Undergraduate Journal of Art History & Visual Culture

Issue 11

The *Undergraduate Journal of Art History & Visual Culture* (*UJAH*) is a free student journal published by the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory and the Art History Students' Association at the University of British Columbia. All material is copyright © 2020 *UJAH*, authors.

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UJAH gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the UBC Art History Students' Association, the Museum of Anthropology, the Walter H. Gage Memorial Fund, and the UBC Arts Undergraduate Society, as well as the editorial and financial support of the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory at the University of British Columbia.

We would like to acknowledge that we work and learn on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people. Issue 11, Fall 2020. Published since 2009.

Printed by Mitchell Press, Vancouver.

Website www.ubcujah.com
Email ubc.ujah@gmail.com
Facebook facebook.com/ubcujah
Instagram @ubcujah

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Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

It is with immense pride and pleasure that we introduce to you the eleventh issue of the *Undergraduate Journal of Art History and Visual Culture*. Throughout the years, this publication has always been a way to untangle and reflect upon the state of the world as it was, as it is, and as it will be. In this issue you will find work that challenges us to shift our perspectives, redefine current systems, and really pay attention to what's around us. It asks us to take a moment to be present, to genuinely connect in our vulnerabilities, and to create meaning for ourselves in this tumultuous time. It is my hope that this issue changes your mind about something you had steadfastly believed or offers you a new way to think through certain issues. However small it might seem, this has been—at its core—how *UJAH* has, and will continue to, create change.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude for the tireless work and dedication of our editors—they push this journal to be the best it can be. I am indebted to our graphic designers, Daniela Buitrago and Akari Esaka, who have made this publication into an art piece in its own right; and to our managing editor, Yuko Fedrau, for her invaluable insight and thoughtful leadership. Thank you to the Walter H. Gage Memorial Fund, the Museum of Anthropology, the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory, and the Arts Undergraduate Society, whose generous support made this publication possible.

My never-ending appreciation goes to our undergraduate advisor Greg Gibson, our faculty advisor, Dr. Ignacio Adriasola, and the Art History Students' Association, who continue to support us behind the scenes—it is because of them that *UJAH* continues to thrive and grow. Last, but certainly not least, to our authors and artists: thank you for allowing us to learn, connect, and cultivate change with you.

It has been an absolute privilege to work with so many passionate and driven individuals for the past four years. I cannot find another synonym for "thank you"—but thank you once again, nonetheless!

I hope you enjoy and learn from Issue 11 as much as I have.

Grace Chang, Editor-in-Chief

Letter from the Managing Editor

Art history often gets a bad rep—for those outside of the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory, the image that first comes to mind includes only oil paintings and marble sculptures found in the Louvre, accompanied with unchanging Eurocentric academic discourse. In reality, there are few academic departments at UBC that encourage the use of radical, groundbreaking thought as much as AHVA. This year's issue of the *Undergraduate Journal of Art History and Visual Culture* truly captures this desire to rethink the foundations of our discipline, using a variety of theoretical lenses to examine a wide range of artwork, both historical and contemporary.

This publication would not have been possible without the dedication, passion, and skill of our editorial board. With their guidance, this year's incredibly talented authors were able to highlight the strengths of their work. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to our graphic designers, Daniela Buitrago and Akari Esaka. Tailoring their designs to the themes in the writing, they have truly transformed this journal from a simple collection of essays into a work of art unto itself. As always, we are endlessly grateful to Greg Gibson for his guidance and support. Most importantly, I would like to thank Grace Chang, who, with kindness and compassion, worked tirelessly to make our vision for *UJAH* come true.

It's been an honour to work with *UJAH* for the past two years, and I hope that you will enjoy reading Issue 11.

Yuko Fedrau, Managing Editor

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The Taking of Christ: Caravaggio as the Lantern-Bearer

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ,* 1602, Oil on canvas. 133.5 x 169.5cm, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

AUTHOR: ALYSSA CAYETANO

The Taking of Christ (1602) is an oil painting on canvas by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, which currently resides in the National Gallery of Ireland.[1] The painting was a private commission from one of Caravaggio's lead patrons, Ciriaco Mattei, and depicts the greeting of Christ by Judas as the soldiers arrive to arrest him for his crucifixion.[2] On the right side of the painting, standing among the soldiers, is a man holding a lantern. This lantern-bearer has been identified as a self-portrait of Caravaggio.[3] The inclusion of a self-portrait in a biblical painting, and particularly the nature of this self-portrait in relation to dress, gesture, expression, composition, and lighting, is extremely curious. Regarding Caravaggio's self-portraiture, Michael Fried states that "the 'presence' of the artist within the depicted scene is the outcome of forces far more complex and conflictual than a desire for self-representation."[4] Thus, the inclusion of Caravaggio's own likeness is more than a mere novelty. Prior depictions of Caravaggio in his violent biblical scenes, in combination with historical documents such as police and death records, point to his self-portraiture as an expression of his spiritual distance. In this essay, I will be discussing the significance of Caravaggio's self-portrait as the lantern-bearer in *The Taking of Christ*, particularly with respect to his relationship with religion. Caravaggio's role as the lantern-bearer reflects a cognitive dissonance in regard to his faith, a desire to believe that is wrought by both obstacles and conflict.

Scholars describe the figure of Caravaggio in *The Taking* as a witness to the events depicted in the painting.[5] Letizia Treves regards Caravaggio as a witness to a momentous event and notes his richly coloured clothing, which may highlight his importance in this role.[6] In contrast, John Varriano suggests that the self-portrait does not denote the importance of the artist but rather the significance of the act of witnessing.[7] Varriano sees Caravaggio as an unwitting witness, arguing that his contemporary clothes do not side visually nor metaphorically with either the soldiers' armour or Jesus's robes.[8] This choice of dress gives Caravaggio significance but makes him neutral in morality.[9] On the other hand, Fried proposes that Caravaggio's self-portrait indicates the artist's importance. He suggests that Caravaggio's presence emphasizes the significance of the act of witnessing, specifically the deliberate attempt of Caravaggio to observe Christ's arrest.[10] Fried also writes that Caravaggio's figure is an instigator of the scene. His entrance on the right causes the biblical characters to act, as shown by their collective movement towards the left side of the canvas.[11] Caravaggio mirrors this action in reality by instigating the scene as the painter;[12] he brings the scene to life on canvas by means of his paintbrush. While Varriano's emphasis on the act of witnessing and the dismissal of Caravaggio's importance is interesting, I believe that Caravaggio's history of violent self-portraiture aligns with the arguments of Treves and Fried. His appearance as the lantern-bearer holds significance, and the atmosphere of the painting would change if the lantern-bearer bore the likeness of someone else.

The Taking portrays the arrest of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. This is a scene from the Passion of Christ, a series of events from the last days of Christ's life.[13] *The Taking* follows Christ's entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, and Christ's agony in the Garden, preceding his trials and his crucifixion, death, and burial. The arrest spurs the latter half of the Passion in that one of its players, the disciple Judas, prompts the events of Christ's suffering by betraying him in exchange for silver. Caravaggio does not show the climax of this moment and instead shows Judas about to kiss or having just kissed Christ to identify him to the armoured soldiers on the right. The soldier in the foreground reaches around Judas with a gauntleted hand, grasping Jesus's robe, and the soldier in the middle ground grasps the robes of the man on the left, who flees the scene with a panicked cry. Christ wears a tortured expression, his body leaning to the left as his hands—outstretched either in prayer or for arrest—are presented to the soldiers, showing resistance yet compliance. To the far right in front of the third soldier, Caravaggio peers over the heads of the characters, holding a lantern to illuminate the scene before him. Curiously, Caravaggio's expression does not hint at a sense of admiration or faith, or even a sense of excitement. His body language arguably shows interest, almost as if he is about to stand on the tips of his toes, but his face exhibits little reaction to the tumultuous scene of Christ's arrest before him. His face and mouth are slack, and his eyes are half-lidded. Though his brow looks knitted in concentration, the lines on his forehead are barely evident. In contrast, the folds and creases of Christ's and Judas's face are deep and twisting with emotion. For the intensity of their expressions, it is strange that Caravaggio does not appear to be moved by the events of the Passion.

Before we analyze further the visual aspects of *The Taking*, let us discuss Caravaggio's relationship with religion. There is some basis for Caravaggio's distance from spirituality in the existing literature. Though Caravaggio engaged in religious activities such as receiving the Eucharist, a traditionally important act of consuming bread in commemoration of Christ's sacrifice, he left behind no religious belongings after his death.[14] It also seems that his disposition was far from that of a devout Catholic. Giovanni Bellori, a seventeenth-century writer and biographer of contemporary artists reports that Caravaggio had a temper,[15] and there are extensive police records of his violent and reckless behaviour.[16] However, in analyzing historical texts, we should remember that the lack of biographical material on Caravaggio's spirituality does not indicate he was non-religious. It may simply be the case that biographers of Caravaggio's time did not find it necessary to write on the religiosity of the artist.[17] Similarly, we should also note the bias of the biographer. Bellori showed clear distaste for Caravaggio's style; he did not believe that it was appropriate to his contemporaries

"His self-portrait as the lantern-bearer demonstrates a shift from his hostile relationship with religion, consequently reflecting his lack of faith."

nor for the purposes of the Catholic Church and argued that it lacked both beauty and decorum.[18] Rudolf Wittkower states that seventeenth-century religious artworks were expected to adhere to this decorum. It was crucial that images depicted the correct age, sex, type, expression, gesture, and dress to inspire faith or appeal to the pious.[19] Caravaggio intentionally defied these expectations and was criticized for his sense of "darkness" and secular thinking, which may have reflected his apathy towards ideas of faith and piety.

Caravaggio's spirituality should also be considered in respect to his history of self-portraiture, particularly those portraits included in his religious paintings. In many of these self-portraits, he takes on a biblical character, but these likenesses seem largely self-deprecating. Caravaggio depicts himself as maimed and slaughtered biblical adversaries, most notably as the severed head of Goliath held by the youthful David, and the mutilated figure of Holofernes decapitated by Judith.[20] It is important to remember how villains in the Bible are often portrayed: as enemies of God who align completely and utterly with evil, consistently vanquished directly or indirectly by God's hand. To paint himself as a villain in such a carnal scene could easily be an acknowledgement of Caravaggio's history with violence and misbehaviour, or even as an act of self-deprecation and damnation. As time progressed, Caravaggio began to depict a different kind of likeness in four more religious paintings: *The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* (1600), *The Taking of Christ* (1602), *The Raising of Lazarus* (1609), and *The Martyrdom of St. Ursula* (1610).[21] *The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* is of particular interest in this paper, as it signals a shift in Caravaggio's self-portraiture.[22] He no longer plays a violent central role as a biblical character, but stands in the background of the painting and takes on a lesser, more passive role as a witness. Instead of taking part in the story, Caravaggio stands on the periphery of divine events.[23] In *The Martyrdom*, Caravaggio's features seem grim, as if his high esteem for St. Matthew is corrupted by the violent act of death before him. Any sense of connection or admiration Caravaggio has is sabotaged by conflict, just as we see in *The Taking*. His self-portrait as the lantern-bearer demonstrates a shift from his hostile relationship with religion, consequently reflecting his lack of faith.

With the context of Caravaggio's existing self-portraiture and absence from religion, let us consider one of the more prominent elements of *The Taking*: lighting. Varriano notes that the light of the lantern does not illuminate any of the biblical characters.[24] They are lit by a source from above, while the lantern shines upon Caravaggio alone. Light in Caravaggio's artworks is not solely an indicator of the significance of a subject, as suggested by Fried. Rudolf Wittkower argues that Caravaggio uses illumination as an indirect rather than

“If we consider Caravaggio’s self-deprecating portraiture with his history of violent behaviour, his inability to see Christ is recognition of his own corruptness—his evil qualities. Thus, this obstruction could also come from himself.”

an explicit type of religious symbology.[25] Caravaggio's face is also brightly lit, but this does not necessarily give him divine status. It should be noted that *The Taking* is one of the only paintings where he depicts an artificial light source: a lantern.[26] This suggests that the depiction of the lantern bears importance. As stated, the light of Caravaggio's lantern does not touch the biblical figures in the painting.[27] The figures are lit only by the divine light from above. Just as the artificial light does not touch them, the divine light, in turn, does not touch Caravaggio. It is the artificial light of the lantern alone that illuminates Caravaggio's face and shines into his eyes. The presence of the lantern not only separates him from the divine but also blinds him. It makes him an outsider. The portrayal of Caravaggio as the lantern-bearer serves as a visual depiction of his inability to access spirituality, despite it being within arm's reach. As in *The Martyrdom* where Caravaggio lingers in the background, Caravaggio in *The Taking* exists on the periphery, perhaps indicating a conflicted and futile longing for religious connection.

The juxtaposition of divine and artificial light may also serve to emphasize the distance between Caravaggio and Christ, who are respectively at the far right and the far left of the painting. Christ does not take a central position to indicate his importance. Instead, Judas and the soldiers occupy the centre of the painting and subsequently push Christ and Caravaggio apart. Nonetheless, Christ and Caravaggio are the two brightest points in the painting. The brightest light on the left shines over Christ's face and dims as the viewer's eye reaches the soldiers on the right. These shadows are interrupted by the unusually illuminated face of Caravaggio. This causes the viewer's eye to move back and forth between the two brightest points that are the faces of Christ and Caravaggio, which emphasize the vast space between them. The space is metaphorical as well as physical. It reinforces the notion that he cannot reach a sense of faith, and that there is a distance from the spiritual that he can never close despite his attempts to, which are echoed in his slack and uncomprehending expression.

As mentioned above, Christ and Caravaggio are separated not only by distance but also by the bodies of Judas and two armoured soldiers. Fried, Varriano, and Treves explicitly describe Caravaggio as a witness; however, I propose that Caravaggio is unable to see Christ at all. He certainly looks in the direction of Christ, craning his head to see his face, yet it is possible that Judas's body obstructs his view. Although Caravaggio appears to be taller than the soldiers, Judas is situated at the same height as Christ. If we were to stand where Caravaggio is standing, we should be able to see only Christ's left cheek. The rest of his face should be obstructed by the back of Judas's head. Through his attempts to see Jesus, the human manifestation of God, he is able to see only Judas. It is possible that this reflects obstacles to Caravaggio's faith in real life: his attempts to connect with religion may have been blocked by evil, whether through misfortune, like Christ's arrest, or treachery in others, as embodied by Judas. If we consider Caravaggio's self-deprecating portaiture with his history of violent behaviour, his inability to see Christ is recognition of his own corruptness—his evil qualities. Thus, this obstruction could also come from himself.

With Caravaggio's history of aggression in mind, Fried argues that there is a sense of causality in *The Taking*.[28] As Caravaggio enters the painting on the right, the robed individual on the left flees, suggesting that there is room in the painting for only one of them.[29] Caravaggio's arrival pushes the fleeing individual from the painting, thus putting him in a position of aggression or assertion. When considering their relationship in the scene, we should also consider their opposing roles. The one who flees to the left is already a witness. In contrast to Caravaggio, he is a participant in the scene and likely a follower of Christ as indicated by his biblical robes;[30] Treves identifies him as St. John, a member of the twelve apostles.[31] St. John is thought to have a close relationship with Christ, commonly identified as the disciple "whom Jesus loved."[32] Notably, both St. John and Caravaggio's likenesses are cut off by the edges of the canvas, exiting and entering respectively. The "beloved" St. John already believes in Christ and is integral to the narrative but is unwilling to stay. Conversely, Caravaggio arrives, wishing to become part of the scene. However, his emotional, spiritual, and physical distance renders him unable to participate.

The Taking also presents a third witness: the viewer. As Caravaggio cranes his head and the robed individual runs off the edge of the canvas, the audience alone is privy to the entirety of the scene. We mirror him in that we attempt to take part in the same role, viewing the events of the Passion before us, but we are the only party that is successful. Viewers can see the unsuccessful witness and the unwilling witness; Caravaggio gifts us with the privilege of being spectators. As spectators, we can see, engage with, and to use Christian vernacular, "receive" Christ. Because we can see him and there are no other barriers between us, we can have an experience of faith. Our ability to access Christ and religion is juxtaposed by Caravaggio, who is trapped where he stands. His faith is impeded by external obstacles, which are depicted by physical distance and the bodies between him and Christ. He is also impeded by internal obstacles. Caravaggio is effectively blinded by a tool used for seeing: the lantern that he brought for himself. He is eternally frozen in paint and perpetually distant from the divine, existing in an exile that is both externally caused and self-imposed. As viewers who are unable to intervene, we experience a sense of frustration with these physical and metaphorical barriers that may have mirrored his own.

Varriano suggests that there is a relationship between Caravaggio's distance from spirituality and his existence as an artist. His detachment from religiosity and his secular way of thinking were related to his desire to paint from nature.[33] Concerning painting, Caravaggio appeared to be preoccupied with the earthly rather than the spiritual.[34] He uses *The Taking* to mirror his struggle with faith. This is demonstrated in the depiction of raw emotion on Christ's face, which suggests conflict and turmoil. This expression echoes Caravaggio's torturous lack of access to Christ by physical obstacles and literal distance. His attempts to connect with the spiritual are thwarted by both external forces and his own hand, physically manifested as the lantern he holds before his face. Even if he could close the distance, step past the obstacles, lower his hand, and see Christ, he might be disappointed with what he finds. Christ's face is one of uncertainty and unrest, rather than serenity and faith. In this way, Caravaggio uses the role of the lantern-bearer as a metaphor. He, as expected of a painter in the seventeenth century, is depicting a biblical scene that appeals to the faith of the audience. However, through the nuances of gesture, expression, composition, and lighting, he also uses the lantern-bearer to show his skepticism of and uncertainty about the "truth" he has painted. He reveals the irony of his profession: painting religious artworks that conflict with his personal beliefs. As lantern-bearer, Caravaggio illuminates unthinkable doubt and the taboo of spiritual absence in a time of turmoil for the Catholic Church, allowing viewers to join him in questioning his sense and their own sense of belief. ■

EDITORS
Alexi Paglinawan & Doris Fuller

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From Propaganda to Paralympics: Images of Disability as a Matter of Othering

Figure 1. Slide from *Blood and Soil,* 1936. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Roland Klemig. https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1072055.

AUTHOR: YASMINE SEMENIUK

From the late 1920s through to the end of the Second World War, Nazi media fed German society a "utopian fantasy of a future world uncontaminated by defective bodies" through a propaganda campaign that relied heavily on images of people with disabilities.[1] The goal of this propaganda was to garner public support for a healthy "body politic" that put the good of the community before the individual. These ideals eventually led to the T4 euthanasia program—a means used by Nazis to exterminate people with genetic disabilities. Today, images of disability in media—though often hard to find—may seem benign in comparison to those used by Nazi Germany. In this paper, I will argue, however, that contemporary disability images also engender negative perspectives of disability, much like those used by Nazi propagandists. First, I will examine the propaganda of the Nazi regime, which depicts disability as evil and a burden. This will culminate in an in-depth analysis of visual elements from Nazi slides used to spread State-approved values. I will then look at Hugh Gallagher's article "What the Nazi 'Euthanasia Program' Can Tell Us about Disability Oppression" to compare Nazi Germany and North America today. Gallagher's comparison sets up a juxtaposition of Nazi images around disability with those of the modern day. Looking at current Western portrayals of disability in media, drawn from Quinn and Yoshida's work on images of Paralympic athletes, formal analysis reveals how a photograph can also "other" disability. This perspective will demonstrate how disability, as represented in recent media, extends a harmful tradition that echoes eugenics motives. This raises a cause for concern as it demonstrates how current images of disability evolved from a harmful, intolerant history—one that is still visible in contemporary Western society.

Nazi German eugenics focused on disabilities that were inheritable; this is a fact which revealed itself in my family's history. My great-grandfather's blindness was not a congenital condition; rather, it was caused by an oversight during infancy. As a newborn in 1912, Wolfhard soon developed eye infections that were not treated appropriately by nurses. This mistake changed the course of his life. Fortunately, things were not as terrible as they could have been—since this was not a genetic disease, Wolfhard could live a relatively normal life if he could obtain the paperwork necessary to prove his genetic purity. By filling out extensive medical records, he was eventually granted permission to marry and could even obtain an education—albeit only through a factory for blind people that produced woven chairs and brooms. Wolfhard's life with disability in Nazi Germany contrasted with those whose disabilities were genetic. My grandmother also spoke of a family friend whose daughter had a mental disability. Their family was told she would be taken to a summer camp; however, after a short time, they received a letter stating that she had died. They would later realize that she had been killed as part of the T4 program.

Although it is often associated with Nazi Germany, the concept of eugenics—that the human species can be improved through selective reproduction—reached most parts of the world. The dawn of the eugenics program in Nazi Germany began similarly to the American eugenics movement as they both strived to "engineer a healthy body politic."[2] Germany, however, took eugenics ideology significantly further. They classified eugenics into two types: positive and negative. Positive eugenics attempted to encourage the breeding of healthy stock, whereas negative eugenics was aimed at eliminating perceived "undesirable" traits from the gene pool. The Third Reich took negative eugenics to extreme and egregious ends by developing a mass euthanasia undertaking that was "intended to 'free' Germany of disabled people."[3] The progression from eugenics theory to genocide began with increased control of the State over genetically disabled individuals' rights through institutionalization, forced sterilization, and marriage regulations. This, in essence, was total control of their reproductive rights. These laws evolved into what would become known as the T4 program. Taken from the address Tiergartenstraße 4—the location of the office that oversaw the program—T4 involved mass killings of disabled people who were seen as a burden on both society and themselves.[4] While the program officially ran from 1939 to 1941, the killings continued until the end of the war.[5]

The majority of these killings happened without the public's knowledge, but the State tried to skew views against "carriers of inferior genetic material"[6] through the use of propaganda. Carol Poore, a professor of German studies at Brown University, discusses in her book *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* how visual depictions of disability were vital to the Third Reich's agenda. She notes that "broad masses were exposed to these images in many different contexts whether or not they were inclined to sympathize with eugenics." [7] However, as historian David Welch notes, the efficacy of this Nazi propaganda remains unclear.[8] He suggests that Nazis attempted to appeal to a base of their constituents with the hope "to establish at least passive acquiescence"[9] from groups who might be less persuaded. With this approach, Nazis were able to suppress opposition to their unethical policies. Essentially, their goal was to "label some people as valuable, superior Germans and others as undesirable, inferior, and even subhuman outsiders."[10] This othering was a central theme in their propaganda, and it can be seen in many "slide presentations" in which Third Reich values were celebrated. These slide presentations propagated Nazi ideologies to parts of the population that had not previously subscribed to them. "The problem for the Nazis was how to combine the visual effectiveness of printed material with the popular appeal of the spoken word in presenting this issue."[11] Bruno Czarnowski engineered the idea of slide presentations as a way to inexpensively combine the two aspects; "[Heinrich] Himmler officially adopted it on behalf of the propaganda section as 'a worthwhile project for 1929.'"[12] Although the official records of these slide presentations are lost, it was reported that the presentations were "both well attended and well received."[13] They also functioned as an economical way of letting the "smallest village put on a great show." One such slide from a presentation in 1936, *Blood and Soil* (fig. 1),[15] exemplifies this approach and demonstrates the subtle (and not so subtle) ways through which propaganda was designed to influence.

"THE DISABLED MAN HAS A SHADOW BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER HIM SIGNIFYING THAT HIS FUTURE AND PAST ARE BOTH THE SAME. AS HITLER WOULD IMPLY, HIS LIFE WILL BE FULL OF SUFFERING AND IS 'A LIFE NOT WORTH LIVING'"

This monochrome image exemplifies how disability was portrayed in Nazi German propaganda. The image clearly vilifies one side and heralds the other. The work is framed in a diagonal line of sight with a disabled man holding a sign on the left, and an idealized white family of five on the right, holding a similar sign. Within this line, the disabled man looks to the left and off the image (into the past) while the family looks directly at the viewer and is asking for action. This timeline is also seen in the figures' shadows. The disabled man has a shadow both before and after him signifying that his future and past are both the same. As Hitler would imply, his life will be full of suffering and is "a life not worth living." Above the figures are two statements that translate to, respectively, "A genetically disabled person costs the State 5.50 *Reichmarks* daily" and "5.50 *Reichmarks* can support a genetically healthy family for one day!" The script, which seems to loom over the disabled man, emphasizes the word *Erbkranker* (genetically disabled) by using it both in the noun form and in a larger font while the text above the family de-emphasizes the word *erbgesunde* (genetically healthy) by covertly incorporating it into the phrase. These differing font sizes emphasize the othering of disability and reinforce the idea that being genetically healthy is the default. The meaning of the text also gives an economic justification to the perceived inferiority of the disabled and echoes Dan Goodley's analysis of *Mein Kampf* in "how significant binary opposites are constituted through social, cultural and economic practises in relation to one another."[16]

While both sides hold a sign with the price listed, the disabled man leans on his much-larger sign while the family holds up their smaller sign with pride and gratitude. This shows both that the disabled man cannot survive without the taxpayers' money, and that he will "leech" funds for the rest of his life. This contrasts with the family. Here, the patriarchal "breadwinner" has clearly worked to support his family. The differences between the figures are also highlighted by both the clothing and lighting. The disabled man, shrouded in black with his frail body hiding in an oversized suit, looks deathly ill. On the other hand, the family sports fashionable and respectable clothing in light colours to mirror both their pure morals and genes. As is suggested by his high-quality suit, the father has a stable job. Similarly, the mother is dressed modestly with her hair up and out of her face; this implies that she is working in the home and raising the children. These children are following in their parents' footsteps. The girls cling to the mother, suggesting that they will also produce Aryan children and help further the "ideal" race, while the son is next to his father. The boy is holding books, indicating that he is being educated (perhaps in a Hitler School) and will be following his father into the workforce. The stark contrast between these two sides of the slide, from a contemporary perspective, seem almost comical in their caricature. However, when compared to images today, the exaggeration remains.

Hugh Gallagher looks at the oppression of disabled individuals in Nazi Germany and questions whether such a genocide could happen in modern-day America.[17]

“NOTING THAT ‘BOTH SOCIETIES WORSHIP WELL-BEING AND FITNESS, [AND THAT] YOUTH, BEAUTY AND ATHLETICISM ARE IDOLIZED,’ GALLAGHER IMPLIES THAT PUBLIC OPINION IN MODERN AMERICA, LIKE NAZI GERMANY, HOLDS THAT THERE IS SUCH A THING AS A ‘PERFECT BODY.’”

This thought experiment focuses on the two countries' socio-cultural similarities; this includes social hierarchies, limited healthcare funding, and the importance of beauty and health.[18] He concludes that because of the American Disability Rights Movement, modern laws, and social views, persecution of the disabled community would not happen in the modern era. However, the similarities Gallagher finds between the two countries are worthy of discussion—especially from the perspective of critiquing visual representations of disability. Noting that "both societies worship well-being and fitness [and that] youth, beauty and athleticism are idolized,"[19] Gallagher implies that public opinion in modern America, like Nazi Germany, holds that there is such a thing as a "perfect body." He goes on to note that "the starkest difference between the two societies, however, is that the state is paramount in the culture of Nazi Germany whereas the individual is paramount in American culture."[20] The importance of the individual is what is emphasized in modern images of disability in the West; this is epitomized by Paralympic athletes. A prime example of this in Western media is a photograph published in the *Telegraph* (UK) during the 2012 Paralympic Games in London.[21] Overall, the image has an effect that harkens back to Nazi German propaganda.

The photograph shows Jonnie Peacock, a Paralympian runner with a prosthetic leg, in a stadium absent of spectators. The lack of spectators in the stands behind him reminds the viewer that the Paralympics are less watched, and consequently, less relevant to able-bodied society than the Olympics. The single competitor in the image also becomes easier to recognize as "not the default body" since he is not shown among his competitors. In this photograph, Peacock is seemingly frozen in space and time, which makes him an object for able-bodied viewers to spectate and allows the emphasis to be on his disability and not his athleticism. This misrepresents the disabled athlete as not fully human.

In this shot, the photographer accentuates the athlete's left leg and right arm, while his prosthetic leg is cast in the darkness—thus juxtaposing these limbs against his missing one. This hints at a morality between good and bad, light and dark. This also mirrors the German propaganda image, with the disabled man cast in shadow. Although the figure's dark pants draw the viewer's eyes further down towards his disability, the perspective of this image has the viewer literally looking up at the runner and puts him on a different level from the observer. Moreover, the bright lighting targets the figure and nothing else that further emphasizes the idea that the athlete is put on a pedestal for viewers. Unfortunately, this pedestal prevents him from being portrayed as a real human being and continues to further differentiate him for his body.

This image exemplifies a common trope among modern images of disability. Borrowing from Garland Thomson's identification of stereotypes of disability in photographs, this specific example can be categorized as "The Wondrous."[22] This type of shot is achieved by "position[ing] the viewer below the image of disability, [and] inviting the viewer to look up with wonder and awe. Deification constructs disability as something different and removed from normal life."[23] This manipulation of distance and the spatial difference changes how the viewer perceives the subject, and in turn, evokes a feeling of othering. Nancy Quinn and Karen Yoshida confirm this othering through an examination of the CBC's coverage of the 2004 Paralympic Games. Here, they conclude that sport journalism and media reinforce ableist views on disability, which consequently shape how society views disabled people. They note that a key way this is accomplished is through the concept of "supercrips": a supercrip representation is when an "athletic achievement triumph[s] over the personal tragedy of impairment."[24] In the end, this harms disabled people by indicating that disability is not acceptable within society unless it is overcome. This idea echoes how Nazi ideology dictated what type of contribution to society was acceptable.

The idea of shared values when some of those values are, as Gallagher identifies, beauty and health, can be oppressive for those with disabilities. A movement towards embracing multiple body types in modelling has grown within the past decade. These changing ideologies show that the process for lifting stigmas is a long and arduous one, but they also demonstrate that visual depictions in society reflect social values. As our society changes towards valuing many types of bodies, so too is what we see depicted. These values get reflected in both images through a clear othering of disability, which is accomplished within three specific

frameworks: financial, moral, and the objectification of bodies. First, an economic perspective is used in both images to denote the difference between disabled and able-bodied people. The Nazi propaganda slide declares that people with disabilities leech off of the State and represent an economic burden to society. This is similar to the image of the Paralympian, as the stadium behind the athlete is shown empty to subtly remind the viewers that the Paralympics are poorly attended and generate less revenue. Secondly, by manipulating light and darkness in the images, there is a vilification of the disabled men. The Nazi propaganda slide accomplishes this by depicting the disabled man wearing a dark suit to contrast the genetically healthy family in the light. The Paralympic image takes a similar approach as the athlete's prosthetic leg is cast in darkness and posed in the background while his other limbs are basked in light and take forefront. Finally, an altered sense of time in both images contributes to the othering of disabled bodies. The Nazi propaganda image depicts the disabled man's shadow both before and after him while the Paralympian is shown frozen in space and time. This technique others the disabled figures in that able-bodied viewers can continue to examine their bodies and project their views of disability onto the figures without considering their humanity.

There is a relationship between modern images of disability in media and the two-dimensional portrayals that flourished in Nazi Germany. These portrayals began as a way to exhibit racist and ableist cartoons through slideshows that worked towards "a central goal of the Nazi project … [in] the shaping of a new subject that was to be an active, willing and worthy participant of the new society."[25] This goal was partially achieved through propaganda. Therefore, as citizens, we must constantly be vigilant of the narrative that is being told to us. Modern images of disability still carry elements that are used to fictionalize disability as a "life not worth living" through dehumanization and an appeal to both economics and morality. Although Gallagher asserts that something akin to the T4 program would not occur in contemporary North America, a critique of the economic and moral values that could cause such a thing is necessary, especially when these values are being perpetuated in images by the media. Moreover, while Western media has improved significantly in terms of inclusivity and free speech, the underlying representation of disability in the media fails to present well-rounded humans who have stories to tell outside their disability. ■

EDITORS
Tatiana Povoroznyuk & Dankile Lin

NOTES

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8. David Welch, "Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft: Constructing a People's Community," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (2004): 214.

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11. Thomas Wiles Arafe Jr., "The Development and Character of the Nazi Political Machine, 1928–1930, and the Nsdap Electoral Breakthrough," LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses, 2909 (1976): 143.

12. Wiles Arafe Jr., 144.

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16. Dan Goodley, *Dis/Ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 58.

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(Re)defining Reconciliation in Moshekwa Langa's *Temporal Distance (with a Criminal Intent) You Will Find Us in the Best Places*

Moshekwa Langa, *Temporal Distance (with a Criminal Intent) You Will Find Us in the Best Places,* 1997.

AUTHOR: AIDEN TAIT

The 1995 South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) intended to "provide a forum for both victims and perpetrators [of apartheid] to share their stories and bear witness to historical harms and injustices in an open, public forum."[1] The terms and expectations for the TRC's notion of reconciliation, however, did not account for the lasting effects of the legacy of apartheid on post-apartheid South Africans. Neither did it account for the complex and highly personal processes of the (re)construction of national identity and the tentative navigation of "home" that would follow such an immense period of destabilization in South African history. As such, how may we navigate socio-political and cultural reconciliation within a post-apartheid South African contemporary art forum? How might we propose a form of visual reparation? By "visual reparation" I refer to a specific means by which these processes of mapping national, cultural, and personal identities operate outside of the TRC and its conflation of absolution with closure. Consequently, visual reparation instead offers a platform upon which post-apartheid artists may (re)define and interrogate the impact of the TRC's definition and implementation of "reconciliation."

At the heart of this paper's analysis is the shifting, uncertain notion of "home" in post-apartheid South Africa. Subsequent to the implementation of the apartheid regime in 1948 under the Afrikaner National Party, the institutionalized segregation of the races resulted in the forced eviction of non-white South Africans from their homes and the resettlement of black South Africans into ten *bantustans* ("tribal homelands"). While tentatively "reconciled" under the banner of a democratic republic following the abolition of apartheid in 1994 under the African National Congress (ANC) party, post-apartheid South Africa was a new, shaken nation. The formulation and impact of the TRC in 1995–97 and the opening of the Second Johannesburg Biennale in 1997 made clear that "home" to many non-white South Africans was imbued with a complex history of socio-cultural and political tensions, memories, and national and personal trauma that could not be so easily reconciled. For South African-

born, Amsterdam-based artist Moshekwa Langa, his 1997 multimedia floor piece *Temporal Distance (with a Criminal Intent) You Will Find Us in the Best Places,* showcased in the Second Johannesburg Biennale, explores "home" through geography, memory, and the detritus of urban living. A metropolis of miscellaneous bric-a-brac linked by a network of thread, empty whisky and Coca-Cola bottles, toy cars, and rubber mice make up a dynamic, sprawling map. This paper argues that by understanding *Temporal Distance* as a form of visual reparation, the piece throws into relief the unreliability and insufficiency of state-sanctioned, state-supervised national reconciliation. *Temporal Distance* instead speaks to the role of post-apartheid contemporary art in the examination of the TRC's strictly linguistic and frequently evangelical definitions and expectations of reconciliation.

I propose that by apprehending and analyzing post-apartheid South African contemporary art as a form of visual reparation, a more nuanced and necessarily critical (re)definition of reconciliation for a contemporary art historical reading can be tentatively reached. To explore this route, this paper will engage with four areas: 1) the socio-historical contexts of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa that led to the introduction of the TRC; 2) the impact of the TRC; 3) the role of the Second Johannesburg Biennale as a contemporary art forum; and 4) an analysis of *Temporal Distance* as a form of visual reparation, contextualized within Langa's biography, oeuvre, and the Second Biennale. I will discuss how understanding its specific works as forms of visual reparation allow us to analyze how they engaged with or challenged notions of national and/or personal reconciliation as outlined by the TRC. More specifically, I will interrogate how these works engaged with reconciliation without directly representing, and therefore being restricted by, the TRC's much-criticized and limited definition of "reconciliation." It is through this art historical lens that I will engage in a critical reading of Moshekwa Langa's *Temporal Distance*, ultimately exploring the impact of framing his work as a form of visual reparation.

APARTHEID AND POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Following the election of the National Party in 1948, the system of apartheid institutionalized the segregation of races through rigid economic, social, and political separations. Many of these separations originated in the 1959 Bantu Self-Government Act, which enabled the forced eviction of non-white South Africans from their homes. Through the policy of "resettlement," they were placed into self-governed but strictly monitored segregated neighbourhoods and business sectors in urban areas, as well as ten *bantustans* to which the black population was restricted. Families were often separated. Under the Bantu-Self Government Act, the white minority legally owned most of the country and relied on black labour to increase white economic power. In addition, non-white South Africans experienced immense social and racial stratification as a result of the formalized racial classification system established by the Population Registration Act of 1950. In accordance with this act, the South African population was divided into four distinct racial groups based on the specific physical appearance, ancestry, and socio-economic status of individual citizens: "Black," "White," "Colored" (a multiracial ethnic group), and "Indian." "Home" became an unstable, unreliable concept for non-white South Africans, one of shifting geographies, subjective citizen rights, racial violence, and enforced censorship.

The road to dismantling the apartheid regime was violent and unpredictable. An immensely transitional period between 1990 and 1993 led to the 1994 general elections, in which the African National Congress party took the majority of parliamentary seats[2] and Nelson Mandela was sworn in as South Africa's first black president. The newly elected ANC implemented a number of socio-economic reforms to address the racial inequalities institutionalized by the apartheid regime. Yet, a black-led political government functioning under a white-dominated economy, high rates of unemployment and poverty, and sustained racial violence led many South Africans to ask one question: how can a nation that has been dismantled into factions be reconciled? Many hoped that the introduction of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission would answer this question.

THE TRC

The TRC was instituted as a restorative justice body per terms set out in the 1995 Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act. The act mandated a series of public hearings in which victims of human rights violations would give statements about their experiences during apartheid and perpetrators could offer testimony and request amnesty from civil and criminal prosecution. This body was designed to offer reparation and rehabilitation to victims of apartheid as "part of the bridge-building process designed to help lead the nation away from a deeply divided past to a future founded on the recognition of human rights and democracy."[3] As stated by chairperson Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the *Final Report* of the TRC, "By accounting for the past we can become accountable for the future."[4] Here, acknowledgement of the gross human rights violations under apartheid was intended to provide a foundation upon which a new democratic, empathetic, and unified Republic of South Africa could build itself. While the TRC was domestically and internationally recognized and many visitors found it successful, others deemed it insufficient due to the restorative rather than retributive justice process. For many, the commission's call for confession and catharsis functioned to "absolve the sins of apartheid through a form of communal expiation aimed at the evolution of a new pattern of public morality,"[5] and, in the very words of the TRC, to "shut the door on the past—not in order to forget it but in order not to allow it to imprison us."[6] The TRC's prescription of forgiveness as a method of healing and nation-building risks containment of the atrocities of apartheid and enforced closure of wounds that cannot be healed simply through testimony, and so soon after apartheid itself. While the TRC acknowledges that the past has "the uncanny habit of returning to haunt one,"[7] it neither accounts for the extent to which the past would come to haunt post-apartheid and contemporary South Africa, nor provides adequate methods of reconciliation beyond confession and contrition.

To "shut the door on the past" is to necessarily enact a state-sanctioned containment of history to a singular, past occurrence, thereby isolating the events and atrocities of apartheid to one specific period of time and de-legitimizing or glossing over the aftershocks. Post-apartheid incidents of racial violence and discrimination included sustained xenophobic rhetoric enculturated in schools and urban centres, fractured communities, and families that struggled to reorient themselves while establishing some stable notion of "home." These socio-economic and political effects of South Africa's international isolation during apartheid were relegated to the realm of the past or went largely unacknowledged. The hearings-based, court-ordained transcription of the victims of apartheid's narratives locates reconciliation within a strictly linguistic forum that is inherently teleological and privileged in its format. It assumes the universal accessibility of verbal and written language and communication for all South Africans, that talk therapy—and, ultimately, that was what the TRC came down to—entails neat psychic closure for all.

David Gaertner identifies TRCs as "an important part of the way nations and politicians resolve conflict arising from historical injustice, civil unrest, war, and dictatorship … [the South African TRC] is widely viewed as a triumph because of its ability to identify the events and emotions surrounding the apartheid regime, while also positively influencing the state's political and economic circumstances."[8] Reconciliation depends on the acknowledgement of place and of memory and the apartheid regime's denial of both of these things. The TRC attempted to enact this acknowledgement in its testimonies, certainly, but a state-sanctioned notion of reconciliation did not sustain an effective space for addressing the effects of the legacy of apartheid felt by post-apartheid South Africans. To limit the dialogue of memory and trauma to a linguistic forum mediated by a government and judicial body and filtered through evangelism is to implicitly re-enact the apartheid regime's censorship of other mediums of expression and resistance.

The Medu Art Ensemble, for example, was founded in 1977 by a coalition of "cultural workers" who had fled the South African *bantustans* and lived in exile in Gaborone, Botswana. Their political posters held the greatest sway for resistance groups in Botswana and South Africa, as they were accessible cultural products

“To limit the dialogue of memory and trauma to a linguistic forum mediated by a government and judicial body and filtered through evangelism is to implicitly re-enact the apartheid regime’s censorship of other mediums of expression and resistance.”

that operated outside of privileged, white spaces and institutions (such as galleries). This accessibility meant that Medu was often subject to pressures of self-censorship in Botswana (which occupied a tense position as a border country where many exiled South African political and socio-cultural activists fled) and to outright censorship in South Africa. Censorship laws doubled during the state of emergency declared in 1985 following increased outbreaks of violent resistance, three years after the 1982 Culture and Resistance festival hosted by Medu in Gaborone. The festival discussed the role of art in the pursuit of a future democratic South Africa, highlighting the fact that “artists were not only used by the progressive movement to serve its needs, artists were in the forefront of the changes happening in the country and they were often ahead of the game when it came to figuring out what the next step should be.”[9] As a result, the ruthless enforcement of censorship laws sought to contain the cultural production of the artist-activist precisely because of the accessibility, breadth of expression, and empathy a visual forum offered to all levels of society.

While empathetic in its intention, the TRC implicitly mirrored aspects of the apartheid regime’s censorship of cultural production and consumption. It limited the ability for a victim to express the traumas and memories that the victim sustained, thereby restricting the notion of “reconciliation” to the realm of judicial, governmental language and rhetoric. The “success” of the TRC is largely due to its effective mobilization of linguistic capital; however, for those who participated in the hearings and who did not necessarily possess this linguistic capital or the means to mobilize it, a language-based forum was immensely restrictive. Reconciliation therefore necessitates a new definition beyond those articulated by “the language of the church, psychotherapy, and nation-building,”[10] one that challenges the use of forms of linguistic capital as “euphemising tools when dealing with narratives of trauma.”[11]

For a nuanced art historical reading of South African artists’ responses to apartheid and reconciliation, the answer to this (re)definition lies in the implementation of visual reparation. As such, a new platform for reconciliation was needed, one that the 1997 Second Johannesburg Biennale tentatively initiated in the form of a contemporary art forum.

THE SECOND JOHANNESBURG BIENNALE

Exploring displacement, migration, exile, and trauma in the formation of concepts of identity and home, the Second Johannesburg Biennale, "Trade Routes: History and Geography," took place from October 1997 to January 1998 in Johannesburg and Cape Town. It was co-curated by Nigerian-born, New York-based Okwui Enwezor and six other curators, and diverged sharply from its predecessor, "Africus" (1995), in its intellectual framework and focus on issues of postnationality and globalism. More than 160 artists from sixty-three countries participated in the biennale,[12] though only thirty-five artists were South African.[13] Conceived in a rapidly changing socio-cultural and political environment, the Second Biennale witnessed two defining events in South African history: the 1997 implementation of the 1996 South African Constitution and the public hearings of the TRC. In the Constitution draft, an all-inclusive constitutive assembly outlined the rights and duties of its citizens; it introduced, for the first time, an extensive bill of rights that listed the civil, political, economic, and socio-cultural human rights and protections for *all* South African citizens. For those participating in the TRC or watching its proceedings, the public hearings demonstrated just how subjective and privileged those human rights were up until 1997.

What of visual reparation as reconciliation, then? In her analysis of the role of artistic representations of and responses to trauma in post-apartheid South Africa in the wake of the TRC, Erin Mosely observes that the TRC's method of articulating trauma through the mediation of language has certain limitations. She agrees with the large body of criticism the TRC received prior to and during its proceedings, stating that "the subjective, personal and multi-layered experiences of living during the Apartheid era were reduced to nothing more than a series of legal violations—and civil/political rights violations at that."[14] Mosely instead calls for an alternative method of expression that she believes the open forum of the art gallery provides. She argues that following changes in cultural institutions in the wake of South Africa's transition to democracy, art galleries provided public and nationally recognized spaces within which contemporary artists could navigate, respond to, and contemplate the atrocities they had witnessed or had faced personally during apartheid. More specifically, these artists were empowered by a mode of expression that functioned outside of the court-sanctioned terms and constraints of the TRC.[15]

However, what is significant about this suggestion, and what makes it critical to my proposal for visual reparation as reconciliation, is that Mosely identifies the art gallery as a "memory site," or as a platform through which "individual memories can function as a valuable resource—sometimes the only resource—in establishing the 'truth' about a particular historical period."[16] Memory is at the centre of atrocity and recovery, and therefore the methods by which we frame memory, the specific ways in which we remember and interrogate the past—what may be broadly understood as "memory work"—are critical. For the TRC, for instance, language functions as tool of the linguistic memory work enacted in the hearings and transcription of the hearings. In contrast, visual culture in the art gallery enacts memory work through visual production, expression, and consumption. The Second Johannesburg Biennale operated as one such memory site. It was a controversial, often locally detached memory site, criticized for its ironically restrictive international focus despite its position at the heart of a socio-political moment of such paramount importance to the precarious establishment of a nation, but it was a memory site, nonetheless. Apprehending it as such allows for a broader understanding of the visual memory work that the Second Johannesburg Biennale facilitated despite the public's misgivings, particularly by that perhaps problematically small pool of South African artists involved, who produced provocative interrogations and confirmations of memory and place that the TRC did not discuss as effectively.

The biennale was internationally lauded for its erudite sophistication in its step away from the pluralistic approach of "Africus." Locally, however, the Second Biennale was seen as too detached, too isolated from the realities felt by South Africans at the time. Carol Becker makes the poignant observation that for many South Africans, "It did not seem to facilitate the conversation that South Africans were having with themselves,"[17] and she argues that discussing postnationality in a nation

“Memory is at the centre of atrocity and recovery, and therefore the methods by which we frame memory, the specific ways in which we remember and interrogate the past—what may be broadly understood as ‘memory work’—are critical.”

that was struggling to articulate itself *as a nation*, let alone a postnational one, was an abstract debate that left South Africa out of the critical dialogue that was being conducted.[18] Nevertheless, Becker makes a particularly compelling argument in her postscript for how the repositioning of the biennale’s focus on the issue of reconciliation might reposition South Africa not as the isolated host but as the active leader and participant in the biennale. Relocating the biennale from its globalized, postnational heritage to that of a specifically South African historic moment[19] is vital—particularly when that very historic moment was occurring only blocks from one of the exhibits: in the opening days of the biennale, the TRC hearings were being conducted in the Sanlam Centre near the *Electric Workshop* exhibition in Newtown, Johannesburg.

Becker’s suggestion and many of the criticisms of the Second Johannesburg Biennale are essential for their focus on postnationality in a country that was only just starting to grasp what it meant to be a nation. However, to articulate or incorporate reconciliation (as defined by the TRC) in a visual forum is to expect those works that interrogate processes of reconciliation to conform to the linguistic and court-sanctioned structure and method of mediation that the TRC utilized. This also implies that in order for those works’ interrogation of reconciliation to be recognized, they must conform to this specific structure and method of mediation. It is not simply a case of translating “reconciliation” into a visual forum. Gaertner makes the important distinction that “the very idea of ‘reconciliation’ is altered whenever it is conveyed into another language and socio-political context.”[20] The word “reconciliation” cannot simply be translated into other languages, cultures, or specific contexts like the biennale without that word undergoing some sort of recontextualization or implicit redefinition. Understanding these works as forms of visual reparation, then, as works that respond to personal or national reconciliation through a *visual* vocabulary or a visual rhetoric rather than just a linguistic rhetoric, would correspond to Becker’s suggestion. It would also offer a nuanced, specifically art historical reading in memory sites like the Second Johannesburg Biennale. Consequently, it is through this lens that I will now turn to *Temporal Distance*.

MOSHEKWA LANGA AND *Temporal Distance*

Moshekwa Langa (b. 1975) was born in rural Bakenberg in northern South Africa in what was then the semi-independent *bantustan* of KwaNdebele. Despite Langa having no formal artistic training prior to his first solo show in September 1995 in the Rembrandt van Rijn Gallery in Johannesburg, his sudden success saw to his participation in several biennales—Johannesburg (1997), Istanbul (1997), Havana (1997), São Paulo (1998 and 2010), Gwangju (2000), Venice (2003 and 2009), and Lyon (2011)—as well as in solo and group exhibitions. It was his considerable portfolio that effectively cemented his spot in the small elite of black artists that would emerge from post-apartheid South Africa. He later studied at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam in 1997–98. Langa's work is primarily multimedia-based and is often oriented around the processes of documentation and mapping. Drawing on his experiences growing up in apartheid South Africa, when "home" became an increasingly distant, dislocated concept for many black South Africans, Langa creates intensely abstract, conceptual, and figurative pieces that "map" geographical and cultural networks and relationships of his past. He utilizes multiple materials in a single given work, incorporating paint, spray paint, ink, masking tape, and miscellaneous objects whose quotidian function often imply a nostalgia for stability, for objects of permanence in an ever-shifting world. His early works were largely conceptual and industrial in their tone and materials in a way that appealed to the international aesthetic at the time. Sabine Marschall suggests that the sudden elevation of Langa's work to the status of international "high art" at this time was largely due to how his works were interpreted; it was a question of "whether they can be seen to cater to concerns raised by current art debates and whether they lend themselves to interpretations privileged in contemporary theoretical discourses."[21] For Marschall, Langa's incorporation of the miscellaneous detritus and discarded remains of a developing modern democratic South Africa, in twisted sheets of corrugated iron and mutilated cement sacks, spools of wool and hundreds of empty glass Coca-Cola bottles—those scrapyard objects—allows for a certain element of adaptability to his work. It creates a surface upon which intellectual discourses of the contemporary art world, most originating in the international urban centres of Western Europe, may converse, conflict, or cohabitate simultaneously.

Langa's works are often likened to maps or networks and seen to be engaging in some form of spatiotemporal or personal navigation of memory, place, and self, and for good reason. He frequently recalls his growing up in the rural village of Bakenberg under apartheid and having to navigate what "home" constitutes for him. Bakenberg did not appear on official maps of the area used in his school—thus his home, and therefore he himself, did not exist within the national eye. Bakenberg was part of one of the ten *bantustans* to which the black population was displaced and restricted under apartheid. As previously discussed, from 1950 to 1983, the apartheid government's policy of mass "resettlement" literally restructured the very geography of the country, and with the abolishment of apartheid in 1994—and the subsequent abolishment of these *bantustans*—black South Africans experienced yet another wave of displacement. As such, there is an immense sense of a desire to be tethered to some kind of tangibility in Langa's work, a nostalgic longing to belong to something fixed and knowable in an ever-shifting landscape, a sea of objects, a space relegated to snatches of memory and dreams by the systematic erasure and denial of something as nebulous but as important as "home" by the apartheid regime. As Tracy Murinik observes, "Bakenberg became for Langa a deeply personal marker of relative distance from wherever else he found himself or felt himself or had to explain himself; a strongly formative location of belonging and un-belonging."[22] It is from this need to contextualize himself in relation to the landscape of Bakenberg—both its physical reality and his memory of it—and to reconcile old and new changing definitions of "home" and self in the wake of physical and socio-political displacement and re-placement of post-apartheid South Africa that *Temporal Distance* emerged. In order to understand how Langa engages with national and personal reconciliation within a visual forum, the nuanced art historical lens of visual reparation is not only necessary, but essential. *Temporal Distance* is a large multimedia floor installation first commissioned by Colin Richards for the

Graft exhibition. The 1997 iteration initiated a versatile but immensely personal, intriguingly conceptual series that spanned several years and several exhibitions, and whose shape and independent elements changed in every new environment depending on whatever objects or materials were at Langa's disposal at the time. As previously mentioned, the 1997 iteration makes use of a vast web of thread linked to spools of various sizes and colours, empty whisky and Coca-Cola bottles like skyscrapers, rubber mice, and toy cars caught in thread or paused as if consulting a map in the vast and consuming network of contained yet seemingly endless chaos. The frenzied, erratic movement invoked by the webs and lines of thread work in tension with the tall, static singularity of empty bottles and tall spools.

For his 2013 multi-piece installation *Counterpoints: Mogalakwena* at the Krannert Museum in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, we witness this same mapping and indexing of objects in the floor installation. For this part of the exhibit, Langa "spent almost a week shopping and collecting objects from libraries, schools, shops, flea markets"[23] to source second-hand books and used vinyls, unshaded lamps and dolls stripped of their clothes, linked by that characteristic myriad of wool and monolithic spools to create works that Ashley E. Sheriff uniquely refers to as "second-hand landmarks" in an endless, tangled world. A comparison of the two floor installations reveals an attachment to a certain sense of liminality in Langa's works, an almost dreamlike, fluid in-between-ness despite the intense disorder of the collected bric-a-brac. I have mentioned before the surface-like quality of Langa's works upon which interpretations may inscribe themselves. Certainly, within these disorganized maps, the objects in each installation, with no context, present themselves as empty signifiers, as hollowed-out commodified rubbish.

This is not to say, however, that the work is devoid of meaning by virtue of its lack of context or its chosen items. There is an undeniable sense of play threading through these works that suggests a cognizance of the desire to draw meaning from an otherwise miscellaneous or arbitrary display of items, and from this perspective *Temporal Distance* positions itself as distinctly self-aware of the deliberate choices that it is making. In a way, if we approach *Temporal Distance* as visual reparation, it becomes evident that the work is centred on a denial of language, of signification—a denial of the precise terms with which the TRC was conducted. Instead, *Temporal Distance* occurs in the imprecise realm of memory and contained temporality, of abstract streets, fictitious avenues, and incomplete second-hand landmarks frozen in time and in motion. It is a landscape of memory in which Langa may reconstruct the Bakenberg of his childhood, which the atlases and maps of his school denied him; of a home, as tenuous and contrived as it was; and of a sense of self and self-existence the apartheid regime sought to systematically efface from the surface of the country. For Murinik, "The relative distance that Bakenberg represents as a point of evaluation for all of Langa's experiences has become not only spatial and experiential, but also temporal—an imagined, longed for time in containment and relative simplicity and uncomplicatedness."[25] Interestingly, while the work presents the image of a sprawling, busy city, the piece is nevertheless overtly contained to its designated floor space. It does not encroach upon the surrounding works; it is at once self-consciously self-contained and regulated by the space of the exhibit. Understood within the context of Bakenberg and the forcible resettlement of black South Africans into *bantustans*, a visual reparation lens reveals how *Temporal Distance* interrogates the spatial and political containment measures of the apartheid regime outside of a linguistic forum. Rigidly contained within the space of the exhibition, *Temporal Distance* pushes up against the unseen but strictly observed borders that designate the separation of "piece" from "gallery," "home" from "nation." Despite bursting with chaos and life within, the geographic and spatial dynamics of *Temporal Distance* articulate the non-white South African's struggle to bridge that separation. Reconciliation of self and memory is attempted by Langa here, but it is deliberately not wholly realized.

There is no certainty or closure that comes from reading *Temporal Distance*. Despite its construction as a fantastical, abstract cityscape positioning Langa and his place in his constantly changing worlds of apartheid/post-apartheid South Africa, Amsterdam, New York, and Paris, it remains, ultimately, a memory. In it we witness

"Instead, *Temporal Distance* occurs in the imprecise realm of memory and contained temporality, of abstract streets, fictitious avenues, and incomplete second-hand landmarks frozen in time and in motion. It is a landscape of memory in which Langa may reconstruct the Bakenberg of his childhood, which the atlases and maps of his school denied him; of a home, as tenuous and contrived as it was; and of a sense of self and self-existence the apartheid regime sought to systematically efface from the surface of the country."

what Colin Richards, when discussing what he envisioned for the *Graft* exhibition, calls the "shifting layers and undertows of cultural and political violence"[26] that subtly weave through the work, that persist even in this dreamlike state and that refuse both the work and Langa closure. Through a visual reparation art historical lens, *Temporal Distance* refuses the expectation of immediate clarification or amelioration that the TRC outlined in its manifesto of national healing, and instead interrogates and makes manifest the lingering effects of separation, of those invisible borders that continue to define the realities of post-apartheid South Africa.

Visual reparation for Langa, then, manifests in mapwork, in visual navigation, as functioning beyond the linguistic and evangelical rhetoric of the TRC to develop a vocabulary of bric-a-brac, of fragmented memory, place, and self. It denies the particular truth that the TRC sought to establish and instead participates in the larger collective counter-memory that was being formed and publicized in the memory site of the Second Johannesburg Biennale. By viewing *Temporal Distance* as visual reparation, then, this paper has tentatively explored a new method by which to navigate national and personal reconciliation of self and home in contemporary art in post-apartheid South Africa. This new method does not rely on, and, in fact, confronts and even denies the restrictive linguistic and evangelical rhetoric of the TRC and its expectations of national healing through holistic amelioration and the construction of a specific, nationalized "truth." The systematic erasure of memory and of place by the apartheid regime manifests in the dreamlike, liminal maps of Langa's early works that attempt to contextualize and position Langa within the Bakenberg of his memory. Langa's specific form of visual reparation places *Temporal Distance* as quietly provocative and pervaded by an intimate longing for tangibility, for substance, and for closure in a piece that denies all three simultaneously. Understanding these post-apartheid contemporary works as forms of visual reparation, then, offers a nuanced art historical lens through which to approach works like Langa's in a manner that necessarily touches upon and critically questions the presence and consequences of the TRC on post-apartheid South African contemporary art.

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Sagorika Haque & Yige Wu

NOTES

1. Gaertner, 446.
2. Peffer, xvi.
3. Parliament of South Africa, 48.
4. Parliament of South Africa, 7.
5. Diala, 68.
6. Parliament of South Africa, 22.
7. Parliament of South Africa, 7.
8. Parliament of South Africa, 446.
9. Peffer, 173.
10. Young, 160.
11. Young, 146.
12. Becker, 87.
13. Becker, 87.
14. Mosely, 104.
15. Mosely, 108–9.
16. Mosely, 100.
17. Becker, 89.
18. Becker, 89.
19. Becker, 89.
20. Gaertner, 445.
21. Marschall, 58.
22. Murinik, 4.
23. Jayawardane.
24. Sherriff.
25. Murinik, 4.
26. Richards, 50.

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"Moshekwa Langa" (© 2009 Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, by permission).

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Momentum

AUTHOR: KATJA LICHTENBERGER

Dance **is an interdisciplinary performance piece that features Lucinda Childs's choreography, Philip Glass's musical score, and Sol LeWitt's film projection. First commissioned by the Brooklyn Academy of Music and performed in 1979, this piece was remounted in 2009 by the Richard B. Fisher Center at Bard College, in which a new set of dancers was paired with LeWitt's original film. Today, we may view this piece only as an archived video of its revived performance. We experience the (re)performance on a screen, re-iterating the doubling of the original performance. In this form, our experience of this timeless work builds endlessly on the film's multiplicity as it (re)performs its momentum for new spectators.**[1]

The screen is dark, and the performance begins with the introduction of the musical score. A tiny sequence of sounds repeats and evokes a twinkling, jumping sensation. It immediately taps into a rhythm of repetition, changing in subtle permutations that only emphasize its core integrity. This rhythm declares a ubiquitous presence.

As the stage illuminates, two dancers come flying out from the side curtain, moving in rhythm with the music. The dancers move swiftly across the stage, hopping and gliding, declaring their path in a whimsical flow. Their movements are highly precise and controlled, performing a sequence that echoes the repetitive nature of the musical score. They cross the stage in pairs, left to right interchangeably, in a constant, hypnotizing continuance. Their gestures repeat, like "the outgrowth of one movement traced again and again until it becomes defined in space."[2] The act of repetition emphasizes a gesture's intrinsic presence on stage.

The stage floor is marked by a network of orthogonal lines, mapping a grid that stretches beyond the platform's edges, pointing to a place beyond the theatre. A few minutes into the performance, the dancers on stage are accompanied by the illusion of another set of dancers. A projection of the original performers from 1979 is superimposed on the stage, creating a doubling of the dancers and of the grid. Our perspective as viewers becomes layered, and further complicated as the projection of the original performance shifts and becomes an aerial view. The grid is lifted off the ground and now also traces vertically on top of the stage. The apparent and virtual ground is penetrated, and the bodies of the dancers seem to float around on a vertical and spatial stacking of the grid matrix.

Fig. 1. Dance revival performance. Photo: Sally Cohn, c. 2009.

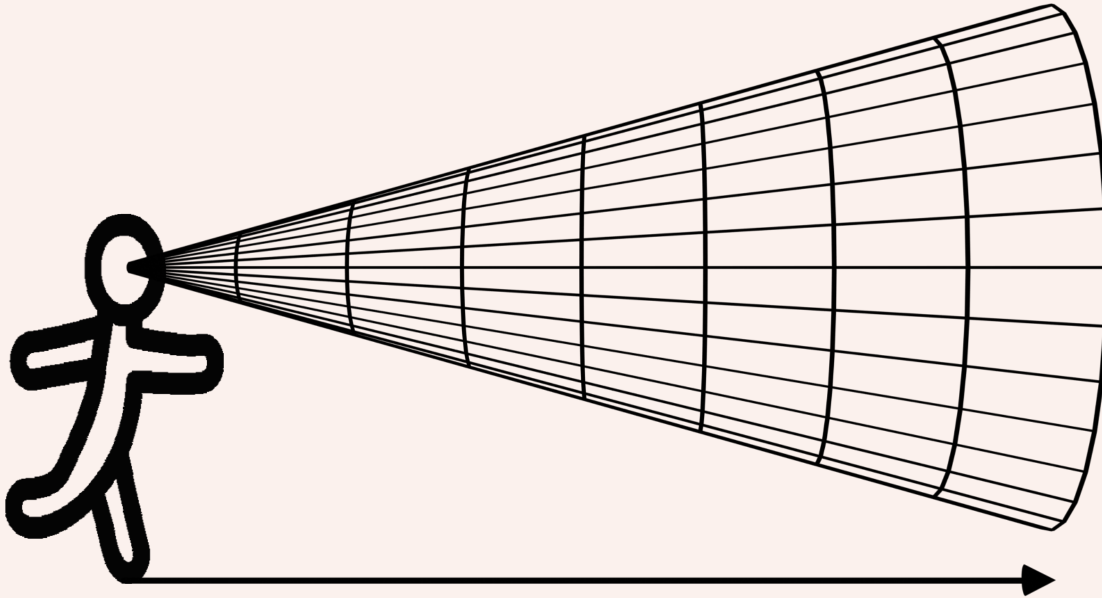

Fig. 2. Linear perspective announcing linear progress. Katja Lichtenberger, *Linear*, 2020.

The dancers and their projected doubles move together in unison, yet their differing scale gives the perception that they are transcending rational time and space. The performance seems to increasingly escape the rational confines of gravity and linear time as the doubling of perception layers multiple temporalities. In tandem, they seem to vibrate the rational fabric of space and time that is proposed by the grid's organized space. Viewers, therefore, also find themselves transcending into a conceptual in-between space. The rhythm set by the musical score and the dancers' movements follow the ever-expanding logic of the grid. The subtle modifications push a sense of undefined acceleration, reaching a crescendo that declares a new realm—a realm marked by an undefined conceptual logic of momentum.

This conceptual and experiential momentum is a condition that functions similarly to the condition of "groundlessness" as described by Hito Steyerl,[3] in which a viewer loses stable footing because of the multiplicity of perspectives, temporalities, and spaces present within a singular moment. It is a conceptual "free-falling" that is generated by our continuous acceleration and expansion toward nowhere in particular. *Dance* demonstrates this as it appears to have no conclusive end. The performance has "no 'organic' beginning, middle, or end, no reason why the composition shouldn't go on indefinitely."[4]

Analyzing *Dance* through this lens helps us to expand upon Steyerl's idea of groundlessness by identifying the free-falling momentum within the visual and non-visual manifestations of the performance, as well as the experience of the contemporary viewer.

The feeling of momentum in *Dance* is a re-articulation of the grid's paradoxical forces. It is an apt metonym of our experience of a "groundless" reality. The expansive, reiterative qualities of the grid, when compounded in *Dance*, create a sense of acceleration. The viewer senses a rising anticipation while simultaneously lifting away from the logical directions of up/down afforded by gravity and a stable perception. Hito Steyerl provides the conceptual framework for us to investigate the manifestation of this momentum through the logic of the grid. Let's first trace the mindful complexities of the grid as it has come to shape our world.

The grid has influenced our perception since the time of Renaissance humanism. The invention of single-point perspective rendered a scientific, rationalized, objective view of representation onto constructed images. By mathematically mapping the image in a perspectival grid, the space became predictable, manageable, and conquerable.[5] Consequentially, the function of the grid within single-point perspective not only transformed space, but also mapped the notion of linear time into the visual field as a mathematical prediction announcing linear progress.[6] The grid as an ontological myth became a transcendental tool, positioning "Art" to channel its own self-transcendence and placed the development of artistic practices in linear time, launching thought, innovation, and progress.

The grid exists as a prefabricated system, a methodology. It demonstrates a serial basis for reasoning. The logic within the seriality and repetitive nature of the three-component piece thus shares the same methodology. The logic of the grid registers conceptually through the application of this repetitive structure. This is realized in the realms of dance and musical composition through the formation of a careful synchronization, of which the root principle remains throughout limitless permutations. The grid is based upon repeating forms of its own structure, similarly doubling and multiplying.[7]

The concept that through time our understanding of the world will forever deepen, and that our intellectualism and rationalism will exponentially increase as humanity strives for self-transcendence, is what caused the objective destiny of linear perspective to collapse under its own weight.[8] Deconstructing the grid thus becomes an abstract method to overcome the limits of our self-awareness and expand our perception of ourselves. It entered Modernism as the activity of a transcendental ego,[9] becoming a model for consciousness and the systematization of oppositional spaces. It modelled a paradoxical nature. The logic of the grid as ontological tool occupied the space between essence and inessential, truth and non-truth. It remained as a method of the mind. As Suzi Gablik argues in *Progress in Art,* the achievement of abstraction in Modernism is the freedom from the demands of perceptual reality and its intent to reveal the mind to itself.[10] The grid took on an ambition of demonstrating a "thinking about thinking."[11] The root principle is the analysis of thought itself.

The logic of the grid "is the moment of grasping the idea or theorem that both generates the system and also explains it."[12] Tracing the development from linear perspective's ambition to impose a rational system to the grid's ability to depict the human mind itself brings forth a growing power and emphasis on the deification of human reason. It is as if we are searching for all answers by honing in on the root principle of ourselves, demonstrating humanity's conquest over nature. The limbo of this paradoxical intersection has no possibility for certainty or truth. It is static in its free-falling, floating state, as Steyerl describes.[13] Since any ground for truth has been abolished, we are left floating in the matrix as we have imposed it on our world, and here I'd like to propose the theory that we have encountered endless permutations of this state that seem to be increasingly accelerating—accumulating into a radicalization of the system and its logic. It is this accumulation of permutations that marks a momentum that shapes the appearance of the logic of the grid in visual and non-visual practices.

Let us examine how each component of *Dance* plays with this logic of the grid.

Philip Glass's musical score declares its presence by ingraining a rhythm of perpetual repetition. The subtle variations in melody only highlight the core structure of the sequence as it is duplicated repeatedly, while remaining fundamentally the same. The dance choreography that Lucinda Childs developed similarly demonstrates a rhythmic repetition. The dancers move on and off the stage in a perpetual manner, slightly varying their movement's tilt, glide, and catch. The flow of their movement gives the effect of a whimsical playfulness, yet meticulous precision and consistent devotion to a core structure make the performance so hypnotic. The rhythm that the music and dancers tap into depends on the same seriality that the logic of the grid rests upon. This serial basis effectively doubles and multiplies the musical and dance sequence endlessly, actuating a ubiquitous presence that propels anticipation and builds an infinitely growing momentum.

Sol LeWitt's contribution to the performance supports the manifestation of momentum through his

"The articulation of multiple layers in the structure of *Dance* demonstrates a new method of systematization away from the logic of linear progress and towards a matrix of homogenous space and time—as if time now stands still—halted in the undefined instance of linear momentum."

integration of the grid into his film. The orthogonal lines tracing the stage echo the repetitive patterns of Childs's choreography and Glass's musical score. LeWitt pushes this notion further by projecting his original film recording of the dancers that he produced in his studio, thus radicalizing the same methodology by reiterating it across multiple screens. He projects virtual dancers over the live performance, manipulating it by zooming, cropping, and collaging the footage together. In effect, the dancers double and multiply as their counterparts move in unison. LeWitt establishes a multiplicity of perspectives by superimposing a virtual grid atop of the stage, placing it diagonally and vertically, proposing an aerial perspective. Through the overlaying of multiple versions of the choreography and the grid, LeWitt creates a grid matrix that seemingly stretches endlessly in all directions, thus effectively manifesting the patterned accumulation and anticipation that conducts this momentum of groundlessness.

The trio's combined efforts to demonstrate a synthesis of these methods, from music to dance to visuals, affirm the extent to which the logic is irreducible to the material support. Furthermore, *Dance* exemplifies how this relentless momentum extends into our experience of the performance via the perspective of the groundless spectator.

Let us now consider the contemporary spectator, the one who views the artwork only through the mediation of video documentation.

The perception of this spectator is significant, because it contributes to the disoriented feeling of the present condition. What is evident in the contemporary spectator's experience of the digitally documented version of *Dance* is that we are in the midst of developing new perspectives and techniques of orientation that Steyerl so aptly describes.[14] The spectator's experience is marked by mobility—their perspective positioning them as if they are suspended in air, viewing the piece from above and around multiple angles. This articulates a "distanced, superior spectator," as Hito Steyerl termed in her writing on sovereignty in vertical perspective.[15] The articulation of multiple layers in the structure of *Dance* demonstrates a new method of systematization away from the logic of linear progress and towards a matrix of homogenous space and time—as if time now stands still—halted in the undefined instance of the linear momentum. The spectator's perspective gives the illusion of a universal space, wherein layers of generation and regeneration and variations are condensed.

Dance is an arena of difference, an interplay of opposing forces. It demonstrates a rhythm of constant generation and regeneration to the extent of the presence of perceptual disorder.[16] It demonstrates the radicalizing momentum of the linear progression of history, and the entropic disorder that our systematization brings forth. Sol LeWitt described this notion of entropy through the logic of his methodology in the grid: "In a logical thing, each part is dependent on the last. It follows a certain sequence as part of the logic. In a logical sequence, you don't think about it. It is a way of not thinking, it is irrational."[17]

In this way, a logical sequence enacts endless permutation, applying variations irrationally and endlessly. It is entropy, as a gradual decline into disorder, that reigns supreme in the grid's serial pattern and its avoidance of climax.[18] It gestures toward a crescendo, an accumulation; the subtle permutations build momentum and parallel the expansive progression and the evolution of perception. It executes the notion of entropy in an endless process with no final purpose or final destination. Momentum is anticipation: constant, regenerative anticipation.

Steyerl's concept of groundlessness and Childs's *Dance* both make the viewer feel anticipation for something undefined: the climax or resolution of some infinitely illogical thing. In this sense, I argue that while this free-falling sensation may hold us in suspension, it is anything but static. It is buzzing in this momentum, infinitely expanding and accelerating. We are moving with ever-increasing speed, running so fast we're falling—falling around an unconfined, undefined realm in infinite, intangible orbit.

Steyerl connects the feeling of groundlessness to the present moment and the paradoxical state of our domination over nature.[19] *Dance* was debuted in 1979, yet nevertheless reveals these uncertainties of our present reality by demonstrating the spatial and temporal elements that have propelled us here.

We find ourselves in darkness. The grid has vanished, and only one solo dancer remains on the centre stage. The light is hitting only her figure, floating in dark, suspended groundlessly. Dancing to an endless momentum. Even in its absence the grid continues. ■

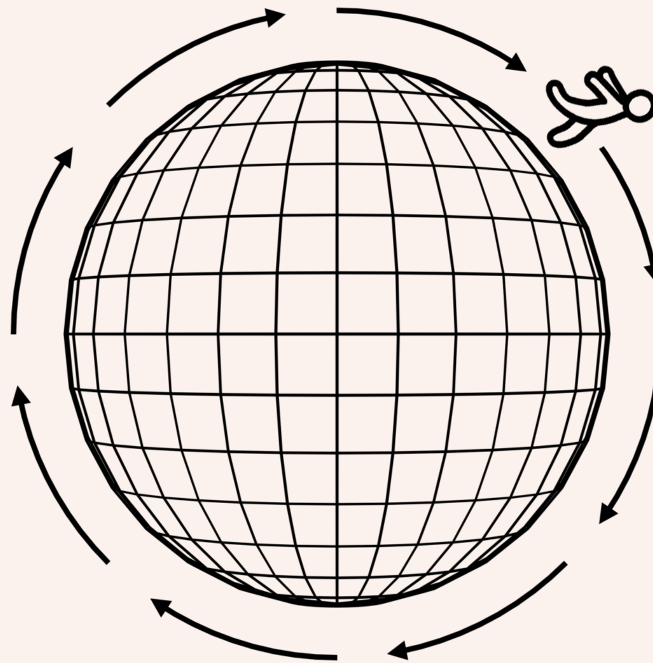

Fig. 3. Katja Lichtenberger, *Free-falling Orbit*, 2020.

EDITORS

James Albers & London Camaclang

NOTES

1. Unfortunately, viewers can experience only snippets of the archived video online, through sites such as Vimeo and YouTube. My intention is that the analysis of the work in this paper will shed more light on the experience of the piece in its entirety.

2. Amanda Jane Lamarra Graham, "The Myth of Movement: Lucinda Childs and Trisha Brown Dancing on the New York City Grid, 1970–1980" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2014), 127.

3. Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective," *e-flux* 24 (April 2011).

4. Jean Nordhaus, "Lucinda Childs at BAM," *Washington Review* 5, no. 5 (February–March 1980): 7.

5. Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 28–31.

6. Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall," 4.

7. Jennifer Hasher Goldstein, "Collaboration, Movement, Projection: The Interdisciplinary Structure of Lucinda Childs's Dance, 1979" (MA thesis, Stony Brook University, 2010), 1–61.

8. Jaleh Mansoor, ARTH 380: Art as Technology (University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2018).

9. Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 19.

10. Suzi Gablik, *Progress in Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), 147

11. Mansoor, ARTH 380: Art as Technology.

12. Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 50–64.

13. Steyerl, "In Free Fall," 6.

14. Steyerl, "In Free Fall," 6.

15. Steyerl, "In Free Fall," 6.

16. Lucy Lippard, "The Structures, the Structures and the Wall Drawings, the Structures and the Wall Drawings and the Books," in Sol LeWitt, ed. Alicia Legg (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978), 25.

17. Rosalind Krauss, "Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem in Series," in *Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1994), 90.

18. Bernice Rose, "Sol LeWitt and Drawing," in *Sol LeWitt*, ed. Alicia Legg (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978), 37.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW – EXHIBITION REVIEW – EXHIBITION REVIEW –
UJAH

Pain as Sonorous Dimension, Post-Imperial Healing and Spectral Counter-Narrative in *a sentimental dissidence*

AUTHOR: SAGORIKA HAQUE

Life in any diaspora is one of innate perplexity, with the struggles to weave and dissect oneself from a heritage strangely distant yet intimate. As a consequence, a purgatory-like emotional space can form, where temporality becomes fluid, the self is thrown into an existential drain, and questions of belonging, recollection, future, and belief arise. These are, thus, some of the themes central to Gabi Dao's exhibition *a sentimental dissidence.* Poignant and contained, *a sentimental dissidence* elucidates a complex yet heartfelt dissection of the pains of diasporic identity, the complications of memory, and growth beyond colonial loss. Deftly done and intimate, it finds grounding in her family's forced migration to Canada following the Vietnam War. Offering a well-fleshed-out, soulful glimpse into the complications of a nation's imperialist past and the integrality of counter-memory in community healing, Dao's works function as a means to traverse and reconcile such fractured landscapes of identity. Located at the artist-run centre grunt gallery on East 2nd Avenue in Vancouver, this solo-artist show ran from November 1 to December 13, 2019. Dao, who completed her BFA at Emily Carr University in 2014, utilizes film, sculpture, and sound to craft a fluid, mesmeric dream sequence of a space. This Vancouver-based artist draws on her familial roots—as well as research along the vast rivers and islands of the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam—to craft a fragmented, yet potently moving narrative of displacement, and, as the exhibition's eponymous phantom narrator, Coco, puts it, "haunting."

Photographed by Dennis Ha, courtesy of grunt gallery.

Within the modest gallery space, an enclosed rectangular room, the ambience is set immediately by soft incandescence and continual, gentle background audio. Soft hums and excerpts from "Foreign Accent Improvement" cassettes—used by Dao's immigrant parents in the 1980s—allow for sensorial immersion, as the instructional nature of the audio requires a willing listener. In this space, the willingness is made void, and the faint, mechanical fragments of accented audio make for an eerie, unsettling experience. Viewers become acutely aware of their own bodily presence, as the noise permeates the entirety of the isolated room, functioning as an illusory blanket of sorts. Dimmed by UV-reducing window vinyl, meagre sources of light in the space include the warmth of two key "somatically activated" sculptures, one entitled *you and i* and the other *i and you*, each standing near the gallery walls. Located on opposite ends, these freestanding human-sized models incorporate aluminum, tempered glass, and transducers in the shape of two intertwined faces accompanied by lavender, red, and mustard beaded curtains. The sculptures are placed strategically under yellow-toned spotlights to cast hypnotizing silhouettes of the faces, along with the viewer's physical form on the walls. Ghostlike mirrored surfaces in their centres complete the works, forcing the viewer to confront their appearance while entwined with those of the crafted faces. A lucidly intimate ordeal, the intermingling of shadows in this deliberate interactivity prove captivating. Although the two sculptures appear nearly identical, a sole contrast between the two is the inversion of the central

tempered glass faces—in one, the two faces appear to be enveloped in each other, while they are conversely turned away in opposite directions in the other. A striking choice on Dao's part, this subtle juxtaposition highlights the ever-shifting nature of a corporeal self that exists while entangled within two physical places. Thus, the audience is invited into and embedded within both her narrative space and the conversation around the variability of constructing identity. They become participants whose physical forms fittingly transpose with movement.

At the centre of the exhibition, both spatially and conceptually, is the focal, engrossing work *coco means ghost*, a 25-minute, 24-second single-channel video projected fittingly on a wall between the sculptures. The impact of this exhaustive work is further augmented by how sound is key in the viewer's experience of it: throughout the film are ambient and swelling background music, bird noises, the sloshing of river water, and the deep whir of a boat. Coming from speakers ingeniously situated on empty Canadian-produced coconut water cans, the set-up and audio allow for an intensified intimacy with Dao's stories, emphasizing the fluid boundary navigation between nations. Viewers are invited to watch the work on folded wooden chairs, made more comfortable with strewn earth-toned pillows, all inducing an ambiguous feeling about the cultural origins of their craftsmanship. One then embarks on a hypnotic three-part sequence accompanied by the pained, reverberating voice of Coco, a spiritual presence that takes the form of a coconut—its disembodied vocal source Dao herself. A sleek, yet nostalgic combination of personal photographs, archival material, and first-person commentary make for a compelling visual treat. Rich with brilliant vivid imagery of Southeast Asian past and present, the film immediately strikes with its opening shots of clouded green water and a faint voiceover of the Vietnamese alphabet. What follows is an immersive, emotional experience of humanity, scenery, and burden. "To whom does nationhood belong in a place filled with ghosts?" Coco poses evocatively. Enamouring shots keep the viewer transfixed on this earnest journey through space and time: lush rural Vietnamese scenery, virulent with greenery; men cutting green coconuts, torched in the sun; a sole national flag bobbing in the water. A boat lulls in lavender waves, cellphone towers visible in the gentle luminescent light; sun-kissed women work in rice fields, interspersed with bustling metropolitan streetscapes. "We waited a long time for this chance to move beyond imperial conquest," Coco narrates over the seamless shifts between landscape and personal testimony. "This is the version that begins with two eyes and a mouth … 'and' is the word between worlds … purgatory is a place where memories come, here eyes and ears wipe off dust." These notions of disjointed, cloaked memory and human presence concretize in the forms of Vietnamese locals recounting their harrowing experiences of U.S. invasion, following years of French and Chinese colonization. In a concurrent lighter vein though, featured memories include those of Ong Dao Dua ("Mr. Coconut"), a monk who founded a self-sustaining anti-war community in the mid-twentieth century on Con Phung, an island colloquially known as the Coconut Kingdom / Phoenix Island.

"While physical distance complicates ascertaining actualization of personhood, there is still an intense pull towards a sense of belonging."

It is Dao's exploration of the question "how do you remember the past the most?" that drives the melancholic soul of this work. Odd, almost cartoonish, overlays of memories in the same location and sudden bursts of heavily accented Vietnamese narration assert the film's unabashedly personal implications of Dao's ethnic roots. Coco's wishful lucid voice speaks of being from the "edge of the water" and how "in conversation between worlds, a ghost is not supposed to ask questions … the experience of haunting is an implication because of the inheritance of the weight we shoulder." These powerful proclamations are thought-provoking, encapsulating the harshness of a post-imperial, diasporic existence where distance from the spatiotemporal experience of homeland—whether forced or native—may indeed feel like being at the edge as a spirit. While physical distance complicates ascertaining actualization of personhood, there is still an intense pull towards a sense of belonging. Violent history can result in a unique pain that functions as an intergenerational burden, as evidence of the past lingers in the forms of memory and lost time. An individual like Dao, being a first-generation immigrant, carries this pain, and her struggle to reconcile with how it complicates identity is evident in her spectral role throughout the exhibition. "Persistence haunts through a self-made narrative; hyphenation is the new form," Coco offers over shots of a dark river rippling with orange city light. "Subjectivity survives ideology through a sentimental dissidence." Dao's art, then, is a form of personal resistance, ultimately demonstrative of her attempt at bridging the anguished gap between personhood and history. Nonetheless, Dao's painful, grief-filled examination of reconstructing a Vietnamese identity from cultural devastation is not without hope. Casting an encouraging, literal golden light over the film are the lively hued scenes of Ho Chi Minh City—sunlit marble statues of the Buddha and Jesus idle underneath wind-swept trees, vibrant local fruit, and lavish, glittering yellow and blue

jewelled stonework. Themes of rebirth are seen in this recurring visual motif of golden light as well as the emphasis on "Phoenix" Island. The artist dedicates the final section of the film to university students of biotechnology and their work on engineering coconuts "like their grandmother sold." Polished imagery of lab work and enthusiastic urban youth convey strong messages of the possibility and potential of a future beyond deep-rooted suffering. For a moment, the lines of identity, nationality, and historical experience blur through the meticulous marriage of sound and imagery, and the outcomes are resonant, insightful, and awe-inspiring.

Gabi Dao's *a sentimental dissidence* is a deep-cutting, wounded memoir that firms its grounding on displaced pasts. The laborious meshing of the contemporary and historical, personal and translocal supplement the stark, personal force of this exhibition. Despite the exhibition's modest scale, I found it immensely profound, comprehensive, and a clear labour of love. The artist's investigation of the painfully divisive nature of navigating an identity that is, in ways, caught between two worlds is brilliantly effective. The space moves and invites, and its parting notes of hope allow it to be more than simply critique, but rather a transcendental reclamation of narrative. It is a stirring, thoughtful contribution to ongoing discourse on conflict-driven introspection and post-colonial healing, a true and tender triumph. ■

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coco means ghost: screen and video, 25m24s, followed by a short pause. HD video, 2.1 sound, LED lights, cans of coconut water, photograph, bench and pillows.

you and i, i and you: sculptures and audio, 6m30s, followed by a short pause. Beaded curtains, UV-reducing window vinyl, transducers, tempered glass, aluminum.

ARTIST PROFILES – ARTIST PROFILES – ARTIST PROFILES – ARTIST PROFILES –
UJAH

YINGQIU ZHAO

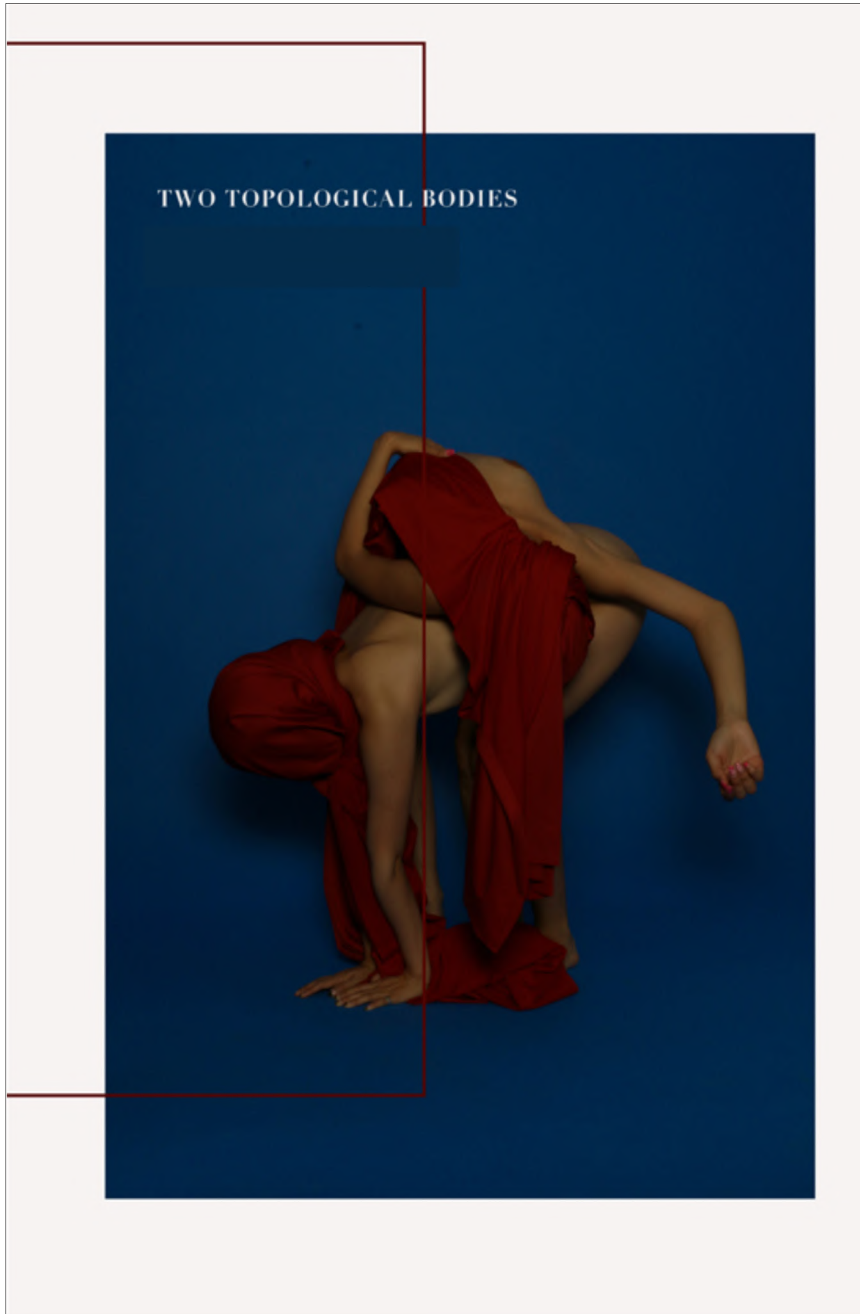
Yingqiu Zhao, Reproduced: (Artist) in Detaching and in Unifying

Walking me out of her studio, located on the third floor of the Audain Art Centre, Ophelia Zhao ran into her colleague and friend David Ezra Wang, who hugged her and said, "I am happy for you, Leyla Rose. I feel like you're back."

Wang's words might be confusing to people who do not know Zhao, as she is fond of creating and separating herself into different personalities. From our conversations, I have learned of five different personas: Yingqiu, the child of two "cynical Chinese intellectuals," Ophelia the Artist (now deceased), Leyla Rose the Artist (c. 2019), Ophelia the Art Critic, and, finally, Катюша (Katyusha), a 1920s-era communist activist. To explore such complex identities, while avoiding potential confusion, I will use her family name "Zhao" to address her, although "Ophelia" still functions as her name in everyday life.

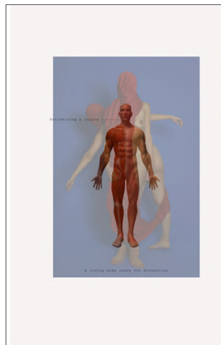
Zhao has "a dialectic obsession with Marxist theories." She told me that a fellow *UJAH* editor, James Albers, once said that Zhao's artist profile could be titled "The Artist in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility," referencing the well-known essay by Walter Benjamin, to demonstrate Zhao's fascination with the Frankfurt School. One would expect such love for theories would inevitably influence an artist's practice. However, Zhao aspires to limit the impact of theory on her practice. Mostly working with photography and performance, Zhao's artist personas begin projects without any theoretical or conceptual ideas. Instead, the personas think through the process of making art: going into the studio with artist partners and starting to work right away, with no clear objectives. As Zhao explains this to me, however, although she does not know what she wants the work to be, she knows what she does not want. For instance, in *Two Topological Bodies* (2019), she knew that she did not want the photographs to be sexual or reminiscent of Greek and Roman sculpture. Zhao's working habit of not starting with objectives reveals her careful approach to theory. This distance to theory relates to why Zhao consciously names her different personas and roles: her artist personas only consider the artworks, not the interpretations. This idea might appear odd at first, but everyone has different sides and roles; Zhao simply labels all of them, in order to protect the purity and independence of each persona.

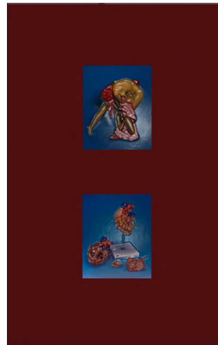
This is why Zhao killed Ophelia the Artist. "Ophelia has to die," Zhao told me, because the character, Ophelia, from *Hamlet*, is destined to die. Ophelia now lives as a critic, alongside Leyla Rose the Artist. The dissociation of art critic and artist prevents her "artist persona [from] residing in that entrapment of theory." Leyla Rose creates the work, and Ophelia critiques and interprets the work. She consciously draws the boundary between her identities and believes that the different roles of these personas would liberate her and provide more freedom for herself and especially for her audience: "I can leave my word agency for my critic persona and I can use the name to critique my work. That makes Ophelia the Critic talking about the works of Leyla Rose. That makes me feel way better." Such restriction of the artist's authority is also revealed in her everyday life. She does not explain or talk about her own works during critique in her classes, with special permission from her professors. Because of such consciousness of denaturalizing her authority over her artworks, Zhao only relates her works with theory using the identity as a critic, to interpret the meanings of these works. The works are always open to interpretation. Ophelia the Critic is only critiquing as an outsider to Leyla Rose's projects. Ophelia is no different from any other audience.

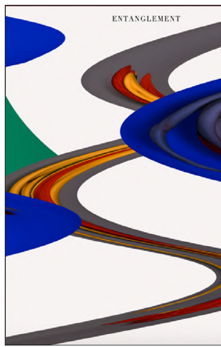


Two Topological Bodies, 2019.

ANATOMY



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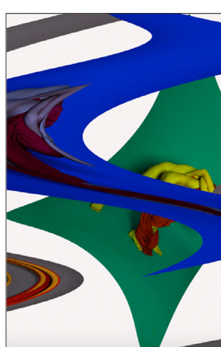

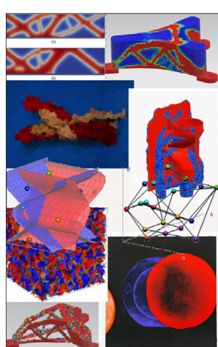

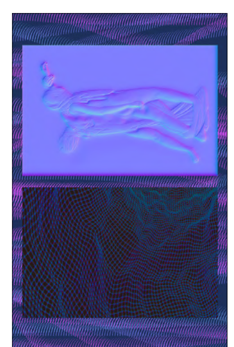

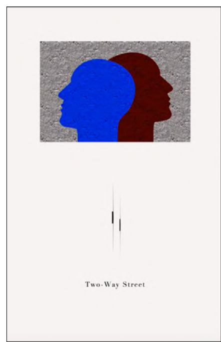
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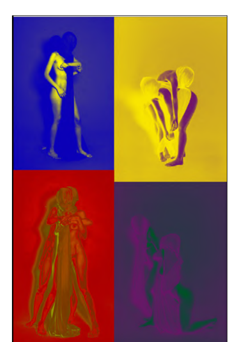

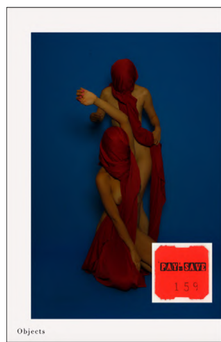
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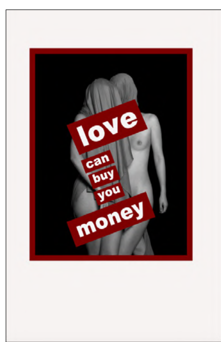
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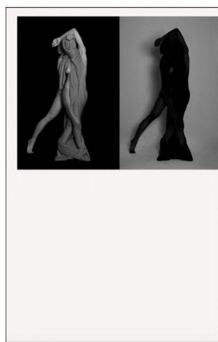

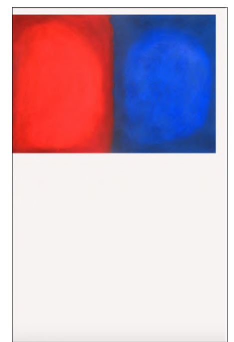

Ophelia the Artist died on a very cold day in November 2019, after performing *My Pain is Your Song* at UBC: "I had a harmonica attached to my mouth. I was almost naked. Because it was so cold, my rapid breathing was captured and transformed into a melody. That was my ceremony for the death of Ophelia. After that point, I felt it was the call for the death of Ophelia. Since then, I started to use the name Leyla Rose." She did not design this work as the death of Ophelia, but performing this piece, Zhao found a perfect moment to end Ophelia's duty as an artist. At the same moment, Zhao liberated Ophelia to exist only as a critic, to talk about art and even to theorize art. The death of Ophelia the Artist marked the birth of Leyla Rose as Zhao's artist persona. The name "Leyla Rose" came from a beautiful story that sounds almost made up: "My friends and I went to Queen Elizabeth Park to have a picnic and saw this random stranger playing the saxophone, so we started to dance with him because it was such a beautiful sound. Then he told us, 'You guys should check out my daughter, Leyla Rose, who's on YouTube.' I later searched online and there was no Leyla Rose, and I decided I am going to take over now." Zhao decided to give this name a new life—while adding that, when she feels the time is right, Leyla Rose will eventually die as well.

Although Zhao believes that visual representations always come before theories, her art frequently presents scientific theories. When I asked about this contradiction, Zhao explained that it is neither Ophelia nor Leyla Rose who use those scientific theories; she has a third-person persona, a quantum physicist, who introduces science to the artworks. Different from the personas mentioned before, this one is not a part of Zhao, since Zhao does not have a background in science; the quantum physicist is the "other," who can bring something different and exciting to Ophelia's art. He adds new dimensions and brings a new scientific perspective to the work. In *Two Topological Bodies*, Ophelia the Artist works with this quantum physicist, and they explore the relationship between quantum physics and love. Zhao suggests that science creates a sense of excitement and detachment for her. As she writes in a recent text-based project, discussing her relationship with quantum physics, "I am very fascinated—after all this fascination being an extreme detachment from my own conscious mind: something that is supposed to be so estranged to me suddenly sounded so familiar—the plethora of incorrect, misled, insoluble, contingent … all coexist and materially entangled with one another." Here, the fascination of science parallels Zhao's creation of different personas: she enjoys the detachment from her own conscious mind.

Throughout our conversation, Zhao presented such detachment. She did not tell me how theories affect her works, but told me how to eliminate the impact of theories; she did not tell me the relationship between her works and scientific theories, but told me that scientific language offers a sense of excitement; she did not tell me how she adeptly switches personas, but told me why having personas is important to her. She sees herself from an external perspective and labels different roles and personalities with names. Such perspective allows her to analyze herself, yet also creates a distance to her different personas. There are no easy ways to access Zhao's personalities. Perhaps only through the artworks can one get a peek inside the complex world of Zhao. ■

WRITTEN BY
Yige Wu

“Not enough Chinese to speak for Chinese, not enough Western to speak for Western; not aggressive enough to start a revolution, not rational enough to have a conversation. Not Marxist enough to criticize, not capitalist enough to purchase; not objective enough to be an object, not significant enough to be a sign ...”

—Yingqiu Zhao

ALGER LIANG

Alger Liang: Artist in Motion

Alger Liang destabilizes the functional opposites of our world that are meant to divide people into categories. His conceptual artworks allow seemingly contradictory devices to exist simultaneously; like two sides of a spinning coin, his subjects are constantly rotating. Liang's art practice begins with a series of questions, or fixations on the phenomenological paradoxes of identity. He often employs a queered methodology in his work, by challenging norms and the stability of "fixed" formats. Thus, his ability to contain multitudes derives from a remarkable capacity for empathy and from an adept manoeuvring around artistic constraints. In this way, Liang hopes to prompt further questions and inspire a more playful, fluid artistic community.

His photographic series *Portrait of Shanghai* (2018) is a documentation of events as well as a conceptual self-portrait. The humid air provides a hazy, cool-toned climate for Liang's analog camera. The wet asphalt, glass structures, and glimmering bodies create a curiously surreal effect. Somehow, the images seem to have been filtered through Liang's own memory. He challenges the very medium of photography by asking viewers to reconsider what or whom is the subject of this work.

For Liang, many circumstances collided during the creation of *Portrait of Shanghai*. He was competing in the World Racewalking Championships with Team Canada for 2018. Although it looks like a queered parody of human movement, racewalking is in fact a feat of endurance that requires superb physical conditioning. This competition was a testament to Liang's years of training. His other identity markers were also present in Shanghai: namely, his Chinese cultural heritage, his Canadian nationality, and his queerness, as linked symbolically to this sport. Notably, however, Liang is not defined by the flag on his jersey nor the Chinese site of these championships. Rather, *Portrait of Shanghai* articulates the feelings of longing and belonging that are tangible for people who live in multiple spaces at once.

The topography of Shanghai is framed alongside the awkwardly ambulating bodies of racewalkers in a manner that catches both off-guard. The racewalkers' bodies are twisted at the waist, due to sport's only two rules: one foot must always be in contact with the ground, and the supporting leg must remain straight. Liang's use of visual repetition pulls at the tension between these familiar and unfamiliar bodily forms. At first glance they may look awkward, but together, their figures affirm one another. Their growing sense of pride also reflects Liang's personal adjustment to Shanghai. His use of seriality provides a visual family for himself and the other racewalkers.

Portrait of Shanghai began with the question: how does our perception adjust according to the spaces we inhabit? This a key touchstone in Liang's art practice. His work is always situated within the mechanisms of transformation. "When I make art, I am (re)creating my world." Liang enacts a vision of someplace where emotional vulnerability is seen as a strength, and perception is malleable. *Portrait of Shanghai,* accordingly, is conscious of how the act of looking can turn into new ways of being. For Liang, this meant finding new communities in concrete and abstract spaces.

For his performance *One More Lap* at the Hatch Gallery in January 2019, Liang used this (re)creative agency to address his relationship with the past. The work references his first international racewalking competition, which took place in Cali, Colombia, in 2015. Liang began the 10,000m race around a 400m track at the IAAF World Youth Championships. However, due

Portrait of Shanghai, 2019.

One More Lap, 2018

I'm a _______ boy, in a ______ world, 2019.

to technical difficulties with volunteer lap counters and miscommunications, he stopped one lap short of the required twenty-five laps, mistakenly thinking that he had completed his race. He was notified of his disqualification afterwards and received a "DNF" (did not finish). *One More Lap* was a performative mimesis of this event, although this time, Liang was in control of its results.

Large canvas sheets were installed at the Hatch Gallery on the floor and the wall. They served to record Liang's racewalking steps as he tracked red paint on the bottoms of his feet and smeared the gallery wall with the outside of his upper arm. The performance was a cathartic experience for Liang, although he did acquire new scars. This time, in a literal sense: his left arm has been permanently scratched from its rough contact with the wall. Liang compares the anxiety of performing *One More Lap* to the few moments right before the start of a race. In his words, "athletic performance and performance art both serve the purpose of demonstrating vulnerability and strength involving an audience—one being physical and the other being emotional. The same is also true about performing an identity you want to share with the world."

One More Lap asked whether the past can be resolved. Liang seems to be keenly aware of how our phenomenological experiences build upon one another, shift and ripple over time. Liang treats his art process like an opportunity to present various facets of himself with fullness; each artistic iteration conceptually reflects an aspect of Liang's being, yet they are tethered to one another in a long dialogue. In his more recent *I'm a _______ boy, in a _______ world* (2019), the performativity of identity is Liang's primary interest. The blank spaces don't denote an absence but rather leave room for multiple answers. Liang often uses portrait photography as a playful means to find and share queer kinship with his audience. Whether through point of

view, digital manipulation, or costume, Liang is able to queer his photographic practice in a way that rejects single definitions. He laughs and notes, "Wearing goggles within a certain context ... if you know, you know." He hopes that in this way, his art can function as an affirmative queer connector. This triptych, along with other works from 2019, accumulates Liang's serial photography work into a body that reaffirms itself with every image.

Liang has found that the act of using a camera is a gesture of pride in and of itself. His short film 為我感到驕傲, 我為你感到驕傲 *(Take Pride in Me Like I Take Pride in You)* (2019) is the culmination of his theory that art making and empathy occur in parallel. The looping four-minute film intercuts archival footage from his mother's home videos—featuring himself as a small boy—with video of his mother that Liang took on his cell phone. In the home videos, young Liang plays the piano, dances, and performs martial arts for his mother, saying "silly pig" and "stupid boy" in Cantonese. In turn, Liang films his mother in everyday contexts, such as eating a meal or smiling in the car. Paradoxically, the title may suggest an absence of pride, but the documentation of these moments is their way of expressing love. To "take pride" connotes taking pride in one's full sexual being, something that happens over time. The film is a reminder of his mother's unconditional acceptance, especially since pride, in all its forms, can create distance between family members. While creating this piece, Liang realized that the act of recording a video is an act of cherishing. The camera's point of view articulates the loving aspects of their relationship as expressed through everyday interactions. The recorder is sending love, and the person being recorded is accepting their care. For Liang, this work is a demonstration of his gratitude towards his mother, a recognition of her care. Liang's art practice demonstrates a breadth of emotional vulnerability, which serves to deepen his critical and conceptual performances. This is revolutionary in a world that is so often dismissive before being kind. The patterns of repetition and self-reflection in his works function as affirmative gestures. Like double lines for emphasis, or many exclamation points, Liang proves that silences can beam open with pride. ■

WRITTEN BY
London Camaclang

"The blank spaces don't denote an absence, but rather leave room for multiple answers. Liang often uses portrait photography as a playful way to find and share queer kinship with his audience. Whether through point of view, digital manipulation or costume, Liang is able to queer his photographic practice in a way that rejects single definitions."

CONNIE LI

H2O Project: Connie Li's Exploration of the Contingency of Chance Operations

"Art is like the fish in the ocean, and the fisherman is the artist," says artist Connie Li as we begin our interview. She believes that the task of the artist is to find the art that already exists as an essence of nature and render it visible or accessible for viewership. She works to mobilize the natural process of chance, automatism, and physics, to become the engine for production within this particular series of "paintings." Li goes on to say that she is "water's assistant within *H2O Project.*" This assertion sets Li on a journey that enlists the forces of nature throughout the very process of her art-making. Water is the subject matter of *H2O Project*, but also the medium, material, and carrier of the contingent message that Li hopes to uncover.

Water is often referred to as the universal solvent, because it can dissolve more substances than any other liquid. For Li, water becomes the glue that adheres her artistic practice together. She recalls moments from a trip to Iceland when she realized the genuine and irrefutable power of water: glaciers carve the landscape by means of their sheer mass just as waves craft beaches along the ocean. Lakes and streams permeate the land like veins in the body and water travels effortlessly from sea to sky to sea in the form of clouds and rain. The literal and metaphoric fluidity of water resonates largely with Li, in relation to her position as an artist in the world today.

In researching other theoretical applications that water may hold within her practice, Li looks to Taoist philosophies. "Taoism admires water because of water's *Wu Wei,* the leading ethical concept in Taoism meaning *'non-action,' 'effortless action,'* or '*action without intent';* sometimes even, '*action without action.*'" This concept, which is ripe with philosophical contradictions, resonates with the questions posed by inserting the artist's subjectivity into their practice or a work of art.

Li sees a connection between *Wu Wei* and Nietzsche's conception of *Nihilism*, while also acknowledging that these philosophical concepts are more easily seen as completely opposite or contradictory in their aim. According to Li, "*Nihilism* denies any inherent meaning and/or purpose to life. As religions (such as Taoism) generally provide people with meaning for life, *Nihilism* can be seen as anti-religious and therefore could stand on the opposite end of the philosophical spectrum to Taoism. Acknowledging this contradiction, I am calling upon *Wu Wei* and *Nihilism* to be considered both with and against each other. This exploration becomes a methodology that I use for the purpose of art-making. I focus my practice on the exploration of the materiality and physicality of my chosen materials." Li focuses on water as her material in this case, removing a degree of control in order to let her experiments become the "artist" that makes the "art." "My materials," she comments, "have no aim to make art—they just make art."

I draw various connections between other artistic movements throughout history that resonate with Li's practice—in particular, the works of Jackson Pollock, which attempt to remove his artistic subjectivity by letting gravity become the engine that creates the composition of his paintings. Pollock follows after the lineage of the Surrealist artists, who also worked with chance operations and automatism in order to unlock the subconscious potential of the human mind. Evidently, these artists failed to acknowledge that art becomes a political tool the moment it is realized into the form of an object for which to look upon. The work of Pollock is a particularly good example of how the act of de-politicizing one's own artistic practice or subjectivity is, in itself, a political action. Similarly, I find pressingly political and environmentalist undertones to the work performed by Li in *H2O Project.*

H2O Project, 2019.

During our interview, I discovered that Li set up very specific rules, limitations, and parameters for the creation of the series. Setting up these conditions is always necessary when making a series in order to determine which works will and will not be included. Li decided that she would designate four large sheets of rice paper to the experimentation of water in its three physical states (solid, liquid, and gas). This means that *H2O Project* would arbitrarily consist of precisely twelve works. Whatever happened (or ceased to happen) would be presented as the final product.

In order for any degree of automatism to take place, the artist must create the conditions under which these chance operations may occur. Instead of removing the artist's hand from the composition of the artwork, Li actually relocates where the hand intervenes. Her intervention as an artist functions more like the "controlled variables" of an experiment. The "art" is born from the results of her preliminary actions. Placing these variables and limitations onto the conditions of the artwork is Li's way to have as little control over the outcome as possible. Even though she has removed herself as the creator of the formal elements, the artist's hand is still present in the fact that the piece even exists.

The first round of experimentations involved making ice cubes with black ink and gold pigment frozen inside of them. Li then placed the cubes onto various parts of the rice paper. As the ice slowly melted, a composition was created from the process of the paper gradually absorbing the water and then drying out. Interestingly, the paper itself becomes a skin-like membrane that swells and relaxes as it reacts to the melting ice.

For the liquid water phase, Li used different methods to produce the works. She primarily hung the rice paper up with a clothing rack and let the bottom dip slightly into a vat of water. As the paper absorbed the water upwards, she dripped ink onto the paper, letting the ink get carried up. In another instance, she spilled water with ink onto the floor and let the ink interact with the water to form a fluid pattern. She then placed rice paper onto the wet floor and made a "print" from the ground itself. This idea came to Li when she noticed that the vats were leaking water onto the floor and were forming natural patterns that could be documented. She comments that this was a funny way to clean up the mess on her studio floor.

Li also used the ever-present Vancouver rain to create one of the panels by taking the rice paper outside while it was raining, and dripping ink onto it in a "Pollock-ian" fashion. However, since the wind was so fierce, the rice paper ripped. Even though the panel was ripped by the forces of nature, it was ultimately welcomed warmly into the final series that formulated *H2O Project*. This inclusion enforces the conditions that Li placed on the project from its conception, and demonstrates a dedication to having an assisting role to the forces of nature as well as chance operations.

The four compositions involving steam were the most difficult for Li to work out. First, she attempted to use the steam produced by a hot pot to infuse the ink into the rice paper, but it simply did not work as she had intended it to. She then decided to use the steam produced by a clothing iron, which worked better for her purposes. However, due to overuse of the machine, it malfunctioned halfway through the third composition. Because of the conditions that she placed on the project from the very beginning of the production process, she exhibited a half-finished panel and one that was completely empty. This action demonstrates her devotion to the seriality of her artistic rationale. The parameters of the artwork (in this case the requirement that there must be four compositions made from each state of water) are strictly adhered to. This outcome is yet another by-product of enlisting a chance operation to act as the engine of artistic production.

By enlisting the natural processes that water engages in with the air and room temperature, as well as the materiality of the rice paper, Li gives up some of her artistic autonomy to the forces of nature. But giving up artistic control to the laws of thermodynamics raises plenty of questions pertaining to the role of the artist within society. In this line of questioning, I am reminded of the anecdote that Li gave us at the beginning of the interview: artists are merely fishermen and the fish are their art. This mental image places me on the high seas, braving the great natural force of the ocean tides in order to grasp at some greater meaning within my own actions.

The process of the work follows a linear path, one that is constantly and exponentially warming—exploring the states of ice, water, and steam. The temperature of each process is incrementally heating until all visual composition ceases to appear (the emptiness of the last sheet of rice paper). *H2O Project* could also be interpreted as enacting collective anxiety around the threat of climate change to the beauty of the natural world. Water, then, is the protagonist of the battle between the processes that humans have engaged in and the counter-processes that our Earth's equilibrium provides. It is interesting that this interpretation was completely unintended by the artist, but it was—in a way—a natural by-product of the process in art making. By supporting this interpretation of the artwork, Li again reinforces her devotion to chance operations.

What began as the desire to erase artistic subjectivity in art-making practices, inspired by the Taoist philosophy of *Wu Wei* and Nietzsche's *Nihilism*, became a highly political comment on the impact of human subjectivity over that of Mother Nature. Li now welcomes this interpretation, stating that during her process, she continues to discover new meanings and implications for her ir/rational actions. Like water herself, Li is open to the contingency that an artwork has depending on its viewership. In this sense, she succeeded in erasing the authoritative dominance of authorship within her practice.

As a final question, I asked Li about her colour palette. The black and white aesthetic from the rice paper and ink became self-evident throughout our conversation as it clearly highlights the formal interaction between the materials. However, I was a bit stumped by the presence of the gold ink. Why gold? Li explains that gold entices—it makes people want to look. It's a *seduction*. I begin to think about the *politics of looking*. What deserves to be looked at? What deserves the attention of the viewer? Neither Li, nor I, have the perfect answer, but it is undeniable that to be seen is the ultimate power of the image. ■

WRITTEN BY

James Albers

Symposium

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Spectatorship Through Selfie: Rethinking Instagram in Museum Space

Tatiana Povoroznyuk

As visual culture is increasingly dominated through image-sharing platforms, spectatorship in the museum space is an act not of passive looking, but of active remediation and self-representation. Instagram is a social media platform centred on curating a personal photo library, where users update their followers by uploading snapshots of their lives through edited photographs. In recent years, Instagram has increasingly become a fully integrated part of life as users place more weight in their profiles as representations of self. This permeation extends to the art world, with exhibition spaces subject to constant documentation from the visitor's perspective. Today's average museum visitor is a smartphone user, meaning they possess easy access to both a high-quality camera and to social media, bestowing them with the capability of capturing the exhibited work and disseminating it to vast audiences in an instant. This phenomenon has drawn heavy critique from media outlets, with journalists critiquing the art-viewing public as egocentric and shallow, attending exhibitions for the express purpose of snapping a selfie.

In this paper, I posit a critique against the notion that these individuals are driven by nothing but follower counts and egotism, drawing on Rancière's concept of the "emancipated spectator," which imagines spectators as a "community of storytellers and translators." Building on an emerging area of research evaluating the interactions between museum visitors and artwork through Instagram, I address Yayoi Kusama's retrospective exhibition, which drew massive crowds and produced unprecedented reactions on social media. I analyze posts made during these exhibitions, drawing on recent scholarly work that conceptualizes Instagram users as curators. By focusing on posts where the users place their own bodies within monumental-scale installation works, I argue that this as an active remediation of the work which allows for radical expression of agency within elitist art institutions. Ultimately, these platforms lead to exciting possibilities of further breaking down cults of the object and of the genius artist, signalling a move towards a post-Internet age of play and open collaboration.

Beyond Communism: Eugenics at the Crossroads

Yasmine Semeniuk

Diego Rivera's 1933 mural *Man at the Crossroads* envisions a utopian future spawning from a complicated present. Analyses of *Crossroads* often centre around the push and pull between elements of capitalism and socialism. These perspectives are often framed in the context of the complex relationship between Rivera—a Mexican idealist—and his patrons, the wealthy American Rockefeller family. While most research focuses on the differences between the two parties, I instead look at the common ground Rivera and the Rockefellers occupied and suggest that it was the emergent eugenics movement in the early twentieth century that was the basis for mutual understanding about what the commissioned mural should represent. I further examine how the development of eugenics, understood and practised drastically differently across geographical regions and throughout time, influenced 1930s social values in North America. By illustrating these values and showing how these elements of eugenics are expressed in the mural itself, I reveal the means by which Rivera and the Rockefellers could envision a similar utopian future, despite the dramatic differences between their political positions. From this perspective, then, I argue that the mural is founded on values that include a search for a 1930s conception of societal "betterment" through science and technology, an emphasis on the community over the individual, and a privileging of whiteness. Therefore, as much as the eugenics movement influenced the ideals of the patron and artist, it also created symbols of assumed shared meaning—technology, evolution, and racial politics—which quite possibly never aligned.

Judith Slaying Holofernes: Artemisia Gentileschi's Feminist Expression of Retributive Violence

Heloise Auvray

Long marginalized from the baroque canon, *Judith Slaying Holofernes* by Artemisia Gentileschi (1610) has been rediscovered by art historians over the past few decades. As questions of parity arose in the world of art, paintings made by women artists—prior to the modern period—started to receive more attention. Due to her affiliation with the Caravaggio school of painting and her extraordinary sense of composition, Artemisia Gentileschi stood out. However, part of the painting's reappraisal comes from the feminist reading of Catharsis. The painting's portrayal of two women working together to behead a tyrant appears to be revenge against male violence. Gentileschi's biography makes this recently popularized view of the painting quite convincing because it suggests that the painting realizes her fantasies for vengeance against her rapist. However, it is reductive to both the artist and the painting's subject to define them solely in the context of the artist's rape. The goal of this essay is to question the legitimacy of the biographical reading of *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, particularly in the context of its feminist appropriation, by analyzing the subject of the painting—the tale of Judith— and how it is represented, as well as by looking into the life of the artist. I compare various essays and scholarly writings by, among others, Mary D. Garrard, Mieke Bal, and Nanette Salomon, in order to explore different points of view regarding the significance of Gentileschi's rape and the subsequent trial in the interpretation of her work. Also, I challenge the way in which Gentileschi's status as a victim of violence has often overshadowed her identity as a woman and an artist.

Community Art Making and Art Therapy as Seen in Judith Baca's *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*

Wendy Hanlon

Using studies devoted to Judith Baca's *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* and research on art therapy techniques, I seek to determine whether community art making should be considered as an effective form of art therapy. Calling it a "moral education", Baca created the Social and Public Art Resources Center (SPARC) in the 1970s. SPARC aimed to show its community a candid and rarely seen view of the history of Southern California.

Cathartic in subject matter and practice for the local youth employed by Baca and the greater community as a whole, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* was the precursor to many community-oriented art projects of the 1980s and '90s in North America. Though there was no formal research devoted to Baca and her work with *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, case studies of similar community-based art projects can help us better understand the invaluable impact made by Baca on the lives of those participating.

By analyzing similar art therapy research on recovery houses, children's hospitals, and PTSD treatment centres, the impact of these community engagements may be more accurately quantified. Baca's wish for restoration and rejuvenation for a land ravaged by imperial colonialism was granted in her conscious attempts to create an open and respectful dialogue with her community. In analyzing community engagement and participant testimonies of both this work and others, her impact is clearly seen. Showcasing a historical narrative contrary to the imperialist norm, Baca used anti-colonial methods of communication to facilitate communal healing. *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* was revolutionary as a mural and exemplary as a form of art therapy, both in East L.A. and the world.