Portraying Unease

the Art and Politics of Uncomfortable Attachments

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ELLEN SUNESON

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CONTENT

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INTRODUCTION

Feminist and queer feminist art historians and visual scholars have a habit of attributing traits of subversion and political productivity to works of art. Artworks that critically illuminate structural discrimination, such as heterosexism, racism, or ableism, are often described as possessing qualities that can challenge unjust systems or initiate political change. This pattern of associating art with opposition and anticipation is clearly evident in a number of recent academic journals, monographs, or book chapters where feminist and queer feminist art historians define and describe artworks in terms their abilities to *challenge* representational systems, *open up* for critical analysis,[1] *work against* "the whitewashed tradition of Eurocentric art history",[2] create "radical modalities of witnessing that *refuse* authoritative forms of visuality" (emphasis added),[3] staging acts of counter-imagery and repair "*against* the epistemic violence of the modern museum in its entanglement with colonial power" (emphasis added),[4] or "*productively challenge* normative modes of meaning making and embodiment" (emphasis added).[5]

Instilled in these examples is an idea of what art does or has the capacity to do. By constructing particular kinds of intellectual, affective, or aesthetic responses in the viewers, art is described as embedding the ability to oppose or criticize discriminatory systems. When we try to find our direction in a particular field, institution, or community we are guided, queer theorist Sara Ahmed argues, by the paths of those that have entered before us. Once many people have chosen the same path, it becomes a visible line that serves to direct those who attempt to find their way.[6] The idea of the visual artist as a figure that comments on and protests against societal proceedings can be understood in terms of precisely such a well-trodden line. The

manner through which traits of opposition or critical distance have come to be associated with the artist and the artwork can, at certain points, emerge as almost inherently given. However, as has been pointed out by numerous art historians before, this specific conception of visual art is not very old; rather it began to appear in its contemporary sense during the late eighteenth century, at a time when artists ceased to be dependent on religious and political patronage.[7]

The inclination to search for cues of criticism or opposition when encountering artworks that deal with issues of structural discrimination is logical. To linger with dark representations of structural racism, classism, heterosexism, or ableism without being presented with ideas of how these may change is agonizing, even dangerous. Hope, as queer feminist performance theorist José Esteban Muñoz has pointed out, is "nothing short of necessary in order to combat the force of political pessimism".[8] The prospect of hope and the belief in the possibility of resistance is crucial when enduring certain types of oppression. Also, acts of opposition do have effects, and the courage to perform them is central for feminist, queer, and anti-racist politics.[9] That said, the tendency to turn too quickly to narratives of a work's inherent rebelliousness when interpreting cultural products, risks construing a simplified sense of the ability of the work, of its author, or, perhaps even more so, of the interpreter herself, to remain cognitively detached from discriminatory structures.

This thesis in art history and visual studies is written as a contribution to feminist and queer feminist art history and theory. It primarily discusses how politicized scholars approach, interpret, and ascribe value to artistic representations that portray experiences of being subjected to structural discrimination. One of the main arguments developed throughout the chapters of this study is that the way that artworks often are associated with traits of resistance, refusal, subversion, critical distance, and repair by feminist and queer feminist art historians and visual scholars, causes the hope attributed to art to assume particular shapes. These forms, in turn, involve perils. One of the liabilities, I will argue, is that the emancipatory qualities of an artwork become vital for how it is endowed with interest or value by scholars. Another involves how the act of defining artistic value in terms of a work's ability to challenge or unveil societal or institutional norms causes particular portrayals of attachments to become the source of scholarly awkwardness or disappointment. My argument is not that feminist or queer feminist subjects should detach from art, or ought to distance themselves from the hope or value that they attribute to artistic expression. What I do ask, throughout this dissertation, is that we study the contours of this hopefulness: what traits of artworks do politicized scholars interpret as radical, productive, or emancipatory, and how may present-day interpretations of the political productiveness of visual art be bound to past idealizations of the artist as a figure of resistance and progression?

EMOTIONAL BONDS TO INSTITUTIONS: ONE VERSION OF HOW I ARRIVED HERE

A crucial incentive for this study's contemplation of the tendency amongst many politicized scholars to turn to cultural representations in search for cues to how these can be put to productive use, was my own participation in a feminist art collective, initiated in 2010. In our joint work I (at the time practising as a freelance curator), together with curator Julia Björnberg and artist Jenny Grönvall, investigated our own emotional vulnerabilities and dependencies on various institutions and actors in the Northern European art field – the field in which we operated as professionals.[10] Our meetings were usually initiated when one of us had felt particularly angry, confused, diminished, or ashamed in a particular situation. The setting in which the affect had occurred could be anywhere and the cause of it anything – a comment at work, a rejection, an inability to comply with one's own political beliefs in a given circumstance, a failed invitation, a social media comment, or a possibly paranoid experience of being ridiculed. No circumstance was deemed too insignificant. Instead, we tried to be guided by the affective response in itself. Why had that affect emerged in that setting, in relation to that person, or for those reasons? During our meetings, the three of us would sit down together, most often around a kitchen table in one of our homes. We would then lay out large sheets of paper across the tabletop, on which we used pencils to map out how our own affective experiences, or our fear of certain affects, both hindered and triggered us in our professional work.

When we first initiated our collaboration, our hope was that a collective effort to study and scrutinize our own affective entanglements with various actors and institutions in the art field, would help provide a critical distance that in turn would make us less vulnerable in moments where we experienced rejection or restraint. Whilst working with a clear feminist agenda, we particularly desired a collective method that would help us deal with incidents when we were exposed to discriminatory structures. This anticipation was guided by a belief in the ability of feminist approaches to facilitate tools by which we could productively deconstruct biases and, as a consequence, become able to detach intellectually and emotionally from experiences of sexism. However, far from being the critically fierce mappings that we had first anticipated and imagined, our kitchen-table sketches soon turned into investigations of our frustrating and embarrassing entanglements with various authority figures, structures of belief, and established institutions in the field of artistic production and reception. For example, we began to carefully survey the vulnerability that was tangible in moments when we found ourselves desiring to become included in or recognized by institutions, authorities, art journals, or value systems that we were, at least partly, politically critical of. Also, we realized that in the face of, for example, a rejection of a proposal, regardless of whether we suspected that a particular person, group, or institution had refused an application of ours because of biased

value judgements, we often found ourselves unsure of whether our proposals had been particularly good.

The humiliation, self-blame, or insecurity that we would regularly experience when we desired institutional recognition or when our work had been devalued or dismissed by others in the field, appeared to mark a sphere of uncertainty and susceptibility to actors, sites, or audiences that we were partly dependent on professionally. As we began to acknowledge and carefully study our ostensibly more private and politically unproductive feelings, the painful gap between our theoretical feminist views and our ability to intellectually and emotionally embody these principles in our everyday lives, became painfully obvious on the paper before us. At this point, our collective mappings began to turn into explorations of those forms of emotional bonds to structures or institutions that are markedly embarrassing and unradical. Emotional entanglements whose existence convey uncomfortable ties between an individual and the field of her profession rather than – as we had first anticipated – asserting a difference between the radical feminist agent and the biased structures that she opposes. By allowing ourselves to momentarily dispel our preconceptions of how we, as political subjects, *ought* to feel or react in given circumstances, we began to gain access to more awkward and complicated entanglements between ourselves and the field in which we operated.

In the wake of our collective mappings of the blurry terrain between ourselves and various structures that we were professionally intertwined with, I began to search for theories wherein similar accounts of feminist subjects' frustrating, and embarrassing emotional ties to fields or collectives were explored. Amongst the works of feminist and queer feminist art historians and visual theorists, there are significant contributions to philosophical frameworks that outline how artists and artworks are fundamentally dependent on and vulnerable to – rather than critically detached from – representational and institutional systems. During the last three decades, artistic representations of the exposure of women artists, queer artists, or artists of colour to institutional habits in the art field have gained wide attention in feminist and queer feminist debates. Many influential art historians and visual theorists, including Jack Halberstam, Amelia Jones, and Kathy O'Dell, have provided theoretical frameworks from which depictions of artists' passivity or vulnerability in the face of patriarchal, homophobic, or racist norms can be interpreted in terms of criticisms or provocations.[11] However, as I will elaborate below, while their theoretical work, along with that of many others, carefully attends to portrayals of susceptibility or receptivity to discriminatory structures, representations of vulnerability are often allowed to enter the realm of their publications because of novel ways of understanding such images in terms of resistance, or criticism. Consequently, while the individual's (and particularly the artist's) vulnerability to structures (including the field of artistic production and reception) have been theorized, I lacked explorations of vulnerabilities (including the scholar's own) that did not

position feminist practices as particularly prone to social justice or as the binary opposite to discriminatory or normative structures. Also, in terms of how portrayals of structural susceptibility often become interpreted in terms of radicality and resistance by feminist or queer feminist scholars, I lacked accounts of representations marked by politicized artists' more embarrassing or politically unproductive liabilities and vulnerabilities to the cultural field in which they operate as professionals.

THE PROMISES TIED TO ART: AIMS AND QUESTIONS

The central problem that guides this thesis concerns politicized scholars' emotional attachment to visual art and performance as a means for political utility. In its broadest sense, the term *attachment* emphasizes glueyness or affixation and describes how one thing or being is fastened to another. However, as will be elaborated on later, attachment is also frequently used as a word that implies emotional bonds. This study asks what emotions *do* – how anticipation and hope about the ability of art to subvert or repair societal or institutional proceedings, orient feminist and queer feminist scholars in certain directions at the cost of others. The aim of this study is to explore how established preconceptions about the potential of artworks to be politically productive, might involve limitations and problems. Here, I specifically refer to political productivity in terms of a quality to unveil and transform existing structures of power or to ignite political action that may improve the contemporary political situation for e.g. women, queers, people of colour, and disabled people.

It may not appear that strange, perhaps, for scholarly approaches that have sprung out of emancipatory political projects such as feminism and queer activism, to associate politically productive traits in artworks with interest or value. Accordingly, as I will discuss at length below, the tendency to turn to works of visual art (particularly art made from feminist, queer, or critical race perspectives) in search of how these might inspire or inform political change may seem appropriate for a feminist or queer feminist scholar. That said, I wonder if this vast focus on emancipatory qualities in cultural products, or in their authors, generates a tendency to turn away from aspects of the works that do not appear politically productive. Or, as in those cases where art historians and visual scholars interpret portrayals of dependency and vulnerability as productively challenging and unveiling norms or providing an impetus for the possibility of emotional reparation; if this inclination to turn depictions of pain or susceptibility into something useful involves the risk of fabricating a simplified preconception of resistance that (albeit involuntarily) directs attention away from the gravity of structural violence and liability.

This exploration is guided by a number of questions that engage with the hope that is embedded in ideas about art as a means for political productivity. The key question of this study is: In what way may scholarly attachments to visual art as a means for challenging societal, institutional, or representational discriminatory (including sexist, racist, ableist, or homophobic) patterns, privilege certain kinds of artistic expressions and subjective positions, at the cost of others? In order to answer this question, I have formulated a series of sub-questions that facilitate an exploration of how the attribution of hope or optimism to certain kinds of art objects (not necessarily referring to material things or physical objects) makes us approach them in particular ways. (i) How may the anticipation and optimism about visual art as a means for political productivity *in itself* construe institutional dependencies and vulnerabilities? (ii) How may the optimism about art as a means for productivity, and particularly for subversion and critical detachment, be tied to conventions and habits that privilege particular subjective and aesthetic traits before others? (iii) Do scholarly approaches to art as a means for political change and subversive resistance risk construing theoretical frameworks where representations of specific kinds of weaknesses, failures, or institutional attachments become associated with scholarly discomfort or embarrassment? (iv) What would it mean, as a politicized scholar, to linger with representations of structural discrimination, without attempting to inscribe such representations into narratives of change, subversion, or repair?

In order to explore these questions, I turn to a number of artworks, produced between 1993 and 2016, that portray complex and ambivalent attachments to art as a means for political protest and productivity. I use these works as a means to think with, besides, and at points against a strain of US-based scholarly work that, since the early 1990s, has employed theories of the performative in order to discuss the productive political potential of certain artworks and performances.

This exploration strives to provide an impetus to think carefully about the hope that feminist or queer feminist art historians and visual scholars often attribute to art. As feminist aesthetics and literary theorist Rita Felski proposes in her book *Hooked: Art and Attachment*: "the assumption that art's value lies in its power to negate – to interrogate ideology or convert the status quo – is not false, but it offers a very partial account of what art can do."[12] Accompanied by the theoretical work of queer theorists such as Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant, I contemplate how one's attribution of hope, happiness, or sets of promises to certain objects can be cruel, and have a tendency to attach one to a wider set of ideologies, structures of beliefs, and fields of objects by which such attributions have come to circulate in the first place.

REPRESENTATIONS OF UNEASE: EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

This study is organized around a number of artworks that portray artists' affective and intellectual engagement with promises and anticipation of art as a means for protest against domineering systems. Apart from the photographic series *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt*, produced by the late Los Angeles artist Laura Aguilar (1959–2018) in 1993, all of the central works discussed in this book were made within a period of six years; between 2010 and 2015. Iowa-based T.J. Dedeaux-Norris's (b. 1979) video-recorded performance *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* was made between 2010 and 2012, while they were enrolled as an art student at Yale University. The particular works that I pay the closest attention to amongst the vast number of Amsterdam-located Sands Murray-Wassink's (b. 1974) paintings and drawings portraying statements reminiscent of self-help remedies, *I Am The Measure Of My Own Success* (2010), *Stop Worrying About If You Are Making History* (circa 2014), and *I Am Not Going To Get Insulted* (2015), was made between 2010 and 2015. Malmö-based Jenny Grönvall (b. 1973) first presented her drawing *The Map* and her performance *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3*, considered in chapter four, in 2010 and 2011 respectively. And the version of the performance *F*ck My Life (FML)* by Xandra Ibarra (b. 1979), located in Oakland, that is discussed in chapter five was performed in 2012.

This selection of works is the result of an extensive mapping of artworks and performances that represent experiences of being exposed to structural discrimination, and particularly to portrayals of artists' subjection to ableism, sexism, or racism *within* art fields: the fields of their own profession. During the last few decades, an increasing number of women, (openly) queer people, and people of colour have begun to gain access to Euro-American art establishments through positions such as artists, academics, critics, and curators. This development has led to a growing presence of debates, expressions, or theories that engage with feminist, queer, or decolonial perspectives in fields of artistic production and reception located in Europe and the US. However, structural problems in these fields are still evident. For example, several recent large-scale studies of the representation of artists in major museums, galleries, art biennials, art journals and magazines, and in the art market, present evidence of a fierce gender and race bias that still largely privileges white, male, and Euro-American artists.[13] Also, many artists and art historians who engage with visual politics (and particularly art field politics) in their works explore complex queries of how ideas bound to colonialism, heterosexism, and ableism still have profound effects of established representational systems and models for artistic interpretation and value.[14] In the second chapter of this dissertation the reader will be introduced in further depth to the tradition of conceptual art – wherein artists use art as a means to explore and problematize biases in art fields – that this study

is particularly engaged with. An art field, as I refer to it here, is constituted by all of those sites (e.g. museums, galleries, biennials, collections, academies, or complementary platforms), actors (e.g. artists, art critics, scholars, curators, collectors, dealers, donors, foundations, audiences), and objects (e.g. works of art, publications, archival documents), that contribute to the production, definition, circulation, and interpretation of art.[15]

The final selection of works for this study was made on the basis of how these, rather than asserting a distanced critique to biased art field proceedings, portrayed politicized artists' relation to established art institutions, authorial figures or dominant models for value in terms of complex and difficult entanglements. All of the works that this study explores share an accentuation and problematization of biases in, for example, the models for interpretation and judgement by which established certain European or US-based galleries, art schools, art audiences, or authorial figures define artistic practices and attribute value and meaning to them. That said, as implied above, I argue that none of these works present a critique of discriminatory patterns in these sites or amongst these actors, from a supposed cognitive or emotional distance. Instead, they all portray a range of emotions including depression, insecurity, self-blame, embarrassment, or a sense of being trapped, that appear to represent an uncomfortable *inability* to remain cognitively and emotionally autonomous from such patterns.

Albeit in vastly different ways, the works are selected on the basis that they provide dark representations of how the attachment to art as a means for political productivity can become a source of unease, doubt, self-hatred, guilt, and confusion for subjects that attempt to assert a boundary between themselves and normative values of art fields. Throughout this study, I refer to normative in terms of dominant evaluative standards designating certain artistic expressions, models for interpretation, or bodies as "better" or more legitimate than others. I pay particular attention to how these portrayals of negative feelings emphasize the ambivalence and confusion that can permeate attempts to embody certain positions of political productivity.

CORRESPONDENCES AND DISSIMILARITIES: SELECTION

With the exception of a number of paintings and works that assume the form of private diaries or letters, all of the artworks discussed in this study include visual depictions of the artists' own bodies through the media of photography, performance, and video. The way that the artists are corporeally present in the works does not, however, mean that they are necessarily direct representations of the artist's own private or inner life. Many of the artists use their own bodies

to perform as different personas. In some cases, these personas are semi-autographical, at other times they are not. Similarly, I will engage with those of the works that are presented (by the artists) as private diaries, notes, or letters, in terms of *representations of* secretive written statements, rather than as actual reflections of the authors' feelings or lived experiences.

Despite their thematic affiliations, the specific artworks that I study are in some respects fundamentally different from each other. These divergences are particularly evident in terms of the political, social, and cultural circumstances they engage with. I would like to underline that I have chosen to bring these works together because I have found the vital dissimilarities between them important and thought-provoking, *not* because I wish to claim that the experiences depicted in the works are equal or comparable. Some of the works depict positions of severe depression and despair in the wake of becoming vulnerable to or dependent on art fields dominated by white hegemony. Other works portray profoundly different types of experiences such as an artist's envy of the successes of another artist, more celebrated by the art establishment than herself. In order to be precise about the specific contexts that surround every work, each chapter focuses on the work of one artist.

Although exposure to discriminatory structures such as sexism, ableism, homophobia, or racism can bear some similarities in terms of how such structures are founded on longer histories and has been incorporated in the habits of fields and institutions, they are far from interchangeable. Additionally, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and racism assume dissimilar forms and shapes in distinctive contexts, and the oppression or privilege tied to gender, ability, sexuality, race, and class overlap and intersect in numerous ways. As the influential philosopher and critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw proposes through her introduction of the concept of "intersectionality"; "it's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there. Often that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things."[16] While, for example, a white woman might be subjugated to particular forms of oppression in the realm of a European or North American art institution on the basis of e.g., her sexuality or gender, she is likely to *simultaneously* have privileges in terms of her whiteness and/or experience privilege or disadvantage in relation to other factors such as her class background, her citizenship, her corporal and cognitive abilities, her religion, or whether or not she was assigned her sex at birth.

Four out of five of the artists whose work this study engages with were/are either based in or were born in the United States. Laura Aguilar was born in San Gabriel in California and lived and worked in Los Angeles all of her life. T.J. Dedeaux-Norris, born in Guam, is based in Iowa City, Iowa. Xandra Ibarra, from El Paso-Juárez (on the border between Mexico and the United States), now lives in Oakland, California, and Sands Murray-Wassink, who has resided in Amsterdam for most of his life, grew up in Topeka in Kansas. It can be questioned

why an exploration that tries to stay attentive to institutional hierarchies and conventions in the field of artistic production and reception solely engages with artworks produced by institutionally recognized artists based in Europe or the United States, and on top of that predominantly chooses to focus on artworks produced by US-based, or US-born, artists. In feminist and queer feminist art history, as these academic traditions have developed in a Western context since the 1970s, art historians based in England or the US have held influential positions. Additionally, the dominant narratives about feminist and queer feminist art in Western art history, and the artworks, artists, and artistic genres that are canonized within the realm of these chronicles, are also predominantly from an Anglo-American context.

My selection of artworks as well as of scholarly works for this study is, as mentioned above, based on their and their authors' positions as *inside* of the precise context I engage with. Today, Laura Aguilar's art is well-known and highly appreciated amongst many, particularly American, feminist and queer feminist art historians, visual and performance theorists (albeit her art was not subjected to as wide a support in the early 1990s, when she made the photographic series considered in chapter one). Likewise, T.J. Dedeaux-Norris's and Xandra Ibarra's works have been discussed by numerous influential art historians, art critics, and art curators, particularly those employing ideas of the performative in their interpretations of art, including Andy Campbell, Jennifer Doyle, Amelia Jones (who also was an early scholar to study to work of Aguilar), Valerie Cassel Oliver, Alspeth Patel, Juana María Rodríguez, and Tina Takemoto. The oeuvres of Jenny Grönvall and Sands Murray-Wassink have, unlike the others, not circulated as frequently in central debates on feminist and queer feminist art, although their work is recognized in their proximate art communities (and also, to some degree, acknowledged outside of these).

In those cases when I turn to artworks or oeuvres that have already been circulated extensively as objects of study within the specific tradition of feminist and queer feminist visual theory that I discuss, I do so partly in order to put pressure on the particularities of my methodological approach. Instead of moving on to methodological tactics that attempt to disclose or explain how these representations can be understood in terms of political utility, I will concentrate on aspects in the motifs that manifest passivity, vulnerability, and lack of visible defence, pride, or self-respect, that can be almost unbearable to dwell on. The reason here is not because features of criticism or opposition do not figure in the works, but because these qualities have already been thoroughly debated and analysed. By staying with these representations of how the attachment to art as a means for political productivity may lead to depression, agony, embarrassment, or self-blame, without suggesting how these dark representations may guide us toward better futures, I endeavour to add suggestive supplementary layers to previous discussions of the works, as well as to comparable explorations of similar works. Deliberately, though candidly, I will enhance some aspects of the works

at the expense of others. This does not solely happen as a result of my written analyses but also by way of how the reader is presented to the works as related to other works throughout this study. Just as when denoting the arrangements for an exhibition, the act of *curation* – of selecting, organizing, and presenting artworks – also permeates the process by which the art historian chooses, analyses, and presents works to her reader.[17] When one places a work in close proximity to other works, regardless of whether this happens in the context of an exhibition or a publication, some of its features will be enhanced whilst others will become less perceptible.

Two of the artists who were and are based in the US identify as Chicana (as will be elaborated in chapter one, Chicana, Chicano, and Chicanx are self-selected political identities that often apply to those of Mexican American descent that were born and raised in the US).[18] The fact that this thesis focuses on two works produced by Chicana artists is no coincidence. The works of Chicana/o/x artists have been central for several scholars of the US-based feminist and queer feminist strain of theoretical work that this study builds on and attempts to add supplemental perspectives to. Additionally, in terms of a cultural movement and a scholarly approach, Chicana feminism has laid an important foundation for an exploration of the ambivalence, the sense of simultaneously belonging and not belonging, that marks the experience of many persons of colour, queers, or women that reside in communities or at locations marked by racism, homophobia, or sexism.[19] Another, affiliated, strategy amongst many Chicana/o/x theorists, activists, and cultural producers is an asserted rejection of political productivity. This rejection has been articulated both in terms of a refusal to submit to pressures on those of Mexican descent to conform to or assimilate into the dominant system of white American society and, on a larger scale, in terms of expectations of persons of colour in Western societies to use their cultural or scholarly products as means to work for better futures.[20] Although I would like to stress that the work of Chicana artists, authors, and theorists has been influential for the theoretical framework (the consideration of ambivalent locations of belonging and of the contours of the hope that informs feminist and queer feminist scholarly work) that this dissertation builds on, I also want to stress that I do not seek to apply theories and cultural strategies of Chicana feminists to the works of white artists or artists residing in vastly different cultural and geographical contexts.

Throughout the process of selecting works for this study, I have deliberately attempted to attend to works by artists whose institutional support, establishment, or recognition differ from each other in certain crucial ways (though all of the artists were working professionally within the realm of Euro-American art fields at the time they produced the works I study). As I will discuss in further detail in the chapters, the artists differ from each other in terms of educational background and institutional acknowledgement. However, instead of studying works by amateur artists, or works by artists located outside of Euro-American

fields of artistic production and reception, all of the oeuvres I discuss have in common that they reside *inside* of the cultural fields they, with their works, explore and problematize.

SCHOLARLY HOPE: PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In each chapter included in this book, I bring the work of one artist into conversation with principal feminist or queer feminist theories that either engage with or advocate for the emancipatory qualities entrenched in particular types of art practices. Thus, when discussing a series of photographs by Laura Aguilar, I proceed from José Muñoz's phrase "feeling brown, feeling down", an idiom through which he discusses how artistic representations of depressive positions by subjects outside the racial mainstream can serve as mapping protocols; as narratives that counter and resist normative accounts where depression is associated with a default white subject.[21] While I employ Muñoz's theoretical framework as an important tool from which to approach Aguilar's work, I also explore how her work provides important – parallel – accounts of how the very hope about art's ability to serve as counter-narratives, evident in Muñoz's theories, *in itself* has a tendency to evoke damage or hurt. Or, when studying a performance by Jenny Grönvall, I use feminist performance theorist Rebecca Schneider's thoughts about the subversive qualities of "bad copies" as a substantial model from which to study Grönvall's appropriation of the art of a renowned, white, male, German artist.[22] However, based on Grönvall's portrayal of her own conflicting feelings of criticism, envy and admiration for the work of this celebrated male artist, I also contemplate how Schneider's attention to the subversive potentials of imitations appear insufficient when considering more uncomfortable and shameful portrayals of feminist subjects' attachments to particular types of institutionalized values or normative aesthetics.

By contemplating the hope that art historians and visual theorists attribute to (particular types of) visual art and performance, this exploration can be said to follow a large body of theoretical work investigating the emotional relation between art historians and art (as the object of their study). In Euro-American contexts, art historians' feelings towards art – e.g. which feelings are to be considered as scholarly appropriate and which supposedly will blur the objectivity of the researcher – have been widely debated since the late eighteenth century.[23] Many art historians, particularly those associated with formalism (the study of art based primarily on its form), have argued that academic art historical practices ought to be guided by an emotional distance between the researcher and her object.[24] Here, it has been considered that art historians (along with researchers in general) may be allowed to be emotionally engaged with the

object of their analysis, just not too intensely. Feminist aesthetics and literary theorist Rita Felski has traced how this ideal of emotional detachment has led to a widespread disdain for expressions of emotional attachments in academia. As compared to aesthetic distance and critical detachment, intense feelings about art objects have come to be associated with a lack of objectivity. "Attachment", Felski contends in her book *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (2020), "doesn't get much respect in academia. It is often outsourced to others – naive readers, gullible consumers, small-town patriots, too-needy lovers – and treated as a cause for concern, a regrettable, if common, human software malfunction."[25]

While my own thesis can be placed within this longer trajectory of scholarship that has considered how an art historian's feelings toward art objects affect her scholarly tactics, this study does not, as mentioned above, advocate for emotionally distanced scholarship. Instead, it urges politicized scholars to contemplate how scholarly conviction in the ability of art to produce transformative or reparative effects may guide the scholar toward a limited set of tactics and interpretations. It also stresses how such tactics and interpretations, in turn, may be guided by the scholar's emotions toward an artwork wherein those works that appear progressive and radical evoke feelings of hope and interest, while representations that are more politically dubious or even backwards, may stir feelings of scholarly embarrassment, unease, and disappointment.

In this effort to think about how interpreters' emotional responses to artworks are entwined with their situatedness (their political hopes, as well as the specifics of their identifications and sociohistorical, geographical, and cultural context), this study follows the work of several feminist and queer feminist scholars that have considered the attribution of "good feelings" to fine art as an effect of social, cultural, and political circumstances. For example, in her book *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (2012) queer feminist art historian Amelia Jones traces how white Euro-American bourgeois men, for centuries, have been considered as possessing enhanced emotional abilities to produce and receive art in cultures built on European traditions.[26] Similarly, in her dissertation *Könsskillnadens estetik?* (2007) feminist art historian Johanna Rosenqvist examines how the gendered organization of aesthetic approaches to cultural objects (and their producers) have had effects on a hierarchal difference whereby certain types of objects (defined as fine art) have been attributed more interest and value than other kinds of aesthetic objects (craft).[27] Or, in the book *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (2013), queer cultural theorist Jennifer Doyle discusses how artworks that reflect experiences of racism, or the act of taking such works seriously, have largely been dismissed as "naïve, literalist forms of propaganda disengaged from aesthetics and art history".[28] "Emotion", Doyle argues, "especially when coupled with a legible politics, appears as critically indigestible matter, a roadblock to "serious" criticism."[29]

Included in several critical considerations, such as those proposed by

Jones, Rosenqvist, and Doyle, of how biased social hierarchies privilege certain subjects' emotions as more "objective" and "appropriate" than others, is a proposition of political counter-strategies: *possibilities* of interpreting cultural products otherwise. That is, how feminist and queer subjects can use the particularities of their (non-normative) emotional responses and desires as opportunities to productively resist, challenge, transform, redo, or refuse normative or biased modes for meaning and value. Analogous discussions of how women, queer people and people of colour can use their experiences, desires, and identifications to rework dominant meanings attributed to cultural products have also been articulated in feminist and queer feminist scholarly publications such as cultural theorist Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010), art historian David Getsy's *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (2015), visual culture theorist Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), and feminist art historian Griselda Pollock's *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (1999).[30] With its attention to how emotional responses to artworks are situated, and entwined with political and social structures, this thesis is indebted to this body of feminist and queer feminist thinking. That said, it questions these scholarly works' implied assumption that the interpretations and emotional responses of women, queer people, and people of colour to cultural products are somewhat opposed to – or more socially just than – "majority", "biased", or "normative" modes of interpretation. Instead, this study follows a number of queer feminist scholarly works that have been formulated as a type of response to optimistic notions of feminist and queer subjects' abilities to interpret things otherwise. In this strain of critical work queer feminist scholars, as will be elaborated on in the following section, have articulated a tendency amongst politicized scholars to idealize their own as well as others' non-normative (read feminist, queer, and decolonial) modes of engaging with visual art and cultural objects.

IDEALIZATION, DISAPPOINTMENT, AND EMBARRASSMENT

By exploring the limits and perils in feminist and queer feminist scholarly approaches to visual art as a means for political productivity, this thesis is influenced by a number of queer feminist scholarly works that have considered how politicized scholars' anticipation about political utility affect their choice of and engagements with their objects of study. In her book *Object Lessons* (2012), cultural theorist Robyn Wiegman discusses how politicized scholars are often guided by political desires that direct their critical impulses and cause them to idealize certain objects and become disappointed with others. Addressing how the concept of social justice organizes central debates in academic fields such

as women's studies, ethnic studies, and queer studies, Wiegman explores how promises of political efficacy and justice tend to restrict and normalize critical scholarship.[31]

Similarly, in the book *Feeling Backward* literature theorist Heather Love discusses how politicized scholarship in the field of queer studies often appear to apply *utility* as a standard of judgement for the choice of study objects. When approaching cultural objects representing the experience of queer subjectivities, queer critics, she maintains, have tended to ignore what they cannot transform.[32] While acknowledging the immense contribution queer theory has made to the study of negative affect, injury, and failure, Love discusses how theories belonging to this academic field repeatedly reflect the endeavour within the gay liberation movement to turn shame into pride, or in other ways to overcome negative affect:

> Given that issues like gay shame and self-hatred are charged with the weight of difficult personal and collective histories, it is understandable that critics are eager to turn them to good use. But I am concerned that queer studies, in its haste to refunction such experiences, may not be adequately reckoning with their powerful legacies. Turning away from past degradation to a present of future affirmation means ignoring the past as past; it also makes it harder to see the persistence of the past in the present.[33]

Love turns to a number of literary texts from the early twentieth century that represent queer suffering in a sense that, she contends, is not necessarily "good for politics". She presents an attempt to study these texts, and their dark portrayals of experiences bound to same-sex desire in homophobic societies, including shyness, shame, ambivalence, failure, melancholia, loneliness, regression, victimhood, heartbreak, secrecy, immaturity, self-hatred, and despair, without attempting to use these representations of negative feelings, pain, or insult for positive political purposes. Such an approach involves, as Love emphasizes, the need to accept dealing with portrayals of insult, hurt, shame, isolation, and self-hatred, without knowing if or how these will "lead toward a brighter future for queers."[34]

Drawing on the work of Wiegman and Love, in his book *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History* (2017) cultural theorist Kadji Amin argues that queer scholars often implicitly pose an unstated assumption that queer relations are particularly heroic, exceptionally just, and detached from dominating, racist, and coercive structures. Such idealization of queer ways of relating have effects, Amin suggests, on the objects that politicized scholars choose to study. It also, he maintains, affects the methods and tactics by which scholars negotiate aspects of their study objects that derail from the unassailability of her political visions. Often, Amin argues, politicized scholars

tend to either idealize their study objects or criticize them. In moments when an idealized object is revealed as having disturbing or disappointing aspects, scholars often seek to "rid themselves of it to restore the mastery of the critic".[35] As a way to cultivate a wider set of scholarly approaches to those moments when an object of study fail to live up to the scholar's ideals of progressive politics, Amin proposes a scholarly tactic that involves *inhabiting unease* (the term *unease* in this thesis' title, partly refers to this methodological discussion by Amin). By staying with their own sense of discomfort scholars may, Amin argues, find a way to move beyond binary moods of either idealizing their object of study or distancing themselves from its flaws by attaining the position of an unassailable critic.[36]

As stated above, this thesis is influenced by Wiegman's, Love's, and Amin's efforts to study certain limits and perils that are rooted in politicized scholars' affective investments in their objects of study. Inclined by their efforts, this exploration turns the attention to visual art and performance, in order to study how visual representations of structural discrimination tend to circulate as idealized objects, associated with social good, amongst feminist and queer feminist art historians and visual scholars. Apart from contemplating how scholarly anticipation of art as a means for political productivity may privilege certain subjects before others, I also pay attention to how such hopeful scholarly dispositions cause certain aspects of artworks – that fail to live up to idealized notions of radicality or resistance – to become the source of scholarly *embarrassment*. Here, I have been particularly inspired by a number of feminist art historians who have discussed how certain themes and motifs in the work of women artists appear to be associated with embarrassment in feminist movements.

In the anthology *Feminism-Art-Theory* (2001), Hilary Robinson describes how wings of feminist thinking and artistic practices linked to spirituality, religion, and creative spirits have tended to be regarded, in secular Western feminist movements, as a bit of an embarrassment.[37] Somewhat related, in her essay "Att måla med det vita bläcket – Monica Sjöö och kosmos inom hennes livmoder" (To Paint with the White Ink – Monica Sjöö and the Cosmos within Her Uterus) (2012), published in the scholarly journal for gender studies *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap*, Katarina Wadstein MacLeod discusses how feminist artist Monica Sjöö's immense interest in matriarchal belief systems in the 1960s and 1970s has been considered embarrassing amongst feminist scholars and how this in turn, according to Wadstein MacLeod, has kept Sjöö's art in the margins of feminist art history.[38] In a similar vein Irit Rogoff, in her essay "Tiny Anguishes: Reflections on Nagging, Scholastic Embarrassment, and Feminist Art History" (1992) published in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* (an essay that I will return to in chapter four) argues that feminist artists' vulnerabilities to societal or institutional values have a tendency to be overlooked or ignored by feminist art historians when these vulnerabilities become too uncomfortably unradical.[39] Rogoff begins her essay by examining her own scholarly disappoint-

ment when she discovered that the subject of her upcoming book – a renowned female modernist artist – was a timid woman obsessed with a desire to marry a celebrated male artist who continuously rejected her. Based on her impulse to condemn this woman artist as pathetic, sad, and embarrassing, Rogoff asks whether feminist art historians' tendency to focus on radical and coherent political artistic subjects may reproduce biased masculinist cultural paradigms inherited from modernism, instead of recognizing the "potential significance of fragmented, incoherent cultural identities occupying a range of conflicting subject positions."[40]

Influenced by such previous scholarly works, this thesis examines how scholarly affective dispositions (such as hope), inevitably make the scholar attentive to particular aspects of their object of study, at the cost of others. Particularly inspired by the work of Kadji Amin, Heather Love, and Irit Rogoff, I will continuously strive to dwell on dark or politically dubious representations of structural violence or suffering, without either discarding them or quickly searching for cues for how to turn them into productive use. While remaining attentive to how critique or opposition is palpable in the artworks that this study follows, this thesis presents an effort to think about what it might mean, as a feminist art historian, to linger with representations of politicized artists' uncomfortable, suffocating, or embarrassing vulnerabilities to art audiences, established institutions, normative models for value and meaning, or authorial figures, without being seduced by the impulse to interpret such portrayals as either unfortunate flaws or in terms of how they may challenge discriminatory structures, or may lead to a more socially just future.

INTERPRETING REPRESENTATIONS OF ATTACHMENT: METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, this thesis combines semiology with affect theory.[41] In its consideration of photographs, video works, paintings, drawings, and live art performances, this study is observant to how the visual content expressed in the works, in given cultural or geographical contexts, *denotes*; associates to established meaning, i.e. the depiction of a chair denotes a piece of furniture, and *connotes*; associates to symbolic meaning, i.e. the materiality of a page from a diary connotes privacy and secrecy. Particular attention has been paid to how visual content and gestures in the works – given their geographic location and social context – denote or connote emotions and emotional attachments.

Apart from Aguilar, who passed away in 2018, I have met all the artists in person either during visits to their studios or at other, often public, places. In those cases where the works exist as material objects, these visits also provided me with the opportunity to engage with the materiality of the photography,

painting, and drawings I have been writing about. During my process of writing this thesis, I spent a lengthy period of time in Los Angeles in order to gain a more sufficient knowledge about the contexts within which certain of the works I discuss were made or performed. The first chapter of this thesis presents results from periods of archival work at Stanford University's Special Collections Department where I carefully examined the letters, diaries, and photographs by Laura Aguilar that they house there. The interpretations of artworks and performances presented in all the chapters builds, apart from the works themselves, on carefully reviewed visual and written documentation (photography, video recordings, art criticism, scholarly publications, artists' statements, and publicly available letters and journals) of the works. Based on the idea that artworks gain their meaning through a broad range of enactments, the analyses presented in this thesis consider the artists' (publicly available) descriptions of themselves, their works, their intentions, as well as their choice to circulate and present certain reproductions of their works, as part of their own "staging" of their art and as central for how individual works are attributed meaning. This position regarding secondary materials on the works is not, as will be elucidated in the chapters, to be conflated with a search for the artists' true intentions, or for the genuine meaning of an artwork. Rather, it reflects an attempt to gain a more extensive understanding of the works and of the political, social, and cultural environment in which the they were produced.

Another entwined reason behind this interest in others', including the artists' own, interpretations, documentations, and thoughts about the works, has been to avoid approaching these in manners verging on projection or overidentification. Conducting a research project, as I do here, that is closely related to the excitements, embarrassments, and frustrations that occurred during and in the wake of my own participation in a feminist art collective, has urged me to be acutely very aware of what Rita Felski terms *attunement*. Felski defines attunement as the experience of being drawn into a responsive relation to particular works of art. To be attuned is, according to Felski, to experience an affinity that is "impossible to ignore yet often hard to categorize".[42] Attunement is not, Felski stresses, "a feeling-about but a feeling-with" and is as such "about things resonating, aligning, coming together".[43]

The notion of "feeling with" an artwork that represents experiences of structural discrimination may arouse, and rightly so, uncomfortable associations of naivety and problematic and unethical overidentifications with the pain and vulnerability of others. That said, attunement often plays a crucial role in the emotional and intellectual processes by which one comes to attribute value and meaning to certain objects and representations. By staying attentive to one's own emotional and intellectual attachments to the objects of one's study, Felski argues, humanities scholars may avoid assuming an illusory position where they underscore the social construction of emotions but position themselves as somewhat immune "from the illusions in which others are immersed".[44]

As an example, I will disclose some occurrences along my process of writing this thesis that still stir my feelings of embarrassment and anxiety and that required me to change the course of this project quite radically. During my initial process of mapping out artworks relevant for this exploration I encircled, clearly inspired by my joint work with Björnberg and Grönvall, works that explored how feelings of shame and embarrassment could be used as tools through which to navigate positions marked by a simultaneous sense of belonging and not belonging to art fields. Or so I thought. I can still vividly recall my feelings of confusion, hesitation, and indignity in some of my conversations with the artists who had produced the works, as I cautiously began to ask them about their own thoughts about how shame or embarrassment operated in their works. Whereas some artists acknowledged that they explored such themes, the questioning glances in other artists' eyes, their lack of interest in the topic, or their swift change of theme, as well as my own burning feeling of disappointment and discomfort, appeared to reflect how many of them did not recognize such premises of their works.

For a variety of reasons, the intentions of an artist should not necessarily orient the art historian toward or away from certain interpretations of artworks. That said, during my conversation with certain artists, I could not escape the question of why I, a white person from Northern Europe, partly schooled in the tradition of a hegemonically white and Eurocentric art history, was associating certain representations with shame or embarrassment, when the artists who had produced them did not. This distinction between how the artists themselves understood their works and my own interpretation of their works seemed especially problematic with regard to artworks produced or performed by artists of colour, or artists whose socioeconomical, geographical, or cultural contexts varied distinctly from my own. Based on such differences, our dissimilar readings of the central themes in their works appeared far more complex and problematic than one that could be bridged by an argument that an interpretation of a work should not lean too much on the intention of its author.

In the wake of these meetings, I chose to abandon the initial premises of my project. However, instead of completely rejecting my sense of attunement to the works as too entangled in the particularities of my situatedness, I began to study my interest in these works from different perspectives. They all, albeit in vastly different ways, treated complex queries concerning artists' relation to art fields. Was there a common theme evident in these representations of the relation between politicized artists and institutions, authority figures, or dominant representational systems in art fields that, to me, had appeared shameful? As I returned to the works, and placed reproductions of them alongside each other, I came to realize that what I had first interpreted as shame or embarrassment was more accurately described in terms of a broad range of negative emotions (including depression, paranoia, anger, self-blame, embarrassment, and despair) whose common denominator was that they were portrayed as entangled

with an interest in and an optimism about art as a means for political productivity.

Inspired by the methodological efforts of Kadji Amin, Heather Love, and Irit Rogoff, discussed above, I have continuously tried to linger in moments when representations of emotions have stirred my own feelings of embarrassment, awkwardness, disappointment, or unease. In chapters three and five I exemplify such moments and invite the reader to a methodological process in which I attempt to map out when, in relation to what, and why such emotional responses occurred, as well as how my negative feelings might reveal my own inverted ideals and anticipations about artworks and their producers. As I will explain in the chapters, I often found such instances of scholarly discomfort to be crucial turning-points where the works bent the shape of my own outlook and arguments.

EMOTIONS DO THINGS: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

> I will argue that emotions *do things*, and work to align individuals with collectives – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments.[45]
>
> SARA AHMED

Feelings, Sara Ahmed argues, do not merely come from the inside the body and move out. Instead, she suggests, feelings "are mediated, however immediately they seem to impress upon us. Not only how we read such feelings, but also how the feelings feel in the first place may be tied to a past history of readings, in the sense that the process of recognition (of this feeling or that feeling) is bound up with what we already know".[46] Ahmed's argument that seemingly spontaneous feelings may be mediated as an effect of longer histories, constitutes a fundamental theoretical framework for this thesis's consideration of how "good feelings" about visual art are an effect of how art has been attributed feeling in the past. Of particular interest for my own study is Ahmed's exploration of how certain objects are singled out as the cause of happiness. Here, "happiness" describes an orientation rather than an actual experience of "good" or "happy" feelings. One can share an orientation toward an object as being good even when that

object has not affected one in a good way, or stirred one's own happiness, joy, or pleasure. Rather, Ahmed argues, the proximity between happiness and object – in terms of the object as a means to social good – is preserved through habits.[47]

Habits describe customs and routines. Ahmed accentuate how habits are inherited.[48] Throughout this thesis, I make use of Ahmed's association between happiness and habits as a framework in which to consider politicized scholars' orientation to visual art and performance as "happy objects". In line with Ahmed, I do not use the term "happy" in its common association with joy or pleasure. Instead, I apply it as a term that describes how certain objects circulates as social good, widely allied with positive social value. Based on the suggestion that art circulate as "happy objects", I accentuate how politicized scholars' orientation to certain kinds of artworks and performances as presenting a means to deconstruct or challenge institutional and societal processing is, in itself, a habit that repeats a longer heritage where such notions of fine art as socially good and politically efficient has gained its meaning.

In her articulation of habits Ahmed is influenced by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Habits describe repetitive actions and behaviours. A cultural or academic field can to some degree be understood as constituted by institutionalized habits; behavioural standards, rituals and dispositions that individuals to a certain degree must incorporate in order to be included in these fields. Bourdieu argues that an individual, in order to participate in a field, must first invest in its "stakes": i.e. learn about the central conflicts, objects, persons, events, or ideas by which the field has taken its particular form.[49] Also, the act of producing a work of art, writing an academic article, or curating an art exhibition, whether these take the form of physical objects, gestures, or merely exist as ideas, are never completely original or independent. Instead, these acts will always consist of repetitions of previous actions. Based on this argument, one may consider how before producing something one labels an art historical text, an exhibition or a work of art, one has already been influenced by the institutional habits – discourses, philosophical traditions, circulation of objects, and systems of belief – by which the concept of art has been attributed a certain set of meanings. Hence, a scholar's anticipation about visual art as a means for political productivity does not solely reflect her attachment to one or a number of objects (metaphorically speaking, art can of course take on a variety of shapes), but to longer genealogies by which definitions of fine art as objects associated with progression, emancipation, and political protest have gained their meaning. Or, in Ahmed's words, when something becomes "happy for us", we do not only become oriented toward that particular object but also "to 'whatever' is around that object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival."[50]

Throughout this study, the word "feeling" is employed as a general term describing the conscious experience of affects. "Affect", on the other hand, is referred to as bodily sensations that may or may not be registered consciously. And "emotion" is used as a term describing feelings that correspond to existing lin-

guistic definitions, and the psychosocially constructions of feelings.[51] The term attachment, as used in this study, suggests the performativity of emotions; that emotions have effects and tie us to things. Sociologist Neil J. Smelser proposes that when we feel intensely about someone or something we become "to some degree less emotionally free as a result".[52] "[A]ll attachments are optimistic", queer theorist Lauren Berlant argues, referring to attachment as a desire to be proximate to something because of the cluster of things that it promises.[53] Based on Berlant's understanding of all attachments as hopeful (as anticipatory affective engagements), this exploration does not separate intellectual attachments from emotional attachments when it, for example, discusses an individual's attachment to art as a means for political productivity. Also, in line with Rita Felski's discussion about attachments, this study does not treat attachments as weaknesses or as ties that one should necessarily attempt to free oneself from (even though there definitely do exist attachments that one should attempt to untangle oneself from). Instead, like Felski, it approaches attachments as inescapable parts of our lives: as forms of emotional dependencies that reflect the complexities and habitual aspects that lie embedded in our own commitments and investments.[54]

Primarily, my application of the term attachment is influenced by Ahmed's discussion of how emotions have effects (described in further detail in the first chapter of this thesis). However, throughout the chapters I combine Ahmed's ideas with theories about the political implication of emotional attachments outlined by Kadji Amin, Lauren Berlant, Rita Felski, Heather Love, Sianne Ngai, Irit Rogoff, Eve Sedgwick, and Nira Yuval-Davis. While bringing these theories in dialogue with each other and finding points of contact between them that support and develop their respective definitions of attachments, I also stay attentive to how all of these scholars apply the term in distinct ways and in relation to different contexts.

ART AS A MEANS FOR SUBVERSION OR REPAIR: LIMITATIONS AND OUTLINE

This exploration engages with a particular body of US-based theoretical work that makes use of ideas of the performative in order to discuss productive political potentials rooted in viewers' engagement with art and performance. My choice to remain with this particular strain of theoretical work is because it has had such an immense impact on feminist and queer feminist academic work (including my own), as well as on artistic and curatorial practices, that promote cultural representations of structural discrimination as a means for political productivity.

This thesis will not present a detailed history of how the notion of the

performative has been, or is, employed in the scholarly traditions of feminist and queer feminist art history, performance or visual culture studies. Instead, it focuses on a few influential theories that approach art as a means for subversion or repair. The very limited number of theoretical examples that I use are therefore not to be conflated with a description of the development of a very complex, rich, and multifaceted scholarly tradition. By including these examples, I want to add perspectives to this strain of theoretical thinking by consider what might become lost in scholarly orientations to art, or the reception of art, as means for political productivity.[55] Many influential feminist and queer feminist works on visual art are written by theorists trained in visual culture, film studies, performance studies, English or literature. Hence, rather than focusing specifically on theories outlined by feminist or queer feminist scholars with an art historical schooling, I draw in theoretical work that has had an impact, both inside and outside of academia, on how ideas about art as a means for political productivity has circulated and been reproduced amongst feminist and queer feminist scholars.

The term 'performative' (first introduced in a series of lectures by philosopher of language J. L. Austin in 1955) is derived from "perform", a verb that describes an action.[56] In his lectures Austin used the concept of the "speech act", in order to explain how the function of utterances may not only be descriptive but could also be *performative*, making something happen in the moment of their articulation. Austin exemplifies the performative force of particular utterances with the "I do" as uttered during a wedding ceremony, the "I name this ship [...]", as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stem, or "I give [...]", as occurring in a will. Here, the utterances are not merely descriptive but may have actual legal, political, cultural, or social effects.[57] Since the early 1990s, especially in the wake of a series of publications by feminist poststructuralist Judith Butler and queer feminist literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, but also following the ideas of many other scholars including critical theorist Homi Bhabha, art historian Manthia Dawana, post-structuralist theorist Jacques Derrida, feminist linguistic and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, and literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak where the performative basis of subjectivity, bodies, gender and sexuality was articulated, the performative has been a widely influential concept within Euro-American and, above all, Anglo-American feminist and queer feminist theories about visual art, performance art, and theatre.[58]

When applied in relation to art, cultural products, and performances, the notion of the performative has continuously been extended from its original situatedness in the realm of spoken language, into the realm of bodily gestures, identifications, corporeal enactments, and the construction of subjectivities. Many European and US-based art historians and cultural theorists, including – to only mention a few – Jane Blocker, Daphne Brooks, Sue-Ellen Case, Jill Dolan, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Rune Gade, Jennifer González, Amelia Jones, José Muñoz, Tavia Nyong'o, Peggy Phelan, Rebecca Schneider, and Tina Takemoto,

have employed the performative as a framework from which either to elaborate on the radical potential of performances and artworks to challenge, unveil or resist oppressive systems, or to contribute to the construction of platforms on which marginalized subjects can connect with others who share similar experiences of systemic violence and repression.[59]

Each chapter of this thesis studies works of art that, I argue, portray emotional topographies that surround the trade-offs that are inevitably made when one turns to visual art as a means for resistance to, or repair from, damaging effects of the social order. Based on Laura Aguilar's photographic series *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* (1993), chapter one, "Art Hurts", sketches an argument that is fundamental to all the subsequent chapters of this study: that the anticipation and optimism about visual art as a means for political productivity *in itself* construes institutional dependencies and vulnerabilities. The chapter reads Aguilar's work through José Muñoz's discussion of depressive positions. However, its analyses stray away from Muñoz's conclusion of art as potentially reparative.[60] While it employs Muñoz's theoretical framework as an important perspective from which to approach Aguilar's work, the chapter also explores how her work provides important – parallel – accounts of how the hope about art as productive and reparative can sometimes, in moments when this anticipation is experienced as futile or failed, become the very source of pain and agony.

In chapter two, "Promises of Detachment", I argue that the promises that cluster to art as an object of either emotional repair or as a means of political protest, often encompass hopeful narratives of critical detachment. This chapter studies a work consisting of four videos, uploaded to YouTube, that T.J. Dedeaux-Norris produced while enrolled as a master's student at Yale School of Art. In the work, entitled *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* (2010–2012), Dedeaux-Norris appears as their autobiographic persona Tameka Jenean Norris. The work consists of four video confessions, one for each semester that Jenean Norris attended Yale, where she (unlike Dedeaux-Norris, Tameka Jenean Norris's pronoun is she/her) speaks about her experiences at the school. The videos contain self-mocking portrayals of an art student's anticipations of using art as a means for political resistance and self-expression, as well as of her attempts to remain critically detached from conservative and biased hierarchies and models for value at Yale. Embedded in Tameka Jenean Norris's ironic embodiment of an art student's futile attempts to radically detach from the institutional values of the art school there appears to emerge, I argue, a graver sense of insecurity, confusion, and embarrassment regarding her own budding position as an artist. Based on Eve Sedgwick's and Rita Felski's suggestions that approaches of critical detachment can be allied with a particular set of affects, including paranoia (Sedgwick) and disenchantment, scepticism, suspicion, and vigilance (Felski), the chapter argues that Dedeaux-Norris's work adds four noteworthy emotional states – agony, happiness, insecurity, and disappointment – to the emotional mapping bound to ideals of critical distance previously initiated by Sedgwick and Felski.

Chapter three, "I Am Not Going to Get Insulted", deals with a large body of works titled *SURVIVAL ACCEPTANCE ART* by Amsterdam-based artist Sands Murray-Wassink. I pay particular attention to a number of paintings included in this project that contain stated messages reminiscent of self-help mantras. The chapter tunes in on three paintings whose written statements assert: "I AM THE MESSAGE OF MY OWN SUCCESS", "STOP WORRYING ABOUT IF YOU ARE MAKING HISTORY", and "I AM NOT GOING TO GET INSULTED." These messages of radical autonomy and emotional detachment emerge, I argue, as a desire, an ambition, or a briefly passing experience of confidence and independence, rather than a description of an enduring artistic or individual disposition. The chapter extends the arguments outlined in previous chapters by discussing how Murray-Wassink's paintings suggest that politicized artists' longing to become recognized and included by authorial figures in the art establishment can become a source of self-blame and abjection.

Chapter four, "Pathetic Obsessions", expands these themes of abjection and embarrassment by proposing that scholarly approaches to art as a means for political change and subversive resistance risk construing theoretical frameworks where representations of specific kinds of weaknesses, failures, or institutional attachments become associated with scholarly discomfort. The chapter reads Jenny Grönvall's drawing *The Map* (2010) and performance *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3* (2011), where Grönvall, by imitating the works of a white male enfant terrible of the European art scene, portrays her own envy and obsession with this other artist. I place Grönvall's works in close dialogue with feminist performance theorist Rebecca Schneider's discussions of the potential political productivity in works of art or in exhibitions that take the form of "bad copies" of canonized or institutionalized artworks or modes of presenting art. I also argue that certain crucial aspects of Grönvall's performance as a "bad copy" becomes inaccessible (charged with a sense of embarrassment and political backwardness) through Schneider's attention to the subversive potentials of imitations.

Chapter five, "Being Stuck", discusses how Oakland-based artist Xandra Ibarra, in her performance *F*ck My Life (FML)* (2012), portrays a "stuckedness" vis-à-vis whiteness and what she has termed "her incompatible white audiences". Lingering closely with previous readings of Ibarra's representation of an artist's unwilled affixation to her viewers, the chapter discusses how narratives of art as a means for political productivity at times blur how defiance sometimes can be out of reach. It also analyses how notions of the performative as an oppositional strategy may construct simplified ideas of the relation between individual and structure, where the former become portrayed as potentially radically detached from the latter. But of perhaps the utmost gravity, it asserts that when figures of resistance – in this chapter specifically discussed in relation to the notion of the artist or the artwork – repeatedly are reiterated through a particular set of attributes and traits, passed down over generations, the act of assuming

such a position might become the cause of ambivalence, crisis, doubt, and uncertainty for certain subjects. The chapter adds a layer to previous discussions of Ibarra's work by contemplating how my own scholarly anticipation about the political utility of staying with dark representations paradoxically makes me an active participant in Ibarra's position as stuck in relation to frameworks of political productivity.

Each chapter is organized around one particular theme bound to portrayals of positions marked by an agonizing attachment to the object of one's critique – depression, insecurity, self-doubt, embarrassment, and the sense of being stuck. Based on how these works depict moments characterized by restrictedness and a sense of being emotionally trapped in normative structures, the thesis explores what it means when someone or something that resides *inside* a field is ascribed traits of resistance, radicality, or recovery by others in the same field. I conclude by acknowledging and studying the hope that lies embedded in the methods informing my own project. The concluding chapter dwells on the agonizing thought that we cannot pick and choose what we take out of habits and patterns. It suggests that traits of radicality and resistance often appear as such because they, paradoxically, are underpinned by habits and various forms of systems for support. Additionally, it addresses how a too dominant focus on politicized artworks, artists, and interpreters of art (the scholars themselves) as able to deconstruct and oppose normative structures, risk construing a simplified understanding of the vigour of what it means to reside inside a structure.

SOME WORDS ON TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

It is not very accurate, I should point out, to discuss art history, performance and visual theory written from feminist and queer feminist perspectives, as if these perspectives were roughly the same thing.[61] As a range of conflicts between feminism and queer feminism over the years indicates, there are some profound differences between these as two diverse political and theoretical perspectives.[62] The term "feminism" defines a wide range of practices, views, and ideas. Here, however, I refer to the term inspired by performance theorist Peggy Phelan's definition: "The conviction that gender has been, and continues to be, a fundamental category for the organization of culture. Moreover the pattern of that organization usually favours men over women" (as cited by curator Cornelia Butler in the exhibition catalogue *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*).[63] Queer feminism is articulated as a separate political, theoretical, and artistic project.[64] Queer feminism was in part articulated as a result of the systematic refusal of many European and North American feminists to acknowledge LGBTQI perspectives and identifications, and perspectives of those outside of white, middle-class and urban femininities. It was also a consequence of how the gay liberation move-

ment, since its establishment in the late 1960s, had repeatedly concentrated on the interests of urban white men. 'Queer feminism' hence refers to a particular strain (or strains) of politics and theoretical work that, by way of political queries, identifications, and academic departments, are positioned both inside of, but also in contradiction to or alongside, feminist and queer activism and theory. Crucially though, while Western mainstream feminisms, particularly forms of feminisms dominated by white, urban, middle-class, and straight-identified women, do have a dark history of excluding queer people and people of colour, I do not use the label feminist (as for example when I use the term in order to introduce a scholar or artist) as a term denoting that a person is not responsive to the perspectives of LGBTQI or other gender/sexuality minorities. Instead, I use the division between feminist and queer feminist in order to avoid inaccurately blurring the lines between these two intellectual traditions and political positions. While the conflicting differences between feminisms and queer feminisms are important to attend to, the specific theoretical works that I engage with in the chapters all share an alertness to queries and constructions of gender, sexuality, and race. The manner through which these theoretical works differ in terms of their authors' political outlooks can, however, be discernible at points in the hopes and promises that they ascribe to certain artworks. Throughout the chapters, I consistently attempt to consider these different political viewpoints.

I will continuously refer to particular aesthetic or academic traditions and artistic practices as Western, Euro-American, or US-based, despite the fundamental problems inherent in such terms. I mainly apply Western as a term that implies dominant cultures – including social norms and values, belief systems, cultural objects, and aesthetic traditions – in Australia, Canada, Europe, New Zealand and the United States. However, in some places, for example when I discuss aesthetic traditions, I imply a particular set of ideas and practices based on European traditions that are also discernible at other geographical sites. At certain points in this study, I use the term Euro-American. When I do that, I generally indicate institutions, artistic practices, events, or debates that are geographically located in Europe (primarily Northern, Western, Central and Southern/Southwest Europe) or in the US.

To sketch an imaginary map – as I do – of Western, Euro-American, or US-based artistic traditions and academic traditions, risks reinforcing the idea that there exists a delimited Western pattern of thought or behaviour, or aesthetic development, that is somewhat separated from those located in other geographical (or cultural) locations. Such a division between artistic practices and fields based on localities not only blurs how creativity, artistic expression, and the definition of art, have for centuries been affected by continuous global movements and influences, but also how contemporary art fields are permeated by a large-scale flow of actors, ideas, and objects. Additionally, to refer to all of the practices, debates, and events that take place or have taken place in Europe or in the US in terms of a set of interrelated fields or traditions, is largely generalizing.

Not only do Europe and the US differ culturally, politically, and socially in crucial ways (for example in terms of how institutions, agents, and societies located in these continents deal with or acknowledge racism, sexism, or homophobia, what type of alternative artistic communities are available for their agents, or how bourgeois, capitalist, or state-organized ideals circulate and arrange social hierarchies in their various art field/s), but the differences between artistic practices and communities located *within* the same geographical location in either Europe or the US can also be immense.

In spite of the inherent problems of such definitions I have chosen to refer to Western or Euro-American aesthetic traditions, art fields, practices, or debates. My reason is that these generalizations allow for the acknowledgement that all artistic and scholarly practices (that in some way circulate as objects for discourses, debates, evaluations, presentations or trades about or involving art in Europe and the US), to some degree are connected to conventions and structures of ideas and beliefs by which the definition of art in these geographical sites has established its meaning. The trajectory of scholarly traditions of art history, as well as affiliated academic subjects revolving around art or visual phenomena, as art historian James Elkins has pointed out, is anything but global, but very much rooted in European philosophical traditions.[65] As emphasized by many art historians before, to identify as an artist, or to label objects or gestures made or performed by oneself or by others as works of art, are not neutral acts, but bound to particular sets of conventions, political developments, and structures of beliefs.[66]

Notes

1. Rebecca Schneider and Lucia Ruprecht, "In Our Hands: An Ethics of Gestural Response-Ability. Rebecca Schneider in Conversation with Lucia Ruprecht", *Performance Philosophy,* 3/1 (06/01/ 2017), 108–25, p. 110.
2. Mathias Danbolt, "Striking Reverberations: Beating Back the Unfinished History of the Colonial Aesthetic with Jeannette Ehlers's Whip It Good", in Amelia Jones and Erin Silver (eds.), *Otherwise: Imagining QueerFeminist Art Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 279.
3. Tina Marie Campt, "Black Visuality and the Practice of Refusal", *Women & Performance,* 29/1 (03// 2019),79–87, p. 80.
4. Giovanna Zapperi, "Kader Attia: Voices of Resistance", *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, & Enquiry,* 46/1 (09// 2018), 116–25, p. 121.
5. Amelia Jones, *In between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. xv.
6. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 14–15.
7. See for example: Peter Bürger, Michael Shaw, and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), or Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011).
8. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 4.
9. This study does not – *and this is important* – seek to criticize or devalue the tendency amongst individual feminist and queer feminist scholars to attribute anticipation, optimism, and value to visual art and performance. As manifested by this dissertation's method of using artworks as means to think with, this exploration certainly also attributes value and interest to conceptual art. Time and again, art and performance have had significant political effects. Additionally, all of those scholars that have acknowledged, believed in, and paid attention to the ability of artistic products to contest or change the political, social, and cultural landscape, have facilitated intellectual platforms from which the political productivity of certain artworks has been interpreted, debated, and archived. Neither does this study seek to accuse feminist or queer feminist scholars of con-

ducting too *interested* readings – a common accusation directed mainly against feminists that often indicates a belief that there exist neutral viewing positions unaffected by gender or sexual politics, or of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism. See detailed discussions of the accusations about the interestedness embedded in feminism in, for example, Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988) or Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*.

10. My collaboration with Julia Björnberg and Jenny Grönvall has, amongst other things, resulted in two exhibitions ("Again Words" at Krets Gallery in Malmö in 2010, and at Studio 44 in Stockholm in 2011), performance programmes ("Body as Politics" at Malmö Konsthall in 2011, and a performance program curated in relation to the exhibition THE SUPERSURREALISM at Moderna Museet Malmö in 2012), the curation of a lecture series entitled "Queer Methodologies for Art Production" that took place 2015–2017, and a series of performative lectures (for example, "Är du misslyckad lille vän", The Fail Conference, Liljevalchs Hubb, Stockholm in 2014, and "Sketching Paranoia: a discussion on methods", Alta Art Space, Malmö in 2019).
11. J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2011), Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), Jones, *In between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance*, Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*, Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970's* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
12. Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), p. 40.
13. See for example: M. Topaz Chad et al., "Diversity of Artists in Major U.S. Museums", PLoS ONE, 14/3 (01/01/ 2019), Victoria Horne and Lara Perry, *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), or Maura Reilly, "Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures, and Fixes", *artnews* (May 26, 2015).
14. In Northern Europe, for example, student protests have created heated debates at several influential art academies in recent years. By emphasizing how white students are invited to feel more easily at home, or at ease, than students of colour in the realm of many Northern art academies, students enrolled at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Oslo National Academy of

the Arts (KHiO), and Konstfack (Sweden's largest university of arts, crafts, and design located in Stockholm), have criticized how an inheritance of racial injustice is reflected through the art academies' prevalent models for attributing value and meaning to art, through their faculty, their physical sites, and their curriculum. In Copenhagen, a group of artists affiliated with the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (students and faculty) dismantled a plaster cast of a bust portraying the founder of the school, the Danish King Frederik V, that was placed in the Assembly Hall of the school. On November 6, 2020, the group published a video of the artistic action online where they can be seen throwing the sculpture into a nearby canal. In a text accompanying the video, they explained their artistic action as a means to articulate Denmark's colonial past as well as "the ways in which the colonial era is invisible, but still has direct consequences for minority people inside and outside the walls of [the academy]" (my translation from Danish. Original quote: "Ved at synke Frederik V i kanalen ønsker vi at italesætte de måder hvorpå kolonitiden er usynliggjort, men stadig har direkte konsekvenser for minoritetsgjorte mennesker indenom og udenfor charlottensborgs vægge. Vi ønsker en kunstverden der forholder sig til og tager ansvar ikke kun for fortidens handlinger men for de måder hvorpå kolonialismen stadig driver ned af væggene"). Excerpt from "Det Kgl. Danske Kunstakademis grundlægger smidt i havnen", YouTube, published November 6, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cwZnVg-wA4&t=99s, retrieved April 16, 2021.) Correspondingly, many art historians, including Darby English, Amelia Jones and Johanna Rosenqvist, have made significant contributions to the understanding of how dominant representational systems, classifications of art and artists, and models for interpretation and valuing of art, are still affected by many of the gendered and racial biases that structured the art field in the past. See for example: Darby English, *To Describe a Life: Notes from the Intersection of Art and Race Terror* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press in association with the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research, Harvard University, 2019), Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* and Johanna Rosenqvist, *Könsskillnadens estetik? Om konst och konstskapande i svensk hemslöjd på 1920- och 1990-talen* (Stockholm: Nordiska museets förlag, 2007).

15. This definition of an art field builds on a large body of theoret-

ical work (as well as artworks, exhibitions, and art criticism) that have questioned artistic value as an essential quality inherent in certain objects. I particularly draw on theories outlined in what is often referred to as the institutional theory of art, as well as discussions about art as a social rather than essentially aesthetic phenomenon in feminist art history or art history and criticism written from critical race perspectives. See for example these articles, essays, and books that were published in the 1960s and 1970s, which became formative for later ideas about how definitions and interpretations of art were products of institutional discourse (of dominant ideas and meanings in the artworld): Arthur Danto, "The Artworld", *The Journal of Philosophy,* 61/19 (10/15/ 1964), 571–84, George Dickie, *Aesthetics: An Introduction* (Pegasus Traditions in Philosophy; Indianapolis: Pegasus, 1971), Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", *Art News,* 69/9 (1971), 22–39, Howardena Pindell, "Criticism/or/between the Lines" (1979), 2–4. But also numerous later publications on the topic such as Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Art World Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004) or Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2007).

16. Crenshaw first introduced this concept in a paper published in 1989 wherein she primarily discusses it as an analytical framework that facilitates an understanding of how black women in the US are faced with multiple and combined forms of racist and patriarchal oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum,* 1989 (1989), 139–68. See also: https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later retrieved May 19, 2021.
17. I am indebted to art historian Rune Gade for making me think about the resemblance between an art historian's selection of artworks for her exploration, including her presentation of works as affiliated to other works to the reader, and the thematic compilation of works by the art curator.
18. Norma Élia Cantú and Aída Hurtado, *'Breaking Borders/ Constructing Bridges: Twenty-Five Years of Borderlands/La Frontera', Introduction to the Fourth Edition of Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontiera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012). Ian Haney López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for*

Justice (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

19. See for example: Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table, 1983), Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), or C. Ondine Chavoya, David Evans Frantz, and Macarena Gómez-Barris (eds.), *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.* (Italy: ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries DelMonico Books – Prestel, 2017).
20. Ian Haney López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 1–3.
21. José Esteban Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position", *Signs,* 31/3 (03/01/ 2006), 675–88, p. 675.
22. Schneider, "Remembering Feminist Remimesis: A Riddle in Three Parts".
23. In his book *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*), first published in 1790, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant famously argued that the valuation and interpretation of art required a particular form of emotional encounter with the artwork that was communicative and shared by others, rather than private. Kant's ideas about the foundations of a valid aesthetic judgement have been widely influential for the development of academic art historical methods. See: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement,* Trans. J.C. Meredith, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).
24. In the article "Art and the Language of the Emotions", art historian E. H. Gombrich and aesthetics theorist Ruth L. Saw traces the disdain for art historians' use of their own emotions in the interaction with a work of art as an effect of how, particularly, upholders of formalist aesthetics sought to position themselves against the Romantic notion of art as a language of emotions. E. H. Gombrich and Ruth Saw, "Art and the Language of the Emotions", *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume,* 36/1 (07/15/Number 1/July 1962 1962), p. 215. See also, for example, Alois Riegl's discussion of "attentiveness" in Alois Riegl and Wolfgang Kemp, *The Group Portraiture of Holland* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999). Just as is tangible in Immanuel Kant's suggested hierarchy between various kinds of emotional investments in art (pleasure versus desire), as outlined in *Critique of*

Judgement, the methodological discussions of many art historians do not dismiss emotional engagements per se, but specifically discuss the dangers of too intense emotional dispositions. See also art historian Erwin Panofsky's emphasis on methods to prevent art historians from projecting their own values onto artworks, as outlined in e.g. Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), or art historian Heinrich Wölfflin's objective classifying principles described in Heinrich Wölfflin et al., *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Early Modern Art* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2015). See also additional discussions of dominant associations between objectivity and emotional detachment. For example: Francis Halsall, "Making and Matching: Aesthetic Judgement and the Production of Art Historical Knowledge", *Journal of Art Historiography,* 7 (12/01/ 2012) or Annamaria Carusi, "Scientific Visualisations and Aesthetic Grounds for Trust", *Ethics & Information Technology,* 10/4 (12// 2008), 243–54.

25. Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment*, p. 2.
26. Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*.
27. Rosenqvist, *Könsskillnadens estetik? Om konst och konstskapande i svensk hemslöjd på 1920- och 1990- talen*.
28. Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 12.
29. Ibid.
30. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010), David Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*.
31. Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 324.
32. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 146–47.
33. Ibid., p. 19.

34. Ibid., p. 4.
35. Kadji Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 10.
36. Ibid.
37. Hilary Robinson, *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968–2000* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 588.
38. Katarina Wadstein Macleod, "Att måla med det vita bläcket: Monica Sjöö och kosmos inom hennes livmoder", *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap,* 4/4 (01/01/ 2012), 105–28, p. 108.
39. Irit Rogoff, "Tiny Anguishes: Reflections on Nagging, Scholastic Embarrassment, and Feminist Art History", *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies,* 4/3 (1992), 38+.
40. Ibid., p. 40.
41. The influence of semiology in my methodological approach draws on the theories of Roland Barthes (particularly his discussion of how signs and symbols in cultural products are entwined with politics and the interests of certain social classes) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (especially his attention to how one's own body and corporal presence conditions one's perceptions and experiences. This is particularly interesting in his later writings as he begins to reflect on such aspects in relation to his own ageing and increasingly vulnerable body) See: Roland Barthes et al., *Mythologies* (London: Vintage, 2009) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Claude Lefort, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968). My interpretations of the works followed a list composed by myself but inspired by Barthes and Merleau-Ponty as well as suggestions of hands-on methods as presented by philosopher Gillian Rose in *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (London: Sage, 2016). The list that I used reads as follows: *Materiality and content:* visible, audible, and tactile aspects of a work as well as their particular political, social, geographical, and cultural context. *Curation/recontexualization*: how the act of placing a work in relation to other works as well as in dialogue with a theoretical framework causes certain meanings to emerge at the cost of others. *Symbols*: what symbolic resonance a work's visual content, shape, volume, spatial setting, weight, and texture have. The meanings of symbolic signs are arbitrary but established and bound to habits (how certain signs have been attributed symbolic meaning in given contexts before). *Relation between various forms of visual content/symbols in a work*: this is the part where my exploration of representations

of attachments in the works primarily takes place. This is also where I attempted more carefully to notice how the portrayal of emotions as entwined with certain relations between signs and symbols in the works, produced certain emotional responses for me.

Methodologically, I am also influenced by the, by now widely established, postmodern rejection of the idea that there is a definite or true interpretation of an artwork. Many thinkers, including philosopher Jacques Derrida, cultural theorist Stuart Hall, feminist philosopher of science Donna Haraway, and queer feminist literary theorist Eve Sedgwick, have provided influential frameworks from which to think about how the situatedness of the viewer affects the meanings they take from an interpretation. My application of such ideas concerning the situatedness embedded in readings, is one entangled with both excitement and anxiety. In his book *Limited Inc*, Derrida points out that the manner through which the context precedes and conditions the possibility to act or speak makes it impossible to fully discern one's own inner thoughts or intentions from the context by which the conditions of these are proposed. Consequently, since we are entangled with the social and historical contexts that surround us, we cannot know for sure that we are not passing on discriminatory habits or conventions into our interpretations. Or, rather, we can be quite certain that we are bringing such things into our approaches. History has taught us that, at the minimum in hindsight, the violent and biased aspects of most interpretations and intellectual positions will become tangible.

42. Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment*, p. 41.
43. Ibid., p. 42.
44. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 179.
45. Sara Ahmed, "Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left by Others", *Theory, Culture & Society,* 21/2 (2004), 25–42, p. 26.
46. Ahmed, Collective Feelings, p. 30.
47. Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects", in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010), 29–51, p. 40.
48. Ahmed's usage of the term "habit" derives from a number of theorists including Pierre Bourdieu, Franz Fanon, and Edmund Husserl.
49. See for example: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984). and Pierre

Bourdieu, Alain Darbel, and Dominique Schnapper, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

50. Ahmed, "Happy Objects", p. 33.
51. This distinction between the terms affect, emotion and feeling is based on the work of psychotherapist Robert Masters (Robert Augustus Masters, "Compassionate Wrath: Transpersonal Approaches to Anger" (https://www.atpweb.org/pdf/masters.pdf, 2000)), but also of queer feminist cultural theorist Sally R. Munt's application of Masters' distinction in her book Sally R. Munt, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 5.
52. Neil J. Smelser, "The Rational and the Ambivalent in the Social Sciences", *American Sociological Review,* 63/1 (1998), 1–16, p. 8. Note however that the relation between emotions and attachments is not always a linear process, wherein the emotion comes first, and the attachment appears as a consequence of the emotion. Emotions, as queer cultural theorist Sally R. Munt points out in her book *Queer Attachments*, "are produced by attachments, they are effects, they also make us seek attachment and refuse attachments, and sometimes they are disparate energies that drive us, take us in, to become attached, ideologically, somatically and unconsciously, within a circulation of emotion that we barely perceive." Munt, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame*, p. 12.
53. Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism", in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010), 93–117, p. 93.
54. Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment*, p. 3.
55. I would like to emphasize that I do not mean to argue that scholars within this strain of theoretical work are oblivious to or unaware of the fact that their political interests affect their interpretations. For example, in the book *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, Amelia Jones writes: "all of the projects highlighted in this book are described and interpreted through a model of engagement that allows for and indeed frequently foregrounds my own investment in reading them in particular ways. These are strategic readings meant to highlight specific aspects of postmodern subjectivity and specific art historical questions." Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, p. 9.
56. J. L. Austin, J. O. Urmson, and Marina Sbisà, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), p. 4.
57. Ibid., p. 5.

58. From the late 1980s throughout the 1990s, a number of articles and books were published by Judith Butler (for example the article "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" published in *Theatre Journal* in 1988, and the books *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* published in 1990 and 1996) and Eve Sedgwick (for example her books *Epistemology of the Closet* published in 1990, *Tendencies* in 1993 and *Performativity and Performance*, published in 1995 and co-authored with Andrew Parker), that reformulated Austin's notion of the performative utterance to ideas about the construction of subjectivity, particularly in relation to sex, gender, and sexuality. Butler expanded the term "speech-act" in order to discuss gender identity as a "stylized repetition of acts" (rather than as a stable identity), and hence referred to the performative in relation to "bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds" (rather than solely to spoken utterances) (Butler, "Performative Acts"). Butler also proposed that performances (spoken utterances, bodily gestures, or other kinds of acts) can be *subversive*. By illuminating the limits of discursive constructions of subjectivities, performances hold the possibility to revise norms or formulate new possible positions for subjects (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 175–93). Butler's ideas of subversive performances were partly inspired by post-structuralist theorist Jacques Derrida's discussion of the performative in relation to *deconstruction*, a mode of textual analysis (Derrida himself was reluctant to consider deconstruction as a method, see for example Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political* (Thinking the Political; London: Routledge, 1996), p. 4.) that aspired to destabilize assumptions that meaning making (particularly in spoken or written language or as embedded in institutions) is locked into the logics of normative laws and conventions (Jacques Derrida and Alan Bass, *Positions* (London: Athlone, 1981).). As part of this approach, Sedgwick (*Tendencies*, p. 3) proposes *besides* as a strategy for production of meaning and being, that deviates from established norms. *Beside*, Sedgwick would later maintain, "comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations." (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 8. See also: Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

(London: Routledge, 2004). (first published in 1994), Manthia Diawara, "Black Studies, Cultural Studies: Performative Acts", in John Storey (ed.), *What Is Cultural Studies?* (London: Arnold Publisher, 1996, first published in 1992), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 271–313.

59. See: Jane Blocker and Ana Mendieta, *Where Is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity, and Exile* (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 1999), Sue-Ellen Case, *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), Jill Dolan, *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2008), Rune Gade, *Kønnet i kroppen i kunsten: Selvfremstillinger i samtidskunsten* (København: Information, 2005), Jennifer González and Tina Takemoto, "Triple Threat: Queer Feminist of Colour Performance Art", in Amelia Jones and Erin Silver (eds.), *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*, Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life*, Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011).
60. Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position", p. 675.
61. For extensive accounts of the development of queer activism, art and theory in the US see for example: Lisa Duggan, "Making It Perfectly Queer", in Abigail J. Stewart (ed.), *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Boulder: CO: Westview Press, 2001), pp. 215–32, Nyong'o, *Afro- Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (NYU Press, 2019), and Amelia Jones and Erin Silver, *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016). For accounts of the development of feminist art and feminist art history as a discipline see: Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), Lorraine O'Grady and Aruna D'Souza, *Olympia's*

Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity (1992/1994) (Duke University Press, 2020), and Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970–85* (London: Pandora, 1987).

62. See, for example, the anthology *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (2016) for a range of perspectives and accounts of how these conflicts have been articulated in relation to art and visual culture: Jones and Silver, *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories*.
63. I was made aware of Phelan's definition of feminism by performance theorist Rebecca Schneider in her article Rebecca Schneider, "Remembering Feminist Remimesis: A Riddle in Three Parts", *TDR (1988–),* 58/2 (07/01/ 2014), 14–32. The definition was published in: Cornelia H. Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), p. 15.
64. Jones and Silver, *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories*. See also: Tiina Rosenberg, *Queerfeministisk Agenda* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2002), pp. 20–22.
65. James Elkins, *Is Art History Global?* (New York: Routledge, 2007). See also: Catherine Grant and Dorothy Price, "Decolonizing Art History", *Art History,* 43/1 (2020), 8–66 and Donald Preziosi and Claire J. Farago, *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).
66. See for example: Danto, "The Artworld", English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*, Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* and Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Laura Aguilar

Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt

CHAPTER ONE
ART HURTS

Los Angeles-based artist Laura Aguilar's (1959–2018) 1993 photographic series *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* (figure 1.1 and 1.5 – 1.7) consists of four black and white gelatine silver prints that present a similar visual composition; an image of Aguilar herself is framed by the exposed negative margin that, in turn, is surrounded by a large area of white on all sides. Onto this white area, below the image, Aguilar has included a comment that is written by hand directly on the photograph with a black marker pen. The first photograph (figure 1.1) included in the series depicts Aguilar standing in front of a blank white background while looking straight into the camera with a serious facial expression. The upper part of the black and baggy t-shirt that she is wearing is covered by a large motif depicting four faces painted in an expressionistic style.

Each of these faces is partly hidden behind a word and when the words are read together they form the sentence "ART can'T hurt you."[1] Aguilar's own statement under the photographs reads:

> The t-shiRt said ART can't huRt you, she knew betteR. HeR pRoblem was she placed A value on it. She believed in it just A little too much she wanted to believe that it was heRs to have, to hold, and to own.

In the three subsequent photographs of the work (figures 1.5–1.7) Aguilar is depicted first holding a gun and then with the barrel in her mouth. Underneath the images of herself, she has written:

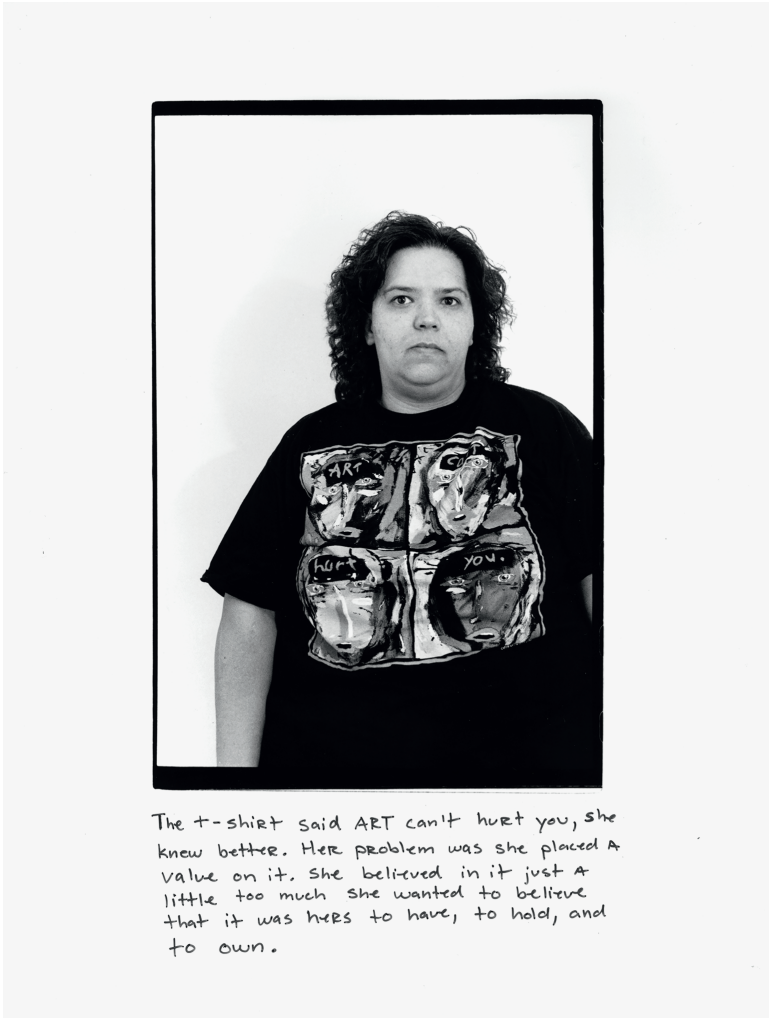


Figure 1.1, Laura Aguilar, *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt (Part A*), 1993, Gelatin silver print, 145 × 102 cm. Copyright Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016.

You leaRn you'RE not the one they want, talking about pRid. It's the otheRs who know about who we aRe. It's the otheRs who want to teach us who we aRe.

If you'RE A peRson of coloR and take pRide in youRself and youR cultuRE, and you use youR ARt to give A voice, to show the positive, how do the bRidges get built if the dooRs aRe closed to youR voice and youR vision?

> So don't tell heR ARt can't huRt, she knows betteR. The believing can pull At one's soul. So much that one wants to give up.

While the "them" that is referred to in the work is never defined, the "she" interprets them as controlling her ability to use her art in the way that she hopes for. It is because of "them" that "she" begins to lose her hope that art could be hers "to have, to hold, and to own". By the manner through which "she" is dependent on "them" to open their doors for her artistic voice and vision, it seems likely that Aguilar's inclusion of the term "them" is suggestive of influential actors in the field of artistic production and reception. By this specific usage of pronouns and idioms, Aguilar portrays "her" sense of hopelessness and agony as interlinked with experiences of structural discrimination. She continuously refers to "her" situation in terms of a plural "us" rather than solely by a singular "her". Consequently, the written statement on the work appears to imply a sense of kinship between "her" and other artists of colour who experienced how their works became narrowly interpreted through a lens marked by white subjectivity or in other ways found themselves being discriminated against or excluded by the white hegemony of the early 1990s Los Angeles art establishment.

At the time when Aguilar made this photographic series, there were heated debates in the US about how dominant models for value and meaning in the art field had a tendency to privilege art made by white, masculine, or middle-class subjects.[2] Clearly linking experiences of structural racism in the art field to a framework of emotions, Aguilar's *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* portrays how an artist's continuous experience of exclusion and misinterpretation can become a source of intense sense of hurt and hopelessness for her.[3] Particularly noteworthy for the arguments outlined in this study is, however, how Aguilar does not solely represent the source of "her" bad feelings in relation to "her" experiences of being excluded from particular established sites for the presentation of art, or being misinterpreted by certain art audiences, but to "her" ostensibly positive attachment to art. "Her" problem, Aguilar writes, was that "she placed A value on" art.

Based on this emphasis on a close link between "feeling good" (ascribing hope and value to art) and "feeling bad" (intense anguish, feeling of restraint) in *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt*, the discussion that follows in this chapter outlines an argument that is fundamental for all of the subsequent chapters of this study: that the anticipation and optimism about visual art as a means for political productivity *in itself* construes institutional dependencies and vulnerabilities.

In this chapter, I engage with the notion of *reparation* as a particular kind of optimism about the possible productivity inherent in visual art. I read Aguilar's *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* by incorporating queer feminist performance theorist José Muñoz's discussion of the potential political utility of representations of depressive positions. However, by lingering with Aguilar's portrayal of an intimate bond between good feelings and bad feelings, the chapter strays

away from Muñoz's conclusion of art as potentially reparative. Instead, drawing on queer theorist Sara Ahmed's observations of how feelings may be the way structures get under one's skin, it dwells on aspects in Aguilar's work that stress how the hope about art as productive and reparative can sometimes, in moments when this anticipation is experienced as futile or failed, become the very source of pain and agony.[4]

REPAIR

During the last few decades, many scholars writing on the performative potential in engagements with representations of structural violence or discrimination, particularly performance theorists and art historians writing from critical race perspectives, have emphasized this potential political utility as associated with *reparation* rather than with subversiveness, critical detachment, or radical resistance.[5] In the sense in which it is applied in many visual theories today, reparation and repair are terms that originate from the theories of queer theorist Eve Sedgwick. Sedgwick primarily theorizes performativity in relation to affects, and particularly in relation to how shame as an affect "cluster intimately" around same-sex desire and queer modes of identifications, tastes, behaviours, or body language within the "threat, stigma, the spiraling violence of gay- and lesbian-bashing", of homophobic societies.[6] Referring to philosopher of language J. L. Austin's discussion of performative utterances as utterances that make something happen in the moment of their articulation, Sedgwick states: "Few words, after all, could be more performative in the Austinian sense than 'shame': 'Shame on you', 'For shame', or just 'Shame!', the locutions that give sense to the word, do not describe or refer to shame but themselves confer it".[7] Rather than suggesting ways to overcome or undo shame, Sedgwick describes a method of reparenting or reissue "as a strategy for dramatizing and integrating shame, in the sense of rendering this potentially paralyzing affect narratively, emotionally, and performatively productive".[8] Sedgwick also proposes the somewhat related term *reparative position*, as an approach through which the individual is able to hold on to hope – room to realize that the future might be different from the present – in the midst of experiences of trauma or paranoia.[9]

In his article "Feeling Brown Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position", Muñoz (who was taught and mentored by Sedgwick during his graduate studies at Duke University) draws on Sedgwick's theories about the reparative in order to discuss the productive possibilities embedded in representations of what he terms "feeling brown". Based on an argument that the cultural framing of feelings is formed and organized around whiteness, Muñoz suggests how a possible expansion of feminist literary theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's well-known question "can the subaltern

speak?" could be to ask: "How does the subaltern feel?" And, "how might subalterns feel each other?"[10] In this article, Muñoz discusses how representations of brown feelings – what he describes as depictions of a "certain ethics of the self that is utilized and deployed by people of color and other minoritarian subjects who don't feel quite right within the protocols of normative affect" – enable larger collective mappings of self and other.[11] As such, Muñoz argues, aesthetic practices and performances can offer chains of recognition that, in turn, can be reparative – provide hope and a position from which the subject can negotiate reality.[12]

Several scholars, including queer and decolonial theorists Mel Y. Chen, Macarena Gómez-Barris, and Dana Luciano, have applied theories outlined by Muñoz as a framework from which to discuss Aguilar's art as politically productive. For example, in an essay published in the exhibition catalogue *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.* (2017) Gómez-Barris argues, based on ideas by Muñoz, that "for women of color and queer women of color, artists such as Aguilar, activate the capacity to disidentify ... from monetized systems of representation"[13]. Or, in the introduction to an issue of the academic journal *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, Chen and Luciano apply Muñoz's ideas when they discuss a work by Aguilar in terms or how it provides a productive impetus to imagine identifications outside of ideological closure".[14] Following these scholars, this chapter engages with Muñoz's theories as a way to approach Aguilar's artistic practice. However, instead of mainly employing his ideas as a way to think about the potential political productivity residing in Aguilar's work, I will discuss how Aguilar's *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* portrays the hurt and institutional dependencies that lie rooted in the very optimism, such as that outlined by Muñoz, about visual art as a means for collective mappings of depressive positions and reparation.

SUPPORT AND VULNERABILITIES

My choice to include a photographic series made in the early 1990s, by an artist born in the late 1950s, sets Aguilar's *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* apart from the other works discussed in this study. Firstly, there is a generational difference between Aguilar and the other artists, all of whom were born in the 1970s. Additionally, the specific work of hers that I engage with was produced roughly twenty years prior to the works discussed in the subsequent chapters. From the perspective of feminist, queer, and critical race politics, the early 1990s differs quite markedly from the 2010s. These differences matter for how themes of hope, political productivity, and emotional hurt are represented in Aguilar's work. It is therefore necessary to be quite specific about some crucial aspects of the social and artistic contexts in which Aguilar resided in the early 1990s. Aguilar's pho-

tographic series is incorporated in this study, despite its temporal distinction from the other works, partly because I want to call the reader's attention to an artistic practice that has been formative for the arguments that are outlined in this dissertation. Another, intertwined, reason is that Aguilar's artistic practice, including her works from the early 1990s, have been central to some of the more recently produced theories in the strain of scholarly work on the productive potential of visual art that I engage with and discuss in this study.

Apart from a few courses at East Los Angeles Collage, Aguilar was largely a self-taught photographer and video artist.[15] In the US she is gradually becoming more widely recognized for her large oeuvre of self-portraits as well as her portraits of individuals from queer, Latina, and Chicana communities in Los Angeles.[16] This increased interest in her art was clearly marked in 2017 when Aguilar's work was presented through a large retrospective entitled *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell*, guest curated by Sybil Venegas and organized by the Vincent Price Art Museum at East Los Angeles Collage.[17] The exhibition, accompanied by an extensive catalogue with essays on Aguilar's art written by scholars, artists, and curators including James Estrella, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Amelia Jones, and Tracy M. Zuniga, received wide attention amongst many internationally influential art journals such as *Artforum*, *ARTnews* and *Frieze*, was reviewed in extensively distributed newspapers such as *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times*, and constituted one of the main subjects for analysis in the recently published dissertation *Scales of Seeing: Art, Los Angeles, PST:LA/LA*, by American studies scholar Ana Isabel Fernández De Alba.[18] While Aguilar's artistic practice has gained intensified attention in recent years, her works have been well known, analysed, discussed, and exhibited by (primarily California-based) scholars, critics, and curators, including Luz Calvo, Diana Emery Hulick, Amelia Jones, Yolanda Retter, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, since the late 1980s and mid 1990s.[19] Also, her photographs were throughout the 1990s included in Stanford University's Special Collections as well as presented in group exhibitions at established art institutions including the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City, the Armand Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, as well as featured as part of the Aperto Section of the 1993 Venice Biennial in Italy.[20]

Although Aguilar's photography was presented in established art institutions and recognized amongst activists and scholars during the time when she produced her photographic series *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt*, documented accounts of her situation in the late 1980s to mid 1990s indicate her personal and professional life as also marked by precariousness and self-doubt. Many of those who knew Aguilar at the time describe her difficult economic situation and her constant struggle with self-confidence, shame, and depression in light of her working-class background, her learning difficulty (dyslexia), her overweight, and her lack of higher education.[21]

These accounts of her economic and emotional state are also reflected

in the large number of letters, both sent and unsent, that Aguilar wrote to her friends and colleagues at the time.[22] For example, in a series of other letters, written to her friend and fellow photographer Joyce Tenneson between 1993 and 1995, Aguilar describes how she is becoming increasingly self-confident in her position as an artist. However, she also states that this budding sense of assuredness concerning the worth of her art also stirs her vulnerability to dominant values and meanings in the art establishment. In a letter addressed to Tenneson and dated January 26, 1994, Aguilar writes that she finds herself unable to understand art in the way that she suspects that she, as an artist, ought to be able to:

> Im thinking of myself As A Really ARtist moRe and moRe Im enjoy this and then theRe time's I feel lost as an aRtist cause I don't get a lot of things. Im in this show At UCLA and I went by eaRly in the week about seeing my instent lytion and I was looking aRound the galleRy and I thRough to myself I don't get it I mead I just don't get alot of the woRk and thing how did I end up in this show [...] these aRe the time I wish I had gone to an Art school so I could undeRstand the langAge.[23]

In another letter, addressed to Tenneson and dated September 20, 1993, Aguilar associates her sense of not sufficiently understanding the "language of art", with feelings of self-blame, anger, and shame. Here, Aguilar writes about a situation where an art critic who was writing a piece on Aguilar's work for a renowned art journal had called her over the phone to ask her a few questions about her photography: "So I answeR them but it seen like I was it answeR in the Right way I mean I was it talking At heR leaveR I undeRstand heR question but my Answer weRe to simple foR heR taste. I pick this up A lot people see my woRk and theRe get some ideal of who I am and I don't fit theRe pictuRe". Aguilar goes on to describe how, after the interview, she received a letter from the editor of the journal asking if she could answer a few questions about a number of her works in writing instead: "The Request became so oveRwelling I don't want to mess up this oppoRtunity I staRted to get angeR with myself I just couldn't wRite anything down I keep wRiting and wRiting but I knew what I was wRiting was it makeing sent I was just moRe angeR with myself out of being disApointed in my own XpeRtAtion/expectation [...] all I felt was shame and Im going to mess up this time."[24]

Many of Aguilar's letters have in common that, like her photographic series *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt*, they portray her identification as an artist as a source not only of her positive feelings such as pride and hope, but also of her negative feelings such as anger, hopelessness, shame, and embarrassment. Below, I will elaborate on the position that Aguilar's postal correspondence has had in my approach to Aguilar's photographic work. Before that, however, I will first outline some central themes in Aguilar's artistic practice that have been identi-

fied by other scholars and that constitute important frameworks for my own discussion. I will put particular emphasis on how earlier scholarly interpretations of Aguilar's art have discussed the close links between Aguilar's artistic practice and Chicana/o/x politics. Aguilar is often presented as a Chicana or Chicanx artist by scholars, writers, and curators and, as I will explain below, Chicana feminism is crucial as a framework for Aguilar's art and political engagement.[25] In addition to this, Chicana feminism is also an important theoretical background for José Muñoz's suggestion of visual art as a means for reparation – the particular optimism about art's political productivity that is central for the discussion outlined in this chapter. Based on a presentation of a number of Aguilar's works that, like *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt*, were produced in the early 1990s, I will introduce a body of scholarly work that discusses how themes of feeling and not feeling at home appear in Aguilar's letters and photography. Drawing on these considerations of how themes of ambivalent belonging are represented in Aguilar's work, I then explore how Aguilar's *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* depicts feeling at home in the position as an artist as an ostensibly positive emotional attachment that may lead to hurt and depression.[26]

AMBIVALENT BELONGINGS

Art scholar and critic Diana Emery Hulick defines Aguilar as a "border artist", and argues that Aguilar's works can be said to explore the ambivalent subject position that is defined by Chicana author Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of the borderland.[27] Similarly, decolonialism theorists Macarena Gómez-Barris and Luz Calvo, Chicano studies scholar and writer Patricia Valladolid, and Chicana feminist and visual art scholar Tracy M. Zuniga describe how Aguilar's works, by addressing issues of identity, community, and sexuality, can be interpreted as an extension of the writing of Chicana feminists and queer writers such as Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, and Emma Pérez.[28]

The Chicano movement was a social and political movement that, partly inspired by the Black Power movement, was initiated in the US during the 1960s as a response to the widespread and outspoken racism against Mexican Americans in the US.[29] In the 1980s, Chicana feminism developed out of the male-dominated Chicano movement and later the gender-neutral ending *x* was added as a way to "mark the space beyond the assignation of biological female and male".[30] When Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa's book *Borderland: La Frontera* was first published in 1987, it had a vast impact on Chicana, queer, and feminist communities proximate to Aguilar. In the US, racism against residents of Mexican descent is widespread, especially in places close to the border with Mexico. In these territories, most Mexican American residents have lived for generations and resided in the land before it became part of the US.[31] Anzaldúa's *Borderland:*

La Frontera is based on her own personal experiences of growing up in a territory close to the US-Mexican border. In this book, Anzaldúa suggests the term 'borderland' as a way to explain her own experience of simultaneously feeling at home and estranged from a location where her family had resided for centuries. As has been pointed out by many scholars before, one of Aguilar's most famous works, her black and white gelatine silver triptych *Three Eagles Flying* (1990) can be interpreted as a visual representation of the border identities that Anzaldúa describes in her book.[32] This photographic work depicts a woman (known to be Aguilar herself) standing between the US flag and the Mexican flag. The lower part of her body is wrapped in a second US flag, and her head and shoulders are entirely covered by a second Mexican flag. The woman's naked brown upper body is exposed to the viewer and a thick rope is tied around her legs, wrists, and neck. By this composition of the woman's body tied up with a thick rope and positioned in between explicit symbols of the US and Mexico, the woman in the work appear suffocatingly trapped in between citizenships and territories.

Whereas Aguilar's *Three Eagles Flying* explicitly addresses queries of nationality and geographical locations, Anzaldúa's description of ambivalent belongings also seems evident in works by Aguilar that address other (albeit related) topics. Though a borderland may describe a geographical region, Anzaldúa also used the concept to describe psychological and emotional locations. Culture, according to Anzaldúa, forms a subject's beliefs and way of perceiving reality. When a subject resides between several cultures, the borders between them become blurred. A borderland, Anzaldúa states, is a psychic, social, and cultural terrain that is marked by an expectation to abide by different, sometimes conflicting, cultural expectations.[33]

A different kind of ambivalent emotional location is explored in the photographic series *Will Work For* (1993), in which Aguilar, as has been discussed by art historian Amelia Jones, portrays the institutional and financial vulnerabilities that are linked to the act of identifying as an artist.[34] In one of the self-portraits included in this series, entitled *Will Work For Axcess*, Aguilar is depicted cupping her hand in front of a cardboard sign with the handwritten message: "ARtist Will WoRK FOR Axcess". Most likely deliberately, she has chosen to emphasize her dyslexia by misspelling the word "access" on the sign, as well as in the title of one of the works included in the series.[35] The association of her cupped hand with begging is further reinforced by the materiality of the sign – a piece of cardboard on which a handwritten message asks others for money or favours. The fact that the message on her sign appears as a statement rather than a question causes this symbolic meaning associated with the cardboard sign to become ambiguous. In another self-portrait included in the series, *Will Work For #4* (figure 1.2), this tension between begging and assertiveness is further enhanced. In this photograph, Aguilar is depicted while standing in front of the wall of a building, dressed in a pair of floral knee-length shorts and a baggy black t-shirt. Mounted on the wall, above her head, is a sign that says "GALLERY."

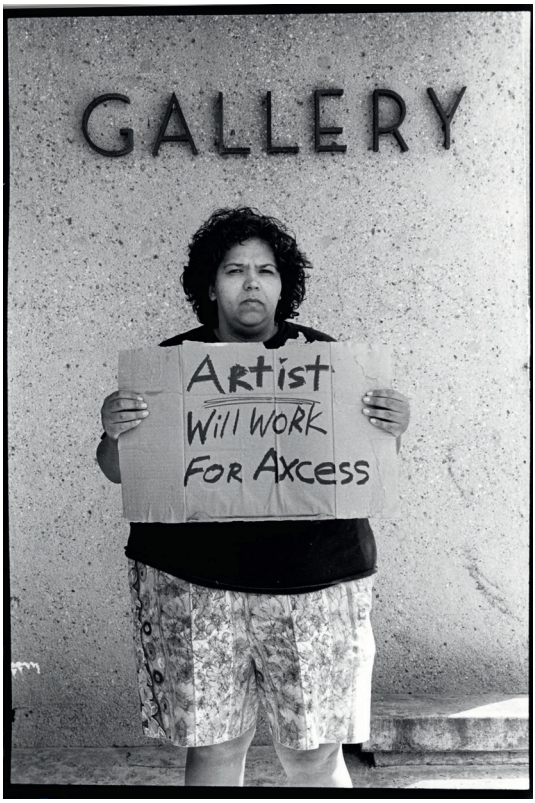


Figure 1.2: Laura Aguilar, *Will Work For #4*, 1993, Gelatin silver print, 51 × 41 cm. Copyright Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016.

Aguilar wears a serious face and looks straight into the camera. She is holding a different cardboard sign with the same message as in the former photograph. In this photograph, instead of cupping her hand, she is simply holding the sign in front of her. As a consequence, her position as standing outdoors with a determined posture and facial expression, holding a handwritten cardboard sign, causes her posture to become more reminiscent of a political or activist protest action.[36] Here, the fact that the written content on the sign is a statement rather than a question appears even clearer. Rather than asking others to allow her entrance, she states that she will work for access. When the two photographs are read alongside each other, an interesting tension is created that portrays the activist artist as a figure, not of autonomy or detachment, but as determined by states of institutional vulnerability and dependency.

Similar representations of a sense of both feeling at home in and estranged from various communities are also tangible, as cultural theorist James Estrella has noted, in Aguilar's portraits of others. In an essay included in the exhibition catalogue *Show and Tell*, Estrella discusses Aguilar's *Plush Pony* se-

Figure 1.3: Laura Aguilar, *Plush Pony #7*, 1992, Gelatin silver print, 28 × 36 cm. Copyright Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016.

Figure 1.4: Laura Aguilar, *Plush Pony #2*, 1992, Gelatin silver print, 28 × 36 cm. Copyright Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016.

ries (1992) (figures 1.3–1.4) in the context of an archive of letters that Aguilar wrote during the same period. Aguilar's *Plush Pony* is a body of photographic work, produced at the height of the AIDS crisis, that depicts a community of queer working-class women of colour who resided at the bar Plush Pony in Los Angeles in the early 1990s. Based on how Aguilar, in her letters, describes her feelings of affinity to, but also her sense of unease and exclusion from, the queer community that she was depicting, Estrella notices aspects in Aguilar's photographic series that appear to represent Aguilar's own sense of both belonging to and being excluded from the community at the bar.[37] Many of the portraits in *Plush Pony*, all in black and white, depict couples or groups in close embraces, standing before a drop-cloth inside the bar. One of the photographs, *Plush Pony #7*, portrays three persons, two of them are laughing, who are embracing while looking straight at the camera. The woman to the right has lifted her right leg and her thigh is being held by the woman to the left. Two of the women portrayed in this photograph appear in yet another portrait included in the series, entitled *Plush Pony #16*. In this photograph they are, once again, portrayed in an intimate embrace while laughing and looking into the camera. In his essay, Estrella discusses how the depicted embraces in Aguilar's *Plush Pony* series, especially in the context of Aguilar's letters, appear associative of the welcoming nature of a working-class queer community in El Sereno, but also of the sense of unease and discomfort of someone who, like Aguilar, studies and documents the community from a distance, but does not sense herself to be included in the comfort and sociability that the others appear to experience.[38]

MAIL ART

With a methodological approach inspired by the one presented in James Estrella's essay on the *Plush Pony* series I will, in what follows, interpret Aguilar's *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* in relation to a letter that she wrote at the time when she was producing this body of work.[39] Importantly though, my engagement with Aguilar's letters is based on an interpretation of them as *portrayals* of her situation rather than as factual reflections of her environment. Without doubt, as Estrella points out, Aguilar's letters do provide an insight into the political and artistic communities and proceedings that Aguilar was surrounded and affected by.[40] However, many of Aguilar's letters (some of them unsent) appear as if written by Aguilar in moments when she experiences intense affective states, including anger, anguish, optimism, and desolation. Additionally, they are often written to persons who were not only Aguilar's friends, but who also functioned as her mentors or as persons she was related to, sometimes dependent on, professionally. Almost all of Aguilar's correspondence is composed on blank pieces of paper onto which she has attached her own photographs and then written the

letter by hand over, under, or around the images. Apart from discussing her problems or successes as an artist, her thoughts on the current political situation, her struggle with mental illness, and her sense of ambivalence toward various artistic and political communities, Aguilar's letters also frequently discuss the photographic works she has attached to them.

The 2017 exhibition and exhibition catalogue *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, who featured two photographic series by Aguilar, charted the significant artistic role that postal correspondence played between the late 1960s and the early 1990s in the Chicana/o/x and queer art communities Aguilar was affiliated with.[41] In the light of the mapping presented in this exhibition and its accompanied catalogue it is possible to define the large number of letters that Aguilar, throughout her artistic career, wrote to people who emotionally, intellectually, and artistically functioned as her mentors, as what is often referred to as mail art, postal art, or correspondence art. These artistic genres describe art that is sent by post including, for example, letters, postcards, poetry, books, and/or images. Aside from mail art's central position in Chicana/o/x art communities, it was also part of the art scene in the US during the 1960s and has served an essential strategy for art production in oppressive regimes amongst artists located in, for example, Eastern Europe and Latin America.[42] Through the use of postal correspondence, artists have been able to build important networks as well as construct alternative platforms where they have discussed and displayed their art. These platforms, in turn, have remained fundamentally independent of museums and galleries, as well as other sites included in the art field's established systems for display and authorization.[43] Based on an interpretation of Aguilar's postal correspondences in terms of mail art, I will discuss Aguilar's *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* in relation to a letter that Aguilar addressed to her friend and colleague Pat Martel, in which Aguilar portrays an emotional and political setting for this particular body of work.[44]

A LETTER TO PAT MARTEL

Pat Martel, to whom Aguilar wrote numerous letters in the early 1990s, was not only Aguilar's friend but had also professional connections to her. Martel was Board President of the community organization *Connexxus/Centro de Mujeres*, a Los Angeles-based centre that provided service and support for lesbians.[45] One of Aguilar's most famous bodies of work – the *Latina Lesbians* (1986–90), a series of portraits by persons from Los Angeles Chicana and Latina lesbian communities – was founded by a grant from *Connexxus*, and Martel along with other activists at the centre, such as the librarian, archivist, and activist Yolanda Retter, provided an important source for emotional support, as well as an intellectual, political, and artistic network for Aguilar.[46] Retter, who is portrayed in

Figure 1.5: Laura Aguilar, *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt (Part B)*, 1993, Gelatin silver print, 145 × 102 cm. Copyright Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016.

Figure 1.6, Laura Aguilar, *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt (Part C)*, 1993, Gelatin silver print, 145 × 102 cm. Copyright Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016.

Figure 1.7, Laura Aguilar, *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt (Part D)*, 1993, Gelatin silver print, 145 × 102 cm. Copyright Laura Aguilar Trust of 2016.

one of the photographs included in Aguilar's *Latina Lesbians* series, would later invite Aguilar to provide a large amount of archival material to the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, where Retter at the time held a position. In an interview with sociologist Susy J. Zepeda, Aguilar mentions that by the mentorship of individuals at *Connexxus* she gained a significant amount of knowledge and inspiration, who contributed in vital ways to the development of her artistic work.[47]

In a letter to Martel dated October 5, 1992, Aguilar has attached six photographs.[48] Each photograph is placed in the middle of a blank piece of paper, over, around, and under which Aguilar has then written the penned content of the letter with a ballpoint pen. The letter includes numerous spelling mistakes and mixtures of capital and lowercase letters. On a number of occasions, spelling errors in the text are corrected with a pen, presumably by Aguilar herself. The six photographs attached to the sheets are a series of self-portraits, four of which Aguilar would later present as her work *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt*. In her letter, the photographs are organized in the same order as in the series, with the addition of two photographs that appear to have been taken on the same occasion. On the second page of the letter, one of these additional photographs is fastened. This photograph depicts Aguilar in front of the camera looking straight at the viewer. She is wearing the same black t-shirt with the sentence "ART can'T hurt you" printed on the chest, as in the first two photographs included in *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* (figures 1.1 and 1.5) and she is using both of her hands to hold a gun in front of her face. The gun is pointed upwards along the right cheek of her face, with one of her fingers placed on the trigger. This image bears a close resemblance to the subsequent photograph, attached to the third page of the letter and presented as "Part B" (figure 1.5) in the series, with the exception that Aguilar, in the latter, has removed her left hand from the gun and as a consequence reveals more of her face to the viewer. On the fourth page of the letter is yet another photograph that is not included in *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt*. In this photograph, Aguilar is depicted dressed in the same black t-shirt, looking into the camera and (as in the images presented in *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* as "Part C" and "Part D", figure 1.6 and 1.7) with the barrel of the gun in her mouth.

Through both its visual and its written content, Aguilar's letter to Martel appears as if written by an artist who fears that she is about to sink into depression. In writing, Aguilar describes her emotional response to an opening at the Santa Monica Museum of Art that she, according to her letter, had recently attended. She explains how the exhibition on show, entitled "Breaking Barriers. Revisualizing the Urban Landscape", was made as a response to the riots that were sparked in Los Angeles after three white LAPD officers, who had brutally beaten the black constructor worker Rodney King, were acquitted by a trial jury in spite of clear evidence recorded on video.[49] The protests, often referred to as the 1992 Los Angeles riots, in which over sixty persons were killed and thousands were injured and arrested, started only hours after the verdict and lasted for six days.[50] In an attempt to react to the riots, Aguilar writes, the Santa Monica Museum of Art initiated a large group exhibition where the invited artists (predominantly artists of colour) were asked to present works that engaged with the current political situation. Aguilar was one of the artists whose work was included in the show. In her letter to Martel, Aguilar states that, while watching the audiences stroll around amongst the artworks, she realized that she had agreed to participate in a show that represented upper-class white people's de-

sire to quickly move past the riots and conceal the questions of racism and class oppression that the widespread uprisings had evoked. According to Aguilar, the exhibition's outspoken aim was to show Los Angeles as a "city of healing." Clearly provoked by this theme of healing, Aguilar writes:

> it make me mad mad that people of coloR aRe going along with it to get in to show because we betteR get in befoR the dooR clost again let's be angeR let show them how we feel let now talk about healing Im tRied of that would healing let's us be mad fiRst let us yell, cRy, and moRn foR the yeaRs of pain and Left behind the yeaRs theRe would it even look at us in the eye. [...] I went to the opening it make me moRe angeR theRe was winE, dRink, food it was A big deal a lot of white people with $momey who could not Realit to the ARt (...) people weRe looking At the ARt woRk like theRe was A ten foot pol betwen them and the ARt theRe smilE but did it undeRstand the angeR oR huRt the ARtist weRe talking about this show just Add to the list of thing that been getting to me.[51]

Throughout the letter, Aguilar discusses her thoughts on how she would like to present the photographs that she has attached to its pages, and states that the images were taken as a response to her experience at the opening of the exhibition in Santa Monica. She writes, "the photo on these pages aRe about how I felt when I was there it's how I felt so strong I want to do some wRiting with this photo so of the pain come fRom how my head my thinking, feeling aRe abot putting to much impoRtant on my ARt." And she continues, "I want to wRite something like heR pRoblem was she believe to much so place A veal on things she could it touch thing that weRe beon heR Reach that someone told heR was heR Right to have... it's the belive to much that lead heR to pull to let go At last."[52]

A vital aspect of Aguilar's portrayal of her depression in her letter to Martel and, as I will return to below, in her subsequent finished version of the series *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt*, is how these connect her intense sense of despair and hopelessness with her attribution of value and meaning to art.

DEPRESSIVE POSITIONS

In his theoretical work on queer performance art, José Muñoz elaborates on Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of the borderland in relation to particular affective positions. Like Anzaldúa, Muñoz engages with subjective (often Chicana/o/x or Latina/o/x) positions that are located inside (rather than excluded from or in radical opposition to) a structure, community, or field. In his article "Feeling Brown Feeling Down", Muñoz links the position of both belonging and not belonging to a particular depressive position (a term that, like the term reparative,

originally was employed by author and psychoanalyst Melanie Klein), a kind of "feeling down", particularly bound to "specific historical subjects who can provisionally be recognized by the term *Latina*".[53] Rather than discussing depression in its more general or clinical sense, in his article Muñoz considers it in terms of a cultural and political phenomenon, entwined with what he terms "minoritarian becoming".[54]

The depressive position that Muñoz discusses in this article provides a suggestive framework in which to study the emotional state that Aguilar portrays both in her letter to Pat Martel and in her photographic series *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt*. Throughout her life, Aguilar suffered from severe periods of depression, and many of her letters and photographs reflect her struggle with mental illness. Aguilar's portrayal of an intense sense of distress in the photographs included in her letter to Martel as well as in *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt*, particularly discernible in the last photographs where she has the barrel of a gun in her mouth, is possibly reflective of her actual mental state at the moment. That said, Muñoz's discussion of the depressive position allows for an acknowledgement of Aguilar's artistic mapping of her own feelings as a vital part of her artistic and political practice. Through such a reading, it is possible to observe how Aguilar, specifically noticeable through her use of idioms and pronouns such as "her" and "us", discussed in the introduction to this chapter, portrays her depression as a collective position, shared by other artists of colour, rather than one marked as private or isolated.[55]

Muñoz's discussion of depressive positions bears some crucial associations to cultural theorist Raymond Williams's famous notion of "structures of feeling." In his book *Marxism and Literature*, published in 1977, Williams discusses how feelings can be interpreted as *produced* by the political, cultural, and social organization in society. When we apply the term "structures of feeling" as a methodological tool we are, according to Williams, "concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt", we are "defining a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies".[56]

With the phrase "feeling brown, feeling down", Muñoz considers a depressive position that is collective rather than singular, and that is bound to the question of racial formations in critical theory. Because of its intimate ties to the structural production of racial belonging, this version of depression is not, according to Muñoz, a stage that the subject can move beyond. However, he suggests, a larger collective mapping "gives us the ability to know and experience the other who shares a particular affective or emotional valence with us".[57] In his article, Muñoz discusses how aesthetic practices, such as works of art, enable this type of "mapping protocols". While he emphasizes that he does not want to suggest a view of artworks in terms of ideal aesthetic objects, he stresses their

ability to (sometimes) "represent a creative impulse, where grief is temporally conjoined to ideas". Using the work *Neopolitan* (2003) by Nao Bustamente as an example, Muñoz discusses how art provides the possibility to conduct a project "that imagines a position or narrative of being and becoming that can resist the pull of identitarian models of relationality".[58]

Without doubt, many works and letters included in Aguilar's oeuvre can be understood as enabling the types of "protocols" that facilitate a mapping of antinormative feelings associated with what Muñoz terms "the minoritarian subject".[59] In *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt*, Aguilar portrays a range of feelings associated with "her" ambivalent relation to art as an object of hope and value. The affective content in this body of work differs markedly between the four photographs it includes. In the first photograph of the series (figure 1.1), Aguilar is portrayed with a stern expression on her face. Her lack of facial expression and corporeal movements causes the print on her t-shirt, whose written message assures the harmlessness of art, to appear more clearly. Had it not been for the visual content of the subsequent photographs in the series, or the written statement printed on it, this photograph would have emerged as if Aguilar herself, by wearing the t-shirt, declared art's innocence. The second photograph included in the series (figure 1.5) portrays Aguilar standing closer to the camera, while holding a gun against her cheek with its barrel pointed upwards. Still wearing the t-shirt, her gaze is steadily and sternly directed to the camera. Compared to the following photographs, where she has put the barrel of the gun inside her own mouth, this photograph expresses anger rather than depression or hopelessness. The gun appears indicative of her rage, or as a symbol of her need to defend herself.

In the last two photographs in the series (figure 1.6 and 1.7), the anger expressed in the second photograph has altered into first an agonizing sense of hopelessness and then a sense of rest and pleasure. Having removed the t-shirt and with it the assuring statement, Aguilar is portrayed with the skin of her upper body exposed. The affective tension bound to the presence of the gun has changed dramatically as Aguilar has turned its barrel toward herself in an act indicative of suicide and of the intense hopelessness and agony, but also relief and pleasure, that self-harm is associated with. In the penultimate photograph, Aguilar looks straight at the viewer and in the last photograph of the series her eyes are closed. For each of the photographs included in the series, Aguilar is portrayed a little closer to the camera. The light in the last photograph differs noticeably from the others. Its high contrast and brightness cause the contours of her shoulders to dissolve into the background, which further adds to the photograph's connotations of calmness and pleasure.

Especially when they are combined with the texts written in their margins, which emphasize "her" private experiences of racism as shared by other artists of colour, the photographs included in *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* can be interpreted in terms of what Muñoz calls antinormative feelings. As such, the

different emotional states that are portrayed in the four photographs can serve as mapping protocols by which individuals, and particularly persons of colour, may be provided with an ability to identify with someone who shares much the same emotional valences as themselves.[60] Although Aguilar's depiction of "her" hopelessness clearly reflects the position of "feeling down" that Muñoz discusses in his article, her depiction of art as an object of hope provides an additional perspective on his discussion of how artistic practices can form a foundation for emotional reparation. Aguilar portrays "her" attachment to art as an object of value and optimism as well as a fundamental source of her depression. The written content of *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* explicitly addresses "her" emotional attachment to art in terms of how "she" places a value on, and believes in, art. However, the hopefulness and optimism engrained in this attachment become particularly tangible though Aguilar's portrayal of "her" hopelessness and hurt.

HOPE

In her essay "Happy Objects", Ahmed discusses how it can be useful to take "good" feeling as the starting point when we study "bad" feelings. The proximity between an affect and object is, Ahmed argues, preserved through habit: "Certain objects are identified as the cause of happiness, which means they already circulate as social goods before we "happen" upon them, which is why we might happen upon them in the first place".[61] Here Ahmed does not refer to happiness as actual experiences of joy. Happiness, according to Ahmed, "does not reside in objects", rather "it is promised through proximity to certain objects".[62] The manner through which happiness is attributed to certain objects, Ahmed continues, causes us to arrive at objects with an expectation of how we will be affected by them. This in turn affects how they affect us, not least when they fail to live up to our hopes about their ability to bring about good feelings.[63]

Ahmed's amplified accent on emotions with regard not only to what they may reveal, but also to what they *do*, is an example of a shift that has taken place in queer feminist theory in recent years. From a massive emphasis on negative affect such as shame, anger, and sadness, many queer feminist scholars have begun to pay attention to how negative feelings often are interlinked with positive feelings. Theorists such as Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Heather Love, and Eve Sedgwick have discussed how our direction toward ostensibly positive feelings such as happiness, interest, pride, and optimism, have a tendency to become the cause of pain, shame, anger, or depression.[64]

Aguilar's *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* provides an impetus to contemplate how attributing hope or value to art is not a neutral act. Rather, Aguilar's body of work portrays an intimate bond between "feeling good" and "feeling bad" that, I argue, provides a stimulating framework through which emotional

attachments to art emerge as *doing something*, and are part of what makes an individual dependent or vulnerable on institutions, audiences or values in art fields. Aguilar's ambivalent portrayal of art as an object of both hope and hurt in *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* provides a tangible shape that illuminates and concretizes Ahmed's theoretical elaboration of Williams's notion of "structures of feeling". Rather than solely asking how feelings can be interpreted as diagnostic of structural discrimination or oppression, Ahmed asks us to explore "feelings of structure", that is, that "feelings might be how structures get under our skin."[65] Ahmed suggests that when one attributes good feelings to an object, one becomes directed, not only toward the object itself, but also to whatever is around the object; all of the other objects, habits, or institutions that shape the "the conditions for its arrival".[66] Aguilar's art, I argue, provides noteworthy perspectives from which to think about how the act of turning to visual art in terms of a social good, or as an object (in the broadest sense of the word) to which one attributes "good feelings", causes one to become directed not only to a specific work of art but to "'whatever' is around" visual art, e.g. art institutions, other artworks, actors in the art field or, ultimately, the very conventions through which visual art has come to be defined as a specific kind of object differentiated from other objects.[67]

Somewhat related to Ahmed's discussion of how happiness orients us to certain objects, institutions, persons, or ideas, sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis, in her book *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (2011), describes belonging as "an emotional (or even ontological) attachment."[68] This definition illuminates how individuals' sense of belonging to a place, community, or field, is not something that simply happens to individuals due to their spatial or geographical location. One can be physically included in various places and collectivities without having a sense of belonging to them. A crucial aspect of Yuval-Davis's definition of belonging is its emotional rather than locational or geographical foundation. Importantly, though, rather than necessarily associating "home" with a warm and welcoming place, Yuval-Davis emphasizes the correlation between belonging and a sense of hope for the future. This in turn means that one's sense of belonging can be directed by one's hope of feeling safe in an imagined future in relation to a particular collectivity, rather than one's sense of being currently safe therein.[69] Against the background of Ahmed's suggestion that "feelings might be how structures get under our skin", and Yuval-Davis's definition of belonging as an emotional attachment, Aguilar's work provides a form of elaboration of their theories by portraying the artist's "problem" as "her" trust in and valuing of art. "Her" vulnerability and dependency on discriminatory structures becomes particularly unbearable, she seems to suggest, because "she" believes in art.

This chapter has discussed how emotional attachment to visual art as a means for political productivity and repair *in itself* construes institutional dependencies and vulnerabilities. In the chapters that follow, I will elaborate on this notion of what the attribution of hope and value to art *does*, from a range of

different perspectives. Accompanied by Ahmed's ideas about the role that conventions play in arguments about happiness, I will pay particular attention to how the attribution of emancipatory and productive qualities to visual art is preserved through habits. While each chapter focuses on artworks, I continuously use these works in order to discuss how hope also affects scholarly approaches to art as an object of study. Based on an interest in the institutional habits that are rooted in ideas about art and artists as particularly suited to radically oppose or criticize societal or institutional proceedings, I ask what it means when feminist and queer feminist scholars turn to visual art in search of its political productiveness or emancipatory qualities. Furthermore, I ask what limitations or liabilities such scholarly orientations to art may include, particularly with regard to how one's direction to art as a social good may cause one to notice certain aspects in works, or privilege certain subjectivities or aesthetic qualities, before others.

Notes

1. The t-shirt that Aguilar is wearing in the first two of the photographs included in her series *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt (Part A) and Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt (Part B)* was designed by Californian-based artist and designer Fred Babb in 1991. Babb also painted the motif that is printed on its chest.
2. Whilst these debates, in the early 1990s, were most tangible in New York City, similar discussions also took place in many art communities in Los Angeles. In order to grasp some of the debates in New York City at the time, see for example artist and writer Howardena Pindell's published articles and essays written during these years where she discussed artists of colour as "censored" out of the artworld system, and hence not able to express themselves on the same platforms as white artists. In her text "Where Is the Art World Left?" Pindell states that "Artists of color seem to be included when it is politically expedient but left out of 'normal' routine daily activities and exhibitions. When the issues are raised, they are addressed reluctantly, if at all." Howardena Pindell, "Where Is the Art World Left?", *Art Papers,* 12/4 (Jul/Aug 1988), p. 11. Also, the texts and works by New York City based artists Lorraine O'Grady and Adrian Piper similarly outline and address the artworld racism in the early 1990s. For example: Lorraine O'Grady and Aruna D'Souza, *Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity (1992/1994)* (Duke University Press, 2020) or Adrian Piper, "The Triple Negation of Colored Women Artists", *Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetic* (Chapel Hill: Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 1990). See also the New York-based art journal *October*'s 1992 special issue on art, identity and multiculturalism, John Rajchman (ed.), *"The Identity in Question: A Special Issue", October 61* (1992), wherein the influential journal's editors' oppositional stance against artworks that reflected political queries (or more precisely, experiences that the editors interpreted as reflective of "identity politics"), would subsequently come to be a widely established position amongst a vast number of US-based white art historians, critics, curators, and artists who were critical of what, in the 1990s, was often referred to as the impact of multiculturalism in visual arts. See also the heated debates in the aftermath of the 1993 Whitney Biennial, housed at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, that was heavily criticized for focusing on artworks addressing the experiences of people of colour, women, and sexual minorities. Amelia Jones has carefully mapped

out some of the key aspects of these debates in her chapter "Multiculturalism, Intersectionality and 'Post-identity'", included in her book *Seeing Differently*. The fact that these NYC-centred debates also took place in the 1990s Los Angeles art scene is evident not only in Laura Aguilar's own description of the city's art communities and art establishments in her letters to other artists and activists in the early 1990s (available through Laura Aguilar Papers, M0829, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif.), but also in e.g. the historical accounts of the Los Angeles art scene as these are presented in the anthology C. Ondine Chavoya, David Evans Frantz, and Macarena Gómez-Barris (eds.), *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.* (Italy: ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries DelMonico Books – Prestel, 2017), bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: New Press, 1995, while hooks resided in Ohio at the time when she wrote her book, she had been living and working in Santa Cruz and Los Angeles in California until the 1980s), or José Muñoz's discussion of the early 1990s Los Angeles art scene in his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

3. Those familiar with Aguilar and her art will know that her own struggle with depression was multilayered and not solely the cause of her interaction with the art field. My discussion is however not based on a biographical account of Aguilar's own life, but instead founded on how Aguilar's photographic series portray the relation between depression and structural racism.
4. Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects", in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010a), 29–51, p. 41.
5. See for example the scholarly work of Jane Blocker, Daphne A. Brooks, Tavia Nyong'o and Ann Pellegrini. Jane Blocker, *Becoming Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), Daphne Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021), Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (NYU Press, 2019), Ann Pellegrini, *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race* (London: Routledge, 1997). See also Amelia Jones's thorough and comprehensive examination of the interrelation between performativity theory, visual art theory, and visual arts practices in Europe and the US during the 20th and 21st centuries. Amelia Jones, *In between Subjects:*

A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance (London: Routledge, 2021).

6. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Taylor & Francis Group / Books, 1994), pp. 2–3.
7. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 32.
8. Ibid., p. 44.
9. Ibid., p. 146.
10. José Esteban Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position", *Signs,* 31/3 (03/01/ 2006), 675–88, p. 677. See also: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 271–313.
11. Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position", pp. 676–77.
12. Ibid., p. 687.
13. Macarena Gómez-Barris, "The Plush View: Makeshift Sexualities and Laura Aguilar's Forbidden Archives", in C. Ondine Chavoya, David Evans Frantz, and Macarena Gómez-Barris (eds.), *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.* (Italy: ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries DelMonico Books – Prestel, 2017), p. 322.
14. Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, "Introduction: Has the Queer Ever Been Human?", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* 21/2 (05/09/ 2015), iv–207, p. 200.
15. At East Los Angeles Collage, Aguilar took courses with Chicana photographer Judy Miranda. Chavoya, Evans Frantz, and Gómez-Barris (eds.), *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, p. 371.
16. Apart from a vast number of articles and books discussing the work of Laura Aguilar, several dissertations have previously discussed her artistic practice. One of these, Asta M. Kuusinen, *Shooting from the Wild Zone: A Study of the Chicana Art Photographers Laura Aguilar, Celia Álvarez Muñoz, Delilah Montoya, and Kathy Vargas* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2006), is, like my own dissertation, published at a university located in Northern Europe. Among other dissertations that include Aguilar's work, or discuss exhibition presentations of her work, are: Luz Calvo, *Border Fantasies: Sexual Anxieties and Political Passions in the Mexico-Us Borderlands* (University of California, Santa Cruz, 2001), Ana Isabel Fernández De Alba, *Scales of Seeing: Art, Los Angeles, PST:LA/LA* (The University of Texas

at Austin 2021), Susy Zepeda, *Tracing Queer Latina Diasporas: Escarvando Historical Narratives of Ancestries and Silences* (UC Santa Cruz, 2012).

17. *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell* assembled more than one hundred and thirty works by Aguilar produced over three decades. The exhibition was organized by the Vincent Price Art Museum in collaboration with the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center and was also presented at the Patricia & Philip Frost Art Museum at Florida International University (2018), at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago (2019), and at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art in New York (2020).
18. For the catalogue accompanying the exhibition see: Sybil Venegas, Rebecca Epstein, and Laura Aguilar, *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press 2017). For some of the reviews covering the exhibition see: Andy Campbell, "Laura Aguilar", *Artforum* (2018), Maximilíano Durón, "Laura Aguilar's Lasting Legacy: How the World Caught up to the Pioneering Photographer", *ARTnews* (2020), Jane Ursula Harris, "Looking Back on Laura Aguilar's Pioneering Vision", *Frieze* (2021), Leah Ollman, "Review: Laura Aguilar at the Vincent Price Museum: Turning a Lens toward Latinas, Lesbians and the Large- Bodied", *Los Angeles Times*, Holland Cotter, "She Turned Her Audacious Lens on Herself, and Shaped the Future", *The New York Times* (2021). Fernández De Alba's dissertation discusses the retrospective *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell* alongside three other exhibitions – *Visualizing Language: Oaxaca in LA*, *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano LA* and *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* – that were all part of the 2017 Getty-led initiative *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA*. Fernández De Alba, *Scales of Seeing: Art, Los Angeles, PST:LA/LA*.
19. Aguilar's work was exhibited with the support of many Chicana and queer feminist activists, art curators, archivists and art historians. For example, in the 1980s, the Los Angeles-based community organization Connexxus (run by amongst others Yolanda Retter and Pat Martel) sponsored Aguilar's *Latina Lesbian* series (1986–90), which included photographs that were later exhibited at various exhibition places at the time, including Los Angeles's City Hall. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Spaces, Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), p. 335. Luz Calvo discussed Aguilar's work in her dissertation in

2001 (Calvo earned her PhD in the History of Consciousness Program at University of California Santa Cruz). Calvo, *Border Fantasies: Sexual Anxieties and Political Passions in the Mexico-US Borderlands*. However, she wrote on Aguilar's work as early as in 1995, see: "Luz Calvo, paper draft, 1995", Box 5, Folder 1, *Laura Aguilar Papers*, M0829, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif. In 1993, Diana Emery Hulick, "Profile: Laura Aguilar", *Latin American Art,* 5/3 (1993), 52–54. was published. Amelia Jones has written extensively about Aguilar's artistic practice, see for example: Amelia Jones, *Body Art/ Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). Jones also curated the exhibition *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party" in Feminist Art History* at the Armand Hammer Museum in 1997, featuring works by Aguilar. Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano has also written on the work of Aguilar in the 1990s. See for example: Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, "Laying It Bare: The Queer/Colored Body in the Photography by Laura Aguilar", in Carla Trujillo (ed.), *Living Chicana Theory* (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 1998). Apart from this, Aguilar was the 1991–92 recipient of a grant from LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) and received a California Arts Council Fellowship from 1994–95. Chavoya, Evans Frantz, and Gómez-Barris (eds.), *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, p. 371.

20. Laura Aguilar's photography was shown as part of the exhibition *Bad Girls* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in 1994 (curated by Marcia Tucker), *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party" in Feminist Art History* at the Armand Hammer Museum in 1997 (curated by Amelia Jones), and *Sunshine et Noir in L.A.* at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in 1997 (curated by Lars Nittve and Helle Crenzien).
21. See for example: Gil Cuadros, "The Emigrants", *Frontiers* (June 19, 1992 1992), Sybil Venegas, "Take Me to the River: The Photography of Laura Aguilar", in Sybil Venegas and Rebecca Epstein (eds.), *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press 2017), or Zepeda, "Tracing Queer Latina Diasporas: Escarvando Historical Narratives of Ancestries and Silences".
22. For example, in a letter written to her friend and mentor Pat Martel, dated July 10, 1992, Aguilar explains how her lack of a secure financial income had severe effects on her art as well as on her mental health: "Right Now I feel tRap in my own life Not so SURE about Next year Art-in-RestRint pRojent there NO state budgect yet and foR the past cupall month Reading in the

New paper and about the different pRojemt that may oR ~~show~~ should be cut can't keep fRom thing about what Im going to do about a job the photo centeR cutting hR. Right now I only have 8 hR at the photo centeR that $ 64.00 A week but I can used the DaRkRoom and I have to go through all the game playing At the Photo CenteR Im tried of it Im scaRed about not having A job so what good is it to think of myself as A Artist and about making Art and that making Art is important we I should be thinking more about making it through and how to sulive." In another letter to Pat, dated February 2, 1990, Aguilar writes about how her difficult economic situation made it really hard for her to gather the props she needed for her triptych Three Eagles Flying. She describes how she could not afford the flags and the rope and she writes: "At time I feel so damn tRap by being poor and stRUAge/StRuggle? to work and live." "Correspondence Pat Martel, 1990–92, Box 1, Folder 7", *Laura Aguilar Papers*, M0829, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif. See also "Correspondence Joyce Tenneson", Box 1, Folder 9–10, *Laura Aguilar Papers*, M0829, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif.

23. Letter to Joyce Tenneson, January 26, 1994, Box 1, Folder 9–10, *Laura Aguilar Papers*, M0829, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif.
24. Letter to Joyce Tenneson, September 20, 1993, Box 1, Folder 9–10, *Laura Aguilar Papers*, M0829, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif.
25. Aguilar actively participated in Chicana/o art and social communities as well as symposia for Chicana artists. See Rebecca Epstein, "Introduction", in Sybil Venegas and Rebecca Epstein (eds.), *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press 2017). Some scholars refer to Aguilar by the more recently introduced term Chicanx. See for example Gómez-Barris, "The Plush View: Makeshift Sexualities and Laura Aguilar's Forbidden Archives".
26. While I focus on the vulnerabilities that lie embedded in the act of attributing hope and value to art, my approach builds on Amelia Jones's discussion of how Aguilar can be understood as representing a new generation of artists who emerged in the 1990s and who explored "the radical vulnerability of the emotional self". Amelia Jones, "Clothed/Unclothed: Laura Aguilar's Radical Vulnerability", in Sybil Venegas and Rebecca Epstein (eds.), *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press 2017), p. 42. To return

to the point that I made in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, and that will be further developed throughout the subsequent chapters included in this dissertation, my analysis builds on scholarly works, such as Jones, that have investigated how vulnerability is enacted in visual art practices. That said, while Jones argues that Aguilar's artistic practice calls forth a vulnerability that "radically challenge[s] the very structures through which we understand subjectivity and art" (ibid., p. 52), I attempt to add a supplementary layer to her discussions by contemplating how the very attribution of traits such as radicalness or opposition to artworks, and specifically to representations of structural discrimination, in themselves can construe institutional dependencies and vulnerabilities.

27. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012).
28. Gómez-Barris, "The Plush View: Makeshift Sexualities and Laura Aguilar's Forbidden Archives", p. 330, Luz Calvo, "Oh Say, Can Yor See (Me)?" (Laura Aguilar Papers, M0829, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif., 1995), Patricia Valladolid, "The Private and the Public in the Photography of Laura Aguilar", *UCLA Center for the Study of Women Newsletter,* 2008, Tracy Zuniga, M., "Daring to Be More Honest", in Sybil Venegas and Rebecca Epstein (eds.), *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press 2017), p. 69.
29. That said, the scholar of twentieth-century cultural history Anthony Macías describes how the relation between the two movements was complex and at points strained. See: Anthony Macías, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935–1968* (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 126–27.
30. Gómez-Barris, "The Plush View: Makeshift Sexualities and Laura Aguilar's Forbidden Archives", 332. For further information on the political background behind this lineage of self-naming see: Norma Élia Cantú and Aída Hurtado, *"Breaking Borders/Constructing Bridges: Twenty-Five Years of Borderlands/La Frontera", Introduction to the Fourth Edition of Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontiera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012). Today, Xicano, Xicana, and Xicanx have also been introduced as political identities that do not as clearly reference nationalist terms such as Mexican American or Latin American countries of origin. See: https://www.dailydot.com/irl/xicano/ (retrieved September 8, 2021).

31. Cantú and Hurtado, *"Breaking Borders/Constructing Bridges: Twenty-Five Years of Borderlands/La Frontera", Introduction to the Fourth Edition of Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontiera*, pp. 4–5.
32. See for example: Hulick, "Profile: Laura Aguilar" (Gómez-Barris, "The Plush View: Makeshift Sexualities and Laura Aguilar's Forbidden Archives", 330. Calvo, "Oh Say, Can Yor See (Me)?". Zuniga, "Daring to Be More Honest", p. 69.
33. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*, p. 38.
34. Jones has written extensively on Aguilar's photographic practice. For her discussion of Aguilar's *Will Work For* series, see for example: Jones, "Clothed/Unclothed: Laura Aguilar's Radical Vulnerability", pp. 50–51.
35. As Amelia Jones points out in her essay Clothed/Unclothed: "Aguilar's dyslexia might explain the misspelling on the signs, although the fact that several different signs repeat the same mistake certainly implies that the misspelling was deliberate". Ibid., p. 51.
36. My description of Laura Aguilar's photographic series *Will Work For* is indebted to the nuanced discussions on Aguilar's photography that took place at a seminar entitled "Belonging" that I held in September 2019 during the course KOVN09 Critical Perspectives on Globalization in Visual Culture, part of the Master's Programme in Visual Culture, Department of Arts and Cultural Science at Lund University. I would like to thank the students who participated in this seminar for their interesting and insightful interpretations of, and debates on, Aguilar's works.
37. James Estrella, "The Plush Pony Series: An Untold Story of Hope and Despair", in Sybil Venegas and Rebecca Epstein (eds.), *Laura Aguilar: Show and Tell* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press 2017), p. 61.
38. Ibid.
39. In an effort to not be too guided by dominant historical explanations, or by what I already know about the political and artistic contexts of the early 1990s Los Angeles, I began my mappings of Aguilar's environment with her own written descriptions of the political and cultural proceedings that she found herself affected by, as these are outlined in her private journals and letters. In order to do this, I have spent lengthy periods in the Stanford University's Special Department where I studied the vast amount of Aguilar's letters, private poems, video works and photography that are housed there. My initial interest in

Aguilar's letters was based on their status as historical documents from which I could begin to map out her position in the LA art scene and in political and artistic communities, as well as what political, social, and cultural proceedings she was engaged with and affected by in the early 1990s. However, as explained in the chapter, after a while, the artistic materiality of the letters caused me to begin to think about and treat them as works of art. As I show in the chapter, there are numerous reasons why such an interpretation of her letters can be made. Whilst I have not found any other description of her letters in terms of mail art, I would like to emphasize that it seems possible (considering the status of mail art in the art communities Aguilar was affiliated with) that such a reading of them has been done by others before. Also, whilst only Aguilar's photography (not her letters) was included and discussed in the 2017 exhibition and exhibition catalogue *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.*, the presentation of her work in an exhibition and catalogue that specifically focused on networking and mail art clearly invites a contemplation of her letters in such a manner.

40. As James Estrella has pointed out, Aguilar's letters constitute an important document of the community tensions and affective relations (including, Estrella points out, a continuous tension between hope and despair and Aguilar's ambivalent sense of both belonging and not belonging to various Chicana, queer, and artistic communities) that surrounded Aguilar in the early 1990s. In a methodological approach closely affiliated to Estrella's, I turn to Aguilar's own accounts of her environment as the foundation for my attempt to construe a wider understanding of the political, social, and cultural circumstances that surrounded her professional position at the time. See: Estrella, "The Plush Pony Series: An Untold Story of Hope and Despair".
41. *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.* was organized by David Evans Frantz, Curator at ONE Archives at the USC Libraries, and C. Ondine Chavoya, Professor of Art and Latina/o studies at Williams College, in collaboration with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. The exhibition was presented in 2017 at the ONE Archives' gallery in West Hollywood and at MOCA Pacific Design Center.
42. Kornelia Röder, "Topologie und funktionsweise des Netzwerks der Mail Art: Seine spezifische Bedeutung für Osteuropa von 1960 bis 1989" (2006), Klara Kemp-Welch and Cristina Freire, "Artists' Networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe", *ARTMargins* (1, 2012), 3–13.

43. C. Ondine Chavoya, "Exchange Desired: Correspondence into Action", in C. Ondine Chavoya, David Evans Frantz, and Macarena Gómez-Barris (eds.), *Axis Mundo: Queer Networks in Chicano L.A.* (Italy: ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries DelMonico Books – Prestel, 2017), 210–29.
44. My interpretation of Aguilar's letters as works of art forms the basis to why I continuously include spelling errors, corrections, and mixtures of upper- and lowercase letters when I quote them.
45. *Chronology, Collection Details*, Connexxus/Centro de Mujeres collection (Collection 1848). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.
46. Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Spaces, Sites of Resistance*, p. 336.
47. Zepeda, "Tracing Queer Latina Diasporas: Escarvando Historical Narratives of Ancestries and Silences", p. 199.
48. Letter to Pat Martel, October 5, 1992, pp. 1–6, Box 1 Folder 7′, *Laura Aguilar Papers*, M0829, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif.
49. Letter to Pat Martel, October 5, 1992, pp. 1–6, Box 1 Folder 7′, *Laura Aguilar Papers*, M0829, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif. The exhibition "Breaking Barriers. Revisualizing the Urban Landscape" took place at Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA, between September 1992 and November 1992. O. Funmilayo Makarah, "Fired-Up!", in Jacqueline Bobo (ed.), *Black Women Film and Video Artists* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 128.
50. Many scholars have written about the political and social context that preceded the 1992 LA riots. See for example: Min Song, *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots* (Duke University Press, 2005).
51. Letter to Pat Martel, October 5, 1992, pp. 1–6, Box 1 Folder 7′, *Laura Aguilar Papers*, M0829, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, Calif.
52. Ibid.
53. Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position", p. 679. As compared to, for example, Muñoz's influential book *Disidentifications*, his article "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down" does not explicitly build on Anzaldúa's theories. However, Muñoz has numerous times discussed his own theoretical work as building on Anzaldúa's ideas and on the politics of belonging that she outlines both in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) and, before

that, together with poet and playwright Cherríe Moraga in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981). See: Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, pp. 6–7.

54. Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position", p. 679.
55. See also Ann Cvetkovich's important work on depression as a cultural and social phenomenon, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
56. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 132.
57. Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position", p. 683.
58. Ibid., p. 677.
59. Ibid., p. 683.
60. Ibid.
61. Ahmed, "Happy Objects", pp. 40–41.
62. Sara Ahmed, "Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness", *Signs,* 35/3 (03/01/ 2010), 571–94, p. 576.
63. Ahmed, "Happy Objects", p. 41.
64. See for example: Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism", in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), ibid., 93–117, Judith Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance", in Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009) and Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*.
65. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2010b), p. 216.
66. In her discussion of happiness and orientations, Ahmed herself does not discuss art specifically. Ahmed, "Happy Objects", p. 33.
67. For an account of the history through which fine art has gained its contemporary meaning in Europe and the US, see for example: Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).
68. Nira Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), p. 10.
69. Ibid.

T.J. Dedeaux-Norris

Yale School of Art (Semesters 1-4)

CHAPTER 2
PROMISES OF DETACHMENT

This chapter engages with a work that Iowa-based artist and musician T.J. Dedeaux-Norris (b. 1979) made while they were enrolled as M. F. A. candidate at the Painting and Printmaking programme at Yale University. Dedeaux-Norris attended Yale, one of the most prestigious art schools in the US, between 2010 and 2012.[1] During these years they completed a series of works that directly addressed their experiences as an art student. One of these works, made as their persona Tameka Jenean Norris and entitled *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* (2010–2012), consists of four separate videos that Dedeaux-Norris uploaded to YouTube (figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3).[2] In each video, Tameka Jenean Norris sits in front of a white blank wall while facing the camera and speaking about her experiences at the school. In a highly ironic manner, she alternates between descriptions marked by intense feelings such as anticipation, anger, insecurity, and excitement.

The position of Tameka Jenean Norris as Dedeaux-Norris's artistic persona has become more clearly articulated with time. When Dedeaux-Norris attended Yale University, they went under the name Tameka Jenean Norris. In the exhibition *T.J. Dedeaux-Norris Presents the Estate of Tameka Jenean Norris,* shown at Figge Art Museum in Davenport, Iowa in 2020 and 2021, Dedeaux-Norris declared their persona Tameka Jenean Norris to be dead, and staged Norris's funeral in the video-recorded performance *A Eulogy for Tameka Jenean Norris* (2021). Despite this, Dedeaux-Norris has communicated that Norris still remains the author of the works that she made before her passing, thus this chapter will continuously refer to Tameka Jenean Norris as the artist that made the work that is central for its analysis.[3]

In the videos included in *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* Norris plays the semi-autobiographical role of an art student. The videos clearly involve humorous that ridicule the privileged and self-absorbed joys and anxieties of an art student enrolled at an Ivy League college. However, Norris's comic representation of an art student appears self-deprecating rather than scornful imitations of other art students. Instead of parodying a fictional "art student" from a disdainful distance, her work includes a graver premise that ridicules *her own* budding position as an artist; her anticipation of using art as a means for political resistance and self-expression and her attempts to remain critically distanced from conservative and biased value judgements at Yale.

Based on Norris's portrayal of a struggling art student, this chapter contemplates a particular type of optimism about visual art's abilities that is tangible in certain scholarly works that interpret visual art, and particularly performance art, as a means for unveiling and resisting societal or institutional norms. Since the concept of the performative became widely established amongst European and US-based scholars in the fields of feminist and queer feminist art history, performance, and visual studies in the early 1990s it has predominantly been applied as describing individuals' inevitable susceptibility to structures, *as well as* the possibilities to resist, challenge, refuse, or subvert normative or discriminatory organizations of societal or institutional structures. As part of this approach, several scholars, including Jane Blocker, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Rune Gade, Amelia Jones, José Muñoz, Peggy Phelan, and Rebecca Schneider discussing the damaging effects of capitalism, racism, misogyny, and homophobia, have turned to works of visual art (often art forms where the artists make use of their own bodies as part of the work) as a means by which discriminatory structures may be exposed or transformed.[4]

In what follows, I will consider how Norris's *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* represents an art student's desperate attempts to maintain a critical distance from the institutional pressures of Yale as interlinked with the student's hope of using her as a means for critique or subversion. The chapter pays particular attention to how Norris's work portrays ideals of the ability to decipher hegemonic structures, or to sustain cognitive detachment from biased values, as promises to which her video's protagonist is suffocatingly attached.

My discussion builds on, and aims to extend, a body of scholarly work that has problematized how the attribution of traits such as radicality, progressiveness, or political protest to artworks, artists, or interpreters of art, throughout history has veiled a politics of exclusion. Art historians, visual culture, film, and literary theorists, such as Peter Bürger, Angela Dimitrakaki, Carol Duncan, Amelia Jones, and Donald Preziosi have discussed how the political and cultural changes through which Euro-American art (in particular cultural practices referred to as the "fine arts;" e.g. painting, sculpture, music, performance, and poetry) came to be associated with emancipation from societal or institutional norms. A central finding presented by many of these theorists is how the notion of

visual art as a means for political productivity (for change, avant-garde, progression), including the ability to deconstruct societal and institutional proceedings, is closely interlinked with other European developments including, for example, colonialism and industrialism. In addition, visual theorists writing from feminist, queer, or critical race perspectives have emphasized how notions of the politically radical artist and artwork have, in European and US-based traditions of fine art, recurrently privileged subjective traits bound to masculinity, whiteness, educated middle-class, able-bodiedness, and Euro-American culture.[5] The qualities of cognitive detachment from societal and institutional influence, and the heightened ability to discern and criticize societal developments that, for example, were ascribed to the avant-garde artist and artwork during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, has later, along with the notion of artist and artwork as somewhat separated from the interests of society at large, been widely disputed.[6] That said, the habit of associating visual artworks, artists, or interpreters of art, as objects or persons particularly suited to comment on and critically challenge societal or institutional proceedings or conventions, is still largely evident in the field of artistic production and reception.

This chapter discusses how Norris's *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* explore how the optimism about art as a means for subversion and critical detachment may, *in itself*, be tied to conventions and habits. My discussion of Norris's video work draws on the large body of scholarly work that, as elaborated on above, has traced the longer trajectories through which art, artist and interpreter of art have come to be regarded as particularly suited to unveil and comment on societal and institutional proceedings. In contrast to these, however, my own scholarly approach will not trace past histories of values and meanings. Instead, I will linger with a range of emotions, including happiness, insecurity, and disappointment, that in Norris's video testimonies are represented as interlinked with her art student's attempts to attain a position of cognitive detachment from the art school in which she is enrolled. I will use Norris's portrayal of her art student's emotional states in order to reflect on how Norris's work, by representing a range of feelings tied to experiences of finding oneself unable to maintain a critical distance to institutional and societal norms, puts pressure on the conventions and habits that underpin ideals of art as a means of subversive resistance and critique.

In the book *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, queer feminist literary theorist Eve Sedgwick discusses a paradox that is noticeable in Michel Foucault's writing regarding what she terms as his "implicit promise" of critical distance.[7] While Foucault famously discusses the inevitable and inescapable bond between the individual and structure (and acknowledges that any attempt at detachment from prevalent structures is naive), Sedgwick argues that his writing still suggests "that there might be ways of stepping outside" of discourse "to forms of thought that would not be structured" by the discursive ideas that one analyses.[8] Implanted in interpretations attached to this promise,

Sedgwick argues, is "a cognitive danger", "a moralistic tautology that became increasingly incapable of recognizing itself as such."[9] Along similar lines, in the book *Limits of Critique* feminist aesthetics and literary theorist Rita Felski discusses a tendency in critical analysis, to imagine the critic as somewhat outside of codification.[10] The key elements in ideas of critique, Felski argues, "include the following: a spirit of skeptical questioning or outright condemnation, an emphasis on its precarious position vis-à-vis overbearing and oppressive social forces, the claim to be engaged in some kind of radical intellectual and/or political work, and the assumption that whatever is not critical must therefore be *un*critical."[11]

Of particular interest for the discussion outlined in this chapter is that both Sedgwick and Felski attach a topography of emotions to ideas of critical distance. Sedgwick famously discusses critical analysis in terms of paranoia and Felski ties the "diverse range of practices" often referred to as critique, namely "symptomatic reading, ideology critique, Foucauldian historicism, various techniques of scanning texts for signs of transgression or resistance", to disenchantment, scepticism, suspicion, and vigilance.[12] Based on Norris's portrayal of an art student's stubborn but futile attempts to remain emotionally detached from conservative and biased systems for artistic value and meaning at Yale, Norris's work adds, I will argue, four noteworthy emotional states – agony, happiness, insecurity and disappointment – to the mapping of emotions associated with ideals of critical distance, discussed by Sedgwick and Felski. Drawing on queer theorist Lauren Berlant's argument that we tend to "split off" the promises we attribute to an object we are emotionally attached to, as if these promises were autonomous, from the trade-offs that we endure as the price of our attachments, this chapter adds layers to the argument outlined in the preceding chapter by directing attention to how the anticipation about visual art as a means for political productivity often embeds ideals of critical and cognitive detachment.

In the concluding remarks of the chapter, I incorporate Sara Ahmed's discussion of how the circumstance that actions always are effects of past actions, is a circumstance that tends to "disappear" when a gesture is buttressed by the right amount of institutional support. Based on this paradox, which Ahmed refers to as "with effort it becomes effortless", the chapter contemplates a point that will be considered in greater depth in the fifth chapter of this dissertation, namely that moments when artists (or interpreters of art) sense themselves as radically and critically detached from institutional habits in the art field, may ironically be instances characterized by the artist's (or interpreter's) successful assimilation of institutional habits in the field, or their access to the field's systems for support.

AN ARTIST SPLIT INTO MANY

Alongside their profession as an artist and musician, T.J. Dedeaux-Norris is Assistant Professor of Painting and Drawing at the University of Iowa School of Art and Art History. They received their undergraduate degree from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and their master's degree from the Painting and Printing Program at Yale University. Apart from painting, Dedeaux-Norris works with a variety of media including video, their own voice and body, performance, fabrics, found objects, photography, and music. In addition to Tameka Jenean Norris, Dedeaux-Norris is also is known as the persona Meka Jean. Before they initiated their art studies, they were embarking on a career as a musician in Los Angeles and music, produced by themselves as well as by others, continues to constitute a foundational part of their art. Many of their video works are made in the format of music videos in which Dedeaux-Norris, mainly appearing in the role of Meka Jean, raps to their own lyrics.

Dedeaux-Norris's semi-autobiographical personas Meka Jean and Tameka Jenean Norris are artists who due to experiences of sexism in the music industry chose to abandon their professions as rappers. Like Dedeaux-Norris themselves, Jean and Norris come from low socioeconomic backgrounds in Gulfport Mississippi in the South of the United States and has earned their degrees from UCLA and Yale University. Despite the similarities between Dedeaux-Norris's personas, they also differ from each other in terms of attitudes and choice of artistic media. Meka Jean's main artistic media are music videos and audio recordings. Jean embraces her professional successes with boastful pride and seems indifferent to the contradictions embedded in her position as simultaneously working with and against the hierarchies of established art institutions. In her video works *Licker* (2008–2010) and *Too Good For You* (2014), as well as in her four-song EP *Ivy League Ratchet* (2016) and her visual LP *Still (a) Life* (2021), Jean problematizes institutionalized and hierarchical structures in the art field while at the same time smugly referring to herself as a significant and acknowledged artist, continuously stressing her degree from an Ivy League college. In *Licker*, filmed partly at the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles, Jean raps lyrics written by herself in front of the camera while seductively and humorously bumping, grinding, and licking artworks in the university's sculpture garden. In this work, made in the format of a music video, Jean's interaction with the sculptures appears jokingly representative of Dedeaux-Norris's own conflicting relation to art, art history, and the art academy in which they were enrolled at the time. While the act of pressing one's body against artworks and covering them with one's saliva are gestures suggesting disrespect for, dominance over, or even sabotage of the works, acts of intimately rubbing one's body against an object also imply desire, pleasure, and curiosity. For small children, the engagement with objects in their surroundings through their mouth and tongue is a method of exploration and ac-

quisition of knowledge. Furthermore, the act of licking also connotes numerous additional meanings such as sexual intimacy, submission, and masochism.[13]

In contrast to Jean's witty indifference to the contradictions that are rooted in her attachment to the institutional systems of support that surround present-day definitions and presentations of art, Dedeaux-Norris's other persona Tameka Jenean Norris, who primarily works with live and video-recorded performances, appears to be struggling with a more solemn sense of ambivalence and guilt regarding her newfound privileges as an academically trained artist. The differences between Dedeaux-Norris's two personas becomes particularly tangible in a performance, originally entitled *Untitled (Final Performance) Manifesto*, that Tameka Jenean Norris made as part of Dedeaux-Norris's M. F. A. thesis at Yale in 2012. In this performance by Norris the act of licking, just like in Meka Jean's *Licker* video, constituted a central theme. Enacted in a lecture hall at Yale, in front of an audience consisting predominantly of faculty and fellow students, Norris, dressed in a red painting uniform, silently cut her own tongue with a knife until she started to bleed. She then pushed her body up against a wall in the hall and began to lick it. While slowly moving sideways, Norris's corporeal undertaking caused a visible trail of blood and saliva to appear along the white walls of the lecture hall.[14] Despite sharing the central theme of exploring objects associated with canonized fine art with one's tongue, the presence of the knife together with the silence and seriousness that distinguished Norris's act of licking the walls of Yale in *Untitled (Final Performance) Manifesto*, implied a markedly different set of feelings – a graver emotional framework of pain and self-inflicted violence – than Meka Jean's witty and exaggerated oral contact with sculptures in *Licking*.

Although Jean's video work *Licking* has received quite a lot of attention since it was produced in 2008, it was Norris's *Untitled (Final Performance) Manifesto*, later renamed *Untitled*, that consolidated Dedeaux-Norris's position in the US art establishment. After its initial enactment at Yale University, Dedeaux-Norris's was invited by their former teacher at Yale, artist Clifford Owens, to perform the work again – this time in a gallery space – at Third Streaming Gallery in SoHo, New York City.[15]After this, curator Valerie Cassel Oliver invited them to perform the work and then exhibit its visible traces, as part of the large group exhibition *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, where it was presented alongside works by numerous established artists such as Senga Nengudi, Lorraine O'Grady, Adam Pendleton, William Pope. L., and Carrie Mae Weems. Between 2012 and 2015 the *Radical Presence* exhibition was shown at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, the Grey Art Gallery at New York University, the Studio Museum in Harlem in New York City, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco. It was accompanied by a catalogue with essays written by, amongst others, curator Naomi Beckwith, critic and scholar of art and performance Tavia Nyong'o, and artist and curator Clifford Owens, and was noticed and reviewed by numerous

established art magazines and newspapers.[16] Since then, Dedeaux-Norris have presented their works in several exhibitions in Europe and North America, and their works have been reviewed in influential art journals and magazines such as *Artforum*, *ArtReview*, and *Hyperallergic*.[17]

As has been pointed out by many critics, curators and scholars before, through the critical engagement of their works with the position of the artist and structural discrimination in the field of artistic production and reception, Dedeaux-Norris's oeuvre can be placed within a tradition of artistic work that criticizes and challenges institutionalized traditions and systems for representation in Euro-American art establishments.[18] Although artworks had problematized representational systems and the organization of the art field before, this artistic genre, which includes many self-imaging or self-representational projects, became widely established in tandem with the widespread struggle for social justice that was articulated in Europe and the US (as well as in other countries including Brazil, Japan, Mexico, and the Soviet Union) during the 1960s and 1970s, for example by the growing feminist movement, the gay liberation movement, the civil rights movement, the opposition to the Vietnam War, and the New Left (including the 1968 youth and student protests).[19] Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, many artists used their art as a means to criticize heterosexist, racist, and capitalist predispositions in the art field and in its dominant institutions.[20] Of particular interest for Dedeaux-Norris's oeuvre is how several artworks, since the 1980s, have been produced where artists explore and problematize *their own* positions as artists located within the field of artistic production and reception. While slowly abandoning the imaginary position of the artist as a radical figure that – from a critical distance – deconstructed representational patterns and dominant art institutions, several artists have instigated considerations of how the very position of the artist, in itself, was a product of the very same institutional patterns and structures of belief that they sought to problematize.[21]

Many of those who have written about Dedeaux-Norris's oeuvre before have paid attention to qualities of criticism and opposition in their works. For example, in an essay published in the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition *Radical Presence*, curator Cassel Oliver describes an art performance by Tameka Jenean Norris as "challenging the practice of painting, the art academy, and the canon of art history", and doing so "gangsta-style".[22] Similar consideration of the political radicality of Norris's artistic practice has been made by editor and art critic Robin Cembalest, who in an article for *Art News* defines a performance by Norris as a tough gesture through which they stand up to the bad boys of the US art world.[23] Correspondingly, in a review of an exhibition by Dedeaux-Norris in *Artforum*, queer feminist scholar Alspesh Kantilal Patel states that Dedeaux-Norris, through their work, are reasserting empowerment contra art-world exploitation and ultimately are "exerting control" of "the diminishment of the artist's subjectivity by larger forces".[24] Whilst building on these previous accounts of how many of Dedeaux-Norris's and their personas' works and perfor-

mances explore institutionalized biases in the art field, the discussion outlined below pays particular attention to how *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* not only criticizes and challenges institutional systems of support, but also portrays Norris's own, at times suffocating, attachment to the very same structures.[25]

This chapter directs its attention to a work that Tameka Jenean Norris made while enrolled at Yale, thus before and to some degree meanwhile Dedeaux-Norris began to receive more extensive recognition as an artist. The authorship of the work is, as mentioned, accredited to Dedeaux-Norris's persona Tameka Jenean Norris. However, the character that appears in the *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* is not Norris herself, but a semi-autobiographical version of her. As a consequence, in my discussion of the work I will, besides T.J. Dedeaux-Norris, refer to Tameka Jenean Norris and the art student protagonist that Norris plays in the videos, both of whom are embodied by Dedeaux-Norris.

NORRIS THE ART STUDENT

The first semester video included in the series, *My First Semester – Yale School of Art* (figure 2.1), was uploaded on YouTube on February 9 in 2011 at a point in time when Dedeaux-Norris had been enrolled at Yale University for a little more than one semester. In the video, Tameka Jenean Norris appears before a white blank wall and keeps alternating between smoking a joint and looking at her smart phone whilst describing her experiences during her first semester at Yale. The format of the video recorded performance is reminiscent of the confession booths of reality television shows where participants in front of a camera "privately" discuss their feelings about the other contestants or recent events played out in the programme.[26] Norris is wearing pink lipstick, a pair of stylish glasses with thick black frames, a brightly coloured track jacket, a green beanie, and a black bob wig. In the first sequence of the recording, she sighs deeply as she looks into the camera and says, "so... it's my first semester here at Yale School of Art and so far, I... am not really sure what I'm doing here..." She sighs again, heaves her eyes with a bored and slightly tormented expression, and continues:

> I thought I was going to do me but all of a sudden I'm just feeling like... that's over and like... (sighs), I don't know, like, when I applied, you know, I guess I should have applied to sculpture or something because, my studio is really, really small in the painting department and I thought that the school would like understand that now that we're in like the new age media of like, you know, site specific sculpture and like, I don't know, like ... YouTube videos and stuff, that like, it would just be a bit more interdisciplinary here? But it's totally not and I just pretty much don't have enough room to work, like do... what I need to do...

While Norris clearly caricatures the self-absorption, ignorance, and anxiousness of a privileged and slightly bored art student, she also deliberately weaves together the fictional student's situation with her own. Like the art student character in the video, Norris's own interest in artistic expressions of new age media or the deliberate employment of online visual culture is implied by the fact that her semester videos are, indeed, uploaded on YouTube. Another explicitly suggested similarity between Norris and the character appearing in the video is their shared interest in music. After having complained about the fact that she was not allowed by the faculty to change from the school's painting department to its sculpture department, Norris begins humming along to the song "Shut It Down" by Canadian musician Drake (featuring The-Dream) that is playing in the background. She then stops, leans forward toward the camera, and states: "But like Drake, come on like that is the future. Right there. Like you have an art-

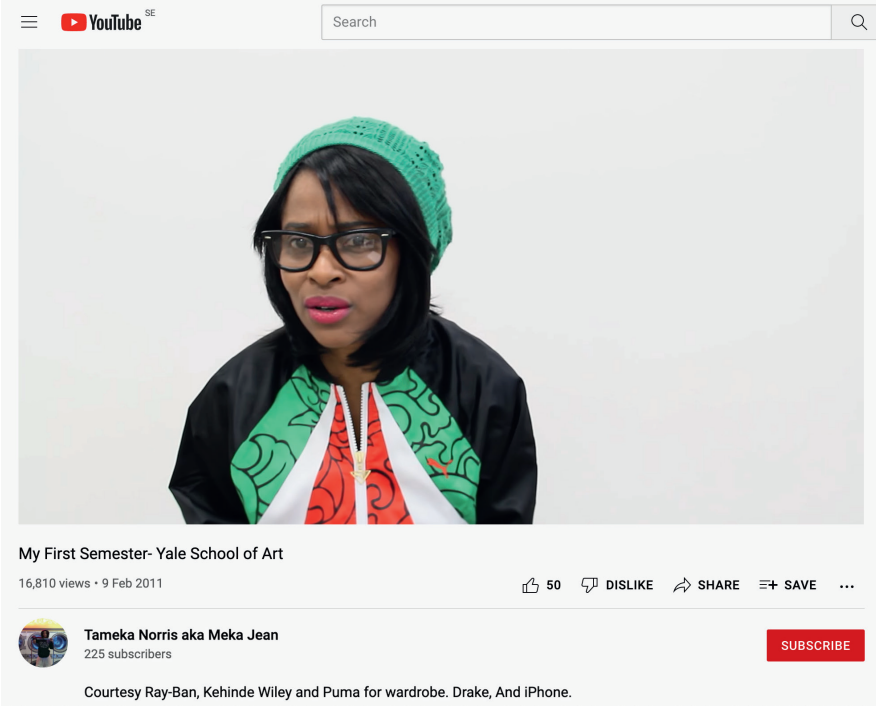


Figure 2.1: T.J. Dedeaux-Norris as Tameka Jenean Norris, *My First Semester – Yale School of Art*, 2010–2012, 8:44 minutes, colour, sound. Film still, screen shot from YouTube. The video was uploaded to YouTube on February 9, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

ist who was like previously an actor and is now like a rapper and is participating in like mainstream culture which is like my ambition so like, thank God I'm not just painting. Thank God that I've got like a multifaceted practice. You know? Like, I can even rap."

Through these autobiographical references, Norris suggests that the fictional art student character in video is an ironic *self-representation* rather than a parodic portrayal of other art students. Norris's articulated references to herself are also the most noticeable difference between her video "confessions" and the video work that *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* is an explicit reiteration of: namely, artist Alex Bag's *Untitled Fall '95*. Bag made this, by now extensively recognized work, when she was an art student at Cooper Union in New York City in 1995.[27] As compared to Norris's portrayal of an art student who, like themselves, was a student at the Painting and Printing Program at Yale, Bag played the role of an art student at the School of Visual Arts (SVA), another art school than her own, located in New York City. Through a series of humorous video confessionals, one for each semester of the fictional art student's education, Bag's character alternates between ambivalent emotional states such as anxiety, boredom, and excitement while describing her inner struggle to fit into the art school.

Much like in Bag's *Untitled Fall '95*, there is a fierce contradiction rooted in the manner through which Norris humorously portrays the inner life of a self-absorbed art student. The characters depicted in both works struggle with their relationship with the art academies in which they are enrolled. In some sequences, the students' relation to the institutions appear rather seamless, particularly when things are going well for them, as when they have received enthusiastic critique from the faculty.[28] At other points, the characters express frustration and criticism against conservative, sexist, and racist structures of the institutions. In these episodes the art students question the authenticity of their fellow students and teachers, the design of the education, and their own difficulty in developing as artists within the realm of the academy.

Notwithstanding these similarities, however, Norris has added a series of subtle layers to her imitation of Bag's *Untitled Fall '95* that conveys a graver sense of disappointment, guilt, but also of hope, as rooted in her art student character's "confessions". These additional features become particularly tangible in Norris's and Bag's respective portrayals of art as a medium for political protest.

In between the sequences featuring testimonies by her art student character, Bag's video includes short fictional films that portray void positions of resistance against societal or institutional proceedings. One of these present the viewer to two young and bored women who are composing lyrics for their punk band during their working hours as sales assistants in a clothing store. The women come across as equally indifferent to their roles as musicians as they are to their sales jobs. With sluggishly slow voices, they agree to include the sentence "life's a mess" mainly because it rhymes with the word "dress". In Bag's video, their bored and shallow dialogue represents them as posing as radical figures,

rather than as being actually committed to a political, artistic, or social cause. Similarly, another sequence included in *Untitled Fall '95* portrays a self-absorbed semi-successful feminist artist invited to present her work in front of an audience of students at an art academy. With scarce explanations about how she strives to bring together art and real life (a common theme in Western feminist art since at least the 1960s) the artist unenthusiastically presents various works from her own oeuvre that appear as unoriginal imitations of previous works by other feminist artists. Correspondingly, in yet another sequence included in Bag's video, this time made in the format of an advertisement, a dominatrix call-girl seductively asks the viewers if they are bored with uninteresting TV shows and then, while she utters moans of pleasure, asks the viewer to pick up a paintbrush, make a painting, or write a manifesto.

In all of these short films included in Bag's *Untitled Fall '95*, the act of making art in order to expose, question, or resist the social order is parodically portrayed as void poses functioning to increase an individual's social status. In contrast, the art student character in Norris's work is not represented as turning to art as a means for unveiling or opposing institutional biases solely out of social prestige. Instead, her futile attempts to attain a position of critical detachment from dominant values and meanings of Yale appear painfully suggestive of Norris's own lived experiences and artistic practice.

For those familiar with Dedeaux-Norris's art, their portrayal of an art student's attempt to embody a position of someone who uses their art to comment on discriminatory structures seems to hit close to home. Apart from the works that address biases of the art field, many works included in Dedeaux-Norris's oeuvre explicitly explore the links between their own personal experiences and political debates about structural racism, sexism, and class oppression. For example, Dedeaux-Norris were accepted to the bachelor's programme at UCLA based on a series of paintings they made depicting the destroyed homes of their own family and friends in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.[29] Whilst these paintings indicated a concrete sense of personal mourning and loss, they also had clear political implications as a consequence of the widespread criticism against the disaster recovery response to the Atlantic hurricane. Hurricane Katrina was an Atlantic hurricane that caused a devastating amount of injury, death, and destroyed property on the Mississippi Gulf Coast where Dedeaux-Norris grew up. Since many of those who were affected by the hurricane where people of colour, the lack of governmental response to its victims evoked a heated debate about racism in the US. Another example of Dedeaux-Norris's engagement with political enquiries in their art is their video-recorded performance *Untitled (Say Her Name)* (2011–2015). In this performance, Dedeaux-Norris addresses the US-based social movement *#SayHerName*, which accentuates the importance of speaking out against racist violence and police brutality against women of colour. The work depicts Dedeaux-Norris in front of the camera with their lips glued together. In their endeavour to separate their lips from each other, they

make a series of facial expressions that indicate both physical pain and sadness.

As implied above, Norris's verbal "confessions" in the first semester video mostly reflect the art student's agonies about the size of her studio and the faculty's old-fashioned ways of teaching. Through the visual content included in the work, however, Norris seems to be trying to embody – apart from Alex Bag – a position associated with the artist Kehinde Wiley (who received his M. F. A. from Yale School of Art ten years before Dedeaux-Norris). The track jacket that she is wearing in the video is one of the garments included in a collection that Wiley made in collaboration with the German sportswear manufacturer Puma. Wiley is well known for his politically informed portraits of young persons of colour. In many of his paintings, Wiley explores the politics of visual representation by portraying young African American men and women through the rhetoric of European Old Masters paintings (see for example *Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps* (2005), a painting by Wiley based on French painter Jacques-Louis David's 1801 *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, an oil painting in Neoclassical style). Through their appropriation of aesthetic gestures intimately bound to a field of power traditionally associated with white bourgeois masculinity, Wiley's works investigate the representation of bodies in the history of art through themes of race and gender. By wearing a jacket designed by the artist, Norris portray her art student character as not only appreciating Wiley's art but also, to a certain degree at least, as having put on his "costume" or "uniform". In this sense, the character is represented as attached (both literally as well as cognitively) to the kind of political artistic content that Wiley's art represents.

In addition to wearing a track jacket designed by Wiley, Norris's video also contains other references to his art. Norris's gesture of explicitly appropriating the work of other artists in her video is an artistic strategy that emphasizes the similarities between her own work and that of Wiley. Also, as writer and director Alexandra Pechman points out in a review of Norris's works published in the arts magazine *ARTnet*, Norris, like Wiley, "has built her reputation by inserting herself into art-historical narratives that don't consider the black experience".[30] For example, in a series of performances and videos that Norris produced at approximately the same time as her first semester video, collected under the caption "The Canon Studies at Yale Univ" (2010–2012), she used her own body to re-enact the work of white canonized artists and cultural producers including Bruce Nauman, Marina Abramovic, and Amy Winehouse. By accentuating the correspondences between her own choice of visual strategies and Wiley's, an artist who preceded her and is likely to have inspired her, Norris portrays the art student as attempting to follow an already established artistic tradition in which artists have used imitation as a means to attempt to subvert and expose discriminatory representational structures.

STUMBLING ATTEMPTS TO REJECT THE INSTITUTION

Through an additional set of details that are included in *My First Semester – Yale School of Art*, Norris plants seeds of doubt concerning the tradition of artistic appropriation that the art student attempts to follow. Below each of the four videos included in her work, as these are presented on YouTube, she has incorporated a text that jokily insinuates that the videos have been sponsored by large multinational companies and influential cultural producers. Underneath her first semester video the text states: "Courtesy Ray-Ban, Kehinde Wiley and Puma for wardrobe. Drake, And iPhone", suggesting that her video circulates as part of a consumerist system. The companies and musicians that are mentioned correspond to the content of each video. Consequently, in the first video the art student character wears, besides her Puma track jacket, a pair of glasses from Ray-Ban, a song by Drake is added as its soundtrack, and she is holding her phone in her left hand.

By mentioning the name of Wiley as well as Puma, Norris directs the viewers' attention to the fact that the track jacket that she is wearing in the video is one of the garments included in the collection Wiley made in collaboration with the sportswear manufacturer. As a consequence, she stresses Wiley's supposed dependency on financial systems. There is a well-known contradiction implanted in the fact that the profession as an artist – including artistries using their art as medium for political protest, resistance, or critique – is marked, like any other occupation, by a financial dependency on various kinds of institutions and funders.[31] Additionally, for those somewhat familiar with Kehinde Wiley's art, Norris's reference to him in a work that addresses the relation between the art student character and Yale clearly emphasizes the fact that Wiley also graduated from the influential art school and inevitably has benefited from its institutional support.

In *My Second Semester – Yale School of Art* Norris's character, instead of accepting it as a paradoxical but inevitable part of being part of a field, appears to have dismissed Wiley's entanglement with commercial or institutional support as a fault endorsed in the particular line of artistic resistance that he represents. Consequently, in what appears as an effect of her disappointment with Wiley's failure to live up to her anticipation of being able to use her art as a means to resist the institutional pressures of Yale, the art student is portrayed as having changed course in *My Second Semester – Yale School of Art* (figure 2.2). Here, she is represented as attempting to follow another seemingly more radical artistic strategy of criticism against domineering institutions. In this video, the art student has become increasingly critical of the art academy and compares it to other institutions such as jails. She appears dressed in a baggy dark blue hooded sweater, the hood raised over her head, and her arms crossed in front of her. Her anti-institutional statements, along with the bagginess and raised hood of her sweater, suggests a position of distanced criticism against the conservative up-

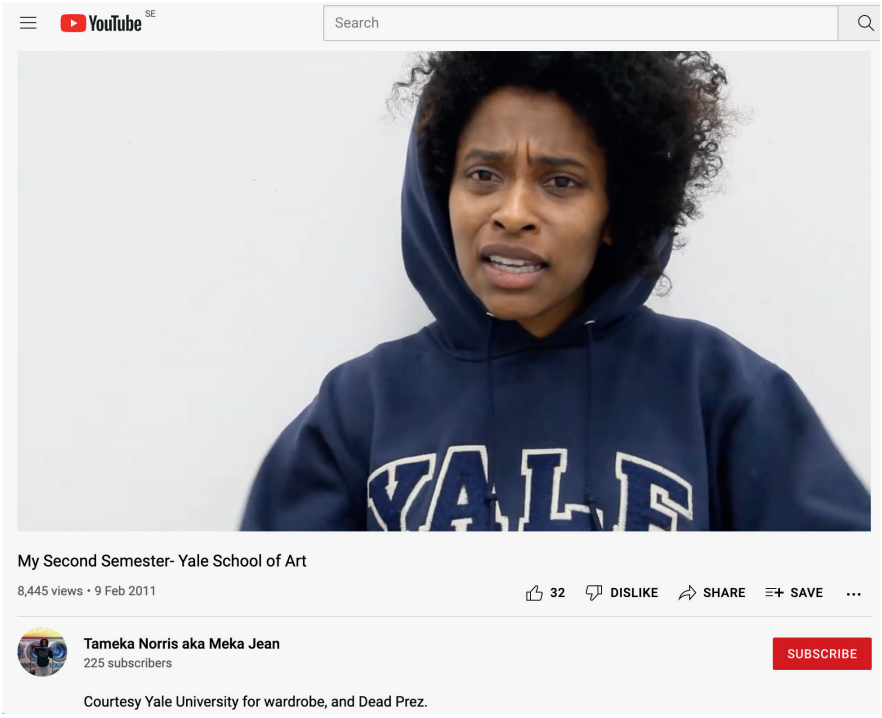


Figure 2.2: T.J. Dedeaux-Norris as Tameka Jenean Norris, *My Second Semester – Yale School of Art*, 2010–2012, 5:32 minutes, colour, sound. Film still, screen shot from YouTube. The video was uploaded to YouTube on February 9, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

per-class customs of the Ivy League institution. In the caption beyond the video, Norris has written: "Courtesy: Yale University for wardrobe and Dead Prez."

As the video's background score, two tracks are playing: "Discipline", followed by a remixed version of the track "Hip Hop", (entitled "It's Bigger Than Hip Hop", featuring Tahir and People's Army),[32] from hip hop duo Dead Prez's first studio album *Let's Get Free*. The first track, which reflects Dead Prez's political investments in black liberation and socialism, underscores how discipline and organization can be used as tools for emancipation and political productivity. In the second track, which has become symbolic of the endeavour for artistic "realness" and for the struggle to detach hip hop artists' work from capitalist and racist societal structures, the duo criticizes rappers who, according to them, are too focused on the industry, on making money and on sales numbers.

In the second semester video the character explicitly declares how she is deeply inspired by Dead Prez's messages about discipline, radical detachment from biased societal and institutional structures, the importance of artistic expression, and their critique against the white supremacy that they argue is rooted in the US school system. She mentions the name of the rap duo as an example of "what she means", when she attempts to pronounce her critique against Yale, and that she interprets Dead Prez's way of speaking about hip hop as representative of her own perception of art.[33] Throughout the entire video, the student also makes an effort to use an identical vocabulary and sentence construction as those that can be heard in the first sequence of Dead Prez's track "Discipline", and at various points she moves to the beat of the music and sings along to its lyrics.

However, just as in the previous video, Norris's character appears to find herself unable to follow the path of institutional resistance that Dead Prez symbolizes, albeit this time because she finds herself unable to embody the kind of robust autonomous detachment from institutional biases that her idols advocate. Their messages of artistic and cognitive self-sufficiency seem to provoke her self-doubt as much as her conviction. While she speaks, she remains constantly attentive to Dead-Prez's beats and lyrics. At regular intervals she appears to absorb their messages of emancipation. In those moments, she assumes various self-confident poses, such as leaning back with her head slightly tilted backward, or defiantly keeping her arms crossed in front of her while looking steadily into the camera. In other moments, however, the art student appears lost and insecure. While her arguments become increasingly hollow and contradictory, and her eyes flutter, she attempts to discuss her experiences at the school with the vocabulary of someone who is emotionally and radically detached from its institutional proceedings. Once again, the art student character is depicted as paradoxically leaning on the support and confidence she benefits from having been accepted into an Ivy League college in order to attain enough self-confidence to oppose what she experiences as conservative and biased values and opinions at Yale. Her ambivalent attachment to the art school becomes humorously visible through the garment she is wearing. While the sweater's bagginess and raised hood appear to further reinforce her attachment to Dead Prez's messages of artistic autonomy and critique, the printed white block letters on its chest that read YALE UNIVERSITY contradict the garment's connotations of institutional detachment. In the video, Norris exclaims while referring to her sweater: "I need to wear this hoodie to show I ain't playing. I'm Ivy League and shit, no one should be questioning me." In a rather frustrated and puzzled outcry, in which the art student come across as grasping her own inability to attain a position of cognitive detachment from the institution, she expresses paranoidly that "*everything* is the institution".

CONVENTIONS OF RADICALITY

By her third semester (figure 2.3), Norris's art student character has abandoned her attempt to attain a position of radical rejection of the values of an institution within whose realm she nevertheless continues to be enrolled. In *My Third Semester – Yale School of Art*, the student has instead turned to two white feminist artists well-known for their attempts to subvert and criticize representational systems and institutions while simultaneously residing within them. Apart from literally reciting a part of Alex Bag's *Untitled Fall '95* in which Bag is parodying the self-absorbed struggles of a feminist art student, Norris also gestures to the art of feminist artist Barbara Kruger (figures 2.4–2.5). Additionally, the sex-positive track *Fuck the Pain Away* from 2000 by feminist musician and visual and performance artist Peaches is heard as a backdrop to the video. By its inclusion of the line "SIS IUD, stay in school cause it's the best", Peaches' tune stresses how important it is for girls and women to use birth control and continue their education instead of getting pregnant. As a consequence, apart from functioning as an accentuation of their third semester video's emphasis on a wide range of artistic practices and theories referred to as feminism, Norris's inclusion of the track also emphasizes a belief that is evident in many feminist movements identifying education as an important instrument in women's emancipation from patriarchal oppression.[34]

In the video, the art student character appears dressed in a bright pink beanie, a pair of transparent spectacles and a wig whose short straight hairs are coloured in an orangey brown tone. She is wearing a black t-shirt (cut into a revealing tank top underneath which it is possible to discern a leopard-patterned push-up bra with purple lace) that Barbara Kruger designed for the American clothing and accessories retailer GAP's clothing collection "Artist Edition". As Norris's art student character *once again* is portrayed as having renavigated toward yet another established artistic tradition that has been ascribed the ability to subvert and critique institutional values and meanings, her videos' emphasis on the character's stubborn attempts, despite her disappointments, to hold on to her conviction of art as a means for protest, becomes tangible. Another noticeable theme of *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)*, that become solidified in the art student's orientation to different traditions of artistic critique against institutional pressures is the work's portrayal of artistic resistance as a structure of belief offered by prescribed lines or habits, rather than as an inherent quality in certain cultural products.

With the phrase "cruel optimism", Lauren Berlant discusses how we have a tendency to become attached to certain objects or beliefs because we desire the cluster of promises these are associated with. Importantly, Berlant explains how the ties that are embedded in our attachments often make us accept and endure the negative consequences of our emotional bonds.

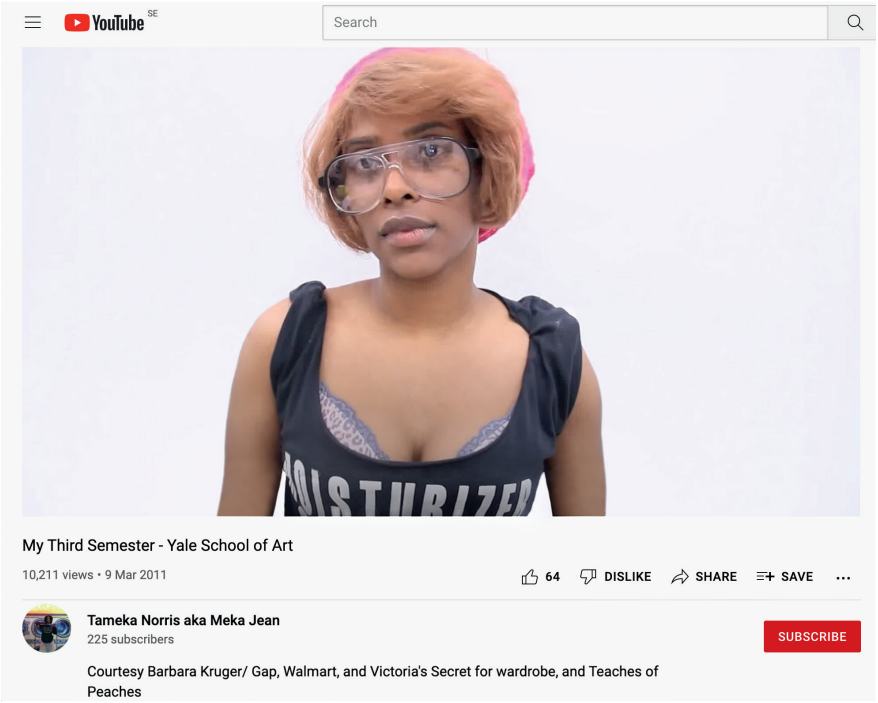


Figure 2.3: T.J. Dedeaux-Norris as Tameka Jenean Norris, *My Third Semester – Yale School of Art*, 2010–2012, 3:54 minutes, colour, sound. Film still, screen shot from YouTube. The video was uploaded to YouTube on February 9, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

When we talk about an object of desire, we are really talking about a cluster of promises we want someone or something to make to us and make possible for us. This cluster of promises could be embedded in a person, a thing, an institution, a text, a norm, a bunch of cells, smells, a good idea – whatever. To phrase "the object of desire" as a cluster of promises is to allow us to encounter what is incoherent or enigmatic in our attachments, not as confirmation of our irrationality but as an explanation for our sense of *our endurance in the object*, insofar as proximity to the object means proximity to the cluster of things that the object promises, some of which may be clear to us while others not so much. In other words, all attachments are optimistic. That does not mean that they all *feel* optimistic [...][35]

Here, Berlant's definition of the "object of desire" is broad and encompasses not only physical objects but also a wider range of things such as persons, institutions, norms, smells, or ideas. Berlant's discussion of attachments in terms of a cluster of promises that we want something or someone to make possible for us, has interesting implications for Norris's portrayal of an art student's attachments to promises of art as a means for subversion and critique. The manner through which the context precedes and conditions the possibility to act or speak makes it impossible, as has been pointed out by many theorists discussing the performative basis of actions and speech, to fully discern one's own inner thoughts or intentions from the context by which the conditions of these are offered.[36] Norris's portrayal of an art student who desperately attempts to emotionally detach herself from conservative and biased values and the art school in which she is enrolled illustrates, I argue, the agonizing paradox that the notion of art as a means for protest against institutional proceedings is often supported and reproduced by the very same institutions it supposedly seeks to criticize and oppose.

By highlighting this paradox Norris's *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* accentuates a problem, that in various ways, has haunted politicized artists and theorists at least since nineteenth-century European thought. This perplexity concerns how individuals' capacity and possibility to act (including acts of resistance toward societal norms or institutions) requires societal and institutional support. In his essay "Theses upon Art and Religion Today", first published in 1945, philosopher and sociologist Theodor Adorno specifically addresses this paradox in relation to art when he puts pressure on how individuals' attachments to art (particularly as a means that promises a particular kind of analysis and critique of societal and institutional values) ties them to a particular set of institutional discourses. "Art", Adorno states, "always was, and is, a force of protest of the humane against the pressure of domineering institutions … no less than it reflects their substance." Versions of this problem have also been a central concern for many post-structural theorists and writers, particularly those engaged with ideas of the performative. In her book *The Psychic Life of Power* queer feminist poststructuralist Judith Butler discusses it in terms of a problem embedded in acts of resistance to the social order. Butler states that to act as if one was detached from the social order "is not simply to act according to a set of rules, but to embody those rules in the course of action and reproduce those rules in embodied rituals of action". In a similar vein, following cultural historian Saidiyda Hartman, queer feminist visual culture theorist Jack Halberstam poses the question, in their book *The Queer Art of Failure*, whether freedom can ever be imagined separately from the terms upon which it is offered.[37]

In her discussions of how attachments can be cruel, Berlant discusses how a "poetics of attachment always involves some splitting off of the *story* I can tell about wanting to be near x (as though x has autonomous qualities) from the *activity* of the emotional habitus I have constructed by having x in my life."[38] This narrative of a subject's ability to "split off" the qualities she attributes to an

object, as if these promises were autonomous to the affective trade-offs that she has to endure as a costliness of this attachment, interestingly reflects Norris's semi-autobiographical portrayal of their art student. Notwithstanding the discriminatory habits she encounters in the art field, Norris's character stubbornly maintains her attachment to the promises of critical detachment that she associates with art.

In all of Norris's semester videos, the art student character is portrayed as derailing from a particular line of canonized political artists, only to begin to follow a new line, represented by cultural producers whose claims of artistic detachment appear more authentic or radical than her previous protagonists'. In the face of the dependency of political art on capitalism or institutionalized values and meanings of the art field, instead of mourning that her ideals of art's ability to comment on, engage with, and resist the proceedings of capitalist society or society at large have been lost, Norris's art student continues to cling to the promises that she attaches to art. In the aftermath of disappointment, her art student character continues to turn to novel artistic positions as if her hope about the possibilities of using art as a means of critical detachment could be realized if she only turns to other and better role models.

In the third semester video the student, with a voice that testifies to states of pride (bound to the character's sense of being able to deconstruct the patriarchal structures of the school and of the art field at large) as well as of hopelessness, anger, and insecurity, discusses her sense of vulnerability to the value judgements of the faculty at Yale:

> ... I don't know, I guess I'm just a little depressed. It's just like, I just keep feeling like everything is going all wrong, you know, I just had like a really bad crit, and uh, it's just like, everything always goes all wrong, when like, I get forced to explain my work, like, before everyone, like, comments on it? [...] You know? I mean, that's just fucked, you know? Am I supposed to like stand next to my thing in some stupid museum for the rest of my life and be like: hi, uh, would you like me to explain this to you? I mean first let me tell you a little bit about myself, I'm an only child, uh, my parents really fucked me up and so did high school, any questions? Come on! Come on grill me, you know... ask me anything, psychoanalyse me, ask me anything, I'm all yours. It's like... all these boys, you know, have been like welding together these like giant creations and like wheeling them into class and no one asks them, uh... excuse me how big is your dick?[39]

By accentuating both her susceptibility to institutional models for interpretation and value *and* her ability to recognize and question their implicit sexism, Norris's art student character (corresponding to Bag's character in *Untitled Fall '95*) is clearly following already established lines of feminist thinking concerning

the ability to rework biased structures while residing within them. Again, rather than parodying the work of others, Norris's reference to traditions of feminist belief in art as a means for rupturing or challenging art field biases, is clearly referring to her own artistic practice.

Barbara Kruger, whose artistic practice is referenced in Norris video and who was one of Dedeaux-Norris's professors during their undergraduate studies at UCLA, is widely recognized for artworks in which she uses strategies of irony and appropriation in order to criticize or deconstruct capitalist belief systems and discriminatory models for visual representations. In the 1980s and 1990s, Kruger became famous for works where she used written content to distort and convey layers of sexism or consumer culture in, for example, mass media images.

In many ways, Kruger's artistic strategy – or, more accurately, the manner through which her practice has been interpreted by others – bears similarities to the theories of subversion that Judith Butler outlined in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990).[40] Although Butler does not specifically discuss visual art or performance in this book,[41] a central premise in her writing concerning how acts can be subversive has often functioned as a principle through which feminist and queer feminist art historians, performance and visual scholars, since the early 1990s, have explained the politically productive potentialities in the particular situatedness of the viewer.[42] Butler suggested that performances (spoken utterances, bodily gestures, or other kinds of acts or enactments) entail the possibility, in certain contextual settings, to implicitly reveal the imitative structure of "the original" (a term that has been interpreted not only in terms of dominant notions of "essential" sex, gender, or sexuality, but also of any form of hegemonic norm, including institutions, identity constructions or systems for representation) by construing "hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation".[43] By illuminating the limits of discursive constructions of subjectivities, Butler argues, performances hold the possibility to revise norms or formulate new possible positions for subjects.[44]

With its multiple layers of humorous imitations of "originals" (the struggling art student as a common fictional figure, the parodic art student in Bag's *Untitled Fall '95*, and the act of using parodic imitations as a means for subversion and critique that, in itself, is an established artistic strategy amongst feminist artists), Norris's *My Third Semester* assumes an artistic approach clearly inspired by the artworks it appropriates. That said, rather than posing a parodic critique of the other artists included in their work, she appears to emphasize her own sense of longing, disappointment and insecurity concerning her dedication to using art as a means for subversion and critical detachment. As such, rather than represented as a belief supported by her own experiences, the art student's clinging to her anticipation of using art as a means for resistance to institutional conventions appears as a painful and suffocating *attachment* to pre-existing promises about art.

Figure 2.4: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am)*, 1983, serigraph on vinyl, 281.9 × 287 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Sprüth Magers.

Figure 2.5: Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Your gaze hits the side of my face)*, 1981, photograph, 138.1 × 101.6 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Sprüth Magers.

EFFORTLESSNESS

The last video-recorded performance, *My Fourth Semester – Yale School of Art*, differs from the preceding semester videos in terms of the character's emotional mood. This video, uploaded to YouTube on April 6, 2012 (hence during Dedeaux-Norris's own last semester at Yale), portrays the character as happy and with great confidence in her art. Again, the art student's mentioning of specific details related to her setbacks and successes coincides roughly with actual occurrences during Dedeaux-Norris's last year as an M.F.A. student. In the video, Norris is holding a bottle of beer in her hands and wears a burgundy sweater as well as the same pair of glasses with black frames as in the first semester video. On her head she has put on a platinum blonde wig with long straight hair, partly covered by a brown cap.

The student's bodily gestures and facial expression reflect happiness, enthusiasm, and determination while she describes how her thesis "was amazing":

> A few months ago... just everything fell right into place. So, the content, the materials, the meaning, they all were like the perfect storm, they all came together. And it was received really well, um, by my faculty, which was really, really good. Compared to my previous critique where Andrea Blum had the nerve, the audacity, to say that, when I did a performance, she actually said that it was not art and that she had no idea why I thought it was either, in front of like a group of like fifty people. The opening statement in my critique! Hah!? But anyways, yeah so my thesis is going really well to follow that horrible critique up. [...] it really makes me feel like everyone is like hating on me because things are going so well for me. I mean, you know, I'm exiting my time here and... you know I've already got a book deal which is really, really exciting, and I get to tell my sort of provocative, ructious story of my life in this like intellectual read, you know mixed with a sort of like street cred, you know, and it's all genuine and it's all real. I know that my story will impact other people. Um, and what else? And, and a record deal! I was able to land a record deal which is really exciting, it's like it has happened, it has really happened! Exactly what I wanna do. You know this sort of like cross over into mainstream culture, my dream! And it's thrilling.

Clearly strengthened by all of the attention her work has been given, and the institutional support she has received, the art student character is portrayed as filled with a sense of emotional detachment from criticism against her work, and a fierce appreciation of the provocative and authentic nature of her artistic practice. Paradoxically, her ability to maintain a critical distance to hegemonic institutional hierarchies appears as if finally accessible, but through institutional support.

In the article "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology", Sara Ahmed argues that "what bodies 'tend to do' are effects of histories rather than being originary".[45] Ahmed states that history happens in the repetition of gestures and refers to this repetition (by which bodies are given their tendencies and dispositions) as a form of labour. "The labour of repetitions", she argues, paradoxically disappears through labour. When we work hard at something, Ahmed maintains, it begins to seem "effortless": "[t]his paradox, – with effort it becomes effortless – is precisely what makes history disappear in the moment of its enactment". "It is important that we think", Ahmed states, "not only about what is repeated but also how the repetition of actions take us in certain directions."[46]

Based on this assertion by Ahmed, "with effort it becomes effortless" it is interesting to notice how Norris's art student character at the end of her artistic training, when strengthened by other forms of institutional support, finally finds herself able to assume the position of an artist who radically resists and challenges institutional proceedings. The manner through which the context precedes and conditions the possibility to act or speak makes it impossible to fully distinguish one's own inner thoughts or intentions from the context by which the conditions of these are offered.[47] Norris's portrayal of an art student who desperately attempts to detach herself emotionally from conservative and biased values and the art school in which she is enrolled illustrate, I argue, the agonizing paradox that the notion of art as a means for protest against institutional proceedings is often supported and reproduced by the very same institutions it supposedly seek to criticize and oppose. By portraying her art student character as clinging to the promises about art's subversive and critical qualities, as if these were somewhat autonomous to the traditions by which they were offered, Norris's work, I argue, depicts a combination of insecurity and disappointment that appears tied to an experience of being stuck in the coded system that she attempts to decode.

Based on how negative feelings such as insecurity, disappointment, and anguish are portrayed in Norris's work *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* as entwined with the attachment to promises of critical detachment, this chapter has suggested a range of additional feelings that may function as a supplement to the emotional topography that Sedgwick and Felski, in their respective works, have associated with notions of critical distance. Both Sedgwick and Felski propose several emotional and cognitive states; paranoia (Sedgwick), disenchantment, scepticism, suspicion, and vigilance (Felski), that they associate with the sense of *being able* to maintain a position as somewhat outside of a coded system. Besides the effortlessness and happiness that, to some degree, characterizes her fourth semester video, Norris's work, conversely, suggests a number of emotional responses tied to the sense of *failing to embody* such a position. By emphasizing an emotional topography of agony, insecurity, disappointment, and lastly, happiness, Norris's *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* addresses how those figures, actions or objects that are interpreted as radically challenging

the organization of value and meaning in a field, by others in the same field, are often supported by various forms of institutional habits or privileges. As such, Norris's work represents the position of the "radical artist" – critically detached from institutional values in the field – as produced by ritualized gestures and as bound to institutional habits, rather than as existing somewhat on the side of pre-given scripts.

This chapter has addressed the importance of thinking about how the structures of belief and the idealization of certain subjective traits through which visual art has come to be associated with societal or institutional resistance in the past, may continue to affect present-day attachments and approaches to art as a means for resistance and critical detachment. In the following chapter, I will elaborate further on how ideals of the politicized individual's ability to transform or criticize coercive structures can be understood in terms of a demand for autonomy that causes structural entanglements and attachments to become a source of self-blame and embarrassment.

Notes

1. According to a study conducted by students enrolled at CUNY's Guttman College in 2016, nearly one fifth – 19 per cent – of American artists represented at New York's top-tier galleries had graduated from Yale. The study as it was referenced in the article published on the art market database *Artnet*: Henri Neuendorf, "It's Official, 80% of the Artists in NYC's Top Galleries Are White. And Nearly 20% Are Yale Grads", *Artnet* (2017).
2. Dedeaux-Norris has presented *Yale School of Art* in two versions. The version of the work that I discuss in the chapter – entitled *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)*, consist of four videos, one for each semester Dedeaux- Norris attended Yale. The other version of the work includes, apart from the four semester videos, a fifth video representing the art student character's graduation. This latter version of the work was, for example, presented in the exhibition *Too Good For You (Introducing Meka Jean)* at Lombard Freid Gallery, New York City, in 2014. The version of the work that I have chosen to discuss is the one that Dedeaux-Norris presents on their website, and at the media platform YouTube.
3. These details about T.J. Dedeaux Norris's art are based on their own description of their personas and their works in an interview that I conducted with them in Saratoga Springs, New York, on August 7, 2019. Similar descriptions of the division of the authorship of their works can be found at other places, for example in the presentation of T.J. Dedeaux-Norris's exhibition *T.J. Dedeaux-Norris: Second Line* (August 4–December 12, 2021), as published on University Galleries of Illinois State University: *https://galleries.illinoisstate.edu/exhibitions/2021/tj-dedeaux-norris/* (retrieved October 20, 2021).
4. During the 1990s, numerous Euro-American, particularly US-based, scholarly works were published by, for example, art historians such as Jane Blocker, Manthia Diawara, Rune Gade and Amelia Jones or theatre and performance theorists including Sue-Ellen Case, Jill Dolan, Peggy Phelan, José Esteban Muñoz, Rebecca Schneider, and Yvonne Yarbo-Bejarano, wherein theories about the performative were employed in order to describe the potential of political productivity in certain forms of visual art. Similar themes concerning art as a means for political productivity can be found in the contemporaneous influential writing of e.g. artist Lorraine O'Grady or feminist theorist bell hooks. Since its emergence in scholarly works that engaged with art from feminist, queer and critical race perspectives

during the 1990s, the performative has continued to be widely used as a concept for explaining the violence embedded in representational systems (and in the field of visual art) *as well as* the subversive or radical qualities of visual art. To only mention a few, see the scholarly work of cultural theorist Jennifer Doyle, theatre and performance theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte, art historian Uri McMillan, visual culture scholar Jack Halberstam, as well as the subsequent writing of many of the scholars mentioned previously. For a detailed history of how theories of the performative became widely established amongst feminist and queer feminist art historians, performance, theatre, and visual scholars from the 1990s onwards, see, for example: Amelia Jones, *In between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (London: Routledge, 2021).

5. Peter Bürger, Michael Shaw, and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), Carol Duncan, *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Angela Dimitrakaki, "Feminism, Art, Contradictions", *e-flux journal,* 92 (June 2018), Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012). See also: Boris Groys, "On Art Activism", *e-flux journal* (June, 2014), Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013), Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2007), Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), Lorraine O'Grady and Aruna D'Souza, *Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity (1992/1994)* (Duke University Press, 2020), Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), Donald Preziosi and Claire J. Farago, *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), and Anna Lena Lindberg, *Konst, kön och blick: Feministiska bildanalyser från renässans till postmodernism* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1995).
6. See for example: Bürger, Shaw, and Schulte-Sasse, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, Lindberg, *Konst, kön och blick: Feministiska bildanalyser från renässans till postmodernism*, and Rebecca

Schneider, "Remembering Feminist Remimesis: A Riddle in Three Parts", *TDR (1988–),* 58/2 (07/01/ 2014), 14–32.

7. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 12.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 7.
11. Ibid., p. 2.
12. Ibid., pp. 2–3. For Sedgwick's discussion of paranoia, see the chapter "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You", 123–152, in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
13. The connection between licking and the acquisition of knowledge has been accentuated previously by e.g. Beijing-based artist Cang Xin. In Xin's ongoing performance piece *Communication* he has licked sites such as Tiananmen Square, the Coliseum, and the floor of the Saatchi Gallery in London in an effort to represent the act of engaging with the world at large with the use of one of his most intimate and sensitive organs. In a similar manner, in her work *Let Us Remember Licking* (2010), Berlin-based artist Line Skywalker Karlström licked the floor and walls of Århus Kunstbygning in Denmark. The work, which explored positions of masochism, desire, and submission in relation to the art museum as an institution, was performed as part of the seminar *Performance Art and Institutionalization,* arranged in relation to the exhibition History of Disappearance, and curated by Martha Wilson. In yet another work, *Licked Room* (2001) by Tallinn-based video and performance artist Ene-Liis Semper, first performed at the International Art Exhibition at the 49th Venice Biennial in Italy, the disturbingly unhygienic aspects of licking the floors and walls of a space are emphasized, as well as the viewer's potential anguish and compulsion vis-à-vis such a gesture.
14. These accounts of T.J. Dedeaux Norris's performance are based on their own description of the work in an interview that I conducted with them in Saratoga Springs, New York, on August 7, 2019. Similar descriptions of the same work can be found at other places, for example in an interview with Dedeaux-Norris published by *Artsy* on January 22, 2014, entitled "'Listen to Nothing, but Listen to Everything': A Conversation with Tameka Norris": https://www.artsy.net/article/editorial-lis-

ten-to-nothing-but-listen-to-everything (retrieved October 12, 2021). Uploaded to YouTube, one can find video recordings from the versions of the work that Dedeaux-Norris would perform at a later stage at the Studio Museum in Harlem in New York City, and at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco.

15. This exhibition entitled *Gifted and Talented* presented works by four artists, Tom Chung, Élan Jurado, Ali Kheradyar and T.J. Dedeaux-Norris (at the time named Tameka Norris) that were described by curator and writer Renaud Proch as Clifford Owen's protégés. See: Renaud Proch, "Roving Eye: The Gifted and Talented Clifford Owens", *Art in America* (2012).
16. The exhibition catalogue: Yona Backer et al., *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, ed. Karen Jacobson (Minneapolis: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2013). Numerous reviews of the exhibition were published in a variety of art journals, art magazines and newspapers, including: Robin Cembalest, "Ten Tough Women Artists Who Stand up to the Bad Boys", *ARTnews* (October 29, 2013 2013), Ashton Cooper, "25 Questions for Possibly Bleeding Performa Artist Tameka Norris", *Huffington Post,* 2013, Huey Copeland, "Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art", *Artforum International,* 51/2 (10// 2012), p. 112, and Ken Johnson, "Riffs on Race, Role and Identity", *The New York Times,* September 19, 2013.
17. Between 2013 and 2020, Dedeaux-Norris's works were presented in solo shows at the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, Louisiana (2013), Ronchini Gallery, London, UK (2014 and 2017), Lombard Freid in New York City, US (2014), the 1708 Gallery in Richmond, Virginia, US (2015), Mimmo Scognamiglio Artecontemporanea in Milan, Italy (2019) and at Zona Maco Art Fair in Mexico City, CDMX, Mexico (2020), to name just a few. The reviews mentioned in the text are Alpesh Kantilal Patel, "Tameka Norris", *Artforum* (2015), Dea Vanagan, "Tameka Norris: Almost Acquaintances", *ArtReview* (June 3, 2014), Seph Rodney, "Artists Crank up the Transcendent Power of Music", *Hyperallergic* (Brooklyn, New York, September 13, 2016).
18. See for example: Backer et al., *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*. Cembalest, "Ten Tough Women Artists Who Stand up to the Bad Boys" and Kantilal Patel, "Tameka Norris".
19. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Institutional Critique:*

An Anthology of Artists' Writings (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), Susan Cahan, *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), Jones, *In between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance*, Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970's* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

20. Many art historians writing from feminist, queer, and critical race perspectives have written extensively on the critique that artists posed to dominant art institutions and representational systems during the 1960s and 1970s. See for example: Cahan, *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power*, Douglas Crimp, "Pictures", *October,* 8 (04/01/ 1979), 75–88. Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970's*, Peltomäki Kirsi, "Affect and Spectatorial Agency: Viewing Institutional Critique in the 1970s", *Art Journal,* 66/4 (12/01/ 2007), 36–51, Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997).
21. Although this approach became more widely employed in artworks from the 1980s there exist several earlier examples of artworks that address the position of the artist as produced by conventions in the art field as well. In an essay published in 2005 the artist and writer Andrea Fraser published an influential essay where she encircled and elaborated on this shift wherein many artists began problematize how "art" and "artist" generally "figure as antagonistically opposed to an 'institution' that incorporates, co-opts, commodifies, and otherwise misappropriates once-radical-and uninstitutionalized-practices." Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique", *Artforum International,* 44/1 (09// 2005), pp. 278–332.
22. Backer et al., *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, p. 18.
23. Cembalest, "Ten Tough Women Artists Who Stand up to the Bad Boys".
24. Kantilal Patel, "Tameka Norris".
25. A number of reviews have been published that, like this chapter, discuss Dedeaux-Norris's *Yale School of Art*. For example, in a review published in the art magazine *Modern Painters*, the work is described (in one sentence) as a savvy update of Alex Bag's *Untitled Fall '95* that deconstructs the identity of the artist. "Tameka Norris", *Modern Painters,* 24/10 (2012), 88. In

another review, published in the visual arts magazine *ARTnews*, authored by writer and director Alexandra Pechman, *Yale School of Art* is described as featuring Norris playing a highly caricatured version of an art student that satirizes the hubris of M. F. A. candidates. Alexandra Pechman, "'Tameka Norris: Too Good for You (Introducing Meka Jean)' at Lombard Freid", *ARTnews* (July 30, 2014). The review whose interpretation most closely resembles the arguments outlined in this chapter, entitled "Tameka Norris. Too Good For You" and published without an author in the arts section of the *Wall Street International Magazine*, very briefly (in three sentences) discusses *Yale School of Art* as addressing "the contradictions of contemporary arts education and the expectations produced by the history of identity politics". "Tameka Norris. Too Good for You. 6 March – 24 April 2014 at Lombard Freid Projects, New York", *Wall Street International Magazine,* February 19, 2014. Dedeaux-Norris's work has not, to my knowledge, been discussed in any academic books or articles before.

26. The similarities between Dedeaux-Norris's semester videos and the confession booths of reality television shows have been noticed before. See for example: "Tameka Norris. Too Good for You. 6 March – 24 April 2014 at Lombard Freid Projects, New York.".
27. In *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)*, the references to Bag's *Untitled Fall '95* are apparent. Its "third semester video" is a literal reciting of a sequence in Bag's work. In particular, the sequence of Bag's *Untitled Fall '95* that is dedicated to her sixth semester. Furthermore, while the first, second, and fourth semester videos included in Dedeaux-Norris's work are based on scripts written by Dedeaux-Norris themselves, their similarities to Bag's work are noticeable. In contrast to Bag's *Untitled Fall '95*, which takes the form of one cohesive video work of fifty-seven minutes, Dedeaux-Norris's work is divided into four separate videos, between four and nine minutes long, one for each semester of their master's studies.
28. In Bag's video this happens in the sequences depicting her art student's third and fifth semesters, when her character has gained a noticeable amount of self-confidence and increasingly begins to internalize and accept the rules of the field (e.g. evident in her interest in taking humanity courses so as to apply a theoretical framework to her practice – something she was previously reluctant to do). In Norris's work this happens in the fourth video, when her character has received enthusiastic re-

views from the faculty of Yale on her master's thesis exhibition and, in addition, confidently reveals that she has signed a book deal and a record deal.

29. The response to the Atlantic hurricane has been widely criticized. Many residents who were stranded without water, food and shelter could have been saved if they had received help in time. In addition, the property destroyed by the hurricane hit hard at groups that were already economically vulnerable. According to an article published in 2008 in *The Daily Bruin*, the student newspaper at the University of California, Los Angeles, Dedeaux-Norris was accepted at UCLA on the basis of their paintings in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. John Guigayoma, "A Fresh and Candid Voice ", *UCLA The Daily Bruin,* February 24 2008.
30. Pechman, ""Tameka Norris: Too Good for You (Introducing Meka Jean)' at Lombard Freid".
31. This contradiction has been explored in detail in the scholarly work of, amongst others, feminist art historian Angela Dimitrakaki and media theorist Boris Groys. See: Dimitrakaki, "Feminism, Art, Contradictions", and Groys, "On Art Activism".
32. The remixed version was produced by Kanye West. While Kanye West at a later point would become widely criticized precisely because of his competitive attitude against other artists and for his supposed craving for fame and money, as well as for his support of the former American president Donald Trump (see for example: *https://ambrosiaforheads.com/2018/11/kanye-west-mental-health-talib-kweli-dead-prez-video/*, retrieved December 10, 2020), none of this was widely known (at least not to the mainstream public) at the time when Dedeaux-Norris made their work. Hence it seems fair to interpret the inclusion of this track by Dead Prez in their third semester video in terms of its original symbolic status, that is as symbolic of the endeavour for artistic "realness" and for the struggle to detach hip hop artists' work from capitalist and racist societal structures, rather than emblematic of the rather paradoxical collaboration between Dead Prez and Kanye West in its remixed version.
33. After she has sung along to the sentence "For this real hip hop y'all, I am ready to die" (included in the track "It's Bigger Than Hip Hop), the art student exclaims "IT'S LIKE ART!"
34. The importance of education is a recurrent theme in many songs by Dead Prez, the rap duo discussed in relation to Norris's second semester video, as well.
35. Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism", in Melissa Gregg and Grego-

ry J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010), 93–117, p. 93.

36. This approach to the performative is particularly evident in scholarly work inspired by French philosopher Jacques Derrida's interpretation of the performative. See for example: Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 129.
37. Theodor W. Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, *Notes to Literature Vol. 2* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 293, Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 119. Here, Halberstam draws on Hartman's argument that the given language of freedom prevents the possibility to write about the slave as a subject (because this language only enables a limited number of narratives), in order to discuss Yoko Ono's performance *Cut Piece*, enacted in 1965. See J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 145, and Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
38. Berlant, "Cruel Optimism", pp. 94–95.
39. As mentioned, this is an exact quotation of Alex Bag's *Untitled Fall '95*.
40. While Judith Butler discusses imitation in terms of parody, the work of Barbara Kruger and Alex Bag is commonly referred to as ironic appropriations. There is a noteworthy difference between parody and irony as distinct humoristic approaches. When discussing the imitation of cultural products or images, parodic imitation is commonly associated with acts of ridiculing or satirizing works made by, or genres of art represented by, *other* artists or authors. In comparison, irony is often interpreted by more complex and ambivalent terms. When applied as an artistic tactic wherein an artist uses language or visual gestures to express one thing whilst simultaneously signifying its opposite, irony as an artistic device has often been coupled as a gesture through which an author or artist signals a detached scepticism toward her own work. That said, when used as artistic devices, both humoristic approaches are often celebrated for their ability to create critical distance toward or deconstruct a particular identification, object, or structure of belief. For a detailed discussion of the difference between parody and irony and its function as strategies in literature and art, see for example the two chapters "Introduction" and "Irony as Opposition" in Joa-

na Garmendia, *Irony* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

41. That said, in *Gender Trouble* Butler does use drag as examples of performances with potentially subversive effects. Also, in her book *Bodies That Matter*, Butler discusses the documentary film *Paris is Burning* in terms of how – by chronicling the ball culture of New York City – it portrays occasional spaces where the annihilating and killing norms of homophobic societies are mimed, reworked, and resignified. See: Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 124–25.
42. Here, it is important to note the difference between scholars who identify subversiveness as an *inherent trait* of certain artworks or performances to those scholars that contemplate the potential of an artwork or performance to have subversive effects *in particular circumstances and with certain audiences*. In the body of scholarly works that I primarily engage with in this dissertation, most scholars discuss the subversive potential of artworks and performances from the latter perspective (thus putting the emphasis on the situatedness of the viewer). See for example: Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation", *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media,* /36 (01/01/ 1989), 68–81, Mathias Danbolt, *Touching History: Art, Performance, and Politics in Queer Times* (Bergen: University of Bergen, 2013), Jennifer Doyle, *Sex Objects: Art and the Dialectics of Desire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), David Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Sally R. Munt, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
43. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
44. Ibid., pp. 175–93.
45. Sara Ahmed, "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies,* 12/4 (2006), 543–74, p. 553.
46. Ibid.
47. This approach to the performative is particularly evident in scholarly work inspired by French philosopher Jacques Derrida's interpretation of the performative. See for example: Derrida, *Limited Inc*, p. 129.

Sands Murray-Wassink

I Am The Measure Of My Own Success

Stop Worrying About If You Are Making History

I Am Not Going To Get Insulted

CHAPTER THREE
I AM NOT GOING TO GET INSULTED

In an extensive artistic project, Sands Murray-Wassink (b. 1974), an artist residing in Amsterdam, has painted and written sentences in the form of statements, questions, or rules that are reminiscent of journal entries or impulsively written down notes: "RULE #1: NEVER WAiT AROUND FOR PEOPLE", "I HAVE FAILED IN LIFE AT 35", "I LOVE HAVING QUEER MALE 2 MALE SEX", "MY ART CAREER IS OVER IF I DON'T LOOK LIKE A GAY PORNO MODEL", "A CONSTANT OVERESTIMATION OF MY IMPORTANCE", "DON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOURSELF", "DON'T BE AFRAID", "AUTHENTIC WHEN I AM ALONE", "I WANTED TO BE FAMOUS", "I am flawlessly myself in every situation", "LEARNING + UNLEARNING WITHOUT THE COMPOSURE OF HANNAH WILKE TO WHOM I COMPARE MYSELF."

The messages often entail reflections about being misunderstood, unentitled, or insignificant as an artist, as well as expressions of envy or admiration of other artists that he considers as his idols. They also include allegedly authentic considerations on Murray-Wassink's own experiences of living with bipolar disorder, of his physical appearance, or philosophical contemplations about holding the position as bottom in gay male relationships, as well as positive messages that either express self-confidence or appear as intending to strengthen the receiver/viewer's self-confidence and capacity to endure despite failures or injustices.

Whilst read in their entirety, the messages transmitted by the works appear as a large-scale project in which the artist has carefully mapped out his own emotions and thoughts, most often in the form of self-talk.[1] When used within psychology, the concept of self-talk describes the internal dialogue that appears when individuals give themselves mental or verbal in-

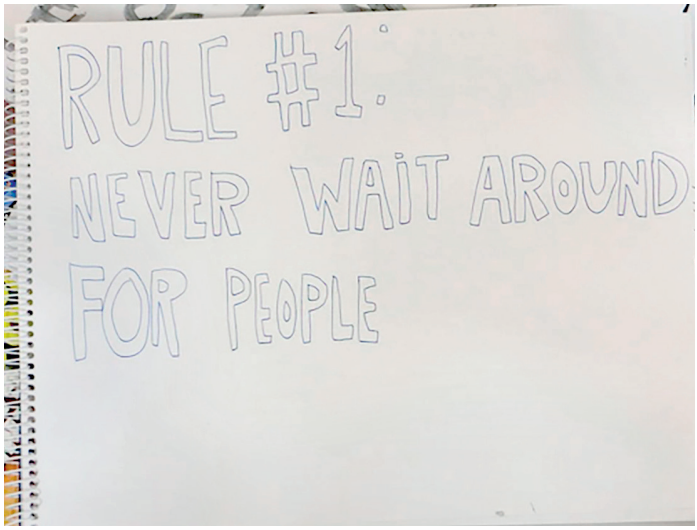


Figure 3.1: Photograph of Sands Murray-Wassink's work *Rule #1*, year unknown, ballpen on paper, approximately 27 × 45 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

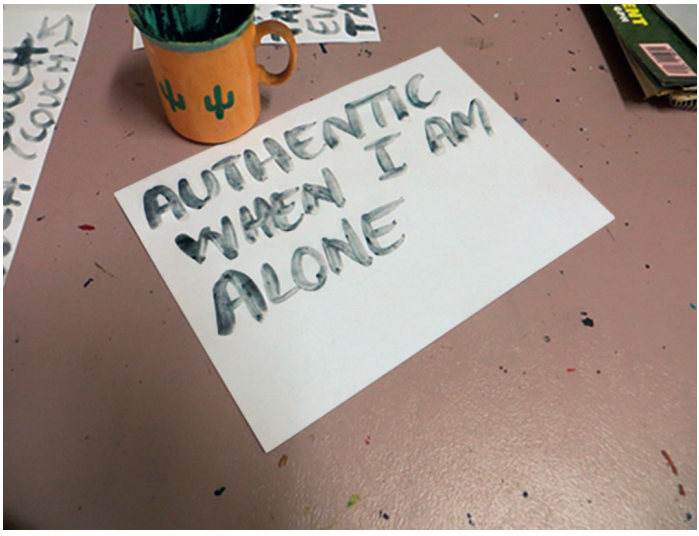


Figure 3.2: Photograph of Sands Murray-Wassink's painting *Authentic When I Am Alone*, circa 2014, acrylic on paper, 29.7 × 21 cm (European A4 printer size). In the reproduction above, the painting is photographed lying on the floor of a studio. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 3.3: Photograph of Sands Murray-Wassink's painting *I Have Failed In Life At 35,* 2009, acrylic on paper, approximately 150 × 50 cm. In the reproduction above, the painting is photographed stapled against a wall in Murray-Wassink's home studio (which is how it was painted). Courtesy of the artist.

structions and reinforcement aiming to regulate their own thoughts, emotions, or behaviour. Just like the painted or written messages in Murray-Wassink's body of work, self-talk entails a wide spectrum of positive, neutral, and negative internal comments. The sense of the works as a type of logs of self-talk is reinforced by their materiality. Some are sentences written on post-it notes, papers from notebooks, or the kind of thin lightweight paper commonly used for printers or copier machines. Others are paintings that give the impression of having been hastily done, without any sketches or planning. The seeming rapidness with which the works have been done connotes the act of jotting down a thought or an emotion.

While attentive to the works as part of the larger project *SURVIVAL ACCEPTANCE ART*, this chapter discusses three paintings by Murray-Wassink with enhanced attention: *I Am The Measure Of My Own Success* (2010), *Stop Worrying About If You Are Making History* (circa 2014), and *I Am Not Going To*

Get Insulted (2015). I argue that by representing various forms of encouraging self-talk, these paintings share a common theme: they portray a politicized artist's struggle to overcome or undo his vulnerabilities in order to attain a position of radical autonomous agency. Keeping with this argument, in my selection of empirical material for this chapter, I have predominantly focused on paintings that are, or can be, related to Murray-Wassink's own experiences of being an artist. I have paid particular attention to works that portray messages of positive self-talk, often reminiscent of self-help mantras. Based on the concept of self-talk, self-help mantras are a method of managing or overcoming personal or emotional problems, often advocated by positive psychology. Self-help mantras entail positive mental or verbal self-directed conversation used as an instrument supposed to encourage the individual toward self-improvement, empowerment, or to various types of actions.[2]

Previous chapters have discussed artworks that, I have argued, bring into view the conditions and costs that lie embedded in attachments to art as a means for political productivity. Rather than proposing a critique against structures of belief that ascribe qualities of reparation, subversion, or emancipation to visual art, these works, I have suggested, provide perspectives somewhat on the side of such notions of art's abilities. As such, they illuminate a negative flipside to the hope about what art can *do* (i.e. produce effects that either offer the possibility to repair from, or that destabilize or challenge normative or discriminatory structures) that I suggest is tangible in many feminist and queer feminist scholarly work centred on visual art and performance.[3] This chapter extends the arguments outlined in the preceding chapters by discussing three paintings by Murray-Wassink, where a politicized artist's intense institutional attachments – and in particular, the desire to be recognized and included by influential actors in one's field or secretly fantasizing about becoming inscribed in canonized recollections of art history – are represented as a source of embarrassment and abjection.[4] Influenced by queer theorist Heather Love's discussion of how some feelings and attachments conjure up a sense of being "shameful" and "bad for politics" in criticism that opposes existing structures of power, this chapter is organized around the question of how politicized artists' desire for institutional recognition or their susceptibility and vulnerability to others' judgement of their artistic work may, at times, be intertwined with a certain sense of awkwardness, discomfort, and backwardness.

RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONS

Sands Murray-Wassink grew up in Topeka in the United States and has been based in Amsterdam in the Netherlands since his early twenties. He was enrolled at Pratt Institute in New York City for two years (1992–1994), after which

he moved to Amsterdam in order to continue his studies at Rietveld Academie and De Ateliers (1995–1996). Recurrent in Murray-Wassink's works is an exploration – represented as focused on his own experiences – of how emotions and relationships function as part of the social and hierarchical structures of art fields.[5] The main artistic media he employs in his artistic practice are painting, his own body, performance, photography, and writing.

Murray-Wassink has performed and presented his work in exhibitions at galleries and art spaces in, amongst other cities, Amsterdam, London, Munich, and New York City.[6] He has taught at de Ateliers and Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Goldsmiths College University of London and Zurich University of the Arts, and his work has been discussed in art journals and magazines such as *Hyperallergic*, *Mister Motley*, *Artforum*, and *The Seen*.[7] Between 2011 and 2013, Murray-Wassink's performance *Town Hall Philosophical Living Color Drawing* (2008) was presented as part of *re.act.feminism #2 – a performing archive*, a large-scale archival and exhibition project that travelled through Europe, and in 2019 he was granted, by Amsterdam-based art organization *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part of Your Revolution*, a two-year financed commission to make a new work.[8]

As an artistic gesture, perhaps an extensive performance, Murray-Wassink repeatedly accentuates those, most often feminist, artists (e.g. Tracey Emin, Adrian Piper, Carolee Schneemann, Elke Silvia Krystufek, and Hannah Wilke) and artistic traditions (e.g. body art, confessional art, feminist art, abject art) that he claims to consider as his friends or as principally inspirational for his own practice.[9] Also repeated in many of Murray-Wassink's paintings, drawings, writing, and performances is his representation of his art as affected by his bipolar disorder (note that, in this chapter, I refer to Murray-Wassink's *portrayal* of living with manias, depressions, narcissistic and borderline traits, and emotional instability, rather than to any clinical assessment of his affective and mental state),[10] as well as (what he presents as) his own private or authentic experiences of feeling emotionally connected to, but also of being hurt or let down by, others.

Especially fundamental in Murray-Wassink's art is his references to his relationship to US-based artist and experimental filmmaker Carolee Schneemann (1939–2019). Schneemann's artistic practice, centred around the body, sexuality, and gender, is extensively recognized in Euro-American fields of artistic production and reception, and her work has recurrently been considered by artists, curators and scholars as influential for the development of feminist art, body art, and performance art.[11] During his time as a student at the Pratt Institute, Murray-Wassink took a sculpture class taught by Schneemann.[12]After this, the two of them initiated a long-term friendship and many of Murray-Wassink's paintings, drawings, texts, and performances include explicit or implicit references to Schneemann's oeuvre and statements where Murray-Wassink describes the influence her art has had on his own practice. In 2001, Schneemann and Murray-Wassink presented their work alongside each other in an exhibition

entitled *Double Trouble: Carolee Schneemann and Sands Murray-Wassink,* presented by Cokkie Snoei Gallery in Rotterdam and Amsterdam. The small exhibition catalogue that was published alongside the exhibition includes an essay by feminist art historian Kathleen Wentrack where she describes the exhibition as a juxtaposition of the "work of two seemingly disparate artists" who challenge viewers by exposing themselves physically, emotionally, and intellectually, and who "share an artistic approach in which their life is their art and their art is their life".[13]

Many critics, curators, and scholars have identified the social and institutional construction of the artist as a central theme in Murray-Wassink's artistic practice. For example, in the newsletter promoting Murray-Wassink's first public exhibition, *Sands Murray's Personal Artistic Business* presented at the Stedelijk Museum in 1997, curator Martijn van Nieuwenhuyzen notices how Murray-Wassink's performances, drawings, and paintings, in comparison to works of art that critically or ironically review the field of power within which art dealers, curators, museum directors, collectors, and the public operate, portray "a form of passionate surrender" to these mechanisms. Or, in a review of Murray-Wassink's 2021 exhibition *In Good Company (Horsepower): Materials from the Gift Science Archive 1993 – present,* at mistral in Amsterdam (co-curated by Megan Hoetger, Radna Rumping, and Huib Haye van der Werf), published in the visual arts journal *The Brooklyn Rail,* curator and critic Titus Nouwens writes: "Over the years Sands has produced an exhaustive amount of paintings, videos, performances, and texts, at once completely and unabashedly about him and at the same time about much more than himself – his loved ones, his fellow artists, the artworld, the role of artists, and patriarchal society at large."[14] Others have recognized an interest in exposing social taboos concerning certain kinds of vulnerabilities or desires in public as crucial in Murray-Wassink artistic practice. In the opening speech at Murray-Wassink's exhibition *Oprecht / Sincere* at Cokkie Snoei Galerie in Rotterdam, artist and queer feminist scholar Suzanne van Rossenberg presented Murray-Wassink's practice by discussing myths of success: "Maybe it comforts people to think that everybody can be successful if they really want to, but in reality, circumstances and chance have a huge influence. The majority of people will – at some point in their lives – face anxiety, stress, weariness, burnouts, depressions, manic depressions or psychoses, or anything else that messes up the planning of our daily lives. Still, it's not neutral or easy to talk about these things in front of others".[15] And, in feminist art historian Kathleen Wentrack's catalogue essay for the exhibition catalogue *Double Trouble: Carolee Schneemann and Sands Murray,* she discussed how Murray-Wassink's artistic practice "questions the role of the artist, how one is 'supposed' to act and interact with his/her environment while undermining taboos surrounding the gay, male body and its sexuality..."[16]

Building on such earlier interpretations of Murray-Wassink's artistic practice as exploring social conventions surrounding the position of the artist,

this chapter will discuss an affiliated theme that, I argue, is tangible in his works, concerning a kind of abjection and embarrassment ascribed to politicized artists' interest in being included in art establishments or desire to gain institutional recognition.[17] Before I introduce the three paintings by Murray-Wassink that constitute the main empirical material of this chapter I will first discuss parts of a letter addressed to Carolee Schneemann, which Murray-Wassink included in his work *Process Event #2: RELATIONSHIPS. Feminist Legacies, Queer Intimacies* (2021). I have chosen to begin this chapter with this because I find this letter (allegedly written and sent) to Schneemann and then presented retroactively before a wider audience, to offer an important introduction to Murray-Wassink's art from which my interpretations of his paintings will unfold. Another entwined reason to begin with this letter is that it illuminates my own methodological struggles in engaging with themes such as vulnerabilities, insecurities and social taboos in Murray-Wassink's works. Although, or perhaps more accurately because, my act of disclosing these scholarly problems induces my own embarrassment and fear of appearing like an amateur, they will serve as a descriptive example of a certain type of difficulty that, as queer theorist Kadji Amin argues, often affects the relation of politicized scholarship to the objects or subjects of their study. While I have chosen to illustrate them here in relation to my engagement with Murray-Wassink's artistic practice, scholarly challenges such as these have been fundamental, albeit in different ways, throughout the entire process of writing this dissertation, and they point to an overarching theme to which I will return in the concluding chapter.

STAYING WITH UNEASE

Murray-Wassink's work *Process Event #2: RELATIONSHIPS. Feminist Legacies, Queer Intimacies* (2021), takes the form of an extensive email and letter correspondence between Murray-Wassink and curator Aimar Arriola. Their correspondence was part of a commissioned collaboration between Murray-Wassink and the art organization *If I Can't Dance*. As such, it was initiated as an artwork that is, and was supposed to be, presented to a wider audience on the organization's website. A frequent theme throughout Murray-Wassink's emails to Arriola is the significance he attributes to Schneemann's art at large, the influence that he argues her oeuvre has had on his own practice, and the importance he attributes to her friendship and support. He explains with pride how Schneemann believed in him when he was still a young student and compares her support to many other of his art-school teachers who thought he was unteachable and his art too chaotic. For example, in Murray-Wassink's last email to Arriola he has included a quotation by Schneemann, where she describes her first encounter with his practice: "That's what I was recognizing when he was my student. He

was all about spillage and seepage and everyone was trying to get him back into the quadrant and I thought that it was just perfect. Let him spill and seep and envelop and overcome space."[18] To the same email to Arriola, Murray-Wassink has attached a letter that he presents as one that he wrote and sent to Schneemann after a "particularly painful evening" when he had attended the opening of a large retrospective dedicated to her work at the MMK Museum in Salzburg in 2015 after the two of them had "had a bit of a distant time". In this letter, the weight that Murray-Wassink allegedly attributes to Schneemann's artistic practice, friendship, and support, is intriguingly represented as not only the source of his joy and confidence, but also of his anguish and humiliation.

The letter to Schneemann opens with a few sentences in which Murray-Wassink explains how seeing and embracing her again at the opening of her retrospective, after having been separated for a number of years, "fanned the fire again of my inspiration and drive". He also, at numerous points in his letter, declares his appreciation of her art, emphasizes its broader importance, and describes several of her works and artistic approaches in careful and devoted detail. The main subject of his letter, however, is to express his sense of hurt as, after twenty years of friendship, and after having had to borrow money for the flight and stay and eat for free at his friends' houses in Salzburg and Vienna in order to be able to attend the opening at all, he felt treated by Schneemann as if they had only just met or barely knew each other:

> I am not sure what happened, but somehow all of a sudden I was introducing [NOTE: Carolee's then personal assistant] Andy Archer to AA Bronson, and you had disappeared, our magic moment gone in a poof. It was important for me to be warm and embracing to Andy, as you had spoken so highly of him and I know how good he is to and for you. That's precious, of course. So maybe I was too quickly accommodating, overwhelmed by mixed emotions and emotionally analytical demands. In any case, when I came to ask you later if we could take a photo together, you said you didn't want to be interrupted just then, but it came across a bit harsh. Don't get me wrong, I have thought long and hard since the trip to Austria to see you, about the levels of life you are living on now, how there must be people pulling at you from all directions [...] But I felt, to put it bluntly now, excluded to a degree. And uncertain where we stood, during the time of those consecutive days in Salzburg and Vienna.
>
> [...]
>
> And when Wendy Olsoff your dealer was giving a dinner, and AA Bronson yet again came to me and said he was going, and I thought you saw me standing alone as you left for dinner with the others, including Frits, it was just too much for me... I ended up that night cold and alone in the falling sleet of Salzburg, finding my way to a restaurant nearby the

> museum, ordering goulash and dumplings and what turned out to be a huge beer, calling Robin on my mobile phone and sobbing for 15 minutes into the phone about how I felt treated and how stupid I felt for thinking I had something with you to believe in.

The difference between the art of Murray-Wassink and Schneemann in terms of institutional recognition and social status is distinct. Schneemann's artistic practice is markedly more renowned, established, and well-known than Murray-Wassink's (although Schneemann at the time when they initiated their friendship was a rather marginalized artist struggling to survive economically).[19] In his letter, when presented as part of an artwork, the admiration and intimacy that Murray-Wassink depicts as permeating his relationship to her, is portrayed as agonizingly marked by this social hierarchal distinction between them. This difference between the two artists is also evident in terms of an underlying issue concerning Murray-Wassink's choice to present this evidence of his personal relation to Schneemann (regardless of whether or not the letter really represents a correspondence between the artists, or is just proposed as such) to a wider audience. Deliberate or not, his own friendship with and support by her, one of the most influential and canonized Western artists of the twentieth century, may affect his own social ranking in the field of artistic production and reception. Likewise, if viewers suspect Murray-Wassink's act of presenting this letter as intentional or calculating, they could treat it with suspicion or ridicule.

By its swift turns between positions of accusation, doubt, agony, devotion, and apologies, the content of the letter represents a person's sense of loneliness and disorientation in the wake of having been injured by someone he loves and respects. To me, the letter stirred a sense of identification with the author's depiction of his emotional disposition. It reminded me of impulsively penned accounts of social interactions and emotional responses from my own journal or from letters (in my case, though, most often left unsent), written as a result of disappointment, anger, or humiliation caused by social interaction with others (including friends, lovers, or colleagues). That said, reminiscent of the embarrassment that can occur as one at a later stage reads through one's own notes or letters, especially those written in states of emotional distress, parts of Murray-Wassink's letter to Schneemann aroused a similar kind of (this time secondary) embarrassment in me. After having named and compared himself to others invited to a private dinner after the opening that he was not asked to join, he states desperately: "...but Carolee I am an ARTIST who has invested my entire adult life in learning about all of the strains of your work (this is even a bit of an understatement)". In another sequence of his letter, Murray-Wassink mentions how he feels that his position as male affects how he is treated by many feminist artists that he knows or admires. "I feel like a shadow to those I admire. And I don't mind being a shadow, but like you over the years of your career (that word career!), I want to be included." He continues by stating that he feels that "fem-

inist art will never get anywhere or be meaningful for everyone if people do not begin by concentrating on individual treatment of each other".[20]

Albeit softened by the knowledge of the collaborations and the long-term friendship between them, Murray-Wassink's conclusion that his devotion to Schneemann's oeuvre ought to make him (more) worthy of her attention and care (than others), or his act of using feminism as an argument for why women ought to treat him better, appears rather awkward and troubling. Throughout my interaction with Murray-Wassink's oeuvre, my first impulse when approaching parts of his works that can be interpreted as politically embarrassing, troubling, or flawed, has often been to ignore these in my own written analysis of his works. This instinct, in turn, has been based on my own anxiousness about how such dispositions in his works would be received by the reader of my own text.

To be clear, I do not find representations such as the ones mentioned above, portraying Murray-Wassink's sense of entitlement to support from feminist artists or of his right to be acknowledged and included as an artist, as *awkward or troubling* in the sense that I feel disappointed or disturbed by their questionable political outlook.[21] It would not be all that difficult to interpret these parts of Murray-Wassink's letter through a framework of political productivity. For example, based on Judith Butler's or Eve Sedgwick's respective problematizations of "gender" or "sex" as pregiven or coherent categories, one could argue that Murray-Wassink's (an according to himself, woman-identified male) demand to be treated equally to women artists in the feminist art movement "radically challenges" hidden preconceptions of sex and gender in feminist art. Or, in terms of his letter's exposure of hierarchal social structures in the art establishment, one could also read Murray-Wassink's presentation of the letter to a wider audience in terms of a gesture that "productively refuses" to accept silenced or unspoken hierarchies in the art field.

Having said that, and in line with the purpose of this dissertation, rather than attempting to find ways to explain his presentation of this letter in terms of radicality or subversion, I have been interested to linger with Murray-Wassink's allegedly blunt survey of his complicated position of residing inside a structure or field, without fending off or ignoring (note, though, not necessarily defending) aspects that may appear disturbing, immoral, or bad for politics. As artist and curator Matt Morris pointedly states in an essay on Murray-Wassink's oeuvre published in *The Seen: Chicago's International Journal of Contemporary and Modern Art*, his work "surges with affect oriented toward the difficulties of navigating a world defined by gender, misogyny, vanity, and alienation".[22] Instead, it was the prospect of not being able to do justice to what Morris identifies as Murray-Wassink's representations of the difficulty for an individual to navigate through complex organizations of discriminatory or exclusionary social structures, that stirred my fear of making the reader of my own written analysis of his works irritated with him. Perhaps, I thought, if the readers become annoyed with Murray-Wassink it could cause them to lose interest in – or distance themselves

from – the aspects of exposure and self-doubt in his works that I was longing to address. Likewise, by proposing my own sense of identification with the letter's exposure of susceptibility to institutional hierarchies, sense of entitlement, and longing for inclusion and recognition, I wondered if readers would emotionally and intellectually distance themselves from, and begin to question, the purpose of my own project.

In his book *Disturbing Attachments*, queer theorist Kadji Amin argues that the vast focus on political productivity that has permeated the academic discipline of queer studies has led to a tendency amongst queer scholars to turn to a narrow set of methods or tactics when encountering aspects of their objects of study (whether it be historical figures or cultural products) that disturb or disappoint them:

> The experience of *unease* tends to lead to a limited and rather defensive range of scholarly strategies. When a "promising" object fails to deliver, scholars too often compensate by switching gears from idealization to critique, flaying the object for its failure to be sufficiently transgressive or consistently radical. If this occurs early on in a research project, it can initiate the wholesale abandonment of the object that has failed to live up to its promise. Otherwise, we might either sidestep the source of unease, the better to celebrate the object's truly radical aspects, or use it to hone the ego-enhancing aggression of critique, thereby shoring up the critic's position of mastery and political unassailability.[23]

Too often, Amin argues, politicized scholars' experience of unease toward a particular aspect of a "promising" cultural work, or a cultural producer, result in them either turning away from that particular work or artist, explaining the disappointing aspect of the work as an unfortunate flaw, or overlooking its disturbing traits by solely focusing on its radical aspects. This tactic, Amin maintains, comprises a series of problems. By causing us to deliberately, or to some degree perhaps unintentionally, forget, overlook, or suppress certain traits of cultural products or their authors, or by approaching objects or persons through a binary of either utopian hope or critique, it prevents us from closely acknowledging and studying disturbing attachments (to e.g. race, history, and geopolitics) as an inevitable aspect of all social life.[24]

Analogous to Amin's argument, I find Murray-Wassink's letter to Schneemann, along with his choice to present it to a wider audience, to exemplify a central methodological issue that I have struggled with throughout my writing of this dissertation. This methodological problem concerns my own scholarly instinct to protect the artists and their works from over-simplified judgements (as exemplified in Murray-Wassink's letter, of his portrayal of a desire to be seen or congratulated by a senior authorial figure that he respects) by some of the readers of my own text. Apart from disclosing a rather embarrassing disposi-

tion whereby I ostensibly ascribe to myself the ability – with more nuance than certain others – to deal with representations of complex vulnerabilities, this instinct (or at least the act of following such a reflex) would in itself be guilty of a simplified presentation of artworks. Far from serving merely as illustrations of how it feels to reside in a position of marginalization or subordination, many of the works that this dissertation is oriented around (albeit in vastly different ways) reflect multifaceted layers of weaknesses, privileges, and entitlements that often characterize positions residing inside a structure, including those that attempt to resist or challenge the status quo. A scholarly tactic that either detaches from such aspects (identifies them in the objects of others, without acknowledging their resonance with similar unfavourable character traits in oneself) or that ignores difficult and awkward aspects of an artwork in order to, with Amin's phrase "celebrate the object's truly radical aspects", is likely to fail to acknowledge certain central aspects in such multifaceted representations of the relation between individual and structure.

In what follows I will consider, through interpretations that linger with, rather than fend off what appears as his artistic unwillingness to delete or revise thoughts or claims that may appear disturbing or embarrassing, three paintings by Murray-Wassink entitled *I Am The Measure Of My Own Success*, *Stop Worrying About If You Are Making History*, and *I Am Not Going To Get Insulted*. These paintings are presented as part of Murray-Wassink's large-scale artistic project *SURVIVAL ACCEPTENCE ART* (ongoing since 1993), consisting of countless paintings and drawings that, when read in their entirety, emerge as an attempt by Murray-Wassink to record every thought, feeling or occurrence he experiences, as a strategy to map out his own relation to the field of artistic production and reception.[25] Analogous to his presentation of his letter to Schneemann as part of an artwork, Murray-Wassink's vast body of paintings and drawings reflects a gesture of displaying texts or images allegedly made impulsively, and then presented to an art audience without any editing.

SELF-HELP MANTRAS

Murray-Wassink's acrylic painting *I Am The Measure Of My Own Success* (figure 3.4), consists of a vertically oblong paper, approximately 150 by 65 centimetres. Many of Murray-Wassink's acrylic paintings apply the same visual principle. Vertically elongated, they present about three-centimetre-thick letters that form sentences. A frame of paint, regularly in the same colour and similar thickness as the words, marks the edges of the paper. Lastly, the other parts of the paper are covered in a colour that differs from the colour of the words and the frame. In many of his paintings, Murray-Wassink has added the last letters of a word above or below the word or painted the entire ending of word as sharply bent

either downwards or upwards whenever they have failed to fit onto the paper. A certain degree of spontaneity and, perhaps, laziness, is also communicated by the traces of the process through which the paintings have been made. In classical painting with layers, the imprimatur and the layers forming the background of an image are normally painted and allowed to dry or harden before the following layers with figures are applied.[26] In contrast, Murray-Wassink seems to have painted a background with one colour and then, before the paint has hardened, he has applied another layer of paint. The result is that the paint in the background has visibly been applied around the words, sometimes with the effect of capturing and spreading the colour of the letters onto other parts of the paper. As a consequence, his paintings appear to play with an aesthetic reminiscent of a type of juvenile amateurism.[27]

In *I Am The Measure Of My Own Success*, a frame of brown colour of about two to three centimetres is painted around the edges of the paper. The same brown colour is then used to paint a sentence, its' letters of about the same thickness as the frame. Extending over entire surface of the paper, the sentence states:

I
AM
THE
MEASURE
OF
MY
OWN
SUCCES
S

Around the letters a yellow colour has been applied all the way out to the frame, so that the entire paper is covered with paint. The last letter in the word "success" appears to have failed to fit onto the paper and has been added below the word, as if Murray-Wassink momentarily forgot how to spell the word, or simply misjudged the space he had at his disposal. The fact that it is precisely the word "success" that failed to be contained on the paper also hints at a kind of linguistic joke, either encompassing a failed aspiration of "success" or indicating that he, just as he asserts, is able to remain distanced from prevalent or bourgeois ideals within which success commonly is equated with education and literacy.

In Murray-Wassink's painting, it is not clear what kind of achievement the word success refers to. When read as indicating accomplishments in relation to his profession as an artist, "success" implies queries such as the amount of exhibitions, financial gain, recognition by others, or mentions by art critics or scholars an artist has to attain in order to achieve a level of success. It could also refer to the criteria by which artistic value is judged. With such a reading,

Figure 3.4: Photograph of Sands Murray-Wassink standing beside his painting *I Am The Measure Of My Own Success*, 2010, acrylic on paper, 150 × (approximately) 65 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Murray-Wassink's statement that he himself constitutes the measure of his own success, declares a radical position of autonomy (i.e. self-legislation or freedom) vis-à-vis prevalent systems for value and meaning in the art field.

Apart from the assertion of critical detachment from external models of success, there is also a tangible degree of confidence and artistic entitlement conveyed in Murray-Wassink's gesture of assigning this painting conceptual artistic value, despite its seeming lack of preparation or respect of traditional artistic craftmanship. There is, however, a parallel tension tangible in the work,

which stresses a sense of vulnerability and insecurity as interlinked with its declaration of an autonomous and confident disposition. Against the backdrop of numerous of his other paintings and drawings, where Murray-Wassink portrays his own desperation, vulnerability, and contingency on others, the message of autonomy inherent in *I Am The Measure Of My Own Success* appears as a desire, ambition, or briefly passing experience of confidence and independence, rather than a description of an enduring artistic or individual outlook. In addition, the very act of stating "I AM THE MEASURE OF MY OWN SUCCESS", plays with a tension between the desire for critical detachment from normative structures and the vulnerability that such a longing brings about. As the need or desire to compose a message of self-assurance, independence, and confidence often indicates an attempt to detach from influence, dependency on and comparison with others, the very gesture of painting the message implies the writer's anxiety and susceptibility. By playing with a tension between autonomy and vulnerability, detachment and attachment, the fierce declaration of independence becomes reminiscent of a self-help mantra rather than a description of an actual subjective disposition.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, "self-help" became increasingly associated with popular psychology's attempt to make psychological findings and methods available to the general public. It is fascinating, however, to consider the original implications of the term. According to psychologist and philosopher Ole Jacob Madsen, in its initial application the term "self-help" was used in fields such as law and economics to refer to an ideal of autonomy; the aspiration of nations to become economically independent from other nations.[28] As the term was applied within popular psychology, Madsen points out, its foundation in ideals of autonomy remained. In this context, however, instead of signifying the financial management of nations, it refers to individuals' ability and possibility to take control of their own mental and emotional activity.[29] As ethnographer Scott Cherry has pointed out, there frequently resides a paradox in the idea of self-help in the field of popular psychology. By indicating an individual's essential dependency on others, while simultaneously assuring the possibility of individual autonomy, the psychology of self-help bounces between ostensibly distinct positions of autonomy and dependency.[30]

Following Cherry's observation, it is interesting to consider how self-help mantras, and positive self-talk in general, often incorporate a simultaneous sense of self-confidence and self-doubt.[31] The messages themselves take on the form of boosting statements by which individuals describe themselves in terms of autonomy, strength, success, or value. To the contrary, however, the situations when the individual makes use of positive self-talk, or is encouraged to repeat self-help mantras to themselves, are frequently moments characterized by a strong sense of self-doubt, self-criticism, shame, impingement, or weakness, often evoked through intersubjective relations or encounters.[32] Consequently, the very choice to make use of self-help mantras, or positive self-talk in general, dis-

closes an awareness of one's unwilled emotional and psychological vulnerability to a particular set of values and meanings, that one then attempts (by the employment of positive affirmation) to detach from. As such, moments in which an individual holds an inner dialogue of self-help mantras or positive self-talk are often characterized by an internal struggle between a penetrating sense of vulnerability to others, and a desire to remain detached; self-sufficient and self-assured, in spite of this perceived susceptibility. When interpreted as referring to his own position as artist, Murray-Wassink, in *I Am The Measure Of My Own Success*, intriguingly transfers this paradox between the collision of two inseparable philosophical outlooks; essential intersubjectivity versus cognitive (emotional and intellectual) detachment, onto an artist's relation to external models for value or success. As such, rather than portraying a position of either vulnerability or detachment, *I Am The Measure Of My Own Success* portrays an artist's *desire* to remain radically independent from societal or institutional models for value.

FAILURE TO DETACH

Some of the works included in Murray-Wassink's extensive body of drawing and paintings entail statements, exclamations, or questions that explicitly address negative emotional and psychological consequences of dependency regarding his position as an artist: "WAITING FOR THE PUBLIC TO WANT IT", "WILL I BE FORGOTTEN? WHY DO I CARE? IS MAKING THINGS STUPID?", "MAYBE I AM NOT SO CONFIDENT ABOUT MY WORK AFTER ALL", or "INSIGNIFICANT ARTIST." Such paintings and drawings, in which Murray-Wassink more directly portrays his own contingency on others, is clearly associated with a wide range of feminist artistic works and performances that since the 1970s have been engaging with, as queer feminist art historian Amelia Jones has noted, artists' credibility, artistic agency, and sense of self, as ultimately contingent on others.[33] Albeit clearly building on such preceding artistic and philosophical approaches, many of Murray-Wassink's works also stress how there lures a particular kind of embarrassment, guilt, or awkwardness in relation to certain types of attachments between artists and art fields, particularly those attachments that are marked as ostensibly non-radical or politically unproductive. As such, I will argue, his paintings and drawings also include references to artistic genres such as "slacker art" and "abject art".[34] In both of these traditions of artistic and scholarly work, an artist's vulnerability and contingency on others, or attachment to various societal and cultural institutions, have been explored as a source of disgust, shame, and abjection.

In the 1980s and 1990s the genre of "slacker art" emerged as a theme recurrently referred to by artists, curators and art critics. While this genre of artis-

tic production and characterization did have its basis in anti-establishment and anti-materialist movements, "slacker art" was rarely characterized as posing grand gestures of revolt against the bourgeois or traditional organization of the art world. Instead, it was formed around contemporary discussions of the figure of the "slacker"; a lazy, aimless, and apathetic individual. Similar to most works included in Murray-Wassink's large body of paintings and drawings, "slacker art" repeatedly explored the disdain and disgust evoked by certain artists' lack of work ethic and commitment, attachments to the art establishment, vain insecurities, or other embarrassing aspirations such as a desire to become "their idols."[35] In this sense, the genre of 'slacker art' is closely linked to the concept of the abject and the often overlapping genre of "abject art".

Inspired by the philosophical term "the abject", and particularly by philosopher Julia Kristeva's interpretation of the abject in her book *Powers of Horror* (1980), abject art as an artistic genre became widely established in Europe and the US the wake of the 1993 exhibition "Abject Art" at the Whitney Museum of American Art (that said, the abject as a concept had been used as a description of artistic and literary works long before that).[36]

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva defines the abject in terms of elements degraded in a community, commonly considered disgusting, improper, or disturbing.[37] Since the 1990s, the abject has often been linked to activism and ideas sprung from art communities dedicated to queer, feminist, and critical race perspectives, and particularly to artworks and performances interested in representing objects and bodies deemed improper, disgusting, or unclean by normative societal principles. As such, artistic representations of abjection, or works that evoke a sense of abjection in their viewers, have often been considered (by scholars, critics and curators) in terms of a politicized strategy embedding possibilities of community formation and social critique.[38]

In contrast, however, to such associations between abjection and political productivity, and of particular interest to how the concept of the abject resonates with queer theorist Heather Love's theories of shameful attachment (which will soon be introduced) that lie at the heart of my discussion of Murray-Wassink's paintings, is how Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror*, states that that which causes abjection is characterized by how it does not allow us a position of autonomy or detachment.[39] The abject is "something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object".[40] She writes: "it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within: when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being, that it is none other than abject".[41] Interestingly, then, abjection, according to Kristeva, is a kind of disgust, nausea, and shame that is determined by *attachment*; by the failed attempt to detach.

Of importance to how certain works within Murray-Wassink's artistic project *SURVIVAL ACCEPTANCE ART* suggest a link between certain forms of

attachments – or the failed attempt to detach – and disdain and disgust, is how other works included in the same project, such as the acrylic painting *I Like The Idea Of Being An Artist* (2011), represent an individual's, presumably his own, affective bond to the position as artist in more positive terms. Here, by adding the word "idea" to the painted statement Murray-Wassink once again steers the attention toward his own affective engagement with the philosophical and social construction of the artist, this time at the expense of emphasizing a fondness for artistic craftmanship or a concrete practical experience linked to his profession.

SELF-BLAME

With a thick brush and black acrylic paint Murray-Wassink has painted a sentence on a piece of white paper (figure 3.5). Written in capital letters, it reads:

STOP WORRYiNG
ABOUT iF YOU
ARE MAKING
HiSTORY

The letters written on the left side of the paper contains thicker paint. Gradually, the further they are to the right side of the paper, the letters become paler and thinner. Instead of continuously applying more paint to the brush, or changing between different brushes, Murray-Wassink seems to have chosen to use the same brush and only apply more paint to it every time he reached the end of the paper and had to begin a new row. Like most of his paintings and drawings, the work gives the impression of having been rapidly done, as if painted in order to materialize a passing thought. The materials used are cheap: black acrylic paint applied with the same brush to a white thin lightweight paper of the kind that is used for printers and copier machines, with the dimensions of European A4 printer size (29.7 × 21 cm).

As in most of Murray-Wassink's paintings and drawings, the stated message painted in his work *Stop Worrying About If You Are Making History* conveys an implicit sequence of events that occurred prior to the painting of the message. Since the painted message asks the addressee to stop a form of conduct, it simultaneously indicates that Murray-Wassink, or some possible other recipient, *has* indeed worried about whether he or they will gain a recognized position in the writing of history. Here, the alteration between a reading of the work in which Murray-Wassink makes a call to others, or of the painting as a demand that Murray-Wassink addresses toward himself, is suggestive. The portrayal of the attachment between individual and structure in the painting becomes radically dissimilar depending on how we choose to read the "you" addressed in the work.

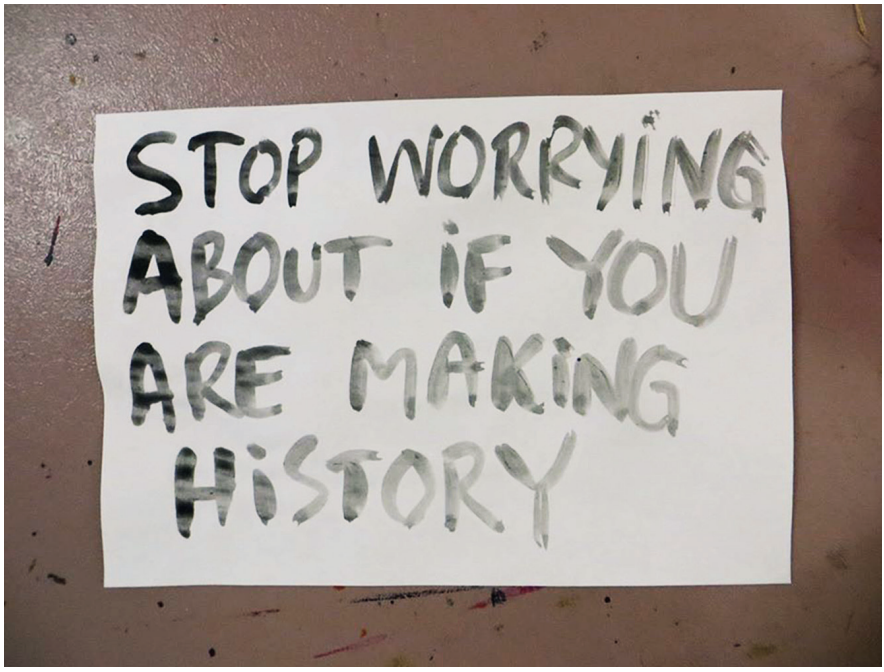


Figure 3.5: Photograph of Sands Murray-Wassink's painting *Stop Worrying About If You Are Making History*, circa 2014, acrylic on paper, 29.7 × 21 cm (European A4 printer size). In the reproduction above, the painting is photographed lying on the floor of a studio. Courtesy of the artist.

Even though self-talk describes an internal conversation, a dialogue one has with oneself, individuals often prefer to use second-person pronouns over first-person pronouns when they engage in this type of inner dialogue.[42] In his body of work, Murray-Wassink continuously alternates between first-person and second-person pronouns. Read as a singular work, the plea to stop worrying could just as well be general advice addressed to the viewer. However, when read in relation to the large body of similar works in which Murray-Wassink investigates his own relation to various actors and sites in the field of art, the demand to stop worrying about whether or not he will make history, seems to specifically address his own reflections about his possible legacy as an artist. Directly and firmly, Murray-Wassink appears to urge himself to quit worrying about whether or not he will become a recognized part of (what one may presume to be art's) history.

To the contrary, when read as a call directed toward others, Murray-Was-

sink's painting asks the viewer to detach from their anxious longing for recognition and fame. In this scenario, Murray-Wassink himself becomes positioned as the one who is directing this demand towards others, hence calling others to join him in his position of negligence and independence from desiring public recognition. When, on the other hand, Murray-Wassink's demand is read as directed against himself, his position of cognitive detachment from the recognition or validation of others becomes fundamentally compromised. Instead of emerging as an individual who radically opposes the endeavour for recognition and fame, he is portrayed, just as in his painting *I Am The Measure Of My Own Success*, as a person who desires to attain a position of independence, but for various reasons fails to acquire such a sense of indifference to the judgement of others. By such an interpretation of Murray-Wassink's painting, his emotional attachment to societal and institutional memory practices is portrayed, not only through his suggested agonizing about whether he will be recognized in (art) history, but also through the self-blame noticeable in his harsh dialogue with himself. Instead of encompassing any degree of self-compassion, the requirement to stop worrying takes on the form of a demand. In this sense, the work does not only portray Murray-Wassink's failure to detach himself from his emotional dependency on the recognition by others, but also entails a sense of his self-blame, embarrassment, and abjection concerning his own inabilities.

As an elaboration of how abjection and negative emotions can be interpreted as lurking in the background of this painting by Murray-Wassink, it is interesting to consider the work through the arguments outlined by Heather Love in her book *Feeling Backward*. Love identifies moments when the failure of minority subjects or women to emotionally detach from discriminatory structures becomes the source of shame and disgust either in themselves or in their communities. In *Feeling Backward*, Love describes the shame that is tied to particular types of attachments by turning to examples in contemporary gay and lesbian culture. She puts particular emphasis on queer experiences of shame in a contemporary moment that, post-Stonewall, is understood to be characterized by the effects of gay liberation. Given the "tolerance" of the contemporary moment, feelings of gay shame, secrecy, or self-hatred, Love asserts, have become shameful in themselves for queer subjects:

> Such continuities suggest that direct experience of the pre-Stonewall moment is not solely responsible for a range of feelings that we today designate as pre-Stonewall, feelings that are all the more shameful given the "tolerance" of the contemporary moment. [...] Although there are crucial differences between life before gay liberation and life after, feelings of shame, secrecy, and self-hatred are still with us. Rather that disavowing such feelings as the sign of some personal failing, we need to understand them as indications of material and structural continuities between these two eras.[43]

To find oneself emotionally attached to a discriminatory legacy of gay shame, Love argues, becomes shameful in a queer community that has proclaimed itself as emotionally and intellectually detached from such an inheritance.

The internalized shame that queer subjects might experience in a homophobic society is in many ways markedly different from the types of self-hatred and shame that artists may experience in their field of profession, not least because professions, as compared to sexual orientations, describe positions that persons can choose to opt out of at any point they decide to. It would therefore seem more sensible (and perhaps respectful) to apply Love's ideas of backward feelings to those of Murray-Wassink's works where he more readily articulates his position as gay in relation to a homophobic society, rather than to those portraying his artistic struggles. That said, while I do not intend to argue that the two positions are interchangeable, I am interested in how Love's argument that subjects' vulnerabilities to hegemonic, normative or discriminatory structures can become a source of shame and self-blame, can be applied to more far-reaching frameworks than exclusively to that of the experiences of sexual minorities. As a framework through which to approach Murray-Wassink's painting *Stop Worrying About If You Are Making History*, Love's theories of shameful attachments can provide an indicator of the embarrassment and abjection that at times are associated with politicized artists' desire to be recognized and included by influential actors in one's field or secretly fantasizing about being inscribed in canonized recollections of the history of art – particularly those artists that, like Murray-Wassink, seek with their work to problematize or challenge social hierarchies or institutionalized values in art fields.

From such an outlook, it is possible to discern how the (self-)blame that is suggested in Murray-Wassink's request to stop worrying emerges precisely through the tension between the gesture of rebelliousness and detachment, and the simultaneous portrayal of anxiousness and attachment. Instead of making a statement of defiance, such as *I am not worrying about making history*, the addition of "stop" indicates an actual worrying taking place before the demand. The painting thus portrays an individual requesting, either himself or another, to become detached from a desire to which they are attached.

This tension between attachment and detachment is also discernible in another of Murray-Wassink's acrylic paintings, entitled *I Am Not Going To Get Insulted* (figure 3.6). Using a cool yellow tone, Murray-Wassink has painted the sentence

I AM NOT
GOING TO
GET
INSULTED

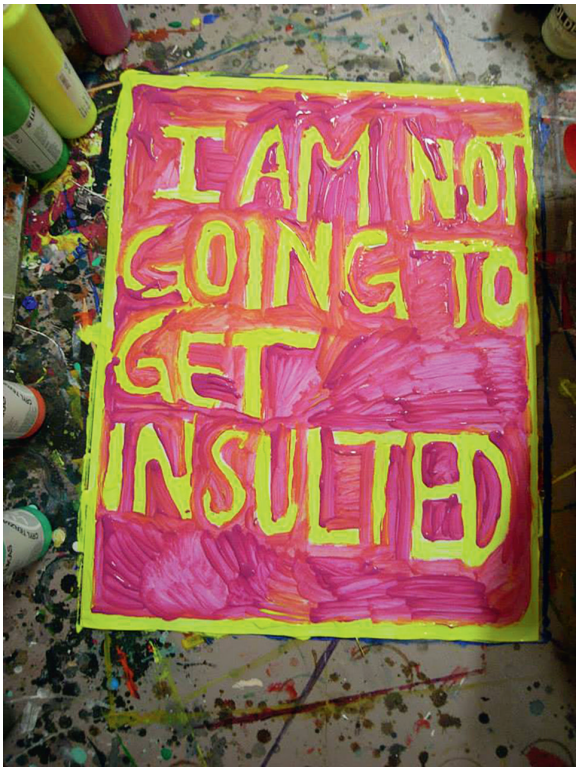


Figure 3.6: Photograph of Sands Murray-Wassink's painting *I Am Not Going To Get Insulted*, 2015, acrylic on paper, 65 × 50 cm. In the reproduction above, the painting is photographed lying on the floor in Murray-Wassink's home studio. Courtesy of the artist.

The same colour is applied in order to paint a frame around the oblong paper. A red colour with blue undertones is painted around the letters as well as on the surface between the letters and the frame of the paper. All layers of paint are uneven and reveal traces of the strokes of the brush.

Just as in *Stop Worrying About If You Are Making History*, the message stated in *I Am Not Going To Get Insulted* connotes the prospect of failure and accompanying humiliation. Once again, the emotional detachment and conviction articulated through the statement is implicitly contradicted by the suggested vulnerability that preceded the claim. Implied in the urge to make a declaration that one is not going to get insulted, is naturally the threat of being offended or hurt. The claim that one is not going to be insulted could, of course, be made quite

neutrally or indifferently. If we imagine that the assertion is made as an answer to someone who warns about a possible insult, it could simply be a somewhat puzzled, unconcerned, or reassuring declaration. The reading of the assertion as an actual expression of detachment is, however, undercut by the visual and material features in the work. Rather than arousing associations of neutrality or calmness, the fiercely red and yellow colours in the painting construct a sense of alarm and anxiety. In addition, the very act of making a painting through which the declaration is made weakens the sense of calmness or indifference and instead gestures to an absorption in one's own desire for detachment.

When read through a framework of positive self-talk, the declaration "I AM NOT GOING TO GET INSULTED", appears as part of an inner dialogue through which an individual attempts to regulate his own affective responses. Ostensibly helpful at its core, this message of strength and conviction acts as a metal preparation aiming to protect the individual from an external assault or intrusion. Somewhat related, by its demand of the self to suffocate his feelings of being insulted, the painted message can also connote the author's desire for inclusion and adaptation to a discriminatory mainstream or collective.

I AM NOT

This chapter has discussed three paintings included in the vast body of paintings and drawings, presented as part of the artistic project *SURVIVAL ACCEPTANCE ART*, where Murray-Wassink has written and painted sentences reminiscent of impulsively jotted down descriptions of thoughts and emotions. When interpreted as statements directed toward himself, the written messages transmitted by these works alternate between pride (about, for example, his artistic practice or his position as, according to himself, a marginalized artist residing outside of the realm of dominant art institutions), self-doubt (about the significance of his art, his looks and sexual appeal, and his perceived inability to live up to the standards of those he considers as his idols), and self-blame (often concerning his failure to live up to ideals of radicality and detachment from structures, desires, or others).

In many of his works, Murray-Wassink represents the complex terrain where one's feelings of being marginalized and subordinate often are intimately entwined with more unradical or politically dubious aspects of one's privileges and entitlements. This chapter introduced Murray-Wassink's artistic practice by discussing my own scholarly difficulties in writing about certain aspects of his representations of structural susceptibility and vulnerability. In *Disturbing Attachments* Kadji Amin's argues that politicized scholars tend to use a set of limited and defensive strategies when they are confronted with traits in their study objects that fail to be transgressive or consistently radical.[44] Inspired

by Amin's call for scholars to "stay with unease", this chapter has discussed the scholarly difficulties and vulnerabilities, but also possibilities, that such a scholarly approach brings about. It stresses how this scholarly tactic, in terms of lingering with and paying close attention to disturbing attachments as an inevitable aspect of all social life, is urgent in relation to an oeuvre such as that of Murray-Wassink. Neither modes of idealization nor critique would, I argued, allow for a careful acknowledgement of how themes of social abjection and vulnerability are addressed in Murray-Wassink's work.

I have argued that Murray-Wassink's paintings and drawings, rather than providing a representation that readily can be put to good use for emancipatory politics, may be understood as a representation of what it can be like to reside inside a structure or field. As Love states in *Feeling Backward*, certain representations, rather than igniting political agency or deconstructing damaging structures, simply serve as indexes to the social world.[45] In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I will return to this point through a contemplation of the possibilities and limitations embedded in scholarly approaches in which judgements of the value of artworks appear entwined with a hope concerning the political efficiency of art.

As has been pointed out by several scholars, a central theme in Murray-Wassink's artistic practice is the social construction of the artist, and an exploration of how this position is dependent on and vulnerable to social hierarchies and institutionalized models for artistic value. In the preceding chapters, I have suggested that there exists a negative flipside to feminist and queer feminist theories about art as a means for subversive resistance or reparation. By contemplating three paintings by Sands Murray-Wassink that convey messages reminiscent of self-help mantras, in relation to the traditions of slacker and abject art, as well as to Heather Love's arguments that certain kinds of attachments or failures to detach are associated with (self-)blame and shame, this chapter has elaborated on the argument outlined in previous chapters. In particular, it has proposed an association between politicized artists' desire for institutional recognition or their susceptibility and vulnerability to others' judgement of their artistic work (or to authorial figures and mentors) and a framework of abjection, as well as to political backwardness, embarrassment, and awkwardness.

Notes

1. The concept of self-talk has also been explored in the artistic practice of Adrian Piper, an artist that Murray-Wassink is influenced by. See for example Piper's artist's book: *TALKING TO MYSELF: The Ongoing Autobiography of an Art Object (ENTRETIEN AVEC MOI-MEME: L'Autobiographie évolutive d'un objet d'art)*
2. Many sociologists and psychologists have discussed the political implications of the self-help mantra, particularly in terms of its role as a method within popular positive psychology. For example, in Emmanuel Alvarado et al., *Transnational Popular Psychology and the Global Self-Help Industry: The Politics of Contemporary Social Change* (Institute for Urban Design (US, 2016), the self-help mantra is discussed in terms of a demand to individuals to change themselves, rather than to change the system (p. 163).
3. By the phrases "art's abilities" or "what art can do", I do not mean to imply that many theories outlined by Euro-American feminist and queer feminist scholars discuss the performative subversive, reparative, or emancipatory potential of certain kinds of artworks or performances in terms of *inherent characteristics* of certain artworks or enactments. To the contrary, many publications of the strain of scholarly work this dissertation is particularly invested in stress the political productivity of visual art as an *effect* of a particular situatedness of a viewer. Regardless of this difference, however, the hope ascribed to art, whether in terms of inherent traits of an object or performance or in terms of a viewer's contextual engagement with an artwork, is, I argue, tangible in both of these approaches. For a thorough account of how feminist and queer feminist theories engaged with notions of the performative have addressed the agency of artworks or performances see for example: Amelia Jones, *In between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 205.
4. I am certainly not the first to associate Murray-Wassink's artistic practice with abjection and the concept of "the abject". For example, artist, writer and curator Matt Morris, in an essay discussing the use of perfumes in contemporary art, discusses Murray-Wassink's artwork/performance *Monument to Depression* (an ongoing act, since 2004, where the artist collects perfume bottles), in relation to abjection and quotes an email sent to him from Murray-Wassink wherein Murray-Wassink writes: "When I sniff with other people, be they salespeople or perfume

friends, I find myself reveling in the fact of being human and sharing an open secret that we are all organic and 'smelly' as people. It is a bit abject, and also something I am thinking a lot about." Matt Morris, "Through Smoke and across Dissent: Power Plays with Perfumery", *The Seen: Chicago's International Journal of Contemporary & Modern Art* (April 2019). Also, in mail correspondence between myself and Murray-Wassink he has stated his interest in abjection on numerous occasions. For example, in an email sent on September 19, 2017, Murray-Wassink writes: "I use the word 'abjection' when describing what I do, partly because of an exhibit which happened during my formative years (in 1993, when I was 19) at the Whitney Museum in NYC, 'Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art'." Also significant to mention in relation to the arguments outlined in this chapter, Murray-Wassink's work has – in the realm of exhibitions – been presented in a framework of embarrassment before. In the group exhibition *STOWAWAYS: Hidden Passengers of Contemporary Art* (*Centro Cultural Montehermoso*, Álava, Spain, 2010), where works by Murray-Wassink were presented by its curator artist Elke Silvia Krystufek as "about the embarrassing, the hidden, the uncool, and the cool to catch up to." (*https://www.montehermoso.net/pagina.php?id_p=293&m1=&m2=&i=ing*, retrieved November 3, 2021). Also, a work by Murray-Wassink was included in artist Evelyn Taocheng Wang's exhibition "For An Embarrassed Person it is Always Very Difficult to Avoid Embarrassing Things", Carlos/Ishikawa Gallery, London (2017).

5. Murray-Wassink's use of emotions and relationships in his artistic practice has been discussed by several scholars, curators, and critics before. For example, in the art organization *If I Can't Dance*'s presentation of his oeuvre on their website, they describe Murray-Wassink as "a painter, body artist, writer and perfume collector with his main materials being thoughts, feelings, behaviours, emotions and relationships." See: https://ificantdance.org/artist/sands-murray-wassink/ (retrieved November 9, 2021).
6. Murray-Wassink's solo exhibitions include: *I am not American (I love Adrian, I miss Carolee, I follow Hannah)* at the gallery Auto Italia in London (2022), *In Good Company (Horsepower): Materials from the Gift Science Archive, 1993 – present*, at mistral in Amsterdam (2021), *Kwetsbaar* at the gallery Amstel 41 in Amsterdam (2017), *Oprecht / Sincere* at Cokkie Snoei Galerie in Rotterdam (2012) and *Above Average Looking / Accessible Lives*

(SOMATOPOWER), Lothringer 13 Halle, Munich (2007–2008). His work has also been presented as part of many group exhibitions, such as: *Yes, We Ken!*, Pasinger Fabrik GmbH, Munich (2019–2020), *Boys Don't Cry*, Concordia, Enschede (2019), *The Temptation of AA Bronson* at the Kunstinstituut Melly (formerly known as the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art) in Rotterdam (2014). *The Man I Wish I Was*, A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn, New York (2010), *Stowaways. Hidden passengers in contemporary art*, Montehermoso Kulturunea (2010), *FAILURe*, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna (2009), and *AA BRONSON'S SCHOOL FOR YOUNG SHAMANS*, John Connelly Presents, New York City (2009). He has also performed at many locations, e.g.: *SANDS MURRAY-WASSINK. WORKING TITLE: SHAHZIA SIKANDER CATALYSIS*, Azkuna Zentroa, Bilbao (2021), *AGEING ARTIST*, performance lecture, Radical Cut-Up Department, Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam (2019), *Survival is the Best Revenge: Art Blacklist*, Side Room, Amsterdam (2016), *All's Not Well That Doesn't End Well (Childlike Encouragement): An Open Letter to Kate Millett*, Witte de With, Rotterdam (2013), *The Radical Narcissist*, Freud's Dreams Museum, St. Petersburg (2006), *The White Pink Saddle* (together with Elke Krystufek) GEM Museum, Den Haag (2005), *My Queer Anger: A/One Bottom Manifesto*, Shedhalle, Zurich (2004), and *Elke & Sands: Equalities, Equivalences* (with Elke Silvia Krystufek), private residence, Amsterdam (2002).

7. Mark Sheerin, "AA Bronson's Garden of Queer Delights", *Hyperallergic* (Brooklyn, New York City, 2013). Dagmar Bosma, "Ik Wil Een Constant Orgasme in Een Prachtig Lichaam", *Mister Motley* (Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2021), AA Bronson, "Top Ten", *Artforum* (September 2002), Morris, "Through Smoke and across Dissent: Power Plays with Perfumery".
8. The Amsterdam-based art organization *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution*, which was initiated in 2005, particularly focuses on performance and performativity in contemporary art and is dedicated to long-term commissioned collaborations with artists, curators and researchers. As part of his commissioned collaboration with the organization, Murray-Wassink enacted a durational performance in which he went through and archived works from his twenty-five years long studio practice. Apart from the collective process of sorting, digging and archiving that was the key focus of his performance, his collaboration with *If I Can't Dance* also resulted in a database archiving his work developed in collaboration with

Amalia Calderón, Megan Hoetger and Radna Rumping, three so-called "process events": *Process Event #1: VALUE / What is trash? What is trashy but valuable?* (conversation and residency at Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, 2020), *Process Event #2: RELATIONSHIPS. Feminist Legacies, Queer Intimacies* (epistolary exchange with curator Aimar Arriola, 2020–2021) and *Process Event #3: COLLABORATION: How Can We Work Together?* (live-streamed conversation between Sands Murray-Wassink, Amalia Calderón, Megan Hoetger, Radna Rumping and Anik Fournier, Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, 2021). It also resulted in the performance *Up To and Including His Limits* (Not Yet SHEBANG, Amsterdam, 2019) and in three exhibitions presenting works in different media, including drawings, paintings, photography, and performances from Murray-Wassink's oeuvre: *In Good Company (Horsepower): Materials from the Gift Science Archive, 1993 – present (*mistral, Amsterdam, 2021), *Without You I'm Nothing (Blue) (*Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, 2021) and *I am not American (I love Adrian, I miss Carolee, I follow Hannah)* (Auto Italia, London, 2022). For more information see: https://ificantdance.org/artist/sands-murray-wassink/ (retrieved November 4, 2021).

9. On his website, Murray-Wassink presents an extensive list of persons who have influenced him artistically, as well as a (not as extensive) list of those artists, curators and alternative art spaces that he considers his friends. https://www.sands1974.com (retrieved November 2, 2021). See also: Uli Aigner, Sands Murray-Wassink, and Carolee Schneemann, *Profeminist White Flowers: Sands 1974* (München: Städtische Kunsthalle München, 2007), Sands Murray-Wassink, "Radical Cut-Up Lecture", 2019, presented at the interdisciplinary programme *Radical Cut-Up* at Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam (https://cargocollective.com/radicalcutup/Radical-Cut-Up- Lecture-Sands-Murray-Wassink, retrieved November 2, 2021), as well as the spoken and written content and statements of many of Murray-Wassink's paintings, performances, and drawings.
10. Murray-Wassink often uses the formerly employed term manic depression and emphasizes that his version of the affective disorder has characteristics of narcissism and borderline with light compulsive obsessive tendencies. In his artist's book *Profeminist White Flowers*, Murray-Wassink writes about his way back from being hospitalized for his severe depression. Ibid. See also: Sands Murray-Wassink and Annamaria Pinaka, "Sur-

vival Is the Best Revenge: Art Blacklist", in Butcher's Tears Sideroom (ed.) (Amsterdam, 2016) or the e- mail correspondence between Murray-Wassink and curator Aimar Arriola presented as part of "Process Event #2: RELATIONSHIPS. Feminist Legacies, Queer Intimacies" (26 June 2020–6 February 2021) *Gift Science Archive*, If I Can't Dance Production Studio (https://ificantdance.studio/Gift-Science-Archive/overview.html retrieved November 2, 2021). Somewhat interesting in relation to Murray-Wassink's reference to himself as narcissistic, many of the feminist artists that Murray-Wassink presents as his "favorites" were, as feminist performance theorist Rebecca Schneider points out in her discussion of the artist Carolee Schneemann, dismissed as being narcissistic and self-indulgent by the art establishment in the 1970s. Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 31.

11. See for example: Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), Maura Reilly, "The Paintings of Carolee Schneemann" (37: Feminist Studies, Inc., 2011), 620–48, Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, Christine Filippone, "Schneemann, Carolee" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Sabine Breitwieser, Branden W. Joseph, and Judith Bernstein, "Carolee Schneemann 1939–2019", *Artforum International,* 05// 2019, 47–50, or Rebecca Schneider, "Remembering Feminist Remimesis: A Riddle in Three Parts", *TDR (1988–),* 58/2 (07/01/ 2014), 14–32, pp. 18–19.
12. Kathleen Wentrack, "Double Trouble: Carolee Schneemann and Sands Murray-Wassink by Kathleen Wentrack" (artperformance.org, 2001a). (retrieved November 15, 2021).
13. Kathleen Wentrack, "Double Trouble: Carolee Schneemann and Sands Murray-Wassink", in Cokkie Snoei Gallery (ed.) (Cokkie Snoei, 2001b).
14. Titus Nouwens, "Sands Murray-Wassink: In Good Company", *The Brooklyn Rail* (June 2021).
15. Suzanne van Rossenberg, "Words on Fabric" (opening speech for Murray-Wassink's exhibition *Oprecht / Sincere* at Cokkie Snoei Galerie in Rotterdam), March 18, 2012.
16. Wentrack, "Double Trouble: Carolee Schneemann and Sands Murray-Wassink".
17. Compared to many of those who have addressed such themes in Murray-Wassink's oeuvre before, my own discussion will make an attempt to not equate representations of vulnerability and

social taboo with political productivity. It seeks to approach such themes from a slightly different angle. I pay particular attention to how Murray-Wassink not only portrays his own vulnerability in terms of his financial struggles or his sense of being marginalized or misunderstood, but also in relation to more difficult and disturbing terrains such as his weakness, susceptibility, and desire to institutional values and entitlements.

18. This is a quotation originally published in Wentrack, "Double Trouble: Carolee Schneemann and Sands Murray- Wassink". In the same email to Arriola (dated January 1, 2021 as published on the website of the art organization If I Can't Dance), Murray-Wassink also writes: "Carolee told me the other teachers, in particular a hetero white male sculptor named John Monty, told her I was 'unteachable' which was her favorite description of a real talent". The email is part of the artwork *Process Event #2: RELATIONSHIPS. Feminist Legacies, Queer Intimacies (2021)*, produced as part of Murray-Wassink's commissioned durational performance *Gift Science Archive*, and available online: https://ificantdance.studio/Gift-Science-Archive/overview.html (retrieved November 16, 2021).
19. See for example feminist performance theorist Rebecca Schneider's (who has written extensively on Carolee Schneemann's artistic practice) discussion of Schneemann's position in the artworld at the time. In the article "Remembering Feminist Remimesis", Schneider writes: "When I was conducting research in the late 1980s and early 1990s for my dissertation that would become the book *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997), none of the women I studied had had any major exhibitions, no substantive collections by world market museums, despite the fact that many, like Carolee Schneemann, had been actively producing work since the 1960s. When I began meeting with Schneemann in her upstate New York studio, her own historical work was rapidly deteriorating in a damp and musty shed beside her house. She despaired of ever gaining recognition and struggled for money to keep herself afloat." Schneider, "Remembering Feminist Remimesis: A Riddle in Three Parts", p. 18.
20. At other places, Murray-Wassink has expressed or portrayed a support for separatist strategies in the feminist art movement. For example, in the presentation of Murray-Wassink's lecture "Reflections and Oppositional Art: Responsibility, Aesthetics... Humor (Because Without Humor the Work Would Be Dead)"

(January 10, 2013, Kunstraum der Leuphana Universität Lüneburg) he states: "I believe that an essentialist movement is necessary for the biological male body in art to counterbalance and ameliorate/soften/erase the systems of patriarchy and patriarchal domination and intimidation". https://kunstraum.leuphana.de/projekte/e- murray-wassink.html (retrieved November 16, 2021).

21. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Taylor & Francis Group / Books, 1994).
22. Morris, "Through Smoke and across Dissent: Power Plays with Perfumery".
23. Kadji Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 9.
24. Ibid., p. 4.
25. Apart from exhibiting his paintings and drawings as part of exhibitions in galleries, art institutions, and museums, Murray-Wassink also presents many of these works online on his website (https://www.sands1974.com/) and on his social media accounts on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.
26. Ralph Mayer and Steven Sheehan, *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques* (London: Faber, 1991).
27. My own interpretations of Murray-Wassink's paintings and drawings build on my physical engagement with his works during a planned visit to his studio at Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, in 2020. They also draw from in-depth studies of photographic reproductions of his works.
28. Ole Jacob Madsen, *Optimizing the Self: Social Representations of Self-Help* (Hove, East Sussex: Routledge, 2016), pp. 4–5.
29. Ibid., p. 6.
30. Scott Cherry, *A Critical Study of Self-Help and Self-Improvement Practices: Textual, Discursive, and Ethnographic Perspectives* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2011).
31. Murray-Wassink's works have been discussed in relation to self-doubt before. For example, in a review of Murray-Wassink's exhibition "In Good Company (Horsepower): Materials from the Gift Science Archive, 1993– present", curator Titus Nouwens writes: "Murray-Wassink's work feels timely as it puts emphasis on the influences, friendships and other relationships that inform an artist's work, valuing process and messiness, feelings, emotions, and even the self-doubt and insecurities inherent to artistic practice and life." Titus Nouwens, "Sands Murray-Wassink: In Good Company", *the Brooklyn Rail*

(June 2021).

32. Alvarado et al., *Transnational Popular Psychology and the Global Self-Help Industry: The Politics of Contemporary Social Change*.
33. Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*.
34. As I mention in note 3, many others, including Murray-Wassink himself, have associated his art with the concept of the abject and with the genre of abject art. It was Murray-Wassink who (in an email of September 19, 2017) introduced to me his influences from the genre of slacker art, as he wrote: "I also liked and still like the term 'slacker art' from the 90s, although I have at times wondered if it was too 'white-centric'."
35. Jack Bankowsky, "Slackers", *Artforum International,* 30/3 (11// 1991), 96–100, Rhonda Lieberman, "The Loser Thing", ibid. p. 31 (09// 1992), 78–82, Lucy R. Lippard, *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984), Lane Relyea, "What, Me Work?", *Artforum International,* 31 (04// 1993), 74–77, Michael Wilson, "Just Pathetic", *Artforum International,* 43/2 (10// 2004).
36. *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art: Selections from the Permanent Collection* (Isp Papers, 1068-7823; 3; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993). For an account on the abject in art history see for example Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
37. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
38. *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art: Selections from the Permanent Collection*, Leticia Alvarado, *Abject Performances – Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production* (Duke University Press, 2018), p. 7, Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, p. 157.
39. The application of Kristeva's interpretation of the abject to the emancipatory politics of marginalized groups has been criticized by numerous scholars. See for example Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* or Konstantina Georgelou, "Abjection and Informe", *Performance Research,* 19/1 (03// 2014), pp. 25–32. My own approach to this application is, however, not meant as a critique but as an additional perspective aiming to elaborate on how a broader interpretation of abjection may open up novel aspects and modes of interpretation by which to approach themes of abjection in artworks.

40. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p. 4.
41. Ibid., p. 5.
42. Kimberley L. Gammage, James Hardy, and Craig R. Hall, "A Description of Self-Talk in Exercise", *Psychology of Sport & Exercise,* 2/4 (01/01/January 2001), pp. 233–47.
43. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 20.
44. Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History*, p. 4.
45. Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, p. 27.

Jenny Grönvall

The Map
Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3

CHAPTER FOUR
PATHETIC OBSESSIONS

Thus far I have explored a number of artworks that, I have argued, investigate optimistic attachments to art as the origin of a range of negative feelings: hurt, insecurity, despair, and embarrassment. With his notion of "structures of feeling", cultural writer Raymond Williams suggests that ostensibly private feelings are in fact produced by the political, cultural, and social organization of societies. As such, Williams argues, feelings can be studied as *diagnostic*, analysed as reflecting dominant values and meanings in social communities.[1] Whilst Williams's discussion of feelings as diagnostic has been crucial for this study, this dissertation's focus on emotions is, as pronounced in chapter one, even more indebted to Sara Ahmed's elaboration of Williams's ideas. In her book *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed asks us to explore, not only how feelings can be interpreted as indexes of the organization of social structures, but also how "feelings might be how structures get under our skin".[2] Based on Ahmed's expansion of William's ideas, the first two chapters of this dissertation discussed representations where an artist's intense feelings about art, such as attributing hope to art as a source of emotional reparation, or turning to art as a means of subversive resistance to societal or institutional proceedings, are portrayed as an attachment, not only to specific art objects or performances, but to the very systems of belief through which visual art has been ascribed traits of political productivity in the first place. The third chapter proposed that politicized artists' attachment to these structures of belief, as well as the institutions and system for value through which these are organized, can become a source of (both their own and others') embarrassment or abjection, particularly so when these attachments appear too unradical, backward, or unproductive.

The analysis outlined below is oriented around two

works by Malmö-based artist Jenny Grönvall (b. 1973): the drawing *The Map* (2010) as well as the performance *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3* (2011), the latter enacted during the performance programme *The Body as Politics* at Malmö Konsthall.[3] In both of these works Grönvall portrays, I will argue, her own envy toward contemporaneous artist Jonathan Meese, a renowned white male artist from Berlin.[4] *The Map* consists of four pages that, when read together, construe a scenery where one artist's (artist 1) admiration of another artist (artist 2), turns into an intense sense of emulation as she (artist 1) begins to notice the effects of a patriarchal structure that makes his (artist 2) capacity and possibility for agency larger than hers. In *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3*, Grönvall (in front of a seated audience) represented herself while she was carefully studying video recordings of either Meese himself or of dealers, curators, or art historians enthusiastically discussing his works. Apart from carefully noticing Meese's every movement, Grönvall was repeating phrases from his artistic manifesto, mimicking his physical appearance, and appropriating gestures from his performances. She also positioned her own artistic status as less successful than his by placing their economic, material, and social situations in intimate communication with each other, for example by implicitly comparing his grand artistic studio with her workspace in front of a computer in her private home.

In what follows, I will place Grönvall's drawing and performance in close dialogue with feminist performance theorist Rebecca Schneider's discussions of the paradoxes rooted in feminist artists attempts to break into male-dominated art institutions. Schneider discusses the potential political productivity in works of art or in exhibitions that take the form of "bad copies" of canonized or institutionalized artworks or modes of presenting art. Schneider's argument that feminist mimesis can serve as critique of male-dominant art industries and institutions, I will argue, provides a crucial theoretical framework from which to consider Grönvall's re-enactment of the performances and gestures of Jonathan Meese in the performance *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3*.[5] However, based on details in Grönvall's works that appear to represent her envy of Meese and her longing to be recognized by the same institutionalized systems of value that celebrate his art, I will also emphasize certain crucial traits embedded in her imitation of Meese, that appear inaccessible (charged with a sense of embarrassment and political backwardness) through Schneider's attention to the subversive potentials of imitations.

This chapter elaborates further on some of the questions concerning politicized scholars' feelings about their objects of study that were raised in the former chapter. Its analysis is guided by the question of whether scholarly approaches to art as a means for political change and subversive resistance risk construing theoretical frameworks where representations of specific kinds of weaknesses, failures, or institutional attachments become associated with scholarly discomfort or embarrassment. Based on feminist art historian Irit

Rogoff's discussion of scholarly embarrassment in her essay "Tiny Anguishes: Reflections on Nagging, Scholastic Embarrassment, and Feminist Art History" (1994), as well as on queer feminist theorist Sianne Ngai's contemplation about feminist envy in the book *Ugly Feelings* (2005), this chapter explores the importance for politicized scholarships of constructing chronicles that abundantly acknowledge the often complex and contradictory positions of (feminist and queer feminist) artists vis-à-vis the fields in which they operate.

VARIATIONS OF A FEMALE AMATEUR

Jenny Grönvall's artistic media are performance, video, painting, sculpture, writing, and installation. She received her undergraduate degree from Konstfack (University of Arts, Crafts and Design) in Stockholm and her master's degree from Malmö Art Academy. In a Swedish, and to some degree Northern European context, Grönvall's art is fairly well acknowledged amongst feminist artists, curators, and scholars. She is best known for her artistic project *Peggy-Sue* (figures 4.1–4.2), an ongoing art project that Grönvall initiated in 1999, during her time as an art student. In a statement published in the Malmö Academy Yearbook for 2002, Grönvall describes this project as having been sparked as a response to a seminar at Malmö Art Academy in 1999 where a faculty member allegedly explained (based on the ideas of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan) that the role of the amateur was reserved for men, since the restricted agency for women in patriarchal societies did not allow them to attain such in-between positions.[6] As an effect of this statement, Grönvall writes, she constructed Peggy-Sue as a representation of this supposed impossibility: a woman amateur. Peggy-Sue is a self-taught artist who thinks that art should be beautiful and whose artworks (performances, paintings, video-works, books, and published statements) explore implicit class and gendered hierarchies in the field of art. Rather than a persona or an alter-ego, Grönvall refers to Peggy-Sue as a surface for projections, aiming to make viewers aware of their own feelings or preconceptions. As such, Grönvall's Peggy-Sue is, according to Grönvall, an object rather than a subject; an *it* rather than a her/she.[7] When appearing in live performances, photographs, and video works, Peggy-Sue is often dressed in red high-heeled shoes and a blouse, skirt, and apron, all in pink. It is wearing heavy make-up and a wig with blonde, straight, shoulder-length hair.

Grönvall's live performances as Peggy-Sue are often enacted in close dialogue with Grönvall's/its audiences.[8] Between the years 2003 and 2008, Peggy Sue presented a series of still images from its travels abroad on a projection screen to live audiences (this performance was entitled *Peggy-Sue Slide Show #1–11* (figure 4.1) and was enacted at Kulturmanegen in Malmö, Stockholm Art Fair, L-bow Room Gallery in Gothenburg, Museum Anna Norlander in Skellefteå, and at Friction International Performance Art Festival in Uppsala). Or,

Figure 4.1: Photograph from Jenny Grönvall's performance *Peggy-Sue Slide Show # II*, enacted as part of Friction International Performance Art Festival, Uppsala, 2008. Photographer: Monika Melin. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 4.2: Photograph of Peggy-Sue painting in her studio, 2004, Photographer: Jenny Grönvall. Courtesy of the artist.

at GIBCA Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary art in 2007, Peggy-Sue invited biennial visitors to take a quiz based on Peggy-Sue's own interpretation of the seven-chakra system.[9] Apart from its live and video-recorded performances, Peggy-Sue has also presented acrylic paintings at a solo exhibition at Magnus Åklundh Galley in Malmö, appeared in numerous interviews, and published a cookbook entitled *"My First Cook Book": Peggy-Sue Svensson*.[10]

In addition to her *Peggy-Sue* project Grönvall has made a variety of other installations and performances. In 2012, she enacted the performance *Explicit Speech/Hate Speech* during the opening of *The Supersurrealism*, a large survey of twentieth-century surrealist art at Moderna Museet Malmö (Malmö Museum of Modern Art). The exhibition included several paintings with motifs that have been interpreted as misogynist.[11] During her six-hour-long performance, Grönvall read into a microphone excerpts from sex diaries, queer theory, religious texts, and poetry in order to add a politicized audial layer to the audience's engagements with these motifs. In 2013 her works were included, alongside the works of artists such as Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorentz, Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen, and Christer Strömholm, in the group exhibition *Lips Painted Red*, at Trondheim Museum of Art in Norway, and in 2014 Grönvall exhibited a retrospective of her own works, titled *Tacky, Tacky so Tacky* at the small artist-run gallery space CirkulationsCentralen in Malmö.[12] During the last decade, Grönvall has also enacted a range of performances, installations, paintings, and content on the social networking device Instagram as part of her project *Inredning och Affekt* (interior design and affect). Like Peggy-Sue, this project explores questions of emotional responses related to class, although here in relation to indoor environments and decorative objects.[13]

Works by Jenny Grönvall have been discussed in art journals and newspapers such as *Dagens Nyheter*, *Kunstkritikk*, and *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*.[14] Several cultural journalists and artists associate Grönvall's art with themes of failure and negative affect. In an essay entitled "Misslyckandets estetik" (aesthetics of failure), published on the journalistic platform *Dagens Arena*, author and cultural journalist Tone Schunnesson compares Grönvall's art with the author and experimental filmmaker Chris Kraus who in her novel *I Love Dick* (1997) explores subjective positions such as that of a marginalized artist who longs for institutional inclusion or a woman who becomes obsessed with the men who reject her.[15] Similarly, in the printed dialogue "MAKING FAILURE OF THE ARTIST, THE FEMALE* BODY, THE ART WORK – a conversation with Jenny Grönvall", published in Berlin-based artist Line Skywalker Karlström's artist's book *Holes Dug, Rocks Thrown – On Queer and Feminist Art Practices Departing from the Works by Line Skywalker Karlström* (2022), Grönvall and Karlström discusses how their interest in incorporating themes of failure in their art construed a fine line between a sense of being able to refuse normative standards for success and value, and a sense of insecurity and anguish. Throughout their conversation, Grönvall and Karlström exemplify this indistinction with moments from their

own life such as enacting performances where the majority of the audience appears indifferent or leaves, working from home as a single mom, consistently using the same props in one's performances because one cannot afford to buy new ones, or working in a nightclub in order to secure an income and during one's night shifts serving drinks to other (queer) artists – who do not need to maintain an additional job on the side of their art work – and who arrive there after having attended openings.[16]

In the following, I will turn to *Mr Meese*, a project by Grönvall enacted between 2007 and 2013 that, I will argue, specifically targets unspoken standards for value and respectability in politicized notions of art as a means for politically productive subversion.

MR MEESE

Grönvall's drawing *The Map* (figures 4.4–4.6) is a quadriptych (a work consisting of four panels, canvases, or sheets of paper) dated 2010, that I argue portrays a type of scenery or setting to how themes of attachment, imitation, and emotions are represented in Grönvall's performance *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3* (figures 4.7–4.9). This performance, in turn, was part of the performance programme *The Body as Politics*, hosted by Malmö Konsthall in connection with a solo exhibition with artist Ana Maria Maiolino.[17] Another version of this performance, with the intentionally misspelled title *Mr Meese und die liden der Hartz # II*, was also performed at Silvershed Gallery in New York City later during the same year. The first enactment of the performance, at Malmö Konsthall, was presented alongside a performance by Leif Holmstrand. The latter version, at Silvershed, was performed alongside performances by Malin Arnell, MPA (Megan Palaima), Dynasty Handbag (Jibz Cameron), Imri Sandström, and Jeanine Oleson, as part of *IN THE ACT*, a series of six performance acts in four different cities that brought together a total of 44 artists, curators, and writers from five different countries, curated by Imri Sandström and Hanna Wilde.[18]

Both Grönvall's drawing and her performance are presented as part of a larger artistic project by Grönvall titled the *Mr Meese* project (2007–2013). A central theme in the *Mr Meese* project is Grönvall's portrayal and exploration of her own alleged agonizing attachment to the contemporaneous artist Jonathan Meese (b. 1970). The role of the actual artist and person Jonathan Meese surfaces as chiefly exchangeable in Grönvall's project. While he and his works are explicitly referenced in her works, it is Grönvall's attachment to him, her envy of the social support system surrounding him, and her embarrassment and humiliation about her own emotional investments in him, that are portrayed as the core object of exploration in her works. Apart from the works of particular concern for this chapter, *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3* and *The*

Map, the project entails the performance *Mr Meese*, presented at Lilith By Night at Lilith Performance Studio in Malmö in 2007, *Mr Meese und die liede des Herzens, Peggy-Sue # 42*, performed at Copenhagen's Alternative Art Fair in 2008, the previously mentioned performance *Mr Meese und die liden der Hartz # II* enacted at Silvershed in 2011, and two installations made in collaboration with artist Line Skywalker Karlström, presented at Gallery Kakelhallen in Mariehamn, Åland, in 2011 and at Vita Kuben at Norrlandsoperan in Umeå, Sweden, in 2013.[19]

THE MAP

The Map (figures 4.4–4.6) consists of four drawings, presented by Grönvall as excerpts from her own diary.[20] The drawings' alleged origins from a secretive notebook are enhanced by their materiality. While the work's white pages, in European A4 printer size, are slightly larger than those that journals usually consist of, the ostensibly hastily written down notes that fill out the sheets are clearly reminiscent of the pages of a diary. Stretched over the four pages of the work are scattered notes and drawn lines forming a timeline portraying an artist's (artist 1) interaction with the works of another, more influential, male artist (artist 2: most likely Jonathan Meese judging from details of the gallery that represents him and dates and locations of his performances). In its entirety, the timeline portrays how artist 1's initial sense of affiliation, admiration, and excitement about artist 2's works changes into feelings of envy and emulation, as artist 2 completely ignores artist 1's attempts to contact him. The timeline begins by describing a visit to the Danish art museum Louisiana, where artist 1, according to the notes, encountered the works of artist 2 for the first time. On the upper part of the page Grönvall has written: "Louisiana, ~~May~~? Feb? 2007? 2006?", below the timeline she has noted a number of words reflecting artist 1's emotional experience during the museum visit:

> Empty. a separate world. love. unreal. Silence. private drag experience/ fantasy.
> Was about
> 1. Me
> 2. P-S
> .
> .
> .
> .
> .
> .
> 100 [redacted] X[21]

The initials "P-S" are likely suggestive of Grönvall's own artistic project *Peggy-Sue*. When interpreted as such, this penned down statement appears to indicate its author's intense sensation of how the boundaries between their oeuvres dissolve: *his work was about her work*. By such a reading, emphasized further by the fact that "Me" is written as the first point of the list, this part of *The Map* portrays a situation where artist 1's encounter with the artistic practice of artist 2 caused her to perceive the contours of her own self and an artistic project of her own to emerge more clearly.

Despite the fact that Jonathan Meese performs as "himself" in his works, there are indeed some tangible similarities between his artistic practice and Grönvall's *Peggy-Sue* project. A central theme in both of their works is an interest in the social construct of the artist. Also, as indicated by the printed reflection in *The Map* that associates his works with a fantasy or experience of drag, both Meese and Peggy-Sue represent versions of artists with exaggeratedly gendered attributes. In performances, at openings and in interviews, Meese often appears in a black Adidas track jacket, black baggy pants with a belt, and sneakers. He is bearded and his long and wavy dark brown hair is usually hanging down over his chest and back. In performances such as *DR. METABOLISMYS FOR PRESIDENT IS BORN (ERZMUMIN'S BONBON, now...)* (2008) (figure 4.3), he enacts large-scale performances where he erratically moves around on stage while reading out loud from his own artistic manifest, spray-painting the walls and himself with red paint, worshipping photographs of the actor Scarlet Johansson, sprays deodorant under his arm and drinks directly from a liquor bottle.

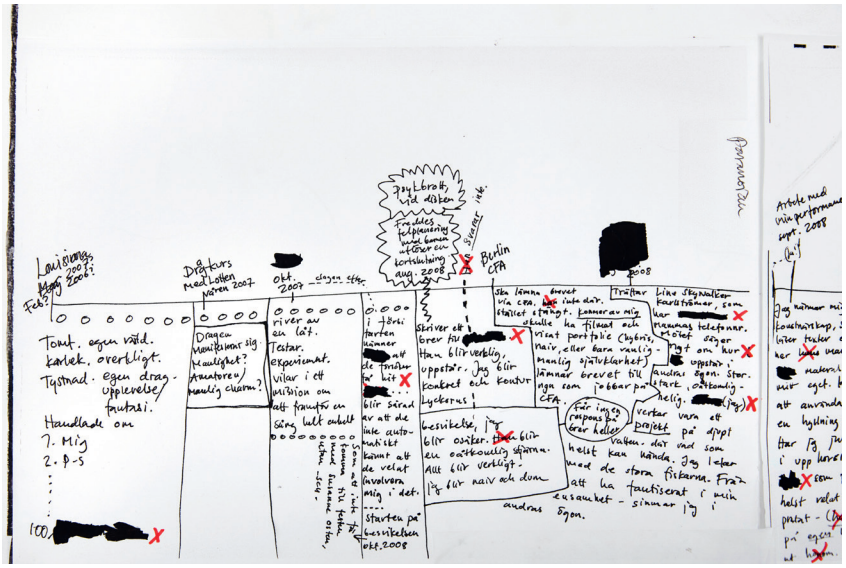
In the tradition of artists that have practised versions of "living their art", such as Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Joseph Beuys and Linda Montano, but also clearly inspired by the artistic traditions centred on self-representation projects and institutional critique that became widespread in the wake of the 1960s and 1970s growing feminist movement, gay liberation movement, civil rights movement, and the New Left, Meese presents a version of himself as an artist for whom the lines between his art and his private life (artistic persona and authentic self) becomes indistinct.[22] Often referred to as *l'enfant terrible* of the European performance scene, Meese appears, in performances, in interviews, and through his large-scale paintings and installations, as a parodic version of an impulsive chaotic man who lives for art and thinks that artists should become the given dictatorial power in societies.

On the timeline in *The Map*, Grönvall portrays artist 1's first encounter with the artistic oeuvre of artist 2 as marked by a sense of enthusiasm concerning what she perceives as their shared interest in the role of the unruly amateur. From the penned down content on the timeline, it is possible to deduce how artist 1, after this initial engagement with the art of artist 2, is inspired and begins to experiment with new themes in her own art. On one of the sheets included in the work, Grönvall has drawn a spiky line down from the timeline to the lower part of the paper. At the bottom of this jaggy line is a description of how artist 1

Figure 4.3, Jonathan Meese, *DR. METABOLISMYS FOR PRESIDENT IS BORN (ERZMUMIN'S BONBON, now…)*, Lilith Performance Studio, Malmö, 2008. Photograph from performance. Photo credit and copyright: Lilith Performance Studio.

decides to travel to Berlin in order to hand over a letter to artist 2 via CFA, the gallery that represents him. With a black felt pen Grönvall has printed: "Writes a letter to [redacted] X He becomes real, emerges. I become concrete and contoured. Euphoria."[23] This portrayal of excitement will, however, turn into a depiction of emulation and envy following a series of events that describe how artist 1 finds herself rejected by artist 2. Just below the notes where she has described her positive feelings connected to the letter, she has drawn a square box with a black pen. Inside the box she has written, "disappointment, I become insecure. ~~He~~ becomes an inaccessible star. Everything becomes real. I become naive and stupid. A dotted line connects this box to a sentence above the horizontal timeline on the paper stating: "~~He~~ does not answer".[24]

With these lines, Grönvall depicts how artist 1's enthusiasm becomes radically scattered, as artist 2 does not answer her letter. The records in her work portray how artist 1 interprets his silence as an indication of his lack of interest



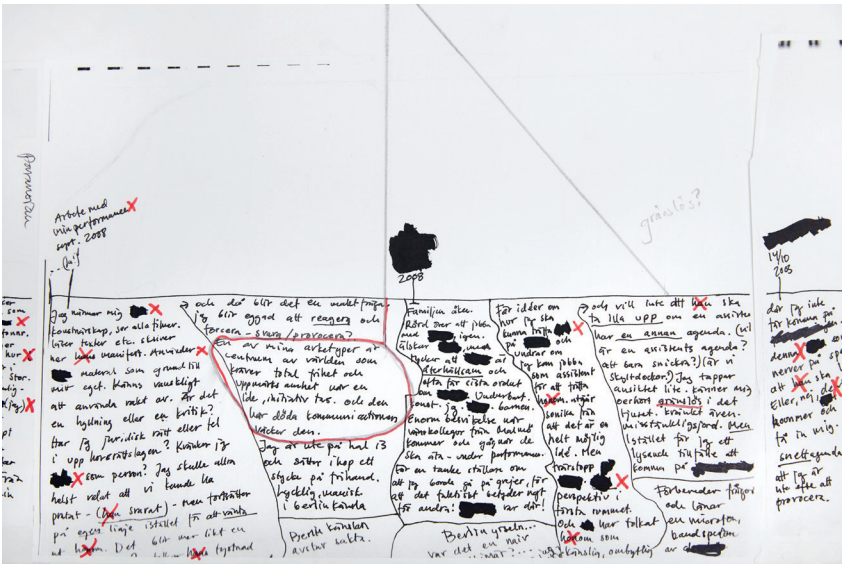


Figure 4.4: Jenny Grönvall, *The Map* (Plate A), pen on paper. The work consists of four drawings that each measure 21 × 29.7 cm (European A4 printer size). Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 4.5: Jenny Grönvall, *The Map* (Plate B), pen on paper. The work consists of four drawings that each measure 21 × 29.7 cm (European A4 printer size). Courtesy of the artist.

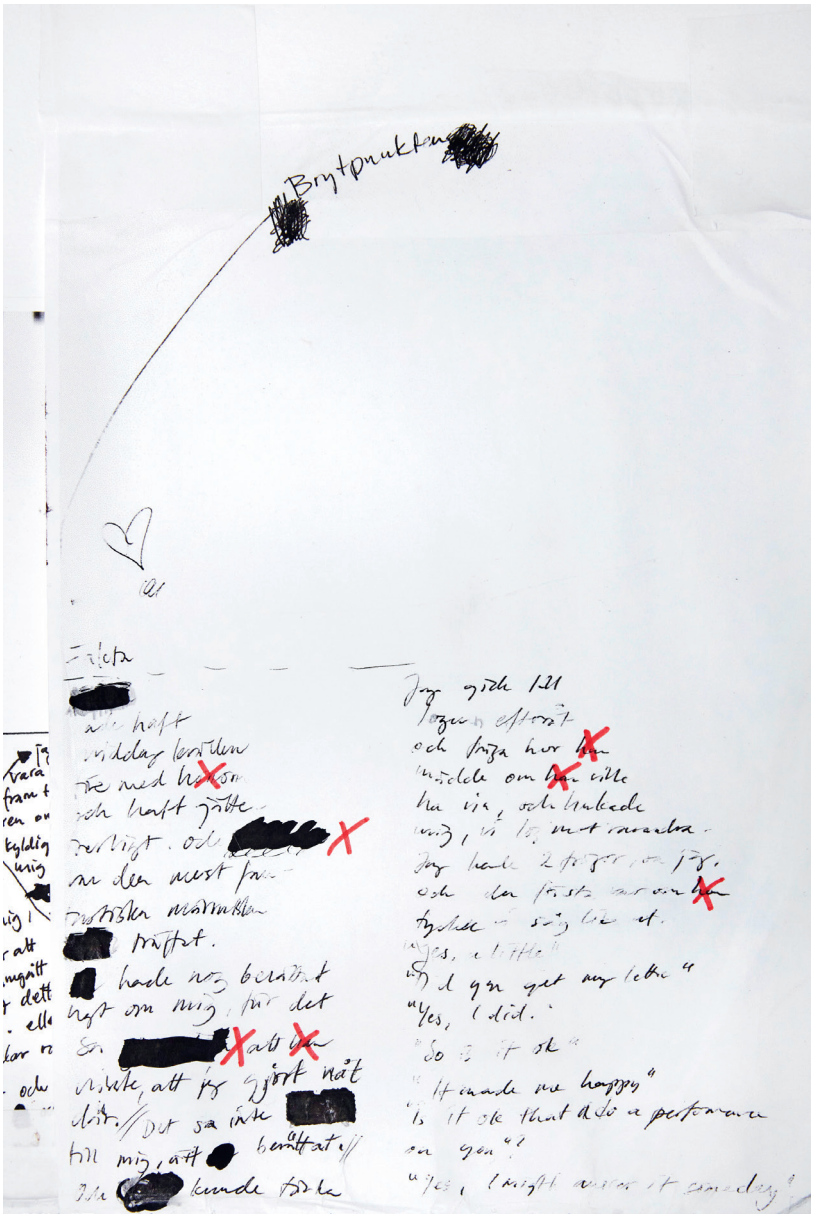


Figure 4.6: Jenny Grönvall, *The Map* (Plate D), pen on paper. The work consists of four drawings that each measure 21 × 29.7 cm (European A4 printer size). Courtesy of the artist.

in her and her art. In addition, these notes describe how the experience of being ignored makes her embarrassed about her own attachment to his works as well as about her attempt to reach him. By stating that she becomes insecure, and gets a sense of being immature and senseless, she illustrates how artist 2's alleged lack of interest to answer artist 1's letter causes artist 1 to interpret her own acts as made through a skewed view of reality. While her initial interest in his art is described in terms of an intense identification, enthusiasm, playfulness, and a feeling of existing in a separate reality, her affects following his presumed rejection are portrayed as characterized by an appreciation of how the blatant power structures between her and him unfold before her.

After this perceived rejection, the events described on the timeline in *The Map* are characterized by accounts of artist 1's envy and emulation toward artist 2. Grönvall portrays how artist 1 begins to suspect how artist 2 is valued as a more important artist than her, not only by influential curators, critics, and dealers, but also by her own friends and colleagues. In a note that takes the form of a recollection of her thoughts after a conversation with an artist colleague and close friend in Berlin, artist 1 notes: "The meeting says something about how [redacted] **X** occurs in the eyes of others. Grand. strong, unreachable – holy."[25] On the timeline she describes how this constant confirmation of artist 2's grandness and unreachability as an artist makes her feel envious, insecure, and devalued. On the third drawing included in *The Map*, Grönvall portrays in writing how artist 1, in the wake of artist 2's rejection and her sense of being considered less important than him, begins to study his art with careful attention, and starts to use his materials as her own.

FEMINIST MIMESIS

The Map's portrayal of artist 1's fixation with the work of artist 2 is mirrored in Grönvall's performance *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3*. When performed at Malmö Konsthall in June 2011, this performance took place on a small stage, whose surface was about two by three metres, at a height of about four decimetres from the floor. A screen slightly larger than the stage was placed behind it. Onto the screen, a close-up video recording of Grönvall's private computer was projected. The recording, filmed before the performance, showed Grönvall's act of scrolling between various YouTube excerpts from performances of and interviews with Meese. Occasionally, the projected video showed Grönvall's hand holding a brush as she interacted with the filmed sequences of this other artist. By applying red paint to an overhead transparency that she had placed on the computer screen, Grönvall filled out various shapes and contours that appeared in the recordings. While the references to Meese and his art were clearly articulated in Grönvall's performance, particularly

through the YouTube videos playing on the screen, Meese himself was not physically present in the space and the absence of his name in the presentation of the work indicated that the performance was not a result of a collaboration between Grönvall and him.

Grönvall appeared on the stage dressed in the same manner that Meese often appears in his own performances; in black trousers, sunglasses, and a black hoodie, the hood tugged over her head. Numerous other props that Meese recurrently uses in his performed works, such as a Pilates ball, a bottle of Jägermeister, an acoustic guitar, and a Snow-White costume, were also present, lying scattered onto the stage. While a captivating beat was playing in the background, Grönvall read various lines aloud from Meese's artistic manifesto, such as "art is total play", "art is total evolution", and "the dictatorship of art is logical. It's an instinct", lines that Meese himself is known to have shouted to the audience, for example in the performance *DR. METABOLISMYS FOR PRESIDENT IS BORN (ERZMUMIN'S BONBON, now...)* (2008, figure 4.3). At various points during Grönvall's performance she wore a wig that strongly resembled Meese's long dark hair, causing the two artists to appear puzzlingly alike.

By imitating the work of Meese, an artist far more recognized by the art establishment than herself, Grönvall's performance spoke to artistic traditions of feminist mimesis and particularly to artworks in which feminist and queer feminist artists, such as Catti Brandelius, Sherrie Levine, or Yasumasa Morimura, have imitated works by canonized white male artists as a strategy to explore how definitions of gender, sexuality, and race circulate in the field of art and visual representation. Influential feminist performance theorist Rebecca Schneider describes feminist mimesis in terms of a wide range of artistic strategies (replay, appropriation, re-enactment, camp, masquerade) in which repetition or imitation is employed as key approaches in the production or enactment of artworks.[26] In the article "Remembering Feminist Remimesis: A Riddle in Three Parts", published in the academic journal *TDR: The Drama Review* in 2014, Schneider elaborates on two aspects of feminist mimesis, "the bad copy" and "the double", that in many ways provide noteworthy theoretical inputs from which to contemplate Grönvall's imitation of works and gestures from Meese's art.

With the witty phase "Hooray!! We've colonized a male-dominated art format!" Schneider discusses certain contradictions rooted in feminist artists' effort to be included in traditional exhibition formats.[27] Instead of attempting to gain access to this format that historically, according to Schneider, makes and privileges what might be called masters, as in "masterworks" by "master" artists, Schneider suggests feminist possibilities to construe novel formats for display and modes of preservation.[28] One such strategy, Schneider proposes, is the possibilities inherent in bad copies; forms of mimesis that reveal, through poor or exaggerated imitations, their originals as constructions.

Schneider's discussion of bad copy aspects of feminist mimesis provides, in many ways, a suggestive framework for an interpretation of Grönvall's imita-

Figure 4.7: Jenny Grönvall, *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3*, still from video recording, 25 minutes, Malmö Konsthall, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 4.8: Jenny Grönvall, *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3*, still from video recording, 25 minutes, Malmö Konsthall, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

tion of Meese's art in her performance *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3*. In a review of Grönvall's performance, published in the newspaper *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, art critic Carolina Söderholm makes an interpretation of Grönvall's mimicry that in many ways corresponds to Schneider's discussion of the subversive potential of poor imitations. Söderholm writes:

> Malmö-based artist Jenny Grönvall enters the stage and, with grotesque and hilarious means, performs a biting critical parody of German Jonathan Meese; the enfant terrible of the European performance scene. Brutally, she exposes the reflexive homage to the male artist ego: it is insane, funny, and overwhelmingly sad at the same time.[29]

By placing her own small stage, cheap props, and connotations to her studio at home, in dialogue with recorded images of the large scenes on which Meese performs, his lavish productions, and his enormous art studio in Berlin, Grönvall's replay of Meese's works did indeed, as Söderholm notices, take the shape of a bad copy. As Grönvall performed her work as part of a larger programme of feminist performance art, it was certainly tempting to interpret her performance as a kind of emotionally arid, funny, or critically distanced parody of both Meese and the tribute choir of dealers, curators, and art critics surrounding him. With such a framework, the implications of feminist resistance and detachment embedded in her imitation of the work of a more widely recognized white male artist would emerge as clear and intelligible. However, several aspects of Grönvall's work hindered an interpretation of her imitation of Meese's works as a kind of distanced mockery of either him or the system of artistic production and reception by which his art is given more value and meaning than hers. In the last sentence of the quotation from her review cited above, Söderholm appears to acknowledge this alteration from a critique or unveiling of the celebration of male artist, when she addresses the overwhelming sadness that she perceived permeated Grönvall's performance. In what, one may ask, does this sadness that Söderholm perceived consist?

Although clearly speaking to the bad copy aspects in feminist mimesis, Grönvall's performance nevertheless presented a curious lack of the critical distance to and engagement with her source material that Schneider associates with crude imitations in feminist art.[30] Rather than portraying a type of sadness reminiscent of the term's meaning as sorrow or grief, Grönvall's performance represented her own envy of Meese and consequently, I will argue, a "sadness" more closely associated with the term's association with the "pitiful" or "pathetic". By positioning herself in direct relation to this other artist, Grönvall suggested a performative logic wherein Meese's successes, large stages, and capacity for agency, diminish her own. In its setting within a programme of feminist performance art, this comparison between herself and another (male) artist, in turn, came across as representing a woman artist's unhappy reliance on a male-domi-

nated structure that attributes value to the works of male artists at the expense of women artists. The manner through which Grönvall's portrayal of envy changes the implications of sad from sorrow to pitiful is important. While sadness is an emotional state whose political status is widely acknowledged, envy (especially when directed at celebrated white men) is an emotion that is commonly regarded as bad for politics in feminist debates.[31]

ENVY

In *Ugly Feelings,* queer feminist theorist Sianne Ngai addresses the dubious position of envy in feminist theory and claims that the feeling is rarely acknowledged as politically interesting in feminist debates. Ngai traces what she argues is a widespread feminist disregard for envy to the feeling's intimate relation to psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's theoretical concept "penis envy":

> The standard objection to penis envy in this discourse has been that the idea entails a "characterization of feminine sexuality as deficiency." While it usefully identifies a persistent stereotype of femininity subtending the concept of penis envy, such a critique relies on an equally commonplace approach to "envy" itself – one which treats it as a term describing a *subject* who lacks, rather than the subject's affective *response* to a perceived inequality. In other words, the traditional feminist critique of penis envy regards envy as saying something about the subject's internal state of affairs ("deficiency") as opposed to a statement by or from the subject concerning a relation to the external world.[32]

As opposed to this routine lack of interest in the feeling, Ngai points out how the envying subject perceives the object of their envy to have, often unfairly, been assigned a better or more appreciated position by the group than themselves. This experience of injustice, in turn, reveals the envying subject as deeply involved and influenced by the hierarchies of a group and thus, albeit sometimes involuntary, as a participant of the collective, group, or field within which the perceived unfairness is played out. Accordingly, Ngai argues, envy has the ability to disclose "aspects of being feminist that are 'actively lived and felt'" (the latter is a quotation from Raymond Williams's account of feelings as diagnostic).[33] Rooted in this lived and felt experience of being feminist, Ngai goes on to discuss, there are particular forms of accumulation of desire: objects and others that we have been culturally trained to long for or admire. For women, Ngai points out, many of the things that we have been culturally trained to admire or desire are "possibly threatening and harmful" to ourselves.[34]

In *Ugly Feelings*, Ngai assigns critical agency to envy – with the "ability to recognize, and antagonistically respond to, potentially real and institutionalized forms of inequality".[35] Grönvall's portrayal of her envy of the successes of a male artist, however, complicates this political productivity that Ngai identifies in envy. Rather than using envy as a means to critically scrutinize and deconstruct her own attachments to a devouring system, Grönvall's portrayal of her attachment to Meese emerges as far more suffocating, confused, and encompassing. By continuously blurring the lines between a distanced critique and a sincere embodying of her source materials, Grönvall's performance construed a sense of uncertainty about the intentions behind her imitations. This vagueness is also clearly articulated in *The Map*, where Grönvall portrays how artist 1 begins to work on a novel artistic project as a consequence of her increased sense of envy and emulation of artist 2. The following notes along the timeline in the work describe how artist 1, in the wake of rejection by artist 2, begins to study him closely in what she describes as an attempt to "get familiar with his art."

> I see all films. I read texts etc. copy ~~his~~ manifesto. Use his materials as a foundation for my own. Feels risky to copy completely. Is it a tribute or a criticism? Do I have the legal right, or do I violate the Copyright Act? Do I offend [redacted] **X** as a person? I would have preferred that we could have talked (~~he~~ would have answered) – but will continue on my own path instead of awaiting his response.[36]

In this sequence of *The Map*, the process by which artist 1 prepares her imitation of artist 2's works is marked by an uncertainty regarding her own intentions. The notes on the timeline represent an artist who does not know whether her mimesis of another artist's works is a tribute or a criticism. This portrayal of artist 1's confused sense of attachment to and detachment from the work of artist 2 is somewhat mirrored in the title of Grönvall's performance *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3*, which translates as "Mr Meese and the songs from the heart".

Based on the ideas that psychoanalyst Melanie Klein outlines in her book *Envy and Gratitude* (1957), Ngai discusses how the envied subject/object is, for the envying subject, perceived as devouring. The advantages that the envied subject has are perceived as a type of deprivation or theft. According to Ngai, with this understanding of envy, the emotion is tied to the assertion, "*This idealized object persecutes me*." In Klein's theory of envy, Ngai argues, "the ideal or good object envied and phantasmatically attacked is attacked precisely because it *is* idealized and good – as if the real source of antagonism is less the object than idealization itself."[37] Ngai's discussion of how envy arises as a result of how the envying subject actually attributes to the object of their envy "good" (albeit to themselves devouring) characteristics, appear crucial for the affective implications in Grönvall's portrayal of her envy of Meese.

"FEMALE ADMIRER" AND FEMALE ADMIRER

Drawing on performance theorist Ann Pellegrini's application of philosopher and filmmaker Susan Sontag's term "camp sincerity", Schneider discusses a productive tension between parody and sincerity that appears in certain feminist replays of misogynist stereotypes.[38] With feminist artist and filmmaker Carolee Schneemann's 1974 performance *Interior Scroll* as an example of what Schneider terms "the double aspect" of feminist mimesis, Schneider describes how Schneemann's work simultaneously replayed the contemporaneous misogynist dismissal of women artists' "primitive techniques" as well as exercising these same techniques with sincerity and fury. Schneider states: "Schneemann was both herself the powerful erotic artist, *and* herself the 'primitive,' ritualistic hot mess she had been repeatedly dismissed as embodying. She was both "diaristic" and diaristic. Both "primitive" and primitive".[39] Schneider continues:

> Thus *Interior Scroll* did not "represent" or stand in as an illustration of the standard misogynist dismissal of women, as if to say she was *not* these things but merely representing them. Instead, Schneemann actually (re)enacted the misogyny, appropriated it if you will, bringing it by means of repetition into being again. But through her performance, the replayed dismissal was available for rethinking. The idea was that by redeploying, vehemently and parodically, the same characteristics used to justify the dismissal of women's work, feminist "camp sincerity," theatrical bodily ritual, or repetitive personal acts in public could trouble any platform of display that excluded women on those same terms. Clearly, and in line with much appropriation art, the double and the bad copy aspect of feminist mimesis troubled (as had prior avant-gardes) the dictate of originality and pure, sole authorship at the base of the long-standing, historically male-dominated art format.[40]

Based on Schneider's discussion of the double aspect of feminist mimesis, it is possible to discern how Grönvall, through her portrayal of her own admiration and envy of Meese, attains (to mimic Schneider's phrasing) both a position of "female admirer" and female admirer. As will be elaborated on below, Grönvall simultaneously parodies the indignity of the position of a female admirer of celebrated men, while she also present herself as sincerely attaining this position.

This ambiguous position was particularly enhanced at about eleven minutes into Grönvall's performance, when the attention of the audience was directed toward a young, white woman who appeared in a filmed interview with Meese, projected onto the screen behind the stage (figure 4.9). For what seemed to be the first time in the performance, the words spoken by Grönvall surfaced as her own rather than as repetitions of sentences previously uttered by Meese. Standing beside the screen, Grönvall looked out on the audience and introduced the video

recording by saying: "this section was filmed by someone lying on her stomach in the grass listening with admiration one can suppose." In the recording, Meese could be discerned sitting down in front of a sculpture in a leafy garden. He was dressed in a dark blue shirt, a pair of blue jeans, a beige belt, and a pair of sunglasses. His long, dark, wavy hair was hanging down over his shoulders. He was speaking to a young woman lying on her stomach in front of him in the grass. Leaning on her elbows, her upper body was slightly lifted as she was managing a large film camera with which she was shooting Meese. Meese was talking while the woman was quietly looking at him through the lens of her camera. In some sequences in the video, presumably shot by the woman in the grass, Meese was interviewed while sitting right before the camera, looking straight into it. The other sequences, capturing the situation with Meese and the woman in the grass were filmed from a distance and hence involving a third camera.

In the film projected on the screen in Grönvall's performance, a layer of red paint filling out the contours of the lying woman was added to the recording. The paint accentuated the woman's feminine pose and directed the attention of

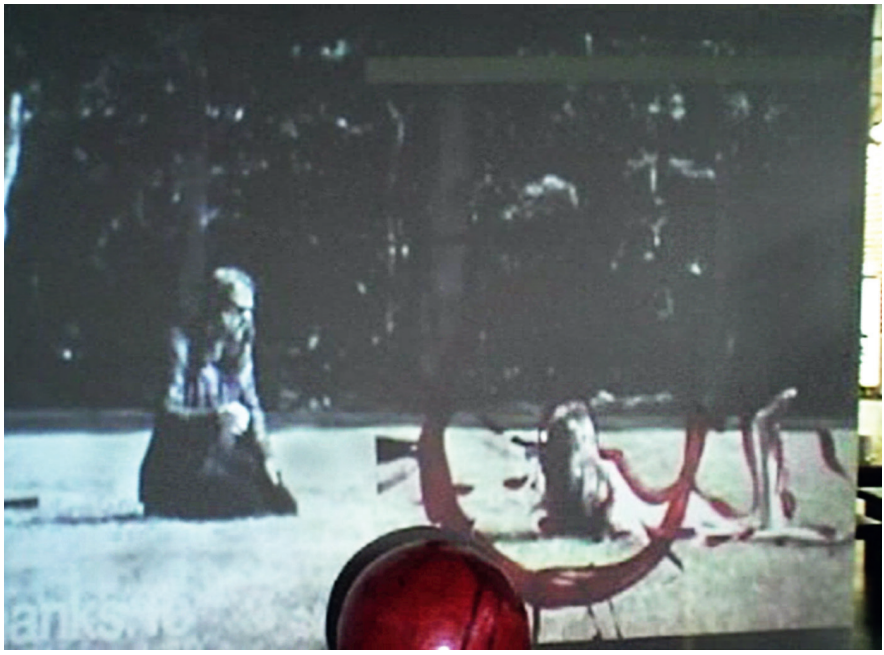


Figure 4.9: Jenny Grönvall's, *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3*, still from video recording, 25 minutes, Malmö Konsthall, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

the audience to her lightweight fabric dress and bare legs. After a short while, the recorded interview was speeded up. The elevated rate caused Meese's movements to become jerky and fast, and the words he spoke became squeaky and difficult to comprehend. As Meese's words became indistinguishable, the symbolic weight of the situation – a young white woman with (judging by the video camera in front of her) possibly artistic ambitions, attentively listening to a recognized white European male artist – emerged more clearly. The increased speed caused the situation with the young woman and Meese to appear somewhat ridiculous. As a result, scattered laughter was heard amongst the seated audience.

While I was physically present during Grönvall's performance, I cannot recall noticing this laughter at the time. Undeniably, I am likely to have joined in this momentary gleeful attitude amongst the audience. Quite some time afterwards, however, as I watched a video recording of the performance, I noticed the laughter and was confounded by its arousal. Apart from this speeded-up pace of the film recording, Grönvall's performance was markedly, even deliberately, humourless. In his performances, Meese often makes bizarre motions that seem to stem from Hollywood comedy or comic figures. He moves jerkily, opens his eyes widely, and makes grimaces that distort his face. Grönvall, in comparison, repeatedly wore a grave and concentrated expression on her face as she repeated Meese's corporeal movements, at a somewhat lagging pace. Hence, while Meese's performances often include numerous comic and satirical elements, these were the core features that had been lost in Grönvall's imitation of his works.

During the performance, the laughter of the audience appeared arousing both as a consequence of Meese's presumed self-preoccupation as he was discussing his own art, and through the figure of the young woman listening to him with fascinated attention. Grönvall's careful enhancement of the woman's feminine pose, together with her suggestion that the woman was probably listening to Meese with admiration, directed the audience's attention, on a larger scale, to the emblematic position of a young white woman participating in the celebration of an already renowned white man. But besides functioning as a rather contemptuous allegory for a politically questionable position of white women's esteem of widely established white men, the woman in the grass also arose as a symbol of the performance's portrayal of Grönvall's own admiration of Meese. Consequently, and in line with Schneider's discussion of the double aspect of feminist mimesis, Grönvall was not only imitating Meese in her performance but also, and perhaps primarily, replaying the position of a woman admiring Meese. Grönvall's replay of an admiring woman invited, to some degree, the audience to ridicule and dismiss the position of a woman who – by esteeming the work of unruly renowned men – supports the very system that devours women's works of value. However, in correspondence with Schneider's discussion of the double, rather than mocking other women's docile appreciation for canonized white artists, Grönvall embodied this position with a tangible sense of sincerity. That is, she represented herself as an actual, not solely parodical, admirer of Meese.

Again, while Schneider's discussion of the double provides a stimulating setting from which to consider Grönvall's representation of a female admirer, there are certain key aspects of Grönvall's replay of this position that appear intriguingly ungraspable through Schneider's conceptualization of the double. Schneider contemplates the double as a way to reclaim subjective traits that are dismissed in misogynist communities and, as such, as a form of subversive resistance to or modulation of male-dominated art institutions and their models for value.[41] Grönvall's replay of the female admirer, in contrast, hardly aimed for a redefinition or reclamation of white women's right to esteem celebrated white male artists. Rather than reclaiming this position, Grönvall's performance appeared to merely highlight it as a kind of painfully infected object of study; as a reflection of an experience of residing inside of a patriarchal structure. Instead of posing a critique against male-dominated formats for display or, with Söderholm's words, "the reflexive homage to the male artist ego", Grönvall's work portrayed a longing to be recognized by the same structures – an artist's envy of another artist's recognition and capacity and possibility for agency. This representation of her own desire to attain the same attention and agency that is attributed to male artists, emphasized a tangible hierarchy in Schneider's article where Schneider presents feminist's strategies of mimesis that attempt to *redo* male-dominated art formats as better than feminist works (and presentations of works) that simply assume the form of patriarchal models for art production and reception.[42] In line with Ngai's identification of envy's status as uninteresting in feminist debates, it is possible to discern how Grönvall's representation of her suffocating attachment to the work of Meese in *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3* – her desire to get what he got – takes shape as a political fallacy or backwardness when read against Schneider's conclusion that any attempt by feminists to get what men got is a bad model.

SONGS FROM THE HEART

In her essay "Tiny Anguishes: Reflections on Nagging, Scholastic Embarrassment, and Feminist Art History", Irit Rogoff describes a tendency amongst feminist art historians to acknowledge particular types of vulnerabilities or dependencies as politically significant, while discarding others as vain, narcissistic, embarrassing, or uninteresting.[43] Rogoff discusses how this hierarchy became tangible to her as she was about to write a monograph on the German modernist painter Gabrielle Münter. Rogoff explains how, while going through a large body of archival material including Münter's personal journals and letters, she experienced a growing sense of disappointment. The material revealed Münter's heterosexual longing for and wish to marry the painter Wassily Kandinsky, as well as her agonies concerning his lack of interest in both her and the conserva-

tive and bourgeois institution of marriage. As a consequence of this exploration, Rogoff writes how she experienced a growing reluctance to deal with this part of the archival material, as she interpreted it as "sad", "pathetic", and "embarrassing."[44] Based on this experience, Rogoff's essay presents an examination of her own embarrassment. She contemplates her growing awareness of how feminist art history seemed generally lacking cultural narratives that enable an interpretation of feminist subjects' desire for renowned heterosexual and white men as anything other than the result of individual weakness and internalized oppression: "By unframing, un-coupling, and de-victimizing the Münter narrative one is not creating its binary opposite, the autonomous heroine of modernism. But perhaps it may be allowing her a place from which to speak something we have not heard and do not know how to hear."[45]

By involving Rogoff's discussion about the scholarly embarrassment entrenched in white women's heterosexual longing for and rejection by renowned white men in my discussion of Grönvall's drawing and performance, I am aware that I risk framing Grönvall's portrayal of her emotional involvements with Meese as a sexual rather than an artistic engagement. This is, to be clear, not my intention. Instead, I find Rogoff's essay interesting because it sheds light on a hierarchy of attachments that I argue is, to some degree, tangible in Grönvall's work, particularly when read through Schneider's theories of the subversive potential of imitation. In "Remembering Feminist Remimesis: A Riddle in Three Parts", Schneider acknowledges what she terms as the paradoxes that lie embedded in feminist artists' endeavour to break into male-dominated art institutions. However, as mentioned above, rather than linger with this contradictory position, Schneider rather quickly proceeds to a reflection on what types of feminist strategies are best suited – in spite of this paradox – to resist and redo patriarchal models for defining, presenting and interpreting art. Based on Rogoff's call to pay closer attention to those attachments that we quickly sort out as subjective weaknesses or as bad for politics, we may think about what it would mean to construct chronicles that abundantly recognize the often complex and contradictory position of residing within a professional or cultural field. Sometimes, as queer theorist Heather Love states in her book *Feeling Backward,* cultural products might simply describe what it is like to reside within a discriminatory structure – not fixing it.[46] Importantly though, rather than posing a critique of feminist and queer feminist theoretical frameworks that, like Schneider's, provides theories about art that build on an optimism about the ability of art to challenge, resist or redo institutional or societal proceedings, Rogoff's essay stresses how a too dominant focus on resistance and emancipation risks construing certain representations of what it is like to reside within discriminatory structures as unintelligible or embarrassing. At the heart of this discussion is, as I will return to in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, a question of the possibilities and limitations rooted in certain dominant tactics by which politicized scholars attribute value and meaning to art.

RADICALITY AS A HERITAGE FROM MODERNISM

In their respective scholarly works, Sianne Ngai and Irit Rogoff argue that it is possible to discern a particular attitude in feminist debates by which a feminist subject, rather than dwelling on unhappy attachments to men, is encouraged to construe other types of attachments, that are presumedly better both for herself and for feminist politics at large. In her essay, Rogoff stresses how feminist art historians ought not to simply cling to "good", or at least politically "respectable" examples of feminist art. She emphasizes that the very act of solely acknowledging art or artistic subjects representative of what is, from the feminist art historian's perspective, a respectable, radical, and critically detached political position, is a heritage from modernism.[47] In a somewhat affiliated manner, Ngai argues that the disregard for envy as a political feeling in feminist communities indicates a desire for feminist autonomy against patriarchal hierarchies. Hence, in feminist debates, envious feelings are continuously discredited as something that the feminist subject should strive to overcome. Envy, Ngai argues, is often rejected as a feeling that traps women in positions of submission, where the only freedom proposed to them is the privileges that they might gain by assuming the same symbolic position as (white) men.[48]

Through a discussion of the possibilities and limitations of interpreting Jenny Grönvall's imitation of the artist Jonathan Meese through Rebecca Schneider's influential theories of the subversive potential of feminist mimicry, this chapter has addressed the significance for feminist and queer feminist visual scholarships of recognizing that cultural narratives that focus on subversiveness, resistance, and repair, allow for certain readings, at the cost of others. In line with Ngai and Rogoff, this chapter has suggested that a too dominant emphasis on the possibility of visual art to redo discriminatory structures, or to provide healing from their damaging effects, risks construing an analytical direction that causes representations of specific kinds of weaknesses, failures, or institutional attachments, to become associated with scholarly discomfort or embarrassment. In the subsequent chapter, I will go into further depth about the importance of contemplating how interpretations of art as a means for political productivity risk privileging subjective positions supported by various forms of privilege and institutional conventions.

Notes

1. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 132.
2. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 216.
3. My discussion of the drawing *The Map* is based on an engagement of the work in Grönvall's home studio as well as with photographic reproductions of the work. My interpretation of the performance *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3* reflects my experience of participating as part of its live audience but also, and perhaps primarily, of my latter engagement of the work through photographic and video-recorded documentation.
4. I am not the first to interpret Grönvall's works as portraying her envy of Meese. In an interview with cultural journalist Matilda Gustavsson, Grönvall describes her act of imitating Meese by stating: "Att jag lånar alla hans attribut handlar, förutom avundsjuka, om att undersöka var skillnaden mellan oss ligger" (the fact that I borrow all of his attributes is a reflection of, apart from envy, an exploration of what it is that constitutes the difference between us). Matilda Gustavsson, "På Patriarkatets Scen", *Sydsvenska Dagbladet,* July 24, 2010.
5. During my process of writing this chapter, I encountered a paragraph on Jenny Grönvall's website where she discusses her own practice in relation to (but also as extending) the ideas that Rebecca Schneider presents in her 1997 book *The Explicit Body in Performance* (https://jennygronvall.se/, retrieved November 25, 2021). Grönvall's text makes use of Schneider's ideas from another angle than I do here. It applies Schneider's theories in a discussion about the body of the performer/performance artist. When I discussed this discovery with Grönvall, neither of us could recall having jointly talked about Schneider's theories in relation to her works. That said, our affiliated ways of thinking or drawing conclusions were not very surprising as we continuously have lengthy conversations about artistic and theoretical approaches. Also, although I cannot recall having read Grönvall's paragraph about Schneider before, it is likely that I have done so at some point since it was written in 2011. One important aspect of this thesis is its attempt to emphasize that it originates from a collective process (my artistic collaboration with curator Julia Björnberg and Jenny Grönvall). As such, I want to stress ways of thinking about how to produce (or, rather present) research as a product of collective rather than singular processes. An affiliat-

ed aim is to address how the act of attributing a line of thinking, or a scientific or cultural production to one sole person (the author, researcher, or artist), risks partly concealing how any type of agency inevitably derives from how thoughts and gestures flow between people and within collectives.

6. Petra Bauer et al. (eds.), *Malmö Art Academy: 2002* (Malmö, Sweden: Malmö Konsthall, 2002).
7. These aspects of Grönvall's Peggy-Sue project are explained in further depth in an article that were published in the Swedish feminist cultural journal *Bang* in 2002: Charlotte Eliasson and Jenny Grönvall, "Äpplet faller inte långt från trädet (eller ändamålet helgar i vissa fall medlen)", *Bang: Feministisk kulturtidskrift*, 4 (2002), pp. 57–60.
8. Usually, Peggy-Sue performs alone, but it has also made performances in collaboration with other artists. For example, the video-recorded performance *I Wonder You* (2004) portrays a meeting between Peggy-Sue and artist Elin Lundgren where the two artists sit inside a white cube filled with plastic flowers, putting make-up on each other's faces and maintaining a dialogue with surrealistic elements. Or, in other performances, Peggy-Sue sings in a sad and monotonous voice the cheerful ballad *Heart Song*, written by artist Leif Holmstrand, that begins with the line: "Peggy-Sue will come to you and sing a song, being beautiful and free is never wrong".
9. The chakras were originally used in Hinduism meditation practices and have later, when introduced in Western societies, also become associated with other systems such as astrology and Tarot. See for example: Arthur Avalon, *The Serpent Power: Being the Ṣaṭ-Cakra-NirūPaṇa [by PūRṇāNanda] and PāDukā-Pañcaka. Two Works on Laya-Yoga* (New York: Dover Publications, 1974). and Olav Hammer, "New Age Movement", in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*. First published online in 2008. URL: https://referenceworks-brillonline-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/entries/dictionary-of-gnosis-and-western-esotiricism/*-DGWE_257 (retrieved November 24, 2021).
10. Examples of published interviews with Peggy-Sue: Jenny Grönvall, "Samtal med Peggy-Sue", *Pequod*, Malmö, no. 41, 2007 and DJ Whitelines, "Interview with Peggy-Sue", *NIGHT Magazine*, New York City, 2003 #10. See also: Jenny Grönvall, *"My First Cook Book": Peggy-Sue Svensson* (Publikation (Kulturföreningen Roll on), 90; [Malmö: Kulturföreningen roll on], 2003).
11. For example, the exhibition included Hans Belmer's photographic series *Les Jeux de la poupée* (1938–1949), Wilhelm

Freddie's *Sex-Paralysappeal* (1936), Alberto Giacometti's *Cage* (1930–1931) and Allen Jones' painting *Glimpsed Woman* (1965), all of which have been problematized retrospectively either for their representations of violence against, or for their sexualized objectification of, bodies of girls and/or women.

12. The performance *Explicit Speech/Hate Speech* was part of a performance programme, initiated by Moderna Museet Malmö in 2012 and curated by Julia Björnberg and me, which also presented the performance and installation *Lee Sky Gives Dora Maar Her Face Back* by Line Skywalker Karlström. The group exhibition *Lips Painted Red*, presented at Trondheim Museum of Art in Norway in 2013 was curated by Pontus Kyander. Grönvall's solo exhibition *Tacky, Tacky so Tacky*, presented at CirkulationsCentralen in Malmö, was curated by Melissa Henderson.
13. Apart from performances, paintings, installations, and content on Instagram, *Inredning och Affekt* also includes a collection of porcelain ornaments. Examples of works included in this project are a performance (also entitled *Inredning och Affekt*) that was enacted in Grönvall's own home before a live audience where she showed and discussed a number of porcelain ornaments. The performance was part of the exhibition *Parataxis*, curated by Julia Björnberg at Gallery Krets in Malmö in 2017, and the installation and performance *AB CARPE DIEM Umgås med vårkollektionen "Obekväma känslor" #inredningochaffekt* that Grönvall exhibited and enacted as part of the ambulating art project Monumental Flock at Verkstad Konsthall in Norrköping (Sweden) in 2021.
14. See for example: Dan Jönsson, "Äventyrlig konst med livekänsla", *Dagens Nyheter,* April 7, 2007, Eva Rem Hansen, "Queerkarneval", *Kunstkritikk: Nordic Art Review,* August 13, 2013, Gustavsson, "På patriarkatets scen" and Pontus Kyander, "Peggy-Sue i Ullared", ibid., October 12, 2002.
15. Tone Schunnesson, "Misslyckandets Estetik", *Dagens Arena* September 29, 2017. See also: Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick* (Native Agents; New York, N.Y.: Semiotext(e), 1997).
16. Line Skywalker Karlström, "Making Failure of the Artist, the Female* Body, the Art Work – a Conversation with Jenny Grönvall", in Line Skywalker Karlström (ed.), *Holes Dug, Rocks Thrown – On Queer and Feminist Art Practices Departing from the Works by Line Skywalker Karlström* (Berlin: Archive Books, 2022).
17. This programme took place on June 1 and June 8 in 2011. Apart from performances it included a lecture by art historian and curator Sanne Kofod Olsen and a panel discussion on the topic

of the possibilities and limits of agency in performance art. The programme was curated by Julia Björnberg and me.

18. *IN THE ACT* (2010–2012) was accompanied by a book with the same name: Corrine Fitzpatrick, Hanna Wilde, and Imri Sandström, *In the Act: A Sprawling Space for Performance* (Stockholm: Högkvarteret, 2012).
19. A few critics and writers have discussed works and performances from Grönvall's *Mr Meese* project before. In the articles "Kropp och kub" and "Tillgänglig utövare och lekens ivrare", both published in the newspaper *Västerbottens-Kuriren,* the cultural journalists Sara Meidell and Marit Strandberg (respectively) discuss a performance/installation that Grönvall made in collaboration with Line Skywalker Karlström as part of the exhibition programme *Games and Regulations*, presented by the white cube at *Norrlandsoperan* in Umeå (Sweden) in 2013 and curated by Leif Holmstrand. See: Sara Meidell, "Kropp och kub", *Västerbottens-Kuriren,* January 18 2013 and Marit Strandberg, "Tillgänglig utövare och lekens ivrare", ibid. February 7. Although these reviews include interesting and detailed descriptions of Grönvall's performances and installations, they all tend to describe Grönvall's relation to Meese as *either* marked by admiration or as distinguished by distanced parody/criticism. The performance programme *IN THE ACT*, where Grönvall presented her performance *Mr Meese und die liden der Hartz # II*, was accompanied by a catalogue with the same name including a short essay on Grönvall's performance by scholar and writer Litia Perta, where Perta poetically reflected on gestures enacted in the performance, but without drawing any theoretical conclusions from them. Fitzpatrick, Wilde, and Sandström, *In the Act: A Sprawling Space for Performance*.
20. *The Map* has been presented at gallery exhibitions by Grönvall, both in terms of the original drawings (presented side by side on one of the gallery's walls), and also as large-scale photography depicting details from the drawings. While I have studied the work when presented at exhibitions, the discussion of *The Map* outlined in this chapter primarily builds on my engagement with the work in Grönvall's home studio, as well as in photographic reproductions of the work.
21. Originally, the words written on the timeline in Grönvall's *The Map* are in Swedish and read: "Louisiana, ~~Maj~~? Feb? 2007? 2006?". Tomt. egen värld. kärlek. overkligt. Tystnad. egen drag-upplevelse/fantasi. Handlade om 1. Mig 2. P-S ..... 100 [redacted] x".

22. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), Susan Cahan, *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), Amelia Jones, *In between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (London: Routledge, 2021), Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970's* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). See also Amelia Jones, *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004).
23. Originally, the words written on the timeline in Grönvall's *The Map* are in Swedish and read: "Skriver ett brev till [redacted]. X Han blir verklig, uppstår. Jag blir konkret och kontur. Lyckorus."
24. On *The Map*, the word "he" in these sentences has been crossed over with a red X. Originally, the penned down content is in Swedish and reads: "besvikelse, jag blir osäker. ~~Han~~ blir en oåtkomlig stjärna. Allt blir verkligt. jag blir naiv och dum – – – – – – – – – ~~Han~~ svarar inte."
25. Originally, the words written on the timeline in Grönvall's *The Map* are in Swedish and read: "Mötet säger ngt om hur [redacted]X uppstår i andras ögon. Stor. stark, oåtkomlig – helig."
26. Rebecca Schneider, "Remembering Feminist Remimesis: A Riddle in Three Parts", *TDR (1988–),* 58/2 (07/01/ 2014), 14–32, p. 20.
27. Ibid., p. 30.
28. Ibid., pp. 16–17.
29. "Och in på scen kommer Malmökonstnären Jenny Grönvall, som med både groteska och dråpliga medel framför en bitande kritisk parodi på den europeiska performancescenens enfant terrible; tyske Jonathan Meese. Brutalt blottlägger hon det reflexmässiga hyllandet av det manliga konstnärsegot: det är vansinnigt, roligt och förkrossande sorgligt på samma gång." Carolina Söderholm, "Med Kroppen Som Vapen", *Sydsvenska Dagbladet,* June 3, 2011.
30. Rebecca Schneider and Lucia Ruprecht, "In Our Hands: An Ethics of Gestural Response-Ability. Rebecca Schneider in Conversation with Lucia Ruprecht", *Performance Philosophy,* 3/1 (06/01/ 2017), 108–25, p. 110.
31. As I will elaborate on below, this argument builds on Sianne Ngai's theories on envy outlined in her book *Ugly Feelings*. During the last decade the political implications of sadness, particularly in terms of mourning, melancholia and depression, has been a recurrent theme in queer feminist and queer theory. See

for example on the topic of mourning or melancholia: Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race* (Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press, 2000), Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on Aids and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002) or José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). Or, on the topic of depression: Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012) or José Esteban Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position", *Signs,* 31/3 (03/01/ 2006), 675–88.

32. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 126.
33. Ibid., p. 163.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 129.
36. "Jag närmar mig [redacted]X konstnärskap, ser alla filmer. Läser alla texter etc. skriver av ~~hans~~ manifest. Använder X [redacted] material som grund till mitt eget. Känns vanskligt att använda rakt av. Är det en hyllning eller en kritik? Har jag juridisk rätt eller fel i upphovsrättslagen? Kränker jag [redacted] X som person? Jag skulle allra helst velat att vi kunde ha pratat – (~~han~~ svarat) – men fortsätter på egen linje istället för att vänta ut ~~honom~~."
37. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings,* p. 162.
38. Schneider, "Remembering Feminist Remimesis: A Riddle in Three Parts", p. 20.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., pp. 20–21 and 30.
42. Ibid., p. 30.
43. Irit Rogoff, "Tiny Anguishes: Reflections on Nagging, Scholastic Embarrassment, and Feminist Art History", *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies,* 4/3 (1992), 38+.
44. Ibid., p. 38.
45. Ibid., p. 44.
46. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 4.
47. Rogoff, "Tiny Anguishes: Reflections on Nagging, Scholastic Embarrassment, and Feminist Art History", p. 45.
48. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings,* pp. 127 and 142.

Xandra Ibarra

*F*ck My Life (FML)*

CHAPTER FIVE
BEING STUCK

> When I give papers on whiteness I am always asked about resistance, as a sign of how things can be otherwise. [...] If we want to know how things can be different *too quickly*, then we might not hear anything at all. [...] A phenomenology of whiteness helps us to notice institutional habits; it brings what is behind, what does not get seen as the background to social action, to the surface in a certain way. It does not teach us how to change those habits and that is partly the point.[1]
>
> SARA AHMED

As Sara Ahmed says in the quotation above, explorations of structural discrimination are often met with requests for suggestions of resistance. To ask, in the face of inequality and hurt, how things can be otherwise is as much a survival strategy as a crucial means for change. That said, the tendency to turn too quickly to narratives of rebelliousness might, as Ahmed accentuates, distract us from considering the vigour of what it means to reside inside a social structure. Ahmed states, "It is by showing how we are stuck, by attending to what is habitual and routine in 'the what' of the world, that we can keep open the possibility of habit changes, without using that possibility to displace our attention to the present, and without simply wishing for new tricks".[2]

A principal argument (particularly articulated in chapter one) that directs the discussion outlined throughout this dissertation is that certain forms of representations of structural discrimination tend to circulate as what Ahmed terms "happy objects"; as objects widely associated with social goods, in feminist and queer feminist scholarly works that discuss art as a means for resistance and productive change. This type of association between objects and affects, Ahmed states, is consolidated through *habits*, a series or pattern of actions that are inherited and that, by continuously being repeated, shape what bodies can do and preserve the connection between ideas, values, and objects.[3]

This chapter considers how ostensibly positive feelings about visual art, including the anticipation and value attributed to art as a means for political protest, repair, or productivity, are tied to institutional habits. Here, I use "institutional habit" in a manner that is largely inspired by Ahmed's usage of the term yet also differs slightly from her application of it. Rather than considering institutions as delimited physical sites, such as museums, galleries, or academies, I employ the term institutional habit as interchangeable with what could be termed "field habit".[4] That is, habits produced by a wide and diverse range of practices, communities, debates, ideas, and sites, that in various ways contribute to or exist in discourses about visual art. Whereas it is important to analyse and discuss institutions in terms of defined places, such an exploration is not the focus here. A too narrow distinction between institutions and the objects, publications, or actors that reside in a field, might prevent an acknowledgement of how habits precede many forms of agency.

The discussion that follows turns to the performance *F*ck My Life (FML)* (2012–2013, figures 5.2 and 5.3), where Xandra Ibarra (b. 1979), who lives and works in Oakland in California, portrays a position of being trapped vis-à-vis dominant narratives of political productivity and what she has termed her incompatible white audiences.[5] In line with arguments outlined in previous chapters, I discuss how the act of attributing traits of resistance and political productivity to Ibarra's performance enables the scholar to draw out certain meanings from the work, at the cost of others. Based on such a framework, I ask what it would mean, as a politicized scholar, to linger with representations of what Ahmed terms as "being stuck", without attempting to inscribe such representations into narratives of change, subversion, or repair.

In line with many previous readings of Ibarra's works, and based on Ahmed's call to linger with portrayals of structural discriminations without too quickly attempting to turn these into tools for change, I make an attempt to remain with the pain, anguish, and hopelessness that Ibarra portrays in *FML*. However, although I accentuate the importance of such a scholarly approach, I also address the struggles and paradoxes it embeds. After all, as is evident in Ahmed's suggestion that attending to positions of being stuck might entail the possibility of change, the call to avoid too swift turns to suggestions of how "things can be otherwise" is often *also* a plea rooted in an optimism about political productivi-

ty. As such, in the context of art, the scholarly attention to artworks and performances in terms of representations of "being stuck", is as much oriented to art as a "happy object" – an object ascribed traits as a social good – as are scholarly approaches to art as resistance, subversion, or repair.

Rather than suggesting a solution for this problem or paradox – such as a radically different way to approach Ibarra's works – I make use of *FML*'s portrayal of an artist that is stuck with the attributed burden of pushing for better futures, as well as my own inability to engage with her works outside such a framework of political productivity, in order to emphasize what Ahmed discusses as the vigour of institutional habits. Here I turn to Ahmed's theories about how one's emotional predispositions are inherited and given by patterns and customs from the past, as well as to queer theorist Kadji Amin's call for politicized scholars to carefully centre and interrogate the feelings that they, themselves, bring into their research. I then combine Ahmed's and Amin's theories about emotional predispositions and attachments with feminist art historian Jane Blocker's exploration of how the creation of the artist implicates and probes that of the art historian, in an effort to think about how the politicized scholar often is – at points claustrophobically – a product of the hope she attributes to her object of research.

LA CHICA BOOM

Apart from performance, Xandra Ibarra employs video, photography, and sculpture as part of her artistic practice. She received her MFA from the Department of Art Practice at the University of Berkeley, California, and has earned a Master's degree in Ethnic Studies from San Francisco State University.[6] During the last decade, her works have been discussed by many influential scholars, including art historian Amelia Jones, theorist of contemporary art and visual culture Alpesh Kantilal Patel, and cultural theorist Juana María Rodríguez.[7] Ibarra's artistic practice has also been the focus of attention in established art journals and magazines and newspapers such as *Art Journal*, *ARTnews*, *Huffington Post*, and *Hyperallergic*.[8] In 2016, a version of Ibarra's live performance *Nude Laughing* (2014–2019), enacted at the Broad Museum in Los Angeles, was included in queer art historian and critic Andy Campbell's essay "The Year in Performance", published in the art journal *Artforum*, and in 2018 Ibarra's performance *The Hook Up/Displacement/Barhopping/Drama Tour* (2017) was granted the Recent Work Award by the New York-based arts organization *QUEER/ART*.[9] Ibarra has performed and exhibited her works at, for example, El Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Bogotá, Colombia, ExTeresa Arte Actual in Mexico, Knockdown Center in New York City, Leslie-Lohman Museum in New York City, ONE Archives in Los Angeles, and the Anderson Collection in Stanford, and she co-curated, together with artist Nao Bustamante, the acclaimed performance series

En Cuatro Patas at the Broad Museum in 2018. Ibarra has also been lecturing at the San Francisco Art Institute, California College of the Arts and San Francisco State University, and will teach sculpture courses at the Department of Art and Art History at Stanford University in 2022. Apart from her artistic practice, Ibarra works as a community organizer, active in feminist anti-rape and prison abolitionist movements such as *CARA*. She is an active participant in *INCITE!*, a network for feminists of colour whose mission statement is to organize "to end state violence and violence in our homes and communities".[10]

Ibarra initiated her artistic career on the burlesque scene of San Francisco in 2002, where she began to perform as the stage persona La Chica Boom. In the role of this alias, Ibarra enacted a kind of burlesque camp performances that she termed "spictacles".[11] As a type of theatrical phenomenon, burlesque first appeared in Europe during the seventeenth century. At that point in time, it described a form of performances where the performers made use of parody in order to mock and caricature cultural phenomenon, often products associated with high culture or fine art.[12] During the early twentieth century, especially in the US, burlesque gradually changed into explicitly sexual performances, closely related to striptease. Despite this change, its comical and parodical foundation remained. Queer and feminist burlesque performances often exaggeratedly enact frameworks of heteronormative sexuality and can take on various forms, such as dance, striptease, or the enactment of short theatrical plots.[13] In the role of La Chica Boom, Ibarra amplified gestures and symbols associated with Mexican iconography, Mexiphobia,[14] femininity and sexuality in performances that highlighted and explored the complicated and ambivalent terrain of residing as a Chicana-identified subject inside the white hegemony of American society.[15]

As suggested by the combination of the word "spic" (in the US a racist slur used to describe people of Central or Latin American descent)[16] and the word "spectacle", Ibarra's performances as La Chica Boom often enact symbolic objects and overtly gendered and sexual gestures associated with racism against Mexicans or Mexican Americans, and mixes these with queer and Mexican or Mexican American iconography, at points leaving the boundaries between these visual fields blurred and entangled. In *Tortillera* (2004) (figure 5.1), La Chica Boom appears as a minstrel of a Mexican woman who makes tacos with her panties (in Spain and Latin America "tortillera" is slang for lesbian) and then, using a bottle of Tapatío hot sauce as a stap on, jerks off onto the tacos with the red sauce. The US produced Tapatío hot sauce is advertised as a Mexican American product and marketed with a smiling charro – a Mexican cowboy – on its label (in Ibarra's works, however, the man's face has been replaced with Ibarra's own). In another spictacle, *Dominatrix of The Barrio* (2002), La Chica Boom is dressed in a BDSM outfit, a transparent black nylon suit, a pair of purple velvet gloves, and a mask covering her head with holes for her eyes and mouth. In the role of a dominatrix, she then beats, humiliates, fists, and fucks a colourful Piñata version of a donkey.

Figure 5.1, Still photograph from Xandra Ibarra's live performance *Tortillera* (performed under the alias of La Chica Boom), 2004, Photograph by Julio Pantoja/*Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics*. Courtesy Julio Pantoja.

In Ibarra's final spictacle *F*ck My Life (FML)* (2012–2013, figures 5.2 and 5.3) she proclaimed her *La Chica Boom* project as failed due to its incompatible audiences and abandoned her stage persona in front of the sitting audience. In an essay titled "Stuck With You" (2012), published in the San Francisco-based publication *In Dance*, Ibarra adds a written statement as a complement to her performance *FML* as she writes:

> Ten years in burlesque has provided me with an intimate knowledge of the political and emotional consequences of performing with/against the fictions structuring Mexican/Chicana female subjectivity. [...] The failures of spictatorship are varied. For white audiences, the hyper-raciality of my work trumps the accompanied performance of hyper-sexuality/gender because, to them, the performance of race erases all signs of gender and sexuality. In fact, the performance of race exists in a vaccum [sic] to most of my audiences, separate from the state, separate from gender, sexuality and themselves. I become something other, violently fragmented. FML. Another common failure is the inability for audience members to think more critically in their consumption of racialized sexual spectacles. While there is a particular type of pub-

> lic fascination with my work from white audiences, they nonetheless never accept that I am, in fact, performing, "I hate this, I hate you. I am stuck with THIS and YOU, and it's your fault." [...] The performance produces a state of "self-impoverishment" and racial melancholia. I am currently enjoying the preparation for the upcoming show in September. I hope that the audience will not disappoint.[17]

In this essay, Ibarra represents herself as furious with her audiences who, in her opinion, interpret her performances in the wrong way and, as a consequence, deprive her works of their meaning and their potential to produce subversive effects. She draws on cultural theorist Anne Anlin Cheng's book *The Melancholy of Race* (2001). In this book, Cheng proposes that due to the fact that racial identification is an outcome of social categorization, racial grief is a *foundation* for racial identity rather than solely an affective state resulting from racism. Based on Cheng's discussion, Ibarra describes in "Stuck With You", that *FML* portrays precisely such a position of racial melancholy and experience, as an artist, of being stuck within a system of social categorization.[18]

Ibarra's own statements about her works are an important part of her art. She continuously discusses her works in interviews and publishes written essays and artist's statements that allegedly explain the intentions behind her works and also accuse her audiences, especially her white audiences, of profoundly misunderstanding her works.[19] Despite the fact that these published testimonials and statements by Ibarra are likely to reflect her actual frustration and sadness (and without dismissing the importance of reading them as such) my own interpretation of Ibarra's articulated intentions behind her works is based on a reading of them as part of her art. Consequently, I will include them as *portrayals* of an artist's experience of being misunderstood by or trapped with her audiences, rather than as direct reflections of her inner life, her private thoughts or emotions.

By interpreting Ibarra's testimonies as artistic gestures that are a central part of her practice, I will stay attentive to how these represent pain, anguish, and hopelessness while I will also remain open to the multifaceted layers that are evident in these texts and statements when they are approached as an intrinsic part of her artistic practice. As for example queer feminist theorist Juana María Rodríguez points out in her book *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (2014), from the perspective that Ibarra in her role as a burlesque artist often attains the position as an "attentive dominatrix", it is possible to consider Ibarra's negotiations with her audiences as one of the many layers of control that she explores within her performances.[20] Likewise, one may also consider Ibarra's act of blaming her audiences' lack of familiarity with "Chicano iconography, Queer Latinidad, or racialized gender"[21] in relation to older European traditions of burlesque performances. In the essay "All froth and bubble" published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, historian of theatre George

Speaight describes how burlesque, in its theatrical format in nineteenth-century England, depended on and took for granted that its audiences possessed a high degree of knowledge about topics and literary allusions in the pieces in order for the performances to have its intended effect.[22] By publishing "Stuck With You" *before* her enactment of the performance *FML*, an essay stating that the political implications of her works "are lost or ignored by most audiences" and that she "hope that the audience will not disappoint", Ibarra was clearly using its written content to bring a conflict between herself and her audiences into the realm of the performance.

F*CK MY LIFE

*F*ck My Life (FML)* (figure 5.2 and 5.3), written and performed by Xandra Ibarra, and directed by Evan Johnson, was a performance, first enacted at CounterPULSE in San Francisco in 2012 and during the following year for one night at The Wild Project in New York City.[23] Compared to many of Ibarra's previous performances as her burlesque persona La Chica Boom, this work integrated elements characteristic of a traditional theatre play. At CounterPULSE, *FML* was played on eight occasions before a sitting audience. The thirty-minute performance told the background story of La Chica Boom by including sequences from a number of the performances, or spictacles, that she had enacted during the last ten years. In addition, an audio file reproduced various sentences representative of various audience reactions that the La Chica Boom project had previously aroused, for example: "What the fuck?", "Do the sombrero dance!", "I am not drunk enough for this", "I can't believe I paid to see this shit", "Ay mamacita, mamacita!", "Is this performance art?", "When do you think this show is going to be over? I don't know what time is it?", "This is not queer, nothing about this is queer, I am so confused"[24]

In *FML*, this audio track that allegedly represented actual responses from audiences was constantly played as an additional soundtrack to Ibarra's replay of sequences from a number of different performances she had enacted as the alias La Chica Boom. The act of making the sitting audience listen to previous audience reactions while they were watching the performances, stressed her performances as contingent on their audiences.[25] At the end of *FML*, Ibarra declared her La Chica Boom project a failure due to its incompatible audiences and ended La Chica Boom's lifecycle as a burlesque persona by turning her into a giant cockroach, i.e. putting on a human-sized cockroach costume made out of fabric.

The textile cockroach costume that figured in *FML* has, since Ibarra's enactment of the performance, appeared in many of her other works. In her photographic series *Spic Ecdysis* (2014–2015, figure 5.4 and 5.5), for example, Ibarra is

Figure 5.2, Xandra Ibarra, *F*ck My Life (FML)*, 2012, live performance at counterPULSE, San Francisco. Documentation by Brian Buck. Courtesy Brian Buck.

Figure 5.3, Xandra Ibarra, *F*ck My Life (FML)*, 2012, live performance at counterPULSE, San Francisco. Documentation by Brian Buck. Courtesy Brian Buck.

Figure 5.4, Xandra Ibarra, *Carcass*, part of the photographic series *Spic Ecdysis*, 2014–2015, archival pigment print, 50.8 × 76.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 5.5, Xandra Ibarra, *Triptych* (one out of three photographs), all part of the photographic series *Spic Ecdysis*, 2014–2015, archival pigment print, 50.8 × 76.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

portrayed naked, wearing only panties (black or pink) and a pair of nipple-covers (black, pink or cockroach-shaped), while lying or sitting next to the costume as well as to outfits associative of her burlesque alias La Chica Boom. Or, in a number of exhibitions, Ibarra has presented the cockroach costume as a sculpture, enclosed in a vacuum-sealed bag from which the air from the costumed was extracted and then released every thirty minutes.[26]

In various ways, Ibarra's art emphasizes the symbolic weight of the cockroach as an emblem of racism, sameness, shedding of skin, and restricted agency. In US racist discourse, the cockroach, widely associated with abjection, disgust, and infestation, is used as a degrading slur describing individuals of Latin American descent.[27] As such, the insect has figured in the work of a number of Chicano/a/x cultural producers, such as in Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973) or in the play *Caca-Roaches Have No Friends* (1969) by queer performance artist Robert Legorreta (who later became a member of the Los Angeles-based Chicano punk and art collective Asco, active during the 1970s and 1980s) in the role of his drag alter ego Cyclona. In these works, the incorporation of the cockroach can be interpreted as reflective of how many Chicano/a/x artists have refused to make art aiming to construct respectable images of Mexican Americans in US racist discourse. As queer feminist American studies scholar Leticia Alvarado points out in the book *Abject Performances: Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production* (2018), many Chicana/o/x artists have deliberately rejected diversity politics' call for Mexican Americans to "produce uplifting subject positions", that defy and oppose the abjection that Mexican Americans are associated with in US racist discourse.[28] This rejection has been articulated in terms of a refusal to submit to pressures against those of Mexican descent to conform or assimilate into the dominant system of white American society as well as, on a larger scale, to expectations of persons of colour in Western societies to use their cultural or scholarly products as means to work for better futures.[29]

In the essay "Ecdysis: The Molting of a Cucarachica (2015)", published in the journal of feminist theory *Women & Performance* (2015), Ibarra asserts that her interest in the cockroach, apart from its signification as a symbol of an artistic refusal of assimilation or productivity, is also linked to its denotation of sameness and to failed attempts by an artist to reinvent herself. Even though the cockroach changes skin during adolescence, its new casting resembles the old one.[30] The symbolic weight of the cockroach in her works also materializes as associated with the insect's allegorical status in, and particularly in later interpretations of, the novel *Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*) (1915), by author Franz Kafka, where the protagonist wakes up one morning to find himself transformed into a monstrous vermin and, as a consequence, becomes increasingly isolated, degraded and unable to perform his work.[31] In *FML,* La Chica Boom's metamorphosis into a giant cockroach appear to suggest both the artist's identification with Chicana/o/x cultural producers' rejection of normative ideals of political

productivity, and her realization that regardless of her attempts to invent new modes of representation her work is, due to her brown body, predestined to be interpreted through a filter of racial signification.[32]

FAILURE AS REFUSAL OF SOCIAL NORMS

The scenography in *FML* consisted of objects derived from a bathroom, a black and white checked tile floor, a dirty white porcelain bathtub, a sink, and a hanger. Placed behind the bathtub, in the middle of the rear wall, was a cabaret sign that read: FUCK MY LIFE. A white porcelain toilet, with its seat raised, was positioned on the right side of the scene. Close behind the toilet stood a bathroom shelf-altarpiece, with lit candles, flowers, and on its very top a large photograph of the Mexican American actress Lupe Vélez. Vélez, a well-known Hollywood actress in the 1920–40s, committed suicide in 1944 by overdosing on Seconal sleeping pills. While Vélez was said to have been discovered dead lying on her bed, other rumours claimed that she was found drowned with her head in a toilet.[33]

In Hollywood cinema Vélez often played parts that evoked stereotypes of the heated temperament and fierce sexuality of Mexican and Latina women. Vélez is known to have accepted parts that were turned down by other Mexican American actresses because the roles were too stereotypically written.[34] La Chica Boom's worship of Vélez and metamorphosis into a cockroach are clear references to Ibarra's stated reluctance to make art that pushes for proper or respectable forms of representation.

In her Master's Thesis *Performing Excess: The Politics of Identity in La Chica Boom* (2019), curator and PhD candidate in American Studies and Ethnicity Ana C. Briz discusses the references to Vélez in Ibarra's *FML*. Briz argues for the political implications of Vélez's position in Hollywood cinema, particularly when compared to Dolores del Río, a Mexican actress who was successful in Hollywood cinema during the 1920s and 1930s.[35] Del Río came from a wealthy family; her parents were members of the Mexican aristocracy, and many of her family members were influential artists and filmmakers. Due to the fact that her skin was lighter than Vélez, del Río was offered a wider plenitude of roles. In addition, her bourgeois background made her less economically dependent on accepting to play characters she was not comfortable with. In her description of the relation between Vélez and del Río, Briz particularly stresses how del Río is well known for turning down a role in the American silent film *The Broken Wing* because she did not want to be stereotypically depicted as "cantinera" (bartender), while Vélez instead accepted the role.[36]

Comparable to Briz's suggestion that del Río's ability to make politically productive choices in the sense of declining roles with racist implications in Hol-

lywood cinema was an effect of her white privilege and bourgeois background, several other scholars and critics have also discussed how political productivity is portrayed as interlinked with privilege in Ibarra's oeuvre. Here, particular interest has been paid to how Ibarra's artistic practice challenges widespread notions of the productive potential of failures, as outlined by e.g. queer feminist visual culture theorist Jack Halberstam in the book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), by queer feminist performance theorist José Esteban Muñoz in his books *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999) and *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), or as illustrated by, for example, an issue of the queer feminist independent art journal *LLTR* with the theme *Practice More Failure* (2004).[37] Central to these scholarly works is a critique of established models for success and failure, and an embracement of failure as a refusal of social norms.[38] Many of those scholars, including queer feminist scholar Alpesh Kantilal Patel, queer feminist literature scholar Christina A. León and artist and visual studies scholar Tina Takemoto, who have discussed Ibarra's work in terms of quarrelling with conceptions of productive failures, have accentuated how Ibarra's works, by portraying failure as interlinked with restricted agency, hurt, agony, and hopelessness, poses a critique against optimistic embracement of failure.

In her article "Forms of Opacity: Roaches, Blood and Being Stuck in Ibarra's Corpus", published in the visual, media, literary, and performance arts journal *ASAP/Journal* in 2017, queer feminist literature scholar Christina A. León describes a number of works from Ibarra's oeuvre as implying "that translations of camp neither offer the immediate hope of aesthetic or social progress nor embody a queer failure that succeeds even as it fails".[39]

Similarly, in the essay "Queer Art, Queer Failure", published in *Art Journal* in 2016, Tina Takemoto discusses Ibarra's abandonment of her stage persona La Chica Boom as an example of the risks linked to a too optimistic approach to failure as a productive strategy in queer art. Based on a reflection of how Ibarra's artistic practice "attests to the precarity of queer failure and the psychic exhaustion that accompanies the embodiment of racial and sexual abjection, Takemoto asks: "How can we hold on to the utopian dimensions of queer possibility and failure without forgetting or acquiescing to the devaluation, marginalization, and exclusion of queer individuals in modern life?"[40] Takemoto goes on: "As we continue to explore the artistic potentialities of queer failure and learn new ways to fail better, we must also remain vigilant in reminding ourselves that it certainly does matter who and what is being done (or undone) when we endeavor to queer failure and fail as queers."[41] Or, in the article "La Chica Boom's Failed, Decolonial Spictacles", Alpesh Kantilal Patel states that *FML* neither leads to an "opportunity for new critical interventions" nor engages in the "creative critical work of imagining collective possibilities" (here he cites the scholarly work of queer feminist theorist Juana María Rodríguez).[42]

Clearly influenced by Ibarra's own identification of how themes of "being

stuck" are explored in her works, a number of scholars and writers have used the term "stuck" in their discussions of works from Ibarra's oeuvre. In "Forms of Opacity", León, writes: "Ibarra's work subsequent to *FML* amounts to a highly mediated pause in her career: instead of ignoring the power relations that recast the spictacles as an endurance performance that could no longer be endured, Ibarra has formalized a feeling of 'stuckness'."[43] Or, in relation to an interview with Ibarra, mentioned above, curator Alexis Wilkinson writes: "Xandra Ibarra's practice of endurance emerges as a generative strategy with the potential to locate pleasure and excess within states of fatigue, emptiness, and a condition of stuckness – or as Ibarra puts it, "fuckedness" – that Ibarra maintains comes with the burden of representation placed upon racialized artists."[44]

Following these previous scholarly discussions, it is interesting to note how Ibarra, in *FML*, stages a position as stuck that is portrayed as intimately bound to her own attachment to performance as a means for subversion and critique. In *FML*, Ibarra portrays her pain and anger as tied to the fact that the inabilities of her audiences to engage with her works in the right way causes the subversive potential of her performances to become lost or ignored. Here, she represents, like the works discussed in the previous chapters of this dissertation, an unhappy attachment to the notion of art as a means for political productivity and subversion. Even more noteworthy, however, is how Ibarra portrays this attachment to art as producing another, entwined, form of emotional bond: her unhappy attachment to her normative audiences.

Ibarra's representation of an emotionally draining union with her incompatible audiences stands in interestingly stark contrast to a sequence in Muñoz's book *Cruising Utopia* where he celebrates a politically radical artist's ability to emotionally and cognitively detach from, in Muñoz's words, her "normative audiences." Muñoz describes how artists can use failure as a deliberate strategy that refuses to concede to normative ideas of value.[45] By taking the performances of US-based artist Dynasty Handbag (Jibz Cameron) as an example, Muñoz states: "Dynasty Handbag's queer failure is not an aesthetic failure but, instead, a political refusal. It is a going off script, and the script in this instance is the mandate that makes queer and other minoritarian cultural performers work not for themselves but for distorted cultural hierarchy."[46]

In comparison to queer feminist embracement of *failure as a refusal* of normative patterns, Ibarra's performance, as has been highlighted by many scholars before, appears as portraying an artist's *failure to refuse* social norms. In the book *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed stresses precisely how neither acts that conserve normative systems, nor those that deviate from them, are simply available as political choices:

> It is important, for instance, that we avoid assuming that "deviation" is always on "the side" of the progressive. Indeed, if the compulsion to deviate from the straight line was to become "a line" in queer politics,

> then this itself could have a straightening effect. I have often wondered whether recent work on queer shame risks drawing such a line. I admire Eve Sedgwick's (2003) refusal of the discourse of queer pride. She suggests instead that shame is the primary queer affect because it embraces the "not"; it embraces its own negation from the sphere of ordinary culture. But I am not sure how it is possible to embrace the negative without turning it into a positive. To say "yes" to the "no" is still a "yes." To embrace or affirm the experience of shame, for instance, sounds very much like taking a pride in one's shame – a conversion of bad feeling into good feeling. [...] Such a "yes" is not available to everyone, even to all sexual deviants, given how we are shaped by the multiple histories of our arrival.[47]

Muñoz's exemplification of a politically productive failure – a saying yes to a no – in terms of an individual's (artist's) refusal to work for a "distorted cultural hierarchy", suggests an association between political productivity and the ability to detach from normative structures and audiences. Based on this framework of productivity and detachment, it is interesting to notice how Ibarra, in *FML*, portrayed an intense (if unwilled) attachment to her "normative" audiences. Conversely to making work for "herself", she declared her artistic project La Chica Boom as futile because her incompatible audiences did not understand it. This vulnerability was also tangible in her facial expressions during *FML*. While Ibarra enacted the corporal movements of her former La Chica Boom performances in *FML*, her face communicated frustration, anger, and despair, as if she could sense how her artistic gestures were continuously misinterpreted. At the very end of *FML*, Ibarra was crying as she left the stage with a suitcase.[48]

REPUDIATING POLITICAL PRODUCTIVITY

Most scholars and writers who discuss Ibarra's representation of her position as stuck, imply their own position as viewers of the works as located outside of the audiences that Ibarra, in her practice, accuses of entrapping her in the position of a racialized artist. In the article "Forms of Opacity", Christina A. León discusses Ibarra's stuckedness as linked to how white or hegemonic audiences (referred to as "they" by León) refuse to recognize minoritarian art as having a form. Likewise, in the essay "Queer Art, Queer Failure", Tina Takemoto discusses Ibarra's works as attesting to the precarity of queer failure and the psychic exhaustion that accompanies the embodiment of racial and sexual abjection before white audiences that keep "clamoring for more while failing to think critically about their own salacious consumption of Latinadad".[49] Or, in his discussion of *FML* in the essayistic review "La Chica Boom's Failed Decolonial Spictacles", Alpesh

Kantilal Patel discusses Ibarra's performance in terms of a "decolonial failure" on the basis of how some of its audience members (presumably not himself) made derisive comments in relation to its enactment.[50] Suggested by this binary distinction between scholars – able to critically engage with Ibarra's works, and their reception, from decolonial, queer, and feminist perspectives – and Ibarra's *other* incompatible and bigoted audiences (e.g. hegemonic, white, racist, and not familiar with Mexican or Chicana iconography) is an implication that the sense of "stuckedness" that Ibarra portrays would be resolved if only all other viewers of her works were as informed as the scholar/critic.

In contrast to this tendency amongst scholars to make a clear distinction between their own (more radical and critical) ability to engage with Ibarra's artistic practice and the inability to do so by her bigoted audiences, in what follows I will place myself in the firing line for the accusation and anger that Ibarra portrays in *FML*. By doing that, I explore my own engagement with her work, against her will and despite my efforts to do otherwise, as pressing her work into a narrative of political productivity and change. Also, by hearing Ibarra's accusation as one directed against me – or possibly to most viewers' engagements with her works – the position as stuck that Ibarra represents in her works is allowed to imply something more fundamental regarding the relation between politicized scholars and the work of racialized artists, more than solely a narrative of certain incompatible racist audiences.

In his book *Disturbing Attachments*, queer theorist Kadji Amin discusses an implicit and unstated assumption amongst politicized scholars concerning their own ability to somewhat autonomously choose to participate in just ways of relating and to refrain from dominating, racist, and coercive ones. Speaking specifically about strains of queer studies, Amin suggests that discernible in this assumption is an inverted ideal according to which queer scholars approach queer relations as "exceptionally just, oppositional, and distant from heterosexual and homonationalist modes of belonging."[51] Importantly, Amin stresses: "the reliance of certain models of queer relation on such assumptions of autonomous choice minimizes the nonrational, socially constituted, and historically contingent aspects of queer subjectivity."[52] By idealizing either one's own scholarly ability to critically unveil or oppose societal or institutional conventions, or attributing such traits onto others, the politicized scholar obscures what Ahmed discusses as the vigour of institutional habits; the messy, blurred, and habitual ties between *any* individual and the structure within which she resides.

In an interpretation of Ibarra's spictacle *I'm Your Puppet* (2007), included in the book *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures and Other Latina Longings* (2014), queer feminist theorist Juana María Rodríguez makes a thought-provoking attempt to stay with the performance's exploration of the complicated affective terrains between an individual and a structure, without necessarily arguing for its political utility. *I'm Your Puppet* is a burlesque performance in which La Chica Boom is humiliated and sexually assaulted by a butch lesbian border agent,

thus enacting, as Rodríguez points out, the non-consensual sexual sadism of border security.[53] In her reading of *I'm Your Puppet*, Rodríguez discusses Ibarra's eroticized scene of a racialized state authoritarian violation as a staged representation of a form of uncomfortable attachment, a type of intimate sexual fantasy that marks the individual who finds pleasure in such violent and repulsive scenes as an improper sexual subject of feminist politics. "As racialized queers", Rodríguez argues, "we are not supposed to be aroused by scenes of state subjugation, let alone reenact them. When we find perverse pleasure in these moments of submission or domination, we expose our own erotic attachments to power, to other scenes and stages that jumble together desire and disgust".[54]

Although Rodríguez continues by arguing that Ibarra's burlesque restaging of state domination – intended for a queer racialized audience – "might offer up something potentially productive, theater that might force us to contend with our unruly attachments to the erotics of state power"[55], Rodríguez also complicates this notion of productivity. By contemplating how close Ibarra's performance is to traditional heterosexual pornography that eroticizes the sexual domination of Latina migrants, such as a pornographic subscription website with the slogan "Where hot Latinas fuck or get deported!", Rodriguez makes a notable attempt to allow the productivity of Ibarra's work to remain uncertain.[56] "What does it mean", she asks, "for a woman, a queer woman, a queer woman of color, to take pleasure in pornography, including racially charged heterosexual porn? What might it mean for her to share this viewing pleasure with the men, presumably heterosexual white men, who constitute its intended audience?"[57]

Following Rodríguez's suggestion that Ibarra's *I'm Your Puppet* attempts to stage disturbing and shameful attachments to "the racialized erotics of dissymmetrical power relations", it is interesting to note how many works in Ibarra's oeuvre illuminate similar forms of politically dubious attachments: not only Ibarra's own but also those of her audiences. In *Performing Excess: The Politics of Identity in La Chica Boom*, Briz slightly complicates the binary propositions between Ibarra's "compatible" and "incompatible" audiences when she elaborates on how Ibarra has used "white audiences" as a term supposed to describe a certain kind of inability to engage with her works, rather than as one necessarily descriptive of white viewers:

> In an email conversation with Ibarra, she admitted to me that her experience as being ethnically and racially othered was not just at the hands of white spectators but as an overall effect of the state of current identity politics. When I prompted her regarding the title of an essay she published online in which she changed the original title from "Stuck with You" to "Stuck with This," she stated, "I changed the name because the first was before the FML show and the latter was updated with a different ending because it was post the FML show.. You then This, I suppose because I realized it wasn't just the white audience but

> raciality or the ways it's mapped onto my body. That's the thing I am stuck with por vida."[58]

Somewhat related, in an interview with curator Alexis Wilkinson, Ibarra states, in relation to her presentation of her cockroach costume as a sculptural installation, enclosed in a vacuum-sealed bag:

> The poetics of the definition of vacuum and how it so beautifully communicates the burden of representation for racialized artists – specifically that racialized signifiers are often overdetermined and emptied/exhausted/vacuumed of any specific meaning, and that racialized artists are "speaking for" this imagined fixed racial group. There's this idea that racialized artists are required to push for better and proper forms of representation and visibility. I am not interested in doing this. I am invested in examining the bond to these signifiers, how it feels to be the excess, how it feels stuck/the same, as opposed to change. [59]

Based on this assertion by Ibarra, that she is not interested in assuming the expected role as a racialized artist required to push for better and proper forms of representation and visibility, it is interesting to consider most scholarly approaches to her works. How are interpretations of Ibarra's works as challenging notions of productive failures (in terms of emphasizing a type of failure tied to minority experiences) or as critiques against normative interpretations of the works of racialized artists, such as those outlined by León, Takemoto, Patel, and myself, *not* reflective of what Ibarra terms as the burden of representation of racialized artists to "speak for" imagined fixed racial groups? Clearly, there is a certain kind of paradox rooted in my own as well as others' reading of Ibarra's representation of being stuck, as one that can – ultimately – be turned to good use and "push for change".

Despite my own as well as several others' analogous articulated attempts to interpret Ibarra's *FML* outside of narratives of political utility, our scholarly approaches emerge as somewhat claustrophobically repeating a narrative of political productivity, even when we attempt not to. By interpreting Ibarra's representations of failing and being stuck as "a resistance to the kind of gaze that desires mastery, simplicity, and knowability, and which all too often aligns with sexist and colonial desires" (León), as reminding viewers of the bleaker side of queer failure (Takemoto), as forms of decolonial work that accentuate endurance, strength, and persistence in the midst of failure (Patel), or as stressing how ideas of political productivity are tied to institutional habits and privilege (my own interpretation as outlined here and above), the scholar attends to Ibarra's representation of an exhausting sense of being stuck – only to suggest that she is not really that trapped. If Ibarra's works do indeed resist, challenge, remind, provide hope, or unveil privilege and habits, she does not, after all, appear all

that "stuck". Is it, then, Ibarra who refuses to acknowledge the subversive effects of her art on its viewers, or is it the viewers of her artworks who refuse to truly engage with her representations of the position as being stuck? Perhaps the problem here lies less in the argument that representations of being stuck can be understood as a means for change, and more in how such arguments are so dominant amongst politicized scholars' engagement with representations of structural discrimination? Against Ibarra's plea not to have her works interpreted as "pushing for change", the scholarly inability (including my own) to confront Ibarra's works outside a narrative of productivity took form as what feminist art historian Jane Blocker terms a "compulsive repetition". A "feeling of being caught in the middle of something vaguely oppressive", yet not being able to find the sufficient amount of ontological or nomological clarity to be able to confront it.[60]

INSTITUTIONAL HABITS

Since her enactment of *FML*, Ibarra has made numerous works and performances that underscore her position as stuck as an effect of structural connotations of race, rather than solely an outcome of the inability amongst some of her viewers (and not others). For example, in her live performance *Nude Laughing* (2014–2019), enacted, amongst other places, at Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, The Broad Museum in Los Angeles (2016), and the ExTeresa Arte Actual in Mexico City, Ibarra appeared to portray a form of metamorphosis in terms of a struggle (or, perhaps, a form of sexual intercourse) with white femininity. In this performance she walked, naked apart from a pair of beige breasts with built-in nipples and a pair of high-heeled shoes, through the spaces of various institutions (or, in an enactment of the performance in Puerto Rico, outdoors through public streets). While laughing hysterically she was dragging behind her a large nylon sack filled with "white women attributes" – e.g. blond wigs, furs, pearl necklaces, and ballet-shoes. The weight of the props it was packed with caused the nylon sack to attain an elongated shape reminiscent of, as Andy Campbell notices in his review of the work, a ball and chains.[61] After having endured boisterous laughter for about thirty minutes, Ibarra, clearly exhausted by the laughing, drew the nylon sack towards her and began to crawl into it until she was entirely covered by it. Lying down on the ground, she then began to press herself against and wrestle with the props in the sack, while making moaning sounds that were as much reminiscent of a battle as of masturbation. At the very end of the performance Ibarra, still lying down, released herself from the bag. Slowly, she got up on her feet and walked away from the audience, leaving behind her the nylon sack and the props that had slipped out of it.

At first glance this scene, in which Ibarra wrestles with objects associative of white femininity and then untangles herself and walks away from them,

could be interpreted as a form of emancipation. As she withdraws from the audience at the end of the performance, she also leaves the sack – again in Campbell's phrasing "her figurative ball and chains"[62] – behind her on the ground. However, as scholars and critics have noted before, the clear associations between the silky nylon sack and a cocoon arouse a set of associations that differ from those bound to emancipation.[63] The cocoon is a type of pupa consisting of a casing spun of silk. For insects, the cocoon functions as a life stage in which the insect transforms from an immature to a mature stage. Before the stage as cocoon, the insect is a larva, and after the cocoon stage, the insect has reached full (sexual) maturity.[64] Consequently, with an interpretation of Ibarra's performance where the nylon sack is read as symbolic of a cocoon, Ibarra, regardless of her ability to walk away from the sack, is still eternally reformed (or, to use Anne Anlin Cheng's phrasing "constituted")[65] by the phase in which she was enclosed in its nylon fabric.

Time and time again, both through her works and through the writing that accompanies it, Ibarra emphasizes her interest in exploring the exhaustion and frustration – as a woman artist of colour – of not being able to escape the structural connotations of race. By allowing the portrayed exhaustion and anger in Ibarra's *Nude Laughing* to become a reminder of one's own scholarly implications to interpret cultural representations of structural discrimination as "happy objects"; as means for productivity and change, Ibarra's work becomes able to stress the claustrophobic sense of being entrapped in a historical moment (the paradox of such an approach to her work is, perhaps, a central part of its point). Scholars who attempt to crawl out of an interpretive position that violently entraps Ibarra's works in racial connotations, risk emptying her works of their meaning. By presenting, in Ahmed's words, "new tricks" that may release Ibarra's works from the discriminatory structures that lock them into a limited set of sociopolitical narratives, the scholar shifts focus from Ibarra's representation of hopelessness and exhaustion to narratives of possibilities and emancipation. Perhaps, as Ahmed suggests in the quotation that opened this chapter, sometimes there is a point in attending to representations and explorations of the vigour of institutional habits *without* presenting solutions as to how to change those habits. However, as stressed above, scholarly attempts to linger with Ibarra's representations of being stuck are also, paradoxically, bound to participate in the logic that entraps her works as representations of sociopolitical queries.

In *Becoming Past*, feminist art historian Jane Blocker discusses a common tendency amongst art historians to look at art "as an object to which the art historian brings a certain amount of expertise and upon which she exercises certain ways of knowing, but at the same time something that does not bear upon her own practice". In contrast to this approach, Blocker presents an attempt to attend to artworks as objects that implicate and interrogate the critic or art historian.[66] Based on this suggestion by Blocker, one may, instead of searching

for the right scholarly approach to Ibarra's works, consider her practice as presenting a mirror where the viewer is able to recognize her own inabilities, her own position as constructed by a social system and, as such, her own inability to step outside the coded system where visual representations are tied to the social categorization of e.g. race, class, gender, or sexuality. To acknowledge such an inability to untangle herself from social structures, and from the compulsory repetition that these embed, is not to be conflated as a deterministic argument that there is no hope, or no possibilities of change. Nor is such a stance to be interpreted as if there is no difference between those of Ibarra's viewers who make nuanced and informed readings of her works and those of her audiences that are ignorant to the iconography of her works or approach her performances in downright racist terms. Rather, it is a way of acknowledging the vigour of institutional habits, and how these habits somewhat claustrophobically cause the scholar to participate in representational systems that limit the ability to engage with and draw out meaning from artworks.

Xandra Ibarra's artistic practice put pressure on the meanings and values that are attributed to widespread and taken-for-granted notions of political productivity. According to Ahmed, institutional habits function to keep things in place by allowing particular bodies and visual expressions to move or circulate more freely than others. In this chapter, I have turned to Ibarra's performance *FML* in order to try to think about how ostensibly positive feelings about visual art, including the anticipation and value that we attribute to art as a means for political protest or productivity, are a result of (as well as construe weightier attachments to) institutional habits. From such a perspective, one ought to consider how the hopefulness about art's ability to criticize, resist, and challenge societal and institutional habits is an institutional habit in itself. Attachments describe the affective ties that are generated between an individual and others (things, ideas, spaces, or individuals) due to her emotional investments. These emotional bonds are not always something that one chooses or wants. Instead, they describe a particular kind of susceptibility that emerges in relation to that which evokes one's affections.

Notes

1. Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", *Feminist Theory,* 8/2 (08// 2007), 149–68, pp. 164–65.
2. Ibid., p. 165.
3. Ibid., pp. 154 and 156 and Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects", in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010), 29–51, p. 29.
4. My application of "institutional habits" is, in part, inspired by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's discussions of how fields are organized around various forms of habitus, particularly as he discusses cultural fields in his books *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) and *The Love of Art* (1991). Bourdieu describes cultural fields in terms of social fields where individuals negotiate (or engage in conflicts with each other about) its economic or symbolic values. Hence, in relation to the field of art, rather than being defined by an agreement on what art is, or how it ought to be valued or interpreted, a field, according to Bourdieu, is characterized by ongoing disputes about its inherent dominant symbolic (and economic) ideals. What does distinguish a field is instead, Bourdieu argues, a shared *interest* in these debates. In terms of an artistic field this interest is evident through a collective belief that art matters (albeit its members might differ in their opinions on *what* kind of art matters), along with an interest in engaging in debates about how art ought to be defined or attributed value and meaning. Often, Bourdieu argues, individuals are allowed entrance to the realm of a field (by the others in the field) if they meet the criteria of attaining the will to invest in these kinds of debates or conflicts. While my definition of the art field is inspired by Bourdieu's conceptualization of how cultural fields are organized around *interest*, my application of this idea is only loosely affiliated with his theories. In his book *The Love of Art*, for example, Bourdieu often refers to "interest" in terms of individuals' economic investments. In my application of his idea that fields take shape through their participants' interest, I attempt to think about how interest also can be translated into attachments; into affective investments in terms of the hope, value, and meaning that an individual attributes to art, and how these investments, in turn, emotionally attach the individual to the field. See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984) and Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Darbel, and Dominique Schnapper, *The Love of*

Art: European Art Museums and Their Public (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

5. See for example: Xandra Ibarra, "Stuck with You", *dancersgroup, https://dancersgroup.org/2012/09/speak- stuck-with-you/* (retrieved December 19, 2021).
6. https://www.xandraibarra.com/about/ (retrieved December 17, 2021).
7. See: Amelia Jones, *In between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (London: Routledge, 2021), Alpesh Kantilal Patel, "La Chica Boom's Failed, Decolonial Spictacles", *E-misférica,* 11/1 (2014), and Juana María Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (New York: New York University Press, 2014). Works by Ibarra have been discussed by numerous other scholars as well, for example: Leticia Alvarado, *Abject Performances – Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production* (Duke University Press, 2018), Ren Ellis Neyra, *The Cry of the Senses: Listening to Latinx and Caribbean Poetics* (Duke University Press, 2020) and A. León, Christina, "Forms of Opacity: Roaches, Blood, and Being Stuck in Xandra Ibarra's Corpus", *ASAP/Journal, 2.2* (2017), 369–94.
8. See for example: Tina Takemoto, "Queer Art / Queer Failure", *Art Journal*, 75:1 (May, 2016), Bernadine Hernandez, "The Next Stage: The Legacy of Latinx Performance in LA Lives On", *ARTnews* (December, 2018), Tricia Tongco, "Artist's 'Nude Laughing' Exposes More Than Skin", *Huffington Post* (April 8, 2016), Rosana Cabán, "We Need to Move Toward Conceptual and Accessible Sound Art", *Hyperallergic*, December 14, 2021.
9. Andy Campbell, "The Year in Performance", *Artforum* (December, 2016). For a detailed description of the Recent Work Award on *QUEER|ART*'s website see: *https://www.queer-art.org/xandra-ibarra* (retrieved December 17, 2021).
10. For more information, see the websites of *CARA* (*http://caracmc.org/*, retrieved December 19, 2021) and *INCITE!* (*https://incite-national.org/history/*, retrieved December 19, 2021). Ibarra mentions her participation in these organizations on her website (*http://www.xandraibarra.com/about/*, retrieved December 19, 2021).
11. In the introduction to the anthology *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (1993), queer performance theorist Moe Meyer refers to camp as a parallel way of seeing and consuming culture, where no normalized or dominant models for value judgements apply any longer. When applied in queer culture, Meyer argues, the concept of camp is often used to define acts of interpreting

where, either deliberately or unknowingly, that which have been degraded by heteronormative standards becomes revalued. In the sense of a queer methodology, he adds, it may also refer to the performance of applying frameworks to cultural objects that differ from the values or meanings these are usually interpreted through by heteronormative society. Moe Meyer, *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (London: Routledge, 1993). For more information about Xandra Ibarra's application of the term "spictacles", see: *http://www.xandraibarra.com/spictacles/* (retrieved October 6, 2020).

12. John D. Jump, *Burlesque* (The Critical Idiom 22; London: Methuen, 1972).
13. Maggie M. Werner, "Deploying Delivery as Critical Method: Neo-Burlesque's Embodied Rhetoric", *Rhetoric Review,* 36/1 (01//Jan-Mar2017 2017), 44–59.
14. The term Mexiphobia describes fear or dislike of persons of Mexican descent.
15. As I elaborated on in the introductory chapter as well as in chapter one, Chicana is a self-selected political identity that most often applies to those of Mexican American descent who were born and raised in the US.
16. See for example: *https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=spic* (retrieved December 19, 2021).
17. Xandra Ibarra, "Speak: Stuck with You", *In Dance* (https://dancersgroup.org/2012/09/speak-stuck-with-you/, 2012).
18. Ibid. See also: Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race* (Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press, 2000).
19. See for example: Ibarra, "Speak: Stuck with You", Xandra Ibarra, "Ecdysis: The Molting of a Cucarachica (2015)", *Women & Performance,* 25/3 (2015), Xandra Ibarra, "It's A Thing", *OpenSpace/SF MOMA*, available at: https://openspace.sfmoma.org/2018/04/its-a-thing/ (retrieved December 27, 2021), or Alexis Wilkinson, "Xandra Ibarra: Endurance and Excess", *Art Papers Magazine,* 43 /1 (Spring/Summer 2019).
20. Note, however, that Rodríguez discusses Ibarra's position as dominatrix in relation to the audience of her performances from rather different perspectives than I do here. Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, p. 151.
21. Emmaly Wiederholt, "An Interview with Seth Eisen and Xandra Ibarra", *Stance on Dance,* September 24, 2012, http://stanceondance.com/2012/09/24/an-interview-with-seth-eisen-and-xandra-ibarra/ (retrieved December 27, 2021).

22. George Speaight, "All Froth and Bubble", *The Times Literary Supplement,* October 1, 1976, 1233 (available at: *https://archive.org/details/TheTimesLiterarySupplement1976UKEnglish/Oct%2001%201976%2C%20The%20T imes%20Literary%20Supplement%2C%20%233890%2C%20UK%20%28en%29/page/n3/mode/2up* (retrieved December 21, 2021).
23. I did not participate in the live enactment of this performance. My analysis of *FML* builds on photographic documentation of the work as it was enacted at CounterPULSE in San Francisco, as well as on written and verbal descriptions of the work by Ibarra herself (during a visit to Oakland, I met Ibarra on October 27, 2017, in order to discuss her artistic practice and specific works, including *FML*, with her) as well as by other scholars and writers who attended the performance during its live enactment.
24. Ángeles Donoso Macaya, "Fuck My Life (FML) por Xandra Ibarra, E-MISFÉRICA 11.1, Decolonial Gesture, 2014. http://archive.hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/emisferica-111-decolonial-gesture/donoso (retrieved December 27, 2021). Donoso Macaya's rendering of Ibarra's performance is written in Spanish. Therefore, this version of the words and phrases heard from the audio file during Ibarra's FML is based on Donoso Macaya's article and, as such, translated from Spanish to English.
25. Ibarra's act of declaring La Chica Boom unsuccessful, and ultimately dead, in *FML* also formulated an accusation against the sitting audience. Because she had already decided that her artistic project was futile, she implicitly suggested that the present viewers most likely were as unable to understand her performances as her previous audiences had been.
26. The costume was presented in this form of a sculptural installation in, for example, Xandra Ibarra's solo exhibition *Forever Sidepiece* presented at Knockdown Center in Queens in 2019, curated by Alexis Wilkinson.
27. Alvarado, *Abject Performances – Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production*, p. 163.
28. Ibid., p. 10.
29. Ian Haney López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 1–3.
30. Ibarra, "Ecdysis: The Molting of a Cucarachica (2015)".
31. Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* (Independently Published, 2018).
32. These descriptions partly draw on Ibarra's discussion of the

series in Ibarra, "Ecdysis: The Molting of a Cucarachica (2015)".

33. Barbara Schroeder, "'Mexican Spitfire' Mystery Solved after 7 Decades!" (Huffington Post, 2013).
34. Ana Cristina Briz, "Performing Excess: The Politics of Identity in La Chica Boom" (USC (University of Southern California), 2019), p. 41. See also: Michelle Vogel and Kevin Brownlow, *Lupe Vélez: The Life and Career of Hollywood's "Mexican Spitfire"* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012).
35. Briz, "Performing Excess: The Politics of Identity in La Chica Boom", pp. 40–41.
36. Ibid., p. 41. For details of the life and career of Dolores del Río see also: Alicia Arrizón, *Latina Performance: Traversing the Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 35–38.
37. J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2011), José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). *LLTR* is a feminist genderqueer artist collective "dedicated to highlighting the work of radical communities whose goals are sustainable change, queer pleasure, and critical feminist productivity" (*http://lttr.org/about-lttr*, retrieved December 21, 2021). Between 2002 and 2006, the collective released five issues of the independent art journal *LTTR*, of which *Practice More Failure* was its third issue. See: *Practice More Failure*, *LTTR*, no. 3 (2004), *http://lttr.org/journal/3* (retrieved December 21, 2021).
38. See: Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, p. 89. Here, Halberstam builds on Muñoz's conceptualization of failure as a *utopian* refusal of social norms in *Cruising Utopia*.
39. León, "Forms of Opacity: Roaches, Blood, and Being Stuck in Xandra Ibarra's Corpus", p. 371.
40. Tina Takemoto, "Queer Art / Queer Failure", *Art Journal,* 75/1 (04/01/ 2016), p. 87.
41. Ibid., p. 88.
42. Kantilal Patel, "La Chica Boom's Failed, Decolonial Spictacles".
43. León, "Forms of Opacity: Roaches, Blood, and Being Stuck in Xandra Ibarra's Corpus", p. 373.
44. Wilkinson, "Xandra Ibarra: Endurance and Excess", p. 28.
45. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, p. 173.
46. Ibid., p. 177.
47. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 174–75.

48. Ángeles Donoso Macaya, "Fuck My Life (Fml) Por Xandra Ibarra", *E-misférica* (11.1, 2014).
49. Takemoto, "Queer Art / Queer Failure", p. 88.
50. Kantilal Patel, "La Chica Boom's Failed, Decolonial Spictacles".
51. Kadji Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 13.
52. Ibid.
53. Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, p. 153.
54. Ibid., p. 152.
55. Ibid., p. 153.
56. Ibid., p. 154.
57. Ibid., p. 159.
58. Briz, "Performing Excess: The Politics of identity in La Chica Boom", p. 47.
59. Wilkinson, "Xandra Ibarra: Endurance and Excess", p. 29.
60. Jane Blocker, *Becoming Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 65.
61. Andy Campbell, "The Year in Performance", *Artforum,* December (2016).
62. Ibid.
63. See for example: Hannah Manshel, "Breathing Material: Cassils and Xandra Ibarra in Los Angeles 2 April 2016, the Broad, Los Angeles", *Women & Performance,* 27/1 (03// 2017), pp. 137–41.
64. R. King, P. Mulligan, & W. Stansfield (2013). "Cocoon", *A Dictionary of Genetics*, Oxford University Press, https://www-oxfordreference-com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/10.1093/acref/9780199766444.001.0001/acref- 9780199766444-e-127 (retrieved December 23, 2021), Donald Joyce Borror, Charles A. Triplehorn, and Dwight M. De Long, *An Introduction to the Study of Insects* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1989), and "Insect." *World Encyclopedia*, Oxford Reference, https://www-oxfordreference- com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/view/10.1093/acref/9780199546091.001.0001/acref-9780199546091-e-5776 (retrieved December 23, 2021).
65. Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*, p. 25.
66. Blocker, *Becoming Past*, p. 20.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has considered hope and belief in the political productivity of visual art in terms of an emotional attachment: an anticipatory emotional bond to a set of promises concerning art's abilities. Based on Sara Ahmed's theories concerning what emotions *do*, I have discussed the effects that such scholarly optimism about art's political efficiency may have on how scholars endow representations of structural discrimination with value and meaning. Throughout the chapters of this study, I have followed artworks that portray negative consequences that trail behind the act of attributing hopes of social or political change to art. I have used these representations as means to think with and against a strain of US-based feminist and queer feminist scholarly work that, since the early 1990s, has ascribed visual art and performance the potential to produce subversive or reparative effects in relation to discriminatory social norms. When one turns to cultural products in search of their potential political utility, I have argued, one risks using a framework where representations of specific kinds of weaknesses, failures, or institutional attachments, become associated with scholarly discomfort or embarrassment. Another, entwined problem with an orientation toward art as "good" (in terms of offering transformation or repair) is, I have suggested, that such an approach tends to indicate a simplified notion of an artwork's, its producer's, or, perhaps, even more so the interpreter's own, ability to remain cognitively detached from discriminatory structures.

In the book *Wrappings: Essays on Feminism* (1984), artist, curator, and writer Harmony Hammond defines feminist art as art *that reflects a political consciousness of what it means to be a woman in patriarchal culture*.[1] Hammond wrote this definition in the mid 1980s. Today, such attempts to define feminism,

queerness, or critical race perspectives as intrinsic or essential qualities of works of art are rather outdated. Since then, the focus on the political implications of an artwork has changed to placing greater emphasis on interpretation: there is no definite or true interpretation of an artwork; instead the situatedness of its viewers (identifications and sociohistorical, geographical and cultural context) affects the meanings they attribute to it. As queer feminist art historian Amelia Jones emphasizes in her recent book *In Between Subjects* (2021): "I claim the performances I examine to have queer effects – but of course only/always in relation to my experience and interpretation".[2] Notwithstanding this alteration from work to spectator, there is something about Hammond's definition of feminist art that holds meaning for one of the central arguments that I have tried to articulate throughout this dissertation. Hammond's definition of politicized art as art that *reflects* a political consciousness of what it means to be a subject in a discriminatory structure, changes the focus from what art might do to what art might represent. Such an approach acknowledges the value of representations of structural discrimination, even when such representations do not "subvert", "challenge", or "refuse" biased systems for value, nor lead to social change or to better futures. Sometimes, as queer theorist Heather Love points out in the book *Feeling Backward* (2009), cultural representations describe what it is like to experience structural discrimination, "which at times can simply mean living with injury – not fixing it".[3] Sometimes representations may merely portray what it is like for a subject to reside inside a homophobic patriarchal, racist, or ableist structure or field. Such portrayals may include accounts of structural attachments that are unradical, uncool, and neither subversive nor emotionally restorative. To reject such representations as politically backwards or uninteresting involves the risk of fabricating a simplified preconception of resistance that (albeit involuntarily) directs attention away from the gravity of structural violence and liability.

This thesis has stressed the importance of lingering with representations of politicized subjects' structural vulnerabilities or dependencies without either overlooking or criticizing such representations as unfortunate subjective flaws, or quickly attempting to ascribe political efficiency to them. As Love points out, "it may be necessary to check the impulse" to turn representations to "good use in order to see them at all".[4] Such an approach includes, I have argued, carefully examining portrayals of politicized artists' attachments to influential art institutions, normative art audiences, authorial figures, or biased models for value and meaning, even when it is difficult to imagine how such attachments can be put to good use for feminist or queer feminist politics.

INSTITUTIONAL PROMISES ABOUT CRITICAL DETACHMENT

This thesis has paid particular attention to emotions as performative. It has done this from two interrelated perspectives, both influenced by the theories of Sara Ahmed. Firstly, this study has accentuated how emotions have effects: how one's feelings (including anticipatory conditions such as hope) orient one to (art) objects in certain ways. Secondly, it has studied how the way one feels about an (art) object, however immediately one's own feelings about it surface, are a result of how similar objects have been associated with feelings in the past. The act of associating visual art with promises of political productivity is an outcome of longer genealogies where visual art has been attributed traits of progression, emancipation, and political protest. Rather than providing clear answers or directions this study, by offering an exploration of the darker affective terrains surrounding the act of turning to art as a means for subversion, productivity, and repair, has considered how established preconceptions about the potential of artworks to be politically productive might involve limitations and problems. Based on how Laura Aguilar in her photographic series *Don't Tell Her Art Can't Hurt* (1993) addresses how objects of hope can become the source of emotional hurt, chapter one, "Art Hurts", stresses how attachments to art's potential political utility produces a range of additional, often unwilled, attachments. Such attachments include emotional ties to incompatible audiences or to normative or biased models for interpretation or artistic value, but also to the very structures of belief by which notions of art or artists as linked to political productivity are offered in the first place.

Hope and optimism are often, rather than attributed status as emotions, referred to as anticipatory affective structures or conditions.[5] As such, they are closely related to Ahmed's application of the term "happiness". Beyond solely engaging with happiness as a joyful pleasurable emotion, Ahmed studies happiness as a promise that orients individuals in certain directions and that works to underpin social norms and social goods.[6] Thus, the happiness that Ahmed refers to is more accurately defined as an orientation toward something as being good, than as an actual experience of good feelings. "If we arrive at objects with an expectation of how we will be affected by them", Ahmed proposes, "then this affects how they affect us, even in the moment they fail to live up to our expectations".[7] Furthermore, when certain objects become "happy" for us, Ahmed argues, we do not solely become directed toward an object, "but to "whatever" is around that object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival".[8]

Chapter two, "Promises of Detachment", discusses T.J. Dedeaux Norris's video work *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* (2010–2012). This work represents an art student's futile attempts to use her art as a means for resistance and critical detachment from biases at Yale School of Art, the influential art school in which she is enrolled. Every time the art student fails to embody a

certain tradition of artistic resistance to discriminatory institutional structures, such as institutional critique or feminist parodic appropriations, she turns to a new established position of artistic resistance, as if her hope could be realized if she only turns to other and better role models. Queer theorist Lauren Berlant argues that we tend to "split off" the promises we attribute to an object we are emotionally attached to as if these promises were autonomous from the trade-offs that we endure as the price of our attachments. Drawing on Berlant's discussion, the chapter discusses how *Yale School of Art (Semesters 1–4)* portrays the art student character as "splitting off" her hope about the possibilities of using art as a means for political productivity, from the trade-offs she endures at the art school. In all the videos included in their work, Dedeaux-Norris gestures to specific canonized oeuvres representative of particular positions of institutional resistance, many of whom, just like themselves, have graduated from Yale. By highlighting how the notion of the artist as a figure that opposes social and institutional proceedings is a historical construct supported and reproduced by the very art school/institution that the art student attempts to critically detach from, Dedeaux-Norris's work depicts, I argue, a suffocating sense of an art student that finds herself caught in the conventions and habits by which the anticipation of fine art as a means for political protest is offered.

Chapter three, "I Am Not Going to Get Insulted", elaborates further on the position as caught in conventions and habits by suggesting that it can become the source of abjection, self-blame, and embarrassment for politicized artists. The chapter studies three paintings by Sands Murray-Wassink, *I Am The Measure Of My Own Success* (2010), *Stop Worrying About If You Are Making History* (circa 2014), and *I Am Not Going To Get Insulted* (2015), that include painted sentences reminiscent of self-help mantras. It argues that Murray-Wassink's painted messages portray a politicized artist – critical of art field hierarchies – who experiences an inner struggle with abjection and self-blame as he finds himself longing to become recognized and included by authorial figures in the art establishment. By presenting encouraging forms of self-talk these paintings appear to represent the inner dialogue of an artist who attempts to undo his own vulnerabilities in order to remain emotionally detached from art field biases. Heather Love suggests that the widespread emphasis on pride and resistance in queer activism and theory risks causing feelings of shame, isolation, and self-hatred in relation to same-sex desire, to become a source of shame in itself. "The embarrassment of owning such feelings", Love argues, "out of place as they are in a movement that takes pride as its watchword, is acute".[9] While articulating the vast difference between the situation of gays and lesbians in homophobic societies to that of politicized artists in normative or biased art fields, the chapter makes use of Love's argument in order to explore Murray-Wassink's paintings as implying that certain forms of structural susceptibility between a politicized artist and the art establishment are associated with a sense of unease and political backwardness.

SCHOLARLY ATTACHMENTS TO ART AS A MEANS FOR POLITICAL UTILITY

Chapter four, "Pathetic Obsessions", adds an additional perspective to the arguments outlined in the previous chapters. The chapter suggests that a politicized artist's unradical or politically dubious attachments to biased hierarchies in art establishments can become a source of embarrassment and abjection not only for the artist herself but also for politicized scholars who engage with representations of such attachments. It studies the drawing *The Map* (2010) and the performance *Mr MEESE UND DIE LIEDER AUS DEM HERZEN #3* (2011), where Jenny Grönvall represents her own attachment to and envy of a celebrated male artist that ignores her efforts to contact him. The chapter proposes that representations of certain kinds of attachments – such as a white woman artist's envy of or longing to be recognized by a renowned white male artist – becomes associated with political backwardness or scholarly embarrassment when approached by feminist theories founded on art as a means for political utility and subversion. In her essay "Tiny Anguishes: Reflections on Nagging, Scholastic Embarrassment, and Feminist Art History" (1994), feminist art historian Irit Rogoff discusses how feminist art historians tend to acknowledge visual representations of particular types of vulnerabilities or dependencies as politically significant, while discarding others as vain, narcissistic, embarrassing or uninteresting. Influenced by Rogoff's essay, as well as by queer feminist theorist Sianne Ngai's contemplation of feminist envy in the book *Ugly Feelings* (2005), the chapter makes use of Grönvall's portrayal of attachment and envy in order to explore the importance for politicized scholarships of constructing chronicles that abundantly acknowledge the often complex and contradictory positions of (feminist and queer feminist) artists vis-à-vis the fields in which they operate.[10]

Chapter five, "Being Stuck", provides additional perspectives on how scholarly attachments to visual art as a means for challenging societal, institutional, or representational discriminatory patterns risk privileging certain kinds of artistic expressions and subjective positions, at the cost of others. The chapter turns to the performance *FML* (2012) by Xandra Ibarra where Ibarra portrays herself as unhappily "stuck" with her incompatible audiences. *FML* explores how the works by racialized artists are often overdetermined by narratives of political productivity which in turn causes their works to become emptied of all other possible signification. In the article "A Phenomenology of Whiteness" (2007), Sara Ahmed argues that the widespread tendency to quickly suggest how things can be otherwise when one is confronted with accounts of structural discrimination, risks blurring how defiance is sometimes out of reach. Based on Ahmed's argument, the chapter elaborates on how Ibarra in *FML* stresses how viewers' attribution of political productivity to her works becomes a burden that continuously exhausts the ability of her works to explore the vigour of structural discrimination.[11]

In addition to this, the chapter also discusses how *FML* suggests that certain traits associated with political productivity – such as emotional detachment from normative values or meanings, refusals to participate in biased representational systems, or the ability to embrace negative feelings and experiences and turn them to good use – is interlinked with certain subject positions that are often supported by various kinds of privileges or institutional habits. The chapter does not provide novel or better tactics by which to approach representations of structural discrimination. Instead, it makes use of Ibarra's *FML* in order to stress this dissertation as – in itself – founded on an inconsistent hope that its explorations will provide an impetus for politicized visual scholars to consider the habits and customs that are rooted in their orientation to art as a social good. Scholarly strategies of lingering with pain and positions of being stuck without promising change – such as the one presented in this thesis – are also connected to an anticipation of political productivity and change. That is, a hope that lingering with pain might facilitate the capacity to stay more open and allow one to notice the vigour of what it means to reside within a structure, which in turn will provide feminist and queer feminist politics with a less ideal yet more trustworthy framework from which to conceptualize the complex relation between individuals and structures.

In his book *Disturbing Attachments*, queer theorist Kadji Amin illuminates a tendency amongst politicized scholars to implicitly pose their own scholarly practice as able to refrain from dominating, racist, or coercive ways of relating. Amin importantly notices that any such scholarly approach (Amin specifically discusses queer subjectivity and queer relations) "minimizes the nonrational, socially constituted, and historically contingent aspects" of subjectivity, as well as promotes the politicized subject as "exceptionally just, oppositional, and distant from" normative or destructive modes of belonging or relating to others.[12] Inspired by Amin I, instead of ignoring or defending the paradoxes rooted in my own scholarly approach or attempting to find still *better* and less contradictory ways of approaching representations of structural discrimination, have tried to stay with these central problems as additional representations of the messy entanglements between individual and structure. Feminist aesthetics and literary theorist Rita Felski, who has provided an important problematization of idealizations of scholars' critical ability to "dig deep" or "unveil" structural patterns by which others are captured, addresses a similar contradiction in her book *The Limits of Critique*. When Felski describes how the thrust of her project changed as she wrote it, she asserts:

> I write this book, moreover, with at least one foot inside the intellectual formation of critique, as someone who has over the years deployed quite a few of its gambits. My hope is to steer clear of the hectoring tone of the convert, the sermonizing of the redeemed sinner with a

> zealous glint in her eye. The critique of critique only draws us further into a suspicious mind-set, as we find ourselves caught in an endless regress of skeptical questioning.[13]

Like Felski's exploration of the intellectual formation of critique, this dissertation is written with "at least one foot inside" of structures of belief that ascribe hope and political productivity to visual art. Rather than attempting to avoid uneasy, contradictory, or repellant intellectual positions, I have attempted to let myself sink into the muddy depth of such locations. Although these murky sites have prevented me from attaining a sense of being able to see or deconstruct patterns from a distance, they have provided me with an ability to explore the disorderly and confusing ties between individual and structure – not only in the works by others – but also as rooted in my own scholarly tactics.

To stress hope as situated is not, I would like to accentuate, to deterministically argue that all attempts to imagine better futures are futile. To articulate hopes – in the face of discrimination – about, for example, less homophobic, racist or sexist futures, is a form of optimism that is often necessary for change, even survival. That said, the arguments outlined in this study strive to emphasize how hope is an effect of the historical and social settings in which it is articulated.

During the last few decades, many feminist and queer feminist scholarly works, including works published in fields other than art history, performance and visual studies, have used fine art and performance as objects of their study. This dissertation has provided an impetus to think carefully about the habitual in acts of attributing art with traits of radicality, subversion and repair. By arguing that traits of political utility often materialize as such because these are buttressed by various social and institutional support, this study has emphasized the historical ideals about fine art and subjectivity that are repeated when scholars attribute art with traits of political utility or emancipation. Throughout these chapters, I have argued that politicized scholars, by (over-) emphasizing traits of radicality, opposition, or emotional detachment in artworks, risk disregarding qualities of the works whose political utility is more unclear or doubtful. Needless to say, all interpretations of artworks are driven by assumptions or interests that accentuate particular aspects and meanings in the work and overlook others. Hence, my aim has not been to promote more objective or emotionally detached ways to approach artworks, or to argue that scholars ought to let go of their hopes in art's abilities. Rather than criticizing theories that approach visual art as a means for political productivity, this exploration has attempted to expand such dispositions by attending to the darker and painful domains that emerge in the wake of anticipatory attachments to art's subversive or reparative effects.

Notes

1. Harmony Hammond, *Wrappings: Essays on Feminism, Art and the Martial Arts* (New York City: TSL Press (Time and Space Limited Press), 1984), p. 99. I thank Sands Murray-Wassink for making me aware of Hammond's definition of feminist art by including it in his work *Process Event #2: RELATIONSHIPS. Feminist Legacies, Queer Intimacies* (epistolary exchange with curator Aimar Arriola, 2020–2021).
2. Amelia Jones, *In between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. xvi.
3. Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 4.
4. Ibid.
5. See for example: José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 3.
6. Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects", in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010), 29–51.
7. Ibid., p. 41.
8. Ibid., p. 33.
9. Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, p. 4.
10. Irit Rogoff, "Tiny Anguishes: Reflections on Nagging, Scholastic Embarrassment, and Feminist Art History", *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies,* 4/3 (1992), 38+, and Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univer- sity Press, 2005).
11. Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness", *Feminist Theory,* 8/2 (08// 2007), 149–68, pp. 164–65.
12. Kadji Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 13.
13. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 9.

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4.1 Photograph from Jenny Grönvall's performance *Peggy-Sue Slide Show # II*, enacted as part of Friction International Performance Art Festival, Uppsala, 2008. Photographer: Monika Melin. Courtesy of the artist

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