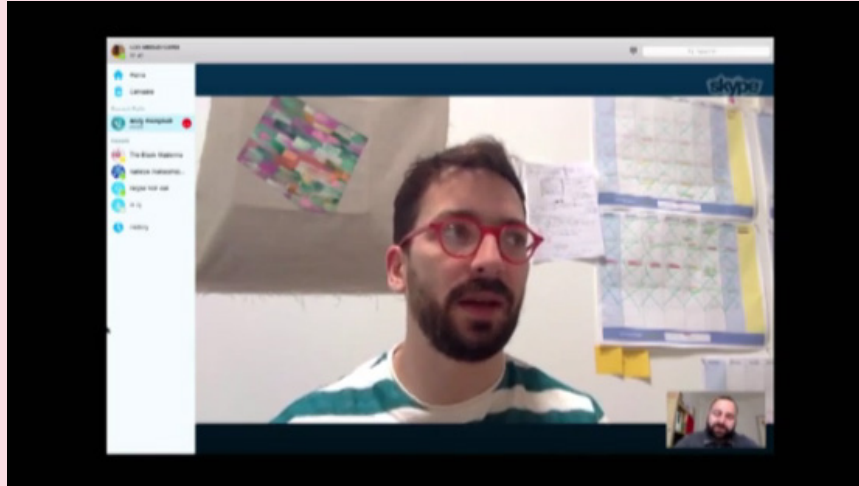
AC: It's funny, I'm often very cynical of people who are assured.

LMG: Yeah, I very much agree

AC: Part of that methodology for me is admitting what is not a very popular thing to admit – at the end of the day this history cannot be written in the ways we assume it can be written in. At the end of the day we cannot be completists about this. And that fantasy of being a completist is actually detrimental to calling forth other voices that are not our own. [...] I think our task as people who look at movements, places and intimacies that are not taken seriously is making room for 'not us' in that

equation.

AC: The term that I usually default to is creative non-fiction, as a way of thinking through what it is that I write. I think for people who are working off of general, basic categories, it intimates that you're not a fiction writer. There's still some kind of agency in terms of structure and how you think about what you're doing. I love Eve Sedgwick's terms and I would use them in an academic context, but I find myself being drawn more and more to this term 'creative non-fiction.'



AC and **LMG** cite works by Eve Sedgwick, Katie Stewart, Lisa Cohen, Molly Nesbit, Wayne Koestenbaum, Catherine Lord.

Andy Campbell, Ph.D., is a Critic-In-Residence with the Core Program (Glassell/MFAH) and an independent critic, curator, and academic. His work has appeared in Artforum, Aperture, Art Lies, and Terremoto. More can be found at andycampy.com

Luis-Manuel Garcia is an Assistant Professor in Popular Music at the University of Groningen (Netherlands) and adjunct researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin (Germany). Currently preparing his first book manuscript, entitled, *Together Somehow: Music, Affect, and Intimacy on the Dancefloor*, his research focuses on urban electronic dance music scenes, with a particular focus on affect, intimacy, stranger-sociability, dance, embodiment, sexuality, creative industries, migration, and urban space.



P A S T E L E
E G R A M

Kegels for Hegel

Power Play, Power Tops, Power Bottoms

LILY HOANG Me, Selah Saterstrom, and Everyone We Violate

KEGELS FOR HEGEL Aztlán (Love Song to los Conquistadores) (stills)



Me, Selah Saterstrom, and Everyone We Violate

Lily Hoang

This is an essentially stolen paper, and I am citing my sources now, lest they go meddling. They are—exhaustively—Selah Saterstrom's *The Pink Institution*, *The Meat and Spirit Plan and Slab*; Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*; Lauren Berlant's "Trauma and Ineloquence;" Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman's *Sex, or the Unbearable*; Lauren Berlant's "Starved;" anthropologist Veena Das's *Life & Words: Violence & the Descent into the Ordinary*; Antonin Artaud's *Theatre and its Double*, and Žižek's *Violence*. Everything beautiful belongs to someone else.

Selah Saterstrom's *Beau Repose* trilogy—*The Pink Institution*, *The Meat and Spirit Plan*, and her forthcoming *Slab*, all with Coffee House Books—forces us against unusually suspected genres of violence. In this talk, I will discuss five genres of violence using Saterstrom's work: the violence of forgetting, of education, of silence and of speech, of form, and of optimism.

The Violence of Forgetting

Well, I'll tell you Barbara [Walters], it was a little like this: standing on a hill at night, holding a piece of damaged paper. And letting it go. Watching it disappear into the inky depths of night. And you think: that's not good. You think, there it goes, language.

the ongoing activity of precariousness in the present

It all enters memory, the watery grave of what you will, in other words, forget.

I have terrible anxiety that most people find charming; they find it endearing, cute. I have terrible anxiety and I don't take medication, as in, I don't take the medication prescribed to me when I have anxiety attacks. I squirrel them for times I don't need them, as in, at night when I'm lonely and too sad, as in, every night. The anxiety medication I am prescribed alters memory; it excises. I find movie ticket stubs I don't remember. I don't remember and it is all fine, except for the things I am desperate to remember, which already—I have forgotten.

The Violence of Education

Willie called his daughters into the dining room. He picked up a dining room table chair and threw it into a closed window. The window shattered. He said, "That's a lesson about virginity. Do you understand?" to which they replied, "Yes sir."

Before, I let my cousin molest me. After, I let my choir director molest me. I did not let any of it happen, but when the dining room table chair went through my window, his name was Mikey Jam and how I wanted his affirmation, calling a maniac, that's what I did. I saw him recently, Mikey Jam, at the restaurant where we both worked when I was a teenager and he was the drummer in a band called Boxcar Satan. His real name is Michael Smith. He goes by Mikey Jam because he jams it all hard, on the drums, yeah. Before, he told me: I like to make girls bleed, and he did.

We all lived together in this house where my grandfather had a vision of the devil because everyone was poor and when the grown-ups needed us children out of the way, and they always did, they'd tell us to go in the yard and dig for the devil.

Sometimes we felt we were getting close.

We would say: it's getting hot.

Robert Johnson didn't really sell his soul to the devil. At least that's what a podcast told me, and I have a crush on a new boy who sent me the podcast and so it must be true.

Digging for the devil or digging for China, either way, I lose and I am not even Chinese.

The handle on obsession: how to touch it, remove. How?

The old boy says to me: I can't marry you because you're the wrong color, ok? Ok, it is not yet 2014 and so I forgive him his trespassing ignorance for flights that predict adventure, ours, together. His honesty, I justify, is refreshing.

He and I, we have fucked many places, but never a sleeping bag. Once, we slept on an air mattress together, in a cabin at the Grand Canyon, Noah Cicero at my feet, in a bed that could not contain him. The places where the fucking was best: cheap motel rooms. In the fancy ones, we couldn't feel a thing for all that blow.

Sex is not a thing, it's a relation; it's non-relation in propinquity to some kind of recognition. It's a sock drawer for anxious affects.

Jackie Wang and I, over text message and Twitter, we will have a contest: The Coming Syncopation: A Contest of Affect, we will start a whole prep school for it: The Affect Queenz Academy for Younger Ladies who

Champion the Largeness of Feeling.

I take two things from this story. One: It explains my predisposition for doing it with guys in sleeping bags. Not in a contrived way; it must happen "naturally." And, Two: Behind the freak is the symbol. Behind the symbol is breath, filling the oracular cavity created by the collarbone when a person's back arches and everything corresponds.

In the bathtub, the old boy asks me if my feelings are hurt because he loves choking me with his cock so much. It gets me off so fast, he says. Earlier, I puked on his cock. I couldn't breathe, I thought: I could die in this moment. Or this one. Or this one. Until he relents and it is his birthday, and we are in the bathtub, and I tell him I think he will live a loveless, miserable life, but he will be rich. He likes this, easy as Facebook.

Cruel optimism is an incitement to inhabit and to track the affective attachment to what we call "the good life," which is for many a bad life that wears out the subjects who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it.

The Violence of Silence, The Violence of Speech

I knit. Wasp nest stitch. We are weighted. Red eclipsed meat shaded. Found bones inter frozen ground. Our shelves are thin, our sugars, hard. We winter amid the lining.

To Bhanu Kapil, I write: Bhanu, I write this to you sitting outside in the Land of Enchantment. It is sixty degrees and sunny. I am knitting a scarf, for a pretty boy, contemplating our conversation. The pattern for the scarf: k1, *yo, k2tog*, repeat until last stitch, p1. The pattern makes a fabric of holes: where has my sentence gone?

Even those whom you would think of as defeated are living beings figuring out how to stay attached to life from within it.

It wasn't so long ago that my husband left me—it's not nearly so tragic as it sounds, but the facts being only what they are, he left me—and six months later my sister died and I was the one who found her and stayed with her and folded books by her bed, unconscious, threading folios and I was on a blind date with the old boy, our first date, and they called and I left and she died and the old boy and I were already in love and six months later my dead sister's son was arrested for possession of heroin and this was a bad thing and it was a blessing—I am still in debt for his veins, even now that he is free and clean and sober.

The backs of the sounds collapsed. Like chicken spines breaking. In a high-pitched voice, like it had been stuffed and packed with rubber balloons, she woke speaking, saying, I can talk I can talk.

I want to commune with Selah Saterstrom. I want to sell my soul to her, just to write one of her sentences, but who am I kidding? I'm no Robert Johnson.

The violence in Saterstrom's novels is anything but subtle, it's anything but quiet; but it's like Saterstrom doesn't have a choice in the matter: she must be bold, she must be loud, even at its most quiet, her sentences secrete violence. Each sentence is an epic, in content, in punch.

Let me tell you, I've been obsessed with Saterstrom's writing since her first book came out. I have written her fan mail, exhaustively, and then there was the time she came to my city and now we share a font.

Our skin can talk.

The Violence of the Material Body

I tell Ian I think I could do it. I think I could slaughter a cow. Thinking it and doing it are two different things, he says. I think I could, I say, I think I could for real. Maybe, Ian says, you should just learn to bloody cook it.

I don't tell Ian how much I really know. How to first open the carcass and remove the entrails inside the chest cavity using a boning knife. Slowly. As to not puncture vital organs. How to then split the hide back to read with a bone saw in order to efficiently cut open the tailbone to remove the rest of the entrails. How to see-saw the blade up, halving the upper chest cavity. How to flush the cavity with thin white towels. How now the slaughter is ready for hanging. Hang the rear legs high. Remove any remaining hide using the thin blade of a skinning knife. With the bone saw in one hand, grab the head with the other. Saw it off. Angle the bone saw into the front legs and saw and saw. With a boning knife, a skinning knife, a butchering knife, hack and carve. Rump, loin, plate, rib, chuck, and shank (139).

At the forefront of our minds, the obvious signals of violence are acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict. But we should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible 'subjective' violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent. And how does Saterstrom do it—make the body so material and then make us bear its weight?

Inside— The chest opens. Gasp. Breath is a hammer coming down. A blank white flashes. Left. Left right left. The thing gathers speed bouncing up and when it returns to the pink organ it otherwise floats above or rests upon it, lands on the organ's bruised top. Repetition has bruised the organ. The tender organ has become more supple, bashed...

Outside— A woman in bed sheets, face down. Her limbs curl to center pulled by blue slackless inner chords. The center is soft, feverish, stomach.

She draws knees up, one at a time. Left. Left right left. Then pushes them back down, one at a time. Left. Left right left. Arms at elbows bend, casing flanks, pinned.

When fantasy works, one does not appreciate the non-conformity between oneself and the world.

I cannot get out, though all the mouths of water complain. Champ enclosed and pulled me sore, like a recompense, Champ put his hands against me. He broke my breathing, my portion, for the mouth, in the yoke, through the Lord, he turned a hole inside a poppy that bangs inside the mouth. And the face in your face on your face, the pinhole view. The smears cartooned your slit hole with. The articulated clarity of a retained edge, the cresting socket en-united with the watery drawn line of your grin. Your swollen honker. Beneath, which raises the brow; yet those brows are pinned. Despite the mist that hardly holds, at your most sincere, I see your Roman nose. Below me, my saddle and my love, you who did and did not want more. From the middle, your sex still fountains. Even here? Yes.

When the inner elastic of the architecture snapped, it was madness. It was yours. The slog of compression does make a sound.

When violence, in the register of the literary, is seen as transfiguring life into something else, call it form of death, or of making oneself... into a ghost.

It is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds.

The Violence of Optimism

A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing.

There are various stories about how the art [of flower arranging] came to be, Kusami said, and the most famous of these stories says it began with a violent storm.

After this storm a monk was gathering debris and ruined plants and flowers. Instead of stashing it all in the rubbish head, he had an idea. He made an arrangement from the trash on the temple altar and sat in front of it. When his superior asked what he was doing he replied: I am practicing the art of decay appreciation.

Before there was the new boy and before there was the old boy, he the husband says: I think I should move back to Canada. He wanted me to fight for him, but instead, I buy a ticket and he is one way delivered twelve hours later.

Even those whom you would think of as defeated are living beings figuring out how to stay attached to life from within it.

Relationships dissolve. Lauren Berlant says we should rid ourselves of attachment, to the good life. I talk to Jackie Wang every night and we talk about our obsession, how to rid ourselves of obsession, and we agree transference is the worst route. Even Lauren Berlant would agree, and here we both are, transferring along; let us bounce: transference. I dream all the time of bouncing, and even though it is a familiar dream, I bounce vertically and every time I worry my legs will compress, compact, crush upon impact, but they never do and up I go again. The universality of relationship demise is not original, it is collective emotionality, collective empathy, we all mourn.

The dread of admitting knowing what brokenness is while managing the rage to repair it.

I offer flowers. I sow flower seeds. I plant flowers. I assemble flowers. I pick flowers. I pick different flowers. I remove flowers. I seek flowers. I offer flowers. I arrange flowers. I thread a flower. I string flowers. I make flowers. I form them to be extending, uneven, rounded, round bouquets of flowers. I make a flower necklace, a flower garland, a paper of flowers, a bouquet, a flower shield, hand flowers. I thread them. I string them. I provide them with grass. I provide them with leaves. I made a pendant of them. I smell something. I smell them. I cause one to smell something. I cause him to smell. I offer flowers to one. I offer him flowers. I provide him with flowers. I provide one with flowers. I provide one with a flower necklace. I provide him with a flower necklace. I place a garland on one. I provide him with a garland. I clothe one in flowers. I cover him in flowers. I love him with flowers.

This is an actual song, Teacher says.

Teacher tells us to take out a piece of paper and write down what we think it means. After a few minutes he tells us to stop writing. He points to me: What kind of song do you think this is? A love song, I say. HmMMM, he says.

I love the song more than any song, ever. It's like I wrote it or was just about to. It annoys me that it is already written. This is the song about my love for Jack.

A kind of love song, Teacher says. The kind sung to Aztec gods before performing human sacrifice.

Fragments allude to a particular way of inhabiting the world, say, in a gesture of mourning.

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Lily Hoang is the author of four books, including *Changing*, recipient of a PEN Open Books Award. She teaches in the MFA program at New Mexico State University, where she is Associate Department Head.

Aztlán (Love Song to los Conquistadores)



PASTELE GRAM

Kegels for Hegel

Death Drive

KEGELS FOR HEGEL Chicken Himmel (Bite Me Nietzsche) (stills)

AN PAENHUYSEN Chicken Himmel and Other Stories

AMY SARA CARROLL The Day José Died

KEGELS FOR HEGEL FEAT. LAUREN KLOTZMAN Death by 1000 Fucks (Love Song to Georges Bataille)

JULIA BARBOSA LANDOIS Star-Crossed II (2013) and Don't Explain (2015) (stills)



Chicken Himmel (Bite Me Nietzsche)



Chicken Himmel and Other Chicken Stories

An Paenhuysen

My mother had eleven little white chickens, a big brown chicken, and a big black chicken. One morning she got up and all the eleven little chickens were gone without a trace. A fox must have come at night and taken all the little chickens with him and the big ones managed to escape. It would only be a matter of time before the fox would come back to get more food for his kids. The black chicken was intelligent and knew what was going to happen. She got very afraid and tried to hide from the fox in the garage of the house every night. The brown chicken was not very intelligent and had no clue of the imminent danger. She lived happily without being worried. A month later during the night she was eaten by the fox. The stressed-out black chicken only survived because she hid. My mother brought her to a new home in another village. The moral of this story is that being intelligent causes a lot of worry, but it might give you a longer life, whereas being not so intelligent will let you live worry-free, but maybe with a shorter life. It's up to you. "What would have become of me," the German artist Joseph Beuys said, "if I had been intelligent?"

I have a Mongolian friend whose name is Ali Mongo but it changes all the time. When I met him he was called Ali Baba. When something bad happens to my friend he changes his name. Mongo is a nomad; since he was young he has travelled the world. It started with him wanting to become a priest in Germany, but on his way there by boat he got distracted in India and ended up being a cook, a sailor, a drug dealer, a car mechanic and, most consequently, a painter. Mongo is an outsider artist and his style is naive. He likes to paint naked women and people having sex, animals having sex, and people and animals having sex - all of this in a naive, colorful way. Besides being a great painter, Ali Mongo is a great cook and once I wanted to make a cookbook with Ali Mongo. I never finished the cookbook, but it made me follow him around town in search of good ingredients at farmers markets. Everything had to be organic, including the chicken. Mongo thought it very important to massage the meat before he baked or cooked it. It makes it taste better. His English is a little funny and when he gave me the featherless chicken he told me to "do massagi, massagi!".

I once lived with a businessman in San Francisco. He worked for a corporate company and was rarely at home and when he was, he never cooked. Therefore, he didn't need a kitchen. So he sublet the kitchen to me to live in. I remember that my roommate never ate anything but energy bars. He read biographies of famous business people because his dream was to become an influential and wealthy businessman. In his limited free time he played golf. At home he liked to walk around in underwear,

showing off his nice body, so it didn't take long before we had sexual intercourse and it was a nice change to have sex with somebody who was acquainted with money because the artist-boyfriend I had been dating was always broke. This ex-artist boyfriend found out about the businessman and as vengeance sent me the Wallstreet Journal on which he drew a portrait of my roommate. I moved back to Europe and the businessman was promoted to a higher position in North Carolina. I met him again at an event in New York a year later and he had started calling women "chicks." Right before my eyes he started making out with a girl who said she wore no bra and he took off with her into the bushes of the park.

Chicken Himmel is a collaborative work by the Korean Studies Department and Kegels for Hegels. Other Chicken Stories are all written by An Paenhuysen.

An Paenhuysen works as a freelance curator, art critic and educator in Berlin.

The Day José Died

Amy Sara Carroll

Larry strode down the hallway, calling out
to me,

“Have you seen the Facebook
posts, the tweets? José Muñoz is
dead.”

Something turned off in my head. A light.
Bulb. Just above my head. A chamber
of my heart caved in. I leaned against
the wall, listening to Larry’s doleful
detailing. The little known. The lot of us.
Unknowns, looming largest. The largess,
regret. Thickening syntax. My tongue,
stuck, “Okay, that’s enough. You didn’t
even know the guy!” Why. Y? ¿Y, cómo te
vas? Leaving all of us. Lonely. “A little less
alone.” Fred Moten, play it again:

call ‘se‘steban like a father, chicken
and rice down low—

love can

bust you up in increments so

you link ephemera

I sat down in my office. I struggled to collect my belongings. I'd just guest-lectured in Anthony's "Introduction to Latina/o Studies." I googled fastidiously. I recalled Muñoz's analytical caress of Frank O'Hara's "Having a Coke with You."

Tavia Nyong'o, did Muñoz also crush out on the crushed blacks of "The Day Lady Died"? Where were the obituaries, the "cities of the dead," rising to welcome their newest compatriot? Of *Just Above My Head*, Muñoz muses:

The queer solo is a lament that does not collapse into nostalgia but instead takes flight... The singer is... not its author and never has been. He hears a call and we remember... a shared impulse, a drive toward justice, retribution, emancipation... Another vibe is cultivated.

"Okay," I say, still unsteady. The voice.

Of. A generation. 1.5. Of that time. (My time!) Period. "Disidentification." Diss. Identification. "Methexis." A prose poem: If Muñoz needed no introduction, he earned every queer's goodbye.

Amy Sara Carroll is the author of two collections of poetry *SECESSION* (Hyperbole Books, an imprint of San Diego State University Press, 2012) and *FANNIE + FREDDIE/The Sentimentality of Post-9/11 Pornography* (Fordham University Press, 2013) and one book of criticism *REMEX: Toward an Art History of the NAFTA Era* (The University of Texas Press, forthcoming). Since 2008, she also has been a member of the collective Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0/b.a.n.g. lab, coproducing the *Transborder Immigrant Tool*.

Death by 1000 Fucks (Love Song to Georges Bataille) ft. Lauren Klotzman



Star-Crossed II (2013) (stills)

Julia Barbosa Landois



Don't Explain (2015) (stills)

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