

*STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE IN
POST-FORDISM: A FEMINIST
PERFORMANCE PERSPECTIVE*

Over-identification with Benign Evil

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Abstract:

The central concern of this practice-based research project is how to create resistance from a feminist perspective by exploring and developing strategies in performance art. This resistance is aimed at the current economic and political conditions of post-Fordist production, in which an increased precarity of the workforce is accompanied by a shrinking autonomous political sphere and regressive gender politics, led by 'sexual decoys' (Eisenstein, 2007). In my practice, I perform and record political speeches which I circulate online; I also hold live talks and presentations where I introduce utopian performance improving technologies that replace the physical female body with a digital one. In both performance formats, live or online, the role of the performing female body is central to my investigation. According to J.K. Gibson-Graham post-Fordism is characterised by an unquestioned narrative of accumulation which 'takes priority over other social processes, becoming an imperative of the social totality rather than simply an activity of firms' (2006, p.158). My research investigates how to disrupt this narrative through performance, resulting in a resistance towards it. Gibson-Graham also claim that theories of post-Fordism 'tend to highlight ways in which the economy and polity reflect and re-enforce each other rather than the ways they contradict and undermine each other' (p.159). Hence my practice as a performer investigates how to make these contradictions visible as a form of feminist critique and resistance. Central to my investigation is the exploration of over-identification which is based on the inherent contradiction that in order to create critique one becomes the subject of critique. In over-identification the performer overtly affirms the position of the subject of critique instead of articulating an open direct critique. Through my practice I explore how to deploy and transform this strategy effectively from a feminist perspective, to create an agonistic space as the location for resistance and disrupt rather than harmonise contradictions within post-Fordism. I combine this strategy with opacity where instead of an overt affirmation of positions, it transforms into an oscillation between contradicting positions.

Introduction

I am a performance artist asking how to be resistant in the current climate of performance art production from a feminist perspective with a UK, European and US focus. Through my practice I investigate which means are available to me as a performer to create resistance in post-Fordism.

Post–Fordism as research context

The context of my research is post-Fordism, an alleged neutral mode of economic production in which immaterial labour plays a crucial role. The neutral notion of post-Fordism has been challenged by feminist geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham in *The End of Capitalism (as We knew it): A Feminist Critique of the Political Economy* (2006) which I use to frame the circumstances of my work. Key to Gibson-Graham's critique is that post-Fordism is not a neutral concept but one that is equally constructed and a form of politics.¹ They argue that the focus on constant capital accumulation, growth and competition remains unquestioned in the current discourse on post-Fordism, creating a coercive environment of a 'no-outside' to these modes of production. Within this discourse, the inherent contradictions of post-Fordism are also simultaneously suppressed in order to maintain the accumulation narrative and avoid friction (2006).

Gibson-Graham's feminist critique emerged in a theoretical canon dominated by post-Marxists philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and their book *Empire* (2000), which had the notion of 'no-outside' to capitalism at the core of its proposition. Their notion of Empire was intended to signify that in contrast to imperialism, which is defined by expansion, capitalist production as the basis of Empire is everywhere, indicating the end of imperialism (2000, pp.187-188). According to them, 'the capitalist market is one machine that has always run counter to any division between inside and outside' (2000, p.190). This makes Empire a non-place because power is also located everywhere and nowhere within a network-based structure. Gibson-Graham sought to challenge this notion. They write:

¹*Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art* (2005) with contributions by Sven Lütticken, Jennifer Allen, Andrea Fraser, Peggy Phelan, Eran Schaerf and Barbara Visser framed the discourse of re-enactment in performance art around post-Fordism. It was published on the occasion of the exhibition *Life, Once More* curated by Sven Lütticken at Witte de With (January 27 – March 27, 2005).

our action research projects are more concerned with the theorizing conditions of possibility than limits to possibility, seeing the latter theoretical path as perhaps prematurely foreclosing on an open and uncertain future (2006, xxv).

Based on this, my practice-based research emerges from an artistic position that equally intends to destabilize a constructed notion of 'no-outside' of its current modes of post-Fordist production as a form of resistance. It intends to alter perceptions of limitations and investigate the possibilities for this destabilization through performance practice. My main research question is: How to create resistance from a feminist performance perspective in post-Fordism?

The current climate of performance art production

Previously scholars such as Claire Bishop and Jen Harvie offered particularly insightful research that challenged the perceived progressiveness and radicality of art projects in the historical climate of post-89. Within this climate, practices intended to advance collectivism and encourage participation and the collapse of hierarchies between audiences and artists were considered a counter-narrative to neoliberalism's focus on individualism. Post-Fordism and neoliberalism have been both central to the transformation of a cultural economy as Aras Ozgun (2013) points out. Ozgun writes that neoliberalism imposed 'a new governmental logic on upon the field of cultural production' (2013, p.38) while post-Fordism surpassed 'the distinction between economic and cultural production' through the notion of immaterial labour. Bishop and Harvie focused on 'socially turned art' (Harvie, 2013, p.3) and particularly participatory performance art that emerged in the early 2000s. My current practice as a performer is characterised by a focus on the 'social' - interrogating its production frameworks in the context of post-Fordism. It is produced and situated within the frameworks of cultural production that Bishop and Harvie have addressed specific to performance art and its location within the UK, European, and US context. Hence, they are part of my investigation of resistance towards them.

Relational antagonism

Bishop, in her seminal 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' (2004) published in *October* and her later book *Artificial Hells* (2012), was critically responding to a turn towards social practices. With the increase of neoliberal market forces, particularly after 1989, theorists such as French art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud considered the role of art to provide

alternative models to the politics of its time. His notion of relational aesthetics was foregrounding the relationships which were produced in participatory artworks. For him, art practices, through their participatory character, provided a new space for politics that could be considered exemplary for democracy (Bishop, 2004). Bishop (2004) critically remarks in relation to Bourriaud and the emergence of relational aesthetics and social practices that 'today, political, moral, and ethical judgments have come to fill the vacuum of aesthetic judgment in a way that was unthinkable forty years ago' (p.77). She questions a duality between 'good' and 'bad' works of art on the basis that they are merely participatory and henceforth considered democratic. By focussing on the qualities of these relationships produced in these works, she asks: 'what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?' (2004, p.65). Bishop points out that not every participatory piece automatically results in a democratic space but rather risks merely reproducing the same spaces that are already in place in politics, lacking confrontation and being focused on reaching consensus. Specifically, the focus on the production of a harmonious community in artistic practice denies that there are always groups that are excluded in the process of participation and eventually democracy (Bishop, 2004). To examine the relationships produced in the works and their democratic potential, Bishop uses Chantal Mouffe's and Ernesto Laclau's model of political antagonism, which is defined by the necessity of exclusion and impossibility of reaching consensus as the basis for democratic process. This model was laid out by Laclau and Mouffe already in 1985 in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. It was considered a guide to revolutionary politics at a time when counter-hegemonic models to neoliberalism were disappearing with the eventual collapse of communism in 1989 and the 'no-outside' narrative became visible through the invisibility of alternatives.

Growth and productivity

Jen Harvie in *Fair Play Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (2013), critically examines how artists have become instrumentalized in a growth and productivity narrative, particularly in Great Britain, driven by several Party agendas (both Labour and Conservative) since the 1990s. By pushing art practices into a creative industries framework, artists have become fully integrated into ideals of 'growth, productivity and profit' becoming 'artpreneurs' rather than artists. Harvie (2013) questions how 'these proliferating forms of socially turned art contribute to neoliberal governmentality?' (p.3) and also stresses, similar to Bishop (2004) that participation is not 'intrinsically progressive' (p.10). Hence the assumed radicality and progressiveness of particular performance works which she examines are controverted by their compliance with the same agenda that they tried to oppose, such as neoliberal market policy. Key to Harvie's discussion is the constraints and limits these policies impose onto art

practices as they are shaped through a cultural production framework that has evidenced growth, profit and productivity at its centre. Part of this cultural production program was also the 'Big Society' idea, spearheaded by David Cameron and his conservative party campaign in 2010. At its core, it advocated the shift of responsibility of social welfare from the state towards individuals (Harvie, 2013). By artists picking up those responsibilities, they were supposed to fill a vacuum left deliberately by the state through the cutting of funding for social institutions. This cut presented a risk that roles previously occupied by trained social workers and community practitioners were now taken up by artists and that artists would perpetuate and get instrumentalized in the political program instead of challenging it.

Feminist lens

The feminist lens which I chose, complicates the notion of what constitutes the current climate in performance art which is the focus of my research. When using a lens in which identity is considered as contingent and free from politics before entering the space of performance, a work might be considered radical and henceforth antagonistic because of the visibility of a conflict it creates in the space. But a work might be still retrogressive and assert a status quo in its reproduction of gender relations due to its blindness to power constructs based on gender with which the performer enters the space. Hence it might be antagonistic in one respect but not another.

My performance practice is not participatory but feminist, which does not mean that I consider these two categories as exclusive. But with regards to the scholarship of Bishop and Harvie, this shall provide a first layer of distinction for the focus of analysis. Here my investigation of a feminist performance perspective on resistance is also a questioning of the 'label' feminist. Similar to Bishop and Harvie with participatory practices, I question if everything that appears to be feminist, should be simultaneously considered progressive in and outside of the art context. Key to this are two current shifts which I am observing as part of my practice's current climate, which I locate also post the emergence of the scholarship of Bishop (2004, 2012) and Harvie (2013).

Labour processes

In this collapse between economic and cultural production in post-Fordism (Ozgun, 2013) the labour processes of artists have changed, particularly in performance art, with the emergence of social media. Together with the decline of the welfare state, the power of privately-owned

social media companies as main structural frames of support by, for example, providing 'free' exposure, has massively increased. This exposure also means that many artists' labour takes place on these platforms, which are also further drivers of competition. I elaborate on this in more detail in the section 'Performance art, affect and measurement within post-Fordism' as part of my literature review in Chapter 1. Central to this discussion is Gibson-Graham's understanding of capitalism as the ground principle of post-Fordism:

a social relation in which nonproducers appropriate surplus labour in value from free wage labourers. The appropriated surplus is then distributed by the appropriators (the capitalist or board of directors of the capitalist firm) to a variety of social destinations (2006, p.xxiv).

Within this understanding, the feminist position that I take is that women are located to a great degree as the surplus labour producers rather than appropriators, defining this social relation. Hence, they are located in a position of exploitation; this has further intensified over the last decade via the emergence of new communication technologies. The production of emotional labour, a form of immaterial labour, is a crucial factor in the cycle of value production. This emotional labour is particularly important from a feminist lens as it is often assigned to the sphere of women being carers, mothers, and taking any roles that require empathy and emotional support. Furthermore, this work is characterised by underpayment, lack of stability, and financial progression. Thus, the conditions for labour, including emotional labour, with the help of these platforms, become further feminized, meaning they are extremely precarious to the disadvantage of the most vulnerable in society. However, social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are considered empowerment tools, particularly for women, as previous hierarchies and glass ceilings seem to collapse through the free and open access to these platforms, which assumes a democratic dimension. This assumption, as I intend to show in my discussion of post-Fordism in Chapter 1, has its flaws and in some instances serves as a mere perpetuation of an economy that upholds conservative gender notions in which women, and everyone working in feminized conditions, produce a surplus without appropriating it for themselves and sustain a cycle of exploitation.

There is another crucial issue that accompanies this shift of dependence and competition on these platforms. Participation on these private platforms also means agreement with their terms of usage, some of which are characterised by an extremely patriarchal moral standard, for example, on Facebook female nudity is censored. This risks that privately-owned corporations whose interests differ massively from public institutions become regulators of artistic expression and drive an environment of self-reliance and eventually self-exploitation.

They imprint their policies onto the freedom of artistic expression. Harvie (2013) dissected the constraints and limits of cultural production located in governmental policy, the cuts in funding, and the conditions attached to this funding. I see further limits imposed onto the freedom of artistic practices through the dependence on social media platforms and their 'assumed' unlimited possibilities, which can also be considered a further consequence of the conditions that Harvie identified and post-Fordist politics. My investigation critiques the issue of coercive aesthetics, the concentration of power, and continuing exploitation as part of my resistance.

Representation of power

The representation of power has shifted towards a more feminine appearance, making the feminist challenge of existing power structures, particularly relations of exploitation, more complex than before. I elaborate on this in more detail in Chapter 3 'The Feminization of the Right'. At least in the UK, US and many parts of central Europe, big art institutions, international corporations and governments have increased their share of women in powerful positions and made them their public representatives. To name a few examples, Tate Modern announced in 2017 that Maria Balshaw was becoming its first female director, Theresa May became the UK's second female Prime Minister also in 2017, and Christine La Garde became the first female head of the European Central Bank in 2019. The equation that representation already makes progressive politics and drives women's empowerment has its own shortcomings and has to be watched when the policies implemented by women are actually to the disadvantage of them. This observation is also fundamental to Gibson-Graham's critique of post-Fordism as a form of politics when they state that 'The politics of identity cannot alter society's fundamental capitalist nature' (2006, p.157). Hence, the question of representation is not only a feminist one but concerns any marginalised group. Throughout this research I intend to unravel what I consider a *simulation of feminism*, a notion which I explore in more detail in Chapter 6, 'Leaning into Simulation'. In my work I focus on particularly young and female representatives in powerful positions as the subjects of my critique, including Sheryl Sandberg (COO of Facebook), Ivanka Trump (Former Special Adviser to the US president), Alice Weidel, leader of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party and Marion Maréchal (formerly Maréchal Le Pen, and MP for the department Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur for the Front National in France).

Those two shifts that I observe have not developed independently from each other but are interdependent. Social media platforms provide spaces for 'new' female empowered subjects to promote themselves and their policies/products. At the same time, those women, by functioning as representatives of feminist empowerment, play crucial roles in dismantling

support structures that would provide a safety net for all women if provided by the state. Moreover, they are active agents in the changing conditions of the labouring process, which are not improving but further deteriorating, hence enabling emancipation for some but not for all. I will elaborate on the dismantling support structures throughout the thesis as it is key to the critique that I am formulating in the context of post-Fordism and the formation of my feminist position.

Performance

Performance is my primary medium of artistic production and research, either live or recorded. My own body and the use of speech are its main elements, applied in many different ways such as a political address or an informative talk. In the most cases the speeches and talks appropriate an already existing text/format: a TED talk or a speech by a politician or corporate representative. This form of 'address' enables me to test the strategy of 'over-identification' as it appropriates already known and recognizable framings of the subjects of critique. I elaborate on this strategy more below and in Chapter 1 in 'Over-identification'. Key to my practice is the insertion of my body into specific contexts for which I combine video and text montage techniques to create illusions and scenarios that cannot be clearly identified. For example, I used green screen to simulate a speaking AI (artificial intelligence) or combine different speech elements from different contexts into one single speech.

The internet is an integral part of my research structurally and thematically. In the beginning, I used online structures such as linking and multimedia interfaces as parts of my performance work. Platforms such as Vimeo and Tumblr were the places for publication and encounters. Throughout the research trajectory, my focus has shifted from placing performances on the internet (back) to live-performances to eventually arrive at the academic conference as the primary location for my performance of resistance, exemplified by my final work for this thesis *Presentation at the Conference for Artistic Research (Oxford 2018)* in Chapter 8.

Through my appropriation of existing performative aesthetics, such as the TED talk format, I create familiarity for the audience. This sense of familiarity is then utilized to set-up expectations that are not met by the content of the performance as a strategic move. Instead of converting the spectator, my aim is to create contradiction at the core of my artistic efficacy, similar to how Bishop describes the work of Christoph Schlingensiefel (2011). My intention is to work with and against the expectations of the audience. For example, an audience familiar with my practice views an online video work placed on my Vimeo channel with a different

expectation than a live audience in an academic context that might be less familiar with my previous work and position but creates assumptions based on my appearance at the conference.

Throughout my research the notion of performance has become porous, I started to consider elements outside of the performance event, such as dissemination, production, and activity, as part of the resistance in post-Fordism.

Performance in three stages

Throughout the course of research, the performances can be roughly split into three bodies of work all based on the intention to form a critical artistic position in post-Fordism as a form of resistance.

The first body of work is characterized through direct political addresses and speeches in which the framing is intentionally fictional and the work can be identified as a performance. This body of works includes my live-performance *VIVA 2023*, as part of the first-year PhD student exhibition in March 2016 at Chelsea College of Art (Chapter 2) and *Merci Liberte!* (Mayday 2016) and its accompanying blog, *mercilibertemayday2016.tumblr.com* (both Chapter 4) staged in Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park in May 2016.

Then throughout the research, I gradually moved away from a theatrical staging and directly recognizable political addresses and instead tested different formats of presentation. At the beginning of this exploration was the second body of work I started in November 2016, with a series called TAP talks (2016-2017), where TAP stands for technology, art and performance. It was a direct imitation of the popular format of 15-minute TED talks (see Chapter 6). Here reproducing myself on and offline to create a double presence in the performance became a central aesthetic and conceptual element. I partly explored this already in the preceding work, but in the TAP talk series, I emphasized the relationship between technology and economics, blurring the notion of performance further in order to produce resistance.

The TAP talks became a vehicle to blend my practice more into the academic context, introducing the third and last body of work. Within this transition, my performances eventually started to integrate into the academic conference format as opposed to events dedicated explicitly to performance practice. Here the practice could be considered a variation of the format of the performance lecture. However, as I will discuss particularly in Chapter 6 in relation to my TAP talk series as well as my final work (Chapter 8), several aspects distinguish

my work from established notions of this format, in which the theatricality is a central means to either politically convert or educate an audience.

Three artists

I identified three artists central to my field of enquiry of fine art performance practice who deployed similar strategies. Part of my research method is the direct juxtaposition of my performance practice with one significant work by each of these three artists; *Please Love Austria* (2000) by Christoph Schlingensiefel, *Official Welcome* (2003) by Andrea Fraser, and *Excellences & Perfections* (2014) by Amalia Ulman. Each of them addresses the key concern of my practice, the destabilization of post-Fordist image production machines as a form of resistance, but from different angles as well as varying contexts.

Schlingensiefel's work *Please Love Austria!* was staged during a xenophobic right-wing turn in Austria in the early 2000s, which I also address in my practice in its contemporary context. Ulman and Fraser both addressed the question of feminist autonomy, namely what a female performance artist is 'allowed' to do in the power construct of contemporary art. Between those two works are almost 11 years; hence I focus on the different contexts and shifts between those works, which challenged a symbolic order imposed onto a feminist performance practice, in which women are considered more body than mind, and the former is considered inferior to the latter.

All of them have in common, next to performance being a key part of their practice, that their works were challenging to place in the moment they occurred and created 'sticky' affects in their audience once they have passed. All three operate at a porous boundary between 'art' and 'life'.

- Christoph Schlingensiefel's *Please Love Austria!* (2000) action enraged its audience by being so close to reality within the framework of art
- Amalia Ulman's *Excellences & Perfections* (2014) Instagram performance caused anger because some took it for real instead of being staged and
- Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2003) performance at the Hamburger Kunstverein, still makes others question when she is acting authentically or performing as an 'artist'.

This difficulty of placing their work is owed to their ability to make it difficult for their audience to place them as performers. In the act of extreme self-objectification, they turn their

audience's attention entirely towards themselves as the focus of their work. Like in my own practice, they made themselves and how their audiences perceived them, the main object of their practice to disrupt a process of identification and not allow a harmonious atmosphere between themselves and their audience. Instead, they created scenarios full of tension without resolving it.

Funny Feminist ☺

Overall my practice is characterised by a high degree of humour, and this I equally apply within this research. I consider the humour a necessity to allow the audience into the work. Laughter is central to a feminist practice, as Jo Anna Isaak points out in her seminal *Feminism & Contemporary Art The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (1996). In her introduction, she states that she uses laughter in the following way:

As a metaphor for transformation, for thinking about cultural change. In providing libidinal gratification, laughter can also provide an analytic for understanding the relationships between the social and the symbolic while allowing us to imagine these relationships differently. In asking for the response of laughter, the artists discussed in this book are engaging in a difficult operation. The viewer must want, at least briefly to emancipate himself from "normal" representation; in order to laugh, he must recognize that he shares the same repressions. What is requested is not a private depoliticized jouissance but sensuous solidarity. Laughter is first and foremost a communal response (p.4).

Isaak stresses how laughter can become a tool for recognizing shared repression and emancipation between artist and audience. While I share her insights, my research explores how this laughter in my work needs to be expressed via several stages instead of one liberational moment. Otherwise, it risks undermining the critique in itself if it is *too funny*. I elaborate more on this in Chapter 1 in the section on 'Over-identification' and throughout the thesis. Given her claim that this should result in a form of sensuous solidarity, I consider it equally problematic within the context of my work and Bishop's critique of the harmonising effects of artistic practices in her 2004 analysis. This does not mean that solidarity was not a desired outcome of my work but given the intention of disruption and causing destabilization as indicated in my primary research question, immediate solidarity became an indicator of its inefficacy. But as the research demonstrated, there is potential for solidarity resulting from it, but it might just be delayed. The use of humour remains important as it signifies other qualities of my work. Isaak writes 'humour is not resigned but rebellious' (1996, p.14) and 'laughter

purifies from dogmatism' (1996, p.17) which are important features in the attempt *not* to contribute to an ideology which is also part of my concern throughout this research as I elaborate in Chapter 1 in my discussion of the notion of 'resistance'.

From a feminist perspective, there is a risk inherent in the strategic application of humour. Isaak points out that humour often was the only option available to many feminist (women) artists to address the difficult subject of their work (1996). Hence, rebellion was only permissible if it was presented as a form of amusement like carnival practices. There is a fine line to be drawn between making a work funny as a way to allow the audience in and making it appear ridiculous, hence, any serious subject behind it can be neglected. I explore this fine line in my practice and through over-identification as a strategy, which includes how to navigate humour within it, according to my intentions.

Strategy of Resistance: Over-identification

As the means for my performative investigation, I explore a strategy which in the current climate can be considered the most radical available to a performance artist: over-identification. It is extreme in the sense that unlike previous practices of resistance such as the ones of post-war feminist practitioners, it is characterised by full self-subordination to an oppressive power structure rather than an open and straightforward critique and opposition to it; the excessive lack of resistance as resistance might what is considered extreme about it. The reason for deploying such a strategy when everything seems to get absorbed by capital and commodification, including the resistance towards it, the option of not resisting, or at least the simulation of it, might be then considered the most radical and most extreme. However, in over-identification negation is achieved through excessive affirmation, which makes it more complex in its efficacy than simple withdrawal. The Dutch research collective BAVO has framed their discussion of this strategy titled 'Always Choose the Worst Option. Artistic Resistance and the Strategy of Over-Identification' (2007) in the following way: 'We will follow Karl Kraus's provocative suggestion that in being forced to choose between two evils, one should always choose the worst evil' (2007, p.28). BAVO points out that the radicality of the strategy locates itself not in compromise of 'evil' options but in choosing the worst of all evil options available depending on one's standpoint.

Over-identification offers the possibility to focus on the own embodiment as a performative strategy. Through it, the performer embodies the subject of critique in order to create critique similar to Charlie Chaplin's depiction of Hitler in *The Great Dictator* in 1940 directed by Chaplin. K. Austin Collins (2019) writes that '*The Great Dictator* understands Hitler as a

performer, as an orator wielding language like the unifying, galvanizing power that it is.' Hence, part of the movie's success was Chaplin's ability to mimic Hitler's performative tropes including his way of public address and ridicule them in his exaggeration. Collins (2019) further points out that the movie also understood Hitler as a psyche; therefore, it was also important that Chaplin, in his depiction, understood where those performative gestures emerged from and what they intended, such as covering inconsistencies 'an Aryan revolution led by a brunette?' (Collins, 2019). Chaplin found inspiration for the plot in the parallels between himself and Hitler, who next to the toothbrush moustache were born the same year 1889, only four days apart and they both had risen from poverty to world prominence. Chaplin played a double role in his movie, namely his comedic self in the 'Barber' and an evil comedic embodiment of himself, Adenoid Hynkel, Chaplin's character parodying Hitler in the film.



Figure 1. Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*, 1940, source: [Collins \(2019\)](#)

Over-identification from a performance perspective requires extreme self-objectification in its deployment. By using my body, I do not consider limited to the perspective of gender but inclusive of other agencies that I embody as a performer, which determine the interpretive lens of my performances. The reason why I chose to deploy this strategy, apart from its potential for radicality and disruption, is that it gives me as a performer the opportunity to make the most of the agency available to me as a performer; a blonde performer which I elaborate on in more detail in Chapter 2 'The Feminization of the Right' and my discussion of *blondeness*.

Bishop's (2004) and Harvie's (2013) scholarship both address different spheres of performance art, one that focuses on the relationships created within and the other that looks

for the imprint of outside factors such as economic and cultural policies onto it. Through the perspective of performer and researcher I bring those two together. Previous canonised examples of over-identification include practices such as the one of Laibach as part of NSK, The Yes Men and Christoph Schlingensief, which have shown, that over-identification as a strategy is a radical means for disruption and henceforth for the performance of resistance. But what these scholarships lack to a great degree, is a consideration of *How* it works from the perspective of performance. In most cases the focus is on *that* it works as a means of disruption and *what* it is together with the effects that it causes. This still leaves out the performer and the performative tools, such as mannerisms and gestures deployed to make it work and cause disruptive effects. Hence my practice as research aims to investigate *How* to deploy it from a feminist perspective. My detailed investigation of the *How* in the context of post-Fordism, together with the consideration of their own embodiment as part of its efficacy, provides a guide for other practitioners intending to use this strategy for their own ends. This means, for example, that rather than choosing a feminist lens, others might choose a different entry point. This leads me to my second research question as part of my investigation of resistance: How to deploy the strategy of over-identification from a feminist performance perspective?

Aims of research:

In this research project, my practice investigates the possibilities of creating resistance through performance within post-Fordist production modes and their accompanying shifts. These shifts include the further precarisation of a female workforce and those in feminized working conditions and the representation of power from masculine to feminine, producing a convoluted image of emancipation. This deceiving impression is a driving force behind the previous shifts. Both shifts are accompanied by the concentration of power away from nation-states towards US technology companies and conservative forces.

I want to achieve this resistance by highlighting the paradoxes, conflicts, and underlying power structures within post-Fordist production by exploring over-identification as a strategy in my practice. It is my intention to evaluate this strategy in terms of its ability to create destabilization to harmonising mechanisms that repress the contradictions emerging out of post-Fordist production. Through this strategy, I explore how to use humour and mimic existing formats that are well integrated in a post-Fordist mode of production through minor adaptations of each performance in the context in which it appears.

At the same time, I juxtapose my work with three key artists I have identified as crucial to my investigation; Amalia Ulman, Christoph Schlingensief, and Andrea Fraser. I analyse their work from the strategic perspective of over-identification with a feminist focus. The aims here are:

- to distinguish the reasons for the efficacy of this strategy in the specific contexts in which those artists were operating
- use it as a departure point for the evaluation of my practice and
- discern how over-identification functions differently within it.

Overall this discussion and analysis serve to answer how to resist a 'no-outside' narrative of accumulation and competition as the basis of social relations and use performance as a means to disrupt precisely these shifts and narratives from a feminist perspective.

Research structure & methods:

The research is structured into eight chapters. Each chapter builds on the previous one, in a chronological sequence where theory and practice are discussed together throughout. My use of theory mainly serves to understand better the strategies that I am using and what happens within the work. However, as the structure of the research shows, the practice is always the leading element of it, offering the departure point for the subsequent work except for the first chapter, which provides a literature review.

To evaluate my work and the work of the three key artists, I consider the audience's direct responses to the works and the artists' perceptions in the art context after the works emerged. However, for the evaluation of my works, this post-performance dimension is limited to the timely framework of the research; hence there were only a few instances available to me to record the perception of myself by other peers and colleagues after my presentations/performances.

Each work functions as a synchronous response to its current political events, which I consider symptoms of the shifts that I have identified. Hence, the works adhere to be a critique of these shifts as part of an over-arching framework and specificity to the moment in which they emerged, furthermore, reflected in the chronological structure of this document. Chaplin produced *The Great Dictator* (1940) when the threat of war was neither 'abstract' nor part of a distant historical past (Collins, 2019). In 1941 the US entered the war after they were attacked on their own ground. Collins (2019) further writes:

It was, in other words, a strange moment to be making a comedy about Adolf Hitler—even a satire holding him to account, and even one in which Chaplin himself, who was at that point one of the most famous movie stars in the world, famous for playing the ambling, lovable Little Tramp, took on the role of Hitler.

Hence my work through this direct responsiveness intends to yield a potency by holding the subjects of my critique to account in the present which is part of my contribution to knowledge.

Document structure:

In Chapter 1, I introduce the fundamental concepts of my work; post-Fordism, Resistance, and Over-identification. This in-detail discussion of the terms of my practice clarifies the subject of critique, my intentions and provides an overview of canonised practices that have deployed over-identification as a strategy previously.

Chapters 2, 4 and 7 are direct juxtapositions of my work and the works of the three artists that I identified operating in my field of enquiry, Ulman (Chapter 2), Schlingensief (Chapter 4), and Fraser (Chapter 7). I analyse them through individual pairings between my work and theirs in order to use the aesthetic aspects that our works share as a point of departure for my analysis, apart from the deployment of a common strategy. This is for example the narrative arc in *Excellences and Perfections* and *VIVA 2023*, the public staging of *Please Love Austria!* and *Merci Liberte!* and the technique of montage in *Official Welcome* and my *Research Show Opening Speech*. On the basis of these common grounds in these chapters, I further explore differences and overlaps between their and my work focusing on context, performative elements and embodiment to evaluate the efficacy of over-identification as a strategy.

Chapters 2 and 4 introduce my first body of work which are direct political addresses, clearly recognisable for my audience as performances. This includes *VIVA 2023* (Chapter 2) and *Merci Liberte!* (Chapter 4). In Chapter 2, I introduce the concept of interpassivity by Robert Pfaller (2013) in order to analyse the affective mechanisms of the works, and in Chapter 4, I explore the body as a conversion point of affect in more detail using Sara Ahmed's essay on 'Happy Objects' (2010). Both notions I then further apply for the analysis of my work in the following chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Chapter 3, 'The Feminization of the Right' provides a deeper contextualisation of my work in relation to the subjects of critique that I chose to inspire my performances and further situate

the research in its current political and economic context. I also introduce in Chapter 3 the strategy of opacity as the outcome of my research in Chapter 2 showed that it became necessary as an additional strategic move for my intentions.

Chapter 5 introduces the theoretical model of agonistic feminism by Bonnie Honig as an interpretive lens. This became necessary as Mouffe and Laclau's notion of political antagonism which I referred to in Chapters 2 and 4, did not provide sufficient framing for understanding of the work from a feminist perspective. Building on my discussion in Chapter 4, in Chapter 5 I also discuss the importance of montage as a key technique in my work, both on a strategic and contextual level in reference to Jodi Dean's 'Affective Networks' (2010) and to Honig's agonistic feminism (1995, 2003).

Chapter 6 introduces my second body of work, my series of *TAP talks*, in which my practice transitioned from directly identifiable performance framings and self-organized events, to a more blurred framing of the performances and into pre-organized academic events. In this chapter I discuss my works position to existing presentation formats such as the TED talk and the performance lecture. It lays out a more detailed critique of what I refer to as the *simulation of feminism* by discussing the role of Sheryl Sandberg as Facebook's COO.

Chapters 7 and 8 introduce my last body of work which blended itself into the academic production frameworks of my research, presenting *Research Show Opening Speech* (January 2018) and *Presentation Conference for Artistic Research* (November 2018). The final Chapter 8, building on the research in Chapter 7, evaluates how the performance of resistance takes place through the collapse between performance and embodiment.

Chapter 1: Post-Fordism, Resistance, Over-identification – a Feminist Performance Perspective

This chapter starts with an in-detail discussion of Gibson-Graham's 'Post-Fordism as Politics' (2006) which, has been key in my choice of framing my research by post-Fordism. I connect Gibson-Graham's discussion with Bishop's call for political antagonism and the model from Mouffe and Laclau (1985) in order to locate the function of my art practice within post-Fordist politics. My intention is to bring the contradictions within it into visibility through destabilization and sustain conflict similar to the practices which Bishop refers to in her analysis (2004). I then elaborate in the section 'The Economics of Affect circulation' how performance art as a form of immaterial labour is specifically embedded in post-Fordism, with a focus on affect production. I then further explain which issues arise from that in 'Performance art, affect and

measurement within Post-Fordism' and 'Coercive Aesthetics and Free Content'. These sections map the key points of my critique from a feminist perspective as the basis for this research.

In my discussion of the term 'resistance' I elaborate on how my work compares and contrasts to Pussy Riot's 2012 *Punk Prayer* performance. While both positions emerged out of the intention of causing rupture, different strategic approaches were necessary given the different circumstances in which the performances took place in Russia and the United Kingdom. Thus, I use Howard Caygill's (2013) strategic discussion of resistance to deliberate on principle mechanisms that previous resistance movements have applied and how they can be adopted in art practice to understand how it functions as a form of resistance. At the same time, I use Rebecca Comay's (2015) dialectical discussion of the term resistance in order to locate this research within a philosophical framework rather than within a historical trajectory of emancipatory movements.

The final part of this literature review focuses on the previous canonisation of over-identification. Next to the different term variations derived from its more recent historic context, such as subversive affirmation, I review previous scholarship which focused on the practices of Laibach, Janez Janša (both Slovenia), and The Yes Men (US) by Žižek, Lukan et al. (2008), Arns and Sasse (2006) and BAVO (2007). This is followed by an analysis of the relationship of over-identification with mimicry and affect which I connect with Mouffe and Laclau's notion of the contingency of identity as the basis of political antagonism. The final section is dedicated to discussing the risks when using this strategy based on its key three components when applied by the artist; repetition, vanity, and humour. I discuss these three aspects in relation to the previously discussed examples, The Yes Men, Laibach and Janez Janša as well as previous historic Dadaist practices in Zurich and Paris.

Chapter 2: Predictions & Perfections

This chapter introduces my first live performance produced for this research, *VIVA 2023*, the imagined end of my PhD right at the beginning of March 2016, presented at Chelsea College of Art. I discuss it directly juxtaposed with *Excellences and Perfections* by Amalia Ulman staged on Instagram. Both works overlap by building a narrative arc based on being a young female art graduate who is coping with the precarious frameworks of art production. In our works, where we both 'perform' this role, the intention is to articulate a critique of these very conditions. Ulman and I were over-identifying with a sexist body politic and its embeddedness in the conditions of (performance) art production. For our over-identification and the formulation of critique, we heavily rely on the aesthetic reading of our bodies as young, arty

and emancipated. While Ulman was addressing the art market, I focused on the frameworks of practice-based research.

In my analysis, I focus on different audience's reactions towards the works in order to determine its potency for disruption and causing disagreement. For this purpose, I consider the context in which it took place and who was encountering it. I use Pfaller's concept of interpassivity, which as he claims, presents the basic construct of aesthetic pleasure (in performance). Key to Pfaller's notion is the understanding that the delegation of enjoyment is part of aesthetic pleasure.

Regarding my work *VIVA 2023*, I conclude that the agreeability of my critique presented and its clear ironic framing and humour, did not allow any form of rupture to occur among the audience of practice-based researchers in front of which I presented it. The irony contrasts with Ulman's work in which she performed irreconcilable positions and caused disruption because its framing as a performance was opaque and could not be read as ironic.

This clear identification of myself as being ironic and the somewhat abstract frameworks of production that I was critiquing within growing nationalism, led me to shift my strategic deployment of over-identification from being a precarious subject within the production frameworks towards an active identifiable agent. At the same time, based on my analysis of Ulman's work, I identified that an additional strategy was necessary together with over-identification to make the work and myself not immediately identified as an ironic performer in order to cause disagreement. Hence, I introduce the strategy of opacity.

Chapter 3: The Feminization of the Right

Before moving on to the next piece of work in which I directly over-identify with Marion Maréchal, in this chapter, I situate my practice in more detail in its current economic and political context. I locate at the start of the financial crisis in 2008 what I call 'The Feminization of the Right', where the representation of powerful companies and parties in Europe and the US has shifted towards a specific femininity. Based on this, I introduce the agents that I use in my future works for my deployment of over-identification, such as Sheryl Sandberg or Marion Maréchal. I elaborate on how they aide extremist conservative and neoliberal economic policies to move more towards the centre of society and create a convoluted image of emancipation. I use Zillah Eisenstein's concept of sexual decoys (2007) to unpick their deceiving qualities and distinguish Eisenstein's examples Condoleeza Rice and Lynndie England from my subjects of critique. The breakdown of this is critical for my strategic deployment of over-identification as it is not '*just*' the adoption of an 'evil' position embodied by women. However, the positions that I appropriate are more complex and require considering the nuances inherent in the construct of their (blonde) femininity which signifies

innocence, cleanliness, and benignity. Hence, I locate my research as an exploration of benign evil as an actual threat to democracy. As part of this discussion, I focused on the strategic use of social media channels as an unprecedented sphere for representation for these women. I then introduce the concept of opacity based on Eduard Glissant's notion from his *The Poetics of Relations* (1997) by considering it both as a strategic tool within over-identification to be deployed in forthcoming performances as well as a lens to frame the subjects of my critique, whose 'evil' intentions are opaque because of their 'blonde' appearance.

Chapter 4: Love & Merci!

In this chapter, I introduce my second piece of live performance produced for this research *Merci Liberte!* (Mayday 2016) and its online version *mercilibertemayday2016.tumblr.com* (October 2016) in direct juxtaposition with Schlingensief's *Please Love Austria!* (2000) and its documentation *Foreigners out! Schlingensief's container* by Paul Poet (2002). This work is the first piece of analysis in which I directly cite and over-identify with a personified agent of the structures and shifts that I am critiquing in my deployment of over-identification, Marion Maréchal from the French Front National.

My work and the action of Schlingensief have in common that they took place during a time of growing nationalism and directly citing right-wing extremist parties. Both works were staged in touristy public locations in London and Vienna. We both shared the intention of causing a disruption within these public spaces through the presence and exposure of our bodies, which were to some degree, foreign to the context in which they appear, a German in Austria and a (Central-European) woman speaking in Speaker's Corner in Britain. At the same time, through a layer of opacity, our works intended not to allow a clear reading of what was happening right in front of the public's eye and through that not allow themselves a clear positioning with regards to the work, and eventually us, the performers. To analyse this process, I introduce Sara Ahmed's notion of the 'Happy Object' in which she discusses how affect gets attached and transferred to and through objects depending on the context in which they appear. It enabled me to understand how the affects that I was generating in my performance were converting the audience's perception of myself through the objects and the affective associations with them. Through the reading of Schlingensief's work it became evident how his deployment of over-identification was important to the intentions of my feminist investigation. Instead of overt-affirmation Schlingensief shifted between different positions which produced a space of ambiguity which did not allow the harmonisation of conflicts arising from his work.

Based on this, I decided to refocus my practice from a public staging towards a community of proximity in which I can make a sounder judgment on how to use my body for affective

conversions and cause disorientation, strategically. Also, with regards to the strategic application of opacity, since my deployment in this piece of work did not cause the effects I intended, I concluded that a more nuanced application of it became necessary, for which I consider the technique of montage as a helpful tool to apply it differently.

Finally, through the direct juxtaposition of my work with Schlingensief's, it became evident to me that the reading of gestures in my work required an interpretive lens which put more emphasis on its feminist aspects. The theoretical lens of political antagonism by Mouffe and Laclau was not adequate. Hence before discussing my next body of work, I introduce the concept of agonistic feminism by Bonnie Honig and the technique of montage in both its current and historic context.

Chapter 5: Agonistic Feminism & The Power of Montage

Bonnie Honig's model of agonistic feminism, similar to Mouffe and Laclau, foregrounds the importance of conflict and impossibility of consensus in democratic processes. Here the dimension of antagonism is accounted for in the acknowledgement of conflicting positions within feminism through the notion of agonism. By framing it as feminist, Honig's model considers pre-existing power constructs inherent in sex and gender in the formation of an agonistic space instead of considering power constructs to emerge within it through contingency. This is important for my work as its potency is dependent on acknowledging these pre-existing constructs in order to disrupt them.

As a means to accommodate conflicting positions and contest assumed positions, in the following body of work, I start to use montage in different and more emphasized ways. I combine it with the strategy of opacity by not making every montaged item explicitly recognisable. This strategic move I put into connection with Dean's argumentation in 'Affective Networks' (2010), which I then connect with the artistic, historical roots of montage such as Hannah Höch who used images from popular media for her montages to critique the 'New Woman' in the Weimar republic.

Chapter 6: Lean into Simulation

This chapter introduces my series of TAP talks mimicking the TED talk format as a means of artistic interrogation. In this series, women like Sheryl Sandberg are representative of the subjects of critique that I focus on. In order to properly mimic and over-identify with Sandberg and through that articulate a critique, I dissect her two TEDWomen talks from 2010 and 2013 and how they present conflicting positions within them. Here I introduce in more detail my understanding of a *simulation of feminism* in which the affirmative gesture of demanding equal

representation as Sandberg advocates it, is undermined by principles of profit maximization and individuation as part of this call.

Through this series of talks, I moved my performances more into an academic conference framework, further away from performance-specific contexts where I investigate the PowerPoint presentation differently than in my initial work *VIVA 2023* and similar to the form of the performance lecture. Therefore, I put my work in relation to other practitioners of the performance lecture such as BHQF, Jérôme Bel, and Sharon Hayes to show how it distinguishes itself from the intentions of those artists.

The analysis of my series of talks argues that the aesthetic pleasure generated in them, especially a video montage of myself with an image of Beyoncé, similar to my wedding dress in *Merci Liberté!*, over-powered the conflictual positions inherent in my presentations and therefore prevented a feminist agonistic space from emerging. I conclude that the following work needed to refocus from visuals back to voice and speech as its main aesthetic elements. I also needed to include more conflicting positions and make them difficult to recognize as montaged elements through opacity.

Chapter 7: (Un) Official Welcome

The work that followed was a public speech called *Research Show Opening Speech* (Chelsea College of Art, January 2018) which I juxtapose directly with Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2003). My work applies a similar method to Fraser's, where she montaged different quotes together in one speech and both works took place at the opening of an art show. Hence, her work is a crucial reference point for my analysis and I compare it with mine to evaluate the efficacy of both our performances in their different contexts. At the beginning of the chapter, I dissect the different montaged sections of my speech, which contexts they referred to, and their conflicts in relation to my embodiment as a young blond European female research student. I then discuss how the performative elements of the work, such as voice, gesture, and rhythm, were crucial in its disruptive quality making the montaged elements one smooth act of speech, upholding the tension between the other parts while at the same time unbinding them. I compare the performative qualities of my speech with Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2003) in order to reflect on how the different rhythms of the works can be understood to signify a change of the language of power which happened in the 15 years between the two speeches, based on the shifts that I laid out in Chapter 3. This reflection is to further locate my practice in its moment of emergence, where despite shared intentions between mine and Fraser's work, there was a need to adapt its performative qualities to the contemporary political and cultural climate.

Next to *Official Welcome* (2003), I also discuss Fraser's *Kunst muss Hängen* (2001) which I also refer to in my speech, and *Untitled* (2003). Both were part of this body of work that Fraser did in the early 2000s. Crucial to my discussion is the artistic efficacy of the moment of collapse between performance and embodiment that happened in Fraser's work and was inspired by the artist Martin Kippenberger. Hence, part of my discussion is dedicated to the relationship between Fraser and Kippenberger; how over-identification found deployment through them by overtly identifying with the role of the 'artist'. Based on the findings of previous works, my feminist understandings of over-identification and opacity become more clearly defined.

I conclude that my performance of resistance still lacked a moment of collapse between my performance and embodiment within the framework of practice-based research, making the boundary between myself and research porous which introduces my last piece of work for this research.

Chapter 8: The Power Point as a Power to Point

The last piece of research is a presentation I did at the conference for Artistic Research at Brookes University in Oxford, which took place in November 2018. Unlike my previous TAP talk presentations in this work my talk blended in smoothly with the conference program as it lacked theatricality and strictly followed the structure of an academic presentation.

Over the course of the research, the PowerPoint presentation in its academic format, unlike in *VIVA 2023* where I used in an ironic way, has become my practice. In this presentation, I performed the 'role' of the practice-based research student and the conflicts as part of this role, without ironic distance and actively played with the perceived benignity of my appearance as a disruptive means to post-Fordism as politics. The result was the performance of a politics of ambiguity where neither myself nor my work could be placed in a known framework of recognition as performance, lecture performance or academic presentation. At the same time through the doubt I evoked in my audience, this opened up a space for the audience to consider the possibility of an outside of the coercive frameworks of cultural production. Finally, by me upholding this ambiguity and my audience resisting the need to resolve it, I shared with them a moment of resistance in the context of post-Fordism.

Chapter 1:
POST-FORDISM, RESISTANCE and
OVER-IDENTIFICATION
a Feminist Performance Perspective

The following discussion of the three key terms of my research provides first, an over-view on the existing literature and positions relevant for this research and second, a feminist performance perspective onto these terms as the framework for my practice. Although I situate my practice in the framework of post-Fordism, the discussion of the term will show that post-Fordism is not an exclusively economic perspective. It is one that affects all sorts of social relations connected to performance. The discussion of resistance is informed by a strategic and philosophical perspective. This is crucial for the location of this research as a practice-based project which operates between those two areas, where the strategic informs the practice and the philosophy, its analysis and vice versa. Finally, the discussion of over-identification as an artistic strategy offers an overview of the existing canon including key practice examples as well as a discussion of these examples. It provides the grounds for central aspects to explore within my own practice as research.

1. Post-Fordism

(Alleged) Neutrality and Dualisms:

Central to the feminist critique of post-Fordism by Gibson-Graham in 'Post-Fordism as Politics' (2006) is that it is not a neutral narrative but is presented as such in its current theorisation. They stress that while many Marxist and other leftist thinkers critique and theorise class struggle and antagonism, the principle of capital accumulation as the basis for the formation of class is, never questioned. All attempts of contestation such as by economic development activists or bigger political projects are still always situated within 'the boundaries of profits and markets and their requirements for growth' (2006, p.158). The current theorisation on post-Fordism as the basis of capital growth never finds contestation in itself. Hence capital accumulation and in consequence principles of growth and competition as its key drivers have become central to a 'There is no alternative'-narrative (2006). This, as Gibson-Graham state, not only leads to an essentialist view of the economy that becomes manifested as a social totality but also occludes any possibilities of developing structural models that exist outside the principle of accumulation.²

At the heart of my practice is a feminist performance perspective, whose key concern is the destabilisation of categories and resisting essentialist narratives. This includes social relations being based on growth and competition as well as assuming a stable core to the category of women and the resulting construct of femininity. This also means that I deeply reject the totalising narrative of growth and competition as determining conditions of any art production, and performance art production in particular.

² In their understanding essentialism is '(...) the intellectual process of locating a single element (or a set of elements) at the center or origin of a process or event. With respect to causation, then, the essentialist move involves an attempt to isolate sole or principal causes (within Marxism, such causes are often economic); with respect to identity, essentialism involves the positing of a stable core such as gender or race' (2006,p.159).

Away with dualisms:

Gibson-Graham further argue that the way post-Fordism is defined in relation to Fordism contributes to a narrative of exclusion and intensified dualisms. They write:

Post-Fordism is currently defined by the absence of Fordist institutions and practices and the presence of institutions and practices that are historically or logically “opposite” to those associated with Fordism (2006, p.161).

For example, they point out that Fordism is associated with mass production while post-Fordism with flexible specialisation, starting from the 1970s onwards. This then can be understood as a division between unionisation of workers as opposed to workers self-management. Boltanski and Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2007) which was published just a year after Gibson-Graham’s analysis, seems to have done exactly that by distinguishing between three successive spirits of capitalism in a ‘Weberian mode of analysis’ as Slavoj Žižek points out in ‘Architectural Parallax Spandrels and Other Phenomena of Class Struggle’ (not dated). Their analysis, which as they state, focuses on ‘ideological changes that accompanied recent transformations in capitalism’ (2007, p.3), after drawing a historic trajectory, aims at showing how those practices of the counter-culture, from the 1960s and 70s have been absorbed by capitalist production. As Boltanski and Chiapello explain, from 1970s onwards the hierarchical Fordist production process was abandoned in favour of a networked based structure building on the post 68’ demands for autonomy and self-management, particularly stemming from a community of creatives.

Gibson-Graham (2006) criticise this particular historic understanding of Fordism and post-Fordism as economic theorists do and similar to Boltanski and Chiapello, suggests that different forms of production and social relations cannot exist alongside each other. They claim that it is through this strict separation that potential contradictions for example between economy and polity within post-Fordism are obscured and therefore have a stabilizing function secured by unquestioned categorical thinking which extends to other social domains (2006), making post-Fordism a form of *politics*. They write:

Mass production and flexible specialization operate not only as origins, but also as models, for other social practices and institutions; thus the Fordist image of standardization and the post-Fordist image of fragmentation/differentiation are translated from the realm of production to other social domains (2006, pp.154-155).

Hence, the translation into other domains gives the narrative of accumulation its potency, where it becomes a hegemony in the Gramscian sense, where it is not imposed by force but consent and internalized as a form of culture. Gibson-Graham (2006) at the beginning of their discussion do intensively use the term 'capitalist hegemony' in order to address the subject of their analysis. But then consecutively they reduce this usage throughout and make a point by stating that by referring to non-capitalist forms of economy, creates a notion of these practices to be subordinated to capitalism. So, any form of economic or social activity will always be represented as dependent on capitalism. Therefore they are always represented as a lack, resulting in the 'suppression and negation of economic difference' (2006, p.13). The usage of the term 'capitalist hegemony' does not allow an escape from it but falling back into duality that eliminates a plurality of economic practices. Hence throughout this research I intend to refrain from referring to the hegemony of capitalism for these reasons, and eventually from the term *hegemony* altogether. Calling something a hegemony, to me, seems to take away a form of agency as it precludes a space to act. Instead I maintain Gibson-Graham's 'growth narrative' terminology within post-Fordism. Through this I hope to develop an argument independent of the all-consuming notion of capitalism. I understand the notion of narrative as something that is produced via the performance of those involved; a story one chooses to tell. This potentially allows the stepping away from an understanding of the dominance of growth as something independent of one's actions and a move towards autonomy and enhanced agency. Using the term narrative instead of hegemony should allow developing a plurality of practices with different intentions in my research.

Harmonisation and Stability:

A central aspect to Gibson-Graham's feminist critique is how narratives of class pursued by the Left further intensify the principle of accumulation. Class struggle always allows the falling back into a stable vantage point in which conflict is harmonised (2006). Through this the antagonism between two systems, one in and one outside of accumulation, is further obscured (2006). According to them, one of the issues is that the activities of both activist and many leftist parties actually function as an affirmation of the system of accumulation. Their demands, instead of a general questioning of the system, are aimed at finding a way of coping with it that accommodates worker's needs. Hence, they are not 'fighting' capitalism but are 'accommodating' (2006, p.158) it and through that create a progressive form of post-Fordism (2006, p.164). They write:

Not only is capitalism the only game in town but its socialization is the principal route to socialism (if that end is to be desired). To refuse to build capitalism is to build nothing at all.

A similar argument is made by Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) in their analysis of *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, which I equate here with post-Fordism. According to them, the process of absorbing strategies from the post 68' counter-culture deprived those practices from their subversive potential by fully integrating them into the process of capital valorisation and accumulation. These include but are not exclusive to the search for authenticity, the ideal of self-management, and the anti-hierarchical exigency (2007). These practices according to Žižek (Architectural Parallax) in reference to Boltanski and Chiapello, are then sold as an

egalitarian project: by way of accentuating auto-poetic interaction and spontaneous self-organization, it even usurped the far Left's rhetoric of workers' self-management and turned it from an anti-capitalist to a capitalist slogan (not dated).

In turn Gibson-Graham (2005) stress that post-Fordism then as a narrative expands on to the political and cultural level with a massive retreat of the welfare state that

coincides with the reassertion of market relations in all spheres of social existence. The culture of postmodernism elevates individual rights and self-development over collective organization and goals, replicating (and reinforcing) the decentralization and privatization taking place in the economy (2005, p.152).

In post-Fordism as a form of politics a clear distinction between cultural production and economic production also in line with Harvie's (2013) discussion, as I stated in the introduction, is falling apart.

The Role of Art

Given that over-arching dominance of the post-Fordist narrative entangled with cultural and political domains, Chantal Mouffe in 'Agonistic spaces and artistic activism' (2007) on the premise of Boltanski and Chiapello, asks: What is the critical potential artistic practices can have given their absorption and full integration in this process?

Mouffe's antagonism is the acknowledgement that there are 'conflicts that cannot have a rational solution' (2014, p.150), hence, there always will be exclusions of those who do not agree, which builds on the arguments she and Laclau had already made in 1985. The constant

attempt for harmonisation and search for consensus obscures this exclusion which is also part of Bishop's critique (2004) in relation to participatory art practices. But since Bishop's analysis (2004) Mouffe attempted to clarify the model of political antagonism in relation to aesthetics as Jason Miller (2016) points out:

These remarks reflect a more general attempt to distinguish between antagonism, understood as the uncritical valuation of confrontation for its own sake, and what she now terms "agonism," introduced to emphasize the importance of disagreement and difference as democratically productive forms of social engagement (p.174).

Part of Mouffe's distinction is based on the notion of legitimacy; in antagonism enemies deny each other legitimacy and in agonism adversaries confront each other but acknowledge each other's legitimacy (Mouffe, 2013, p.7). In both cases, antagonism and agonism, the impossibility of reaching consensus and the sustaining of conflicts rather than their erasure are central to the understanding of real democratic politics. And this is what Bishop used as the premise for her analysis (2004) when she writes 'in other words, democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased.' (2004, p.65) which is also key to my analysis. Mouffe concludes in this regard, that the role of artists is to sustain conflict and 'foment dissensus' (2007, p.4). Through this function art practices can secure a space of politics in which counter-hegemonic projects can compete with each other, maintaining a democratic dimension as pointed out by Bishop (2004). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) stress the impossibility of consensus if the projects that are competing are truly counter-hegemonic, and argue that if there are grounds of agreement, those projects are located within one hegemony. And this is exactly what Gibson-Graham (2006) are criticising about leftist and activist politics at the time of writing, that the principle of accumulation at the centre of production and expanding to all social spheres, putting them under the conditions of a competitive market, is never questioned by their demands or activities. Instead it gives the accumulation principle a stabilizing and harmonizing function. Another part of Mouffe's later distinction between agonism and antagonism was assigning to the role of artists the responsibility 'to put forward new models of politics and new modes of collective identity' (in Miller, 2016, p.175), hence the provision of alternative models. This, as I elaborate later on in the section on 'Resistance' I do not consider part of my intentions as my focus lies on the question on how to cause and sustain conflict and disagreement to avoid harmonization as part of my resistance.

Against Harmonisation and for Friction:

Maintaining separation

Claire Bishop (2004) declares those works that seek to establish harmonious communities are not antagonistic in the democratic sense as laid out by Mouffe and Laclau. She writes:

I dwell on this theory in order to suggest that the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic, as Bourriaud suggests, since they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as whole and of community as immanent togetherness. There is debate and dialogue in a Tiravanija cooking piece, to be sure, but there is no inherent friction since the situation is what Bourriaud calls “microtopian”: it produces a community whose members identify with each other, because they have something in common (2004, p.67).

Those works that Bishop claims as antagonistic and therefore democratic in the framework of Mouffe and Laclau, are the ones which cause friction, conflict, division and instability. Key to this functioning is not the highlighting of commonalities, but differences between participating parties as in the works of Santiago Sierra. His works are successful by drawing attention to forms of exploitation which are often obscured or not put into direct relation with the observing art audience. He undoes the separation in his staging of exploiting marginal groups within an art context while the works of Tiravanija maintain it, as Bishop argues (2004). She writes about the works of Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra that:

The model of subjectivity that underpins their practice is not the fictitious whole subject of harmonious community, but a divided subject of partial identifications open to constant flux. If relational aesthetics requires a unified subject as a prerequisite for community-as-togetherness, then Hirschhorn and Sierra provide a mode of artistic experience more adequate to the divided and incomplete subject of today. This relational antagonism would be predicated not on social harmony, but on exposing that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of this harmony. It would thereby provide a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to one other (2004, p.79).

Here she addresses another key aspect in theorisation of hegemony and antagonism in the scholarship of Mouffe and Laclau, namely the premise that they consider identity or

subjectivity as always incomplete and contingent in accordance with post-Structuralism and especially Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

The split subject and contingency

Laclau and Mouffe are drawing from a Lacanian understanding of the subject, in which identity is always constructed through an outside, the other. Grant Kestner describes (2012) their theory as an 'idiosyncratic merging of Marxism and Post-structuralism' and points out that:

Laclau and Mouffe came to view the de-centering of the subject prescribed by continental theory not as a barrier to the development of organized political resistance, but rather as a key moment in the long march toward democratic pluralism (2012).

In their theory the de-centering becomes an empowering force. Further Kestner (2012) stresses that Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of resistance still contained some key components of Marxism such as Gramsci's hegemony but allowed it to move away from the Marxist focus on class and economic production as the key determining factor when it comes to identity. By considering identity as contingent and multiple, within the theorisation of Mouffe and Laclau of political resistance (1985), different alliances could emerge. Kestner writes in relation to their theorisation, that this

(...) will allow us to maintain our capacity for political agency without succumbing to the often violent defensiveness associated with conventional identities based on fixed notions of class, community, nationality, or ethnicity. The goal of revolution is no longer the liberation of a single oppressed class, ethnicity, or gender, but a global reconfiguration of our relationship to difference in all its guises and forms, leading to a society based on a non-instrumentalizing "agonistic pluralism" (2012).

This 'global re-configuration of relationships' (Kestner, 2012) also corresponds with Gibson-Graham's demand to move away from the focus of class in order to reject capitalism on the premise of over-coming class struggle as its harmonising feature. Mouffe further writes that the agonistic space in order to emerge, needs the provoking of disagreement or as she calls it 'affects of an adversarial nature' (2014, p.157). It functions as the means of identification for those supporting different hegemonic alternatives instead of previous assumed identities (2007). This focus on affects adversarial nature within democratic politics further embeds the model of political antagonism within an affect centred economy which I will discuss in detail later on in the section 'The Economics of Affect Circulation'. For now it is important to point

out, that within the notion of post-Fordism, affect has become central in the valorisation process of capital and moved from the margins to the centre of production.

Familiar and unremarkable

Gibson-Graham equally build on Mouffe and Laclau in their critique of capitalism. In Chapter 1 'Strategies' they use Mouffe's and Laclau's notion of identity as hybridized, nomadic and multiple to ask how this then can be understood from an economic perspective. They write:

It might suggest, at the very least, that the economy did not have to be thought as a bounded and unified space with a fixed capitalist identity. Perhaps the totality of the economic could be seen as a site of multiple forms of economy whose relations to each other are only ever partially fixed and always under subversion (2006, p.12).

In their view, the focus on contingency of Mouffe and Laclau (1985) would allow revealing the principle of accumulation as a hegemony in itself. But as they conclude later on in the chapter, Mouffe and Laclau exactly fail to acknowledge this hegemonic principle within the economic. The way Laclau and Mouffe use capitalism within their theorisation, Gibson-Graham consider familiar and unremarkable (2006, p.38). They write that 'In a diverse array of texts and traditions, capitalism is rendered as the "subject" of history, an agent that makes history but is not correspondingly "made."'. They further conclude, while Mouffe and Laclau were successful in 'undoing the closed and singular social totality, and unfixing society from its economic base, Laclau and Mouffe leave the economy theoretically untouched'.

This means that while there was a breakage in de-centering class and economic relations as the sole defining element in revolutionary movements as in Marxism, again there was no questioning of the principle that defined those classes themselves. This further affirms and fixes a no-outside narrative of capitalist production while identity construction within it, is rendered flexible. This unquestioned principle of capitalism in their theorisation, makes using the term hegemony and eventually counter-hegemony, which Mouffe and Laclau derive from Gramsci, misleading in the context of this research. Another reason to give preference to the term narrative over hegemony to give protagonists more agency.

Bishop (2004) advocates the move against harmonisation and microtopian practices that emphasize dialogue over contestation as they prevent a rethinking of relationships and the establishing of a democratic dimension in art. This I consider similar to what Gibson-Graham (2006) suggest with regards to the harmonising function of class conflict, hence the move

against it, is key towards the intention of breaking a no-outside consensus narrative as the one of post-Fordism. Given those arguments by Gibson-Graham (2006) together with Bishop (2004) and Mouffe (and Laclau), the unravelling of contradictions which are obscured by the current consensus are equally central to such intentions.

The Feminist Position:

This feminist position such as the one by Gibson-Graham I see equally reflected by Rosi Braidotti's notion of feminism. She writes:

Feminism rejects the sanctimonious, dogmatic tone of dominant ideologies, Left or Right of the political spectrum, in favor of the production of joyful acts of insurrection. Feminist politics is critical but also affirmative, it aims at the counter-production of alternatives to the present and to the structures of subjectivity (Braidotti, 2015, p.241).

From a purely feminist perspective I agree with Braidotti that feminist politics should reject dogmatic ideologies and not align itself with existing political direction, resulting in the entire rejection of the accumulation principle. But from a feminist performance perspective I consider the counter-production of alternatives not within this sphere. In my research I am not aiming to articulate an alternative model but recall the current one; I consider my practice as a potential enabler to articulate these alternative models, but not the actual models themselves. In her book *Revolt, She Said* (2002), Julia Kristeva makes a distinction between revolt and revolution that I consider crucial to my intentions. While a revolution may risk 'just' overthrowing one regime and replacing it with another, revolt represents 'a continuous state of questioning. The questioning is on the side of exposing contradictions and undoing fixity and most importantly, keeping this process in motion' (Revolt, She said 2019 event brief). Chantal Mouffe (2007) points out that she considers the role of artistic practices within the model of antagonism and hegemonies, that it

makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony (2007, p.5).

In this research, I do not intend to engage in a dialogue between two ideologies but rather in a feminist discussion of the paradoxes of post-Fordism. Instead of oppositional my resistance is defiant through affirmation when deploying the strategy of over-identification. Defiance I

understand as not taking an oppositional role or withstanding a pressured situation as it is the case with resilience, defiance for me, means not accepting different forms of oppression without offering any alternative solutions or models towards the issues at hand. As defiant I consider the act of resisting the steadiness of terms and categories in line with Gibson-Graham's critique of the stability of categories in post-Fordism as an ideological character (2006). I will elaborate on this in more detail later on. But now I want to discuss the role of performance art within the politics of post-Fordism and its networks of immaterial labour production.

The Economics of Affect Circulation

Ozgun points out that “immaterial labour” which signifies the integration of socially reproductive activities, affective, cognitive and creative processes into capitalist production cycles, has been the pivotal term for inquiring about post-Fordism.’ (2013, p.33) and I consider performance art such a form of immaterial labour. Ozgun further writes that in post-Fordism ‘forms of labour, thought as belonging to “cultural and aesthetic production”, have become directly “productive” economic resources (2013, pp.33-34).

In consider performance art as a producer of affect in an aesthetic sphere, at risk to become further absorbed as another ‘productive economic resource’. Affect I understand here as something that changes a person's emotional status. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth write that ‘affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, non-human, part-body, and otherwise)’ (2010, p.1). For this research I particularly focus on affect produced between human bodies as well as between human bodies and communication technology as the intermediary between them. I draw a distinction between bodily affects and digital affects while acknowledging that in both cases, there are human bodies at both ends of the encounter. Given the post-Fordist narrative that Gibson-Graham (2006) criticise, also the production of affect is prone to the narrative of growth, accumulation and competition, rendering it into a form of commodity.

Theories of affect value creation:

There are several theories that developed, particularly in the early 2000s, conceptualising affect commodification in connection with the further increase and spread of communication technologies. One leading example are Italian theorists Cristina Morini and Andrea Fumagalli and their paper ‘Life put to work: Towards a life theory of value’ (2010) published in *Ephemera*:

theory & politics in organization. Here they create a theory of bio-capitalism as a form of value accumulation that is founded in the 'entirety of human faculties, from relational linguistic to affective-sensorial' (2010, p.235), all entangled with the production of affect which result in subjectivity being the product that is sold. Previously Andrea Fumagalli and Stefano Lucarelli developed the model of cognitive capitalism in 'A model of Cognitive Capitalism: a preliminary analysis' (2007) which falls under the umbrella of the later conceptualised bio-capitalism. According to them (2007), cognitive capitalism is specifically concerned with the category of knowledge as a productive factor where knowledge has become the key component of structural change and wealth production within a new growth regime driven by information and communication technology. Central to this mode of production, as they write, is a net-shaped structure that benefits from the development of both linguistic and non-linguistic communicative commodities, which has replaced traditional forms of labour organisation. Cognitive capitalism differs from the Fordist economic production phase in that 'the present diffusion of knowledge no longer depends merely upon technological transfers of machineries, but rather upon relational flows generated by immaterial processes' (Fumagalli et al, p.2). In this form of production, the circulation of knowledge – for example, by posting one's own opinion or tweeting a comment – represents a form of value creation; the value is generated by creating a flow of attention to the network platform, as well as to the individual profile of the author through affect circulation. This is of particular interest to researchers, journalists and academics to contextualise their involvement in this cycle of value creation. Morini and Fumagalli further argue that one consequence of cognitive capitalist production is the decreasing distinction between work time and free time, which, they write, recalls the dualism between (wo)man and machine and creates instability in individual lives (2010, p.239).

The Feminization of Labour:

Cristina Morini in 'The feminization of labour in cognitive capitalism' (2007) published in the *Feminist Review*, calls this increased precarity and instability "the feminization of labour"; a specific development of cognitive capitalism and its focus onto affective processes. She writes that:

It aims to signal how, at both the Italian and the global level, precarity, together with certain qualitative characteristics historically present in female work, have become decisive factors for current productive processes, to the point of progressively transforming women into a strategic pool of labour (2007, p.87).

The feminization of labour depicts a form of production that prioritises extracting value from different forms of affect production, such as relational and emotional labour, which are more likely to be part of 'women's experiential baggage' (Morini, 2007, p.40). At the same time, this type of production requires higher degrees of flexibility and adaptability, leading to more precarious work relations for the female – and, according to Morini (2007), eventually for the global workforce. This precarity is then further enhanced by a decreasing support structure, including a lack of safe employment and healthcare which also Gibson-Graham (2006) have pointed out. The lack of stable income and/or affordable childcare requires workers under such conditions to be constantly available for a potential paid opportunity. This is particularly an issue for women, who are still the main carers of young children. From the perspective of a performance artist, such as myself, this lack of support structure entails another issue. Performance art is an embodied practice. Due to the immediacy of the medium, and the requirement of physical presence, a performer needs to keep *her* body constantly available for these potential opportunities; but events like pregnancy, childcare, and physical injury interfere with this requirement. As a female performance artist, this precarity is a cause for constant anxiety.

Depoliticisation:

Equally important for the context of this research is Jodie Dean's theory on 'Communicative capitalism: Circulation and the foreclosure of politics' (2005). In her theorisation of Communicative Capitalism, similar to the Italian theorists, she stresses that value is created through intensified circulation of online affects. She further concludes that this causes a shift of focus from content to circulation and creates depoliticising effects in this form of value creation. She writes in relation to online activism that:

Weirdly, then, the circulation of communication is depoliticizing not because people don't care or don't want to be involved, but because we do! Or, put more precisely, it is depoliticizing because the form of our involvement ultimately empowers those it is supposed to resist. Struggles on the Net reiterate struggles in real life, but insofar as they reiterate these struggles, they displace them. And this displacement, in turn, secures and protects the space of "official" politics (2005, p.61).

While she emphasizes the aspect of displacement as the main depoliticising element in online activism, she also acknowledges at another point that online struggles do to some degree translate into protests on the street. This is even more remarkable as Dean conceptualised communicative capitalism in 2005, so before events such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter

which generated huge attention to structural injustices as well as in-person protests in 2017 and onwards. Still the real effects of such a circulation into actual effective structural policies is yet to be seen. But what can already be seen is the effects that these developments have on performance art production which I discuss in the next section. These effects are key to the critique that I formulate in this research through my practice.

Performance art, affect and measurement within Post-Fordism

From margin to centre

As I understand it, these theories starting with Jodie Dean in 2005 and then further with the Italian theorists publishing in 2007 and 2010, mark an important shift from the understanding of the positioning of knowledge and affect production within an overall cycle of value production in both economic, social and political terms. Concepts such as communicative capitalism, cognitive capitalism and eventually bio-capitalism position them right at the centre, next to a focus of material production. The collapse of the financial markets starting with the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in 2008, has even further pushed affect and knowledge production from the margins to the centre of immaterial production. This is further reflected in the steady increase of power and influence by a handful of software companies such as Facebook (which owns Instagram) or Twitter on a global scale; so powerful that it took EU governments a long time to demand their contribution to the economy according to their revenues in terms of taxes. Value production as it currently stands, is highly depended on material goods, financial products and affects as commodities. My claim to reject accumulation as the central mode of art production is not new but the difference is that previously affect as a commodity was considered marginal to a cycle of global value production. Now it is right at the centre, which reframes the claim for its rejection.

Based on this I suggest that performance art as a virtuosic form of affect production has experienced its own push from a marginal to a central practice in art value production. The Tate Tanks which opened in 2012 in London, are described on the Tate Modern website in the following way:

The Tanks provide a permanent gallery for live art, performances and a film and video work from the Tate collection. There is also a programme of new commissions of works made for the specific spaces (The Tanks, not dated).

There have been live performances in Museums before, and were steadily increasing in the years before 2012, as well as the establishment of independent performance art venues. But the fact that there is a permanent gallery dedicated to performance within one of the biggest art institutions of the world, to me does signify the 'new' status of performance art within the context of art economies and beyond. Practices that are characterised by ephemerality are now permanently positioned at the centre of an art interested audience instead of a performance specific audience as it would be the case in specially dedicated venues. Therefore performance art also progresses further to the centre of an overall economic and social production, as institutions such as the Tate Modern increases its influence and power on a global scale.

Alleged neutrality, intensified competition and measurement

Next to its increased canonisation, this progress of performance art towards the centre of economic, social and cultural attention can be also attributed to the fact that issues such as value measurement have become much easier with social media as a replacement, or addition to monetary terms. Although performance art and knowledge production such as academic research was never completely outside of commodification modes, it was more difficult to attach a value to it because of its immaterial nature and affect as its product. This is in line with what Morini and Fumagalli (2010) claim in relation to bio-capitalism. They write

The production of wealth and value is no longer based solely and exclusively on material production, but is increasingly based on immaterial elements, namely on intangible 'raw materials', which are difficult to measure and quantify since they directly result from the use of the relational, emotional and cognitive faculties of human beings (2010, pp.236-237).

This was theorised in 2010, and since then there has been a change in circumstances through the increased usage of social media tools. Their parameters in many ways are used to measure affect, the product of performance, in the form of clicks, views, shares, follower numbers and engagement time by the users. With these tools, performance art as well as political and academic content can be much more easily placed within a regime of accumulation and measurement. By providing these tools and the complete transparency of measuring numbers attached to profiles, anyone participating on it, participates in the severing of competition between each other. This competition takes place equally outside of these platforms in bids for funding, residencies and commissions. But the difference is that the platforms via the transparency of the numbers, are assumed to provide an equal playing field

as opposed to obscure decision-making processes behind closed doors. I argue that these measurement tools provided by these platforms, next to increasing anxiety among many, do not entail the assumed advantage of transparency and henceforth neutrality. One reason is that if this form of affect measurement is presented as neutral and indicative of a value of a performance, it does not give any indication of the artistic quality as for example in line with the parameters that Claire Bishop suggests, the quality of relations between performer and audience. This requires an analysis of relational shifts between work and audience rather than numbers. The kind of measurement that platforms such as Instagram provide, deny the subjective dimension of art. It creates standards of comparison that do not require an in-depth approach but simplify the process of assigning value. Similar arguments could be made when using social media measurements for researchers as an indication of someone's value (next to citations and publications as such categories). With regards to the aspect of neutrality that such a measurement is assumed to provide, I am in line with the critique of Gibson-Graham in relation to theorisation of post-Fordism; something that is presented as neutral cannot be questioned and therefore excludes it from a debate and eventually de-politicises it while enacting a form of politics.

Also another important aspect to this is the role of algorithms, which are constantly changing and have a key function in the circulation of images and subvert the assumption of neutrality even further. This is not to be understood as a reactionary position of mine to wish for a re-instatement of a status quo before social media. The lowering of barriers into the art world, as well as the flattening of hierarchies in academia via tools like twitter that allow direct messaging, have broken glass ceilings for many. This makes those platforms well cherished particularly by women artists and young academics. But at least within a closed door process of a competition, it is not the illusion of neutrality that is sold to the competitors. From a feminist performance perspective the questioning of such allegedly neutral measurement and its negative effects is part of my critique articulated through the practice.

Negative effects and surplus labour

One of these negative effects of alleged neutral performance measurement, next to tightening the competition, is the way in which it changes the social relations between art producers/performance producers with each other. Based on Gibson-Graham's definition of capitalism which located it within a set of social relations where it 'becomes recognizable as a set of practices scattered over a landscape in formal and informal enterprises' (2006, p.xxiv), these tools are damaging towards relations between artists. By constantly comparing and being compared with each other through images and numbers, the intensified competitive

conditions of art production create an atmosphere of no-outside to the competitiveness and constant surplus production. This then can be further damaging to practices that heavily rely on a communal effort and the same can be argued for research. At the same time it increases the already dominant mode of self-exploitation among artists (and researchers) but also other forms of work in which a surplus value that is produced, is not obtained by its producers. In the context of art production/research and social media, the surplus can be understood as the amount of value that is generated through the labour invested into production of affect that goes beyond the production of the art work/research itself. This includes, for example, its promotion and sharing on these platforms given that the artists/researchers practice is located outside of these platforms. In academic research this surplus value can be also next to running several social media channels for the promotion of their own research, the presentation at conferences of the own research, which then gets promoted again on their own social media channels. In both cases the surplus involves the production of affect where the self-exploitation can take the shape of increased presence, flexibility and the acceptance of being paid below a minimum requirement to merely self-sustain. This risks, as Morini and Fumagalli point out in relation to cognitive capitalism, turning humans into (eternally self-promoting) machines (2010).

Coercive Aesthetics and Free Content

Social media platforms hugely benefit from a constant affect production by artists driven by competition as well as (art) institutions who are provided with free content. By institutions and companies being able to rely on such free content, there is even less incentive in having to invest into the livelihoods of those artists/researchers/contributors according to the value that they create for them. For companies this, for example, would mean paying proper taxes to support a country's social system and in the case of institutions, paying artists much higher fees. The content can be easily appropriated by institutions and companies through the claim of added value via institutionalisation and the increase of outreach. It could be argued here, that this kind of production process enables a freedom of the artist to produce without an institutional pressure. I suggest that this assumed freedom is convoluted by the premise of quick affect generation, where complexity and content is potentially compromised by visual appeal and quick 'outrage'. Jodi Dean in 'Communicative Capitalism' (2005) points out that the most value is generated by contributions that cause quick outrage and therefore get shared and circulate quickly.

The economics of social media equally cause a shift from content to circulation in performance art, with depoliticising effects for the latter as well as creating a coercive environment for instagrammable practices as well as a coerciveness in the platform's usage. It is becoming, not yet the main, but already a primary point of encounter with artistic performance practices. While its easy access it incredibly advantageous compared to the strict hierarchical economy of relations in the art world between institutions, galleries and artists, there are issues stemming out of the dominance of a privately owned platform as the mediator between them and interfering with the freedom of artistic practices.

Free the nipple! & painterly performers

For example, the user standards of platforms such as Instagram, particularly censor female nudity, creates a moralistic framework for visual production. This then further translates into users perception of artists work by taking on such frameworks, turning them into a form of potential invisible constraint. The work *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) by Amalia Ulman provides a crucial example for my arguments which I discuss in Chapter 2. But apart from the risk of patriarchal informed moral standards to which users potentially surrender in order to be 'seen', there is another aspect of coercive aesthetics that the usage can produce, particularly from the perspective of performance.

Anne Imhof, originally a painter, won the Golden Lion in the Venice Biennale 2017 with her work *Faust*. Despite or because of its lengthy character over several hours where audience and performers share the stage, the work partly owes its success to its visual appeal that translates well onto platforms such as Instagram. Her performers in their model-like appearances do translate very well onto this medium. And images of those extremely melancholic but cool looking young performers are circulated by an audience not paid for their contributions via their personal Instagram channels. My point is not to lessen the works of Anne Imhof to an aesthetic social media spectacle as this would not give justice to the work itself which I have experienced. My point is to highlight a coercive nature of visual appeal under the current production modes in which performance art operates. While this is not an issue per se, it is problematic once it becomes coercive and therefore eradicates the space for practices that operate through different or multiple parameters which do not necessarily rely on affect production via visual appeal. There is a risk of *instagrammability* becoming the main indicator for value within (performance) art production. Considering the bodily dimension of affect, and the limits of transporting this dimension on a digital scale to me threatens the embodied quality of affect and the value produced within it. Saying that, the bodily affect production in Imhof's work which I have experienced in *Faust* (2017) and *Sex* (2019) staged in the Tate Modern's Tanks, I consider outstanding. Still the coercive character of

'instagrammability' risks becoming the main determinacy of aesthetic production, led by the economics of digital affect circulation. The impossibility of showing a nipple when one intends to Instagram as well as the coerciveness of 'instagrammability', next to the aspect of institutions profiting from artists' or researchers self-promotion, can be neglected as critical arguments in relation to the platforms overall benefits. My main concern though is a narrative that re-enforces a 'no-outside' of these platforms.

Will performance art die on Instagram?

Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked: the politics of performance* (1993) discusses the relationship between performance art and the economics of production in the context of the early 1990s and the shift of funding policies at the time. She writes:

Performance only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations; once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology (1993, p.146).

Despite her observation being located in a time before Instagram, her claims are transferable to the now. Back then and now, there is a risk that practices with a strong focus on how its documentation translates positively within the affective networks of Instagram and its logics of circulation, push practices which rely particularly on aesthetics of disappearance, out of frameworks of recognition. Phelan in her argumentation makes a connection between the economy of reproduction in performance art and a conservative notion of sexuality. She writes that 'Non reproductive performance art dovetailed with the non-reproductive ontology of homosexuality; conservatives used to attack the other.(....)' (1993, p.134). Phelan further writes that the same is applied to women, who are distrusted in their rejection of being reified reproductive subjects (1993). She stresses that from the mid 1980s funding structures have shifted together with increasing conservatism to a framework in which ephemerality is superseded by reproductivity. Phelan concludes that funding and economic structures of performance art that do not accommodate and support non-reproductive practices, are constructed out of a patriarchal understanding of gender relations translated into economic relations (1993, p.134). Phelan writes:

The pressures brought to bear on performance to succumb to the laws of the reproductive economy are enormous. For only rarely in this culture is the 'now' to which

performance dresses its deepest questions valued. (This is why the now is supplemented and buttressed by the documenting camera. the video archive) (2003, p.146).

The work of Anne Imhof, for example, is impossible to think of without audience members pointing their phones at the performers to catch them, before they disappear again. This over the course of time, has become integral to its aesthetic, but it does not necessarily result in a subversion of the pressure to make it enter the networks of online commodification. To me, her work seemed to try to create a middle ground between affective body to body experience as well as its effective translation into mediums of documentation. During the 2019 staging of *Sex at the Tanks* (London) which I went to see, the presence of a camera team professionally documenting the work, next to the numerous mobile phones, was impossible to ignore. At some point the organization of my own body in the space, seemed less determined by the performers action, but by my own awareness not to obstruct the view of the camera holders' and not to be in the shot of the camera which documented the performers. In some way this overt presence of the documentation, and I observed already something similar during the 2017 Venice Biennale, enforced a notion that what I was witnessing was iconic. And that made the absorption of the bodily effects, at least for me, impossible. The presence of multiple cameras heightened my awareness that my bodily reaction could become part of an eternalising representation of the work, captured through all the present lenses, making disappearance eventually impossible. Here a critique of capitalist consumption society became absorbed in its own effort to be made consumable once it has disappeared. This may seem a very reactionary notion of performance, one that seeks a state prior to mobile phones and the internet. But from the perspective and intentions for my research, which investigates strategies of resistance, the attempt of finding a compromise within the coercive frameworks of production I consider similar to the notion of seeking harmonization rather than friction. The question that arises from here is:

- Where to draw the line between adaptation and withdrawal, between compromise and resistance ?

Surplus of Meaning:

Apart from the aspect of surplus affect production, within Mouffe and Laclau's theorisation of identity and the construction of the social, results another form of surplus; the surplus of

meaning of each social element. This is pointed out by Gibson-Graham in the discussion of Mouffe and Laclau's *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy* (1985). They write:

In displacing the economy from its founding and unifying role, Laclau and Mouffe theorize the social (and by implication the economic) as constituted within a multiplicity of discourses, each of which represents an attempt to fix social meanings and positions. Each social element therefore has a surplus of meanings (and exists in a variety of discursive relations to other elements) rather than holding a fixed or preestablished social location (2006, p.36).

This observation is crucial given Gibson-Graham's emphasis on anti-essentialism as the premise of their work. Gibson-Graham as well as Mouffe and Laclau (1985), next to Lacan and Derrida, build on Althusser's notion of over-determination for their argument on the contingency of identity and the surplus of meaning that occurs with each social element. Mouffe and Laclau describe over-determination in the following way:

For it, the sense of every identity is overdetermined in as much as all literality appears as constitutively subverted and exceeded; far from there being an essentialist totalization, or a no less essentialist separation among objects, the presence of some objects in others prevents any of their identities from being fixed (1985, p.104).

So through their emphasis on over-determination, they stress the simultaneous decentring of the subject from a fixed position and the multiple relationships each subject has within a social construct, from which the surplus of meanings results. Rather than the dissolving of categories, over-determination acknowledges the presence of several categories in, as they call it, one 'object'. Bishop (2004) discusses the work of Liam Gillick from the perspective of over-determination. She writes:

Gillick has become best known for his three-dimensional design work: screens and suspended platforms made of aluminum and colored Plexiglas, which are often displayed alongside texts and geometrical design painted directly onto a wall. Gillick's descriptions of these works emphasize their potential use value, but in a way that carefully denies them any specific agency: each object's meaning is so overdetermined that it seems to parody both claims made for modernist design and the language of management consulting (2004, p.59).

As I understand it, her critique of Gillick's work is that it contains such an excess of meanings, that they eventually cancel each other, leaving the work with no meaning at all, or as she states without any 'agency' because it is left completely open. This raises the following question for my own practice that seeks the dislocation of a fixed position similar to the anti-essentialist position that Gibson-Graham are taking:

- Is there a risk that it equally ends up without any agency in the quest to perform multiple agencies at the same time ?

Here the works of Amalia Ulman *Excellences and Perfections* (2014), Andrea Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2003) as well as Schlingensiefel's *Please Love Austria!* (2000) offer particularly interesting examples for my analysis as they occupy several positions at once while relying on a single performer, themselves.

Self-objectification

My research shifts from Bishop's focus on relationships via the aspect of self-objectification. Gillick outsourced the over-determinacy onto an object and his description of it. In performance the discussion of multiple agencies shifts to a personified object. When focusing on the artist as performer, the distance between person and the work decreases. In the works of all the three performers that I chose for my later analysis, Ulman, Fraser and Schlingensiefel, it is often hard to distinguish moments of performance, *the work*, and moments when they are considered to be not performing. Still their entry point is always the one of an artist and so is mine. For this research I chose the perspective of a feminist performance artist, but this does not prevent this entry point being contradicted or undermined by additional agencies that are added via the context of each work that I decide to place myself in. From this regard, the surplus of meanings of the term performance generated in each context, also becomes crucial. While my entry point is performance in relation to the art form, within the context of my overall research, the term *performance* generates multiple meanings, for example in the context of research outcome measurement. The research shall show how this holding of multiple agencies that can contradict each other, affects the outcome of each work, and if a resistance emerged from it or not. What I exactly understand as resistance I elaborate in the next section.

2. Resistance

The notion of resistance from a feminist movements trajectory puts an emphasis on emancipatory projects seeking to end all forms of oppression. In this trajectory the emancipation is brought through a clear opposition, disobedient acts and social critique, resulting in a form of liberation through affirmative action. This is equally reflected in many feminist post-war performance practices to more contemporary ones such as Pussy Riots' 2012 *Punk Prayer* performance. The starting point for my investigation into feminist strategies of resistance was the disruption that their less than one minute long action and YouTube video caused within the political framework of Russia, and the global attention it generated via online circulation. It raised the following question for me: What was the reason it was considered so disruptive by the Russian authorities? So disruptive that the performers were met with such severe state force that seemed totally inadequate from any democratic perspective. Their YouTube video reached an international audience which raised another question for me: What did the performance's video generate through its circulation?

Watching it on YouTube shortly after the performance, to me, was a sign of extreme courage and playfulness by the performers. But it was also evidence that the contestation of power from a feminist perspective was ongoing and always incomplete, and that resistance has many different manifestations. Although it was not the performance per se that highlighted this incompleteness and continuity of contestation, but the consequences for the group members as seen in their trial and imprisonment. And while the resistance emerging from Pussy Riot's political and performative action, was both humorous and playful, it was also aggressive and confrontational. Given the powers that they were resisting, marked by extreme masculinity as personified by Vladimir Putin (thinking of the famous shirtless image of him riding a horse) and his authoritarian style rule via state aggression targeted at the suppression of opponents, their strategy seemed adequate to me, to resist and oppose but even more importantly generate international attention. Their *Punk Prayer* (2012) revealed the repressive conditions in which the performance took place in and outside of Russia. Here the revealing of conditions as an evidence of efficacy responds to Mouffe's notion of artists role within the formation of antagonism.

The forces I intend to resist as laid out previously in the discussion of post-Fordism, are by far not as visibly aggressive and even more, have taken on a feminine appearance in order to cover the regression of emancipatory politics. This I refer to as *the Feminization of the Right* which I will elaborate on later in Chapter 3.

The resistance, I seek does not solely understand itself as form of revealing but aims to produce autonomy from within its conditions of production in order to mark 'the outside'. Hence, the revealing may not be entirely sufficient to my understanding of resistance. The efficacy in one aspect may not be applicable in another. The resistance that I seek needs to take on a different form than the openly oppositional and disobedient example of Pussy Riot. My resistance is not a directly aimed at patriarchy, like in Pussy Riot, but the unquestioned principle of capital accumulation and its consequences which is in line with Gibson-Graham's point that the pursuit of identity politics is not enough to overthrow capitalism (2006). But this does not mean that identity politics, in terms of advancing rights of marginalised groups, are obsolete. A patriarchal system of production is central in upholding capitalism as I intended to show through my discussion of the feminization of labour. But my research asks:

- What kind of resistance is needed according to my intentions?

The quest for autonomy from frameworks of production eventually places this research within a political and activist framework of feminism(s) which seeks the downfall of repressive structures and emancipation. Still my understanding of emancipation tries to distance itself from a notion of clear opposition as the premise of resistance which is a strategic choice I have made for this research as I elaborate in the following.

Resistance: a strategic approach

Howard Caygill in *On Resistance: A philosophy of defiance* from 2013 offers insight into different forms of resistance by drawing up a historic trajectory of resistance movements from the 1960s up until the Arab spring in 2011. He stresses from the beginning that:

There is never a moment of pure resistance, but always a reciprocal play of resistances that form clusters of sequences of resistance and counter-resistance responding to each other in surrendering or seizing initiative (2013, p.5).

Based on this impossibility of purity on the premise of reciprocity, Caygill throughout his entire discussion resists a conceptualisation of resistance. Instead, he shifts his focus from *what* it is to *how* it is achieved. He points out 'What I hope is becoming clearer are not the only difficulties generated by the concept of resistance but also the gravity of complexity of the question of how to resist' (2013, p.140).

No escalation

He continues his discussion that the question of *how* involves the identification of enmity when referring to Antonio Gramsci and Walter Benjamin in their discussion of resisting Nazism and Fascism. Caygill emphasizes Gramsci's notion of resistance as a creative action based on invention. Gramsci and in consequence Caygill, draw from a militaristic understanding of it when referring to the writing of Prussian Military general Carl Clausewitz. It should be noted here that Clausewitz equates resistance with warfare, which, as Caygill stresses himself, is always aimed at violent escalation (2013, p.58). He writes on Clausewitz's strategy:

The reciprocal also holds: war is also the preservation and enhancement of the same capacity against the onslaughts of the enemy. The logic of violence - escalation - essentially concerns the process unleashed by each adversary's attack on the other's capacity to resist at the same time defending their own (2013, p.58).

Although violent escalation is at the core of Clausewitz's strategy, Caygill tries to offer a reading on Clausewitz that turns his original writings titled *On War* into '*On Resistance*' (2013, p.58). He claims that Clausewitz strategic and systematic approach to warfare based on reciprocal action can be seen as a starting point for non-violent resistance as exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi. Central to Clausewitz strategy was 'overcoming the enemy's capacity to resist' (2013, p.58) which Gandhi did by offering no grounds for violent escalation.

Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* (2012), even though non-violent, did offer enough provocation to Russian authorities leading to escalation via their trial and imprisonment. This is not to say that Pussy Riot are to blame for their imprisonment and punishment but rather the opposite, that their punishment by no means was adequate, as justified by the Russian authorities. Hence, it could not have been part of their calculation when planning the performance. But what followed highlighted even more the extreme force and brutality with which opposition and critique of the state was met in Russia at the time. In the Pussy Riot case, it was also an opposition to the church, which in Russia aligns itself with the state. This force heightened their short performance to an epiphany of disobedience to these authorities and into a revealing moment of contradictions, in which the Russian state's claim to be a democracy, was undermined in its authoritarian reaction. This *joyful act of insurrection* as Rosi Braidotti (2015) calls it, would have not been met with any punishment in a democracy.

Given Caygill's claims with regards to Gandhi, avoiding escalation might be key in my performative investigation of resistance. With regards to Mouffe's claim that the artists' role is

to foment dissensus in a model of antagonism and Pussy Riot's example, this raises the following question:

- Is the relationship between avoiding escalation and forging dissensus exclusive or accommodative within a performance practice that seeks resistance?

Processes over things

Caygill (2013) in relation to Gramsci, drawing on Clausewitz, also claims that resistance should be aimed at interrupting processes of production that produce forms of oppression rather than focusing on things or entities such as the state. Caygill writes:

Thus the state appears in one time frame as a thing and in another as a process. An important consequence of this view is that resistance can be understood as an intervention in a process rather than the confrontation with a thing. This understanding of the 'life of the world' in terms of intersecting and conflicting processes moving at different historical speeds allowed Gramsci to develop a very subtle account of a political action as a war of movement with different strategic options corresponding to different speeds of deployment (2013, p.141).

Caygill's emphasis on resistance not being a form of confrontation but an intervention in a process I consider central to my understanding of resistance within this research. It is not aimed at creating a clear opposition, but to cause disruption through the strategies that I use. This notion of artistic resistance has its roots in Dadaism and what Hal Foster in *Bad New Days* terms 'mimetic exacerbation' (2015, p.78), one of the earliest predecessors of over-identification, which I will discuss later on. The common denominator of mimetic exacerbation and over-identification is causing rupture through excessive mimicry.

I investigate in my practice as research the strategic option that Caygill depicts in relation to Gramsci; the concept of different temporalities of action and forms of resistance that do not always have to result in one disruptive moment but can operate at different speeds. Caygill in line with Gramsci's argumentation, takes Gandhi's actions as a prime example; 'from small and symbolic events at the level of everyday life, to sabotage, blockages and overloading of the enemy's movements to grand strategic movements of the masses in concerted action' (2013, p.143). The result of this deployment of different temporalities in the process of resisting, as Caygill concludes, is the constant state of being 'both besieged and besieging, at

once conducting reactive and affirmative resistance' (2013, p.143). He situates affirmative action such as the one advocated by Braidotti's notion of feminist politics as well as reaction towards oppression, inherent in the act of resisting, being both active and reactive. As stated in my introduction, I consider my work responsive to current events, but given the live nature of performance this aspect of reaction that Caygill stresses might be applicable to the moment of performance itself. Caygill's discussion of resistance is very useful for my investigation from a practical point of view to analyse the mechanisms of what happens in my performances. My research also locates itself in a framework of political philosophy when using political antagonism and other theories from the field for its reading, therefore I continue my discussion of the notion of resistance from a philosophical perspective including (early) psychoanalysis, close to the field of philosophy.

Resistance: a philosophical approach

Rebecca Comay in 'Resistance and Repetition: Freud and Hegel' published in *Research in Phenomenology* (2015) discusses the notion of resistance from the perspective of psychoanalysis with a Freudian lens onto Hegel. The psychoanalytical and the philosophical notion of resistance are crucial in the context of my practice as research as they are also central to the theories of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau that I use as a starting point for my discussion. It helps further locating this practice-based project within a field of enquiry between performance art and political philosophy close to Bishop's initial analysis (2004). At the same time Comay's focus on repetition together with resistance creates a direct connection with over-identification which is an excessive form of repetition as resistance which I discuss later on.

Resistance: an antinomy

In her opening investigation of the notion of resistance Comay (2015) stresses that it signals several antinomies such as immobility and upheaval. She points at the 'internal dissensus' (2015, p.239) of resistance and writes:

(...) resistance signals impediment and impetus. It can either disrupt or sustain the equilibrium and steadiness of every state of affairs or set-up: either a force of

transformation or a bullwark against innovation, either conservative or transformative – and at times disconcertingly both at ones (2015, p.238).

This constant 'Gegensinn' (German term for antinomy) of resistance she also points out with reference to Nicole Loraux and her analysis of the term stasis, which is part of the ontic origin of resistance. Stasis contains meanings such as 'steadiness, constancy, permanence—and it also means sedition, faction, rebellion, civil war' (2015, p.239), and offers an interesting point of perspective for my research. The strategy that I choose to deploy, over-identification, operates through a notion of contradiction in which the overtly affirmed is simultaneously the subject of defiance. Similarly Caygill writes that the deployment of strategic invention within an understanding of 'resistance is already a counter-resistance.' (2013, p.142).

Both Caygill (2013) and Comay (2015) make an inherent tension in the notion of resistance visible; that it is never one state but several at ones and as Caygill stressed from the very beginning, resistance is most likely to be impure and in constant tension. These tensions do not allow a complete definition of resistance, as Caygill suggests (2013). Hence, the focus on *how* resistance is performed, rather than the question *what* it is, as Caygill stressed, is the defining attribute of resistance. In this research my practice as a performer should answer the question of *how* resistance is performed. Therefore, it might be that my previous claim on resistance being a form of defiance becomes obsolete when focusing on the *how* rather than the *what*. But the focus on the *how* puts the practice of performance at the centre of the investigation of resistance, by asking *how to perform* defiance instead of opposition as a form of resistance, for example.

Comay (2015) makes another similar point to Caygill's claim on resistance being both active and reactive, when she writes that 'Resistance can be either a struggle against or a secret collusion with domination' (p.244) and concludes that 'At times irritatingly, it can seem to be both at once – simultaneously the opening and the greatest obstacle to transformation'. This raises the following question given the context of my research where I investigate the 'social' with my focus on frameworks of production, through artistic means.

- Can social and artistic critique be accommodated in one performance practice?

There is a conflict of interest between those two types of critique as I pointed out in my introduction in reference to Bishop's analysis (2004), where aesthetic judgements are at risk of being replaced by ethical ones. I discuss these conflicts in more detail in the following section.

Social vs. Artistic critique:

Boltanski and Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2007) draw a distinction between social and artistic critique in order to distinguish emancipatory movements with different intentions. In their view, artistic critique advocates ‘the freedom of the artists, their rejection of any contamination of aesthetics by ethics, their refusal of any form of subjection in time and space and, in its extreme form, any kind of work’ (2007, pp.37-38). Although I do put an emphasis on freedom through the question of autonomy, overall this framework seems insufficient to grasp the key concern of my critique within the framework of post-Fordism. Boltanski’s and Chiapello’s framing of social critique draws on four categories of indignation in which capitalism is a source of a. disenchantment and inauthenticity; b. oppression; c. poverty and inequalities and d. opportunism and egoism (2007, p.37). The feminist critique of post-Fordism by Gibson-Graham includes most of those categories, forming the basis for my resistance and its underlying critique. But I also agree with Boltanski and Chiapello that ‘it is virtually impossible to combine these different grounds of indignation and integrate them into a coherent framework’ (2007,p.37). But it is not the insufficiency of the artistic vs. the impossibility of integration of the social critique into one practice which makes me reject considering my work as one or both forms. There is a dualism that arises from it, as Claire Bishop stresses during her Creative Times *Living as Form* (2011) lecture; a dualism that represents those two spheres as separate from another. She concludes in *Artificial Hells* (2012) in line with Boltanski and Chiapello, that it is not an either/or question between social and artistic critique but ‘that they exist in continual tension’ (p.276). My art practice operates in this tension and intends to uphold it rather than resolve it. For example, the offering of alternatives as part of the practice would be a form of resolving it, which is also why I do not consider this part of my intentions.

An important aspect to this tension is that social critique denies artistic critique’s claim to moral neutrality as pointed out by Bishop (2012) when referring to Boltanski and Chiapello. This impossibility of neutrality, is central to my feminist understanding of my art practice and this research project; that it is always embedded in a framework of production and operates through a dependency on it. But this impossibility is not intended to create a suffocating environment of ‘no-outside’ but rather than question why it is not neutral and how it complies and through that, enables the space for resistance rather than compliance.

The strategic approach of over-identification might be considered a compliance with the subject of critique, although not secret but overtly open, depending on its deployment. But the

results of its exploration might be an opening to transformation. This is key to my intentions as I want to create a potential opening through the resistance without making any claims for transformational consequences as a result of it. At the same time it is important that the practice does not result in a dead-end. In my research I explore how not to reach such a position where its impact remains within the framework of practice-based research without making a claim to offer alternatives for a social sphere. I elaborate in the following section why this is important.

Resisting pre-determination:

The research collective BAVO (2007) claim that the demand for critique to be constructive and always offer alternatives instead of a mere analysis results in the neutralization of any criticism and gives a licence to *continue business as usual* and further that any critique or form of resistance can be neglected if it lacks a constructive approach when it is understood as a neglect of responsibility. This puts forward an important question within artistic practices that operate or are understood as a form of activism; What is the responsibility of such a practice if it chooses not to be pragmatic and eventually constructive? Practices operating on the basis of negation, the formulation of critique, will always potentially be faced with such a criticism. This as BAVO point out, offers a form of differentiation between different forms of *artivism*, the merging between art and activism. Over-identification as a strategy functions as a form of negation, therefore, potentially deemed pointless. Artists need to decide for themselves if they want to take such a responsibility of their work being constructive. If they cannot, it puts into question the autonomy of the art maker through imposing a framework in which the artists' role is pre-determined as Harvie's discussion of UK funding structures has shown (2013). Still artists in choosing an approach in which the work is not supposed to provide solutions but 'merely' critique has its own risks. Comay writes that the

desire to challenge existing conditions but without the means or will to overcome them, resistance is committed to reproducing these conditions, borrowing its energy, tactics, and even objectives from extant social models (2015, p.243).

And while this corresponds with my previous claim that I refuse the notion of art practice having any transformational potential on a social scale, what takes place within and through the practice should still be able to signify something beyond itself and the mere act of mimicry. The work as a form of negation does not need to result in a simple reproduction of its

conditions of making. It may not have total transformational power, but still a critical potential. This potential though in line with Mouffe's understanding of antagonism and art practices, could be undermined by being a form of consensus, 'even if this consensus is seen as a critical one' (Mouffe, 2007, p.4) which eventually fails to develop its disruptive potential and forge disagreement.

My practice investigates from a feminist performers perspective in the context of post-Fordism how a critical potential is developed and generated that is not based on consensus. At the same time I adopt Caygill's and consequently Gramsci's notion of different strategic temporalities of acts of resistance which can be immanently disruptive such as Pussy Riots' *Punk Prayer* performance from 2012 as well as practices that are more long term and are obscurely subversive through slow sabotage.

Resistance is what breaks the rhythm

Comay, in relation to Freud, refers to resistance as a form of interruption in the context of psychoanalysis. She writes:

Resistance is what breaks the rhythm of what Freud will continue to the end to call the work—the repetitive, accumulating scansion from month to month, from session to session, from moment to moment, from word to word. Whatever interrupts or impedes the continuation, the going on, of work is a resistance (2015, p.245).

Instead of analysis, in the context of my research I consider 'the work' to be the forms of post-Fordist production (as a form of politics); its narrative on accumulation and the essentialist nature of this narrative is at the centre of my resistance. This in its togetherness can be considered as operating at an all absorbingly fast rhythm. Hence the intention of my work is to generate an interfering noise in this rhythmic production that halts it and interrupts this rhythm through exploring the disruptive potential of over-identification. Over-identification is a strategy functioning through negation, that is affirmative rather than negative towards its subject of critique. The latter is replaced by the simulation of consensus with the subject of critique rather than its opposition. How this affirmative negation functions as a form of resistance I explore in my practice and the foundation for it I discuss in the next section.

3. Over-identification

Self-subjugation:

Comay (2015) observes that resistance can also result in a form of 'self-subjugation', turning it into a regressive and repressive concept and confronting the emancipatory notion of resistance 'as a practice of insubordination' (Comay, 2015, p.244). This can lead to some form of discomfort because of the ambiguity that results from resistance becoming a mode of voluntary self-subordination rather than emancipation. This ambiguity I consider different than the state of being 'besieged and besieging' (2013, p.143) which Caygill describes. Here the positions are still always clearly defined within an existing antagonism and there is no ambiguity of who is resisting to what or whom. In the case of self-subjugation as a form of resistance these positions are not clearly defined. BAVO, when referring to Austrian satiricist Karl Kraus's notion of resistance as choosing the worst between two evils, they acknowledge that 'Instead of fleeing from the suffocating closure of the current system, one is now incited to fully immerse oneself in it, even contributing to the closure' (2007, p.28). Hence, in this notion, the artist deploying over-identification does not take the clear position of being a critical antagonist but sides with the position that initially was the subject of the agitation.

'What if they really mean it ?'

Over-identification came to prominence as a concept through Slovenian Philosopher Slavoj Žižek to describe the unique, subversive strategy of Slovenian avant-garde group Laibach, who are the musical wing of the artist collective Neue Slovenische Kunst. They emerged in 1980s Communist Yugoslavia. He writes about Laibach:

In the process of disintegration of socialism in Slovenia, they staged an aggressive inconsistent mixture of Stalinism, Nazism, and Blut und Boden ideology. The first reaction of the enlightened Leftist critics was to conceive of Laibach as the ironic imitation of totalitarian rituals; however, their support of Laibach was always accompanied by an uneasy feeling: "What if they really mean it? What if they truly identify with the totalitarian ritual?" (Žižek, 1993).

He points out in 'Laibach and NSK' (in Monroe, 2005) that the intention of over-identification is to subvert the subject of critique through taking the system more seriously than it takes itself,

rather than attacking through a direct, open, or straightforward critique which can be easily identified and eventually neutralised.

An 'Eastern European' phenomenon

The discourse on over-identification has been highly dominated by a focus onto practices in former-socialist Eastern European countries such as Slovenia. Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse (2006) point out that the reason for this can be found in the political circumstances in the post-war period. They write:

Since the early 1970s affirmative elements have been present in all areas of unofficial art in the former Eastern Bloc. These strategies, initially adopted by way of necessity (i.e. underground) in Socialist Eastern Europe and later chosen deliberately led to a special art of practice' (2006, p.445).

In these practices of 'explicit consent' which developed during periods of oppressive regimes, 'classical aesthetical methods of; imitation, simulation, mimicry and camouflage' were applied by the artists' to become 'invisible' and 'disappear; into the background' (2006, p.445). This disappearing practices, produced under repressive regimes had to be invisible for the artists protection and therefore were not part of a choice.

Over-identification and Subversive Affirmation

Arns and Sasse (2006) make a distinction between subversive affirmation and over-identification in which over-identification can be understood as the more radical version of subversive affirmation. They frame subversive affirmation in the following way:

Subversive affirmation is an artistic/political tactic that allows artists/activists to take part in certain social, political, or economic discourses and to affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them. It is characterized precisely by the fact that with affirmation there simultaneously occurs a distancing from, or revelation of, what is being affirmed (Arns and Sasse, 2006, p.445).

At the same time their distinction also seems to emerge out of a specific historical context in which subversive affirmation 'appeared in the context of Moscow conceptualism and described the literary practices developed by Vladimir Sorokin' (Arns and Sasse, 2006, p.445) in the late 1980s, where its roots can be traced back as early as the 1920s in Russia. Over-identification as a practice emerged with Laibach, who also started in the 1980s and then found more direct deployments when it was imported from the 'East' to the 'West' as Arns and

Sasse point out, exemplified by the practices of The Yes Men and Christoph Schlingensief in the early 2000s, which I will discuss later on. Over-identification was as a strategy developed by Laibach almost independently of early practices of subversive affirmation in other soviet areas (2006). Arns and Sasse write about Laibach (NSK) that:

The tactic of over-identification is, if you wish, subversive affirmation in its ultimate form because it manages to create an absolute totality. (...) The tactic of NSK, did not formulate itself in an openly critical discourse of the state and its ideology; nor did it distance itself from ideology through irony or ironic negation (2006, p.448).

They draw their distinction based on the level of radicality and extent of these two tactics when they are deployed and the level of distance which is created between the subject of critique and the critic. And this lack of distance, or collapse in over-identification is achieved through an approach that lacks irony and operates through a totality of gestures which does not allow a space of separation between the artists and what or who they are over-identifying with. As Žižek pointed out, over-identification raises the question of 'What if they actually mean it?'

The focus of my research is on over-identification where I am looking into disrupting and resisting the totality of a system of production through over-identifying with its agents and my full immersion into it. My research focuses onto contemporary practices on a porous boundary between 'art' and 'life', which deploy a combination of affirmative and negative gestures. Hence, rather than operating as a form of camouflage in which the practice becomes invisible, these gestures as a resistance are foregrounded in the practices of the artists which I focus on (Ulman, Schlingensief Fraser), hence their critique does not operate in a space of invisibility. On the contrary the conditions of post-Fordist production actively endorse criticism rather than suppress it. This not only secures the framework of post-Fordism to be considered as democratic but also secures that artistic critique keeps contributing to the process of valorisation. Mouffe points out that:

Nowadays artistic and cultural production play a central role in the process of capital valorisation and, through 'neo-management', artistic critique has become an important element of capitalist productivity (2007, p.1).

Hence, artistic critique is fully integrated in the current modes of production. A similar point is made by Boltanski and Chiapello when referring to 1960s counter-culture building the foundation of the so-called new spirit of capitalism. Therefore, also the deployment of over-identification has to be rethought in a condition where critical discourse is permitted but basically ineffective.

It could be argued that when these strategies have been imported from the 'East' to the 'West', that they turned from a necessity due to oppressive regimes into a choice of strategy. But this is put into question when considering how the mode of exercising power has changed as in the model of post-Fordism. The context for my analysis is not one in which a visible repressive regime is exercising power but where an 'invisible' narrative of accumulation as in the politics of post-Fordism determines the framework of art production and as I elaborated previously, risks producing a coerciveness of aesthetics as well as participation in privately owned networks. In this framework of coercion, power is shifted away from the state towards software companies. In my exploration the aim is on how to make this invisibility of the narrative visible through over-identification. I elaborate in the following section how direct critique has been rendered inefficient in the model of liberal democracy within post-Fordism and why over-identification has become a necessary strategy in order to articulate critique within this context to disrupt it.

The capitalist master making critical discourse superfluous

BAVO (2007) in their discussion of over-identification, next to Laibach, put a closer focus onto activist art practices particularly aimed at criticising neoliberal power structures in the 1990s and 2000s for which the American duo The Yes Men are exemplary by using over-identification in a framework in which free speech is endorsed rather than oppressed. Over-identification as an artistic strategy of resistance for The Yes Men, means 'Giving a Big 'Yes' to Capitalism' (BAVO, 2007, p.9) in order to critique capitalism. BAVO (2007) in order to explain how it works in this kind of context refer to Lacan's model of the capitalist master in which superiority of the master is affirmed 'by openly listing all weaknesses and problematic features of his/ her project' (2007, p.22). This observation of Lacan was made in response to a change of how power operated during the 1960s, namely away from authoritarian structures acting by force and suppression towards a new style of power. BAVO write that in this style the master becomes his own critic and through that

creates the illusion that the system is receptive to participatory improvement, that there is still significant manoeuvring space that allows for bottom-up input as well as a willingness on the part of those in power to amenably discuss such suggestions and take them into serious consideration (2007, p.22).

Therefore, critical discourse is made superfluous because of the simulation of criticality and horizontality of power where 'critical actors are seduced into collaborating amicably with their usual enemies about possible solutions to the many problems at hand' (2007, p.22). Over-

identification aims at reversing this approach from criticism to praise of the critiqued, through simulating a position of overt consent with the subject of critique. This makes it harder for the subject of critique to appropriate the position taken by the artist, who in this case, fails to be the critical antagonist of capital. In the following I will discuss the already existing canonisation of contemporary examples of over-identification including Janez Janša, Laibach (in the contemporary) and The Yes Men, all of whom have been applying this strategy in the context of liberal democracies.



Figure 2. Laibach at Steirischer Herbst (Austria) 20 September 2018, Photo: my own

Laibach, The Yes Men, and Janez Janša

BAVO (2008) in line with Žižek (1993) claim that Laibach's early adaptation of the strategy in the 1980s worked in challenging the communist regime by embarrassing themselves through the inability to critique the group who accused the regime of being too lax. Later, the combination of totalitarian aesthetics and the accusation by the left of not being left enough, made a targeted critique by the left and right impossible, without ending up critiquing their own position. This I suggest corresponds to Clausewitz's strategic approach that Caygill (2013)

discusses; taking away the enemies capability of resisting and defending. Stephven Shukaitis (2011) points out that an excessive adoption of a set of ideas, images, or politics is central in the strategy of over-identification. Hence it does not only work through an aesthetic but through several aspects as the example of Laibach shows and as Arns and Sasse stressed, as a totality.

The Yes Men

The Yes Men compared to Laibach, came to later prominence in the late nineties and early 2000s. Similar to Laibach, who claim that the communist regime was too lax, BAVO (2007) argue that The Yes Men's critical efficacy functions via their expression of sympathy with the WTO and *wooing* the core principles of capitalism that the organization is based on. In many of their performances The Yes Men slipped into the roles of representatives of huge US corporations to formulate a critique of their business practices. BAVO (2008) describe the work of The Yes Men in the following way:

In the bogus lectures they present ever so seriously at conferences and at universities, their strategy is to present the official discourse of the WTO in its pure, unmediated form, that is, stripped of any form of sugar-coating such as ethical sensibilities, concern for poverty or respect for democracy. Recall, for example, the hilarious scene in which one of the Yes Men participates as a representative of the WTO in a television debate on global injustice and the role of financial institutions. The usual trick of genuine representatives on such debates is, of course, to water down their own policies or couch them in euphemistic terms, so as to prevent being attacked by the opponents head-on. The Yes Men, on the contrary, bluntly and openly propagated all kinds of hardcore neo-liberal arguments and schemes, to the obvious confusion of the other participants in the debate (2007, pp.29-30).

One of the most famous examples is The Yes Men's appearance on BBC World as authentic representatives of Dow Chemical in a 2004 work called *Dow does the Right Thing* in which they promised huge compensation for the thousands of victims of the Bhopal disaster, which Dow Chemical's subsidiary Union Carbide India was responsible for in 1984. As a consequence the share price of Dow Chemicals slumped right after the airing of The Yes Men's performance, hence the performance created a form of impact in real financial terms for the company (The Yes Men, 2004).

One key aspect of the Yes Men's work, that actually led them into playing the role of representatives, has been the use of fake websites, with the one imitating the WTO as the

most famous example. Those 'bogus' websites were and are still incredibly successful in imitating the 'original' and it was their successful imitation of these websites in first place that actually gave them the possibilities to stage their performances. To this day, they get contacted and invited to give talks and presentations via their websites. This shows, in line with Shukaitis argument, how they take up ideas, images and politics of these powerful corporations and political lobbies as part of their work. One of their more recent stunts has been a campaign that they launched aimed at hoaxing no other than the NRA, the US National Rifle Association, called 'Share the Safety' as part of their work, *NRA shares Safety* (The Yes Men, 2017). Part of this hoax has been a campaign video that like in many of their other works, brilliantly takes up the aesthetics and workings of the NRA, with the focus on fear. They made the campaign video appear so authentic that the NRA invited them to speak at one of their conferences but they were uncovered during the performance at the conference.

Self-objectification and Distance

BAVO (2007), similar to Arns and Sasse, map different forms of over-identification, which they name as tactics, like over-affirmation as critique in The Yes Men and Laibach. Schlingensief is different because he is shifting between over-affirmation and critique which I will discuss in more detail later in the thesis. But BAVO do not address how those tactics work in relation to those who perform them nor what exactly happens in the performances. Their analysis does not include the relationship between efficacy of the tactic and the performer and the signifiers that the performers use, stemming from the subjects of their over-identification. For example does the fact that one of The Yes Men with his Alter Ego, or Fake Name, Jude Finisterra, was so convincing in his personification of corporate power that BBC World took him as the authentic representative for Dow Chemical, deserve more attention.

All the examples in BAVO's discussion are reliant on extreme self-objectification, even though the members of Laibach have changed over time, the performers were always the artists behind the concept as well. The Yes Men for example in their appearances often took on different names or alter egos such as Jude Finisterra in *Dow does the Right Thing* (2004). Through that, despite being both performer and artist, there was always a certain distance inherent in their work; it allowed them to step back from the position of *evil* which is not easily achieved in the works of Laibach and Schlingensief. Although when watching interviews separate from their performance; Schlingensief in Paul Poet's *Foreigners Out! Schlingensief's container* (2002), a documentary on the action *Please Love Austria!* (2000), or listening to members of Laibach giving interviews today, or watching The Yes Men's videos on their

hoax's, this distance is re-instated through non-contradictory statements of their intentions during off stage moments. For example in *NRA shares safety* (2017) The Yes Men explain the issues arising from the workings of the NRA or in the case of Laibach, I experienced this during a public talk with Ivan Novak, a member of Laibach in 2018. The talk was a day after their concert as part of the *Steirischer Herbst* – an international cultural festival held in Graz, Austria. During this interview Novak was clearly dissecting the workings of over-identification (without naming it as such); especially when confronted with an audience question on the efficacy of it, once it has been used over such a long period of time, as in the case of Laibach. With reference to their concert in North Korea in 2015, Novak concluded that it was still efficient in causing outrage and provocation given the public media response to their concert and trip there.

Janez Janša

An interesting example for the total collapse of distance in the act of self-objectification via over-identification is the work of the Slovenian artist collective Janez Janša. In this collective three different artists officially changed their names in 2007 to Janez Janša, the head of the Slovenian right wing party and government. It was during a time when Slovenians were encouraged by the right wing party, to change their names to make them sound more Slovenian. Here the lack of distance concerns the degree of transgression into reality from their staged to their private persona, in a form that the other previous examples do not. Although there are legal consequences and threats as in the case of The Yes Men given the extremely powerful antagonists that they take on, which puts their own safety at risk. But looking at it from the perspective of over-identification, which is my focus, The Yes Men's performance of the *evil* stops when the performance is over. For Janez Janša the staged "act" is always ongoing as they have officially changed their names and not just taken on an alter ego for the moment of the performance. They are constantly reminded and identified with their subject of critique. Aldo Milohnić (2008) describes their work in the following way:

Thus, it seems that the Janša artists are working with political "ready-mades" on several levels in an attempt to subvert the ideology of the (present) ruling party in Slovenia. Their method of over-identification is adapted to a post-socialist situation with the SDS right-wing ruling party as an obscure combination of nationalist ideology, neoliberal economics, Stalinist-like hierarchical intra-party organization, and totalitarian tendencies in overruling key mass-media, state, and quasi-state funds and corporations (2008, p.126).

Milohnić points out that Janez Janša have adapted their work to the different modes of power which also Lacan observed. Still this practice sounds and seems very similar to the approach Laibach are taking. But the distance that Laibach still potentially have to their work, I suggest has disappeared in the case of Janez Janša. In their 2008 exhibition *NAME Readymade* in Moderna galerija Ljubljana they exhibited the different documents on which the name change became visible to a public audience. In an interview with Lev Kreft (2008) they illustrate how officially changing ones name is different to taking on a pseudonym they state:

JANEZ JANŠA: What we are dealing with here is the fact that this gesture actually intervenes into the relationship between art and life; it locates itself at the intersections of the public, the private, the political, the artistic, the administrative, the judicial, the mediated ... You cannot avoid the consequences of changing your name in any of these spheres (2008, p.152).

JANEZ JANŠA: What is the basic paradox? Why does this gesture produce uncanniness? Precisely because it has really taken place: had we used the name as a pseudonym, the whole thing would have been immediately clear as well as distinct: "Ah well, this is just the name they use in public." But now the question is: "Why did they do this for real? It would be more or less the same thing [if they only used the pseudonym] and we would understand it." (2008, p.152).

JANEZ JANŠA: We also need to point out the difference between this gesture and the existing forms of multiple names. Usually, the latter are collective pseudonyms. The case of one of the most famous multiple names, Luther Blissett, was similar to mine in that it involved the assumption of the name of an actually existing person (Luther Blissett was a black football player with AC Milan); however, I assumed my new name not only as a pseudonym but also administratively (2008, pp.152-153).

As the quotes above show, there are actually two levels of transgression inherent in the work of Janez Janša that exceeds or at least distinguishes their deployment of over-identification via self-objectification from the other examples discussed so far. On the one hand it is the administrative change to their lives as all three Janez Janša state. On the other it is also the overall giving up of their previous identity to the outside and replacing it with a collective and shared one, between each other and Janez Janša, the right wing politician. Although as they state in their interview with Lev Kreft (2008), they still remain the same artists with the same previous work that they have done, in this collective new name adaptation, they leave each individuals name behind (and work) as well as their previous efforts of making a name for themselves as artists. The excess here lies not only in commodifying themselves individually

through self-objectification in which their identity is the centre of their practice, but transgressing each other's identities by becoming an object as a collective through the gesture of conceptual art. Hence it is not only the boundary between art and life they have transgressed but also between each other and the politician Janez Janša.

Collectivism and the question of surplus

Milohnić (2008) points out that it would have been sufficient for only one of them to rename themselves to Janez Janša, the head of the Slovenian Right-wing party as an affirmative subversive gesture. But the effect of doing it collectively, the excess, results in an even more grotesque gesture. He writes:

The alienation effect of the serial renaming to Janez Janša's name is precisely an absurd type of subversive affirmation; over-multiplication of Janez Janša's is a consequence of overidentification with the ideological mechanism of interpellating individuals as subjects (2008, p.127).

Therefore, it becomes even more revealing towards the subject of critique that Janez Janša are targeting, the dissolving of identity through identitarian politics as pursued by the Slovenian right-wing party and the oppressive character of such politics. Arns and Sasse, write that in 'In subversive affirmation there is always a surplus which destabilizes it and turns it into its opposite' (2006, p.445) which to me, further blurs the boundary between their distinction of subversive affirmation and over-identification on the basis of excess. At the same time they point out that 'Over-identification makes explicit the implications of an ideology and thus produces such elements that may not be publicly formulated in order to an ideology to reproduce itself' (2006, p.448) which is also core to my intentions, hence, I will further stick to the notion of over-identification within my discussion, especially in relation to the aspects of surplus and excess as part of the strategy. And it seems to me in the work of Janez Janša there is an excess of surplus in their deployment of the strategy, rendering self-objectification from an individual to a collective act in which the blurriness between them and their supposedly authentic selves reflected in their "authentic" Slovenian names, is undone. The same potentially could be argued for Laibach as the efficacy of their approach equally lies in their performance as a collective; they collectively embody a totalitarian aesthetic which relies on homogenization as a form of empowerment. But there is a difference between Laibach who from the beginning deployed this strategy as a group.

They lack the transformational aspect of identity as in the case of Janez Janša, who have become an object while Laibach were the object from the very beginning. This makes Janez

Janša's gesture more revealing through its excessiveness in the contemporary. This is not to heroize the work of Janez Janša into a form of self-sacrifice but to frame the effects of this excess which as they call it can be also considered a 'counter-marketing gesture' (2008, p.160). They state:

We are dealing with a paradox here, which I would describe as visible disappearance, that is to say, Grassi, Hrvatin and Kariž have disappeared, but in a visible manner, their disappearance has rendered them even more visible than before. This is the point where we must consider the gesture of renaming in connection with the thesis about withdrawal as a political strategy, that is, withdrawal not as a romantic act of escapism but rather as a withdrawal from the logic and pressures of the art market. With Laibach, the assumption of the name is more important, for the name represents a certain traumatic historical point that was topical at the time; their name hit the traumatic core and produced uncanniness in the public (Kreft, 2008, p.160).

Laibach's name evokes a connotation to the Nazi occupation of Slovenia as *Laibach* refers to its capital's Ljubljana German name, a memory which sits with a discomfort among many Slovenians as German language is equated with fascism (Arns and Sasse, 2006). For Janez Janša their collective name has been the *ultimate* marketing gesture from the perspective of art world economics. Looking at the track record of Janez Janša and their participation in exhibitions after the collective name change in 2007, it has generated an excess of attention to Janez Janša, the collective and to them as individual artists.

The Role of the Audience

Arns and Sasse emphasize that the viewer, and actually the denial of the position of the viewer is key to the efficiency of affirmation techniques when applied as a critique of an aesthetic experience. In this context the viewer/listener/reader needs to be involved in the situation, 'so that she or he can understand her or his involvement afterwards and reflect upon it' (p.447). The location of the revelation with Laibach, as Janez Janša state, lies in the production of *uncanniness* in the public. But in the case of Janez Janša I think this production can be found less in the wider public than in their (artistic) audience specifically. Based on their interviews, it seems that it is mainly their surroundings that are the most irritated by their gesture while a wider public is potentially able to ignore the nuances and the direct confrontation with it such as having to address them directly as Janez Janša. In the case of Janez Janša, the subversive effects that arise from their act, despite their administrative and therefore public facing aspect, are too intimate as well as too complex for a wider public to be agitated. Unlike the work of Liam Gillick where its over-determinacy leads to a denial of any agency (Bishop, 2004) as it

remains so overtly open to interpretation, Janez Janša's might be too closed from the perspective of agency. This is not to say that their work therefore has less value because of its effects on a rather intimate circle compared to *The Yes Men* by causing irritation to a wider public such as in *Dow does the Right Thing* (2004). But that the effect of disruption within this intimate circle is lessened by the agreeability and consensus that arises from the work within this circle equally arising from the intimacy of the gesture. The surplus of meanings that their work created in its complexity also contributes to the settling into this vantage point because it can be neglected on the premise of its excess. In the end Janez Janša and their audience are reconciled on the premise of the agreed critique articulated through the gesture that concerns them very directly. Hence, the question of 'What if they really mean it?' gets resolved in this agreeable moment which hints towards the different factors which can render over-identification inefficient as a strategy. There are fine lines between excess producing agreement and excess producing contradiction and those lines, this together with aspects such as humour, need to be paid attention to in the deployment of this strategy, which I elaborate on in the next section.

Over-identification's (in)efficacy as resistance

Over-identification, repetition and mimicry:

Comay writes:

Or, to speak in a Lacanian-Nietzschean register, resistance is frozen in the imaginary. Mesmerized by its antithesis, caught up in the mirror-play of endless mimetic doubling, it is condemned to reactivity and resentment (2015, p.243).

Based on this it could be argued that there is always a dimension of mimicry in practices of resistance, it is just that in over-identification this mimicry is active, excessive and consciously used, putting it even more at risk to get stuck in a state of reactivity as Comay writes. Her analysis of the internal negativity of the term resistance as opposed to its positive connotation, additionally provides a groundwork for the understanding of the principles of over-identification as resistance. This strategy uses the negative, the overt identification with *evil* (BAVO, 2007) and its repetition and mimicry, to produce, although not always obvious, the positively associated aspects of resistance. It depends on the different forms of application of the strategy how obvious and visible these positive aspects are to the audience. This is what can

be considered its modes of operation or tactics as laid out by BAVO with the examples of Schlingensiefel vs. The Yes Men. These examples of “successful” applications of this strategy by being subversive such as The Yes Men or Slovenian Avant Garde Group Laibach have shown that this mimicry only becomes a form of resistance the closer the subject of mimicry and the artists are located. In the case of Laibach it was the mimicry of authoritarian communism of their home country Slovenia, even though they have been in exile for the majority of their career. Still they have lived and experienced what they now mimic in an exaggerated manner. Arns and Sasse in their discussion of the NSK point out that their ‘appropriation of components and elements of the ruling ideology’ was ‘a game with these “ready-mades”, an adoption of existing ruling codes in order to – according to Laibach – “answer these languages with themselves”.’ (2006, p.448). So the mimicry is dependent on an active and playful working with these ready-mades, as the term ‘game’ suggests. In the case of The Yes Men it is American Corporatism and their convincing impersonation of their subjects. Part of their efficacy is the fact that they also could have been the people they are impersonating, hence it is not difficult to imagine them as their subjects of critique without the ironic distance.

Are artists ready-mades?

Andy Bichlbaum in his TEDx Talk ‘How to become a yes man’ (2014) points out at the very beginning it was all ‘an accident’, that he never had the intention of becoming a Yes Men but it just happened to him. It all started when he was working as a computer programmer and broke up with his boyfriend (Ted X Talk, 2014). The same applies to Janez Janša, where the strength of the work also lies in the possibility that each of them could have been Janez Janša, the politician, in first place as their age, sex and looks overlap, further minimising the distance between them and their subject of critique and making the act of mimicking even more efficient. It seems only a matter of contingency that they became artists and not real spokespersons of a big corporation or right wing politicians, that makes the mimicry successful for their intentions. This assumption also renders the artist into a form of ready-made in the context of over-identification; it enables the process of appropriation where ready-made appropriates ready-mades. This allows the smoothing out of the edges and blending the two into one, intensifying the efficacy of over-identification as a form of mirroring. Here part of the efficacy could be located in the contingent reversibility of the critic and the subject of critique, the mime and the mimicked.

Hostility and/or homage

With regards to the discussion of *evil* being contingent, Anna Gibbs (2010) offers an interesting insight. She writes:

Mimicry may represent a desire to disguise what one is (an animal avoids its predators; an Internet predator pretends to be a teenager), or the desire to become something else (a human infant identifies with its parents). It can mean either homage or hostility; it might signify sympathy, seduction, deception, defence or aggression (2010, p.193).

Gibbs here equally seems to point to a contingent nature of the mime towards the subject of mimicry which then results in a potential conflict and contradiction inherent in the act of mimicry. But while she considers it an either/or situation, it might be as Comay stresses in relation to the antinomy of resistance, that over-identification as an act of overt mimicry both signifies a hostility *and* homage; sympathy *and* rejection. When considering that the efficacy of mimicking *evil* positions depends on a notion of contingency where the mime and the mimicked can be easily exchanged, it puts into question the potential depth of *evil* of the subject of critique, which for me connects over-identification further with a post-structuralist debate on identity on which I elaborate in the following.

Contingency of identity ?

This potential for exchange and contingency of mime and mimicked, I consider from a feminist perspective, a further acknowledgement of the contingency of identity as in Mouffe and Laclau (1985) and a rejection of essentialism(s). It might be also through this perspective that over-identification is a useful tool to furthering the critical debate on essentialism and gender normativity through the aspect that both men and women, artists and right wing politicians, can act *evil*, questioning a stable core of *evil*. One of key aspects of Chantal Mouffe's theorisation of agonistic/antagonistic politics is the contingent nature of social order. She writes:

I agree that artistic practices could contribute to the struggle against capitalist domination but this requires a proper understanding of the dynamics of democratic politics; an understanding which I contend can only be obtained by acknowledging the political in its antagonistic dimension as well as the contingent nature of any type of social order. It is only within such a perspective that one can grasp the hegemonic

struggle which characterizes democratic politics, hegemonic struggle in which artistic practices can play a crucial role (2007, p.1).

Mouffe in the same text (2007) uses the terms symbolic and social order, interchangeably. She stresses not to make a distinction between political and non-political practices based on the importance of artists contributing to a symbolic order, by constituting and maintaining it. The symbolic order stems from a Lacanian register that Mouffe and Laclau used in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985). Lacan writes in his own records that the symbolic order is defined as 'Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together...the shape of his destiny' (1997, p.67). As I understood it, and similar to the accounts of Mouffe and Laclau, here the incomplete split subject finds completion by locating its position in a symbolic order. The symbolic order regulates how one, in the case of Lacan, *man*, relates to another and through that form an order, which Mouffe and Laclau in reference to Lacan, stress as contingent. Over-identification provides an interesting aspect to this theory through creating an assumed reversibility between artist and subject of critique when artists evoke the question 'What if they mean it?'. It might be that the artists decision to identify with the *evil* can signify an attempt to compensate for a lack of artistic identity, a brand, and locating oneself in the formation of a moral hierarchy within a social/symbolic order. This counter-marketing gesture by Janez Janša, to name themselves after *evil*, eventually became the signifying brand of their practice.

From mirroring to rendering to re-organization

Gibbs also points out in reference to Foucault, that mimicry initiates a '*rendering* - a relation between things in "which, like a flash, similarity appears" (Foucault 1973, 24)' (2010, p.193) rather than being a mere representation of the other. This notion I consider key when exploring the efficacy over-identification, namely the act of rendering, that differentiates it from mere mirroring or repetition. One of the aims in this research is to render the material that is appropriated. McKenzie Wark (2016) stresses the productivities of repetition in reference to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. She writes:

To this Butler adds a soupçon of Derrida, where the act of repeating something brings with it an *unavoidable variation*. Hence while gender performativity does not mean being free to chose one's gender, there is still always some slippage in the performance of gender norms. That gender comes into being through its performance implies that there is always something a bit *off* about it (emphasis my own, 2016).

Over-identification offers a tool for revealing what is “off” in the performativity of femininity in the context of corporate and political power. But at the same time I would be wary to consider this guaranteed, as there are several complexities that determine the potential of this revealing, hence the efficacy of the strategy. Further Gibbs points out that mimicry is a form which, through borrowing, organizes and communicates relationships ‘which might be spatial, temporal, tonal, energetic, logical, causal and so on’ (2010, p.194). In the case of over-identification I suggest that this can be a form of relationship re-organization in which those aspects, spatial, temporal, tonal, energetic etc. that Gibbs mentions, are crucial elements in contributing to a rendering instead of mirroring. For example, can the reorganization of space cause a shift in the energy between the audience and the performer in it and equally those elements can render the relationship between the performer and subject of critique, the mime and the mimicked. In simpler terms; it matters who speaks from where to whom with which voice and how this is organized.

Gibbs (2010) also stresses that the medium in which or through which the mimicry is taking place and what it signifies, is less important than its mode of operation (p.193). In this research the performance might present the medium while the mode of operation I consider what BAVO described as the tactics used by their different examples. In my research I intend to explore on the basis of biographic proximity, which mode of operation suits my intentions best when using over-identification and what kind of rendering (or not) has taken place through its usage. This *rendering* may be considered in relation to the material that was appropriated and the relationships between performer and audience. This then tunes in with Bishop’s (2011) claim that the creation of antagonism within an art practice requires the re-organization of relationships between art work and audience. Hence the efficacy of over-identification to be antagonistic from a performance perspective, is potentially dependent on the (re) organization of the aspects that Gibbs points out.

Repetition, Vanity & Humour:

There are several inherent risks in the functioning of over-identification as a strategy, where through its excessive repetition it can become exhausted. Its over use risks resulting in a form of parody which enables the audience’s ironic distance, therefore minimising its destabilising and disruptive potential. At the same time, since it can become defining to an artist’s identity, one’s brand, the over attachment with this brand also risks to undermine its efficacy as a mere means to display ones vanity.

Repetition

Coming back to Rebecca Comay's discussion of resistance, she points out that repetition as part of the notion of resistance contributes to its inherent antinomy and contradiction. Resistance can result into its own negation and eventually ending up in a reactionary position. In its German translation *resistance* is understood as *Widerstand* where the phrase *wider* refers to the English against and the German *wieder* to again. She writes:

An oppositional and repetitive stance and standing (there's an "again" lurking in every "against," just as there's a *Wieder* spilling out of every *Wider*), resistance straddles the line between persistence and insistence. Resistance points at once to a kind of conservatism—a reluctance, inertia and even paralysis—and to a restlessness that needs to push every situation to breaking point and to leave nothing standing (2015, p.241)

One of the key criticisms that Laibach are facing today is that their work has become ironic through its repetition. As previously stated, since the 1990s they have been mainly working in Slovenian exile and since then they have gained something like a 'cult-status' among an Central European art audience and beyond. This was also part of the question by the audience member towards Ivan Novak during his talk at the Steirischer Herbst in 2018; that subversive affirmation gets exhausted as a strategy when over-used. This point Novak met with his remark that provocation is still possible when referring to Laibach's concert in North Korea in 2015. Still I suggest what the audience member was also questioning is the status that Laibach occupy by being so iconic – resulting into a perception of their work as ironic negation in the *now*. Arns and Sasse (2006) previously declared the lack of ironic perception key to Laibach's potency and threat. Hence the question 'What if they really mean it ?' has lost its potential for doubt over the years. I personally found this manifested in a moment during their concert at Steirischer Herbst in Austria on 21 September 2018 when 'Austria is a fascist country' was projected on the concert stage before Laibach performed. Katerina Degot, the festival's curator remarked critically at the beginning of the talk with Novak after the concert that 'Austria is a fascist country. And everyone is laughing.' (Degot, 2018). Although I personally was not laughing, it just shows the degree of irony with which Laibach's work is perceived today, at least within a Central European Art context such as Austria. Given this ironic canonisation of their work, they had to travel all the way to North Korea to create doubt or at least some form of provocation. The media outrage around this concert in 2015 raises another aspect of questioning over-identification's efficacy; the repeating of the negative and the (assumed) alliance with *evil*. The risk is that rather than being subversive, over-identification becomes a

form of homage lacking the critical distance that this would require from the artists deploying it.

DADA becoming dada

A similar observation, where the repetition of negativity turns into the opposite of the intended is made by Hal Foster in *Bad New Days* (2015) in his discussion of *mimetic exacerbation*, a term which he uses to examine the strategies of the Zurich Dadaists such as Hugo Ball, developed in the midst of the 1st World War. Foster writes that at the core of this strategy was the appropriation of the 'corrupt language of the European powers around them and played it back as a caustic nonsense.' (2015, p.91). As the term mimetic exacerbation suggests, Foster states that the mime was a key persona in Dada who adapted to the traumatic conditions around him. He writes:

the Dadaists assumed these conditions - particular the armouring of the military body, the fragmenting industrial worker, and the commodifying of the capitalist subject – and inflated them through hyperbole or “hypertrophy” (2015, pp.91-92).

This 'hypertrophic buffoonery' (2015, p.92), as Foster further describes it, was first a critical mode of parody where the potency lay in its ability to expose an order as failed if maintained as a strategy. But he also stresses that it soon became 'a farce of nothingness'; a 'play with shabby leftovers' and contained the risk of self-disintegration of the performer given its 'excessive identification with the corrupt conditions of a symbolic order' as a necessity for its functioning. Foster through the lens of Zurich Dadaist Hugo Ball acknowledges the strategy's limit that on the one hand it potentially represents 'a defense than knows that the damage is already done' and that on the other it can be also mistaken as an affirmation or celebration of the negative that risks to collapse into nihilism.

In *Artificial Hells* (2012), Claire Bishop writes that the Dadaists in Paris were very aware that their strategy of provocation and causing scandals when performing in the cabaret space became exhausted. As Bishop writes, at some point, the audience themselves were becoming Dadaist by throwing eggs, cabbage, and beef steaks at the performers, as well as bringing instruments to interrupt the performances (2012, p.70). The audience that came to Dada performances in the cabarets were waiting to be provoked. This, as Bishop (2012) writes (with reference to Andre Breton), made the tactic of audience provocation become stereotyped and fossilized; hence, for Breton, it was important that Dada moved to a space other than the cabaret or theatre. He stressed that Dada needed to move outside of the goodwill of the

audience and focus less on merely causing a scandal, he states 'At all costs, they must be prevented from accepting shock as a work of art' (Bishop, 2012, p.70).

And in the case of Laibach this shock, to me, became accepted as a work of art, when everyone was laughing at 'Austria is a fascist country' in Graz in 2018. Although it has to be also attributed to Laibach that they themselves adapted their styles over the course of time; from confrontational industrial metal in the early 1980s, they shifted to the performance of their version of *The Sound of Music* (1965) in North Korea in 2015 and in 2018 in Graz, including a string Quartet; they changed their style and appearance as the politics did into a more amicable and softer aesthetic. But still the ironic distance with which their work is encountered in the "West", remains and 'everyone is laughing' (2018, Degot).

But similar to the existing canon of over-identification, neither Foster nor Bishop discuss the aspect of gender within the workings of this strategy. Particularly Berlin Dadaist feminist artists such as Hannah Höch and performance artist Valeska Gert, who was Höch's contemporary, have addressed the hypocrisy of gender norms during the Weimar Republic. Within the notion of the 'New Woman' that was a result of the 1st World War, their work was critically addressing the sexism within Dadaism and society under the cover of emancipation of this 'New Woman'. I will discuss the work of Hannah Höch later in Chapter 5 'Feminist Agonistics and The Power of Montage'.

Paradox of over-identification: success = failure

This signifies to me another paradox of over-identification; in the moment it is successful it also starts to fail. Rather than disruptive, it gets integrated into a recognition of ironic art practices in which the audience is ready to laugh at and applaud the artists for being 'subversive', therefore, instead of disruption, they create consensus and agreement. I suggest that there are three aspects which are crucial to the efficient deployment of over-identification but can render it inefficient; vanity, humour and repetition; resulting in agreeability and unrecognizability.

Vanity

Foster (2015) stresses that the strategy of mimetic exacerbation among the Dadaists had its own attractions which must have been strong enough to outweigh the potential risk of dis-integration that he stresses with reference to Hugo Ball. Although he does not articulate what the attraction is, my suggestion from the perspective of a performer is vanity. Both resistance

and over-identification, share the necessity for a certain degree of vanity by those who pursue it. Resistance as an heroic political act and over-identification as a strategy of artistic resistance, require the act of absolute self-objectification by the performer/activist; it is only the full commitment of the self, that generates its full effect from a mythological point of view. The counterfeit of Che Guevara, eternally young, more than 60 years after his death, is still decorating resistant movements all over the world. By being killed in another revolutionary attempt after the Cuban revolution, he is understood to have sacrificed himself towards the idea of resistance and revolution. It is his counterfeit and not the one of Fidel Castro, that animates contemporary spirits that intend to resist oppressive powers. Comay addresses in relation to activism that this vanity can produce a certain toxicity that eventual can become its own obstacle. She writes:

But the problem can haunt any form of activism: you can get so captivated by the struggle that you never want it to end. This was also Hegel's critique of abstract negation: the problem is not that it's too radical but that it's ultimately reactionary. Like all skepticism of the less-than-"thoroughgoing" kind, it invests everything in its own powers of contestation, in this way conveniently obscuring its own unwavering commitment to the status quo (2015, p.243).

It could be argued here, when sticking to the example of Che Guevara, that he was so captivated by the 'spirit of revolution', that he could not exist outside the workings of power contestation. It made him blind to the obstacles of his revolutionary attempts in Bolivia including the lacking desire of the population for it. With regards to Comay's statement, this could mean that he turned from a revolutionary to a reactionary, leading to his early death in 1967. I will refrain from making such an observation. But when looking at the long reign of Fidel Castro over Cuba and his wardrobes, a central element to my performance analysis, he wore his military uniform for the majority of his time in office. Through it, he signified that the revolutionary struggle against imperial powers was ongoing. In the early 1990s he changed into a dark suit, shortly after the Soviet Union collapsed and Cuba's economy was in a steep decline. The constant wearing of the military uniform might be considered more in line with a reactionary position, as Castro made his power dependant on the fact that Cuba was stuck in the Status Quo of the revolutionary moment in 1958, hence unable to progress from there.

Considering the long term practices of Laibach and The Yes Men and their outfits, communist uniforms and business suits, their appearance has rarely changed and potentially signifies their attachment to a status quo. Although Laibach also did wear black tie for their concert in Graz in 2018, there is still a dependency of their practices on their subjects of critique and the

status quo. Like Castro and the revolution, the attachment is so strong that their artistic existence and wardrobe is fully attached to their subjects and them remaining as powerful as they are. They cannot exist without the narrative that brought them into existence as a ruler/artist. Here the risk is from an artistic perspective, that being so closely attached to the subjects of critique, making it the sole basis of their artistic existence, potentially prevents them exploring other forms of expression or subjects of critique. They are so captivated in the struggle and their heroic role within it, that it also leaves no other option than to continue. Watching The Yes Men's videos, reading and listening to Laibach's interviews, sometimes gives such an impression. And particularly looking at the work of Laibach and The Yes Men shows that over-identification can be also considered a practice that risks limiting artistic agency as one gets so caught up in the process of contestation that no other artistic output is considered. Still while it shows a high degree of dependency in the case of The Yes Men, Laibach, and even more in the case of Janez Janša as their work becomes ineffective once Janez Janša is out of power, this also shows the continuing urgency of their work.

Therefore by no means do I intend to lessen their work on the premise of vanity and captivation, but highlight that it is both a necessity as well as a potential obstacle to the efficacy of over-identification. It might be also here where my initial need of escaping any form of opposition as part of my resistance is rooted. By claiming opposition one risks getting stuck with the subject of opposition as the sole subject of critique and eventually their own artistic existence. I intend to focus my work on a critique that operates on multiple levels and multiple relationships for which the feminist performance perspective is my entry point. When considering the works of Christoph Schlingensiefel, his varied practices do allow a more differentiated view, even though over-identification always lurks in the background of each work.

Still I cannot ignore my previous claim here, that over-identification might be a well suited subject to the exploration of a Lacanian notion of subjectivity, where one always lacks and seeks to compensate for that lack by finding ones position in a symbolic order and discursivity. In over-identification this could be the artists seeking their position within a moral order when overtly identifying with an *evil* character as their subject of over-identification. This then turns the artist into a complete subject, in which a symbolic order on moral grounds of good vs. evil is established. In this dependency their desire to contest is perpetuated, potentially resulting in an endless spiral of antagonism between these artists and their *evil* subjects of critique.

For the purpose of this research I intend to rather loosely refer to a Lacanian terminology. The depth of study that it would require to use it in a proper way is not part of this research and

not central to my concerns. Nevertheless, I do want to use the term symbolic order to describe the shift of relationships and hierarchies happening or not in my works and the works of the artists discussed as part of my discussion of resistance. As both Bishop (2004) and Gibson–Graham (2006) stress, antagonism and resistance is bound to emerge from the resetting of these. Still it is noteworthy that neither Bishop (2004) nor Gibson-Graham (2006) use the term symbolic order in their discussions.

Humour

Humour does have an extremely important role in the practice of over-identification, like vanity and repetition, being both part of its strength but also its potential nemesis. Practitioners of over-identification produce works that are incredibly funny while they are 'deadly' serious with The Yes Men's Bhopal appearance on BBC world as one of the leading examples. I suggest that over-identification's efficiency is also to a high degree dependant on the nuancing of humour that is produced in the works. On the one hand if a work is too funny it easily overshadows the potential conflict that arises from it, making it easily detectable and digestible as a form of critique. On the other, if it is not funny enough, but actually so serious that it cannot be detected as a form of art, it equally risks being completely unrecognisable as a form of critique. Hence, both extremes risk rendering its deployment inefficient.

The Golden Phallus

For me one of the best examples for this, in reverse though, are two works from The Yes Men; *Salzburg/The Horribly Stupid Stunt (Which Has Led To His Untimely Death)* (2001) compared to *The WTO's Golden Phallus/The Employee Visualization Appendage* (2001). They comment on this shift on their website in the following way:

Shortly after the New York Times publishes a full page about our trickery in Salzburg, the organizers of a textiles conference in Tampere, Finland make the same exact error, mistaking our fake WTO website for the real one. They invite the "WTO" to give their keynote address; Andy and Mike are, of course, glad to oblige.

This time, Mike and Andy decide to cook up more drastic fare. The lawyers in Salzburg hadn't noticed anything wrong with our talk, so we ask Mike's friend Sal Salamone, a costume designer in Hollywood, if he could make us a truly outrageous costume that would demonstrate in one unambiguous image what corporate freedom is all about (The Yes Men, 2000).

This drastic fare has become the famous golden spandex body suit with an enormous inflatable phallus that they presented at this conference in Finland. So, while their talk in Salzburg despite slight discomfort in the audience, still stayed unrecognized as a piece of performance, a bogus lecture without recognizable bogus, their massive golden phallus did not allow the overseeing of their artistic intentions, literally. Although The Yes Men claim that during the conference in Finland (2001) there was rarely a reaction to the inflatable golden penis, as they state 'Even a huge golden penis, swelling alone in an auditorium full of corporate leaders, can make no sound.' (The Yes Men, not dated), I still think from the perspective of over-identification, this represents a shift in their tactic. Their erect spandex golden phallus could not go unrecognized afterwards anymore as an ironic statement. To me, this undid the subtlety that made their work so powerful from a strategic perspective even if they were *bogus* lectures. While in the first instance they blended in too well, in the second they stood out too much. The golden phallus was not only grotesque but also their presentation of it turned their tone into an ironic one. So even those who were their subjects of critique, not many, but still a few of them, had to laugh at the grotesqueness and irony of their gesture. It was not weird discomfort that was caused but a liberating laughter, similar to what I experienced during the Laibach concert; and this liberation was available to both their corporate, but also artistic audience. This is to say that this is not a gradual development that happened in The Yes Men's work but just one instance. The laughing at 'Austria is a fascist' country was followed by several instances of laughter when Laibach were yodelling on stage while showing North Korean Propaganda images in the background. These projections, were from at least an 'Austrian' perspective, ridiculous; North Koreans doing fitness exercises in neon coloured sports outfits. It was so grotesque that not laughing was almost impossible. So I did laugh while refusing it initially. It was too funny. I needed to liberate myself.



Figure 3. *The Yes Men: Employee Visualization Appendage 2001* [Screenshot 07/05/2021]
source: [The Yes Men \(2001\)](#)

Based on this discussion of the foundations of my research, in the following chapter I introduce my first piece of practice for this research *VIVA 2023* which took place at Chelsea College of Art in March 2016. I discuss it in relation to Amalia Ulman's work *Excellences and Perfections* from 2014. This work is the first instance in which I explore over-identification as a strategy and articulate a critique of post-Fordist conditions of performance art production in the context of the upcoming Brexit referendum in June 2016.

Chapter 2:
Predictions & Perfections

In the following I present my own work *VIVA 2023* via a trans-scripted account of the performance in a black framed table and then I discuss the overlaps between my work and Amalia Ulman's *Excellences and Perfections*. I introduce her work specifically via a short description and the reactions towards it, particularly during her 'reveal' at the ICA in October 2014 and then briefly frame the differences between our works to then analyse them in more detail in relation to my theoretical framework. In my analysis I address through a feminist focus how both of our works used over-identification and what the different outcomes were from our different deployments of this strategy, particularly with a focus onto the audiences' reactions. This intends to evaluate if a position of resistance towards post-Fordist modes of production was reached by discussing what kind of disruption the works caused in relation to the audiences' reactions by deploying the strategy.



Figure 4. [VIVA 2023](#) Video documentation (2016) [Screenshot 15/05/2021]

Work 1: *VIVA 2023* (March 2016)

The first performance of my practice-based research was at the 1st year PhD student exhibition at Chelsea College of Art. The audience of my work was other researchers and artists in the context of an institutional setting. This provides a space of recognition between me and the audience, where we share both an affinity and a language we recognize.

The performance intended to articulate a feminist critique of conducting research under current modes of post-Fordist production, in which economic precarity is a central issue. This was the first instance in which I appear in the context of my practice-based research degree and over-identify with researchers' feminised working conditions, from a European perspective in the context of Brexit. I perform a critical voice of the hyper-networked female academic.

The following account documents what happened in the performance, its set-up for the exhibition and its location within a political context.

**30 March 2016: 1st-year student exhibition, Cookhouse Space, Chelsea College of Art
6.30pm:**

I was about to start my performance, which was part of my PhD programme. For the exhibition, I decided to stage my envisioned end of PhD in the form of a Viva in the year 2023. This future time frame was intended to map the potential struggles a female and European research student would face without funding and growing nationalism.

At this point, I was registered as a part-time student, without funding, whose latest submission date was 2023. It was the end of March, and a referendum on whether the UK should leave the EU was to be held two months later. I was unaware, at this moment, that the UK was expected to leave the European Union almost exactly three years (the minimum length of a full-time PhD) later, in December 2020.

The performance lasted about 20 minutes. I was wearing smart black trousers, a white shirt, and a gown from an academic gown shop in Cambridge. To document my live performance, I placed the camera right in front of the audience, visible to everyone; as well as functioning to document my performance, it was part of the stage set-up.

Before I started staging my Viva, I gave the audience (with the help of a PowerPoint presentation) a brief overview of future events that could potentially influence my research degree until my Viva in 2023. This was followed by my envisioned Viva in 2023, in the form of a live enacted conversation between me and my two 'examiners', both performed by myself in a pre-recording. Below I present a shorter version of the PowerPoint and the dialogue from my envisioned Viva. The PowerPoint presentation is a juxtaposition between my slides and the accompanying information I gave the audience with the slides. In *italic* are additional information for the reader of this document but not for the audience of the live-performance.

I introduced myself to the audience and the journey we were about to embark on, seven years into the future, before actually starting my own Viva.

The first slide showed the future result of the referendum in June, three months ahead of the performance. *The content of this presentation was fictional and based on my assumption that the vote would be in favour of remain.*



Figure 5. Slide 1, VIVA 2023

From this prediction, I continued the performance with:

- David Cameron's resignation
- Boris Johnson's takeover of the Conservative Party,
- Dropping out of my PhD due to increased fees and lack of funding



Figure 7. Slide 2, VIVA 2023

Boris Johnson, one of the supporters of the out campaign gets elected as new head of the conservative party



Figure 6. Slide 4, VIVA 2023

This is followed by:

- a slump in the British economy;
- my own failure to enter parliament with a self-founded feminist party in Austria to meet the growing influence of the right-wing party there
- the re-entering of the UK into the EU after a second referendum in May 2019;
- my own pregnancy and second drop-out from my research degree;
- another Facebook data scandal revealing its collaboration with Chinese intelligence services;
- and re-entering my research degree, arriving at my Viva in 2023, after which the research department of UAL will be closed due to budget restrictions.

The presentation was met with laughter from the audience.



Figure 9. Slide 10, VIVA 2023



Figure 10. Slide 16, VIVA 2023



Figure 8. Slide 14, VIVA 2023

I was about to start my Viva by calling my future examiners via Skype. In the year 2023, no examiner would fly in anymore, and most academics would work from home. With the audience behind me, we all faced the screen in which the two examiners appeared in separate Skype windows. One of them had the washing machine on in the background. We – that is, my live body and two different versions of my recorded body – started our triangular conversation about the intentions and challenges of this PhD.

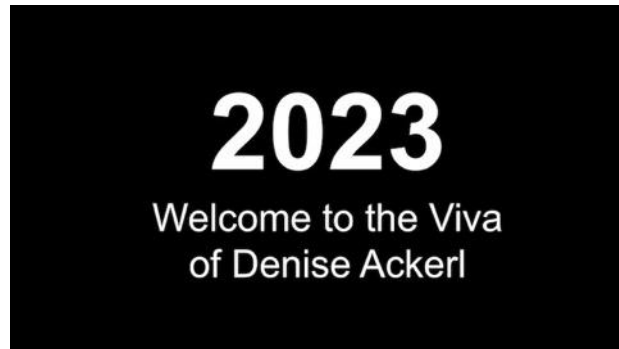


Figure 11. Last slide, VIVA 2023

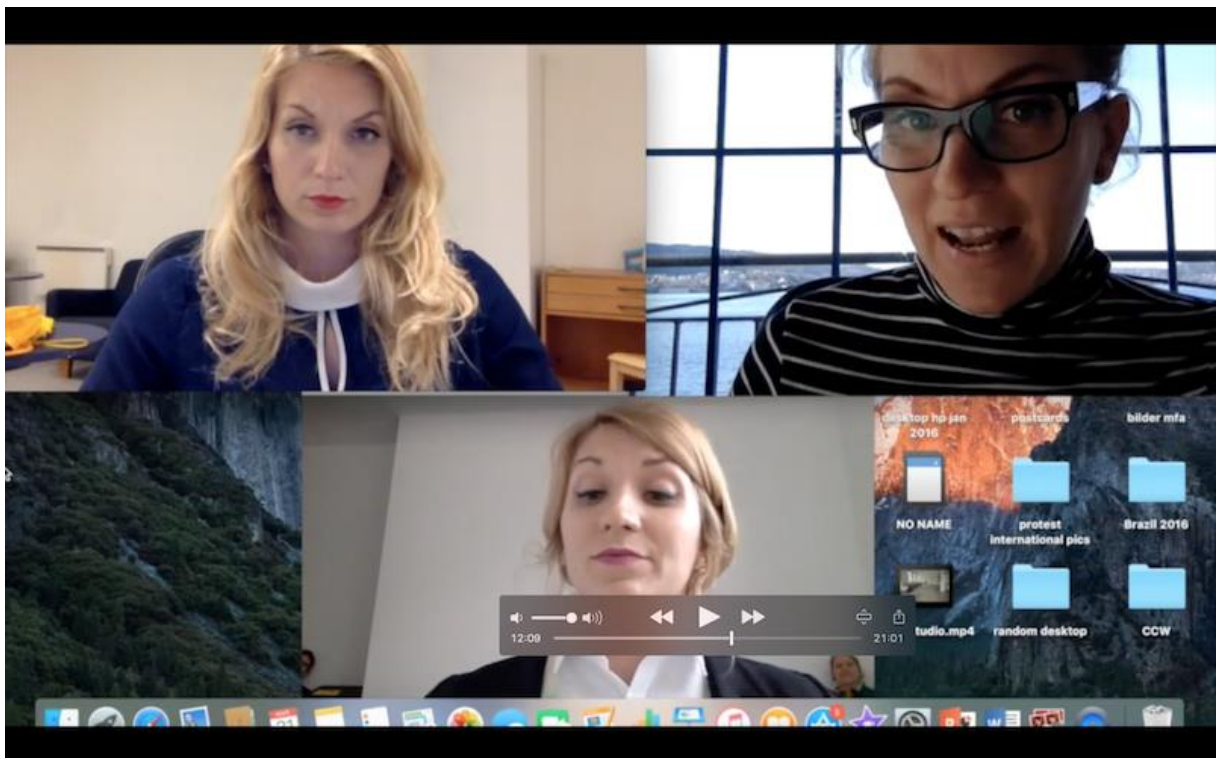


Figure 12. [VIVA 2023](#) Video documentation (2013) [Screenshot 15/05/2021]

VIVA 2023 (based on transcript of performance video)

(Skype ringing, calling Examiner 1 (X1))

X1: Hello? Hello? Can you hear me well?

(Ringing another examiner)

X1: Hello? Can you hear me? Can you see me as well?

DA (Denise Ackerl): Yes.

X1: Great, this is Ingrid Ibsen calling from Norway from Bergen, from the Arts University. Can you hear me? Sorry I got the washing machine on, I am just going to speak up a little bit.

DA: Yeah that's fine.

X1: Hi Denise, I am really pleased to be part of your Viva today and yeah.

X2: Hello. Am I on? Yes, this Prof Judith Pollock, from Yale University. I am also very pleased to be part of this Viva today.

X1: Ok, so ... My first question is Denise, why did you choose this topic? What specifically led you to feminist activism and performance art and social media?

DA: I think it all started with Pussy Riot and their *Punk Prayer* performance in 2012. I saw it on YouTube, and I guess I was very intrigued by this manifestation of outrage online; the way I encountered the performance was digital, through a YouTube video at home. During my painting studies I already tried to fake a revolution for my degree show.

X2: My question concerns the title of the dissertation. Why did you choose *Making the Worst Out of the Worst* as a title for this dissertation?

DA: This is actually a quote from the research collective BAVO and it goes back to Karl Kraus. "We will follow Karl Kraus' provocative suggestion who said, that if we are being forced to choose between two evils, always chose the worst option. That would imply that in Nazism, it is better to stop resisting altogether and stop trying, instead of being an idealist."

Technical interruption: Skype connection cuts.

X1 calls back in again.

X1: My apologies, I lost connection. Is it ok now? Good.

Denise, what is the gap in knowledge that you are addressing?

DA: I want to investigate different strategies of feminist protest and activism and how they can be used in my own practice as a performance artist for the creation of a critique of the current conditions of performance art production.

I am interested in the links between contemporary performance practice and feminist activism, and how they inform each other. This is important because those two always had a strong connection. And a lot of research has been done already about specifically this

connection between feminist activism and performance art about works from the 1960s until the 1980s, and many of these works are on display in big art institutions of today.

X1: So, tell us specifically what is new about your research?

DA: It focuses on social media such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter as new spaces for the empowerment and location of activism and protest.

Feminist artists always have created opportunities and spaces that previously did not exist for women and this is the next step. Now we see a big wave of feminist activism happening on those channels, which are used for communication, organising, and campaigning. Informally this is also known as “the fourth wave of feminism”, which is defined by the use of technology.

X2: Great! Tell us though what is so unique about your work?

DA: Through my specific background in fine art and economics, I can offer very special skills and understanding of the complex relationship between economic policies and performance-art production. In my practice, I actually aim to critique/protest against exactly these conditions. And the current economic situation, with increased austerity and higher cuts to benefits, all further contributes to the problems. It is commonly known that women are often hit first and the worst by these cuts, resulting in a common feeling of paralysis, especially among female artists and performance artists in particular; this potentially causes more protests and outrage among those affected, which is exactly what I want to look at in my investigation and in my practice. Through my online performances, I want to test the effectiveness of different protest strategies and participate in feminist activist online communities.

X1: So, what went wrong in all these years of your PhD?

DA: Where shall I start? I guess the result of the referendum was a crucial point. And then it just went on all from there.

X1: What would you do differently?

DA: Maybe not start a PhD at all, or at least make sure I get enough funding and that I am not my own subject of investigation of economic precarity. For sure not get kids.

X2: Why did you choose this methodology?

DA: Since I was looking into the question of social media and how platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube can be new spaces for empowerment, subversion and activism, I also needed to consider those communities present on there, as well as peers, for the evaluation of my performances. Especially, the online communities were of particular importance, because their reactions and the follow-up consequences would determine if the performances I produced for particularly YouTube would work as a subversive means. But involving online communities turned out particularly tricky as, for the results not to be biased,

they could not be informed about the research aspect, which on the other hand is a great ethical issue in research. Then I also needed to protect myself from online harassment, so I also had to come up with an alter ego, or actually a couple of online identities, spreading the different forms of activism, which made the whole case even more complicated. And then evaluating online commitment is very difficult as well, because attention spans are short, and so is commitment and reaction followed by actual memory.

X1: What have you learned about being a researcher?

DA: It is a tough business which requires a lot of endurance and conviction and self-motivation, and handling all sorts of people, and a great degree of philanthropy. A lot of it also requires good administration skills, total availability, and flexibility, and then you need to be very passionate about your research topic because it eats you up completely; you become your dissertation, knowing every single word out of 30,000, and especially in performance you analyse every single movement you did, and the reaction caused.

X2: Why do you think this deserves a doctorate?

DA: The new knowledge I have created is unique in its composition and of high value for every contemporary art institution, be it Tate, ICA, or the MOMA. And in the end, I have been suffering so much to get where I am, I sacrificed any sort of private life.

X1: Ok great. Thanks a lot Denise. I will consult with Professor Pollock over the result of your thesis.

X2: Goodbye. Thank you very much.

The performance ended and the audience applauded. We went to have a drink.

Overlaps *VIVA 2023* and *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) by Amalia Ulman:

In the performance there are many overlaps between my work *VIVA 2023* (2016) and Amalia Ulman's *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) from the perspective of strategies and methods used in the performance including aesthetic and audience as well as synchronicity (timing) which I present in more detail below. Both of us are young female art graduates whose practice heavily relies on the aesthetic of our bodies and appearances as validators for our critique. In both cases it is an extremely feminised appearance paired with a display of (an ironic) naivety. Both works are based on the construction of a narrative arc from downfall to resurrection transported via staged images and added narrative lines, paired with modes of live interaction, her replying to her followers and me to my 'examiners'. Ulman was synchronously reacting to what she was observing as the spectacle of social media emerging and the negative influence it had and still has on young women and the relationship to their bodies – *VIVA 2023* staged in March 2016 was synchronous to the political debate of the upcoming Brexit referendum as well as the lack of support structures for young (female and fertile) women in general. Equally there was an immanent social media critique, which for Ulman though only became articulated after the staging of *Excellences and Perfections* while in *VIVA 2023* it was during the performance, for example, the data leak scandal of Facebook. In both works we were over-identifying with the precarity of the surrounding structures for women being embedded in a sexist body politic. In our 'naive' display of a feminist critique of economic conditions we were both overtly identifying with something that we were already part of rather than something that was exactly opposite of who 'we' were. So the distance between us as artists and our subjects of critique in this case was not only small but almost non-existent. This could be seen, given my previous analysis of over-identification, as an indicator for its efficacy; it made the critique articulated believable and particularly in the case of Ulman, made the performance appear as authentic and un-staged. But there are also several differences between these works contributing to the different reactions towards them, which I will discuss after introducing Ulman's work in the next part.

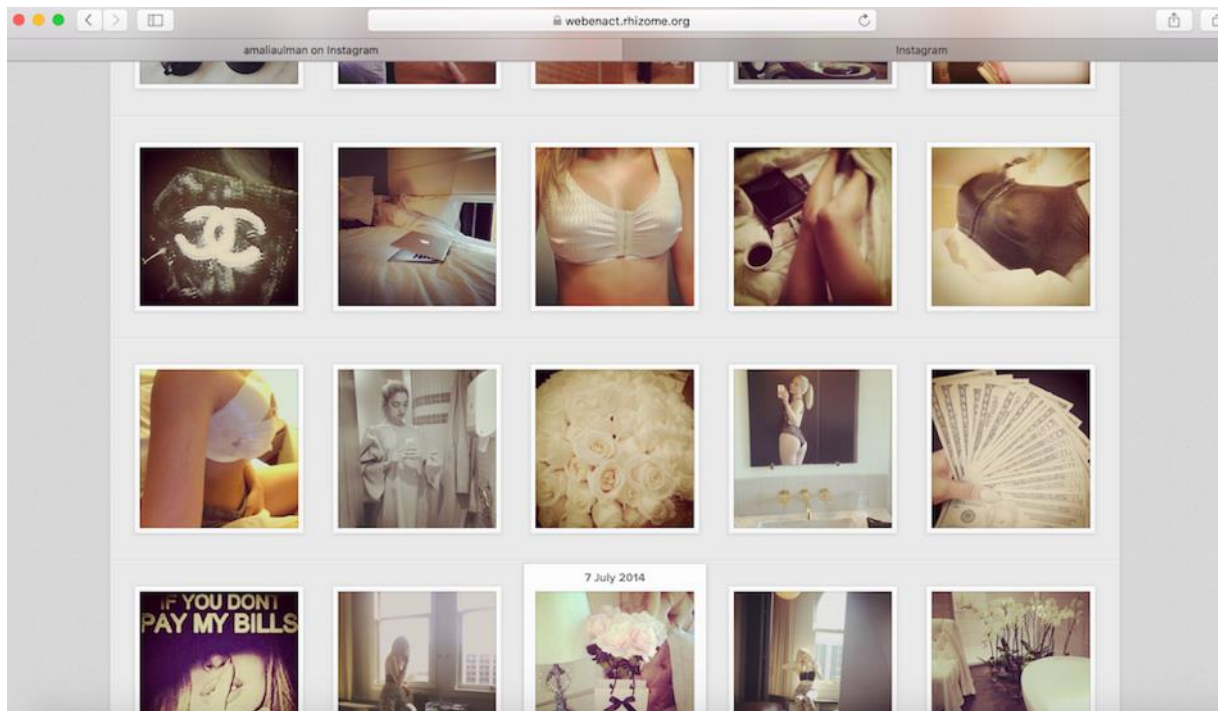


Figure 13. *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) [Screenshot 15/05/2021], source: [Ulman \(2014\)](#)

Excellences and Perfections (2014) by Amalia Ulman

In mid 2014 Argentinian born artist Amalia Ulman staged her *Excellences & Perfections* performance on Instagram. The key concerns for Ulman's work were 'exposing the conditions of neo-liberal femininity in which the pressures to conform to particular body images have led to body dysmorphia and increasing demand for plastic surgery.' (Walsh, 2015, p.25). For her exhibition *Amalia Ulman: Excellences and Perfections* (2014) at New Museum it is described in the following way:

On April 19, 2014, Amalia Ulman uploaded an image to her Instagram account of the words 'Part I' in black serifed lettering on a white background. The caption read, cryptically, 'Excellences & Perfections.' It received twenty-eight likes. For the next several months, she conducted a scripted online performance via her Instagram and Facebook profiles. As part of this project, titled *Excellences and Perfections*, Ulman underwent an extreme, semi-fictionalized makeover. She pretended to have a breast augmentation, posting images of herself in a hospital gown and with a bandaged chest, using a padded bra and Photoshop to manipulate her image. Other elements of the makeover were not feigned; she followed the Zao Dha Diet strictly, for example, and went to pole-dancing lessons often (not dated).

Over the course of several months of staging *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) Ulman generated a substantial amount of followers, who were witnessing her half-staged downfall and up-rise synchronously as Ulman was posting it. The story and the witnessing was all aligned. Many thought that Ulman's transformation as she posted it on Instagram, was authentic. She 'appeared to shape-shift on social media from cute girly-girl to narcissistic sugar-baby to wellness-oriented green juicer—an is-she-or-isn't-she arc' (Longmuir, 2016). The authenticity that Ulman produced was partly owed to her being perceived as a naïve young art graduate; she graduated from Fine Art at Central Saint Martins' London two years before *Excellences and Perfections*. In an interview for Elle in 2016, Ulman said "I had been this cliché of an arty girl. Which is so fetishized by certain people. So I thought, What if I transform myself into something that is not allowed in the art world?".' (Longmuir). Ulman, fully aware of what was assumed to be her authentic self, decided to turn this around throughout *Excellences and Perfections*. She describes how her own gallery started to reject her because of her Instagram posts, which included highly narcissistic and sexualised body shots. Langmuir writes:

A gallery Ulman had worked with advised her to stop posting immediately, believing she was sabotaging her career. 'I used to take you seriously as an artist until I found out via Instagram you had the mentality of a 15 year old hood rat,' wrote one follower (2016).

But it was not only fetishized arty femininity in terms of physical appearance that Ulman was addressing. In previous works she had already emphasized the precarity of this female 'arty body' lacking support right after graduating. During an event at Art Basel Miami in 2013 Ulman answered a question on artist branding with "I am an artist who cares about money, the lack of it and the consequences of such a thing," (Langmuir, 2016) rather than branding. Ulman's scripted performance aesthetic started off with benign girly pastel coloured posts, then transformed to a more darker episode and resurrected in vibrant colours. I would like to point out here, Ulman, a natural brunette, started *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) with blonde long hair and finished it with a brunette bob. It is also noteworthy that Ulman's narrative culminates, next to personal transformation, around a break-up (with a boy) causing the transition from pastel to darker colours. I am reminded of Andy Bichlbaum and his Ted X Talk where he stated that his path to becoming a Yes Men started with the break-up of his relationship. In both cases it is the banality of a 'break-up' that initiates a transformation and causes authenticity, just in the case of Ulman it was considered pathetic and in case of Bichlbaum a sign of sincerity. Langmuir further writes:

In response, the comments got harsher. Followers critiqued her dancing (on a video of Ulman undulating her hips to Iggy Azalea, whom she was, in fact, coming to resemble) and her growing vanity ('You're beautiful ... but borderline boring. #kindawhiney!'). This escalated as she hinted she was working as an escort, photographed her bandages after an apparent breast augmentation ('#frankenboob lol'), then had a full-on Amanda Bynes crack-up—eight posts in quick succession culminating with two videos of herself red-faced and crying. 'Que coño puta mierda?' was the first comment. What the fuck is this shit? Which about sums up the response of the art world at large (2016).

These were the reactions right at the peak of her performance before Ulman returned with images of avocado toasts and yoga poses, which was then followed by an unravelling live event at the ICA (2016) London in October 2014, titled *Do you follow ?*.

Differences VIVA 2023 and Excellences and Perfections (2014)

Unlike my work *VIVA 2023, Excellences and Perfections*, even though scripted, did not operate in a fictional space for those who were following it. In *VIVA 2023* my role as a performer, through the framing of the intervention as a performance inside a student exhibition, was clear. Like in a theatre production, the audience and I recognised the fictional space of the performance, where the assumption of the fictional constituted the authentic in the sense of a performance. The presence of the camera and the gown further re-affirmed this framing; the gown functioned as a costume. In *VIVA 2023*, despite its uncannily accurate prediction of future events, the audience was aware that I was presenting an exaggeration, a parody, and a critique through the framing of the presentation as a performance within a practice-based research exhibition.

Even though *VIVA 2023* was a live performance, its narrative leading into the future into the year 2023 made it an asynchronous encounter for the audience; starting in the now and ending in 2023; critique and presence were disconnected and not as immediate as in the case of Ulman. Ulman's followers were always placed synchronous with the event, making her script disappear and creating an atmosphere of immediacy. It might be also that social media generally being considered a 'platform', so not so different from the concept of stage, that a notion of staging is always inherent in every single post, hence an actual staging can stay unnoticed.

Reactions: backlash and applause

Excellences and Perfections

Ulman was an invited speaker at the *Do you follow ?* event which was organized by Rhizome as part of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA, 2016), London offsite in October 2014. There she introduced her work *Excellences and Perfections* as a scripted performance to a wider public via a very scripted (or at least appearing as such) talk. It was a shock to many of her followers. Maria Walsh (2015) writes the following about the reveal:

Initially, her followers did not know that the whole thing was faked ... At the end of the four month period, Ulman 'came out' to her followers, which elicited very angry responses. Her followers had been subscribing to what they believed was an authentic personal drama with a fairy tale ending. ... The audience were incensed about her perceived inauthenticity and her refusal to admit that she might derive a therapeutic effect from her blog when she was 'liked' or received positive feedback. She was accused of compounding the issues that she claims her performance critiques (2015, p.25).

Walsh further writes that:

She also stated that she has not personally invested in this online culture and that she had actually been posting the second part of the diary from an artists' residency retreat (2015,p.25).

The impression that she was indifferent to the "likes" she generated and denying her personal investment in social media culture resulted in a perceived position of elevated morality. Through this reaction, Ulman was at risk of 'losing the credibility of the non-art audience to whom it is directed so that Ulman emerges as a superior critical consciousness, which is familiar territory for the art world.' (Walsh, 2015, p.26). Ulman created a space of affinity with her followers, which she then broke. This caused the upset and anxious reactions. The fact that she did not acknowledge the likes having any effect on her potentially reveals Ulman's lack of discernment for the system she was critiquing. Walsh (2015) stresses, 'Mimicry of the system is not enough. In order to survive our contemporary context, something more needs to be added.' (2015, p.26). Like many of my works, Ulman's piece was potentially rooted in an anxiety of precarity. By acknowledging the likes and her own investment, she would probably

have been closer to a state of discernment than to staying within a projection of anxiety. The risk of trying to articulate a critique based on the strategy of over-identification next to mere mimicry, is to end up in a moralizing position as well as mere repetition, which then can result in a narrative counterproductive to one's intentions.

VIVA 2023

Applause! That was the end of VIVA 2023. I was surrounded by a room of a smiling audience. Everyone seemed well entertained and I was relieved that my slightly complicated triple interaction with myself did not glitch in an unintended way.

When considering that my intention of using over-identification is causing rupture, ending up with a room full of smiling audience members, was an indicator for me that the rupture did not happen. I created a space of consensus between me and my benevolent audience of other PhD students, friends and researchers where we all agreed: many of us are precarious which is painful and Brexit is a bad idea. This type of consensus, I realised, is counterproductive to my intention of creating resistance. Next to being set in the future and a clear fictional scenario, in *VIVA 2023*, the grim but ironic future prospects as well as the performance of the triple female academic was too comedic and staged to cause anxiety or doubt. The critique was too benign; it offered a sort of critical entertainment for the audience in which I rendered my own future into a ridiculous scenario. The fine line here between humour and ridiculing was overstepped given the assumed exaggeration within these grim prospects. Because everyone was in consensus about the critique presented, I also consider it failed in line with Bishop's critique of the work of Tirvanajia; it had harmonising effects on a community that already agreed with each other (2004). There was rarely any friction or dissensus caused by it.

On the right side

Daniel Neofetou critically examined the work of the collaborative research group Forensic Architecture who was nominated for the Turner Prize in June 2018. Their practice is to reconstruct crime scenes and present this evidence at courts and tribunals. Their work was displayed in a huge show at the ICA London in spring 2018 and found great recognition in the UK art audience and beyond. Neofetou though puts the audiences' role into question within this positive hype around the collective. He writes:

the group does not seek to affect the viewer as an embodied subject dependent on other subjects and objects. Instead, the spectator is positioned as an omniscient surveyor on the right side of history (2018, p.44).

This observation is important for my research as this positioning of the audience as an omniscient surveyor I consider close to Bishop's point on works that cause no friction. Their intention is to build a harmonious community. Neofetou puts the focus onto how the artwork positions the viewer. For him Forensic Architecture fails to put the audience into a position where they have to consider themselves dependent on others. Hence, considering and addressing the audience member as an embodied and acting subject dependent on others is crucial; it allows a notion of co-responsibility, a term which I borrow from Sruti Bata (Wimbledon College of Art, 2021)³, to emerge rather than mere observer. This is also similar to the point Arns and Sasse (2016) are making on how techniques of affirmation in aesthetic experiences need to involve the viewer to enable a position of reflection (see Chapter 1). Otherwise it risks falling back into a notion where an observing audience is an object floating above on the basis of moral neutrality as Boltanski and Chiapello (2006) have pointed out. In *VIVA 2023* I positioned the audience and myself into a similar place of flotation. Within the space of the college I assured myself and the audience that we stood on the right side of history, omnisciently surveying as (potentially) pro-European academics, the upcoming Brexit vote, isolated from the majority who will be voting for Brexit three months later. We were aligned in our positions and my performance enforced this alignment. Ulman's *Excellences and Perfections* on the other hand, even though she allowed her audience to be so assured of their position as surveyors on the moral 'right' side, she was positioned or positioned herself, on the other. Ulman during her staging alienated herself from her audience. But it was through this alienation that she enabled the revealing of her audience's co-responsibility in the very thing she was critiquing. By allowing them to attack her, as the alienated deviating subject, they revealed themselves. Still given the fact that most of her audience did not 'know' raises questions about the quality of this moral positioning between her and them. As I stated in my fictional *VIVA 2023*, there is an ethical dilemma when not letting the audience know of one's own intentions. Although it could be argued here that Ulman was transparent from her initial post, the question of audience agency remains one to be investigated further.

³ Dr Sruti Bata, University of Amsterdam gave a talk on on 26 March 2021 for Wimbledon College of Art in which she discussed the work of Belgian performance scholar and artist Chokri Ben Chikha and how he addressed this co-responsibility in one of his performances/lectures. It suggests that performance and politics are related by the ways in which they interrupt and interpellate each other.

Lack of conflict

Compared to Ulman's work, it could be argued here that my audience had a form of agency during *VIVA 2023* as my intentions were very clear as well as our roles, me the performer and them watching a performance. Still *VIVA 2023* in contrast to *Excellences & Perfections*, and despite its heavily political content, eventually created a space of depoliticisation, even if it was ethically more coherent. The model of antagonism laid out by Laclau and Mouffe and used by Bishop, asks for conflict to be sustained rather than harmonised through finding consensus. In *VIVA 2023*, there was an entire lack of conflicting positions because myself and the audience already agreed on the critique I presented, even though it was not direct but framed as ironic, we were a harmonious community.

Here the concept of *interpassivity* – which Jodi Dean uses in her analysis of communicative capitalism (2005) to describe how online activism has depoliticizing effects, is a useful tool for analysis. Dean (2005) stresses that interpassivity leads to a depoliticisation because when we think we are acting politically, like through a tweet, we stay passive. This results in the illusion of being active, which then re-affirms and perpetuates existing power structures through the substitute of political action. Here the political activity is simply displaced onto the online, leaving the space of real politics unaffected. Interpassivity was originally coined by Austrian Philosopher Robert Pfaller who defines it as the illusion of activity. This concept helps to explain why *VIVA 2023*, partly in contrast to *Excellences & Perfections*, did not cause a form of rupture to an existing consensus and modes of production as I intended and eventually established a depoliticized space.

'Interpassivity'

Pfaller in *Interpassivity: the aesthetics of delegated enjoyment* (2017) writes that interpassivity is the blurring between active and passive; it indicates a situation where enjoyment is delegated to another object or subject – we think we are active, but actually we let someone, or something, be active on our behalf. He writes: 'With the help of the photocopier, intellectuals played at reading in libraries' (2017, p.5). His original intention when formulating the concept, as early as 1996, was:

to water down the overwhelming dominance at the time of the discourse of interactivity. The concept was mainly intended for artists, who were responding in complete panic to the pressures of interactivity,

obsessively pondering about how to and whether they could include the audience in their work (2017, p.2).

This I consider similar to what Claire Bishop was criticising (2004) in relation to Bourriaud's emphasis on the democratic potential of works that involve the audience and let them participate. While Bishop's claim is that not every form of audience participation automatically renders a work democratic, Pfaller underscores this by stating that not every piece of interactive art automatically renders the audience into active participants. Pfaller states that interpassivity is a process of double delegation, where first the pleasure and then the belief in the illusion of the staged is transferred (2017, p.7). He uses, with reference to Octave Mannoni, the example of the actor playing a dead body in a theatre play. If that actor has to sneeze, the audience usually laughs, because they and the other actors know this actor is not really dead. The audience laughs because this glitch of the sneezing dead body is actually fooling the fictional or as Pfaller names it, a naïve observer (2014) the one who is projected by both the audience and the actor/performer. As Pfaller writes, they are not laughing about their own disappointment but rather the disappointment of the naïve or 'invisible observer' (2017, p.45), the third other present in the play, not aware of the fictionality of the situation (2017). Pfaller concludes that 'Interpassivity thus appears to be most general structure of aesthetic pleasure' (2017, p.45).

For Pfaller the naïve/invisible observer is a key determinant in the construction of aesthetic pleasure for the maker and the audience, as the observation of a work is delegated to it and therefore influences the aesthetics of the work.

During the Laibach concert in Austria the majority of the audience reacted by laughing, while I did not – at least, not in the beginning. The audience could have been laughing at the naïve observer of the concert, who was unaware of Laibach's strategy of provocation; namely, over-identification. Given the political climate of that time in Austria, where a right-wing party was in power, I did not recognise this naïve observer as I felt too concerned as an Austrian by these developments which also form part of my research context with my focus on growing nationalist tendencies, which is not limited to Austria. In this moment at the concert the distance to real political events was not enough for the naïve observer to be unaware of it. Similarly the glitch of connection in the triple conversation in *VIVA 2023* can be considered such a situation in which my audience was laughing at the fictional observer, those who believed the staging of the conversation in the future was not-staged.

Pfaller (2014) argues, with reference to psychoanalysis and Lacan's concept of *jouissance*, that this delegation, or outsourcing of enjoyment and pleasure through interpassivity, takes

place because we are afraid of enjoying – or, in the case of *jouissance*, of the excess of enjoyment (2014, p.21). Jacques Lacan who coined *jouissance* describes it in his seminars as something that ‘starts with a tickle and ends with a blaze of petrol’ (2007, p.72), hence the delegation functions as a relief from that feeling, which seems too intense according to Lacan’s conception. Lacan chose a French term to describe this feeling which also refers to orgasmic pleasure. Coming back to online activism, I understand that we enjoy the tweet because it acts politically on our behalf, which means we don’t have to face feeling of impotence and lack of power like for example being a EU citizen during the Brexit referendum in the UK.

Interpassive VIVA 2023 ?

Taking both Dean’s and Pfaller’s notion into account, in *VIVA 2023*, I associate this enjoyment with the notion that the audience of my work equally had an urge to resist precarisation and growing nationalism in line with their intellectual circle and upbringing. I base this assumption on the context of the performance, which is a gathering of practice-based researcher students, academics and artists within a London Art University building. With reference to Pfaller, who writes that interpassivity can be an anti-ideological behaviour (2017), I suggest that the audience and I enjoyed a *fantasy* of resistance than actual resistance, because of what happens if we really resist. If the resistance could be in the form of a work strike, refusing to provide the surplus labour involved in the conducting research and making art or the refusal to sign an hourly paid contract instead of a more permanent one with more security: many of us would likely lose our jobs (if we have one), or our funding (if we have it), or risk not getting a job or funding (if we don’t have it). The stakes for real resistance are too high under the very circumstances I am trying to create resistance towards, which means also that the enjoyment/suffering derived from this ‘real’ resistance might be equally excessive, because of the stakes involved. Hence, the resistance seems to be condemned to a space of fantasy. So, by performing the critique as a substitute for this resistance, ‘we’ end up in an anti-ideological position as the status quo remains and the ideology is only present in the fantasy, and the ‘resistance is frozen in the imaginary’ (Comay, 2015, p.243).

VIVA 2023 generated applause for this performance of resistance or in this case it was actually more a form of critique than resistance – a critique I potentially performed on my own but also on the audience’s behalf. This allows them to keep their perceptions as they were before, without a shift. As Pfaller writes: ‘Interpassivity is thus a strategy of escaping identification and consequently subjectivation ... people seize interpassive means to flee into self-forgetfulness’ (2017, p.8). In my work, however, I intend not to allow relief or escaping identification; what I

am investigating is how to achieve this. But again, I do not aim to create conversion; more importantly, I would not presume to know what to convert the audience *to*.

A dualism of audiences

Walsh in her discussion of Ulman's work makes a clear distinction between the non-art audience and the art audience among her followers, which I first wanted to treat here with caution. It risks to some degree falling into a similar form of dualism to what Bishop was critiquing in Boltanski and Chiapello's distinction between artistic and social critique, suggesting a separation between the two. Although previously in the analysis of the work of Janez Janša in Chapter 1, I made this distinction myself when considering the effects of their conceptual gesture. To re-iterate, my point was that the effects of their work were more relevant to their closed circle, a more art-orientated audience, than a wider public for whom the irritation of the name change was neglectable or rather unnoticeable.

But as the following analysis will further show, and similar to Bishop's claim, this distinction between the audiences here helps to show the tension between those two audiences, art and non-art in this case, through the reactions to Ulman's work. Given that the feeling of moralization is mainly considered an issue concerning the non-art audience, this creates a potential assumption that an art audience was more likely to appreciate Ulman's attempt of subversion in a new medium at the time; the newness of the work as well as her intentions outweighed her being considered as 'moralizing' and potentially manipulating. But the reactions of fellow artists such as Hannah Black who was in the talk with Ulman at the ICA in October 2014, indicated that Ulman also managed to cause a form of discomfort within her closer circle, during her Instagram staging. This discomfort, as equally shown by her gallery's reaction, stemmed from her breaking the 'rules' of a potential imaginary artistic code in which vanity, highly sexualized images and naïve behaviour, are disapproved of, especially when it comes from a young female artist. Not only was she looking naïve but also immoral, when hinting at her work as an escort.

In *VIVA 2023* this dualism of audiences did not occur in the space as the non-art, or in this case more specifically non-art-academic audience had no presence, neither physically nor metaphorically and because of that, no tension could occur.

Frustrated delegation: before and after

From the perspective of interpassivity in Ulman's work the opposite was the case compared to *VIVA 2023*, at least with regards to the art-audience. Here the temporal development of Ulman's work is crucial. The effects during the posting and after the reveal need to be distinguished. At the beginning of her work, despite giving it an official introduction via her first post, she did not make her intentionality of exactly subverting the codes of use of the very platform she was using, obvious. Her art-followers who potentially appreciate a well-articulated feminist critique, could not enjoy her formulating this critique on their behalf; the naive observer was missing to whom Ulman's *fooling* could be delegated to. At the same time given how invested many of her non-art followers were in the *realness* of her postings, and the potential enjoyment they generated from it, can be considered as a loss of dignity from their side. They turned out to be 'fools' after the reveal. The term 'realness' I borrow from Peggy Phelan (1993) who used it in her analyses of Jenny Livingstone's documentary *Paris is Burning* from 1990. Phelan describes *realness* as the ability to blend in and not to be noticed (1993, p.96) in the context of gender and gender performativity where 'passing performances in general seek to use one form of invisibility to highlight a usually privileged form of visibility' (1993, p.96). I borrow this term to describe how Ulman managed to blend into to a social media aesthetic of femininity, another performance of gender, and making her performance unnoticed among her followers. Her non-art audience's perceived enjoyment generated from her downfall and resurrection, was taken from them, the *realness* was revealed not to be real.

Given Pfaller's notion of interpassivity it might be that Ulman's work while angrily received by her non-art audience because of the stolen enjoyment, her art-audience regained their (delegated) enjoyment because the invisible and naive observer, was re-instated after revealing that it was a performance. Ulman became the subject of enjoyment delegation for the performance of a feminist critique again, which she was performing on their behalf. And the art audience was reconciled in the re-rendering of the non-art audience back into the naive observers who were fooled and the sole receivers of her critique.

Failed Resistance and the Necessity of Dissonance

Re-evaluating online authenticity

Walsh (2015) in her observation that mimicry of a system is not enough, asks what else can be added to consider Ulman's work as a form of resistance. In her conclusion she draws on Steven Shaviro and his notion that within the strategy of immersive mimicry that there is 'hope that something remains "unexchangeable, outside the circle of capital" (Shaviro 2010: 63)' (2015, p.24). This unexchangeable item in the case of online performance could be authenticity which as Walsh writes, becomes re-evaluated as a consequence of works such as the one by Ulman (2015, p.26). She further stresses that within the online space that 'having your identity recognized and validated is an important factor in contemporary expressions of femininity online' (2015, p.27). McKenzie Wark in 2016 re-evaluates Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, at a time when social medias influence was already becoming more visible. She stresses that Butler's theory is limited by not sufficiently considering the performative aspects of media. She states:

The media remain only marginally present in Butler's body-centric political theory. Yet media is necessary to the performance of gender: "Recognizing a gender depends fundamentally on whether there is a mode of presentation for that gender, a condition for its appearance; we can call this its media or its mode of presentation." (2016, pp.38-39).

Wark, similar to Walsh, claims the importance of media in gender performativity and it providing a space for its representation and coming into being. At the same time the play with the perception of authenticity on these platforms serves as a tool to question the idealized and commodified image happening on social media, which is what Ulman achieved (Walsh, 2015). With regards to my previous analysis of a deployment of over-identification in Chapter 1, this is crucial as it was the performance of masculinity that gave many of the examples a sense of authenticity and believability such as in *Dow wants to Do Better* (2004) by the Yes Men. This masculinity was performed by a (white) man in a dark suite announcing important decisions on international TV, lacking any emotional engagement and having no ironic undertone, which then though changes once The Yes Men perform for their 'actual' audience. For Ulman the performance of femininity, meant the loosely dressed modification and selling of her own body, rendering herself from cute to sexy within a framework of recognised femininity in neoliberal terms. Hence this means for Ulman that without her overt performance of vulnerability in

Excellences and Perfections and all the nuances that are included in the notion of femininity, it would have probably never been perceived as authentic by most of her followers. Her feminine authenticity was produced in her excessive self-commodification and emotional display. In her performance of anti-feminism on the platform, her close allegiance to the construct that she was criticising, allowed her to give her work the potency for disruption. It was disturbing but considered authentic in the context of Instagram.

Ironic negation: the gown question

In *VIVA 2023*, I performed an immediately identifiable critical feminist position in which the critique was obvious to the audience via a dystopian future scenario I depicted which no one in the audience would have desired to become reality. Next to the agreed and shared undesirability of this dystopian future, the set-up with the camera together with academic gown, the irony of my voice and my partly theatrical gestures during the performance, were all contributing factors to an ironic framing. Rather than a lack of irony, the performance was full of it. Here the act of over-identification clearly failed as I intended to apply it. The clear opposition produced an ironic negation and enabled the alignment between me and the audience all the way through. Also *VIVA 2023* being openly feminist was considered the authentic position among an academic audience. In *Excellences and Perfections* Ulman's performance of a commodified femininity, was a display of anti-feminism without ironic distance at the time of posting. The opposition was not clear. Ulman in her hospital gown created a space for the seriousness and depth of her transformation without irony during her posting. My academic gown was underscoring the ironic aspect of my performance; I was performing an ironic aspiring academic.

The academic gown was also a manifesting symbol of identification between me and the audience, a circle of intellectuals. Ulman's hospital gown in relation to the beauty clinic, was the opposite by signalling a focus on the body rather than the mind as in the academic gown; a focus which eventually renders any wearer of the beauty clinic gown, particularly a young woman, into a banal and superficial subject who finds recognition through physical appearance and not intellectual work. While the academic gown signifies the power of intellect, the hospital gown emphasizes the potency of the body. Given the symbolic order of 'patriarchy' in which women are often constituted as merely body and not mind and men are more mind than body, the gown through its different emphasizes, in itself sets up a symbolic order of our roles within such a notion and in relation to our (art)-audience, in which the bodily is considered inferior to the mind.

In *Excellences and Perfections* over-identification was at work because of the doubt she created in her audience. To me the key lies here in Žižek's initial assessment of Laibach's work, namely how it produced the question of "What if they really mean it? What if they truly identify with the totalitarian ritual?"(1993) – a doubt which was later lessened by their iconic status. It is the doubt about the artists' intention, which as Žižek elaborates can result in a doubt about the viewer's position in relation to the artist. This is key to my intention for this research. The artist endorsing the question if they/she/he really mean(s) it, becomes the opposite of one's own understanding of being on the 'right side' as suddenly this would mean aligning oneself, for example, with *the right* or/and women's commodification. At the same time rejecting it, *if the artist does not really mean it*, if it is an ironic position, would reveal oneself as being stuck in a conservative notion of gender roles and becoming the moralising agent. Hence *VIVA 2023* failed because the inherent irony left no space for doubt about my and the audience's position.

Double-effect of (re) organization

Going back to Gibbs and her notion of mimicry, that it can be a means of communication that organizes relationships, I asked if this could become also a form of re-organization through over-identification. Looking at the relations in Ulman's work between her, and her art and non-art audiences, I suggest that Ulman's work did have a double effect between the organization and re-organization of relationships within the different temporalities of her work.

During the work Ulman revealed an irreconcilability within the construction of how a female artist was supposed to behave and produce work; an un-articulated essentialism organizing the roles between artists and non-artist users of Instagram and keeping them separated. But by fooling both of these audiences as well as revealing both of their co-responsibility within the issues she was addressing, she undid this separation for the duration of her staging. In her *Elle* feature, it stated that other comments she faced were that 'she couldn't have really understood what she was doing—that it was too accessible, too banal to be art.' (Longmuir, 2016). Ulman disrupted an order in which artists are expected to have a critical distance and not engage in 'banal' practices of those not involved into the intellectual codes of art school graduates, or mimic them ironically. In fact Ulman was denied an awareness of what she was doing at the time, potentially too young and naive, too blonde, to have such an elaborate awareness. Her 'arty' peers first dismissed her because of her performed 'banality' (she could never be so vain! She must be above that!) and lack of ironic distance. Here Ulman's *evil* was associated with her lacking the ability to see what she was doing from a point of critical reflection, her view was considered too banal and she was too focused onto her body. On the other hand her non-arty followers were upset afterwards because she generated (an

impression of) superiority through a distinct and reflected play with this banality. So the result is a double reveal; a hypocrisy of democratic equality between art and non-art users on the platform and the impossibility of being just an omniscient observer within such a framework. In *VIVA 2023*, the relationship between me and my audience remained unchanged because of the lack of doubt evoked as well as the isolated and protected character of the performance. It kept audiences separated as well as providing grounds for disengagement by not questioning this separation.

Manifesting and disrupting orders – oscillating polarities

After the reveal of *Excellences and Perfections (2014)* the art-audience kept performing a symbolic role of moral superiority to a non-art audience. As a consequence the disruption of symbolic order that Ulman challenged in first place, was re-instated. And while Ulman's opposition to the neoliberal construct of femininity was clear, there are other parts of her work in which doubts, at least for me, remain. When I watched her heavily scripted presentation at the ICA in 2014 on YouTube in which she appears as slightly insecure and reliant on her prepared script, the seeming lack of performance/presentation skills, made me wonder if this was actually the skill she was displaying? Molly Langmuir in her piece on Ulman further writes that

"Her genius is she can understand, dissect, and embrace extreme polarities," says James Fuentes, the New York gallerist known for representing emerging artists on their way to becoming big names. "She does this in both her life and her art. The boundary between the two is porous (Longmuir, 2016).

So maybe Ulman keeps playing with her audience by performing an authentic form of girlish insecurity paired with a sense of manipulation, a kind of insightful naivety between which she is oscillating. During *Excellences and Perfections (2014)* Ulman managed to dissolve this boundary to her followers to the utmost degree, creating the uncanny effects of the work altogether, in which she sent her entire audience through a roller coaster of emotions. It was not one but several affective shifts that she caused in them. This does suggest to me, that a successful application of over-identification according to my intentions of being disruptive, requires a constant state of dissonance of myself as well as a layer of obscurity of my own intentions. Given the different kind of emotional responses that Ulman caused in her art and non-art audience might be considered another form of dissonance emerging from it, where they were not sure how to relate to it at the time. A few years on, this dissonance seems

ultimately resolved through the canonization of Ulman's work, epitomized through its display in Tate Modern's 2016 *Performing for the Camera* show.

Neither dissonance nor obscurity of my intentions were present in *VIVA 2023*. The boundaries between my art practice and real life were clear, even though in *VIVA 2023* it was about the future course of my life. I did not give the audience an opportunity to create any doubt about the boundary. Also the audience did not need reconciliation as there was nothing that required it, no symbolic order was challenged; the economic weak but intellectually potent role of the academic as well as the subjugation of women to the lack of support structure, was mimicked and presented without any hope for something else to emerge. This raises the question on how to create dissonance in my work in order to evoke a 'What if I mean it?' in my audience for my over-identification to be effective as a resistance to dualisms and calls for transparency within a Post-Fordist framework of production and eventually avoid the formation of consensus between myself and the audience.

What about laughter?

Jo Anna Isaak (1996) stresses the solidarizing function of laughter – hence who laughs at what also has the potential to show who aligns and identifies with whom and in which way and who does not. Going back to the Laibach concert in 2018, at the beginning I clearly disassociated myself from those who were laughing – there was no sensuous solidarity from my side. In *VIVA 2023* the laughter I consider a signifier of both consensus and solidarity, it was communal and was never disrupted but always aligned. When Isaak points out that it is not a 'private depoliticized jouissance' (1996, p.5) that is requested but a sensuous solidarity, I wonder how can *jouissance*, this surplus enjoyment which is also the focus of Pfaller's interpassivity, be considered other than depoliticized in the context of over-identification?

Surplus: meaning & enjoyment

In *VIVA 2023* there was no over-determinacy present in the work in the sense of providing grounds for several objects within my identity. Here the agency that I was performing was clear and lacked any kind of self-negating quality that would arise from conflicting objects present in my identity that I was performing. This made it easy for the audience to uphold the space of affinity and solidarize as well as being in an interpassive position along the lines of Pfaller and Dean's conception; there was no frustration of enjoyment delegation. Ulman on the other hand, by embodying irreconcilable positions at the time of posting and afterwards,

did hold several objects in her position together that contradicted each other. Vanity and criticality, genius and naivety, blonde and brunette etc. She became an over-determined subject who was denied agency because of these contradictions, at least for a period of time. Ulman was accused of failing to see her own vain investment as well as the position of moral superiority. She denied having generated some form of excessive pleasure from the work, a surplus enjoyment, an excess of affect. Isaak describes *jouissance* in the following way:

Enjoyment, pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure or pleasure derived from the body. Included in this notion of *jouissance* is a sense of play as linguistic excess, the joy of disrupting or going beyond established, or fixed meaning into realm of non-sense (1996, p.3).

From the perspective of this research this is of particular interest with regards to the question of how to control the surplus of affect in the practice of performance art which is both bodily and linguistic. In the discussion of interpassivity, the excess pleasure becomes delegated from audience to performer, a feeling which Ulman frustrated through the obscurity of her intentions. According to Isaak's statement though, Ulman's own excessive pleasure, her acquisition of her own affect surplus production derived from her body (thinking back to the hospital gown), could be then considered private and henceforth depoliticized rather than emancipatory and autonomous depending on who was laughing with her during and after her performance. Very few were laughing with her – at least in the beginning (ICA, 2016). It might be also that it is this initial solitary character of this pleasure, the inherent narcissism and its banality, that make some still consider her as *evil*. Now Ulman is canonized as the *Instagram artist*, which has become her brand and has a lot of young female art students among her admirers.⁴ Janez Janša obtained the surplus from their collective name change and in comparison to Ulman's case, it reveals something substantial to the feminist performance perspective of the extreme self-objectification. Ulman self-obtained excess pleasure/surplus affect is more likely to be dismissed on moral grounds because the surplus she obtained was derived from the exploitation of her female body.

Still even though Ulman seems to appear as a rather melancholic personality in her live performances, with *Excellences and Perfections* she generated a community who is laughing with her in and outside the art world, which could be considered the formation of solidarity as

⁴ Skye Arundhati Thomas, in her review of Ulman's opening at Arcadia Missa gallery in 2016, writes the following: 'At the opening, with the promise of seeing Ulman herself, the gallery space spilled over with excited young girls, "As a first-year student on the Goldsmiths Fine Art BA, it is almost a prerequisite to be totally obsessed with Amalia and her work," declared one to artnet News' (2016).

Isaak (1996) puts it. So while the *jouissance* might have been solitary in first place, it became communal later on. This also means, similar to the outcome of Janez Janša's work, that it settled into an agreeable vantage point, at least for Ulman's art audience. This raises two important questions with regards to particularly a feminist application of over-identification in post-Fordism :

- Does it allow the forming of solidarity (the core of many feminist art practices) through or despite the performance of an anti-feminist position as Ulman did?
- And how to negotiate the surplus-enjoyment in this case between artistic autonomy and community ?

These two questions are entangled as the surplus enjoyment emerging from the anti-feminist performance does potentially not allow the forming of a sensuous solidarity, at least for a certain time, as Isaak calls it, while at the same time does provide a form of feminist autonomy.

Limits and potencies

Looking at it from the perspective of autonomy and the question who benefitted from Ulman's staged physical and mental self-exploitation on social media, it was herself, her institutional representatives later on but also Instagram the platform. Ulman's usage of the platform for her performance has not lessened its popularity but since then has steadily increased and its coercive image production standards seem to remain, despite users' attempts to subvert them. Ulman, with her brand and marketing gesture of reveal, has made herself dependent on this platform more than any other artist. Although I do not assign Instagram's success to Ulman's work, it shows the very limits of it. The practices that Ulman was criticizing, the coercive images of young women that Instagram users re-iterate and intensively circulate, are persistent and generate profit for the platform. The display of self-exploitation and the production of surplus affect value by artists on it and the competitive set-up between them, also remains and there is no sign of it decreasing. Hence, my claim of not wanting to cause social transformation is also rooted in a false expectation that art has the potential to transform social relationships as enacted on these platforms. But as Ulman's work showed it has the potency to disrupt them as well as its modes of production. She also disrupted, consciously or not, an artist's own slightly essentialist self-perception of moral superiority, which is equally important.

Conclusion

While her enjoyment was lacking the potential to form solidarity at the time, to me Ulman succeeded in causing a rupture to the post-Fordist production circle. She generated autonomy by being the primary beneficiary from her surplus affect value production; she undid the separation of audiences, enacting an antagonist relationship between art and non-art and caused friction between her and them by revealing also their responsibility in the issues she was addressing. And, at least for a moment she was the one in control of her own and the audience's enjoyment. Despite being solitary at first, this control of enjoyment and its excess still remains an extremely powerful position from a feminist perspective.

In *VIVA 2023* I made my audience enjoy themselves by creating a space of agreement and solidarity and we shared this enjoyment in its resignation as it further allowed remaining in a fantasy of resistance, leading to the lack of rupture. I produced a performance on top of my labour sustaining myself, partly for my own benefit but also for the benefit of the institution. This entangles the question of production with the frameworks of research funding which I will further explore through-out the course of the research. This observation is important given the initial starting point with Harvie's observations of how funding conditions imprint themselves into performance art practices. This raises an important question for this research though, namely to determine what do I consider as part of its conditions? Neglecting the frameworks of research funding as part of it, is one possibility in order to focus onto the wider picture, being macro rather than micro. But what I intend to do is rather than setting up an exclusive dualism, as in art and non-art, or social and artistic, to explore how these two dimensions may operate in a tension relevant for my research outcomes. From the perspective of causing rupture, and creating an antagonistic relationship, the building a harmonious community makes *VIVA 2023* a failure of resistance.

How to proceed ?

Given the different outcomes of *VIVA 2023* (2016) and Ulman's *Excellences Perfections* (2014) I suggest several aspects are important to consider for further practice investigation into how to produce resistance in the context of post-Fordism.

With regards to the affective shifts that Ulman produced in her work, it seems that a layer of obscurity needs to be introduced to my own work to allow this shift in the audience to happen. By making my intentions less obvious, it is then possible not to present all positions as clearly

defined up front and enabling an oscillation between affirmative and negating gestures of feminism within the performance work, rather than just one as in *VIVA 2023*. From the perspective of over-identification I also feel a more direct identification with *evil* in the sense of an agent rather than a structure, is needed to enhance its efficacy. In the case of Ulman, there was such an indication, for example in the comparison with Amanda Bynes, although not necessary considered as someone evil, but a *banal* Hollywood starlet. She provided a direct reference point. And I think this direct reference point to the present in the form of an agent is necessary to actually reduce the distance between myself and my subject of critique, and between myself and the audience. In *VIVA 2023* the distance created by the projection into the future, the year 2023, resulted into the possibility of delegation. Also given the overall space of consensus that *VIVA 2023* created as well sustaining the separation of different audiences that potentially would be affected differently by the work, I realized that I need to locate my practice in a space potentially outside of an exclusively institutional setting and within a space where different audiences can encounter them. Hence the possibilities for encounter need to be multiplied. Looking at the performative elements themselves such as outfit, gesture and voice, next to reducing the aspect of fictionality, these parameters have to appear less ironic and blend in more, where I shift from being an 'actress' (of my own play) more to a presenter, for example. Here creating realness as in Ulman's case, I consider key. I am considering a performance ready-made for online promotion without fully giving into the coerciveness of its aesthetics. My intention is to uphold my own previous demand and preference for creating bodily affects but simultaneously produce a work suitable for the online where it can generate a different affect than the live work. My intention is to take advantage of the delayed encounter with the work online and the possibilities for different audiences that this produces.

Turning point of identification

Before I move on to the next work, the following chapter titled 'The Feminization of the Right' serves as a deeper contextualization for the agents of post-Fordism as Politics which have now become the subjects of my over-identification instead of systemic structures. The chapter shows how those women who I start to directly over-identify with in the coming works, emerged out of a specific political turn and framework in the context of the US and Europe.

Through this discussion I situate my practice more specifically in its current political and economic climate and build the groundwork for a more direct identification with *evil* in my research as part of the question of how to deploy over-identification from a feminist perspective. As I intend to show rather than radical, the subjects of my critique in the context of my research are nuanced and appear as benign, similar to what BAVO have pointed out in relation to Lacan's theory of the capital master. My claim is that the current 'iconography of evil' (Collins, 2019) is obscured by a construct of femininity in which particularly blonde white women play a crucial role, and therefore represents a key figure in my strategic deployment of this strategy as my own aesthetic is already caught up in this construct.

It also serves as the basis for the introduction of opacity as an additional strategic move in combination with over-identification as Ulman's work showed to me, a certain degree of opaqueness can contribute to the disruptive potential in a feminist deployment of over-identification. But I also intend to use opacity as an interpretive lens onto the subjects of my over-identification, to consider them both, from a performative but also psychological perspective.

Chapter 3:
The Feminization of the Right

I located the context of my research to start in the year 2008, which I consider an intersection of time that shifted the appearance of *evil* in the context of capital and right-wing populism, the subject of my over-identification. The majority of examples of over-identification in the “West” such as The Yes Men or Schlingensiefel are located in the early 2000s, before this moment. Since then, as I intend to show in the following discussion, the representation of the agents of post-Fordist politics have shifted appearance from previously being dominated by men to now including many more women. And a similar observation can be made for the representation of conservative and right-wing ideas in the US and Europe. The politics of post-Fordism and increasing nationalism need to be considered entangled which I elaborate in more detail in the section called ‘Right-wing radicalism is a business model’. From this I continue to discuss, by using Zillah Eisenstein’s concept of sexual decoys (2007), how these women who started to represent capital power and right-wing ideas, need to be considered different than the examples Eisenstein used, whose discussion is located in the early 2000s. Here I put a particular focus on the construct of ‘blondeness’ as a deceiving factor. This leads me to the discussion of the concept of opacity by Eduard Glissant (1997), to connect their deceiving qualities of representing diversity with a strategy that primarily was intended to advocate pluralism.

Collapse: 2008

The German journalist Jochen Bittner at the end of May 2016, asked: ‘Is this the West’s Weimar moment?’. He posed this question right before the Brexit referendum in June 2016 and shortly after my *Merci Liberte!* performance at the beginning of May 2016 which I will discuss in the following chapter. In this performance I embody Marion Maréchal (formerly Le Pen) from the Front National as her popularity in France rose. Bittner draws a comparison between the circumstances that led to the Nazi Regime starting in the 1920s in Germany and the growing influence of right-wing parties in Europe; in both areas, then and today he locates the financial and economic crash, 2008 and 1928, as key moments defining what is going to happen next. He stresses that in 2008, like in 1928, the financial crash came as a surprise, shaking many off their stable seats. The voters reactions (in the West) were angry as governments allowed bankers to ‘play’ without rules and then being bailed out by tax payers (Bittner, 2016). He writes:

In America and Europe, the rise of anti-establishment movements is a symptom of a cultural shock against globalized postmodernity, similar to the 1930s’ rejection of modernity. The common accusation by the “masses” is that liberal democracy has somehow gone too far, that it has become an ideology for an elite at the expense of

everyone else. Marine Le Pen, chief of the French National Front, calls these normal folk “les invisibles et les oubliés,” the invisible and the forgotten (2016).

In 2008 the system in the “West”, the hyped free market, collapsed and gave a push to the growth of Nationalism in Europe. Although it did not start in 2008, as the work *Please Love Austria!* (2000) by Schlingensiefel shows, but was already happening much earlier and was always present. But I suggest that 2008 can be considered as a year where appearances and forms of identification started to shift, partly because of the financial crisis. It is important to note here that I do not consider this a singular sequential process, but one that ran alongside other processes such as feminist positions entering the mainstream while being absorbed by neoliberalism (McRobbie, 2009). With the financial collapse, the old faces of *evil* became even more associated with white middle-aged men in suits; those walking out of the Lehman Brothers headquarters in New York on the day it was announced that they were bankrupt (although their bosses were not seen walking out with a box in their hands) in September 2008. Three years later Marine Le Pen took over the leadership of the Front National from Jean-Marie Le Pen, her father, introducing what I suggest to call a *Feminization of the Right* in Europe starting in 2011. By this I mean that the representational appearances of right-wing parties shifted towards women. Although I do think that this feminization is not exclusive to the sphere of politics, hence, it could also be considered as a feminization of *capital*.

From masculine to feminine – from margin to centre:

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook who appears more benign thanks to his hoodie and trainers, or elderly Alexander Gauland in the German AfD (no trainers but a tweed jacket) are still present as male representatives of their parties and companies, but not with the same dominance as previous to 2008. Now they are accompanied by women, and some of the women have even taken centre stage. Although it is still mainly white women in these cases, their femininity helped to make *evil* from a non-extremist conservative perspective appear more nuanced and blurred. I am aware here that the anti-capital narrative especially in right-wing circles, is driven by strong anti-Semitism. My point is, without ignoring this crucial aspect, that the change of appearances has helped to attract an electorate who did not share the anti-Semitic sentiments of those parties but got drawn to them by their new female protagonists, as anti-establishment representatives. So, while their appearances have changed, the models and intentions of making business/politics have not. And this shift of appearance I consider two-fold – from masculine to feminine and from the margins to the centre of voters and users

via the former. The shift to femininity allowed not only the covering up of patriarchal and exploitative business models and party agenda but especially in the case of right-wing parties, the further progression into the centre of voters, away from the margins. Of course, there is more complexity to this rather than attaching it to a single moment as well as a single trope of identity such as gender, but with regards to my research I consider it as a point of orientation from where it emerged. It is also crucial for the consideration from the perspective of national identity from which I write this PhD, as an Austrian citizen, a country with a fascist history. In 2000, when Schlingensiefel staged *Please Love Austria!*, it was the first time a right-wing party had come into power since the Second World War, and in 2017 for the second time, both in a coalition with the Austrian Conservative Party ÖVP. Even though in both cases there were rarely any women directly representing the campaigning parties, these developments left me concerned about the general increase of power of these forces in which the aesthetic of the blonde (young) women is part of their politics of identity.

‘Right-wing radicalism is a business model’

Schlingensiefel in an interview in Poet’s film *Foreigners Out! Schlingensiefel’s container* (2002), which I will discuss in the next chapter together with my work, states ‘Right–wing radicalism is a business model’. So far in my discussion I have kept the spheres of politics and economics separated and mainly connected through the shared shift of appearance as shown above, even though the models of post-Fordism laid out by Gibson-Graham as well as by Mouffe and Laclau, do emphasize that the capitalist narrative is internalised in all different social spheres. Still capitalism as a principle of accumulation and nationalism are often presented as distinct models but it is important for my discussion to emphasize that they are highly inter-dependant. Ishay Landa (professor of history at the Open University of Israel) opened the ‘Our Little Fascisms’ debate at Steirischer Herbst festival 2018 by stating:

To trace the history of fascisms is to locate its roots in liberalism. The two are inextricably linked, best played out in the relationship with the economy where both fascism and liberalism are pre-occupied with the tension of modernity: class struggle, nation building and war.

In *Žižek’s Politics* (2006), Jodi Dean writes that Nazism (as a historic form of fascism) attempted to

retain capitalist productivity by subjecting it to political control, that is, by displacing the economic crisis onto a set of political coordinates where the problem was identified and embodied as the Jews (2006, p.61).

So, it is an important part of my understanding to think these spheres together, where parties shift attention away from the failure of the principle of accumulation and its contradictions as presented in the Post-Fordist narrative, towards as Dean writes 'political coordinates'. Christian Fuchs (2020) discusses how an authoritarian form of capitalism develops into a form of fascism through the use of communication technologies. He writes:

Right-wing authoritarians use all means necessary, including data breaches and privacy violations, to spread their ideology. Cambridge Analytica was enabled by the combination of far-right ideology, Facebook's digital capitalist practices, and neoliberal politics (2020, p.16).

My work *VIVA 2023* (2016) discussed in the previous chapter, anticipated a similar observation before the Cambridge Analytica Scandal became public in 2017. Fuchs draws on Adorno's *The authoritarian personality* (1950) which outlines four key features which in their combination are necessary for authoritarianism to emerge:

the antidemocratic belief of the necessity of strong, top-down leaders, nationalism, the friend/enemy-scheme and ideological scapegoating, and the belief in law-and-order politics, violence, militancy, and war as the best political means (Fuchs, 2018a) (2020, p.3).

Mouffe's model of agonistic pluralism, emphasizes the importance of the democratic relationship being between adversaries rather than enemies, where several political positions can exist next to each other without the necessity of reaching an agreement between them, as in the form of consensus (2013). A relationship between enemies would mean the other has no legitimacy to be in the same democratic space, which eradicates the democratic principle altogether (2013). Fuchs (2020) points out that the combination of an accumulation principle together with an intensification of a friend/enemy relationship driven by nationalist parties, poses the biggest threat and could lead to a form of authoritarian capitalism, which combines the principles named by Adorno with the principle of accumulation. In its most developed form authoritarian capitalism together with an authoritarian society results in fascism (Fuchs, 2020). That is why Mouffe and Laclau advocate the taming and sustaining of conflict between adversaries which I explore in my practice through over-identification. Over-identification here

represents a tool to evoke and sustain a conflict instead of its elimination via harmonisation or escalation via direct confrontation. Social media tools accelerate and escalate the conflicts and as Dean's discussion (2005) of communicative capitalism has shown, further decrease democratic spaces while companies like Facebook generate huge profits from this process of depoliticization via circulation. And crucial to this process are the female representatives of those parties and companies who actively use these tools for the promotion of these principles but in a deceiving manner by foregrounding their femininity. In the following I present Eisenstein's sexual decoys as a lens onto this effect and apply it towards the subject of my critique.



Figure 14. Ivanka Trump's Twitter profile (2019) [Screenshot 06/08/2019], source: [Trump](#)

Sexual decoys – a lens onto evil

Zillah Eisenstein's 2007 book *Sexual decoys: gender, race and war in imperial democracy* was published just before the financial crash. Through her concept of *sexual decoys* she offers a theoretical lens onto the shift that my research intends to focus on. She writes that via *sexual decoys* she looks to 'explain and reveal the newest fluidities of gender that disconnect the

meanings of the female body from its gendered formation' (2007, p.xii). Eisenstein's analysis is centred on US politics, particularly the time from 2000 onwards and the military action in Iraq. She maps how protagonists such as former US secretary of state Condoleeza Rice, 'the warrior princess' (2007, p.58), have helped to give imperial aggression an aura of equality and emancipation through her race and gender. She writes:

Condoleeza Rice wields power, but not as a woman – whatever this might really mean today – and not for women and their rights – but for an imperial democracy that destroys women's equality and racial justice. Imperial democracy uses racial diversity and gender fluidity to disguise itself – and females and people of colour become its decoys (2007, p.17).

Central to Eisenstein's argument in relation to Condoleeza Rice, is that she repeatedly spoke in favour of the necessity of extreme and coercive interrogation' (2007, p.58) while she holds on to an extreme outside femininity as for example, by emphasizing her passion for shopping Ferragamo shoes. Here particularly her femininity paired with race is a way to cover politics that signify aggressive masculinity and as Eisenstein writes, makes patriarchal imperialism look like democracy.

Gender decoys are females in drag and the drag allows us to think that they represent the best of democracy when they don't. (...) Gender is already in place when females are defined as feminine; the gendering of the body controls the interpretative lens (Eisenstein, 2007, p. 39).

Rice's femininity (and race) determine the interpretation of her politics, rendering them democratic in the embodiment of Rice. Her body in this position at the centre of power shall indicate a progressive form of politics. In a (previous) patriarchal and post-colonial construct of power her appearance would signify her location on the margins of power.

Another example that Eisenstein uses is Lynndie England, who gained 'fame' through the photograph of her in US soldier uniform while humiliating a male (rendered female) Iraqi prisoner in Abu Ghraib and who was convicted for this in 2005. Eisenstein writes about the effects of that photograph that England 'represents masculinity in a female body. Gender floats disconnected from its signifying body. She is a decoy for imperial wars.' (2007, p.35). Unlike Condoleeza Rice, when recalling the image of Lynndie England which was very present for a while in the media, she lacks the feminine appearance of Rice but still her female body is enough to function as this decoy. Eisenstein writes about the confusion that this produces:

Imperial feminism utilizes a masculinist militarism in drag. Imperial(ist) feminism obfuscates the use of gender decoys; women are both victims and perpetrators; constrained and yet free; neither exactly commander nor victim (2007, p.40).

Eisenstein is aware of the risk that this confusion might result falling into a form of essentialism of womanhood in order to resolve the contradiction, where for example women can be only victims but not perpetrators. She writes towards the end of her book that:

Recognizing the identifiable identity that is always more than singular is what makes non-imperial feminisms central to any construct of meaningful democracy. Women's bodies – their hormones, brain cells, vaginas, wombs, and breasts – must be recognized but not reified or essentialized. Feminisms must not be afraid of sexual equality and the similarity it imagines; and yet recognize the multiplicity and diversity of sexes and genders (2007, p.99).

Eisenstein here makes a clear statement against essentializing women (or race) through advocating the recognition of complexity in identity. Cinthia Cockburn in her review of Eisenstein book points out that

The very purpose of Eisenstein's book is to expose and explore a contradiction: that things really change but do not really change, that we appear to gain and, in some ways, do gain, but we simultaneously lose (instead, or as well) (2008, p.164).

And while I find Eisenstein's observations incredibly useful for my research, I suggest that the concept of sexual decoy in a purified form, risks that the depiction of those women in power acting as decoys for patriarchy, result in another form of essentialism, not of gender but of *evil*. On the one hand by declaring them as sexual decoys, they are getting deprived of any agency and are turned into a one-dimensional subject, making them clerks to *evil* forces behind them. On the other, if this narrative is dismissed, they become self-motivated *evil* subjects, aware of their contradictory roles and acting in their mere self-interest.

Nuanced evil

The examples that Eisenstein uses, such as the photo of Lynndie England are easy to reject and condemn as *evil* on moral grounds as well as the aggressive and militarist policies embodied by Condoleeza Rice. Both acts heavily contrasted with a structured notion of femininity as benign, caring and peace seeking. Hence, the separation from the embodied

female gender and masculine acts of destruction are more visible due to that contrast, creating a stronger tension to be observed because of this contradiction. Since then, using Eisenstein's publication year 2007 as a reference point, this stark contrast has become more nuanced. The contrast between the embodiment and policies that are represented, has decreased. For example, Ivanka Trump does not support her father's misogynist, racist and homophobic positions but at the same time does not disagree with them publicly, while advocating women's empowerment programs. Sheryl Sandberg's (COO of Facebook at the time) call to 'Lean in' in her 2013 published book with the same title promotes women's self-initiative while denying any need for structural support from the state, therefore creating grounds for emancipation for the few but not the many. I will elaborate on this in more detail in Chapter 6 and my discussion of *the simulation of feminism(s)*. Marion Maréchal in January 2017 held a very feminist appearing speech in French Parliament as part of the debate on abortion (Cassius, 2017). In it she accused female MP's from the socialist party of not providing enough economic and structural support for young women with children and pushing them into precarious living conditions and hence, promoting the increase of abortions. This speech circulated on YouTube including on her own channel and her other social media outlets.

Social media and representation

Social media proves the ideal platform to soften these women's images and policies as well as agitating. This development has exploded since Eisenstein's publication in 2007. Social media platforms are an ideal tool as they make these women not dependent on their depiction on mainstream media outlets but allows them a high autonomy in self-representation including photos with (their) babies, as in the case of Ivanka Trump's twitter channel. Alice Weidel from the German right-extremist AfD, posted a selfie with the artist Ai Wei Wei on her twitter account in April 2018 showing herself in alliance with an artist who critically examines the European treatment of refugees while her own party runs an extreme hard line against them. Social media has helped to feminize right wing and capitalist politics creating a mode for its representation through these platforms. To me, this resonates with Wark's (2016) and Walsh's (2015) claim of social media providing a space for gender performance (see Chapter 2). This new type of 'sexual decoy' acts a lot more nuanced and with more subtlety than previously. They, women such as Ivanka Trump, Marion Maréchal (formerly Le Pen), Sheryl Sandberg or Alice Weidel, have adapted their policies, or at least the way they present them, to make them equally correspond to the femininity that they embody. They are less aggressive and appear more benign while still being discriminatory and capitalist. I investigate in my exploration of over-identification how to capture this nuancing.



Figure 15. Alice Weidel Ai Wei Wei Tweet (2018) [Screenshot 17/06/2021], source: [Weidel](#)

White (blonde) women

Still, one key aspect that should not be ignored here and is part of the complexity I am dealing with is race, together with gender.⁵ All those women who I consider as representative examples of a more nuanced embodiment of *evil*, decoys that are harder to detect, are all white women within my research context in the US, Europe and the UK (once part of the EU) and the majority of them are blonde.

One of them is Ivanka Trump, even though in this research I do not over-identify with her directly but appropriate many of her mannerisms and aesthetics. I consider her central to the further polarisation and the perpetuation of dualisms in society. She was and still is the soothing and balancing component to her father's image, and I consider her key to his successful presidential campaign in 2016. Ivanka Trump made her father appear acceptable to a range of voters who potentially would reject him and his 'Pussy-grabbing' rhetoric,

⁵ Eisenstein equally addresses class as another factor within her discussion of decoys but I consider this of lesser importance within my argumentation for this research as I focus on visible markers of femininity in performance but I am also aware of its relevance.

including white (middle class) women. At the same time Ivanka Trump embodies several contradictions in her extremely feminine appearance as well as being part of her father's administration (2016 – 2020). These include for example her 'feminism' vs. his sexism, her being married to a Jew and his anti-Semitic voters. These contradictions intensify her balancing effect, making him more acceptable because of her. On the one hand this can be attributed to her sex and gender similar to Eisenstein's' argument. They are not functioning as an opposing but completing component to his electorate. In fact, Ivanka Trump generates a paradox of her own, in which she, in her less confrontational and balancing position to her father, occupies a gap for potential voters who would have neither voted for Trump or as in the 2016 election, nor for Hillary Clinton. And by offering these voters a more amicable position, she intensifies the polarisation. Here I consider Ivanka Trumps' overt feminine and 'sexy' but poised appearance as extremely important which in itself is the balancing of two polarities, similar to the workings of Ulman, but more mature. Her long blonde, sometimes wavy sometimes sleek hair which she mostly wears down, is an extremely important carrier of her appeal, next to her 'super model body'. To make it more visual, if Ivanka Trump had a sharp brunette bob instead, I suggest that her soothing power would be less. Or even if it was blonde bob, like in Charlize Theron in *Atomic Blonde* (Leitch, 2017), Ivanka's appeal is stronger with long wavy hair (she did have a short sleek bob before but not for long). So, she develops her biggest potency in an aesthetic that builds on Reese Witherspoon in *Legally Blonde* (directed by Luketic, 2001). It is her hyper-sexualised at the same time angel-like appearance and the balancing of it that makes her so powerful and eventually deceiving, and she knows how to use it. She also underscores this with her wardrobe, mostly knee long body accentuating dresses in pastel colours. This aesthetic of Ivanka Trump in particular, to me resonates with 1930s Nazi propaganda images. The cover of the magazine *Mode und Heim* produced for women in the Third Reich, depicts a blonde, neat, clean woman. This iconic image of femininity then has progressed and carried over in the following decades in Western Culture. I am also thinking here of Claudia Schiffer; an iconic German model who had her career height in the 1990s and part of her appeal was her clean and neat blonde aesthetic.

Exploring bloneness as a strategic move

It is noteworthy here that the hairstyles from Alice Weidel and Marion Maréchal (Le Pen), are similar to the one of Ivanka Trump, with long feminine blonde hair, even though Weidel wears in a stricter form. 'It's great to be a blonde. With low expectations it's very easy to surprise people.' (brainy quote not dated) is one of Pamela Anderson's most famous quotes to date. I was once referred to by a male Eastern European curator as a Pamela Anderson look alike.

Here my hair style seemed sufficient as a reference point. Although it might be extremely banal to consider a hairstyle indicative as signifier of a position within a construct of power, in an age of social media I suggest it has become one of the most important image makers of this day and also a key aesthetic component of my work and myself. In the end it is the construct of women with long blonde hair to be considered the most benign and naïve like Elle Woods, Reese Witherspoon's character in *Legally Blonde* (2001), that gives the emphasis of blondness as a strategic feature in the interrogation of power, its justification. Pamela Anderson displays a great awareness of that when she states: 'I don't think I am an actress. I think I've created a brand and a business.' which could be referred to as the brand of blondeness. Sheryl Sandberg, a brunette, on the other hand, the representative of feminism in a US corporation, wears shoulder long, also sometimes wavy sometimes sleek hair, more of a business look. I explore her aesthetic and mannerisms in Chapter 6 in my discussion of my TAP talk series. Coming back to Clausewitz's (Caygill, 2013) notion of overcoming the enemy's capacity to resist, as a key strategic move, using *blondenness* and what it contains such as naivety, innocence and benignity may be considered such a move. This strategic move I actually do not refer to as the usage of *blondenness* but of opacity, which rather than deceiving, has not making intentions explicit at its core which I discuss in the following section.



Figure 16. Ivanka Trump at the G20 2017, source: [Smith \(2017\)](#)

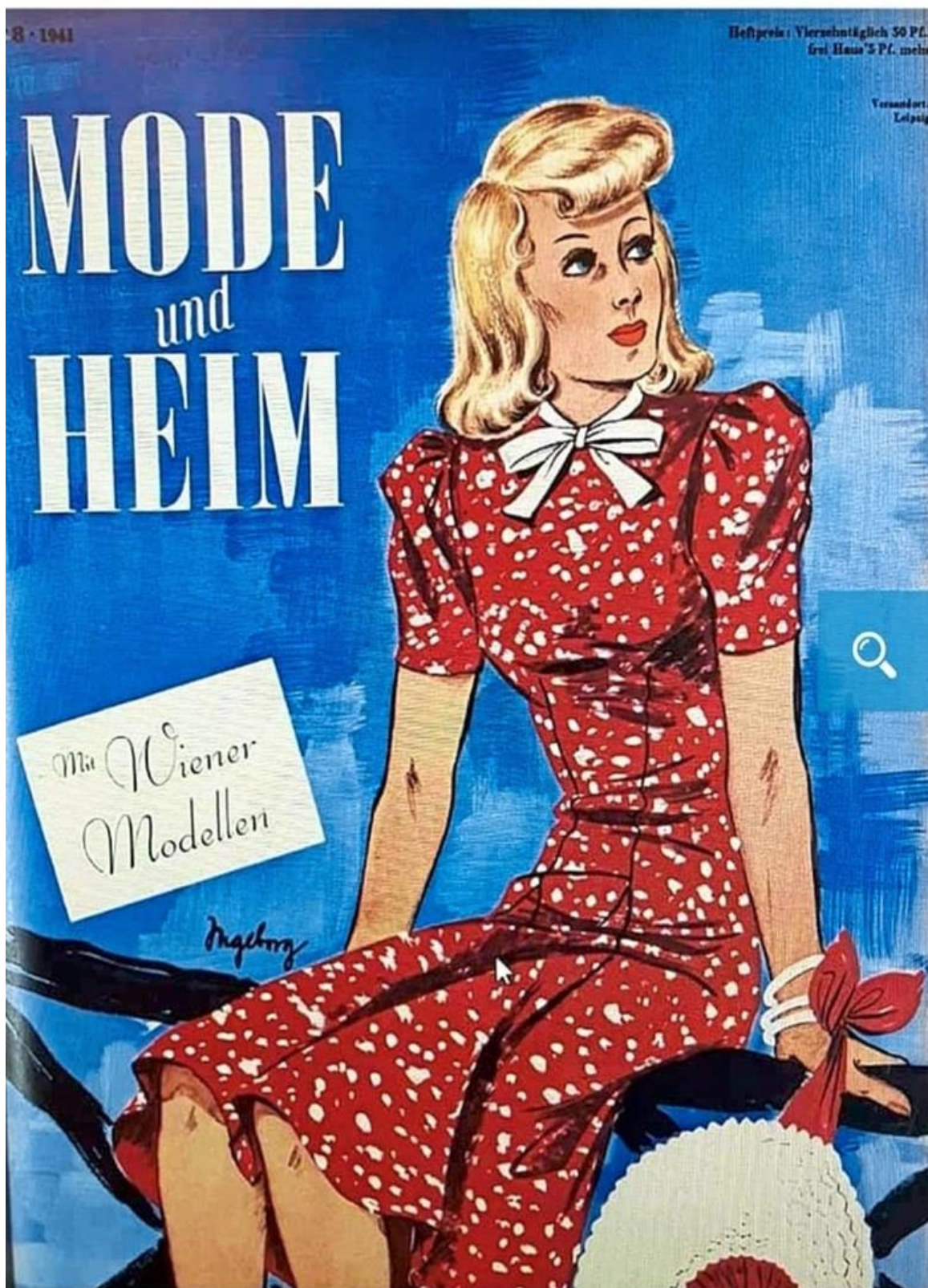


Figure 17. *Heim und Mode* magazine cover, source: [Lau \(2019\)](#)

Opacity – from bloneness to obscurity

A key concern of my practice is the revealing of conditions of performance art production by using over-identification as a strategy from a feminist perspective. But as I pointed in my previous analysis, being upfront and open about the critique and my position seems a hindrance towards this intention. Therefore, I introduce the concept of opacity which was first coined by Martiniquais philosopher Eduard Glissant. Also given my previous claim that an embodiment of conservatism and capitalism has become more nuanced, covered with long blonde wavy hair, the concept of opacity may offer a strategic approach in capturing this nuance through over-identification.

Glissant came up with concept of opacity in the context of 'creolity' and 'creolization' – the mixing and intertwining of peoples and cultures, 'as early as 1969 at a congress at the National Autonomous University of Mexico' (Hook, 2012). Most well-known is Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1997) in which he emphasized the use of language and literature to give his global political project of creolization an aesthetic dimension (Hook, 2012). Glissant's key concern in the context of the African Diaspora and creolization, was to re-evaluate Western thought which was so focused on revealing and the pressure of transparency. He writes

As far as I'm concerned, a person has the right to be opaque. That doesn't stop me from liking that person, it doesn't stop me from working with him, hanging out with him, etc. A racist is someone who refuses what he doesn't understand. I can accept what I don't understand (1997, p.185).

In line with Hook (2012), and as I understand it, when Glissant claimed everyone has the right to stay opaque, he meant not everyone has to be completely understood by everyone in order to be accepted. Racism in this relation, signifies the situation of resenting someone for not understanding the other person instead of accepting their 'otherness' (1997, p.185). For Glissant, opacity is 'the force that drives every community: the thing that would bring us together forever and make us permanently distinctive. Opacity enables otherness' (1997, p.190). In his writing, Glissant uses the metaphor of the weave, whereby different strands, or opacities can coexist and the focus should be on the texture of the fabric rather than its components.

In my practice, I engage with the notion of opacity developed by Glissant. It is relevant to my project because of its relevance to political struggle. There are several paradoxes that seem

to occur at this point of my research which correspond with the inherent tension of the term resistance which Comay (2015) stressed. First given my intention to reveal existing conditions, adding a tactic which intends to cover and not make explicit, seems contradictory. Still the point of this research is to show how a deployment of over-identification in performance art can have a revealing and disruptive function, where not making all intentions explicit, can become part of its efficacy. But as pointed out with Ulman's work, there are ethical issues arising from this approach in relation to audience agency, hence, the quality of their participation needs to be part of my interrogation.

In a seminar I participated in on Opacity at the ICA (February 2016), it was pointed out to me that Glissant's theory, which mainly focuses of questions of racism, has been appropriated by numerous white authors for other purposes. My intention of using Glissant's opacity as a strategic tool to play with the notion of the *evil* blonde women, who can be perceived as the embodiment of the racism that Glissant is describing, may cause irritation. But it could provide a tool to show how also they can embody several agencies, that are interweaved next to each other and that they are rejected because it is difficult to understand the simultaneity of these differing positions in one person/woman. While they are xenophobic, they are also subject to discrimination themselves because of their sex/gender. They support patriarchal structures in their politics while advancing themselves into powerful women. I want to use Opacity here as a tool to show how several positions can or cannot co-exist next to each other, because they are not only conflictual but exclusive to 'our' perception and through this it becomes a crucial tool in relation to the exploration of agonism and antagonism through performance art.

Also, by adding opacity in my strategic setup of the performances, my intention is to remove the layer of fictionality in them and through contradicting and juxtaposing different voices, create a blurred position of my work – neither agreeable nor entirely objectionable. I explore this strategy in the next chapter together with a direct over-identification with one of the blonde agents discussed in this section, Marion Maréchal.

Chapter 4:
Love & Merci!

The following chapter presents my first direct identification with a female agent of the politics of post-Fordism, Marion Maréchal. In this work I adapt my exploration of the strategy of over-identification based on my findings in Chapter 2 and add a layer of opacity to my performance. One of the reasons why I chose to over-identify with her was our biographic proximity and aesthetic similarity. I staged my live performance in a public space, in Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park. It was part of my calculation that some passers-by such as French tourists would recognise her speech, not only through the language but also my appearance and through this cause irritation. While this aspect was only going to be visible and intelligible to French speaker's in the live audience, I also produced an online version of this work to make this direct over-identification visible to an English-speaking audience, hence the online encounter was also part of my exploration of over-identification. Through this double presence of the performance I sought to create multiple locations of encounter for different audiences and explore how an equality-image-producing machinery can be interrupted via an affirmative feminist gesture such as a woman speaking in male dominated Speaker's Corner and negated via the citation of a politician who pursues anti-feminist policies. In the production of an ambiguity through over-identification I sought to reach a position of resistance in the context of post-Fordism.

I discuss this work in direct juxtaposition with German artist Christoph Schlingensiefel's action *Please Love Austria!* from 2000. The work of Schlingensiefel, who was often referred to as the *art world bad boy* while he was still alive, is characterized by an 'aesthetic of excess' (Hughes, 2006) David Hughes emphasizes that Schlingensiefel's work 'is a world of endless suggestiveness that cries out for explanation or revelation, only to yield a virtual abyss of meaning' (2006, p.325). There are several commonalities between these two works including an aesthetic of excess and the intention to make the work ambiguous through over-identification, which I explore through my analysis.

Both works were staged in the context of rising xenophobia; Austria experienced a far-right turn in the election in 2000 and again in 2017; in the UK the Brexit debate in 2016 started to polarise the electorate and in the Front National under Marine Le Pen, her niece Marion Maréchal was gaining substantial influence during the same period of time. By the end of 2015 Maréchal almost won an election in her French department.

Both works are operating in a public space, where potentially several audiences were able to encounter them, including tourists and locals, art and non-art. In both cases it was obvious that a 'foreigner' was the agitator of the situation and addressing the public audience directly, as part of the spectacle. Both performances share a level of ambiguity and the conscious

intention to agitate the audience through this ambiguity by not making the own intentions clear from the very beginning, by being opaque. Also, both works have transgressive elements in them; Schlingensiefel using the far-right rhetoric directly and myself by not using English language, breaking one of few written rules of Speaker's Corner as well as citing a speech from a far-right politician. But this citation was not obvious to the majority of the audience in Speaker's Corner because it was in French. While there is no rule that no women are allowed to speak in Speaker's Corner, the gesture of placing my female body in it when it was missing previously, could be also considered a transgressive act of an unwritten rule.

So, there are several layers of transgressions in each work, but they operate through different dramaturgical arcs, which help me to evaluate the efficacy of over-identification as a form of resistance in each work based on its differences and commonalities.

In the following analysis I distinguish between the live performance in May 2016, *Merci Liberte!* and its online presentation *mercilibertemayday2016.tumblr.com*, published in October 2016. The live performance *Merci Liberte!* is presented within this thesis in its chronology of its two parts (Speech 1 and Speech 2) together with the translated version of the speeches from French to English, juxtaposed next to each other in a black frame. The text on the right, which represents its translation was not available to the audience during performance but corresponds to the text on the blog which I present via a screenshot. On the blog the different speeches were presented not as a chronology but different fragments, hence not as two coherent speeches. The introduction of my work is accompanied with a short script of what happened before, in-between and after the live performance. I then introduce the work of Christoph Schlingensiefel *Please Love Austria!* (2000) together with the documentary of the work by Paul Poet titled *Foreigners Out! Schlingensiefel's container* (2002). I discuss in more detail these works from the perspective of gender, audience, interpassivity and antagonism.

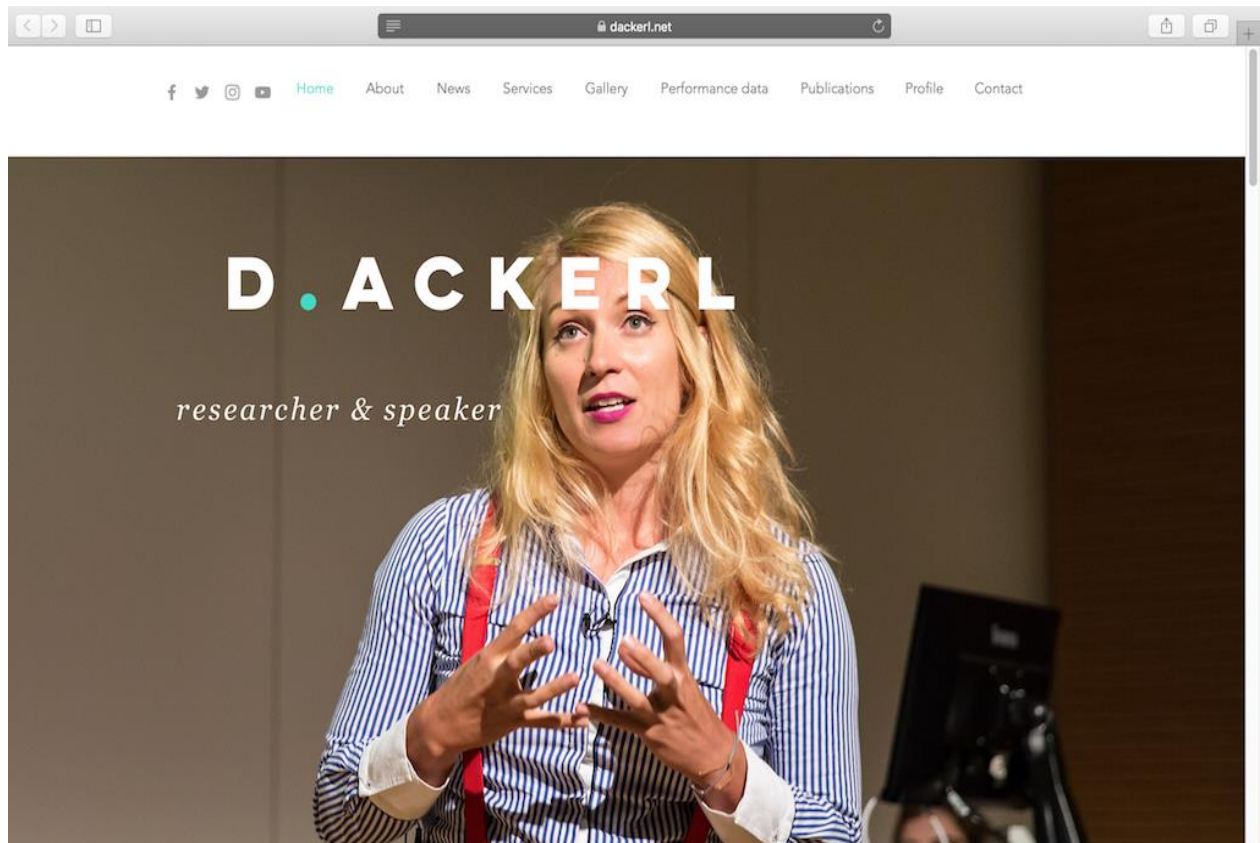


Figure 18. Frontpage of my [own website](#) (2019) [Screenshot 06/08/2019]

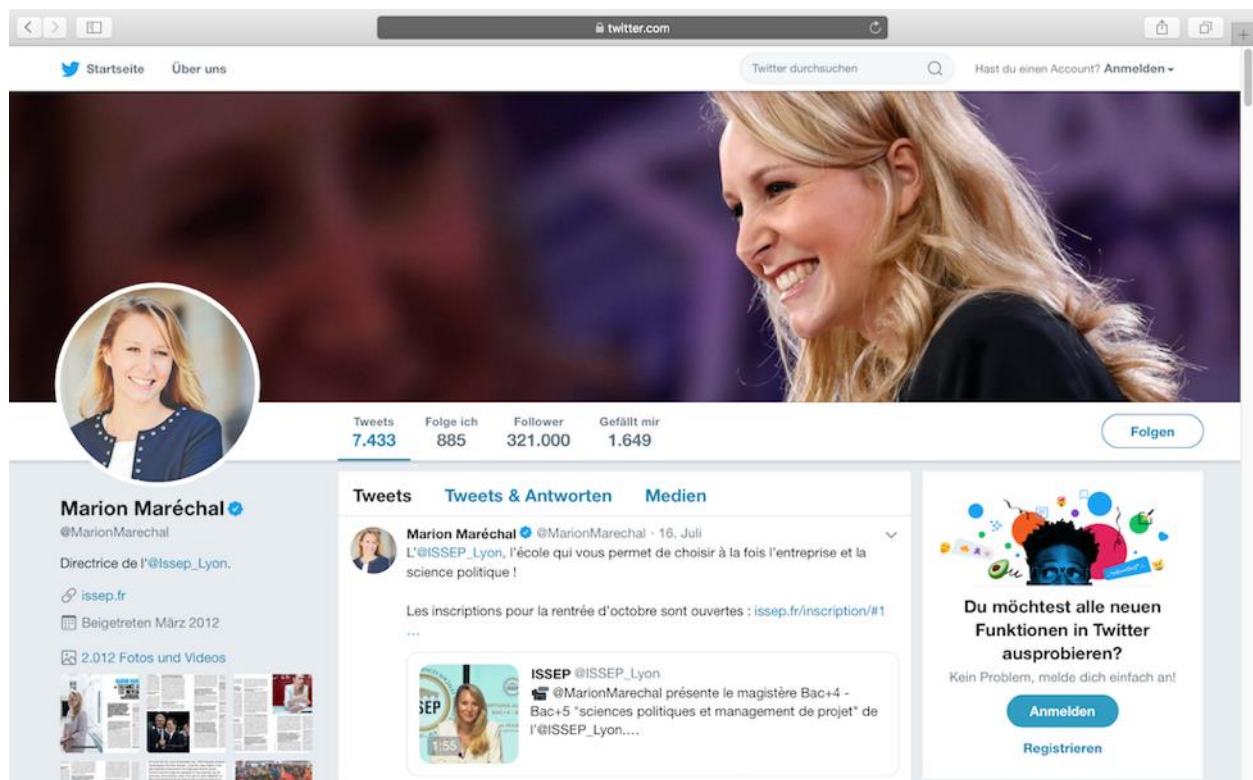


Figure 19. Marion Maréchal's Twitter profile (2019) [Screenshot 06/08/2019], source: [Maréchal](#)

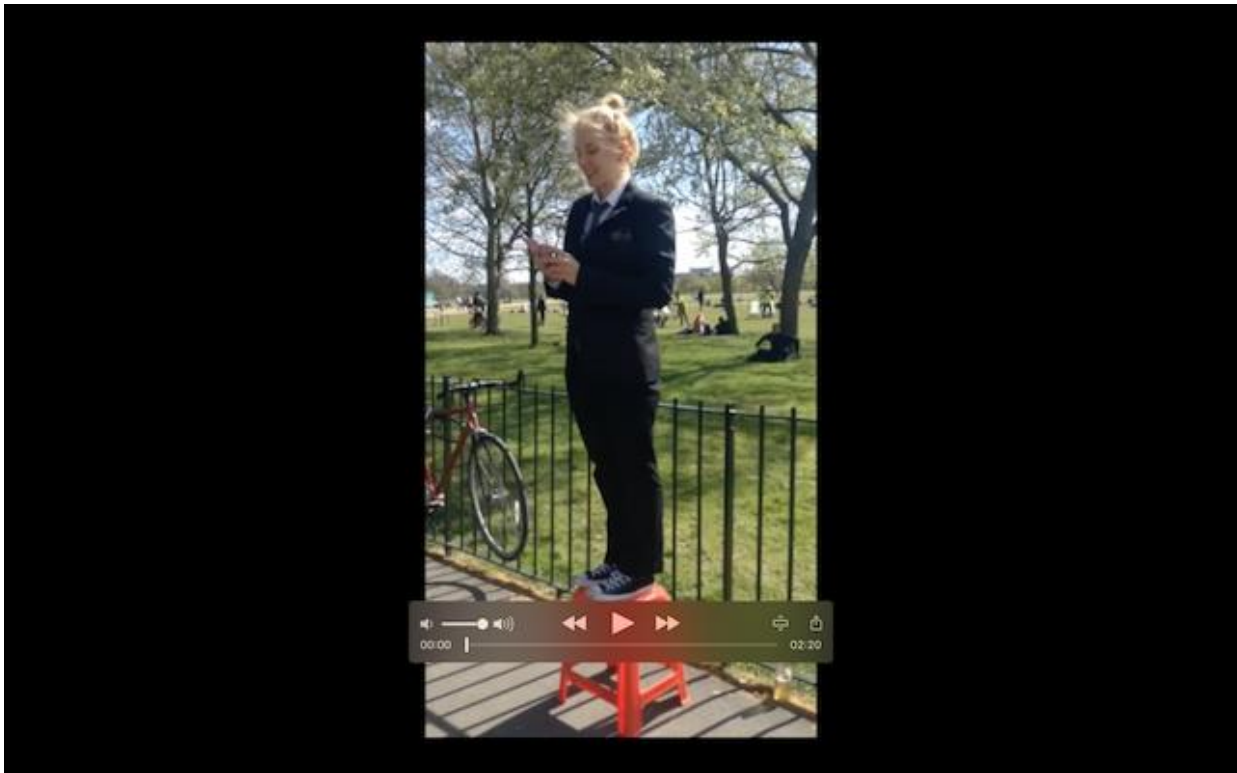


Figure 20. *Merci Liberte!* performance documentation [Screenshot: 06/08/2019]

Work 2: Merci Liberte! (Mayday 2016)

And mercilibertemayday2016.tumblr.com (October 2016)

Sunday 1 May 2016, Speaker's Corner, Hyde Park, London

I was just about to do a live performance. I was in the first year of my part-time PhD, and a referendum on whether the UK should leave the EU was just a few weeks away. In my performance, I was breaking one of the few rules of Speaker's Corner: one must use the English language. I chose to speak in French that day.

I stood on a red plastic stool, wearing a black suit and citing a speech from Marion Maréchal, when she lost an election in her French department in December 2015. She was 26 years old (I was 28 at that point). Even though she lost the election, she gained many voters, making the Front National stronger than it was ever before in that region. Maréchal is an open advocate of banning the right to abortion and has repeatedly made Islamophobic statements.

Speech 1:

<p><i>Marion Maréchal Le Pen: Ils ont gagné à dix contre un !</i></p> <p><i>Eléctions Régionales 2015 (La Provence, 2015)</i></p> <p>Speech transcript:</p> <p>Merci! Avant tout merci infiniment à chacun d'entre vous et bravo</p> <p>0:26</p> <p>Merci a nos électeurs</p> <p>0:28</p> <p>Il y a de victoires qui font honte aux vainqueurs</p> <p>0:38</p> <p>Au nom des valeurs de la République ce soir ils auront saborder la démocratie</p> <p>0:41</p> <p>gagner à 10 contre 1</p> <p>0:44</p> <p>n'est pas autre chose qu'une défaite</p> <p>0:47</p> <p>Tout aura été fait</p> <p>0:51</p> <p>Calomnie, mensonges, clientélisme, communautarisme</p> <p>0:55</p> <p>et je vous en passe, depuis maintenant dix jours.</p> <p>0:58</p> <p>Alors ne les écoutez pas il n'y a pas de plafond de verre</p> <p>1:02</p> <p>ce soi-disant plafond de verre etait de 25 %</p>	<p><i>English Translation: Marion Maréchal Le Pen : They won 10 against one!</i></p> <p><i>Regional Elections 2015</i></p> <p>Speech transcript translation:</p> <p>Thank you! thank you above all to all of you and congratulations</p> <p>0:26</p> <p>Thank you to our voters</p> <p>0:28</p> <p>There are victories that are a disgrace to the winners</p> <p>0:38</p> <p>In the name of the Republic tonight they will sink democracy</p> <p>0:41</p> <p>to win 10 against 1</p> <p>0:44</p> <p>is not anything other than a defeat</p> <p>0:47</p> <p>Everything will have been done</p> <p>0:51</p> <p>Defamation, lies, cronyism, communitarianism</p> <p>0:55</p> <p>to name only a few you, for the last ten days.</p> <p>0:58</p> <p>So do not listen to them, there is no glass ceiling</p> <p>1:02</p> <p>this so-called glass ceiling was of 25%</p>
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<p>en 2010 aujourd'hui il 1:07 est de 48% combien demain ? 1:17 Où est le plafond de verre lorsque nous gagnons près de 200 000 voix à l'entre-deux tours? où est le plafond de verre lorsqu'ici en Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur nous obtenons 1:25 le meilleur score Front National de France 1:37 Alors si tous ces profiteurs cyniques 1:39 pensent nous effrayer 1:43 S'ils pensent nous dégouter 1:45 S'ils pensent nous décourager je leur dis qu'ils se trompent 1:49 nous allons redoubler d'efforts 1:53 Nous allons redoubler de combativité et notre amour 1:57 de la France n'a jamais été aussi exalté 2:09 Une nouvelle page se tourne, la recomposition 2:10 de la vie politique française aujourd'hui est inéluctable et elle partira de 2:15 notre région 2:16</p>	<p>in 2010 it is now 1:07 48%, how much tomorrow? 1:17 Where is this glass ceiling when we win 200,000 votes in between elections? Where is this glass ceiling when here in Provence Alpes and Côte d'Azur We obtain 1:25 the best score for the National Front in France 1:37 So if all these cynical profiteers 1:39 think they scare us 1:43 If they think they can put us off 1;45 If they think they discourage us I tell them they are wrong 1:49 we will redouble our efforts 1:53 We will redouble combativeness and our love for 1:57 France has never been so exalted 2:09 A new page has turned, the reconfiguration 2:10 of French political life is inevitable today and will begin in 2:15 our region 2:16</p>
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dans cette région nous serons avec mon équipe 2:19 vos représentants, la représentante des patriotes 2:23 une représentation honnête, fidèle 2:26 et surtout libre 2:27 pour que notre région reprenne toute sa place 2:29 et que les patriotes quel que soit leur bord soit défendu 2:33 Les vieux rentiers du système ont été élus par défaut 2:36 ils sont d'ores et déjà pieds et poings liés par leurs compromissions 2:40 il n'y aura pas 2:41 de changements avec Christian Estrosi 2:44 mais nos compatriotes reviendrons j'en suis sure 2:47 vers l'envie , l'envie d'être défendu, d'être représentés, l'envie d'être 2:52 français 2:53 le succès n'est pas finale l'échec n'est pas fatal c'est le courage de	in this region we will be with my team 2:19 your representatives, the representative of patriots 2:23 an honest representation, faithful 2:26 and especially free 2:27 in order for our region to fully resume its place 2:29 and so that the patriots, whatever their side, will be defended 2:33 The old annuitants of the system were elected by default 2:36 their arms and legs are already bound by their compromises 2:40 there will be no 2:41 changes with Christian Estrosi 2:44 but our compatriots will return I'm sure 2:47 to desire, the desire to be defended, to be represented, the desire to be 2:52 French 2:53 Success is not final, failure is not fatal. It is the courage to
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2:57	continuer qui compte et parce que nous sommes français	2:57	continue that counts, and because we are French
3:00	nous ne manquons pas de courage (applause)	3:00	we do not lack courage (applause)
3:10	Parce que	3:10	Because
3:12	vous êtes des français et des patriotes sincères mes amis	3:12	you are sincere Frenchmen and patriots my friends
	vous savez que notre histoire de France		you know that our history of France
3:16	est faite à la fois d'immenses tragedies mais aussi	3:16	has known both immense tragedies but also
3:21	de sublimes résurrections	3:21	sublime resurrections
3:23	et la sublime réssurection ne viendra pas seul	3:23	and the sublime resurrection will not come alone
3:26	elle viendra par nous à force	3:26	it will come by our strength
3:28	de courage	3:28	courage
3:29	de droiture	3:29	uprightness
3:30	de pugnacité et surtout de travail	3:30	pugnacity and especially work
3:33	avec tous les patriotes de France	3:33	with all the patriots of France
3:35	plus que jamais ce soir	3:35	more than ever tonight
3:37	je le dis	3:37	I say it
3:38	Vive la Provence, vive les Alpes, vive la Côte	3:38	Long live Provence, long live the Alps, long

d'Azur, Et surtout vive la France!	live the Côte d'Azur, And especially long live France!
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Halfway through my performance, after the first speech, I took a short break, put up a note stating, 'break for costume change', and disappeared into my portable changing room in the middle of the park. I came back in a wedding dress. Upon my return, one audience member said:

'Oh, she must be from the comedy club'

Back on my red stool, I now cited the poem *Liberté!* (speech 2) written in 1942 by French Resistance member and artist Paul Eluard during the German occupation of France. I was driven by adrenaline and the audience's attention while the wind blew through my silky white skirt and hair.

The Speaker's Corner audience's first reaction to my speech was to shout: "Subtitles!" I kept going. When conducting research for this performance on previous visits, I was struck by the fact that I had never seen a single woman speaking at Speaker's Corner; that religion was the dominant topic; and that – as on social media – it seemed the loudest (rather than the most sensible) voices attracted the biggest audiences. Then another (male) speaker with a deep, booming voice positioned himself right in front of me. Serendipitously, a French film team was also present; video footage that my team recorded when I was getting changed revealed the following conversation between one male, English-speaking audience member and a female member of the French TV team:

MAN: So, is she a feminist?

WOMAN: I guess you have to be a feminist to do that.

Then, when I came out of my little changing room:

WOMAN: Oh, she is a married woman.



Figure 21. Video still from *Merci Liberté!* performance documentation (2016)

Speech 2:

Liberté	Freedom
<i>Paul Eluard</i>	<i>Paul Eluard</i>
<p>Sur mes cahiers d'écolier Sur mon pupitre et les arbres Sur le sable sur la neige J'écris ton nom</p>	<p>On my school notebooks On my school desk and the trees On the sand on the snow I write your name</p>
<p>Sur toutes les pages lues Sur toutes les pages blanches Pierre sang papier ou cendre J'écris ton nom</p>	<p>On all the pages read On all the blank pages Stone, blood, paper or ash I write your name</p>
<p>Sur les images dorées Sur les armes des guerriers</p>	<p>On the golden image On the warriors' arms On the crown of kings I write your name</p>

<p>Sur la couronne des rois J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur la jungle et le désert Sur les nids sur les genets Sur l'écho de mon enfance J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur les merveilles des nuits Sur le pain blanc des journées Sur les saisons fiancées J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur tous mes chiffons d'azur Sur l'étang soleil moisi Sur le lac lune vivante J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur les champs sur l'horizon Sur les ailes des oiseaux Et sur le moulin des ombres J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur chaque bouffée d'aurore Sur la mer sur les bateaux Sur la montagne démente J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur la mousse des nuages Sur les sueurs de l'orage Sur la pluie épaisse et fade J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur les formes scintillantes Sur les cloches des couleurs Sur la vérité physique J'écris ton nom</p>	<p>On the jungle and the desert On the nests on the brooms On the echo of my childhood I write your name</p> <p>On the wonders of nights On the white bread of days On the engaged seasons I write your name</p> <p>On all of my azure rags On the pond mildewed sun On the lake moon alive I write your name</p> <p>On fields on the horizon On the wings of birds And on the mill of shadows I write your name</p> <p>On each puff of dawn On the sea on the boats On the insane mountain I write your name</p> <p>On the foam of the clouds On the sweat of the storm On the thick and dull rain I write your name</p> <p>On the sparkling figures On the bells of colour On the physical truth I write your name</p> <p>On the waking trails On the unfurled roads</p>
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<p>Sur les sentiers éveillés Sur les routes déployées</p> <p>Sur les places qui débordent J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur la lampe qui s'allume Sur la lampe qui s'éteint Sur mes maisons réunies J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur le fruit coupé en deux Du miroir et de ma chambre Sur mon lit coquille vide J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur mon chien gourmand et tendre Sur ses oreilles dressées Sur sa patte maladroite J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur le tremplin de ma porte Sur les objets familiers Sur le flot du feu béni J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur toute chair accordée Sur le front de mes amis Sur chaque main qui se tend J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur la vitre des surprises Sur les lèvres attentives Bien au-dessus du silence J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur mes refuges détruits Sur mes phares écroulés</p>	<p>On the overflowing squares I write your name</p> <p>On the lamp that comes alight On the lamp that dies out On my combined houses I write your name</p> <p>On the fruit cut in halves Of the Mirror and of my room On my empty shell bed I write your name</p> <p>On my eager and tender dog On his pricked up ears On his clumsy paw I write your name</p> <p>On the springboard of my door On the familiar objects On the flow of the blessed fire I write your name</p> <p>On all granted flesh On the forehead of my friends On each hand reaching out I write your name</p> <p>On the window of surprises On the attentive lips Well above the silence I write your name</p> <p>On my destroyed shelters On my collapsed headlights On the walls of my boredom I write your name</p>
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<p>Sur les murs de mon ennui J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur l'absence sans désir Sur la solitude nue Sur les marches de la mort J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Sur la santé revenue Sur le risque disparu Sur l'espoir sans souvenir J'écris ton nom</p> <p>Et par le pouvoir d'un mot Je recommence ma vie Je suis né pour te connaître Pour te nommer</p> <p>Liberté.</p>	<p>On the absence without desire On the bare loneliness On the steps of death I write your name</p> <p>On the health returned On the risk disappeared On the hope without memories I write your name</p> <p>And by the power of a single word I start my life again I was born to know you To name you</p> <p>Freedom.</p>
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After the poem I turned around, with my back facing the audience and threw my little pink paper flowers into the air, like a bride would throw her bouquet. I went back into my little changing chamber. The performance was over. A man who stood beside me and previously was one of the main people 'heckling', took over the stage and started talking.



Figure 22. *Please Love Austria!* (2000), source: schlingensief.com (2000)

Please Love Austria! by Christoph Schlingensief (2000)
and *Foreigners Out! Schlingensief's Container* by Paul Poet (2002)

The action *Please Love Austria!* took place in 2000, as part of a cultural festival called *Wiener Festwochen* and was staged in Vienna's city centre, right in front of the State Opera. Timon Beyes (2010) writes that Schlingensief's intervention 'had disruptive effects on the everyday organization of city space.' (p.230). His discussion focuses on the inter-dependence of Schlingensief's work with the urban environment. Theron Schmidt (2011) puts his focus on the work's relation to spectacle or *bad spectacle* in this case. He takes his definition of bad spectacle from Guy Debord, who described it as an activity that begins on the other side of the modern collapse of the idea of the theatre, 'through the involvement of its participants as neither spectators nor actors but as "livers"' (2011, p.30). Schmidt describes *Please Love Austria!* in the following way:

In this action, Schlingensief responded to a farright turn in Austrian politics by constructing a simulation of a detention centre in a prominent public square in Vienna, populating it with twelve people whom Schlingensief claimed were seeking asylum in Austria at that time. Mimicking the Big Brother TV-show format, the project invited

audiences and website visitors to vote each day to 'evict' two of the hopeful 'asylum seekers'; at the end of the week, it was claimed that the remaining contestant would receive a cash prize and the option to marry an Austrian citizen in order to gain the right to remain in the country. The container installation itself was festooned with right-wing quotations and fascist references – including, most prominently, a huge banner reading 'Ausländer Raus' ('Foreigners Out'), the kind of inflammatory phrase that might be hinted at by right-wing groups but which they would never allow to appear in official print. The project drew huge crowds and intense public debate; over the week, the furore over the installation grew, attracting national media attention, attempts at arson and vandalism, denunciation by the right-wing press and the siege of the 'detention centre' by a group of angry left-wing protestors attempting to 'free' the 'asylum seekers' (2011, p.28).

According to Schmidt (2011), Schlingensief achieved a blur "between the boundaries of artistic genres, as well as easy distinctions between 'art' and 'politics'" (p.27). Schlingensief made it impossible for either side of the political spectrum to agree or disagree with him; the Left rejected the right-wing rhetoric he used, and he was using the Right's own rhetoric, which made it difficult for them to denounce it. According to Schmidt, this made *Please Love Austria!* a project:

that deliberately frustrates the processes of identification, and in which "we" exists as a disputed concept, as a fiction, as something not yet determined rather than as a reliable category in relation to which one can either belong or remove oneself (2011, p.30).

So Schlingensief did not allow the audience to identify with each other nor with him, and therefore created a constant shifting between alliance and alienation in the work as the audience partly sympathized with his cause while rejecting his methods. There was never a moment of agreement but he constantly antagonised his audience. Schmidt refers to this as a process of dis-identification that Schlingensief initiated, where *Please Love Austria!* (2000) became 'a machinery to disrupt images' as Schlingensief points out in Paul Poet's Film *Foreigners Out! Schlingensief's container* (2002) on the project. It is important here to distinguish between the live-action and Poet's film on the action. Bishop stresses (2011) that it is particularly Poet's film which makes evident that Schlingensief action was a critique of xenophobia and its institutions and that 'Schlingensief's charismatic role as circus master) was ambiguous enough to receive approval and condemnation from all sides of the political spectrum' (2011).

During their stagings, both Ulman's and Schlingensief's work operated with and through a layer of opacity with regards to their intentions. Poet's work, similar to my blog and Ulman's reveal at the ICA, takes the form of a translation, revealing Schlingensief's intention. During the action, Schlingensief, like in many of his previous works, created a set up that caused an urge in his audience to get an explanation or revelation. So at least for those who knew some of it before, could have had an idea of what Schlingensief was constructing. Unlike Ulman's extremely controlled and scripted *Excellences & Perfections*, Schlingensief's *Please Love Austria!*, despite of a certain level of opacity, was much less controlled and lacks the contained aspect of Ulman's staging, not despite but because of the central object of a container and the message attached to it in the public space. Both works operated in spaces that offer exposure to an audience that is not an art audience. But Schlingensief's dramaturgy eventually escalated and allowed space for this escalation, which could be considered in line with Clausewitz's notion 'On War' as discussed in Chapter 1 on 'Resistance'. Schlingensief created a resistance in a 'Clausewitzian' double sense; he removed not only the enemy's ability to react and resist but also everyone's involved. In Schlingensief's own words 'Die Zeit des Widerstands ist vorbei, es ist Zeit für Widersprüchlichkeit' (Poet, 2002) which in English can be translated as 'The time of resistance is over, it is time for contradictions'.

Differences: *Merci Liberte!* and *Please Love Austria!* (2000)

Focus on performer & framing

In the work of Schlingensief despite the asylum seekers as the main protagonists and subject of outrage by the audience they were hardly visible to the audience in the work. It was always Schlingensief or his counterfeit, that was the most exposed and visible to the audience, making him the embodied agency of it. Schlingensief represented no other than himself during his staging. And the same was the case in my Speaker's Corner Speeches. This also means that our bodies, the main object of the performances, were exposed to an audience that we could not control. This would have been different if performances had taken place within a theatre or college, where the access is more restricted and the audience has a more concentrated interest in art/academia. Catherine Wood, the performance curator of Tate Modern states in a discussion on performance frameworks that 'The perceptual habits of the audience are linked to the building the piece is in.' (2016, p.61).

Like the Dadaists, we, Schlingensief and Ulman and I, took our work outside a space where provocation was expected by the audience. Saying that, Speaker's Corner may be considered as exactly such a space as those 'performing' there seek confrontation and intend to provoke. But Speaker's Corner is not framed by an artistic context where the audience selects itself by their interest in art/performance. In Vienna's public Herbert-von-Karajan square as well as Speaker's Corner, both being touristy locations, the encounter with the audience was more contingent than directed. Jörn Schafaff in response to Catherine Wood (2016) points out that

Speaking of codes, there is one code of behaviour that seems to remain untouched, no matter whether a work appears in the context of a theatre or an art gallery: as soon as something is announced as a performance, no matter whether you're invited to walk around or not, to move through a space and leave and enter, people tend to form an audience body and to behave in that way (p.61).

He further states that

...the institution is not something that is only out there, but something that we all have inside of us. We are the institution when we perform as the theatre visitors, when we bring modes of perception or behavioural codes that are in synch with the side the activity takes place in (pp.61/62).

This is important, particularly in relation to Schlingensief's work but also my own. Even though a performance may take place somewhere outside a building that offers a specific framing, the audience itself brings the framing to the work and not the building on its own. The codes of behaviour are already internalised by the audience which partly direct how the energy of a performance is going to develop, how different affects are generated. Schlingensief's container was part of a cultural festival, the *Festwochen*, so it had an artistic framing despite being in a public square. *Merci Liberte!* was not framed as such, at least in the beginning; I did not give the audience a hint when I started that this was a performance in the context of theatre or fine art, this aspect was opaque to them. Saying that there were several of my friends around pointing phones and other cameras at me, so this opaque framing of my work as a piece of performance art, was convoluted. More than the performance being opaque, here the language offered the primary layer of opaqueness and the set-up of the staging was a secondary contributor. By moving to Speaker's Corner my intention was to partly escape the codes of behaviour from the performance/academic space and synchronize with the 'heckling' activities of Speaker's Corner instead. I consciously located myself in a space set-up for antagonism to antagonise.

Different embodiments and exposure

Given my discussion of the shift of representation of corporate and conservative powers, Schlingensief and I embodied a different agency between masculine and feminine. We were both performing a direct citation of right-wing rhetoric in public in a country in which we were both considered as foreigners, revealed by our accents rather than aesthetic appearance. I spoke as a woman in a place dominated by men and used a rhetoric in the first part, that still has a strong masculine appeal, creating a tension in my work through this contrast evoked by my gender. Schlingensief used the rhetoric of a party primarily associated with and led by men and performed in a cultural framework at that time, that was also dominated by men. Here the inherent masculinity of the performance was almost un-recognisable, 'unmarked' (Phelan, 1993). Schlingensief's performance was not deviating from normative forms of power representation present at the time, as it was marked by masculinity.

Schlingensief kept himself exposed throughout the entire staging while I retreated at some point to my little tent to change. Also Schlingensief's public were familiar with the rhetoric he was using, they could detect and associate its meaning within a second as messages such as 'Foreigners out' even though not printed onto official campaign posters, were well known to the public as unofficial statements that circulated. I recall this from my own memory of that time. Maréchal's official speech, had a more lyrical and allegorical character than the aggressive direct messages that Schlingensief used. Still there was potential for agitation in *Merci Liberté!* by using French language, re-directing the audience's attention from the content onto the language that I was using. From the perspective of dramaturgy, the clear break and shift in my work in this moment of 'costume change' as well as a barrier of encounter through language, made Schlingensief's action more direct and confrontational and he kept going over several days without a pause or retreat. Overall his level of exposure and vulnerability was higher than my own in *Merci Liberté!*, despite the gender differences as an agitating aspect.

Documentations: [Mercilibertemayday2016.tumblr.com](https://mercilibertemayday2016.tumblr.com) & Foreigners out!

Schlingensief's container (2002) by Paul Poet

Both of these works share that they are based on a live performance work but cannot be solely considered forms of documentation but rather forms of translation and revelation. They are produced for an audience, mostly likely art, to encounter this work asynchronously and already contextualised. Like The Yes Men's videos or Novak's interview (2018), Poet's film shows a great awareness of what Schlingensief was trying to do during the action. Here his previous ambiguity is resolved. *Mercilibertemayday2016.tumblr.com* shows the speeches translations

and fragmented video footage. But it does not have entirely the same function as Poet's documentary because it does not contextualise the live performance. However, I put the blog up as place of encounter for a different audience than the one at Speaker's Corner, a more art centred audience, potentially equally shocked by the direct citation of Maréchal's speech like the audience during Schlingensiefel's staging.

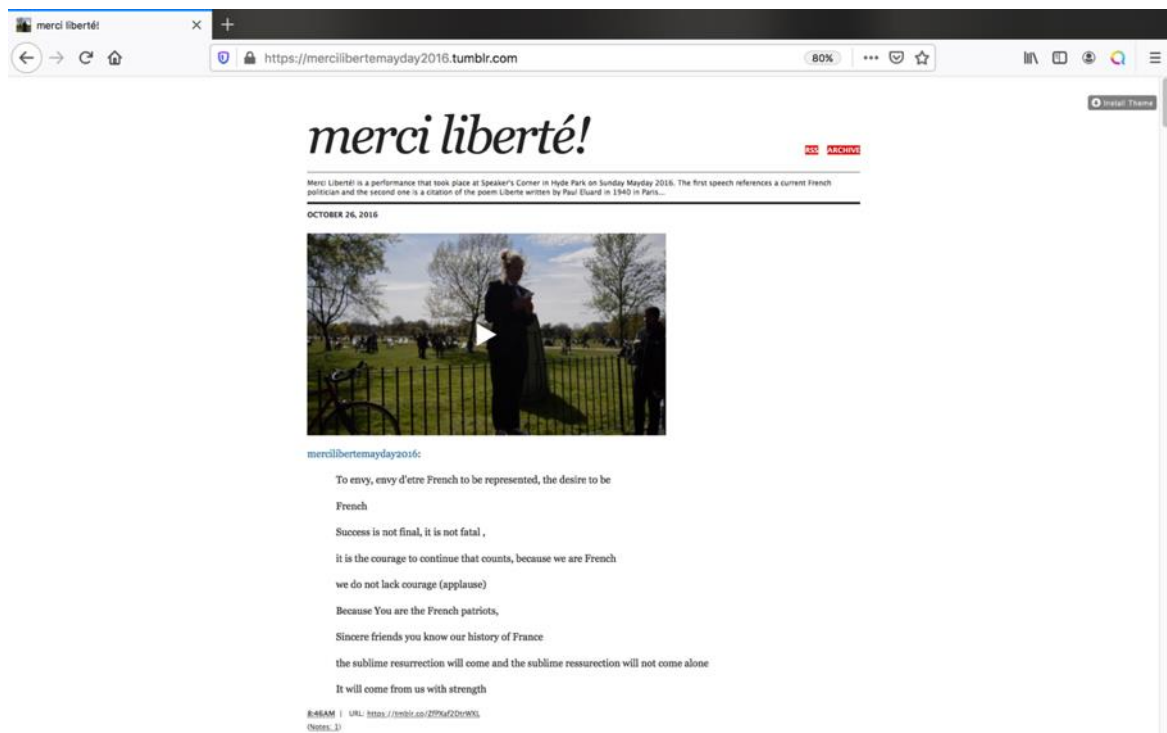


Figure 23. mercilibertemayday2016.tumblr.com [Screenshot 15/05/2021]

What about the audiences? Duality again?

In the juxtaposition of these four works, between live and documentation, the question of audiences becomes even more complex. Who encounters what, when and why? *Please Love Austria!* (2000) as a live action had both an art and a non-art audience during the staging while *Merci Liberte!* (2016) by not belonging to any cultural framing at the time, mainly was exposed to a live non-art audience. This does not mean that this audience was not receptive to a feminist gesture. Given the political framing of Speaker's Corner it might be that it is specifically an audience with a heightened political awareness. The audience for my blog though, a non-live audience, encountering the work asynchronously, mainly was an art-audience similar to Poet's film. The encounter with these works, Poet's film and my blog, are more likely to happen in an art focused environment rather than randomly as compared to strolling through the city, London or Vienna. Going further into the analysis trying to distinguish between different audiences and how they perceive a work becomes messy as a process. Also because I can

only make assumptions about these audiences on the basis of how and where they encounter a work. To better understand how different audience's react to each work in relation to affect theory I introduce Sara Ahmed's concept of the 'happy object'.

Killing joy!

Sara Ahmed in her essay 'Happy Objects' (in Gregg et al., 2010) wants to 'offer an approach to thinking through affect as "sticky". Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and object' (p.29). Ahmed puts the focus onto which affect sticks to which object and how this stickiness can be rendered. This is important for my investigation to better understand how my performances develop a potency for disruption by evoking affects that stick with the audience. In *VIVA 2023*, the creation of consensus did not cause a sticky affect because it lacked a moment of interrupting the harmony within the audience. Ahmed though, from the very beginning also emphasizes the contingent aspect of affective contagion. She writes:

To be affected by another does not mean that an affect simply passes or "leaps" from one body to another. The affect becomes an object only given the contingency of how we are affected, or only as an effect of how objects are given (2010, p.36).

Ahmed points out that the experience of an affect in a space is also highly dependent on our angle of arrival in that space as 'The pedagogic encounter is full of angles' (2010, p.37). Hence, it is actually impossible for me to judge how the different audiences of my work encountered it and which emotional state they were in in that moment. This does not mean that the points made by Jörn Schaffaff and Catherine Wood on behavioural codes in the context of performance become obsolete, but that they cannot be considered as a single parameter for the performance outcome. Ahmed stresses further that affect is not something that circulates autonomously but is dependent on our evaluation of the very thing that affects us (2010). She emphasizes that affect is often attached to an object but that does not mean that the affect that oneself attaches to that object, passes with the object. With reference to Pierre Bourdieu and his famous work titled *Distinctions* (1979) she also points out that a certain orientation towards those objects is shared and that despite the aspect of contingency 'the judgement about certain objects as being "happy" is already made' (2010, p.41). She points out how alienation and alignment work through these objects towards which we get affected in relation to a community. She writes:

When we feel pleasure from such objects, we are aligned; we are facing the right way. We become alienated – out of line with an affective community – when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are already attributed as being good (2010, p.37).

So while a space such as Tate Modern does potentially allow the making of an assumption what the audience of a performance there considers as good or happy, it still does not mean that the affect that circulates attached with an object, is the same for everyone in that space. The work needs to allow these different object attachments to occur.

That still doesn't prevent me from making any assumptions about the audiences and how they encounter my work as to some degree this needs to be part of my calculation. Being part of a certain community such as the academic one, feminist performers or academic feminists, I dare to make assumptions about what is considered a 'happy object' within it. Ahmed, with reference to Nietzsche, equally states that the 'very tendency to attribute an affect to an object depends upon "closeness of association", where such forms of closeness are already given' (2010, p.40). From the perspective for this research these objects may be my academic gown in *VIVA 2023* or the wedding dress in the performance. Similarly I suggest that Ulman shared this awareness when her work was primarily addressed towards a non-art audience, hence, the images of Zao Dha diet that she posted at the end, re-introduced a happy object after her selfie with a gun, which signifies an unhappy one.

Ahmed uses the term 'killjoy' to describe how a feminist position functions as an exposure of the bad feelings that are hidden, displaced, or negated under the public signs of joy. She writes:

The feminist is an affect alien: she might even kill joy because she refuses to share an orientation toward certain things as being good because she does not find these objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising (2010, p.39).

And while Ahmed previously pointed out that the judgement of certain objects as being happy is already made, she asks how those objects and the affects attached to them become converted as in "who" or "what" get seen as converting a bad feeling into a good feeling and good into bad' (2010, p.38). Ahmed looks for conversion points in her accompanying analysis of the film *Bend it like Beckham* (2002). In it she identifies the conversion point from unhappy to happy in the body of Joe, the white young male character in the story. She writes:

Joe becomes the agent that converts bad feeling (unhappy racism) into good feeling (multicultural happiness). It is the white man who enables the father to let go of his injury about racism and to play cricket again (2010, p.49).

For this research in which the self-objectification of the performer is the central focus of analysis, Ahmed's argument to me poses the question of if the performer can be an (happy or unhappy) object and an agent who converts other objects at the same time. The case of Ulman offered a view onto the performer and what renders the performer *evil* in the eyes of an audience; the inability to consider how one relates to others and being a banal narcissistic woman who then has to redeem *herself* by denouncing this narcissism.

Using Ahmed's terminology of killing 'joy' also creates a link back to Pfaller's notion of interpassivity and the delegation of enjoyment. While Ahmed identifies moments where the feminist position becomes an alienating one because it renders previous happy objects for a community into unhappy ones, this could be seen similar to moments when the delegation of enjoyment gets frustrated; for example, when a position is not clearly declared as an ironic one as in the case of Ulman's work. The audience, at least in the beginning, did not fully understand her intentions and her 'joyful' position, her alignment was not clear. In both discussions, Ahmed's and Pfaller's, it is the enjoyment in relation to an object that is in the focus as well as the question of how and when this enjoyment gets disrupted when the joy stemming from it is killed. In the course of my research this object is the performer, and in my case it is the blonde young feminine white performer, potentially considered 'happy' by those who are part or within a proximity of my community.

Reactions: No Conversions but Affective shifts:

Merci Liberte! & mercilibertemayday2016.tumblr.com

I consciously moved my work outside the academic space and outside the safety of the college walls, towards a setting in which the audience is conditioned to disagree and to actively 'heckle' the person speaking. Also through my previous observation of the lack of female voices, it proved ideal as a context for an affirmative feminist gesture; inserting a female voice into a male dominated space. At the same time I thought that the usage of the Maréchal's speech would confuse this affirmative gesture, by using a female voice that emphasizes patriotism. My hope partly was that through the 'tourist contingency', that not everyone in the audience but some would understand what and who I was citing. But rather than the speech

itself it was my usage of language that caused the most agitation in both parts of the performance, even when I changed into the wedding dress. Although my language was obscure to most, my body and my gender were not. My black suite at the beginning of the performance did allow a blending in with the other Speakers as a Speaker. My hair was up in a bun, and even though recognisable as blonde long (Ivanka) hair, it was not ultra-feminine.

But the change into the wedding dress and the letting down of my hair and allowing it blow in the wind, undid this blending eventually together with my note stating 'break for costume change'. It made my female body ultra-feminine, distinct from the other speakers and more visible to the audience. This meant that the content of what I was saying became entirely irrelevant. I was the 'married woman' citing a French poem on Freedom from a comedy club. Here the affective shift that I was causing in my audience was from confusion to enjoyment. Even though there was an affective shift here compared to *VIVA 2023*, it seemed to be heading into the wrong direction, it was not that the joy was killed through the feminist gesture but that it was brought into being.

The wedding dress as well as the poem caused a reconciling moment of the performance, on and offline. This made the initial identification with *evil* negligible for both a live and online audience. The asynchronous temporality of the encounter and removing the opacity of language through the online blog, eventually makes little difference for the different perceptions of the work because the aesthetic and readability of the affirmative feminist gesture outweighs the uncanniness evoked by the direct identification and citation of Maréchal. In *Merci Liberté!* the change of 'costume' in this case, hence the moment of shifting the dramaturgy, from right to left, from masculine to feminine, I consider a moment of clarification for the live and online audience.

Here the change into the wedding dress had a similar function as the Yes Men's golden phallus expansion; it turned the scene carnivalesque, where those performing could be identified via their 'funny' costumes. Like in *VIVA 2023* and my gown, I was ridiculing the scene, my own scene. Through the costume suddenly everyone could sympathise and potentially be relieved from previous irritation.

Ironic negation again

In this moment of transition from the first to the second speech, the work became an ironic negation (again). In the second part the audience was relieved from the preceding short moment of over-identification with Maréchal where I used her words as if they were my own. It shows that within a feminist framework, the exploration of over-identification is much more

complex due to the additional reading of the female body and the political potency developed from its presence. The affect that was overall generated through the performance in its entirety, did not create doubt about my position, it did not stick. There was a lack of readability for the different gestures in it. To be disruptive the affect that sticks needs to be one of doubt as a disruptive mechanism to form consensus and allow the audience to agree with me.

No conversion, no relief!

Schlingensiefel never offered a revealing moment in which he clarified his intentions during the staging. In fact Schlingensiefel never left his role which as the Poet film also shows was not really a role. He never wore anything that could be recognised as a costume such as the one of a circus master. In contrast to Laibach and The Yes Men, BAVO point out that Schlingensiefel in this work applies a slightly different tactic of over-identification. Unlike The Yes Men which is based on over affirmation of a position, Schlingensiefel is shifting 'between over-statement, on the one hand, and mockery or critique, on the other' (2007, p.34). Schlingensiefel's over-identification was not just a simple 'yes' to right-wing politics. His shifting, or constant contradiction as Claire Bishop describes it in her Creative Times Lecture (2011), she declares core to the efficacy of Schlingensiefel's work. This is important as she states that this drew attention

to the contradictions of political discourse in Austria at that moment. The shocking fact is that Schlingensiefel's container caused more public agitation and distress than the presence of a real deportation center a few miles outside Vienna (2011, p.9).

Bishop (2011) stresses that drawing attention to this contradiction is much more important to the efficacy of the work than the attempt to change anyone's opinion. This was central to the critique of Schlingensiefel's work by others at the time, as it didn't change anyone's opinion but instead caused a lot of agitation. This emphasis is also in line with Bishop's key argument from her Creative Times lecture (2011) as the continuation of her previous discussion (2004) that:

For one sector of artists, curators, and critics, a good project appeases a superegoic injunction to ameliorate society; if social agencies have failed, then art is obliged to step in. In this schema, judgments are based on a humanist ethics, often inspired by Christianity. What counts is to offer ameliorative solutions, however short-term, rather than to expose contradictory social truths (2011, p.4).

Schlingensiefel's work mainly generated a form of exposure and agitation rather than a form of conversion of the public which could have been them condemning the actual asylum homes outside the city of Vienna. This is what I think Bishop means by the 'failure of social agency'. *Please Love Austria!* (2000) did not have the transformational power that is desired from those protagonists that she mentions when talking about activist art practices. This is also crucial to my previous discussion of chosen responsibility of a work by the artist. She points out that the expectation of artists stepping in is also in part coming from curators, critics and art audience, and not from artists themselves.

Surplus & Excess: Irony and Positions

Excess femininity

My initial intention when drawing up the *Merci Liberte!* performance was to cause an affective shift in my audience through the change of costume, from suit to wedding dress and agency, from Marion to the married woman. Like in Ulman's work, initial doubt and blending should be followed by a feminist statement that could not be ignored. But it was the sequence of this shift, from doubt to potential enjoyment that I felt was counter-intuitive to my intentions. Overall I felt that the choice of wedding dress and its overt dramaturgy overshadowed the entire performance, the actual act of over-identification, rendering it from a staging to a parody of femininity in the live audience's perception caused by a surplus of signifiers of femininity. This seemed to have resolved all the potential questions or doubts of the audience, live or online, could have had towards my intentions. The wedding dress turned me into an ironic object of femininity. After that, any potential conflict left, was reconciled in the surplus of irony.

Reversed opacity

Also here the element of opacity in the language I feel had the opposite effect of what I intended. First I wanted to transgress a Speaker's Corner rule, second adding a layer of opacity to my work and thirdly I wanted to eliminate the potential for irony in my voice by using another language, even more foreign to me than English. And while the tone of my voice was mostly unironic, also because I was nervous, here using French in itself became an ironic gesture independent of its tonality. This ironic feature was only eventually over-toned by my theatrical gesture of throwing my paper flowers into the crowd at the end of the second part. Even though it resulted in becoming a parody of femininity, it was readable as an affirmative feminist gesture after all. Here the over presence and accentuation of my body including the

open long blonde hair, made this aesthetic and not my voice, the main focus of the audience's attention. The work lacked sustainable ambiguity, and even though it was excessive, it was not disruptive in its excess. Like in the work of Janez Janša, the audience could settle and neglect the excess. The audience was able to delegate their enjoyment onto a naïve observer.

'Unhappy' banner

During the staging of *Please Love Austria!*, Schlingensiefel repeats the disclaimer: 'This is a performance. Everything is real.' This re-enforces the effect of blurring the line between art project and real life. Schlingensiefel kept constantly oscillating between contradictions all the way through to the end of his performance, there was no clear shift. Timon Beyes observed how the project over the course of several days developed. He describes it as follows:

The ambiguity machine that the container project has become denounces any claim to authority of the artistic message over its target audience. Seen this way, the artist's aesthetics of excess surpasses a strategy of over-identification by constantly sending out contradictory signals, obviously in an attempt to prevent the project settling into a stable vantage point (2010, p.241).

So similar to my discussion of the work of Janez Janša, Beyes points to Schlingensiefel's excessive use of over-identification. BAVO stress similarly that the virtuosity in Schlingensiefel's work was to deprive 'the audience of any stable vantage point from which to cognitively map the event'(2007, p.34). Schlingensiefel kept sustaining the conflict, the disagreement between him and the audience and within the audience as well. Even though the majority of the audience did not have any personal relationship to Schlingensiefel, as Bishop writes, he operated as a circus master (2011), where the work itself addressed them on a very personal level. So it is less the question of *What if* Schlingensiefel really meant it when he shouted 'Auslander raus' (Foreigners out) through his microphone that is important. He stated himself, in Poet's film, that there is just someone who shouts *Auslander raus!* and passers-by can go on with their daily business. It is the confrontational presence of the banner 'Foreigners out!' on top of the container in the heart of the city that irritated many, it was an unhappy object. It confronts the Viennese public with the question of their own position in its presence as it disrupts their clean image as urban non-xenophobes. While it is framed as art, its direct citational character from the right wing rhetoric over-powers that framing and makes its ironic reading difficult, if not impossible. This is the reverse to what happened in *Merci Liberte!* where I enabled this reading and distancing. And the persona of Schlingensiefel was the instigator and hence receiver of their frustration as he refused to convert the banner into a happy object for

them. This becomes particularly evident in a scene in Poet's film after a group of left demonstrators stormed on top of the container and removed the banner. When meeting with Schlingensiefel after their de-montage, they realise that their action had the effect of removing a critique of xenophobia.

German swine! – interpassivity in *Foreigners Out! Schlingensiefel's container* (2002)

At some point in Paul Poet's documentary (2002), Schlingensiefel ends up in a public dispute where an enraged Austrian woman says to him: 'At least we, in Austria, haven't lit up asylum seekers homes. The situation at yours (*referring to Germany*) is much worse.' Another enraged woman calls Schlingensiefel a 'German swine' and shouts: 'Kick out the Piefkes! Foreigners in!' ("Piefke" is a derogatory word for Germans in Austrian). Schlingensiefel represented an artist pointing at Austria's fascist history in the present, funded by public money under a right-wing government in 2000. When referring to interpassivity, Dean (2006) uses the example of Christmas to explain how dignity is preserved through delegation. She writes that, while it would be considered ridiculous for an adult to enjoy the illusion of Santa Claus bringing Christmas presents, the parents delegate their enjoyment onto their children, who enjoy on their behalf, so the parents keep their dignity (2006, p.24–25). In the film, it is here where Schlingensiefel's protagonists, the Viennese public, intended to re-instate their own dignity by delegating the 'shame' of xenophobia onto Schlingensiefel, the German Swine, by accusing him of xenophobia, rooted in his German identity. Here the active delegation caused moments of absolute revelation and contradiction which remained unresolved, the conflict lasted but unlike Mouffe's notion of art taming and sustaining conflict, in *Please Love Austria!* (2000) it was very close to escalation.

Big Yes to Immorality?

Even though at the very early stages of the internet, *Please Love Austria!* (2000) offers another interesting example of using an online platform as part of the work, that adds to the audiences conflictual agency that he created. Through using online voting, Schlingensiefel mimicked the Big Brother format for his project; here, the audience could participate in another paradox entangled with reality, become co-authors and take co-responsibility. Through the act of online voting, they made themselves complicit in deciding the fates of 'asylum seekers' in a questionable entertainment format. Although, compared to Ulman, Schlingensiefel's audience's online participation was in its early stages, it similarly offered another layer for a spectacle

between performance and real life. But unlike in Ulman's *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) those voting were in full awareness of what kind of spectacle they were participating in. Here the 'unknowing' audience as contributors to the very thing that Ulman was criticizing juxtaposed with Schlingensiefel's fully-aware audience, demonstrates an audience's willingness to participate in the production of immorality, independent of being conscious of it or not.

At one point in Poet's film (2000), Schlingensiefel states that 'Provocation is a means for the dumb', creating another paradox where those provoked by this statement immediately position themselves as 'dumb' and subordinating themselves to Schlingensiefel's staged play. Statements like this put into question how *Please Love Austria!* denounces the claim of the authority of the artistic message over its target audience as according to Beyes (2010). But Hughes points out that Schlingensiefel's work was opposed to being moralizing, and intentionally lacked a political agenda. He writes that

The general antipathy toward Schlingensiefel, as well as the confusion typically generated by his productions, indicate an issue at the heart of Schlingensiefel's work, which seeks to advance a left-wing aesthetic in a post socialist-era (2006, p.318).

Similarly, Ulman's work adapted the tactics and aesthetics of 1990s feminist micro-online practices in a post-internet era. Neither Schlingensiefel nor Ulman intended to create a desire to change; rather, they intended to reveal through causing doubt what is to be perceived as authentic through strategic juxtaposition. Claire Bishop in relation to *Please Love Austria!* concludes that 'In fact, Schlingensiefel's model of "undemocratic" behavior corresponds precisely to "democracy" as practiced in reality.' (2011, p.9) and that '*Please Love Austria!* is not (and should never be seen as) morally exemplary.'

This conclusion, also in line with Hughes statement, I consider extremely important for my intentions, particularly with regards to the deployment of over-identification;

- How to use it as a device which does not clearly position an artist in a morally exemplary role, where good and evil are clearly distinguishable, but where dissonance is sustained in the impossibility of making this distinction?

Hence, in the case of Ulman, despite the morally questionable nature of her set-up to some, this immorality needed to part of it, part of *her*. It might be that actually this perceived immorality, adds to the more complex forms of over-identification that I consider effective for my ends; a form in which the artists' position cannot be easily resolved and through that

becomes disruptive and eventually makes a doubt sticky. In fact it might be key as well to resolve a hierarchy of moral superiority and the previously discussed separation between art and non-art audiences by further embracing an immoral position without resolving it. This immoral position though in the case of over-identification as I explore it, is two-fold. On the one hand it may be considered immoral because of the opaque character of the intentions and the framing of the work. When it is not directly framed as a performance, it deprives the audience of the possibility to adapt their behaviour and perception accordingly. On the other, it might be considered immoral because of the use of devices such as language, behaviour, images etc. which are considered *evil/unhappy* objects among the audience and the immorality emerges out of the repetition of these. But still there are enough reasons to keep deploying this 'immoral strategy' and keep creating and sustaining unhappy objects and conflicts in the name of 'feminist resistance'.

Unhappiness is not the end

American political philosopher Bonnie Honig in her interview with Janell Watson (2013), describes her understanding of the politics of feminism by being concerned with 'holding people accountable for inequality and seeking to rectify that wherever possible' (p.112). Honig advocates what she describes as a 'politics of double gesture'. She states:

If we are tuned in to the difficulties that result when you translate every political project into a rights project, we may want also to insist on the equal validity of political projects that are not rights projects and that we refuse to translate into rights projects, because we want to have projects that are about public, political goods (this is my own new project, called "Public Things") — like public parks, libraries, education, national land trusts — and the good of these goods is not always the same thing as political rights. So we require some nuance here (in Watson, 2013, p.113).

I consider Honig's point on the defense and fight for *Public Things* as extremely important. It is exactly these 'public things' that are eroded in a post-Fordist narrative as they are not designed to make profits, or surplus when serving a public interest such as health or child care. But the more feminine a woman's representative voice appears, the blonder *she* gets, the harder it is to interpret it against the project of equality, as Eisenstein (2007) argued. Schlingensiefel in his work did to not allow for clear antagonism between right and left, in which the left becomes the correcting force. He wanted to produce a 'machinery that interrupts images', and makes harmonisation as well as a clear opposition impossible. From this perspective I consider an affirmative feminist gesture, in this case the insertion of missing

women's voices, as an corrective function, potentially enabling harmonisation as opposed to disagreement and conflict. This insertion of a woman's voice without the necessary accompanying structural change I refer to as an *equality-image-production-machine*; similar to Eisenstein's concept of sexual decoy where an image of equality is produced but the result is not actual equality as old discriminatory systems remain in place. Therefore, it is my intention to interrupt a machine of equality-image-production as a means to make harmony impossible within a feminist context. The impossibility of harmonisation I consider key in the practice of resistance within 'Post-Fordism as Politics' as conceptualised by Gibson-Graham (2006). But this does not mean that a feminist notion of over-identification is merely focused on causing negativity.

Honig points out that she is not advocating an either/or situation of defending rights as opposed to public goods (in Watson, 2013). But that the problem is that if those rights are 'unconnected to goods, then you get merely juridical rights, and you — to some extent — are involved in betraying some of the goods that those rights were supposed to be distillations of.' (2013, p.113). Her point is to understand 'the pursuit of rights as part of a broader political program.' Hence my work intends, by 'making it worse', by rendering myself into an unhappy object in front of those who celebrate the affirmative feminist gesture, is to show that it can equally have damaging effects. Therefore 'killing the joy' for those who are potentially already on your side, is a way to point to a necessity to not be misled by sexual decoys and keep the contestation. Ahmed in response to Rosi Braidotti's call for more affirmative gestures as opposed to negativity writes:

What concerns me is how much this affirmative turn actually depends on the very distinction between good and bad feelings that presumes that bad feelings are backward and conservative and good feelings are forward and progressive (2010, p.50).

And further that:

I would argue that it is the very assumption that good feelings are open and bad feelings are closed that allows historical forms of injustice to disappear. The demand that we be affirmative makes histories disappear by reading them as a form of melancholia (as if you hold onto something already gone) (2010, p.50).

And she concludes 'Unhappiness is not our endpoint. If anything, the experience of being alienated from the affective promise of happy objects gets us somewhere.' Ahmed's defence

of negativity as necessity to keep injustice from disappearing as well as Honig's claim for the necessity of a double gesture, to me highlights the importance of a double gesture in a feminist exploration of over-identification. It needs a combined act. This double gesture sits between an affirmative, happy, equal rights demanding gesture and one that negates this solidarity based on gender identity; all in one embodiment, where the performer becomes a double agent. The double agent who brings joy and simultaneously kills it, in which both gestures need to be readable. It is a way to point to a downside of representation, making the female representative an unhappy object. By not sharing this orientation towards affirmation as opposed to negation, like Schlingensief, this deployment does not allow the formation of solidarity on assumed grounds of being on the same right side, at least not right at the beginning.

Conclusion and how to proceed

In the 'abyss of meaning' (Hughes, 2006) that Schlingensief's work produced, an excess of affect emerged that could not be tamed anymore. This brings me back to a question that I posed in Chapter 1 in relation to Mouffe and Laclau's model of antagonism; Are escalation and sustaining dissensus exclusive or accommodative within a performance practice? Schlingensief's work with his remaining unsettling effects (encountered via Poet's documentary) and despite its canonisation, to me suggests that escalation is necessary if the affect of unease is supposed to stick. But it might be that this escalation does not always need to take the shape of demonstrators jumping on top of a container. It can be more contained.

Merci Liberte! and *merciliberte!mayday2016.tumblr.com* in their entirety did not produce the disagreement and antagonism that I was seeking. Even if there would have been disagreement or disruption through my presence and speech, it was diminished as soon as it was acknowledged as an affirmative feminist gesture, one that appeals rather than appalls. The performance that could have been at least resisting coercive online presence in its ephemeral nature, got translated by myself to circulate as a political gesture afterwards. On the blog the potential 'shock' of the direct citation and translation of *evil*, was lessened by the translation of the 'good' in the presence of the poem on the same page.

Given Ahmed's discussion of 'Happy Objects' (2010) for the purpose of this research, instead of focusing on different audience encounters, online or live, I want to focus on the question of efficacy for the deployment of over-identification towards a community that I am part of, similar to *VIVA 2023*. For my research concerns it is important that the work causes disruption within this community who are part of a post-Fordist framework of performance production. This is

not necessarily counter-intuitive to Bishop's critique in which the creation of microtopia is the opposite of establishing a democratic space and antagonistic relationships. But it puts more into focus how this microtopia can be disrupted without falling into a form of dystopia which risks putting everyone witnessing into a position of agreeing like in *VIVA 2023*.

With regards to Schlingensiefel's work and its successful causing of friction and disagreement, more contradiction is needed in my work, without it necessarily leading to escalation. Given the invisible masculinity in his work, I want to decrease the overt femininity in mine while still making sure that there is a recognisable political gesture in the work that can be read as affirmative feminism. The conversation during the first and second part of *Merci Liberte!* between two audience members reveals to me that my feminine body was already enough to recognise it as a feminist gesture in a masculine environment.

Also opacity needs to be applied in a more layered and nuanced way in the work's language and framing. Given the overt aesthetic pleasure which resulted from the work which eventually over-powered the inherent conflicts in it, the upcoming work needs to blend more into a framework which does not foreground the aesthetic pleasure. Based on the possibility of distinction of positions through the two parts of my work, the irreconcilable elements, happy and unhappy, good and evil, need to be closer together and presented as one, to stop the viewer from digesting them separately. Based on my analysis of affective shifts in *Merci Liberte!*, the sequence of gestures needs to be re-organized.

The fact that my overt feminized body over-powered any content within the work, as opposed to Schlingensiefel's invisible masculinity, makes me question if the interpretative lens of political antagonism that Bishop uses for her analysis (2004) is adequate for mine. This is also important considering the reading of the different political gestures in my work, which are always read through a power construct of gender. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, Laclau's and Mouffe's model is based on the notion that identity is constructed through discursivity which also means that the body which enters this discursive space is considered to be free of inscriptions. My work shows that this is not the case as the female body enters the space with several visible inscriptions, it is not 'unmarked'. In order to address this I introduce Bonnie Honig's concept of agonistic feminism as an interpretive lens before the discussion of my next piece of work. By introducing this theoretical lens, my intention is to read and understand my feminist entry point in the formation of a political space better and therefore also the potential conflicts which emerge in it. Together with this discussion I introduce the technique of montage as a tool which allows putting different positions together but in a more nuanced way than in previous work.

Chapter 5:
Agonistic Feminism & The Power of Montage

Agonistic Feminism

Antagonism/agonism without body:

In my work I actively objectify my own body like other practitioners of over-identification, therefore it needs to be at the centre of analysis, rather than side-lined or denied. For my research I do not discuss the specificity of having a woman's body, but instead discuss how this influences the interpretive lens of my work. So while there is immense potency emerging from performative gestures, they cannot be separated from the body from which they emerge, at least in performance. The gestures emerge in combination with the body and this is where the resistance occurs. This means that for my research, I need an interpretive lens through which the prior politics which are inscribed onto the performers body can be accommodated to investigate how conflict and disagreement, antagonism, emerge in my work. Hence I introduce a theory of political philosophy that gives the interpretive lens onto my body a presence and relevance, namely, Honig's theory of agonistic feminism.

Agonistic pluralism with a body:

Honig's (in Watson, 2013) understanding of feminism is based on the intention of holding people accountable for inequality, independent of ones gender or identity. She, like Judith Butler and Mouffe, is also a close reader of Hannah Arendt's works who puts an emphasis of identity being the product of and not the condition for, political action. This forms the basis for Honig's idea of *agonistic feminism*. Honig developed agonistic feminism in an earlier essay titled 'Toward an agonistic feminism: Hannah Arendt and the politics of identity' (in Honig, 1995). She writes that Arendt strongly refused any identity politics, which led to her non-identification with feminist struggles based on the notion of a woman's identity (1995).⁶ It is important here to understand that Arendt's intention was to unpick the development of authoritarianism and how to resist it after the Second World War in which the refusal of identity

⁶ Honig writes: The centrality of performativity to Arendt's theory of action stems from Arendt's opposition to attempts to conceive of politics as expressive of shared (community) identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, or nationality. Performativity and agonism are not coincidentally connected in Arendt's account. Arendt's politics is always agonistic because it resists the attractions of expressivism for the sake of her view of the self as a complex site of multiplicity whose identities are always performatively produced (1995, p.149).

as fixed, was key. Honig also stresses that in the active years of Arendt, feminism was very different to Honig's time of writing in 1995 for her edition. Honig writes:

Shaped by new multicultural and postcolonial contexts, recent work in feminist theory tends to focus on plural asymmetries of power, on how sex-gender identities are riven by race, class and other differences, and on how differences of race, class, nationality, ethnicity and sexuality are often feminized or sexualized (1995, p.2).

She emphasizes, similarly to the concept of identity contingency in Mouffe and Laclau, that agonistic feminism 'is more centrally committed to coalition, contest, and solidarity than to identity.' (in Watson, 2013, p.114). But unlike Laclau and Mouffe, and also Arendt, Honig chose an entry point to identity construction through positioning it within a feminist framework. One of the main critiques Laclau and Mouffe face, apart from failing to question capitalism itself as a constructed model (Gibson-Graham, 2006), is that their notion of identity constructed through discourse eventually also has disempowering effects. Benjamin Bertram (1995) writes that without the possibility for positive identities to emerge 'The dislocated subject is left in a perspectival position, one "nodal point" that does not allow for a larger view of the whole.' (p.84). Their model though has the advantage of highlighting struggles separate from class struggle within the Marxist focus, which they decentre, and which lifts a public/private dichotomy (Bertram, 1995) which Arendt was accused of failing to do.

Agon

While the term feminism(s) may be considered as sufficient to ascribe the ability to engage in several struggles in different contexts where different identities meet, the emphasis on the *agon*, the space for conflict, marks the presence of the conflictual position. It does not only indicate a multiplicity, but through the emphasis on conflict allows space for colliding interests within this notion of feminism. Mouffe (2014) points out that Arendt's account of the *agon* did not consider the possibility of antagonism in which positions cannot be agreed on. Mouffe states (2014) that Arendt's account is 'Agonism without Antagonism'. She writes that Arendt:

insists greatly on human plurality and conceives politics as dealing with the community and with reciprocity between different beings, she never recognises that this plurality is at the origin of antagonistic conflicts (2014, p.152).

For Arendt in the practice of *streiten* agreement 'is produced through persuasion' (Mouffe, 2007, p.4) in the *agon*, which Mouffe's model of agonistic pluralism excludes. As I understand

it, antagonism signifies here the constellation of positions as irreconcilable, while agonism concerns the practice of democracy and the space where these positions meet but are not agreed on. Honig emphasizes that agonistic feminism allows to be for and against something at the same time (1995). It gives space to contradiction, exclusion and solidarity. Arendt also faced critique from many feminist writers as she was understood to assign the sphere of politics, the *agon*, to men (Honig, 1995). This notion is reclaimed by Honig for feminism and her model of feminist agonistics. She writes:

What if we treat Arendt's notion of the public realm not as a specific topos, like the ancient Greek *agon*, but as a metaphor for a variety of (agonistic) spaces, both topographical and conceptual, that might occasion action? We might be left with a notion of action as an event, an agonistic disruption to an ordinary sequence of things that makes way for novelty and distinction, a site of resistance of the irresistible, a challenge to the normalising rules that seek to constitute, govern and control various behaviors (1995, p.146).

From the perspective of my research, this is a crucial notion. Honig's understanding of *agon* resonates with the intentions of my performance practice, to cause a disruption in the moment of its occurrence and event, in which assumptions, the ordinary sequence of things are interrupted, which then becomes an act of resistance. One of the advantages of Mouffe and Laclau's notion for identity as being contingent is the stepping away from the public/private dichotomy. This in particular benefits the feminist and queer movement as it lifts these struggles onto a wider political platform, out of the private as Bertram points out (1995). Also Bishop stresses that their emphasis on antagonism allows space for exclusion as opposed to the demand of including everyone via reaching consensus. The disadvantage of Mouffe and Laclau's model is that it also destabilizes bonds of solidarity when solely referring to contingency and discourse as identity constructing determinants. Honig's agonistic feminism allows an entry point for mobilisation as well as the formation of a positive identity which then enables a departure point for solidarity as well as exclusion.

Entry point and performativity

This is important for my research as my sex and gender are my primary entry point for my performances. The feminist angle that I choose emerges from my body and becomes a conscious framing of my work. I actively use my body and the audience's interpretive lens of it as the basis for my exploration of resistance. However sex and gender are not my only angle, but one that connects with a wider framework; the politics of post-Fordism and anyone effected by it. Honig points out why performativity is important in agonistic feminism:

The strategy, then, is to unmask identities but aspire to successful constation, to deauthorise and redescribe them as performative productions by identifying spaces that escape or resist identitarian administration, regulation, and expression. In Arendtian terms, this strategy depends upon the belief that the sex/gender identities that "we hold" can be amended and augmented in various ways through action (Honig, 1995, p.148).

Here the action of 'holding' indicates a performative and active gesture which can be rendered. This is similar to Butler's notion of gender performativity, which also influenced Honig (in Watson, 2013). One of the examples that Honig uses to clarify Arendt's emphasis on how action and performativity bring identity into being, is the American Constitution. For Arendt, Honig writes, 'the very authority of the American constitution resides in its inherent capacity to be amended and augmented' (in Honig, 1996, p.138). Honig stresses, again in relation to Arendt, that the authority of politics lies in its performative rather than constative moment.

The adaptation of speeches and acts of insertion as central strategies in my work could be seen as a playful deployment of Honig/Arendt's notion, where the political potency is developed out of the fact that they can be changed and are not fixed, they were adapted and can be amended. I introduce the technique of montage later in this chapter as a tool for amending and adaptation and through that develop a political potency in the work. Agonistic feminism by Honig could be a theoretical groundwork to the notion of over-identification that I am developing. This on the one hand is owed to the potency she assigns to performative acts which are central to escape fixity and categorization; an impossibility of clearly demarcating an "us" and "them" at the centre of the agonistic space (Honig, 1995). To me, the performance becomes the result of the entirety of performative acts. And on the other hand because

Agonistic feminists support the struggles of their peers to individuate and position themselves with and against various feminisms, dominant practices and identities of sex–gender, and those others who practice and enforce them (1995, p.159).

This is crucial as my intention is to articulate a critique of feminized work conditions which do not only concern those who identify as women. At the same time, I try to break binary conceptions and critique an economic production system that forces women because of their bodies' reproductive function into a state of instability, anxiety, and precarity under the pressure of constant surplus production.

Importance of contestation

Mouffe's agonistic space is where politics are practiced and adversaries instead of enemies meet, but she dismisses Honig's notion of agonistics. She writes in 'Agonistic Democracy and Radical Politics' (not dated) that the focus onto the permanent questioning of dominant identities and ideas in the agonistic struggle is limited to the dimension of contestation, which eventually lacks the element of democracy. Thinking back to Comay (2015), she argued with reference to Hegel, that being captivated by struggle can result in a reactionary position. But Bonnie Honig stresses that this contestation is so central to democratic life. She states:

it certainly understands itself as part of an effort to make progress on behalf of equality in various domains, but it never treats any stopping point as an achieved accomplishment from which we can then move on (in Watson, 2013, p.114).

Similar to Ahmed's point on the necessity to *not* neglect the unhappy melancholic object as it risks erasing injustices, Honig stresses the permanence and necessity of conflict as a driver of democratic life instead of an allegiance to a status quo. Honig's notion of agonistic feminism (which later becomes agonistic sorority) makes conflict and solidarity not binary opposites but part of the same relationship. This notion may capture an oscillation between alienation and alignment, generated through performative acts, which is becoming central to my understanding of a feminist over-identification. In Honig's view, this type of agonistic feminist politics is 'resistant but at the same time responsive to the expressive aspirations of any identity' (1995, p.156). Honig's model of agonistic feminism (sorority) allows both multiple agencies without falling into parody and avoiding over-determinacy that erodes all agency. In agonistic feminism the single agent, the performer, can be read as bound up in a wider context while at the same time having an entry point to this context which is not necessarily a nodal point in a wider network but an entry point emerging from the performer's body. Honig herself

seems to generate a lot of her ideas and abstract concepts from the reading of classical texts such as *Antigone* and as Watson says to Honig 'You read for politics' (2013, p.118), so it might be that 'I perform for politics' in a similar way and add a performance art perspective to Honig's concept. To do this I explore the technique of montage, used in *VIVA 2023*, in more detail. Montage has the advantage of upholding conflicting positions in one act and one piece of work via different aesthetic elements.

The Power of Montage

Affective Networks:

In *Affective Networks* (2010), Dean discusses how the process of depoliticisation is linked to techniques of montage. Building on her discussion of communicative capitalism (2005), she argues that the depoliticisation happens in the actual removal of content through the combination of different elements of content which are aimed at driving circulation. She writes that the politics of montage

is a politics released from burdens of coherence and consistency. It needs neither theme nor message but can rely on questions and repetitions. It is not a politics that relies on "the intensity of the image and the afterlife that such intensities carry," but one that has already challenged and undercut, remastered, recontextualized, and mashed up innumerable, uploaded and recirculated images (2010, pp.20-21).

Dean stresses how the interests from a right spectrum of politics benefit from exactly such workings of affective networks and the technique of montage compared to the left. According to her, montage intensifies circulation and the production of affect as it generates uncertainty and insecurity which are important categories for right-wing empowerment (2010). Given Dean's claim on the benefits and usage of such technique for right-wing politics, my intention is to re-appropriate it from their to my purpose and use it as a tool for repoliticization in my practice. This repoliticization I hope to generate through causing doubt and tension via montaging incompatible elements. But this is not to be confused with reclaiming it as a means to leftist-politics as my intention is to use it as a form of dislocating my position in order to forge disagreement.

This then can be considered within an artistic tradition of detournement which Douglas B. Holt and Douglas Cameron (2012) define as the technique of ‘turning expressions of the capitalist system and its media culture against itself’ (p.252). Also known as “rerouting” or “hijacking” the media, the concept was first developed by the Lettrist International in the 1950s, and later adapted by the Situationist International in 1958. McKenzie Wark in her ‘Detournement: an abuser’s guide’ (2009) writes that today: ‘The key to Detournement is not to appropriate the image but appropriate the power of appropriation itself’ (p.146) which to me refers back to BAVO’s understanding that the use of over-identification in the contemporary is to reverse the capitalist master narrative and appropriating his/her/their appropriation of the critical position. While detournement is part of the historic roots of over-identification (Arns and Sasse, 2006) as a strategy, I want to focus my discussion on Dadaist practices, already started in Chapter 1. I see my work strongly connected with the practices from this time period, and particularly my next work, a series called TAP talks, has a strong link with women’s Dadaist practices. In the following chapter I unpick a specific form of feminism represented by Sheryl Sandberg, the COO of Facebook and advocated in her TED talks from 2010 and 2013 as well as her 2013 published book *Lean in: Women, Work and the Will to lead*. As I will show Sandberg’s feminism is closely linked with the image of the ‘New Woman’ which artists like Hannah Höch were criticising through her work.

Everything DADA:

The Weimar era in which Berlin Dada is embedded, is often seen as an emancipated time for women. Coming back to Bittner (2016) and his article ‘Is this the West’s Weimar Moment?’, he states that in the Weimar era women ‘suddenly went to work, to vote, to party and to sleep with whomever they wanted’, a form of emancipation which was summed up under the notion of ‘The New Woman’ marking this era. Bittner stresses that this cultural gap in which cosmopolitan and traditional lifestyles clashed, embodied by these *new* women, was part of the cause of the disaster that followed (Bittner, 2016).

German artist Hannah Höch critically reflected on gender roles during the Weimar Republic, she was a crucial but often overlooked contributor to (Berlin) Dada. Her work exposed the order of ‘New Woman’ as a failure. Dawn Ades and Daniel F. Herrmann (2014) in the exhibition catalogue for Höch’s 2014 Whitechapel show titled *Hannah Höch*, stress that “The New Woman” in the Weimar era was specially depicted as a female figure, in the aftermath of the First World War, who moved away from her traditional role as mother becoming a self-defined person who followed her own desires. But women in the Weimar Republic were

simultaneously facing double burdens with work and children, and the struggle for the right to abortion was a key issue (Ades and Herrmann, 2014). This new double burden of working in men's jobs and having children resulted in many women voting, which they were legally allowed to do since 1919, for right-wing or conservative parties and asking for previous conditions to be re-installed. These old conditions, at least for the 'bourgeois' class, included the return to the roles of wife and mother as women's main societal obligations. Bittner (2016) in his brief analysis of the time, misses this underlying tension that accompanied women's new lifestyles that also contributed to the right turn, but it seems crucial, next to the cultural gap that he stresses.

In her works, Höch criticised the hypocrisy that was especially transported in glittery fashion magazines and contrasted strongly with the reality of working women who earned much less than most men and could hardly survive on their salaries (Jacques, 2014). Höch articulated her critique through paper collages.

Hannah Höch

Höch's early work is characterised by her focus on mainstream media and its location for the promotion of hypocrisy. Her art, because it relied so heavily on mainstream media was also considered a form of anti-art at the time because it was unprecedented (Ostende et al., 2019). Höch, during the Weimar Republic and afterwards, was part of Berlin Dada and considered to be the only woman in the group. But even with this group, of assumingly progressive artists, Höch was confronted with a conservative idea of gender roles. Meghan Maloney in 'Hannah Hoch and the Dada Montage' (2013) writes that:

Hans Richter patronizingly dismissed her contribution to the movement by calling it merely "the sandwiches, beer and coffee she managed somehow to conjure up despite the shortage of money," failing to note that Hoch was among the few members of her immediate artistic circle with a reliable income.

Maloney cites Höch directly depicting her frustration:

None of these men were satisfied with just an ordinary woman. But neither were they included to abandon the (conventional) male/masculine morality toward the woman. Enlightened by Freud, in protest against the older generation... they all desired this "New Woman" and her ground breaking will to freedom. But—they more or less brutally rejected the notion that they, too, had to adopt new attitudes (2013).

Höch points out that it was a 'fake' emancipation that was appreciated by her peers, rooted in their own reactionary (mis)understanding of masculinity. Violence against women was

ongoing during the Weimar Republic, and Höch used images from fashion magazines she also sometimes worked for, to address this issue. In her collages, produced during the 1920s and early 1930s, she montaged female heads onto male bodies or vice versa as Juliet Jacques writes (2014). Jacques describes one of Höch's most famous works called *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Culture Epoch* (1919) in the following way:

One of Höch's largest collages, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* showcased both the satirical possibilities and political ambiguities of the form, which she pioneered. Using the titular 'kitchen knife' to symbolise her cutting through male-dominated society, Höch incorporated newspaper headlines, animals, industrial landscapes, and political or cultural figures, loosely divided into 'anti-Dada' and 'Dada' sections, leaving open the question of which represented the most positive force in the new Weimar Republic (Jacques, 2014).

This work, as Jacques stresses, puts assumed progressive forces into question by 'loosely' dividing it into an 'anti-Dada' and 'Dada' and not allowing the viewer to fall into a dichotomy of good and bad. The inherent conflict that Höch transported in her work, a simultaneous for and against, where Dada was progressive but also reactionary in its own way, allows us to read Höch's work through the notion of agonistic feminism; where conflicts are present and fixed notions are contested from the angle of feminism. Like I intend in my work, it is the questioning of the notion of progressive thought that Höch addresses. Höch's works aesthetically carry conflict in their rough edges and visible montage, 'brutally' being imposed onto each other. In my own video montages that I put together in the following body of work, I tried to smooth out some of its edges while keeping a DIY aesthetic, to evoke the notion that 'something isn't quite right'. The image is recognisable as well as the voice but not 100% identifiable, for example in my merging of Brad Pitt and George Clooney. Still compared with post-war feminist art, Höch's critique of traditional gender roles and how they upheld a conservative society was a lot subtler as Jacques writes (2014). And similar to what I consider the potency of my Beyoncé-montage (see *TAP talk #2*) and the reaction it evoked in my closer circle, Jacques locates the power in Höch's entire oeuvre in her ability to *defamiliarize*.

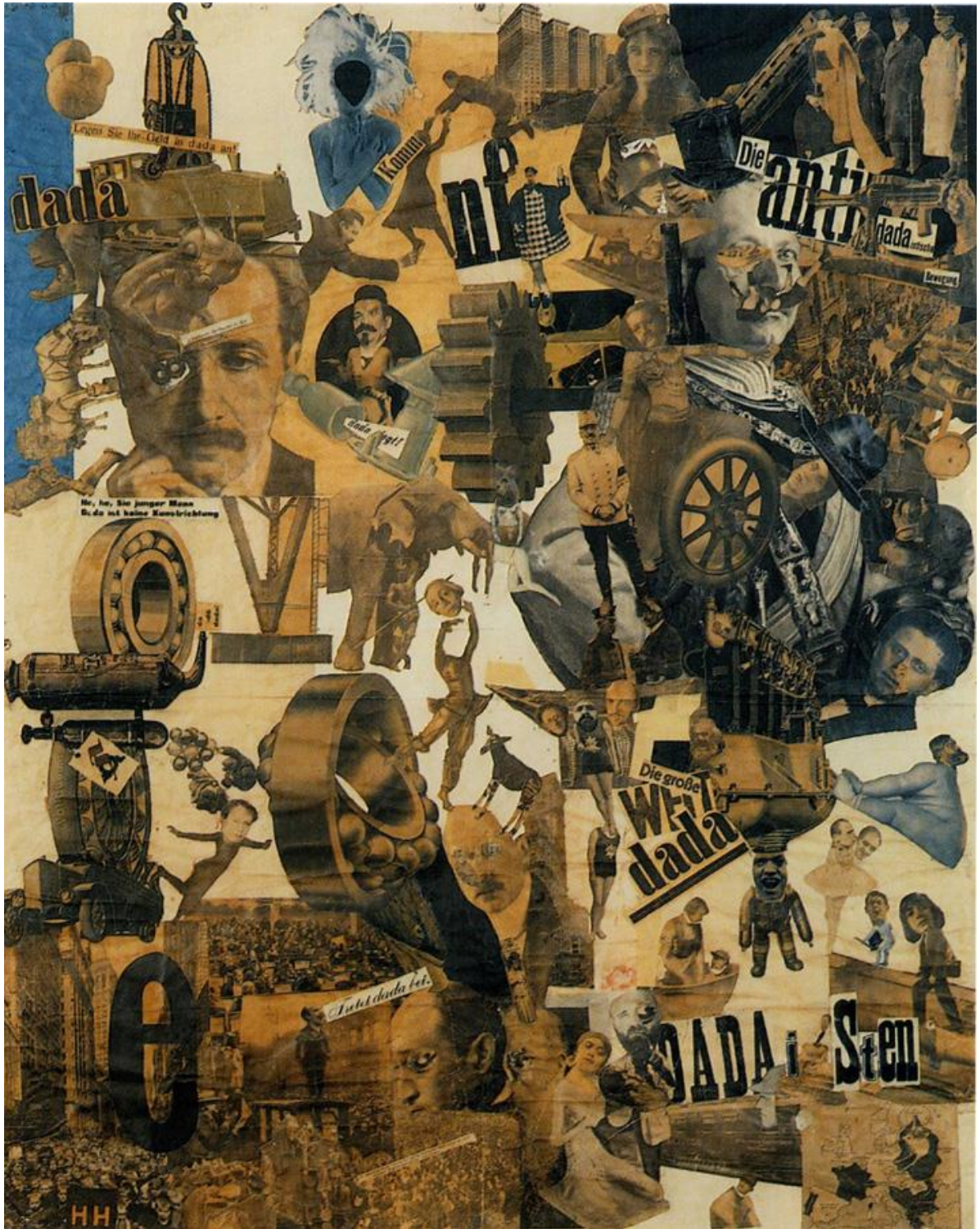


Figure 24. Hoch - Cut with the Kitchen Knife: Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Culture Epoch (1919) by Hannah Höch, 1919, source: [Hoch](#)

How to proceed:

To generate similar effects as Schlingensiefel and his direct appropriation of right-wing tactics and rhetoric, I want to use montages as a means of repoliticization and defamiliarization. For this purpose I will keep relying on recognizable and highly circulating images and sound-bites. I intend to use images that have been already numerous 'remastered, re-contextualized and mashed up innumerable' as Dean (2010) writes.

All of these aspects in their combination, may offer the possibility of allowing the work to be read in line with the idea of feminist agonistics; where I can be for and against a feminist position at the same time; where conflict is present but also not the endpoint. It might also be that the lens of feminist agonistics allows the emerging of a sensuous solidarity, after a moment of disruption. I want to embed in the practice a double gesture, but in a more blurred way than in my previous work *Merci Liberte!* for it to be connected to a wider political program, as Honig suggests (in Watson 2013). The issue with the works at the beginning of this research such as *VIVA 2023* and *Merci Liberte!*, was that because of the context of their encounter, they were single gestures emerging out of the context of Brexit and growing nationalism. Therefore there is a necessity of my work to emerge within a wider context, where it becomes a gesture within a row of other gestures as in the form of a framing, set out by others like the academic conference.

Chapter 6:
Leaning into Simulation

The following body of work called *TAP talks* I discuss in direct juxtaposition to Sheryl Sandberg's TED talks, instead of another performance artist's work. My work directly mimics and appropriates Sandberg's style of talks as well as its messages in order to critique her representation of feminism. This discussion provides the basis for my over-identification with Sandberg's position while appropriating her performative tropes, to use them for my own ends to disrupt my own community from within. Sandberg represents one of the agents of post-Fordism as politics, therefore my over-identification with her serves as means of revealing the contradictory position she represents which is obscured under the current narrative.

Sandberg's corporate-led feminism is presented as a form of political and economic guideline via the TED talk framing, which I will explain in more detail in the analysis. It is exemplary for post-Fordism as politics (as well as neoliberalism) in which social responsibility is entirely shifted to an individual level for the purpose of profit maximization of companies. My aim in this series of work is to investigate resistance through embodying a feminist position of pluralism in which the demand for representation collides with the demand for structural change. The potential of resistance and antagonism I see located in actively performing this contradictory position. Hence, my talks do not intend to become a mere iteration of Sandberg's position but a variation in which the contradiction is revealed.

For the purpose of my TAP talk analysis, I first discuss its structure and how it differentiates itself from the form of the performance lecture in order to elaborate my own intentions. For this purpose I will juxtapose it directly with works of several other artists including BHQF, Jérôme Bel and Sharon Hayes, taking them as reference points as previously discussed by Patricia Milder (2011). I then move on to discuss how my works mimicked Sandberg's talks and how they functioned or not according to my intentions to formulate a critique of her and her positions. For this discussion the question of *how* it provoked conflict or not, I use Honig's framework of agonistic feminism.



Figure 25. *TAP talk #1*, Live Stream, November 2016, Photo: Nalini Thapen



Figure 26. *Why we have too few women leaders* (2010) [Screenshot 23/04/2021], source: [TED \(2010\)](#)

The ready-made format: TED becomes TAP

TED talks are intended to provide a platform that allows a wide audience to engage with 'ideas worth spreading', as their own slogan indicates. Their style and aesthetic are based on American corporatism where each talk is similar to a business pitch. TED talks are characterised by specific features; no longer than 20 minutes, there is always an element of humour and story-telling in it and most speakers present without notes and often even without a presentation. This results in their own double presence on stage as the speaker is projected onto a big screen right behind them, for the entire auditorium to see them. The TED talks are presented as a format in a live setting with a live audience, but produced for online dissemination. This enables a direct and interactive engagement with the audience sitting in the auditorium, who are often involved by doing quick hands-up surveys, like Sandberg did in her 2010 talk. The talks are accessible due to the presenters using a language that often evades discipline specific terms and academic jargon. The format tends to emphasize the speaker's authenticity to which the lack of notes contributes. This indicates to me, that rather than a highly pre-rehearsed script, these speakers speak from their 'heart'. By appropriating this format, my intention was to use it as tool to make the audience question my authentic position. Before I discuss my own work, I introduce Sheryl Sandberg's TED talks from 2010 and 2013.



Figure 27. *So we leaned in...now what* (2013) [Screenshot 23/04/2021], source: [TED \(2013\)](#)

Sheryl Sandberg and the Simulation of Feminism

2010: 'Why we have too few women leaders'

Sandberg starts her talk 'Why we have too few women leaders' (ted.com) by acknowledging her privileged position. Sandberg is a white highly educated American woman and a COO of one of the biggest companies in the world, Facebook but she does not mention this. Her acknowledgement is addressed at the generation of women before her, and how she benefits from their work and fight for rights today. Through her entire talk Sandberg does not mention the term feminism/feminist once. She carries on by pointing out how few women leaders are present in heads of state positions and that the under-representation of women in leadership positions is a real issue. Sandberg summarizes her solution to this issue in three calls. 'One, sit at the table. Two, make your partner a real partner. And three, don't leave before you leave' (ted.com, 2010). This talk and its popularity led Sandberg to write her 2013 book *Lean in; Women, Work and the Will to Lead* making her recognised as the embodiment of American (white) feminism by main stream media. To summarize Sandberg's key point, by leaning in

she means women need to demand more privileges and equal rights as men in the workplace and not diminish their own accomplishments and be more confident about what they deserve.

Simulation of Feminism

Sandberg seems to carry a clear feminist message as opposed to figures like Marion Maréchal whose politics are clearly anti-feminist with her call to ban the right for abortion. In my perception Sandberg advocates in this talk and later also in her book, a simulation of feminism as I understand it. She fails to consider a wider context in which the demand for those equal rights is embedded. This makes Sandberg a decoy for equality, representing one of the biggest and male dominated tech companies in the world.

Sandberg in contrast to for example, Condoleeza Rice, is not representing a public institution. Hence her corporate focus on women's equality could be acceptable as her agency in this case is focused on her corporate role. But the way that Sandberg is introduced and profiled by *TEDWomen* undermines this point. In the section beneath the talk, 'Why you should listen' it states:

Long before Sheryl Sandberg left Google to join Facebook as its Chief Operating Officer in 2008, she was a fan. Today she manages Facebook's sales, marketing, business development, human resources, public policy and communications. It's a massive job, but one well suited to Sandberg, who not only built and managed Google's successful online sales and operations program but also *served as an economist for the World Bank and Chief of Staff at the US Treasury Department. Sandberg's experience navigating the complex and socially sensitive world of international economics* has proven useful as she and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg work to strike a balance between helping Facebook users control privacy while finding ways to monetize its most valuable asset: data (emphasis my own, TED 2010)

Sandberg next to her corporate profile, is clearly represented as an agent for 'international economics'. This makes her position, presented in the talk, embedded in a structural framework that she represents. The hypocrisy of her talk is heightened by the fact that her role includes the increase of Facebook profits. For her TED profile she is described in the following way:

As the COO at the helm of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg juggles the tasks of monetizing the world's largest social networking site while keeping its users happy and engaged (ted.com, not dated).

Facebook avoids paying taxes to increase the company's profits and as a COO she is responsible for such a strategy. These taxes would contribute to public goods, generated through the company's monetization, and in consequence not only to benefit those few women working for the company but all the others who will never have a chance to benefit from it otherwise. Sandberg's single perspective feminism, which is framed as a plural one, makes it a simulation of feminism(s). This I consider different to BAVO's master narrative in which corporations simulate criticality in order to disarm any opposition. The feminist perspective complicates this simulation. The criticality of the lack of female representation that Sandberg advocates might be her genuine concern and her call to have more women in powerful positions does not contradict her company's interests. But a call to pay higher taxes to support not only those who work for it, does. But there is also another side to the aspect of monetization of which Sandberg is in charge. The financial success of Facebook is also the success of right-wing and other extremist parties who promote anti-feminist politics via their 'political ads' which represent income value for Facebook. As Dean argued (2005, 2010) the most outrageous and montaged items generate the biggest value via their circulation.

2013: 'So we leaned in... now what?'

In 2013 Sandberg gave another *TEDWomen* talk titled 'So we leaned in... now what ?' where she was asked to reflect on the impact of her first talk and the book that followed which both were considered a huge success. In this talk Sandberg has turned her terminology around she states:

We shy away from the word "feminist," a word I really think we need to embrace. We have to get rid of the word bossy and bring back -- (Applause) I think I would say in a louder voice, we need to get rid of the word "bossy" and bring back the word "feminist," because we need it. (Applause) (transcript of Sheryl Sandberg's 2013 TED Woman talk 'So we leaned in... now what ?', ted.com).

Here Sandberg performed a clear strategic move together with her acknowledgement that despite women in the corporate world being her main target group, she also received supporting messages from some outside of it. She took away the ability of others to resist by positioning herself as a feminist by not only using the word but advocating its affirmative use and showing how her single gesture is not a single gesture.

Voice and Body Language:

Sandberg's aesthetic, voice and body language are important for this messaging. First she represents herself extremely feminine but not as overtly as Ivanka Trump, her wardrobe colour range is dull but her dress well fitted. Sandberg's hair is not long and flowy, but shoulder length and soft. In her first talk she wears high heels which accentuate her femininity but seem inappropriate for a hectic meeting schedule of a COO. She signifies with her heels that she has it all under control, no need to run and if she does she does not shy away from the pain that this incurs. Sandberg's voice during her presentation is calm and poised, but seems rehearsed when trying to appear authentic. And her body language and gesture for someone so far up in the corporate world seem rather small and lacking presence, further accentuating her 'innocent' femininity. In the first talk, where she presents standing, her shoulders convey a certain tension and lack of looseness. In the second one, where she sits on a sofa, her tightly squeezed legs simulate a conservative position although this also could be owed to her pencil skirt, which never the less contributes to this image in a similar way; it is overall a depiction of a femininity that is holding back rather than storming forward, slowed down by her skirt and heels.

Although it could be argued here that Sandberg's feminism is outdated, with her talks dating back more than five years ago, I suggest that it still resonates with current circumstances and the talks still circulate. Tax evasion as a profit maximiser is still Facebook company policy (in 2019) and goes at the expense of other women's equal opportunity. In Sandberg's feminism those issues are outsourced and solved by technology and private effort. This she presents with a corporate rhetoric mixed with personal appeal and it is this combination of gestures that I appropriated in my TAP talk series. Sandberg takes the function of a harmonising object that obscures the conflict she represents, the maximization of profit for *her* company and the equality of all women.



Figure 28. [TAP talk #3: MONA](#), Feminist Internet Seminar July 2017, Photo: Iona Wolff

Work 3: *TAP talks* (taptalks.tumblr.com)

TAP talk structure

In this series of talks that I started to develop by the end of 2016, I continue my over-identification with an 'icon' of female empowerment in the West, Sheryl Sandberg. Her 2010 TED talk 'Why we have too few women leaders' (ted.com) inspired me for the series as well as the growing popularity of TED talks altogether. TAP stands for Technology, Art, and Performance (TAP) and within this series I started to play with the notion of performance and its multiple meanings in multiple contexts. As I say in the introduction for all of them, in these talks I look into the intersection of the three categories of Performance, Art and Technology.

Each talk had the same structure; it started with the presentation of an issue connected to the notion of efficient economic performance of individuals and particularly women. In the first talk, TAP talk #1, the issue was how to support sustaining the body in the context of growing housing costs as well as the pressure of increased presence on and offline. In TAP talk #2 I addressed the issue of female fertility, in TAP talk #3 the under representation of women in

the art market, and in TAP talk #4 the impossibility of academics finding a love match because of their busy schedules. As part of the structure, in each talk this issue was solved with a technology. I presented each technology as a form of artificial intelligence, 'AI', that, apart from TAP talk #1, came with a name, MONA, EIVA and DEAN composed out of abbreviations. The AI's key functions were to enable the outsourcing of human capabilities including having a physical body. The AI replaced consciousness, met the need to flirt and love, gave birth and made art. The technology was there to enhance one's capability to perform more efficiently in order to optimize labour output and produce a surplus. The structure of the TAP talks was similar to *VIVA 2023*; a presentation or talk which was then followed by a live-interaction of myself with my recorded self. Again I performed the simulation of technology but in this case it was Artificial Intelligence. Again, the recorded became alive through the staged interaction, creating an illusion of functioning technology through the act of performance. Each AI visual was a montage of my own body, onto or into something or someone that had previously heavily circulated on the internet; pregnant Beyoncé, Mona Lisa, and Brad Pitt and George Clooney (merged into one face for TAP talk# 4, presenting DEAN, the digital emotion application network).

Presentation frameworks

I started the series with a self-initiated and organized live-stream talk and then gradually the talks moved into organized frameworks within the academic setting. This started with a performance festival at Wimbledon College of Art in March 2017 and then I presented at the Feminist Internet Seminar series in July 2017 (organized by UAL Futures) and at the TECHNE student conference in November 2017. I also did several presentations at performance focused academic conferences such as *PSI#23* (Hamburg, Germany, June 2017), *PSI#24* (Daegu, South Korea, July 2018) and *The lived female body* at the University of Leeds (April 2019). On these last two occasions the TAP talks were framed as academic talks instead of using the label TAP talks, and were part of a themed panel. So more and more my practice and these talks integrated into the production frameworks of a practice based PhD and academia in general. Here the talks online presentation on the blog taptalks.tumblr.com I consider only part of the work but not the work. It served as an add on feature, but I consider the live performance the central subject of my analysis. For this purpose I use the feedback and reactions I generated during the live staging as well as post-presentation contexts such as buffets and lift rides. The participants present in these contexts were my audience.

Before discussing how my work was received by my audience, I elaborate how my work overlaps and differentiates from the performance lecture format. For this purpose I use Patricia Milder's paper titled 'Teaching as Art: The Contemporary Lecture-Performance' (2011)

published in *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* as a reference point. In this paper Milder discusses several different artists considered to belong to the form, so I want to take her points and compare them to my work to map where it sits within or outside of the performance lecture format and what my intentions are in using this format.

Performance Lecture & Tap Talks: an Overlapping Distinction

Patricia Milder sees the lecture performance within a framework of 'teaching as art'. She states that 'The best lecture-performances always seem to originate from artists who believe that teaching itself is a central component of their artwork.' (2011, p.13). There is definitely an educating aspect in my TAP talks, particularly in the first part where I lay out an issue at hand, but the way these talks developed does not allow them to be entirely considered as teaching as art. But Milder also states that 'Institutional critique also factors heavily in most iterations of the form.' I consider this aspect crucial to mine as institutional critique becomes more and more part of it. Milder makes clear, that for her the most interesting format of lecture performance comes from those 'who meld a critique of institutional structures with a specific and idealistic view' (2011, p.13). Considering that my intentions are feminist, my research has an idealistic view. Milder's samples have in common to work as activism-through-education. The majority of my performances took place within an educational framework such as universities and they had an activist intention, even though not in the direct constructive sense of the word. In order to clarify how my work was not directly constructive, but still activist, I discuss it with a range of her examples including BHQF, Jérôme Bel and Sharon Hayes.

BHFQ

Milder starts her discussion with the BHQF - the Bruce High Quality Foundation, a collective who are defined by a 'young male, intention-ally obnoxious "bad boy" aesthetic' (2011, p.14). One example of this collective's work, who are mainly active in the US, is a lecture titled *Art History with Benefits* (2009). In the work BHQF discussed sexual relationships of artists with their benefactors, making BHQF's work characterised by 'bad taste' as Milder points out. She stresses that BHQF seek to overcome what has become the American system of art education which is dominated by commercialisation. BHQF founded their own educational institution, the Bruce High Quality Foundation University, in which their appropriation of the lecture as a tool to disrupt the system, became important. Apart from their gestures marked by bad taste and their conflictual relationship to capital due to their success, Milder concludes that the efficacy of BHQF lies in the fact that 'The work not only bemoans the problem with the art institution –

over commercialization and commercialized education but also offers a creative alternative' (2011, p.15). Here I draw the first distinction with the aims of my work according to Milder's notion for efficacy; the provision of alternatives as opposed to the mere act of 'bemoaning'. In this notion the alternative art school represents a 'happy object', considered to be progressive and constructive. At the beginning of each TAP talk, I equally 'bemoaned' a problem which I then 'solved' in its second part when presenting the AI. But rather than offering a real alternative, in my talks, it was a simulation of alternatives. It was an alternative in the *Sandbergian* sense, where the issue was outsourced away from a change of structures and institutions towards individuals and technology (which did not exist). In my talks to support the body and its precarity, the AI functioned as a denial of that body deprived of the human faculties that made it eventually human. In my talks a disconnection from a wider program was emphasized instead of a connection. Instead of a constructive solution I advocated volunteer self-subordination to surplus production through the displacement of one's body.

Milder also stresses how BHQF aligns itself with the lecture performance tradition of Robert Morris, a contemporary of Joseph Beuys and another iconic figure in the genre. Morris' legendary performances included the lip-synching of an entire lecture from art historian Erwin Panofsky in 1964 (Milder, 2011). In acts like this the performance lecture is primarily concerned with the "dramatization of knowledge and its dissemination" (2011, p.15). My performed interaction with the AI in the TAP talks could be considered a theatricalization but I did not intend to disseminate any specific knowledge through it. The theatricalization as part of my talks was part of a simulation that was intended to raise questions, such as: *What if* this technology really exists? What would that mean for everyone in the audience and even more importantly, would they use it if they could? Hence, it was not for the purpose of disseminating knowledge but for questioning the audience which for me evokes another distinction.

Jerôme Bel

Another example Milder discusses is Jérôme Bel's piece titled *Veronique Doisneau* (2004) in which a ballerina takes center stage talking about her career she is about to end after the performance. Milder writes that 'Doisneau reveals the larger institution of ballet from a dancer's perspective, through biography and personality as well as the exposure of fundamental professional information.' (2011, p.20). This sounds very close to my *VIVA 2023* performance, although it was set in a 'future' scenario. Milder stresses that Bel's work offers a form of productivity that works from artist collectives such as the V-Girls, which was partly founded by Andrea Fraser, do not. The V-Girls lecture performances such as *The Question of Manet's Olympia: Posed and Skirted* (1989), heavily rely on the usage of academic jargon and as Milder writes results in the 'removal from content' (2011, p.18). This removal as opposed to

the work of Bel, she considers not productive in its anti-institutional rhetoric while Bel offers a reveal of social structures by allowing the audience to empathise with the dancer on stage. For her, Bel is not led by a hostility towards his audience but creates a work that in an amicable way, does not laugh at what is important to the participants in the field. I share this with the work of Bel, according to the way Milder perceives it, as I was not hostile towards my audience but shared with them many concerns, especially in contexts such as academic conferences. This makes my work also different to the *bogus* lectures of The Yes Men, where they strategically present to an audience with whom they do not share interests or an amicable relationship, but rather the opposite as the example of the NRA conference (2017) showed. But I disagree with how Milder allocates non-productivity in the removal of content such as in the work of the V-Girls. Milder looks for the educational paired with institutional critique that paves the way to transforming the audience. The V-girls intention of interrupting perceived notions of themselves and their audience is not part of this productivity; no one is converted and nothing positive results from the work. From this point of view an inherent negativity is considered as regressive and non-productive. This would also include my work as it intended to generate a notion that 'something isn't quite right' and making doubt a sticky affect attached to me and my position as in the TAP talks and my other works in this research.

Milder then later points out that after seeing Bel's work and the dancer 'revealing' the conditions of being a ballerina, rendered her viewing of other ballet performances, where next to her enjoyment of the entertainment, she was 'processing the experience on multiple levels' (2011, p.20). She started to think about the social structure and the labour that is involved in ballet when she watched it. Initiating this kind of thinking in my audience I consider equally an desirable outcome of my work which I share with Bel. Milder concludes that Bel's efficacy lies in the reveal but simultaneously he does not take away the pleasure of watching the ballet. My focus lies on frustrating the audiences pleasure, distinguishing my intentions from Bel's.

Sharon Hayes

The work of Sharon Hayes is very closely aligned to my previous performance, *Merci Liberte!* (2016) in terms of dramaturgy and use of political speeches. The work of Hayes is concerned with the issues of queer rights and the AIDS activism scene of 1990s New York (Milder, 2011). Milder writes about Hayes work that:

her lecture-performance uses directly political language. It stems from forms of political speech rather than academic discourse; its contents are mixed with intimate personal details about her love life. The sentiment that the "personal is political" makes its way into all of her work and, along with her pleadingly sweet voice, results in a disarming

style of constructed speech that both engages and confronts the accidental viewer (2011, p.23).

Milder here specifically refers to Hayes' performances where she cited love letters on street corners via a megaphone in different locations. This is different to the two previous works of BHQF and Bel, where the encounter with them happens in front of an audience with an affinity or at least some sort of connection towards the artists in a performance focused environment. Like in Bel's *Veronique Doisneau*, there is a sense of amicability that Hayes conveys in her vulnerability and her sweet voice. Both works are non-confrontational. This I also consider part of my work, as the TAP talks were not set up as confrontations. My tone was friendly and personal and had lost its ironic intonation, mimic and gesture compared to my previous speeches and talks. It is a 'personal talk', and apart from TAP talk #1, done without notes. Its style had become disarming in my display of personal investment and concern.

Milder foregrounds the activist aspect of Hayes work and her active engagement with the history of activist movements but most importantly she stresses that Hayes work conveys the notion that words can become political action. She writes:

In her works she conveys the feeling that art can create change, that the community can still be ignited, and that words are only important insofar as they are actually connected to political actions (2011, p.24).

This aspect for Milder makes Hayes an heir to Beuys' ideal that political action can/should be meld with art action. She concludes that 'Her work revels in the history of twentieth-century activist speech and explores this kind of speech's possibility to exist in another form: as education as art'.

No conversion but conflict

Milder foregrounds the positive effects of these works in their educational potency. In another example that she uses, she locates its productivity, similar also to the work of Bel, in its double existence of an aesthetic and educational experience. She assigns Hayes work the potential for change and transformation of people and society altogether as its most positive feature. Milder's notion of the performance lecture is characterised by the demand for change and the potency to convert its audience which are not the central concerns of my work. I consider my efficacy in evoking a doubt in my audience in the moment of encounter. As stated previously, particularly in relation to Schlingensiefel's work and now within the notion of agonistic feminism, I locate the productivity in the contradiction and conflict that was brought up through my work which could not be easily resolved. The majority of Milder's examples lack conflicting positions

and the artists intention of causing and sustaining it. Most of these examples are gestures of affirmation without negation leading to an education of their audience. Hence the crucial question of 'Do they actually mean it?' does not arise.

Milder initially dismissed the work of BHQF, *The Artists with Benefits* lecture, because it lacked offering alternatives. This I consider closer to my use of the format of performance lecture. It is not entirely free of content but it does not come up with a solution for any of the issues presented in it. It is a hijacking of the format as a platform for institutional critique that allows a double existence, not of the aesthetic and educational but of the performer and the conflictual.

Milder ends her discussion by stressing that the success of the lecture performance is dependent on its ability to promote and disseminate progressive thought through the precise construction of this form (2011). And it is here where I eventually depart from the form. Rather than promoting and disseminating progressive thought through my work, its intention is to interrupt exactly the notion of what a progressive thought might be and also, who embodies it. Throughout the series of TAP talks they became part of pre-organised frameworks. Within them I actively worked with the 'precise construction of this form', the performance lecture to pursue my intentions. And the following further discussion shows that the Q&A became a crucial part of my construction, to hold the conflictual positions and be read as agonistic feminism.



Figure 29. TAP talk #3: MONA, Feminist Internet Seminar July 2017, Photo: Iona Wolff

The Q&A: the location of agonistic feminism?

The TAP talks followed a specific structure in which as systemic problem, not always but often concerning women, was identified and then 'solved' via the presentation of technology. The previously affirmative gesture in the sense of taking a readable feminist stance was then converted into a *Sandbergian* version of feminism through individualisation, away from a demand for structural change. Through this construction I was hoping that in the live set-up, this argumentation would cause some conflict between me and the audience. But the theatricality inherent in the second part of my talks, the conversation with the partly clumsily montaged AI, in many cases was identified as an ironic gesture by my audience. It was met with a lot of laughter including at the Wimbledon Performance Festival in March 2017. So the potential readable irony of this gesture partly evoked through its theatrical character did not make it an effective negation of the previous one, hence the contradiction and conflict was not entirely visible.

Over the course of performing this construction several times I realised that my ambiguous position, needed re-enforcement. The Q&A in the beginning of my live talks within academic set-ups had the function of reconciling my previous conflictual position and confirmed its ironic character. Doing several of the TAP talks, I identified it as the location for re-enforcing the contradiction that I was performing by not leaving my role and holding onto the conflict. It was the moment where the agonistic position could emerge because it allowed me to deny the audience's demand to resolve the contradiction.

Throughout the course of performing these talks, I actively started to extend my intentions to the Q&A. It required my active manipulation of self-perception and particularly as a performer, to not make a decision when the 'staging' was over. To give one example: After I presented TAP Talk #2 and my digital womb, EIVA, at the Performance Studies International conference in Daegu in July 2018, I ended up in the lift with a couple of men who were in the audience for my talk. One of them said, seemingly to relieve us from the uncomfortable situation of being stuck in the lift together: 'Your talk was really funny', and everyone smiled and giggled. But I answered with a disappointed manner: 'Oh really? It wasn't meant to be.' The giggling quickly stopped, and silence returned to the lift.

So this was one way to take away the ironic reading of the work. For the purpose of this analysis, I would like to focus on the Q&A from my talk at the Feminist Internet Series event titled *Feminism(s), Biocapital and the female body* in July 2017 where I presented MONA, the multiple online navigation application. Present for the Q&A was the event organizer and simultaneous panel chair and another male speaker. Similar to my previous discussion in *Love & Merci!* our co-presence, between male and female, in a feminist focused event for me gave a potency to my work and intentions of becoming a disruptive object to the assumptions of my feminist position.

Feminist Internet Q&A July 2017, Central Saint Martins

The panels chair's first question concerned the notion of play and the importance of it in our work. This question I met with the notion that I think it is important to play with social media and use it for my purposes to deal with its 'dark side'. The other speaker, stressed that it is also important to consider who gets to play in a framework of power and influence. The next question posed by an audience member was twofold; first – Does MONA really exist ? To which I answered: What do you think? This was followed by the question about the potency of critical capital agitation as a strategy. Again, I pointed out how I use social media for my own benefits, so I play the game, to then gain financial benefit from it by getting paid for my performances that result from complying with the game of capital and provide content for free.

I started my talk with a short referendum in the audience who finds social media stressful and time consuming, to which a majority of the audience raised their hands. In the Q&A I negate its damaging effects and my previous critical position, for my personal empowerment. *His* answer pointed out that rather than operating in the structures that are available to us, these need to be replaced by new ones constructed by ourselves and according to our needs. Quickly after he also stressed that one should be wary of making these critical agitations too appealing because of the risk to be absorbed by capital itself again. While I kept advocating a volunteer attitude of self-subordination, complying with the coercive structures of social media to gain an individual benefit and my own empowerment, he represented a feminist position that connects the question of empowerment to a wider framework of policy making. This made myself and my position very questionable from a feminist perspective such as my own.

Later in the talk I confessed that do not to have a Facebook account, but this position was already over-shadowed by my previous simulation of sub-ordination. I already presented a position that would prefer to contribute to the closure of the system rather than asking for structural change.

Post Q&A:

In these circumstances I learned not to render myself into a conversion point again, to stay opaque and not to relieve the audience from the question 'Do I mean it?' and 'Was it not meant to be funny?'. Here the affirmative gesture at the beginning of the talk was followed by an ironic negation via the technology presentation which was then not resolved into being entirely ironic during the Q&A. There is a lack of relief and eventual reconciliation; but this time it had shifted to previously excluded elements of the performance lecture; the Q&A on the sofa, in the lift or at to the buffet. By holding onto my position there was a conflict emerging, and in this case it was present between me and the position of the other speaker, where *he* embodied the position I was supposed to take. For me this was already close to a moment of destabilization and showed how personal agency and demands for wider structures collide. During socializing afterwards with students who were in the audience, for many the question if MONA was an existing technology dominated our conversations. Instead of being critical, it was perceived by many with excitement which led me to rethink the presentation of my critique. Part of the location of excitement and potential happiness that emerged out of some of my talks I locate, next to the feminist framing, in its aesthetic elements including what I was wearing and the visuals I used for my AI presentations, resulting in 'happy' trainers and 'happy' montages.

Happy trainers

Although not always identical, in most of these talks, unlike Sandberg and her feminine business dresses, I was wearing trousers, a shirt, red braces and trainers. It was a mix between a masculine 1980s Wall Street aesthetic with the thin blue striped shirt, Zuckerberg's boy-genius-look and a touch of arty edginess. To me it was an outfit that did not fully read as a costume but was also not something potentially worn on a daily basis in an art school. Looking back though at the Feminist Internet Seminar outfit, I feel wearing something closer to Sandberg's aesthetic may have lessened an ironic reading of my work altogether. But it still may have clashed with the edginess expected in an art school and the looseness expected from someone who just developed a game changing AI. The trainers functioned as a tool to blend in, as everyone on the sofa, presenting un-ironic positions, was wearing them as well. Although my dress-code is slightly *off*, unlike in previous works, it is not possible to read it as ironic. If I was wearing heels like Sandberg in her talk, this then would probably have contributed to a stronger ironic reading of my work and it being a performance.

Happy montage

For the purpose of this analysis I am focusing on the visual montage I used in my TAP Talk #2 *Meet EIVA*, the electronic in vitro application. It is a photomontage of my face onto Beyoncé's pregnant body that she posted on Instagram on 1st of February 2017. Through the post, she announced her pregnancy with twins. In the context relevant for this research, compared to the other images I used as visuals in my TAP talks, this montage caused the most empathy and alienation in my audience. By the time I first used the visual for my talk in May 2017, it had already circulated heavily on social media, not only in its original form but as other montages made by other social media users. In many cases they used an image of themselves to produce their version of Beyoncé's image in a DIY aesthetic. Only a day after its posting on 2nd February 2017, Madeleine Chung published on fashionmagazine.com a list of some of its best meme iterations. 24 hours later, it became an image that has been *remastered, re-contextualized and mashed up innumerable*. There was an intensity already attached to the image which was reflected in the reactions to my talk. Like in Höch's montages an aesthetic of the imposed, disjointed and mashed up body emerged in my work. It functioned as the carrier of a femininity that represents a lack of real structural influence but it became over-shadowed by the intensity of its circulation and positive connotation in line with Beyoncé's popularity. This made this montage, despite its defamiliarizing effect to many in my close circle, a 'happy' object in most of my presentations.



Figure 31. *These Instagrammers Totally Nailed Their Beyoncé Pregnancy Parodies (2017)* [Screenshots 23//04/2021], source: [Chung \(2017\)](#)



Figure 30. Visual from *TAP talk#2* presenting the AI *EIVA*, (2017)

Reactions: How does it work ?

I presented TAP talk #2 four times with slightly differentiating titles at several different events to make it fit better into the conference frameworks. The first occasion was a self-organized event in Chelsea College of Art's Lecture theatre. My audience was a very close circle as it was a also 'celebration' of my 30th birthday. My close circles' reaction was a feeling of 'uncanniness' when they saw my talk. Here the smooth merging of my face onto Beyoncé's body did cause a lot of irritation. Part of the irritation stemmed from the familiarity of the two images so smoothly merged; seeing my familiar face with Beyoncé's pregnant womb attached. The other part of the irritation was caused by the 'magic' of the performance which made EIVA become alive. Both of these elements did leave a humorous but also slightly uncomfortable impression on them.

At the *PSi#24* conference which was titled 'Performance as Network: Arts, City, Culture' in Daegu, South Korea, I actually performed the talk twice, once as part of a panel and once as a performance. At the panel it was titled 'Performing the reproductive female body – a case study of the online absence of reproductive performance'. The reaction, like that of the male audience member in the lift, was an appreciation of the humour as part of the panel talk. It was also to my great advantage that I was the last speaker in the panel, which meant that my talk felt even more 'odd' after two very professional academic research presentations by my colleagues. The second iteration at this conference was scheduled in the performance program (on the same day) and it happened that some of the same audience members were present again without knowing that it would be the same talk. I changed the title to what I felt was appropriate for a performance 'AI, gender and reproduction: An introduction into performance enhancing technologies'. They eventually stayed, despite a competitive conference program and after it turned out that they stayed because they wanted to figure out how the technology *worked*.

Most recently, I performed *TAP Talk #2* for the *Lived Female Body Symposium* in Leeds in April 2019. In the Q&A during the Leeds conference, one audience member asked whether my position was ironic. This was in connection with the question of whether I "really" like Beyoncé and whether I thought she was a good feminist. I did not answer that question. The panel was then dominated by a discussion of Beyoncé and her role within feminism(s). The Beyoncé visual and its already attached intensity through circulation was still present 2019 and the doubt around its presentation in terms of *how it worked*, stuck with many, if not most of my audience. But also did I not talk to everyone in the audience and neither did I know from

which angle they arrived at my talks. The conflict I initially intended to bring to the surface was over-shadowed by the visual montage and its previously attached intensity. Although it did raise questions about my position by the audience and an affective shift from potentially 'happy' given the shared space of interest in the conference, to doubt about this happiness. This compared to *Merci Liberte!* was already an improvement because I represented recognizable but irreconcilable feminist positions next to each other; between myself and Beyoncé, but less between me and Sheryl. My talk did cause tension and conflict and brought questions of power within the feminist discourse to the discourse of the conference.

Failed performance of agonism

With the TAP talks becoming part of conference programs, integrated into the main parts such as panels, I was also able to blend my work into these contexts and not present them as performances explicitly. Instead I could leave it to the audience to make that decision. I applied opacity by not explicitly framing the work as performance as well as articulating my intentions. By turning myself into a blonder and younger version of Sheryl Sandberg, my motives were both believable and questionable. I adopted both her display of affirmative feminism by demanding equal representation, the gentleness and humour of her presentations. Then I (re)turned to *her* advocacy of individual responsibility as the solution, making it a simulation of feminism, which was picked up by some but not by all. So while I was striving for ambiguity in my application of opacity and performing a double gesture, it was still unrecognizable for some in the audience. The *what if* I really mean it, was over-shadowed by the works dramaturgy in most instances. Still the outcomes of the presentation in Leeds in 2019 created more mixed feelings rather than the audience just enjoying my Beyoncé simulation. The multiple conflicts in it together with my 'performance' in the Q&A, showed that I had a better understanding of how to hold and create an ambiguous position, and how not to lose the 'what if she actually means it'.

A suggestion after the panel at the *PSi#24* conference in Daegu generated another important insight. One colleague suggested to me to perform my 'fertility' performance in front of a group of Catholics as they were potentially the right audience. For me this indicated a detachment from my colleague towards the issues I was addressing. *She* understood my intention to be rooted in causing disruption but considering Catholics as my *right* audience, this indicated to me that *TAP talk#2* was also understood to be about moral superiority and not about structural issues in which the academic is embedded.

Conclusion and how to proceed

From the perspective of voice, gesture and costume, this work was already heading in the right direction. My un-ironic but gentle tone, together with my outfit were harder to read as ironic compared to previous work, I had made myself more opaque and my over-identification more nuanced. Like Sharon Hayes and Sheryl Sandberg, I used a disarming almost sweet voice that no one could resist but my own benignity needs another push, without allowing myself to be read as ironic. Despite the theatricality of these talks, including my AI conversations, it still made it hard for some to place them and myself, at least for some time. To proceed it is important to strip the work even further from any theatrical elements and additional props. Also the technique of montage needs to find a different application and potentially a different medium. Here the Beyoncé image was loaded with too much intensity from previous circulation, potentially also simplifying the audiences placement of the work and myself. At the same time I feel it is important to keep using references from main stream media to offer the audience immediately recognizable elements. With regards to the aspect of montage, this could mean, instead of an image, to refocus onto text and speech.

The model of creating one conversion point in the work for the location of opacity, and leading from happy to unhappy was not working for my intentions. Glissant's model of the weave might prove to be more appropriate where different positions are then placed next to each other, creating a constant oscillation between creating joy and killing it. This may also allow the intensification of multiple positions, away from a 'simple' double, back to multiple ones. This needs to happen though without falling into neither over-determinacy nor into foregrounding one reading of the work that pushes the rest in the background and harmonizes my position.

For my intention to reveal a feminine appearance as a deceiving factor, my femininity should not only be present in my voice, but also in what I am wearing, to accentuate it more. But all of this needs to be done in a way that does not make it fall into a form of parody of femininity like in *Merci Liberte!*. And the work needs to appear even more non-confrontational as I see this as core to its potency within the feminist notion of over-identification that I am developing.

For my aim to create contradicting positions I need to more explicitly address the embeddedness of my gestures as part of a wider structural framework. My previous attempt of having the framework lurk in the background without mentioning it, was not enough to negate my own previous affirmation of the feminist position. To create more dissonance as part of my aims when exploring over-identification, the conflicts need to be more visible in an event where I share an amicable relationship with my audience, for which the conference panel proved useful.

Chapter 7:
(Un) Official Welcome

In the following chapter I juxtapose my work *Research Show Opening Speech* (January 2018) directly with Andrea Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2003). My work applies a similar method to Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2003) where she put different quotes together in one speech, making it a montage of different elements. Hence, her work is a crucial reference point for my analysis, in which I point out the overlaps and demarcate differences.

There are 15 years between mine and Fraser's work and we both enact our speeches from different positions. The majority of Fraser's works I discuss in this chapter were produced when Fraser was already a known artist from the US in the early 2000s. After her 2003 solo-show at the Hamburger Kunstverein and one specific work in it, she became a very well-known international artist. When performing my speech in January 2018, I was an AHRC funded practice-based PhD student, known to some but not all in my audience. Both works share being a direct address to an audience as part of an exhibition opening. Fraser was 'officially' opening her own exhibition while I was 'opening' a research show which I co-organised and was part of a congress at my home institution, Chelsea College of Art. Even though my speech was less official than Fraser's, both performances share the play with the ritual of the opening and leaving our audience with an uneasy feeling by the end of it, not knowing how to relate to us afterwards.

Ulman in *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) was at the very beginning of her career while Fraser in *Official Welcome* (2003) was opening her first solo exhibition in Europe, hence further advanced in hers. But while there are these differences in terms of timeframe and position, both of them and my work included were subject to a sexist body politic. Within the social order in which these three works emerged, mine, Ulman's and Fraser's, the fertile female body is always in a structurally weaker position and considered as morally inferior to the male mind. The works play with this position as a form of resistance to post-Fordist politics, in which this moral position is obscured but present in the further precarisation of women as a result of these politics.

In this chapter I first present my speech in the form of a script which I juxtapose with its different reference points as part of the montage (see right-side of black frame). This is followed by the presentation of Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2003). Then I dissect the different elements of my speech and the conflictual positions produced through my embodiment. For this analysis I draw on Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2003) as well as *Kunst Muss Hängen* (2001) which I refer to in my speech. Then I move on to discuss the artistic efficacy of over-identification deployed in these works and apply the lens of agonistic feminism.



Figure 32. *Research Show Opening Speech*, Chelsea College of Art, January 2018
Photo: Abbie Fletcher

Work 4: Research Show Opening Speech (January 2018)

For the winter 2018 congress of my PhD funding bodies consortium, students were asked to put a show together showcasing practice-based research at my home institution, Chelsea College of Arts. I volunteered to put the show together and make a contribution. The title of the congress and show was *Flow and Flux, Flux and Flow*. At the time of putting the following speech together, I had received my scholarship a few months before, and my institution was going through a process of restructuring. This included cutting (teaching and researching) staff members and decreasing the department's office space. A white male functions as the representative of these developments, as further evidenced by the university's own marketing material; for example, it was under the current Pro-Vice Chancellor's management that the cuts to fine art research staff were initiated in an attempt to balance research between different disciplines.

The speech took place on Thursday 11 January 2018, at the Triangle Space at Chelsea College of Art.

On 8 January 2018, just a few days before my contribution to the event, the Golden Globes took place. American TV star Oprah Winfrey gained a lot of media attention for her acceptance speech for the Cecil B. de Mille Award. In her speech, she was addressing the #MeToo movement in relation to Hollywood actresses' recent accusations that (white, male) Hollywood mogul, Harvey Weinstein, sexually abused them.

Speech transcript (left, italics not part of the speech) and references (right):

<i>Research Show Opening Speech</i>	Fraser's works and references for my speech
<p><i>The following transcript is taken from a recording of the actual performance.</i></p> <p><i>I was wearing a dark blue, not-fitted, smart dress, leggings, and trainers.</i></p>	<p>Andrea Fraser created <i>Inaugural Speech</i> (1997) for the opening of inSITE97 in San Diego/Tijuana. It begins as an artist takes the podium to describe the show and thank the exhibition organisers. "Rather than leaving the stage, however she thanks the artist for the kind introduction and continues, speaking first as a trustee, then as a public official and finally as a corporate sponsor" (2003, p.194).</p> <p>In this performance, which is listed on the MOMA (New York) website, Fraser was wearing a smart white jacket and collarless shirt.</p>
<p>Thursday 11 January 2018, 6.30pm, Triangle Space, Chelsea College of Art, <i>Flow and Flux, Flux and Flow</i> research show.</p> <p><i>"Ding ding ding" (using a glass and a knife to get people's attention)</i></p> <p>(1.) Hello everyone, my name is Denise and I am a practice-based PhD student here at Chelsea College of Art and was part of the organising team for this wonderful exhibition that you see.</p> <p>I wanted to take this opportunity of the TECHNE conference and exhibition, which shows the practice of all of these talented students for the first</p>	<p>26 September 1997, opening of inSITE97, San Diego, Loading Dock at a factory-turned-cultural-centre.</p> <p>One of the co-directors of the exhibition introduced the performance by saying:</p> <p>"I am now happy to introduce an artist participating in inSITE97, Andrea Fraser, who is, as her contribution to inSITE97, making a speech. Thank you very much."</p> <p>Then Fraser starts:</p>

<p>time, to stress how important it is to not only read about the results of practice-based research but also to be able to see it and to feel it.</p>	<p>“Thank you.</p> <p>Thank you. Thank you very much. On behalf of the participating artists – who have, actually, been seated way in the back ... Hi! (The speaker waves).</p> <p>Good evening and welcome to inSITE 97.</p> <p>As an art exhibition, inSITE is focused on the exploration and activation of public space. I think I can speak for all the artists when I say that this is an extremely important aim.” (2003, p.271)</p>
<p>(2.) “Art must hang!” Martin Kippenberger once said, and I say: “Research must hang!”</p> <p>I think what you see in here is quite radical’ we see art practice as part of a research process and actually what we see is knowledge, new knowledge, and that is what is radical about it.</p>	<p><i>Kunst muss hängen (Art Must Hang)</i> was first performed by Fraser in 2001 in the Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne. The speech, which is part of a video installation, reconstructs a dinner speech given by the (now deceased) artist Martin Kippenberger, which he originally delivered at the opening of an exhibition of works by Michel Wuerthle at the Club an der Grenze, Austria, in 1995 (2003, p.208).</p> <p>In <i>Kunst muss hängen (Art Must Hang)</i>, Fraser memorised the speech in German from a videotape taken of the original.</p>
<p>(3.) Which actually brings me to the title of the show of the conference, Flow and Flux, Flux and Flow, which, as someone who researches performance, of course immediately reminded me of the Fluxus movement from the sixties and seventies, and radicalism was at the core of their practice. In 1963 the American Lithuanian artist, George Maciunas, he wrote a Manifesto, the fluxus manifesto, and his claim was that the aim of Fluxus was to be extraordinary, and to connect with the radical ideas of its fermented time. And I think we can definitely say today that we are faced with extraordinary challenges as institutions, as students, and as</p>	<p>This information is taken directly from the website of the George Maciunas foundation, titled FLUXUS: MAGAZINES, MANIFESTOS, MULTUM IN PARVO and written by Clive Phillpot.</p>

<p>researchers. So, we have to show extraordinary commitment.</p>	
<p>(4.) And the University of the Arts London, the institution I am part of, has revised its strategy in the last couple of years, to face these extraordinary challenges.</p> <p>And, like Maciunas and his manifesto, we have declared some aims:</p> <p>First, to be the best in creative education.</p> <p>Second, to face the challenges by generating new knowledge and to attract students and income.</p> <p>Third, to be a global institution and to increase its impact influence.</p> <p>And, as a body who is interested in performance as economic category, of course UAL has come up with some performance indicators to measure the aims.</p> <p>Key performance indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research profile ▪ Research staffing ▪ Research student numbers and awards ▪ Enterprise and income 	<p>This content is directly taken from the University of the Arts strategy paper for 2015–22, “Monitoring Progress and Measuring Success”. It has slightly changed since I first adopted it.</p>
<p>(5.) And I think it will be very interesting to see, especially in the challenge of Brexit, how we will perform in achieving these aims.</p> <p>Which actually brings me back to Maciunas and his manifesto.</p> <p>Because another claim that he made was to “PURGE THE WORLD OF ‘EUROPANISM’!” What did he mean by that?</p> <p>In the sixties he wanted to get rid of concepts coming out of Europe, such as “the artist as a</p>	<p>We want to be an independent, self-governing, normal nation. That is what we have done and that is what must happen. In doing so we now offer a beacon of hope to democrats across the rest of the European continent. I’ll make one prediction this morning: The United Kingdom will not be the last member state to leave the European Union.</p>

<p>professional, art-for-art ideology, expression of artists' ego through art, etc." But what was at the core of his claim was to be open to other cultures.</p>	<p>The question is what do we do next? It is up to the British government to invoke article 50 and I don't think we should spend too long in doing it. I totally agree that the British people have voted, we need to make sure that it happens (in Stone 2016).</p> <p>This is an excerpt from Nigel Farage's speech in European Parliament on 28 June 2016, after the UK voted to leave the EU on 13 June 2016.</p>
<p>(6.) And I think here at Chelsea we have totally embraced that. As part of UAL we also have revised our strategy and re-orientated ourselves under the brand of "new histories"; Chelsea has undergone a review, and here the aim is to focus international markets and international communities. And to put that into place there has been a review of the research, which I think is very welcoming. And the aim of this research review was to bring researchers, research students, and other student communities together, and more importantly to integrate them into the studio cultures of the colleges. And, as a practice-based student, I do really appreciate that, because we don't have studio spaces on the campus; some of us don't have studio spaces at all. So, bringing us closer together, I think, is a really good way to serve those needs, and also to think about the hostile environment that we are facing in fine art. And the cost intensity of studio spaces is, I think, a really good way to adapt ourselves to the demands of the market.</p> <p>(SIREN sounds in the background)</p>	<p>Here, I am quoting directly from the strategy promotion video, sent to UAL students in spring 2017, to promote the so-called "New Histories" agenda led by the Pro-Vice Chancellor.</p> <p>It was uploaded on the University of the Arts YouTube channel (2017) under the title "Creating New Histories for Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon".</p> <p>UAL students met this restructuring plan – which included the reduction of fine art research staff and space (particularly in Chelsea College of Arts) – with protests, which generated a statement by the university. This was published on 23 May under the title "UAL Statement on Students' Direct Action".</p>

(7.) Which actually brings me brings me back to *Flow and Flux, Flux and Flow*. All of us are part of institutions, and these institutions, even they may be manifested by their walls; we have to adapt, we have to adapt to the challenges and to the demands and to big new concepts, such as the “big society”.

We can't expect that the structures around us will always support our needs. We have to adapt our expectations, especially those of us who are expecting. But what we *can* do is we can test how self-sufficient we can be, how much responsibility we can take, and how much voluntary work we can do.

Public art cannot forestall the forces foreclosing on our public lives. But it can remind us of what we are losing, like the casual democracy of everyday encounters, when we find ourselves equal before places and things that needn't be paid for and can't be purchased or the practical democracy of forums of public speech, where differences of status do not determine our places at the podium (2003, p.271).

Above is another excerpt from Fraser's *Inaugural Speech* from 1997.

In my speech the big society functions as a reference to the government of David Cameron from 2010–16 who coined this term during his time as Prime Minister when University fees were substantially increased, and state funding withdrawn from them. This marked an important step towards marketization and privatization of the higher education system in the United Kingdom.

(8.) So, I want all here, now, to know that a new day is on the horizon, and when that new day finally dawns it will be because of a lot of magnificent women – many of them are right here in this room tonight – and some pretty phenomenal men, fighting hard to make sure that they become the leaders who take us to the time when nobody ever has to say “me too” again!

APPLAUSE

This is a quote directly taken from Oprah Winfrey's Golden Globe acceptance speech when she received the Cecil B. de Mille Award. It cites the last bit of the speech (NBC, 2018).

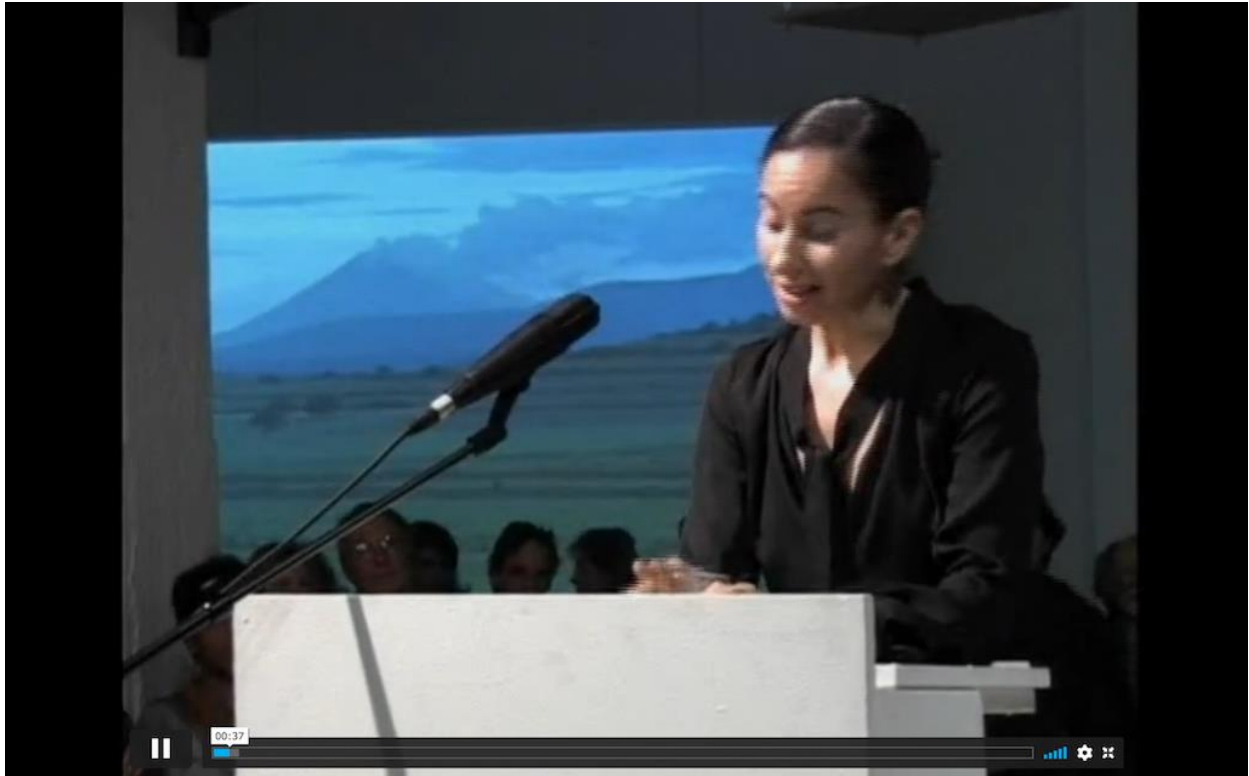


Figure 33. *Official Welcome* (2003) beginning [Screenshot 03/05/2021], source: [Fraser \(2003, ubu.com\)](https://www.ubu.com/film/fraser_03.html)

Official Welcome (2003) by Andrea Fraser

Official Welcome in its first instance in 2001 was a 30-minute speech commissioned by the MICA Foundation. In this performance, Fraser quotes several different people – including her own patrons, Barbara and Howard Morse, the owners of the MICA Foundation. Fraser first performed this speech during a reception in the Morse’s home (2001), and then later for the opening of her solo show at the Kunstverein Hamburg in 2003. *Official Welcome* works through nine different sets of artists, their patrons and supporters, with a script based on fragments quoted from artists’ statements, exhibition reviews, interviews, and profiles of collectors and gallerists (Kempkes, 2003). In this work, Fraser also appropriates Mel Brooks’s acceptance speech at the 55th Tony Awards ceremony in 2001.

Official Welcome in its 2003 version which is the focus of my analysis, started with a direct address to the audience in relation to the event, the opening of her own solo exhibition. It is not clear from the video (ubu.com) what happens before the performance, if one of the exhibition organisers introduced her and what she was about to do. In the video nothing at the beginning hinted towards the rollercoaster of positions that Fraser was about to enact. I will describe the video in the present in order to emphasize that it is based on a live-performance.

Official Welcome: She starts by stating 'Good evening everyone, thanks so much for being here.' She then slightly misleads the audience when she says she did not have time to prepare anything for the introduction but then stresses the importance of rituals in these occasions. The beginning seems genuine and like her own words. But then she suddenly starts switching into a very masculine deep voice. Apart from the introduction that was not an introduction, the first part of the speech is marked by Fraser's appropriation of very masculine gestures, voice and language, she impersonates several different male figures. Her first role that can be distinguished from *her* voice, is the one of a critic talking about the recognisable radicality and grotesqueness *her* work to then switch to *his*. Then she uses another voice, adopting the one of an artist, also seemingly male. Next to intonation and pitch, she also changes her voice's rhythm with each position and keeps doing this for all them. For me, at the beginning it is hard to follow what Fraser was saying because the transitions between distinct voices and characters is quite fast. But over the course of the performance Fraser also enhances the volume of her gestures, they start to support her words more without being too exaggerated, they are theatrical but not over-performed like for example her arm movement and body language by casually lounging on the lectern. The speech builds up to a moment when Fraser takes off her little black Gucci dress, applauded by some audience member. But right before taking it off she says 'She is our fantasy and she lives our fantasies for us' to then refer to herself as an object/artwork instead of a person. After a moment of 'emptiness' Fraser in her underwear, switches back to a very masculine tone while referring to a female artist. With a deep voice, while standing naked behind the lectern she states 'The level is pretty low here' and then moves forward to say 'It takes a lot of courage to do what she does' with her naked body being fully visible to the audience. There are several occasions such as this, in which the quotes Fraser uses could be understood as self-referential to her practice, such as 'some see her success as a sacrifice of her body' while she stands completely naked in front of everyone. She then casually puts her dress back on and finishes the speech with a reference to her mother who she also addresses at the very beginning, coming all the way from California. Fraser breaks out in tears and then fully composed, leaves the stage and thanking her audience again. The entire dramaturgy of the speech is determined by Fraser's different rhythms when speaking, her intonations and her gestures. While her work is 'fun' to watch there is a great degree of discomfort caused by the different sensations that she embodies and enacts.

Over-identification and empathy

George Baker, in his essay 'Fraser's Form' (2003), describes her work in the following way

The realm of over-identification and empathy has always been Fraser's domain ... it effectively opens onto the uncomfortable but potentially redemptive position required by the 'grotesque' forms of Fraser's art (p.72).

This is crucial for my investigation of over-identification from a feminist perspective. Baker here stresses Fraser's focus on empathy in the deployment of this strategy. It signals that Fraser's work despite often considered to be provocative, equally relies on the creation of empathy between her and her audience as well as her and her subjects of investigation. In a 2007 symposium (Chan, 2011), at CalArts Valencia, California, Fraser was a panel speaker next to Mary Kelly and Catherine Lord. Fraser in her presentation tearfully described her feminist upbringing in relation to her mother, who was also an artist. It was in strong contrast with Kelly's presentation before, which was a very academic and un-emotional talk. Kelly refers to Fraser talk afterwards as the *simulation of affect*.

I saw Andrea Fraser live when she gave a talk called 'Performance or Enactment', at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in 2010. I had difficulty telling when she was speaking sincerely and when she was performing. This weird feeling of discomfort with excitement has stayed with me; I was unsure which parts of what she said were her "authentic" self or when she was *simulating* affect. Given my own encounter with Fraser and watching *Official Welcome* (2003), this 'accusation' of Kelly's might be true, Fraser was just simulating and not *really* crying. But if it was real tears or not, I do not consider the important question for this research. To me, the more interesting question is why it might be considered a simulation in first place. Was it a mere means for Fraser to generate empathy for her from her audience? Or was she really emotionally affected by what she was sharing as it sounded like a very personal story? And what did this potential simulation do to her audience?

In the following analysis, I focus on my speech in relation to Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2003), parts of her work *Inaugural Speech* (1997) and *Kunst muss hängen! (Art Must Hang)* (2001). Unfortunately I have had no opportunity to yet see the latter work myself, hence I can only refer to it from descriptions in the 2003 catalogue of Fraser's solo show (Institution Hamburger Kunstverein, 2003) as well as Fraser's own presentation of it at her 2006 International Artist Lecture for The Power Plant (2012). I highlight how each section of my speech carried a form of contradiction in it by explaining what exactly it referred to.

The Speech(es)

Section 1: Lack of Introduction

Like Fraser in *Inaugural Speech*, I start my speech by speaking on behalf of the organising team, which includes other students. This act gave me credibility and agency in the moment of starting. I had a right to be there, to speak on behalf of others, and to hold the official opening speech at my home institution. I gave myself authorisation through the circumstances. This authorisation allowed a space of affinity between me and the audience, which was crucial for the type of affect I intended to cause – not only something for the audience to enjoy but also something they could not easily consume or place within their own categories of recognition; for example, me being a student, a performance artist, an exhibition organiser, a feminist, a critic of the institution, and so on.

At the research show, the lack of introduction of the speech as a performance potentially contributed to the audience's progressive inability to categorise what they were seeing but it still allowed a space of affinity, based on my act of self-authorisation. It might be possible for self-authorisation to be enacted just through the act, rather than through the speech that introduces this authorisation; but my live performance *Merci Liberte!* at Speaker's Corner, where I "just showed up" and spoke in a language the majority of the audience could not understand, showed this was not the case. It takes more than "just showing up" to create a space of affinity and to be recognised as a legitimate actor rather than as someone enacting a parody. Without this legitimacy, the audience is more likely to dismiss my act of self-authorisation, and therefore the performance itself. If I do not let the audience "into" the performance in the first place, I prevent the building of trust between us, which consequentially cannot later be broken. Fraser emphasizes (The Power Plant, 2012) that she thinks of her work to be more specific to situations rather than sites or locations. She explains that what she refers to as situational specificity has more to do with the positions that we occupy and the roles that we play in this situation which is also what her work so excessively interrogates.

In my *Research Show Opening Speech*, although I did not introduce the speech as a performance, I constantly referred to the concept of performance in slippery way during the speech (see sections 3, 4, 5). By referring to it in different contexts, such as economics, academia, and art, I brought up the term constantly *during* the speech without assigning it to the *act* of my speech, potentially frustrating those who were trying to place it as such. Equally, in Fraser's *Inaugural Speech* (1997) the co-director used the term 'contribution' rather than 'performance' in his introduction to Fraser's speech, which offered a framing for her performance. Hence, the audience must have been aware of the fictional aspect of Fraser's

speech. This, together with the fact that Fraser was already a known artist, which could have limited the discomfort she caused in her audience.

When I saw Fraser live in 2010, I was equally aware of her status as a performance artist, but her mixing of different voices and my own inability to detect when she spoke “authentically” caused a sense of frustration and anxiety in me. At the same time, I was compelled by the control she seemed to have within this very act. These (controlled) moments of slippage are crucial to my intentions – creating doubt about what is perceived to be authentic and what is not. In the case of my speech, very few were aware of my practice as a performance artist, even though I gave a hint by pointing out my research interest in the beginning. In *Official Welcome* (2003), Fraser turned this relationship of her being known as a performance artist around, by showing off her performance skills in the juxtaposition of distinct voices in one single act. Here, she overtly performed the role of the performer, like Martin Kippenberger, an artist Fraser also refers and relates to. He, in the speech that Fraser appropriated from him in her work *Kunst muss hängen (Art Must Hang)* (2001), overtly performed the “chauvinist” male artist.

Interpassivity, dignity and morality

In my performance speech for the show, by not framing it as a performance, I removed the layer of fictionality inherent to the notion of performance. By doing so, I did not allow the audience to keep their dignity by acknowledging the “fooled” naïve observer through laughter. The lack of fictionality does not allow a transfer of enjoyment to open up a state of interpassivity, the delegation is foreclosed.

In the video documentation of *Official Welcome* (2003), we hear audience members laughing and giggling at several points when Fraser distinguishably performs the different quotes. I read this laughter as an act of acknowledging the fictional observer of the performance, who was not aware that Fraser was performing. The laughing at the fictional observer in Fraser’s performance of *Official Welcome* (2003) might be understood as an act of preserving the dignity of both the audience and Fraser through delegating the anxiety, evoked by her extreme performance of different voices, to the fictional observer. Fraser’s ability to perform the distinct voices without great transitions or introductions was crucial for creating a sense of discomfort.

Fraser’s dignity is preserved during the staging by acknowledging her as a performance artist in this situation, and the inherent fictionality of that role. This could particularly be the case in the moment where Fraser took her clothes off and says: ‘Why don’t you kiss my fucking ass?’

and pointed her ass towards the audience. After showing her ass to the audience, Fraser then turned around, raised her arms, and said 'I love you all', which generated more giggling.



Figure 34. *Official Welcome* (2003) turn [Screenshot 03/05/2021], source: [Fraser \(2003, ubu.com\)](#)

Fraser potentially undoes her own dignity in her next sentence, 'I am not trying to be funny you know', reminding the audience that this is not an act of comedy. This reminds me of the situation in the lift after my *PSi#24* panel presentation in Daegu in which I deny the ironic character of my panel talk. Fraser's denial of her act being comedic in *Official Welcome* (2003) did not allow the audience a moment to relieve themselves from the doubt if it was comedic.

This raises the question, also with regards to the work of Amalia Ulman, if this should be considered an immoral act because I did not announce my speech as a performance? Was it immoral to not allow the audience to adapt their own perception and behaviour to it? From reactions by some audience members afterwards, I sensed a form of outrage that was caused by this lack of introduction as a performance.

My speech took place with an exhibition framework, even though a research exhibition might be read differently than a *normal* fine art exhibition, it still was an *exhibition*. This framework, compared to my previous work was different to the conference presentations. For this speech, the audience was already in a space, the Triangle space, a dedicated exhibition space, that could have allowed the reading of it as a performance. But it was also my intention to actively

play with this possible reading so I left it to the audience to decide how to read me and my speech in this given framework, in this specific situation. Similar to Ulman, in both cases it was a play with the audience's reading of the performer in a specific context and situation.

In Schlingensiefel's *Please Love Austria!* (2000), part of the public's outrage stemmed from the fact that it was *art* and clearly framed as such by the *Wiener Festwochen*. One extremely enraged woman states 'Wos? Des is Kunst? Des I mi aufreg?' in a very Viennese accent, which translates as 'What, this is art? That I get outraged?' (Poet, 2002). Bishop (2011) and Schmidt (2010) both point out, the efficacy of Schlingensiefel's work is that the *simulation of reality* caused more agitation than the real asylum seeker homes outside of the Viennese city centre.

Section 2: Research Must Hang!

In this second part of the speech, I directly refer to Fraser's work *Kunst muss hängen!* (*Art Must Hang*) (2001) without actually naming her; instead, I attribute the quote to Martin Kippenberger. Neglecting Fraser as the author of her work and emphasising the man who inspired her, could have frustrated those who recognised Fraser's authorship and the resulting neglect of female authorship. In *Kunst muss hängen!* (*Art Must Hang*) (2001), Fraser was appropriating the speech of a masculinist opposite (as in the role of Kippenberger) in an act of female self-authorisation (Kempkes, 2003). In the *Research Show Opening Speech*, this happens progressively in sections 2–7; for example, by referring to George Maciunas, Martin Kippenberger, David Cameron, and the Pro-Vice Chancellor. My adaptation of Fraser's title into 'Research must hang' actually references Kippenberger in a double sense; he admired the practices of American artists in particular, such as Fraser, in their focus on 'explanation, research, presentation' (Kempkes, 2003, p.17).

Kippenberger's collapse

Fraser (in *The Power Plant*, 2012) depicts the moment when she saw Martin Kippenberger live giving the 1995 dinner speech she appropriated in *Kunst Muss Hängen!*. Even though she could not understand a word because it was all in German, she was impressed by how he immersed himself into the ritual in which the speech was embedded as well as the role the audience assigned to him. She understood that what he was doing was a collapse of embodiment and performance. This was heightened by the fact it was not a planned speech but an in-promptu one. She writes about Kippenberger:

For me, this self-objectification is the most profound aspect of Kippenberger's work. I would never describe him as ironic. I think of the grotesque as what's beyond irony.

It's what happens when you eliminate ironic distance by collapsing, for example, the performance and embodiment. Nor would I ever describe Kippenberger as cynical. There was obviously an enormous amount at stake for him, perhaps more than he could bear (Fraser, 2003).

In relation to Fraser's admiration of Kippenberger, this implies (as I suggest) she potentially considered him a free and emancipated subject – not *despite* but *because* he overtly performed the role the audience assigned to him; he fully submitted to their expectations of being a self-indulgent, chauvinist, and self-destructive (drunk) artist, it was an act of volunteer self-subordination. Kippenberger was known for his excessive lifestyle, particularly in relation to the consumption of alcohol. He died at the age of 44 from liver cancer. But in his speech, Kippenberger resists his 'assigned' role of the rebelling artist by not resisting but fully immersing himself in it: he overtly over-identifies with the notion that others have of himself. Rather than a 'bad' artist turning into a better artist who wants to appeal, he made himself 'the worst' in the public's perception and through that reached a state of autonomy. Fraser was a lot more involved with Kippenberger than her speech suggests.



Figure 35. *Kunst muss hängen* (2001), source: [Fraser \(2001\)](#)

She writes:

I was probably introduced to Martin at my first one-woman gallery show, which was at Galerie Christian Nagel in Cologne in 1990. He bought a copy of one of my museum-tour videos and a group of aluminum smiley and frowny faces I made to be installed next to other artworks. One of the interesting things about Kippenberger is how supportive he was of women artists, even though he performed, in a perfectly excessive way, the role of the macho German painter. Such support really challenged that '80s opposition between painting, particularly German painting, and the postmodernist, neo-Conceptualist feminist positions that I identified with. Unfortunately, at the time I was too informed by that opposition to get past the drunken macho persona (2003).

So while Kippenberger somehow embodied a lot what Fraser rejected, he was simultaneously in full awareness of this position and knew how to use it and appreciated practices which challenged it. Fraser (in *The Power Plant*, 2012) also states that being a conceptual artist she was less invested in the actual execution of her wall pieces. When hanging the wall pieces in his Berlin club, Kippenberger found they kept falling off the wall and this led to the line he wrote to her; *Kunst muss hängen!* (Art Must Hang).

Section 3: Flow and Flux

Here, I reveal my research focus on performance to the audience and those unfamiliar with my work. It is the first of frequent uses of the term 'performance' in a slippery way throughout the speech. In this section, the art-historical context offers its definition. Following Kippenberger (Section 2), Maciunas is the next male artist I explicitly refer to, while neglecting any female artists who were part of Fluxus. This potentially caused more frustration among audience members who already recognized my previous neglect of female voices.

Section 4: Performance Measurement

I point out my attachment to my institution, giving my own position further credibility within the situation of the speech – but also starting to reveal a form of micro-passive aggression. Then, I switch to another use of the word 'performance' within the context of the art institution, pointing out its role as an economic rather than artistic entity. The performance indicators represent metric measurement tools, like social media follower numbers for academics, research outputs, or student numbers.

Section 5: Purge the World from Europeanism

Next to another use of the term 'performance', in the context of dealing with challenges, this section acts as a double negation. On the one hand, I advocate the rejection of European concepts (or, as Maciunas called it, 'EUROPANISM'), denouncing the artist as a professional; on the other, I negate this by advocating openness to other cultures, without defining which ones. The notion of the artist as a professional over the course of time increasingly has become a very Anglican notion as Harvie (2013) points out in relation to the artpreneur. Purging the English Art University from Europeanism in this case then would mean purging it from a key characteristic of its own current identity. Within this chapter, I juxtapose this section with a speech by Nigel Farage (former leader of the UK Independence Party) that took place just two weeks after the referendum in July 2016. Farage resigned as the head of UKIP just a week after stating that, now he had done his bit, he wanted his life back (BBC).

Kempkes writes that, in *Kunst muss hängen! (Art Must Hang) (2001)*, Fraser:

distanced Kippenberger's original speech with a double movement of alienation. On the one hand, physically impersonating his male pattern, she produced a delicate re-enactment of his sweeping bodily gestures; on the other, the language shift that took place gave rise to a completely grotesque acoustic phenomenon (2003, p.17).

I think something similar applies to my speech performance. In my speech, my 'European' accent (it often seems difficult for British people to locate my accent, other than European) had a similar function to Fraser's American accent in *Kunst muss hängen!*; it became an alienating and signifying factor regarding the dissonance caused by my words and status as a European. Schlingensief's German accent during the container project in Vienna triggered xenophobic statements in the audience. As a European living in the UK, my accent reveals to others that I am not 'from here', but at the same time it signifies that I am European, and despite the difficulty of locating it exactly, it can be read as central instead of than Eastern or South European. So rather than *just* European, it is an accent that can be associated with a feminine aesthetic which is signified by bloneness, like those images that were used in Nazi Propaganda in *Mode & Heim* (Lau, 2019). And this bloneness compared to Eastern or also Southern European accents, can be also read with a notion of privilege as opposed to deprivation as it is often the case for English speakers with an Eastern European accent, because of the economic status of the different regions in Europe. This nuance complicates

the reading of my position further. I was considered foreign but potentially not economically, and to some degree, ethnically, inferior.

Section 6: New Histories

In this section, I quoted my university's marketing messages published in spring 2017. A strategy branded as "New Histories" threatened my own research degree, due to cuts to staff and space for the fine art programme, so using this institutional white male voice became more than a critique of the institution and its representatives; it was an act of self-defence, potentially recognised by those in the room who were aware of these cuts.

Those who recognised the voices I was using may have sensed a feeling of alienation. This feeling could have been evoked when a student used the words of the Pro-Vice Chancellor and welcomed this 'new' strategy. Although this form of critique was only recognisable to a fraction of the audience, the call for artists to adapt to market demands potentially resonated with many others in the room.

Section 7: Big Society

In this section I referred to (without mentioning his name) now-former Prime Minister David Cameron, and the 'big society' strategy he implemented when he first got into power in 2010. Within this "big society" political agenda, the British government advocated a further shift of state responsibilities towards individuals. By appropriating his words and political vision, I over-identified with a form of institutionalised political power; a power that, while living as an EU citizen in the UK, I did not (and still do not) have outside the act of over-identification. It was under David Cameron that an EU 'leave' vote was made possible, in which, despite being a European resident in the UK (and thus directly affected by this referendum), I was not allowed to participate.

In the final part of this section, in the speech I state: 'We have to adapt our expectations, especially those of us who are expecting.' Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked* (1993) writes in her discussion of the tactics of pro-Life activists 'that the visibility of pregnancy is never absolute, and precisely because of this non-absolute visibility, almost all women are seen as potential mothers.' (p.145). This notion, next to Sheryl Sandberg and my TAP talk series, influenced my choice of dress for the evening of the speech; I wore a smart, blue, non-fitted dress with trainers, which could have easily hidden a small baby bump.

Section 8: A New Day is On the Horizon

The final section of the speech potentially offered a point of reconciliation for the audience, in contrast to my previous use of voices that seemed incompatible with my own subjectivity. In a sequence of 'unhappy' moments there was a necessity to end with a happy one. I was gradually killing the audience's joy in the previous sections (2–7), where I was identifying with the most powerful subject within a symbolic order (from an economic, artistic, academic, and political point of view): 'the white male' and the institution, which were not necessarily the same but institutions still happen to be represented by (white) men, but this landscape is also shifting. By quoting Oprah Winfrey, in her act of solidarity with the victims of #MeToo, I aligned myself with her act of solidarization with weaker (from a structural point of view) subjects, it was a *happy* feminist moment. I could tell from the audience's reactions that this offered a point of relief for many who recognised Oprah's speech from the Golden Globes which was broadcast just a few days before. This included a particular part of the audience who had been frustrated by my focus on male artists and the denial of female authorship. There was a moment of joy. At this point of the speech, the expectation of solidarity with the potentially structurally weaker – in this case, victims from the #MeToo movement, by appropriating Oprah's voice – was finally met.

The previous dissonance I caused by using different voices, in connection with my appearance as a potentially pregnant 'European' female artist/PhD student in an age of Brexit, was now brought back to a place of potential harmony for the frustrated observer. Although as my following discussion shows this was not entirely the case as the row of contradictions and conflicts within the speech and its presentation did not fully re-harmonise the situation.

Voice, Rhythm & Gesture

The following analysis focuses on how voice, rhythm and gesture functioned according to my intentions and in Fraser's work. One of my colleagues, the brilliant Rosie Ram who was present at my speech, pointed out, the consistent delivery of my speech and its sense of sincerity (rather than distinction) contributed to an ongoing dissonant disruption in the audience.

Voice & Gesture:

A great difference between *Official Welcome* (2003) and my speech at the research show opening was the delivery. In *Official Welcome* (2003), each voice was clearly identifiable through change of gesture and tone, which demarcated the different voices that Fraser

appropriated in this work. My colleague Rosie Ram, in her feedback on my speech, wrote the following (emphasis my own):

I particularly liked the way that the performance was playful and almost gentle in the way it was delivered. The build-up of realisation in the audience is gradual, rather than abrupt. You smile throughout and use gesture in a gracious and engaging way. It is very much like watching someone who has been carefully trained in public speaking, such as a *politician or very senior academic*. There is a humour and a playfulness that is unnerving but not directly confrontational or combative. This “nice” tone then contrasts with the increasing discomfort in some audience members as they become confused by the authenticity or purpose of the speech and how they should read the work. The fact that you do not use notes increases the intrigue in what the performance is and what your position is, as does the title “speech” rather than “presentation”. It made me think back to Claire Bishop’s call for participatory art that is antagonistic. The growing awareness that what you are listening to is not a single voice, but some kind of audio collage is also disorienting yet effective (Email, 18 January 2018).

Like Fraser in *Official Welcome and Inaugural Speech*, I learned the speech by heart; but in contrast to Fraser, I did not speak from a lectern but from within the exhibition space and was on the same level as the audience physically. *Official Welcome* and Yvonne Rainer’s *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985) share the aesthetic and ritual of speaking from a lectern as an act of self-validation (Kempkes, 2003, p.16). I felt this aspect of levelling, instead of self-validation through elevation, was crucial to the blurring of my intentions in this performance. Learning the text by heart, and ‘its gentle delivery’ (as my colleague pointed out), seemed to add to a feeling of authenticity and sincerity.

In my speech I used the strategy paper and marketing messages of my own institution while performing within it, in front of and among its staff and students. I aligned myself with them but, because of the interweaving with the other voices, this alignment was unstable and disrupted – or, as my colleague writes, ‘disorientating’. In my speech, I was addressing the live audience directly and I aligned with them; as such, my alignment was also flawed, but for a different reason.

Displacement & the Grotesque

Fraser’s understanding of humour works through displacement (The Power Plant, 2012); where something is not referred to directly but displaced by for example referring to another

thing via the force of the sub-conscious. In *Official Welcome* (2003) she located such a moment when she is fully naked, showing her female body and then performed this extremely masculine voice, where embodiment and gesture do not match and become displaced in this situation; another moment of collapse of distance, making it grotesque. It is here where I think it is really important to distinguish Fraser's work from the notion of carnevalesque which potentially could be used interchangeable with the grotesque. Jo Isaak in her discussion of the notion of the carnevalesque writes that it is traditionally exemplified by Rabelais' theory of 'laughter as misrule, a laughter, with the potentially to disrupt authority of church and state.' (1996, p.15). This she states probably influenced Kristeva's notion of laughter as libidinal license. Isaak quotes Kristeva by stating the 'Carnevalesque structure is like the residue of a cosmogony that ignored substance, causality, or identity...' (1996, p.39). Here the carnevalesque, next to being temporary, is defined by the ignorance of one's identity and aimed at reversal of hierarchy. In over-identification and the practices of Fraser and Kippenberger, the grotesque emerges as exactly the opposite, where their own position, is not ignored but embraced, the position of the artist; Kippenberger as the chauvinist masculine artist and Fraser, the woman artist who uses her body. And the result is not a reversal of hierarchies but a confusion of it, which is where I locate the subversive potential of the works, as it confuses the positions of everyone involved.

My colleague Ram, further points out that I enhanced the confusion and reduced the confrontationality of the speech even further because I smile throughout and 'use gesture in a gracious and engaging way'(2018). My voice, marked by a 'nice' tone and gentle gesture made it appear benign but not ironic. They match the audience's reading of my (blonde) body, hence the confusion of the voices which do not match this reading, increased.

In *Kunst muss Hangen!*, by Fraser embodying the masculine gestures with a delicacy, which I also observe in *Official Welcome*, a similar sensation causing dissonance was evoked. In *Official Welcome* (2003) this dissonance to me, was intensified by the sequence of the distinction between the voices; it was not one masculine gesture she mimicked, it was several and they became distinguishable and nuanced. In both our works the intensity emerged out of the entirety of the voices, as Fraser states in her 2006 lecture, you cannot show *Official Welcome* (2003) in excerpts.

Given this example, the readers of my voices – UAL students and staff – were both present and potentially able to recognise the two stakeholder interests that, through my speech, became embodied into one (although, as I argue throughout, more than two voices were present in my speech, for the sake of my argument I will focus on these two specifically). Hence, this disruption was only made possible through my embodiment, or, within the context

of this research, through the practice of performance. There would have been no disruption without the actual utterance in the speech that gave it a voice – and was one single act by one single body.

Rhythm:

Zoë Lescaze in a 2019 piece for *The New York Times* titled ‘Have We Finally Caught Up With Andrea Fraser?’, knowing Fraser’s works such as *Official Welcome* (2003) and her capacity to mimic those different voices, shows a certain level of stress when interviewing Fraser. She writes:

Listening to Fraser speak in the measured timbre of a veteran academic, as she often does, is a bit like listening to an opera singer softly hum a tune — it can be suspenseful, knowing just how much power she is capable of unleashing, how much voltage is being kept under control.

She expects Fraser to suddenly change tone in an unpredictable manner. Fraser (in *The Power Plant*, 2012) in a Q&A after she showed *Official Welcome* (2003) acknowledges herself, that the moment she gets on a stage people get anxious that she starts performing, even during a Q&A. The fact that Fraser acknowledged this anxiety seems to give even more capacity to it by raising the expectation for it. Next to her voice and gesture, as previously stated, for me, it was the different rhythms that Fraser mimicked and embodied, that made it unnerving to watch. Gibbs (2010) in her exploration of mimicry and affect writes:

The complexity of the relationship between affect and cognition that characterizes the human, and the dependence of cognition on affect and the senses, comes more clearly to the fore when we start to think about the way language – in the very process of making meaning – is implicated with rhythm and movement (Gibbs, 2010, p.198).

She further writes in reference to Colwyn Trevarthen, that ‘pulse or rhythm and affective sympathy are the two main components of attunement between mother and infant. Rhythm (or “pulse”), like affect, *organizes*’. Gibbs applies his notions to speech and writing, which may also ‘be entrained by rhythm’. With regards to *Official Welcome* (2003) and its constant changing rhythm, when considered as its organizing principle, it creates the tension that Fraser develops in the work. My speech, works through the opposite effect. The rhythm is steady but not monotone, like my colleague Ram pointed out. It becomes disorientating because the distinct voices in it, become organised as one voice by the rhythm. The weaving of the positions is unbound by its rhythm.

Mimetic Communication

Gibbs explains her understanding of 'Mimetic Communication' when she writes:

By "mimetic communication" or mimesis, I mean, in the first instance, the corporeally based forms of imitation, both voluntary and involuntary (and on which literary representation ultimately depends). At their most primitive, these involve the visceral level of affect contagion, the "synchrony of facial expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements with those of another person", producing the tendency for those involved "to converge emotionally" (Gibbs, 2010, p.186).

When applying this understanding to Fraser's work, here the emotional involuntary roller-coaster if one was to follow her mimetically on a visceral level was too much to take on and makes it part of the reason why this work created so much discomfort. In my speech, the fact that my facial expression, gesture and tone, lacked the irony that some audience members would expect to make it readable as a performance, frustrated this process of mimicry.

'Resistance is what breaks the rhythm' – a changing rhythm of power

Comay (2015) in her discussion of resistance, refers to it as the *interruption of rhythm* (p.245). Between mine and Fraser's work are 15 years, a time frame in which the rhythm, *the language of power* has substantially changed in the art world and beyond. In the Western context, representatives of major galleries and art institutions have adopted female voices next to female representation. And as I was trying to point out in the *Feminization of the Right*, this change of rhythm is also reflected in the rhetoric of right wing parties, as well as big corporations as exemplified by Sheryl Sandberg and Ivanka Trump. While these two examples are specific to the US context, a similar shift of rhythm can be observed in Europe, including the UK. The confrontational macho and masculine speech as Fraser embodied it in several of her voices and positions in *Official Welcome* (2003), has transformed. This transformation is not only performed by women becoming the new representatives but also by male leaders and institutional representatives who are aware that they equally need to adapt their public persona in response to these shifts.⁷ They have taken on feminine characteristics in their way of speaking to reflect a progressive position. Barack Obama's way of speaking can be considered exemplary by being extremely gentle and poised.⁸ And this shift of tone and rhythm is reflected in the difference between those two works, mine and Fraser's. They both mimic

⁷ This was pointed out to me by my colleague Harun Morrison..

⁸ This as well.

the dominant language of power at the time in the context in which they were appearing. This is also reflected in the feedback of my colleague Ram (2018), when she states 'It is very much like watching someone who has been carefully trained in public speaking, such as a politician or very senior academic.' Similar to Lescaze when she met Fraser, my colleague recognised a rhythm of power which is amicable, benign and not confrontational, and both masculine and feminine.

Agonistic Feminism & the Importance of Ambivalence

The loss of ambivalence

Fraser stopped performing during most of the 1990s and started to work as an almost 'corporate consultant' for art institutions such as the Austrian Generali Foundation (in *The Power Plant*, 2012). For her it reached a point where her practice became functionalised similar to the role of a star-curator. She was acting more as an employee for this company and felt limited in what she was able to do as an artist. She removed herself gradually from *her work*. The role that she occupied as a critical institutional consultant sat uncomfortably with her as the museum landscape in the US was shifting more and more towards corporatisation with a focus onto art practices that as she says 'were servicing the public' (in *The Power Plant*, 2012). By shifting to programs that put the focus community development this offered a possibility to make the museums quantifiable, which she does not reject in itself. But she was uncomfortable with the predetermination of artists and their roles within these developments as set out by institutions and public funding bodies. Like in her role for the foundation there seemed to be a loss of freedom and play in the practice that was at stake or as Fraser puts it, the ambivalence of relationships between artists and the structures in which they work, had been removed. She considered this critical as this ambivalence is crucial to the efficacy of Avant Garde practices.

As I understand it within the framework of my research, the development that Fraser describes was obscuring the conflictual positions between artists, institutions and capital. By museums becoming more quantifiable and artists being pushed into roles that made them contributors to quantifiability, they as Fraser points out, lost their autonomy and through that the ability to be critical agitators within the institutional frameworks. They got smoothly integrated into a process of accumulation and absorbed by capital, which is similar to the points Boltanski and Chiapello (2006) made. Artists through their predetermined roles harmonised the relationship between art and capital by obscuring the conflict of interest between autonomy and functionality. This observation by Fraser, I consider in line with what Jen Harvie was observing

in the UK as laid out in her book *Fair Play* (2013). It was in the backdrop of these developments Fraser changed her practice again and started her new series of work which I focus on this chapter. She started to think again what is the role of the artist, which led her back to Kippenberger, and his sense of self and being an artist and the way he played with it.

The obscuring of conflict

Fraser's reflection of this time period to me evokes a key connection to the core function of over-identification; the undermining and reversing of the capital master-narrative where criticality is simulated in the name of capital as pointed out by BAVO (2007). It might be that Fraser also felt, next to the loss of autonomy, that she was contributing to a simulation of criticality; an artistic decoy for an insurance company to 'décor' its business with criticality. She was no longer addressing the conflicts between her role and the institution, being both for and against it, but was merely working *for* it, hence the potential for performing an agonising position was replaced by a harmonising one in her 'star-curator' role. Although this interpretation is too short sighted and dismissive of the work she made for the Generali Foundation, the felt loss of autonomy led her (back) to probing artist autonomy and to making *Official Welcome*.

Fraser – the agonist ?

Fraser's ability to take on these differentiating perspectives in *Official Welcome* (and other works) which are not hers and displaying them in her practice, the active acting out of them, for me allows the reading of it through agonistic feminism. Lescaze writes about Fraser:

Fraser can, and is willing to, probe "difficult, complex issues" by fully assuming diverse, and sometimes repellent, voices and positions. "I can't think of anyone else who does that," she said. By inhabiting the figures and roles Fraser saw as legitimate, she also discovered a means of negotiating her own fraught participation in the systems they represent. "It was an artistic strategy, but it was also a life strategy," Fraser said (2019).

Like Fraser states, by fully committing to her own fraught position within the system she was able to negotiate and play, making it both an artistic and life strategy; she was for and against it at the same time by being complicit and a critic, without this resulting in a simulation of criticality. There are no points of reconciliation but not because there is no confrontation in her work. She used those positions where the confrontation is reconciled by others, for example, her being referred to as *the fantasy*, in her work. Fraser actively sustained the conflicts that arose from her work in her work, emanating from her female body when entering the space of performance.

The body and the *agon*

In Arendt's original account of the *agon*, the space of politics, those who were merely concerned with their bodily existence and its sustaining, in Arendt's view, were not able to act politically (Honig, 1995, p. 142) and therefore enter the *agon*. In the Greek *agon* this meant that women and slaves were excluded, leading to Arendt's distinction between 'the univocal body and the multiple self'. This original account of Arendt, which Honig reframed through the feminist lens, did not allow political action to emerge out of the struggle to sustain the own bodily existence in the context of a decreasing state support structure. This separation of bodies between those who are able to act politically and those who cannot, because they are 'just bodies' rather than citizens, is another reflection of a symbolic order where the feminine is considered as inferior due to the focus on the body. A similar duality is present in the reception of Fraser's work and the contemporary art context in general. Lescaze writes :

Women had long used their bodies to critique social relations and hierarchies, but the fact that so much of Fraser's work had existed within an intellectual framework, steeped in discourse and terminology, meant that no one really knew how to contextualize her more explicit use of her sexuality. By 2003, critics and audiences alike had essentially decided that women artists could use their bodies, or they could use their brains. Fraser never felt that she had to choose between the two (2019).

This historic framework of post-war feminist performance practices in which the use of the body was so excessive, probably fell outside of a framework for political action in Arendt's account, furthering her dis-identification with the feminist movement of her time. In the context of post-Fordism as politics and performance art, the political struggle to a great degree does concern the female body; a female body that is exploited in its affective labour production that is both cognitive and emotional and is the main subject of my critique. Therefore the female body which enters the space of performance, in my account, is already framed by politics rather than free from it.

***Untitled* (2003): Fraser – the body**

Fraser in *Official Welcome* (2003) uses the following quotes when she is naked; 'some see her success as a sacrifice of her body' and 'It takes a lot of courage to do what she does'. By using these quotes while standing naked in front of her audience, she disarmed everyone in it by using the words that they would potentially use to describe her and her work. Previous

practices of institutional critique by artists such as Marcel Broodthaers, lacked the presence of their own body (Lescaze, 2019). Institutional critique from the 1970s and onwards was very focused on an aesthetic that foregrounded the intellectual separate from the body. This again, reflects a symbolic order where the body is a female domain and considered lesser than the mind as a male domain, organising the relationships between them. Here Ulman's beauty clinic gown as opposed to my academic gown comes to mind again.

Fraser who so extensively uses her female body, by also accentuating its femininity in several other works, made her quotes disarming in their self-referentiality, taking away both her audiences and critics capacity to resist, while preserving her own capacity. This was also because these descriptions, by indicating the transgressions that her work contained, signified the symbolic order that she disrupted. This is particular relevant in the context of her 2003 exhibition because *Untitled* (2001) was part of it and still sticks with Fraser as her defining work (2019, Lescaze), even though she regrets how it became prone to simplified interpretation. Isabelle Graw wrote about Fraser's 2003 retrospective for *Art Forum* (2003):

On returning home to Berlin from Hamburg, where I had seen Andrea Fraser's midcareer retrospective, I was besieged with questions about the artist's new "sex work," a videotaped performance for which she was "commissioned" to have sex with a collector. "Did you like it?" I was repeatedly asked, and I found, even to my own surprise, that I had to answer yes, I liked it very much.

Graw here indicates her attitude towards *Untitled* (2001) which is referred to here as the *sex work*. She shows her sensitivity towards the usage of a female body in the work. By *liking it* rather than being provoked by it, she displays an understanding of Fraser's more nuanced intention of discussing the exploitative nature of the art world and her exploration of autonomy in the piece. Fraser's work highlights how the art world functions through the *simulation of empathetic relationships* between artists and collectors, gallerists etc. based on the production of emotional labour. The journalist Guy Trebay, who interviewed Fraser for *The New York Times* in 2004, when *Untitled* was shown in a New York Gallery reacts differently to it. He writes:

"This is one of the most complicated pieces I've ever done," Fraser confessed to me, laying out her considerable fears for the anonymous collector – that his reputation might be damaged, his feelings hurt, his identity exposed. If Fraser's emotional engagement tends to compromise a project based on satire and debunking, it also calls up another, older sort of story – that of the hooker with the heart of gold (2004).

Trebay here dismisses Fraser's work, by considering her as a 'hooker' and equating it directly with prostitution. This sort of blunt reading and the ignorance of its layers does reveal Trebay's mere focus on her body and the way she uses it, as a non-intellectual gesture.

Resisting the logic of escalation

Through this strategy of critical self-referentiality, Fraser unlike Schlingensiefel in *Please Love Austria!* (2001), pre-empted the possibility of escalation. She turns the narrative around by re-using those affirmative statements towards her work which contain a hidden moral judgement. Caygill (2013) emphasizes this kind of strategic thinking hidden in Clausewitz's *On War*. He writes:

Resistance seems wholly implicated in the logic of escalation – attacking the enemy's capacity to resist at the same time as preserving one's own against the attack of the enemy – but there is also the hint of a deeper resistance, that is, a resistance to the logic of escalation itself (Caygill, 2013, p.59).

Fraser, and previously Kippenberger, applied a strategy in which they pre-empted the possibility of escalation as well as attack, which then can be considered a form of resistance as Caygill frames it. For my speech a similar effect is at work when using the university's own language as well as citing Oprah. From a feminist point of view, the constant negation of the feminist position that happens in the first part, the killing of joy, seems to be resolved by an affirmative statement at the end. But this affirmative gesture is convoluted in itself and did not fully function as the bringer of joy as desired by many in the audience. I explain this in the next section. My position remained unresolved, causing conflict without escalation because of the mixture of gestures in which the naïve observer could not be clearly located by the audience.

In the ambiguity of this framework, the question of how to relate to me, as a performer or student, as stated in the beginning in connection with interpassivity, frustrates the process of delegation. I embody a conflict of positions which many in my audience were unable to resolve because of the lack of irony.

Voice amplification

Coming back to Oprah, the fact that many in the audience recognised her voice in my speech hints towards a specific aspect of social media. #MeToo was started by Tarana Burke, an African American civil rights activist, in 2006; but the hashtag only entered global

recognisability when Hollywood actress Alyssa Milano used it in 2017. By recognising media stars like Oprah preceded by white Hollywood actress Milano, we recognise a voice that is already in a position of leveraged visibility from which platforms like Twitter profit. Rather than re-directing attention, social media tends to amplify existing visibility, which Tarana Burke did not have in 2006.

In my speech I referred to forces that support the spectacle of community while dismantling the support structures within the university and art institution, induced by changing governance and technology. This dismantling can be found in several processes; the reduction of teaching staff, and the shift of communication and art-making activities that previously required a shared physical space into online spaces. Although some of these changes may be accompanied by greater efficiency, the decrease of available space to experiment, represents a particular added barrier to the 'free play' in art making as well as the university as a public good and a place to build communities.

In my speech at the congress, I made myself 'complicit' within these processes when I stressed the importance of adapting to market demands and ceasing to expect structures of support to support us (sections 6-7). For a moment I turned myself into a sexual decoy of my own institution's deconstruction. This was also pointed out to me by my colleague Rosie Ram in her feedback on my performance:

It made me think about the status of women, and the way that male voices dominate through patriarchal structures, even within predominantly female workforces. Women in more junior roles are expected to act as ambassadors, or even mouthpieces, for institutions that are governed largely by men. It made me reflect on the way that men in senior positions might speak through their less well-paid, female colleagues. I have been thinking about your performance as the BBC story has been unfolding about Carrie Gracie, and the way that female colleagues who spoke out in support of her were prevented from commenting on the issue of equal pay on air. When these women stopped using the voice of the institution they were silenced – something that I think your performance addresses very directly (email, January 2018).

While acting as a sexual decoy for market-orientated art education, I was increasing the contradictions throughout the speech. At the beginning, I was dismissing the artist as an entrepreneur and promoting the removal of Europanism as a European. By the end, I revealed myself as a feminist, but as a white feminist appropriating the voice of a women of colour. Even though I was using the voice of Oprah, an incredible powerful woman of colour, this

made this potential moment of reconciliation, where the feminist joy was brought back, flawed in its own construct of power and *herstory* of #MeToo.

Hope

In my *Research Show Opening Speech*, there was no fictionality in the issues I addressed. Speaking as a representative of the college, as well as a practice-based funded PhD student, about the loss of space and university infrastructures altogether, was and still is my sincere concern; it represents a fragment of post-Fordist politics that my PhD is trying to resist. My colleague, Rosie Ram, perceived it in the following way:

I think the way that you use the voice of the institution, or voices of dominance and power more generally, is an effective way to operate politically and critically within the institutional structure. For me, this seemed like a way of acknowledging your position – and all of our positions – within multiple institutional frameworks (from the local framework of UAL to the national framework of neoliberalism/ capitalism). The work seems to nod to the way that these frameworks are inescapable and pervasive – and that we are all compromised – without this seeming like a hopeless or powerless position. For me, it suggested that there is political and critical potential to act within and against the institution simultaneously by repurposing its voice, rhetoric and conventions.

Here my colleague points out that the speech did not appear to be cynical in its criticality. There was ‘hope’ as she states, to resist, to act critically without either falling into a state of resigned paralysis as in *VIVA 2023* or trying to offer alternatives in terms of how it could be done better. It was a *nod* to complicity without making it apologetic, which would have had harmonising effects to the conflict I was addressing.

With regards to the agonistic space, it is possible that members of the audience recognised not one but the multiple conflicting voices I used; an ‘audio collage’, as my colleague Ram called it. It did hold several positions that were not compatible with the reading of my body and the position that I was embodying during the speech, potentially allowing the work to be read within the frameworks of agonistic feminism, where one can perform multiple sites of speech that are conflictual.

Reactions: The Next Day

The next day of the congress (11 January 2018), I could sense that many congress participants and organisers were avoiding me – and if they could not avoid me, they gave me a sceptical, almost pitiful smile. As part of the congress programme, we (the exhibition organisers) did a tour of the research show, where participating students could talk about their work after its opening. Sensing the discomfort and avoidance – particularly by colleagues – I decided to talk about my work as part of the tour. I explained my intentions of critiquing current modes of knowledge production without giving much detail, other than saying that, at the end, I was quoting Oprah Winfrey. One fellow student's immediate reaction was: 'Oh my god I am glad you said that. I was really anxious yesterday that you really meant all of what you said.' I still left it unclear, when asked at later points by other students what parts of this speech were genuine, and did not give details. Even years after the speech, at several events of the founding body as well as at my college, I still get approached by other students and staff who remembered me from that speech. Some still display an inability to place it as a performance or speech. The doubt of *what if* I meant what I said while potentially coming across as nice non-confrontational student, stuck with them.

The Failed Collapse

Fraser in *Official Welcome* (2003) performed a multiplicity of positions that are not entirely foreign to her because she was interrogating which positions are available to her as an artist. So she was over-identifying with being an artist through performing an excess of the multiplicity of positions within this notion, including its most 'appalling' versions. There was conflict between these positions but they were all close to her being an artist.

In my speech, despite the multiplicity of positions and their interweaving, it was not an investigation of the multiple sites emerging out of the position of being a practice-based research student. Despite the gentle presentation of the distinct voices, making them into one, there were still too many separate and too distant angles from my position to create the same kind of interrogation as Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2003). The affect was sticky but there was still some space for it to be resolved where a clear 'we' and 'they' could be established as for example in quoting Oprah and the Pro-Vice Chancellor. Even though the vantage point at the end was unstable, it was not unstable enough. The ironic distance had not entirely collapsed. The intensity with which Oprah's voice was circulating beforehand and becoming a signifier of an affirmative feminist position, was still too powerful compared to the previous negations. And even if it was not over-powering for some, the appropriation of voices did not result in the

same conflict sustaining quality as in Fraser's *Official Welcome* (2003); I was not performing a criticality of my own position. The voices in the end were still too foreign as well as operating through a duality; the freedom of the art school vs. a neoliberal market orientation; the feminist activist vs. the male voice of art history; practice-based research vs. performance-based research measurement. The affect of doubt stuck to me and I created a clear moment of interruption to the equality-image-producing-machine by acting as a (convoluted) decoy for neoliberal institutional restructuring. But there was a lack of self-interrogation and display of vulnerability. Hence the over-identification with my own position as a practice-based research student was not excessive enough and did not collapse in this circumstance.

Artistic Efficacy of 'sustaining conflict'

Bad girls & boys

Anke Kempkes refers to this moment when Fraser turns around in *Official Welcome* (2003) and swears while showing her 'ass' to the audience as the 'bad girl speech act' (2003, p.16). Fraser acting as the *bad girl*, and Schlingensiefel as the *bad boy* aligns their practices in an art world perception, where they actively chose not to allow the placing of their work despite their political and emancipatory intentions. Fraser's work is characterised as provocative (Chan, 2011). Part of this provocation or maybe what is mis-perceived as provocation, is the display of an extreme self-examination and vulnerability, distinguishing Fraser's work from many other artists working in institutional critique. Fraser made herself the site of her art and explored her own fragility in the process, effectively redefining the genre (Lescaze, 2019). Fraser's works are a 'dogged attempt to change audiences and the larger ecosystems they inhabit'. So it is provocative but it does not end there.

In Poet's film (2002) Schlingensiefel's intention to address xenophobia in a non-traditional activist way, comes through in the interviews when he stated that he did not intend to correct but disrupt a machinery of image production. Similar to Fraser, he received the attribute *bad boy* because his works were considered highly provocative. Schlingensiefel when asked the question if his intention was to merely provoke in *Schlingensiefel: A Voice That Shook the Silence* (directed by Bettina Böhler, 2020) was that: he is the son of a pharmacist who healed people with tiny dosages of poison, he considered his art to function in a similar way. This I think, also in retrospect to Hughes' (2006) observation that Schlingensiefel was trying to advance a left-wing aesthetic in a post-socialist era, showed his attempt to bring notions of

identity that were drifting apart, back together in post-Cold War Germany. He addressed what was suppressed in this process and what conflicts were contained in it. In the Vienna of 2000, the rise of xenophobia was met with a mode of dignity preservation by the Viennese rather than admitting to the embarrassment. Schlingensief pointed at the conflict arising from Austrian's wanting to take a critical distance to their fascist past in the face of its re-occurrence in the contemporary.

Ambivalence & conflict as productivity

I would also add that not allowing a direct positive reading of their work, through ambivalence, creates difficulty in reading Fraser's and Schlingensief's productivity. Coming back to Milder's (2011) understanding of productivity in the Performance Lecture; neither do they offer (real) alternatives nor did their words become political acts (even though Schlingensief founded his own party called *Chance 2000*). From Milder's perspective, as stated in the previous chapter, the removal of content in earlier works of Fraser together with the V-Girls (1989) did not generate anything positive, but rather displayed a hostility towards the audience. In *Official Welcome* (2003) Fraser was not hostile to her audience, in fact she acknowledged everyone who came to see her work in her speech. But simultaneously she disrupted the acknowledgement by montaging it with other elements and therefore *contaminating* it with elements of critique. Like in most of her works, nothing is ever one single readable act or gesture. She displayed an empathy that was convoluted, and I think the same applies to my work and audience when performing in front of a close circle rather than an audience such as Catholic Pro-Life activists. Fraser's work was productive in sustaining tension within her own circle, similar to the work of Janez Janša, but hers lacked grounds for reconciliation.

As if

Pfaller in his discussion of interpassivity (2013) claims in relation to Richard Sennett's 1974 *The Fall of Public Man* that the loss of acting *as if* has led to a loss of the critical potential in art. For Pfaller this means in and outside of art, the loss of a fictional space and through that, one's inability to develop a voice that is foreign to one's own. He argues that artists have lost their public personas, in which the private one has to become public, to meet the demand to constantly act as their authentic selves (2013, p.101). Kippenberger, Fraser and Schlingensief, and potentially Ulman provide examples, where at least there is and was always a doubt if their public persona is also the same as their private persona by actively making it the focus of their practice. They could always be acting *as if* they were using a foreign voice, without the audience being able to determine when that is/was which I consider core of their artistic efficacy. Pfaller further states that 'To make an appearance as something foreign

also means, for example, that one can act in a sarcastic or cynical – or even excessive naïve – way and play something evil’ (2013, p.101). Making this play unrecognisable to their audience as play, turns these artists’ deployment of over-identification into a ‘swinish’ venture, as Schlingensief describes his container action in Poet’s film. This swinishness I consider key to my feminist deployment of over-identification. As for Ulman, this could be a strategic part of her public appearances too, but it might be simply an inability to connect with a live audience as opposed to staging photos for Instagram. But again, for me, the doubt matters the most.

Costumes becoming outfits

It here also where the outfit as part of the performance gains more significance. My loosely fitting blue dress together with my leggings and trainers, despite being carefully chosen because of its potential for ambiguity, is also something I wear on a regular base. There is no indicator of it being an ironic outfit to the audience. Fraser for *Official Welcome* (2003) wore a black elegant but not too tight Gucci dress that she could easily take off and put on again without anyone’s help. It didn’t have a zipper or any buttons. There was no tease in the moment she took it off and it did not signify an erotic moment as in a striptease (Graw, 2003). Her heels, which she took off halfway through, were appropriate for the occasion of the opening of her own exhibition. Taking them off, offered a moment of short comic relief because she suddenly disappeared behind the podium, while being almost fully naked. Lescaze (2019) makes a careful remark about Fraser’s wardrobe, who for the interview wore a dark blue jumpsuit. She writes:

Fraser’s occasional bouts of nudity often eclipse her careful choice of costumes, reflecting a savvy that extends to her civilian life — clothes are the only belongings Fraser accumulates other than books. They are props people use to perform themselves, and Fraser’s eye for the subtle ways that they broadcast self-assurance or camouflage fragility helps give her work its bite. In the language of her art, clothes serve as verbs — active and dynamic forces (2019).

The careful choice of costumes in order to not look like a costume, adds to the opaqueness of the performance and the collapse of performance and embodiment. By performing in clothes that also would be part of an ‘everyday’ wardrobe, the play with the *what if* continues. Lescaze displayed an anxiety that Fraser could be performing any time. What sticks to Fraser, even 16 years after *Official Welcome* (2003), is unpredictability. And this stickiness is also owed to her wardrobe which blends in rather than stands out in its lack of theatricality. Thinking back to Ulman’s work *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) which I considered resolved through

its canonisation, does not deprive her work from the possibility for future ambivalences, but it might be generated differently than in Fraser's work.

In acting costumes are extremely helpful to get into character and the performance art which I investigate, requires an oscillation between my 'own' voice as well as the 'foreign' voice. This oscillation and the constant interruption of a foreign with my own voice, this dissonance, is easier to achieve in my *own* clothes.

Collapse vs. agonistics

Pfaller stresses why the presence of the *as if* rather than its oppression is so important for artistic criticality:

If art ever had had political influence, then it was at this formal level, because people and their own views are quite predictable; individuals becoming impersonal (and the articulation of opinions from an indefinite source), in contrast, often set the imaginary of everyone in motion, and thus rob the existing relations of power of their affective supports (2013, p.103).

The collapse between performance and embodiment in Fraser, Ulman and Schlingensief, as Pfaller writes, robbed relations of power from their affective support. The moral judgement of them was exposed and reversed. Therefore, also their roles within an assumed order got interrupted, which would allow these works to be considered from the notion of agonistic feminism as an interruption to an ordinary sequence of events. But the fact that their positions collapse instead of 'sitting' alongside each other as a pluralist framework of politics suggest, to me, does not allow this conclusion.

Focus on the outside

As I have discussed, my work relates to Fraser's, in that we both use performance as an active means to disrupt the audience's reading of our bodies and its positioning within a symbolic order while creating an ambiguity in which the audience is unable to locate the beginning and end of a performance. However, the intentions of my work and research go beyond the articulation of an institutional critique. While the institution is crucial as a location for my work and part of its frameworks of production, my aim is to transgress its borders and connect the critique to a wider framework of production with my focus on post-Fordism as politics. By addressing how these politics impact my work as a performer, in and outside the institution, I bring the audience's attention towards it. Fraser's focus on the inside of the institution leaves

this 'no-outside' aspect un-addressed. My performances are designed to perform a form of politics, which precisely resist post-Fordism's narrative of no-outside by questioning its modes of production and emphasizing how performance art is subject to them.

Conclusion

The voices of authority I used – the perceived adversaries, such as the institution's governance or conservative political programs – made my alignment with my audience opaque and blurry. It created a weave of positions similar to what Glissant describes in his notion of opacity; next to each other without transcending into each other, where the difficulty lies in their simultaneous presence. Opacity became part of the work's framing by not introducing it directly as a performance but also part of speech's structure and performance. As the reactions the next day and months after showed, I generated a 'stickiness' of doubt when I brought and killed joy through the row of contradictions covered in an unironic gentle voice. My work was successful in creating a situation where myself and my performance could not be entirely placed and categorised while articulating a critique of the structural frameworks in which it was embedded. And part of this efficacy, was owed to the way I presented these positions with a voice that functioned as an unbinding element in which I used these foreign voices as *if* they were my own and played 'evil' without making my audience notice that 'play'.

And this notion of *playing evil* through my own voice in this work, becomes part of my feminist understanding of over-identification, enacted and disrupted through the assumed benign feminine performer. A (feminist) over-identification requires the playing of an *evil* voice, one that is not one's own but performing it as *if* it was the own voice together with the own voice. The lack of irony independent of whose voice one is using makes it read as authentic, but in contrast to what Pfaller, argues, not appear as cynical. This is important for the collapse of performance and embodiment, where the performer does not appear as cynical. This collapse I consider a position of resistance performed by Fraser, evoked by the removal of the affective support of existing power structures through the lack of irony and cynicism. The result was not directly a reversal, but a confusion of a symbolic order where the female artist, in this case Fraser, did not allow the placing of herself as more body than mind within it, and through that probed her own autonomy as an artist through the interrogation of her own position.

With regards to the collapse that happens in the performance the theoretical framework of agonistic feminism proved not to be entirely adequate to capture it. In this framework conflicts seem to remain intact via their irreconcilability next to each other, while a collapse indicates a different state than parallel existence.

How to proceed:

From the perspective of performance, the foreign positions that I appropriated in this speech were still quite foreign and separate from myself. There was a level of critical distance, for example between myself and David Cameron's political program or the Vice-chancellors voice, that prevented the collapse of my embodiment and performance of being a practice-based PhD student and performer. This was also further enhanced by the duality of positions that I performed. For the next performance in order to achieve my aim of collapse of performance and embodiment as resistance, I need to interrogate positions which are not my own but closer to myself as part of this collapse. This resulted in my last piece of work, presented for this research discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 8:
The Power Point as a Power to Point

In this chapter I present the final work for this practice-based PhD.

It took place at the conference for artistic research at Brookes University, Oxford, also known as CARU in November 2018. For this final performance the audience of my work was other researchers and artists in the context of an academic setting. This provided a space of recognition between me and the audience, where we shared both an affinity and a language we recognised.

Like *VIVA 2023*, this presentation intended to articulate a feminist critique of conducting research under current modes of post-Fordist production, in which economic precarity is a central issue. Again, I over-identify with researchers' feminized working conditions, from a European perspective in the context of Brexit.

Again, I used the medium of PowerPoint and the multiple reproduction of my own image. I chose to embrace this format and its qualities as a tool for my practice, to subvert the authority it occupies within the context of the academic presentation. In this instance, this was enhanced by the setting of the academic conference, where those presenting were selected by an academic community. I am using exactly this tool as a power to point, perform, and investigate the question of how to create resistance within the academic setting through over-identifying with it.

In the following I first give an impression of my presentation and then discuss how it presented a performance of resistance in post-Fordism from a feminist perspective.



Figure 36. Beginning presentation, CARU 2018, Photo: Aya Kasai

Work 5: Presentation for the Conference for Artistic Research (November 2018)

25 November 2018, Conference for Artistic Research (CARU), Oxford Brookes University, Oxford

12 noon: I am the first speaker after the keynote at the CARU conference for practice-based researchers at Oxford Brookes University. Dr Geoff Hill starts off by singing his keynote wearing a colourful bow tie with matching waistcoat. The keynote is a musical number, delivered with a tiny speaker and a desktop screen as a background, which seemed unintended. I am about to start my PowerPoint presentation, as part of the first panel. I am wearing my mustard-yellow jacket and a shirt.

The following impression of my presentation is presented as a narrated version instead of a direct transcript from the presentation.

I started my presentation with my now usual disclaimer: “I consider everything I do in relation to my research a performance.” Meanwhile, I played a video in the background of me doing trapeze tricks, which I learned during summer 2018.

After a quick overview of the structure of my presentation, I lay out my critique of post-Fordism and social media in relation to academia and feminism. Although I had presented the same PowerPoint several times, I still went through my notes, which helped me to articulate my critique.

I apologised to the audience for checking my notes, while checking my notes. Then I introduced the strategy of over-identification and opacity with images of Christoph Schlingensiefel and Charlie Chaplin.

I then claimed that constant contradiction is at the core of my artistic efficacy. Here, the question of what is real and what is not; what is perceived as performative and what as authentic; is central to this aim, as I explained to the audience.



Figure 38. CARU Slide 1



Figure 37. CARU Slide 2



Figure 39. CARU Slide 5

Finally, 10 minutes into the 20-minute presentation, I showed a slide stating: 'PRACTICE'. I introduced the audience to my work, *VIVA 2023*. When trying to show an online video of it, my failure to remember my own password for the video was demonstrated live on the desktop-screen projection.

I quickly moved on to the analysis of this work, stating that it was too entertaining to achieve the critical position I intended.

I then confessed to the audience how receiving funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council in October 2017 shifted my research entirely; it increased the pressure on me to comply with the funding conditions, in which creating impact according to the REF is crucial.

I finished my presentation by listing all the conferences and symposia I'd attended in 2018 with the help of my funding institution and university.



Figure 42. CARU Slide 9



Figure 40. CARU Slide 11



Figure 41. CARU Slide 17



Figure 43. CARU Slide 18

Finally, I invited everyone to follow me on my different social media channels if they liked my presentation. I claimed to have generated quite a substantive number of followers, with whom I share my research and presentations.

Applause!



Figure 44. CARU Slide 19

Q&A presentation (transcript based on notes taken after presentation):

Q: I would like to see a performance now.

Me: You just saw one.

The audience is laughing.

Q: How about writing a script? Could anyone else do the performance for you?

Me: A script would not allow the blur between the authentic and the performed. Making my performances scripted would result into their staging, which is what I want to avoid.

Q: How are your intentions translated into the writing?

Me: The writing should perform the presentation. It undoes itself in the moment of the encounter with the reader. It says one thing and in the next chapter it says the opposite. Sometimes during the reading of my thesis, you are not sure how much of the stated is true or not, for example.

Q: How do you draw the line between the performance and research?

Me: I don't. I don't know where the line is. It is a complete blur to me.

Applause. End of Q&A.

Lunchbreak.

At the buffet...

I got into a conversation with the chair of the session in which I presented. He said he was intrigued by several elements of my presentation that he was not sure whether were intended or not; for example, the flicking through the notes, the failed video.

I replied: 'Oh, that's interesting'.

He responded: 'Hmmm... Have you actually been to all these conferences?'

I said: 'What do you think?'

Lecture-Performance: Research as Art

At the conference in Oxford in 2018, I appeared as a practice-based research student holding a presentation about my research as part of the programme. Nothing was fictional about this set-up.

Dr Hill's keynote indicated that this conference placed a strong emphasis on the *practice* in practice-based research, and on the experience of this practice. In the presentation I gave, which was such an experience for the audience, I adopted the standard framing of a conference presentation. Despite the similarity between our outfits for this presentation, his colourful waist-coat and my patterned shirt, the sung keynote and my presentation operated on different levels to emphasize the practice in our research. Dr Hill, who worked with students from a theatre and musical background, put the practice on stage for the conference and dropped the perceived standards of a traditional keynote presentation, as his slightly for a conference, outrageous outfit indicated. Despite the (unintended) desktop-screen background, in his keynote (as well as in my *VIVA 2023*) the boundaries between the research and performance were clear, as the keynote was clearly marked as a performance.

In my PowerPoint presentation, however, I intended to blur these boundaries between performance and research entirely. Coming back to Milder's framework for lecture performance (2011), teaching as art/activism through education, Dr Hill's keynote fits well into her understanding of efficacy; it used theatrical means to disseminate knowledge and brought joy to his audience. It was a clear breakage with the frameworks of the academic presentation and offered an educational as well as aesthetic experience. While his sung keynote was

almost too theatrical to be academic, my presentation on the other hand was almost too academic to be art but also too ambiguous to be academic.

It lacked clearly framed theatrical elements or I indirectly referred to them, like starting with the trapeze video. Through this I also did not clearly position myself as a presenter/performer.

Milder (2011) points out how the practice of BHFQ, also with the foundation of their art school, connects to the ideas of Joseph Beuys and the notion of social sculpture. She quotes David Levi Strauss who wrote that 'art, to Beuys, was "the understanding of the labor in the process of creation"' (2011, p.17). My work connects with this central notion of Beuys and his lectures; the understanding of labour. In my case it is in the context of performance and research, and the aspect of labour in feminized working conditions. Beuys, as Milder writes '*was explaining art and thereby making art: attempting to ignite creativity in others by making his ideas known to them through dialogue*' (emphasis my own).

The explaining of my practice as research at a conference became my practice as research. I was *explaining my research and thereby doing research*, performing my role as a 'practice-based researcher'. Although I enacted this role at the very beginning of my research in my staged *VIVA 2023*, this time I performed it without the ironic distance. Instead of an academic gown I wore mustard coloured blazer and an outfit that signified casualty instead of irony.

Sustaining Ambiguity

The choice to use the format of academic talk in my practice, was a move away from its clear framing as a performance and towards the integration of the practice into production frameworks of research. With the extension of my performance to the Q&A after the presentation I could further enhance the affective conversion I was seeking by pushing moments of contradiction and dissonance rather than offering a form of relief towards the end. I pointed out in my fictional viva (2016), that if I let the audience know about the intentions of my performances, I preclude the possibility of causing the intended affect. At the same time, if I do not inform them of my intentions, I do not really allow them any agency; it becomes more a form of manipulation in which I take the position of moral authority. Therefore, for this presentation in Oxford I chose a tactic in which I made the critique and intentions of my work clear at the beginning, and then contradicted them throughout the Q&A, requiring a state of dissonance, the oscillation between a foreign (but not too foreign) and familiar position.

In the case of the CARU conference presentation, the two explicit positions that I presented – the critique of post-Fordism and its appropriation under the pressure of career anxiety, contradicted each other. This happened at the end of my talk in my act of excessive self-promotion via the (fake) social media channels that I advertised to the audience. As the Q&A at the Oxford conference showed, the first layout of my critique of post-Fordism, and *VIVA 2023* as an example of (failed) resistance, seemed to meet the audience's expectation of what an investigation of resistance in performance looks like in the Brexit period. The audience could also perceive the eventual undoing of my critique of post-Fordism by appropriating the standards of post-Fordist production, despite its contradiction, as logical. Becoming a complete product of post-Fordism is assumingly part of a researcher's career. But while the end and beginning of the talk allowed a clear pattern of thought – a potential logic to be followed, depending on the viewer – the moments during the presentation such as the flicking through papers and the failed video, caused real doubt and a need to talk afterwards, as the buffet conversation shows. It potentially left a residue that lasted beyond the end of the panel and at least until the sandwiches arrived.

Unbearable objects

Žižek uses the term 'Bartleby politics' to describe "a politics rooted in a kind of refusal wherein the subject turns itself into a disruptive (of our peace of mind!) violently passive object who says, 'I would prefer not to'" (Dean, 2006, xix) which can be understood as a position of refusal. With regards to my subjects of critique, this could be the refusal to consider themselves as bound up in a wider framework of oppression with other women. Dean writes, that this refusal makes one a 'strange, unbearable object, one hard to recognise as human' (2006, p.22). She (2006) points out that Žižek himself performs these politics when inserting himself into popular culture, where he takes the position of an object of enjoyment, 'an excessive object that cannot easily be recuperated or assimilated' (xix). The artists I discussed as well as myself, in this performance and previous ones, could equally be considered to be deploying such Bartleby politics, in choosing a position which refused to be placed, making them and myself *unbearable*. This would also mean that this position from a feminist perspective, renders the subjects of my critique *strange and unbearable* in their refusal to consider themselves bound up in wider struggle through their single (profit-maximising) perspectives. Here the aspect of intention becomes key in this position of refusal, which does not allow the assumption of contingency between mime and mimicked, artist and subject of critique as I discussed in Chapter 1 in the section on over-identification.

Although critic and subject of critique share the intention of advancing themselves, driven by an elaborate sense of vanity, the artists' intention did not stop here. It was bound up with an ambition to change their audience's perception of exploitative systems of production; systems which do not only include themselves but everyone along the social spectrum. In contrast, these *unbearable women* supply themselves with power at the cost of others. The artists chose it as their duty to use their agency to disrupt the process of capital accumulation and its negative consequences rather than accelerating it. But they also chose to do this in the vainest form via self-objectification.

Contracting dissonance

This buffet conversation showed me that these moments of dissonance made the doubt stick to me as the object of this stickiness. It made me convert from a happy to doubtful to potentially 'unbearable' object. Here, the audience and I were not sure where the line between the real and the fake was, over the course of the talk and beyond. In my Oxford presentation, I left at least one member of the audience – the chair of the panel – in a state of irresolution. The question about whether the flicking through the paper was intended also made him question how much of the actual talk was real. Neither the flicking through the notes nor the failure to show the video were conscious decisions I made when putting the presentation together, but I was aware of their potential to happen and I was ready to play with them. At the CARU conference, the dissonance I enacted also seemed to cause a form of dissonance, and potentially a sense of frustration, in some audience members; it was not clear to some of them how much of the presentation was part of an authentic talk. They mimetically sensed my own dissonance. Here my decision to work with not only the conference rhetoric but even more with the conference as a system came into full realisation. While my previous application of opacity focused on blurring to the moment of presentation and Q&A, the systematic option extended the blurring to spheres outside of the 'staged parts' – namely, lunch and coffee-break conversations as I had already initiated at previous conferences such as *PSi#24* (July 2018) and my opening speech in January 2018.

The missing (blonde) alter-ego

Fraser in her 2006 talk points out that despite the several pairings of quotes she goes through in *Official Welcome* (2003), it was less about the people behind the quotes directly than about the positions that were available for artists to occupy in the art world. So, they were not entirely separate from her but also *not hers*.

With regards to the strategy of over-identification, throughout my research people often suggested I should create an alter ego. Although I anticipated the development of an alter ego as a form of self-protection in my *VIVA 2023* performance, over the course of this research I did not create one. The alter ego as a vehicle for the strategy of over-identification, like The Yes Men practice it, would potentially keep these functions separate and allow a safe space where the viewer is able to distinguish between the artist and his/her performed persona; wearing a golden inflatable spandex phallus. The alter ego would create an illusion, which again would place myself in a space of fiction, as in *VIVA 2023* rather than creating a form of 'realness'. The fictionality enabled through the alter ego does not cause the same dissonance as when it is all embodied in one performer and one site of speech, as in the case of myself and Fraser in *Official Welcome*. An alter ego, even though it is a vehicle for the *as if*, would have undermined the potential of the *what if*.

In the end, it was important for me as a performer not to allow myself to escape in an alter ego, as otherwise I would have been unable to cause the dissonance in the audience and within myself. Here I also distinguish between performance and acting; in my case it is not about playing a role or a character but about embodying a site of speech separate but at the same time close to one self. The virtuosity lies in the mimicry between this site of speech and myself, making it indistinguishable.

It became important that my positions could not be directly identified with the subjects of my critique, which would have risked falling into a similar position as having an alter ego by playing the 'evil blonde'. This was a risk at the very beginning of my work as in my *Merci Liberte!* (2016) performance when I over-identified with Marion Maréchal through direct citation.

Similar to Ulman and her mimicking of 'cuteness' in her work, I used 'blondeness' to frame several inscriptions into one single female body and a specific notion of Western femininity but eventually I did not want to sustain it as a single concept on which my work relied on. I made a strong claim about being blonde as a central aesthetic feature in this process of over-identification similar to Chaplin's moustache and Hitler. It created a tie between myself and what I identified as a 'new' iconography of evil (Collins, 2019) in the process of the feminization of the right and capital, as I identified it in Chapter 3. It was part of the production of a benign femininity in my performances, and the active play with the undoing of this assumption.

Although it is important that some of Ivanka Trump's or Sheryl Sandberg's performative tropes such as the poised voice, the extremely feminine posture and aesthetic were recognisable, they did not become directly identifiable with one of these women. This indicated a shift in my work from direct identification with an evil subject as I pursued it after *VIVA 2023*, back to

different positions as exemplified in Fraser's *Official Welcome* and other works. It was important to avoid such a dependency and single reading of my work to be connected to one single subject compared, for example, with the work of Janez Janša. The maintenance of ambivalence was key in my strategic understanding. If I was giving the audience the possibility to clearly identify, me, the performer as parodying someone like Ivanka, a clear 'us' and 'them' would have been made possible again. And for me the efficacy in the application of this strategy lay in the disruption of this possibility.

Resistance

I answered in the CARU Q&A that my performances cannot be scripted to undermine the notion that the performance was transferable and hence separable from the performer as in playing a fictional role. This over emphasis on the authentic performer, then could be considered as a form of resistance towards the reproductive frameworks of performance, by making its reproduction impossible through the dependency on the performer. Through this the work could not exist separately from the performer, potentially opposite to the way Bishop considered the works of Sierra and Hirschhorn. But I do not locate the performance of resistance in this aspect of the work, but in the fact that it became a moment in which my embodiment between performer and researcher collapsed and through that made my audience question the benign nature of my appearance and its authenticity.

Here the questioning of my benignity was evoked through the negation and eventual affirmation of the frameworks of production of my work in one act and several dissonant acts in between. The contradicting positions could not be identified to be external to my embodiment, which means unlike in *Research Show Opening Speech* where I appropriated the voice of Pro-Vice Chancellor, the contradicting voice that I advocated in the end, was in full compliance with my bodily appearance and position as a practice-based research student, the lowest end of an academic hierarchy. The work became disruptive because the naïve observer could not be located in the room. I did not allow my critique to be a harmonising entity within the conflict which arises from the question of structural critique and personal agency; between needing to support my own body and thereby contributing to the closure of the very system which would have supported it in first place. If I had just presented my critique of the structures of post-Fordism and the role of social media in it, I would have presented the critical consciousness performing the resistance on the audience's behalf and the object of delegation and henceforth the harmonising element to the conflict. But because I eventually undid my own critique, I frustrated this delegation, rendering myself from a resisting (feminist) happy

object into a submissive 'unhappy' object. My position could not be read as ironic, hence I disrupted the process of building consensus on the basis of irony as like in *VIVA 2023*. In order to hold this position, it was important that the humour in this work was decreased to a minimum but at the same time not absent. There was irony in the opening of my presentation when I showed the trapeze video. It had the function of setting up an expectation for a funny spectacular performance, similar to Dr Hill's, which eventually was not met.

Agonism is not enough

Like in Schlingensiefel's *Please Love Austria!*, there was an impossibility of a clear 'we' and 'they' in this talk which is also key to Honig's concept of agonistic feminism. But I did not perform the so-called double gesture, which should allow space for solidarity and exclusion according to her concept. The critique I presented at the beginning provided grounds for solidarity between me and the audience; we were all academics sharing the same oppression from these structures of production. But I broke off the solidarity with my sustained ambiguity. It made it unclear on 'which side' I positioned myself, resisting or submitting, hence it did not result in a clear exclusion of myself. The space I was occupying was more complex, therefore using Honig's framework of agonistic feminism here shows its limits for the reading of my work. The space that emerged was not one of 'simple' conflict or multiple positions next to each other which then could be resolved by giving preference to one conflict over another as the notion of agonistic pluralism suggests. It was a space in which my position was impossible to locate on either side and resided in a place of ambiguity.

No dogmas

At the same time, by resisting to resolve the tension between the two opposing positions I presented, I avoided falling into a dogmatic position, such as advocating a complete withdrawal from coercive frameworks of production. But I also did not advocate a compromise between withdrawal and submission. Instead I declared my full submission when presenting my success indicating social media numbers by the end of the talk. And this full submission created doubt in itself – and raised the question 'What if I mean it?'

At another conference presentation, at the University of Nottingham in June 2018, I presented an almost identical talk (without the trapeze introduction). Here, one of the first questions was: 'So to create critique of social media you fully immerse yourself in it?', to which I answered: 'It is the very exaggeration that makes the critique visible.' Later in this conference (in the Q&A) I also stated that my hope was that, once people realise what they have been following was

fake, it may change their perception of what they have been following. These conference presentations were similar to Fraser's work, dogged attempts to 'change audiences and the larger ecosystems they inhabit' (Lescaze, 2019). There is potential that the critique does not end there, at the Q&A. But it is also not autonomous. It was a play that interrogated what it means to be a feminist practice-based researcher without locating the conflicts in a fictional space but holding them in the present.

Conclusion

The two key questions in this research were *How to* perform resistance from a feminist perspective and *how to* deploy the strategy of over-identification as the basis for this resistance in a post-Fordist context. Throughout the research process the question of *what if* I really mean what I said during my performances produced by the acting *as if* I meant what I said, proved key to this notion of resistance.

In previous scholarship the mimicry of a set of performative aesthetics which include dress, voice and gesture in the masculine deployment of over-identification such as in Laibach, The Yes Men or Schlingensief, was invisible because it was *unmarked*. The way of speaking, the suits in The Yes Men as well as Laibach, and their body language was automatically associated with the codes and the languages of power; it was identical with the masculine. But since then, this has changed as I elaborated in Chapter 3 'The Feminization of the Right', so also the reading of signifiers of power have changed. My performance work made these changes visible.

Previous scholarship on over-identification also neglected the role of the performer and *his* position in a symbolic order as well as the set of performative gestures that contributed to its efficacy. As a reminder, Stephen Shukaitis (2011) points out that over-identification is an excessive adoption of a set of ideas, images, or politics that is central to the strategy. But he did not explicitly include these bodily elements which I consider crucial to its efficacy, particularly from a feminist point of view. It requires an inclusion of the reading of the performer's body in the evaluation of its efficacy as disruption.

Throughout this research I actively used the reading of my body and the performative elements available to it, as a means of disruption. Pamela Anderson states: 'The true meaning of feminism is this: to use your strong womanly image to gain strong results in society.' Although I disagree with the claim to true meaning, in my feminist investigation, I used my womanly, overtly feminine image as the basis for the potency of my disruptions. It became a deployment of over-identification that played with aesthetic and performative elements such as hair, outfit (formerly known as costume), gesture, voice and mimicry in their entirety and the situation in which they occurred. It became a practice that interrogated the complexities imposed via the feminist lens, where the disruption was also aimed at an *equality-image producing machine*.

My investigation also offered an extensive discussion on the different positions available to a feminist using the concept of 'sexual decoys' by Eisenstein (2007) and Honig's agonistic feminism.

In Honig's understanding of agonistic feminism, contestation is always constant and the feminist agonistic space can hold several conflicts at the same time where they can exist in parallel (1995, 2013). Honig's model does not entirely deny or neglect the prior power construct that is imposed onto a body when it enters the political space as opposed to the original model of the *agon* in Arendt or Mouffe and Laclau. Denying its inscriptions, such as blonde, young, white, central European, as pointed out in Chapter 5 would suggest that the performative gestures emerge in a vacuum, separate from the body. Even though Honig's model through the framework of feminism did allow the recognition of power constructs when entering the *agon* from a performance perspective, it eventually did not seem to be sufficient for reading of my performances' intentions.

Agonism +

My research intended to show that the performative gesture's potency develops out of the context and position from which it emerged, the structure which inscribed itself onto the body of the performer as for example shown in *Merci Liberte!* (Chapter 4). My performative gestures were not solely a performance of the construct of femininity that emerged out of the notion of sex and gender, but a femininity that was constructed in the context of its location such as the US or/and Central Europe, captured through the notion of bloneness and the academic conference framed through the label 'feminist' as exemplified by my TAP talk series (Chapter 6). And even though pluralist agonism as the basis of Honig's agonistic feminism allows the co-presence for conflicts which arise from all these inscriptions and constructs, my performance focused on holding the tensions between them unresolved. This I started to explore more strategically in my TAP talks (Chapter 6). Like in Kippenberger, Ulman's, Fraser's and Schlingensief's performances were subversive because they overtly performed and eventually collapsed the reading of their bodies and its positions through performance and did not allow a clear positioning of themselves. So rather than being reified by an outside interpretive lens, they played with this single reading of themselves as artists, women and provocateurs and through that undid their reification by others and sustained the conflicts. In my *Research Show Opening Speech* (Chapter 7), I may appear to have resolved the conflict of unequal power between male and female in my Oprah quote, but the conflict of unequal power between race and ethnicity remained intact.

So, while one conflict was resolved, another one unfolded. The result was a constant instability in the demand for contestation of one identity over another. And even though Honig's attempt as I understood it, was to exactly stabilize this unfolding via the focus on public goods as an over-arching aim, my works aimed at keeping things destabilized. In itself each work never

made any demands for the improvement of the wider framework directly, but always kept the focus on the conflicts which I considered also a key difference between my work and other forms of the lecture performance as discussed in Chapter 6. In my performances, the performative gestures did not become defining political gestures but produced a blurring of gestures in which they did not clearly sit alongside each other. They were left in a space of ambiguity helped by the strategy of opacity.

Opacity: blurred and unbound

Within my practice I developed a notion of opacity which departed from Glissant; the possibility that one is not fully transparent about one's motivations and intentions in opposition to a Western call for full transparency and understanding of the 'other' in order to be able accept it. Initially I used opacity to cover my performance as a performance. Over the course of my research, my performances transformed from an open, up-front performance set-up with camera and gown in March 2016, towards a conference presentation that blended itself into the codes of academia without parodying it (November 2018). At the same time, I started to declare at each presentation that everything that the audience was going to encounter, was part of a performance.

At the beginning of this research I also used opacity to cover my intentions and through that, cause disagreement and friction. Considering the issue of audience agency for certain contexts in which this active covering denied agency to them like in my TAP talk series (Chapter 6), I decided to use opacity differently and gradually transformed it. It became an open contradiction with the intentions being presented right up front and then contradicted by the end of a talk and asserted again in the Q&A (Chapter 8). In my application, the opacity functioned through negation, recognisability and eventually through playing with the framing of my work through the notion of performance, rather than its active obscuring.

I negated my own position of critique in the conference presentations and through that rendered it opaque. At the same time, I used recognisable voices such as the one of Oprah to aid the blurriness around my position by interweaving it with others. The voice then in its unbinding quality, created a weave of positions which made them all appear as one consistent position. By removing the possibility to distinguish between these different but recognisable elements, I made the edges of my montage opaque.

By not making a clear separation between on and off stage moments such as the panel talk and the buffet in my last work (Chapter 8), I made it even harder to place my work and in

consequence myself, within a recognisable framework between performance, lecture-performance and academic presentation, contributing to the ambiguity of the situation as well as myself, the performer. In all these aspects opacity, similar to Glissant's framework, became a tool to uphold ambiguity in order to resist the demand for full transparency. This I consider key to the performance of resistance in post-Fordism in which artistic practices are forced into a framework of clarity by producing measurable outcomes, similar to what Fraser was observing when artist practices had to contribute to quantifiable outcomes for museums. This also serves to distinguish between the notion of invisibility and opacity which marked the practices of many artists that Arns and Sasse (2006) discuss in the context of oppressive and authoritarian regimes in which the 'disappearance into the background' of their works was a necessity.

As pointed out in Chapter 1, the context of my work and the other artists I analysed, is not one in which disobedient voices are repressed but rather encouraged. But the issue is that those critical voices become absorbed and eventually neutralised within post-Fordist production modes as Mouffe (2007) has pointed out. Hence, opacity became a tool to resist this process of valorisation through producing a critique that cannot be circulated without producing an ambiguous outcome for the subject of critique. My practice-based research has shown that unlike those secretly disobedient practices, opacity together with over-identification produced a visible resistance but with contradictory messages.

Frustration of identification

Like in Schlingensiefel's *Please Love Austria!* the aim was not the conversion of the audience in itself, but an affective conversion in relation to the reading of my body and my position; to confuse the reading of the body, its associated intentions and location in a symbolic order. In his 'swinish venture' Schlingensiefel deliberately created frustration of identification. In my *Research Show Opening Speech* as well as other occasions that followed, I created a similar effect.

For example, I didn't allow myself to be completely identified with 'us the feminists' in the room when I mentioned Maciunas and Kippenberger, on top of all the other male voices I used. These references potentially represented barriers to clearly identifying me as a feminist and locating my position from the beginning of the speech. This made it also impossible for the audience to locate theirs because they did not know how to relate to me; a process which was brought into motion via mimicry. The relationship between me and the audience was re-organized by 'robbing it from its affective support' (Pfaller, 2013). The reactions of the

audience members at the CARU conference as well as at my *Research Show Opening Speech*, showed to me that the situation was ambiguous. Beyes (2010) refers to Schlingensiefel's work as an 'ambiguity machine' which my work also has become. This poses the question: How does the feminist deployment of over-identification differentiate itself from the one of Schlingensiefel and what do artists need to consider when using this strategy successfully for the production of ambiguity in the context of post-Fordism?

Over-identification: A Feminist Swinishness

A feminist swinishness could be signified by a gentle and seducing manner that is 'unnerving but not directly confrontational or combative', as my colleague Ram (2018) described my performance (Chapter 7). It was a performance without megaphone, but a poised and gentle voice. It put an overt emphasis on femininity without parodying it; it came with elegance and grace and a business jacket in mustard yellow. But there is more.

It was not so funny in the end

Part of these unnerving mannerisms was a lack of irony in the performance which proved key to its working. Over the course of research, there was a gradual reduction of humour and theatricality within my performance work but without annihilating the humour completely. It was not explicitly funny or comedic as in my conversation with my pregnant self, montaged onto Beyoncé's body in *TAP talk #2*, nor humorously resigned as in *VIVA 2023*. However, my Oxford presentation as well as my *Research Show Opening Speech* were extremely playful rather than advocating a certain dogmatism. There was a space specifically in these works for them *not* to be read within a certain political agenda, sometimes not even a 'feminist agenda'. At the same time the work was not over-determined by an excess of positions that would deny it and myself any agency; I was still representing and performing the young female (European) academic/performer in the context of Brexit. But unlike The Yes Men who with their golden expandable phallus, were demonstrating 'in one unambiguous image what corporate freedom is all about' (The Yes Men, 2001), my mustard yellow blazer, jeans and patterned shirt, for example, that I wore for my Oxford presentation, did not allow such an unambiguous reading and neither did my loosely fitted dark blue dress worn for my *Research Show Opening Speech* performance. These works were a clear demonstration of the lack of irony with a casual touch of wearing trainers. The lack of humour eventually contributed to the doubt of me being a 'happy object' and kept my position from being reactionary and harmonising.

Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940), even though it was a great success when it was released in the cinema in the US in 1940, faced a lot of critique for the final scene of the film in which the two men, which Chaplin played, the Barber and Hynkel, merged 'somewhat, into one' (Collins, 2019). It lacked the slapstick and parodying qualities of Chaplin's previous performance. In the last scene, Chaplin, with a direct gaze into the camera, addressed his audience as himself, Charlie Chaplin the film maker and actor, and not as one of his characters. Collins points out that one of the reasons the last scene of *The Great Dictator* (1940) caused so much controversy was because the film as a construct collapsed when Chaplin emerged as himself. It removed the layer of fictionality and directly confronted the audience with the context that the film addressed. At this point they could not delegate their pleasure to a naïve observer laughing at the parody of Hitler played by Chaplin. The previous safe space for doing that in which Chaplin enacted Hynkel as a role, got lost in that moment, causing dissonance in the audience as it confused their relationship to Chaplin. Instead of an entertainer, he now emerged as a serious political figure. Even though Chaplin's previous movies such as *Modern Times* (1936, directed by Chaplin) had political themes, they could be neglected because of the humour; they were overtly entertaining when Chaplin played the 'Tramp'. This is important with regards to Isaak's point on feminist critique and laughter which I discussed in the introduction, where humour and ridiculing risk over-shadowing the issues at hand. I consider it part of my feminist resistance to not let the critique be dismissed on the premise of laughter and become hidden behind theatricality and humour.

A nuancing of *evilness*

And unlike Schlingensiefel's action (2000), all my performances lacked confrontation including the last one, which made it so powerful through the impossibility to place it and eventually to resist it. Being nice and pretty as in Ulman, as well as confident and assertive as in Fraser together with the display of vulnerability (*the simulation of affect* as Kelly referred to it), made it more difficult for the viewer to oppose the feminist performer's position. This I consider similar to what Caygill (2013) claimed about the non-violent strategies of Gandhi – 'attacking the enemy's capacity to resist' (p.59) even though the pluralist agonistic lens suggests a relationship of adversaries rather than enemies. Still attacking a benign appearing and vulnerable object, makes the attacker seem weak. To frame this vulnerable, feminine and benign appearing position I previously referred to the construct of blondeness a means to deprive the audience's ability to attack and eventually prevent escalation which was key in a feminist swinish deployment of over-identification.

A feminist deployment of over-identification with benign-appearing agents such as those I focused on, develops its efficacy through the lack of radicality. This lack of radicality could be understood as a form of subversive affirmation rather than over-identification according to the lines of distinctions which Arns and Sasse (2006) have drawn between those two strategies. But in the case of my research, the lack of radicality was the result of over-identification, of the excessive mimicry of femininity and a language of power which has changed from a confrontational masculinity to an amicable femininity. Here the lack of radical positions caused the greatest disruption as the clear line between these positions could not be drawn in the process of over-identifying with my subjects of critique, keeping the work from being read as ironic as well as entirely serious in an excess of contradictions. Through this, my intention was to draw the audience's attention to the deceiving potential of a benign appearance through my embodiment.

Voice as *the* location of montage

Throughout my research my voice and speech became the main location of montage rather than the performance's visual elements. It was here where the majority of appropriated elements were located, placed next to each other and un-bound through the rhythm of my voice. Its rhythm became key in defamiliarizing the appropriated material, making my body a synthesizing machine which was smoothing out the edges of the different speech elements and enabling the acting of *as if* they were where my own.

The Great Dictator (1940) was the first sound film that Chaplin made, hence it was the first time his audience could hear his voice compared to his previous films, where the 'Tramp' was silent and mainly acted through physical comedy. Part of the movie's success was owed to Chaplin's exaggerated imitation of the 'way Hitler speaks, the melange of rough sounds and brutish insinuations that have long made footage from his rallies as fascinating as they are frightening' (Collins, 2019). At the same time, this 'melange' made the contrast to Chaplin's speech at the end even stronger through its lack of comedy and parody together with the sensation of *watching and hearing* Chaplin speak directly to his cinema audience.

For the perspective of this research, the reading of the performer's body equips the voice with the highest potency to be read against of what it signifies. In order to develop the performing body's full efficacy in the production of dissonant voices, it requires a body that places these voices in a structure which then can be contravened. From a feminist perspective, the oscillation between affirming feminist ideals and its simultaneous denial was only available to a female body to produce ambiguity and contradiction. If a male body was oscillating between

such positions, he might have been praised for his feminism while his anti-feminism might have remained invisible.

Ambiguity

Central to the question of *how* I create this ambiguity in the context that I was operating, was the production of affective turns in the performances instead of specific affects. Through these turns I disrupted the audience's ability to read me as a feminist performer and as a PhD student, defying academic frameworks of production. The efficacy of this I evaluated through Ahmed's notion of the 'Happy Object' (2010) as well as Pfaller's 'interpassivity' (2013). In this process I started to consider myself, as both, a *body of conversion* for a happy object as well as a *happy object*, as I elaborated in Chapter 4. Part of the conversion of myself I caused through frustrating the delegation of pleasure towards me and the happy objects that I used as part of my performance such as the label 'feminist'. I made the reading of myself as a performer and its assumed attributes the central focus to cause these different turns and the audience's frustration.

Unbearable (vain) objects

The artists I discussed in this research despite their choice of immoral means, still might be considered superior in terms of morality compared to their subjects of critique. They decided to use their vanity as a means to interrupt exploitation machines rather than their acceleration. But as I stated in the 'Feminization of the Right', considering women who function as sexual decoys, as mere agents or narcissistic, is insufficient because of the potential discrimination they have faced beforehand in relation to their race, class and gender. My research has helped me to understand that from the perspective of feminism(s), apart from Eisenstein's concept of sexual decoys, that myself and my subjects of critique are disruptive in their unbearable positions; positions produced out of a refusal to be clearly placed within a symbolic order based on physical appearance and the lines of solidarity which would emerge from it.

Artists are not ready-mades

My works such as the *Research Show Opening Speech* showed, that there were several conflicts already inherent in my own positions, with elements that seemed incompatible with each other such as challenging one construct of power (gender) but ignoring another (race).

Based on this my initial claim in Chapter 1 that artists find completeness in their lack of identity, by performing a part that is separate from themselves, an *evil* part, was refuted. Considering oneself as good and the rest as evil did not resolve this internal conflict when self-reflexivity is core to their own practice. Therefore, the performance of 'evil' was not identity defining through placing oneself on a moral scale as it may even had opposite effects (bad boys & girls). The practice of over-identification as I explored it, required acts that verge on immorality, making the eventual positioning on the 'right side' impossible, even if the artists' intentions were located on it.

A Big *No!* to being morally exemplary

To repeat Bishop (2011) again in relation to Schlingensief's *Please Love Austria!* (2000); it should never be seen as morally exemplary. And neither should the means of performance that Fraser, Ulman or I have used be considered as such. The deployment of over-identification as I pursued it in this research, functioned through the (assumed) moral superior position of the artist which then was put into question by an opaque framing and the appropriation of unbearable positions. So, while the intentions may have been considered morally exemplary, the means were not, and it is also here where the space of art should be considered separate from other social spaces.

Self-interrogation

In the feminist deployment of over-identification, the mimicry also becomes an act of self-interrogation. Fraser states (The Power Plant, 2012) that after giving up painting she started to use art historic images and paintings, such as Manet's *Olympia*, as the basis for her performative work. This led her to approach performance from the perspective of appropriating positions in relation to these images, such as an art historian would, as her practice. This is very similar to the way I approached performance art - it was a result of my parallel studies of Business Administration and Fine Art, where I took the practice from PowerPoint presentations in the business degree into the context of my fine art degree. So, I came to performance from the site of the economics in which art represented an opportunity for capital accumulation rather than free play. Instead of a training in Drama or Theatre, our performance practice emerged from the positions we previously inhabited to our practice, and the performance became a means to interrogate it. And for this research in particular, over-identification became a means for re-negotiating these positions and my assumed identity without ending up in a state of an over-determined agency, but one that had several layers which this interrogation was unravelling as well as collapsing. The framing of my work as feminist

became one point of interrogation next to its position within post–Fordism. It required a set of different tactical gestures which were not all affirmative, hence, my investigation of resistance does not stop here.

Resistance: ambiguous and impure

Protean Versatility

At the beginning of this research I sought to make a clear distinction between affirmative gestures as part of over-identification and gestures that result in ironic negation. Over the course of this research, this juggling with terminology to determine the efficacy of a work developed into a trap in itself. The attempt to blur categories of performance by imposing a framework of categorization of what happens in the performance, proved inefficient to the task. My research discovered that shifting between those different categories was the most efficient deployment of this strategy to create resistance; where they follow each other and negate themselves in their oscillation; for example, the affirmation of feminism through an act of ironically negating patriarchy followed by a negation of feminism through full submission into structures of oppression. According to Comay this can be understood as the ‘protean versatility of resistance’ (2015, p. 249). She writes:

its indefatigable inventiveness, as it keeps shuffling unpredictably from negation to position, from affirmation to refusal, until the very distinction becomes unclear: every denial can mask an affirmation, every acquiescence can harbor a sly repudiation (2015, p. 249).

My intention is not to declare a feminist over-identification to be defined by indeterminacy as the feminist perspective always has at its centre the questioning of power constructs based on sex and gender. But my deployment of over-identification does not contain one single gesture at its core but several; a row of positions which are montaged, being both affirmative, negative and something in between. The simultaneity of positions and gestures I tried to capture through the theoretical framework of agonistic feminism by Honig proved to be insufficient as a reading tool for the outcome of my research. In my practice-based research I was actively seeking to oppose strategies of disambiguation which I consider different to holding on to conflictual positions.

Impurity

My practice is now fully embedded in the system of surplus affect production as set out by frameworks such as the REF, the Research Excellence Framework, with whom every researcher has to comply with. I voluntarily self-subordinated to the principle of productivity, competition and growth via research by producing a track record of academic presentations and research sharings on an international scale (see Appendix). And even worse, I generated an immense amount of pleasure in my sub-ordination and competitiveness. But still this development I do not consider as a compromise with the frameworks of production, but a *contamination* of them, where they became impure. Each occasion was also an opportunity to display a criticality and ambivalence of my own position in the frameworks in which I was producing my research. It was not mere sub-ordination but excessive interrogation. Still it cannot exist outside of the framework in which it was produced in, hence the resistance, as Caygill (2013) stresses in his discussion, *was impure*.

Based on this, in my performances, the quest for resistance may be then considered a simulation of it, because as I wrote in the very beginning of this research, the stakes for real resistance are too high. It might be that the resistance merely exists on a theoretical level, as the enjoyment of it leaves me in a libidinal dependence on these frameworks, risking my own attachment to the status quo and ending up in a reactionary position where I do not want the frameworks to change. Otherwise I have nothing to rub my practice against and cause friction. Still the result was not a critical consensus (Mouffe, 2007). At the presentations I did in Oxford and Nottingham (Chapter 8), my simulation of sub-ordination and eventual consensus caused so much doubt in the audience that it may also lead to doubt about the 'no-outside' narrative of these frameworks. The doubt provides a hint towards the possibility that there is an 'outside', which is what I want to offer the audience of my work.

It was too academic to be art

My performance practice gradually developed an aesthetic that allowed itself to be withdrawn from the networks of circulation and re-production. The PowerPoint presentation in the academic conference lacks 'instagrammability', it denies any aesthetic pleasure when discourse is foregrounded and instead of a 'stunning' location as a background such as a former train station, we see lecture theatres without windows. The practice developed itself in a way that made its documentation for this research more and more challenging added by the decline of a dramatic wardrobe. Bryony White in 'Performance Anxiety' (2019) criticises Roselee Goldberg's attempt to canonise the history of performance art through the fixation on

visual aesthetics, assigning works such as the one of Vanessa Beecroft the adjective 'irresistible' (p.9) because of its visual appeal. Rather than an irresistible aesthetic, my academic presentations especially, became characterised by a resistance to the foregrounding of performance as a form of visual aesthetic as well as display of performative skills. Watching my Oxford presentation would have the same visual appeal as any other academic presentation, where the aesthetic of the intellectual discourse is characterised by a lack of appeal. Even Dr Hill in his attempt to outperform the academic aesthetic, had a desktop screen as his background. But it is exactly in this lack of appeal where my work develops part of its potency as resistance to the frameworks of production as I discussed in Chapter 1. White writes further in response to Goldberg's assigned irresistibility that:

The reason Beecroft's work is irresistible is because it reads well as art, as an image, despite being a performance devoid of the social structures that have brought it into being. It is easily codified, easily assimilated (2019, p.9).

As stated in my last chapter, my presentation in Oxford was too academic to be recognised as art which is part of its resistance towards entering coercive aesthetics of network circulation; it does not read *as performance*. The professional recording of these academic talks, but also of the rest of my work, would have displaced it from its situational specificity. The recording would have deprived the work of its potency and eventually betraying the ontology of performance, eternalising a patriarchal system of reproduction, in which only the reproduceable generates value.

Impossibility of re-production

Milder (2011) discusses how Beuys faced a lot of criticism because of his critique of capitalism while he earned huge amounts of money. It seemed a contradiction undermining his own position, representing another form of impure resistance. She writes that:

The only methodology that can really work against capitalism is what he calls "the color, the manifoldness in the unity." In other words, that which is all encompassing of the creativity of individuals, which truly sets us free from dependence on money and state in a given structure, won't itself ever be defined, categorized, and systematized. Working with the fleeting substance of verbal language and the changing thoughts of an audience- as-students is material as amorphous and non-systematic as it gets (2011, p.18).

Beuys gave emphasis to a practice which sat outside categories of recognition which his lecture performances did at the time they emerged; to him they represented a state of autonomy from frameworks of reproduction in their 'fleeting substance' and ephemerality and resisted visual irresistibility. Beuys himself became the irresistible element where his practice could not exist separate from him, *the* authentic Beuys wearing his felt hat. But if it is authenticity that is sold, considering it a means to escape reproduction cannot be claimed as a resistance towards it. But the focus on situation specificity for each work I consider as a form of resistance to reproduction. My works cannot be re-staged outside their context and develop the same potency. This does give importance to its ephemeral character, making it resistance to reproduction in an impossibility of re-staging because with moment that has gone, the work's potency has gone with it.

Still this raises the question if the excessive writing about the work in the course of this thesis actually undermines the claim of resistance towards reproduction and circulation. Phelan (1993) in her discussion of performance's conflictual relationship with reproduction writes:

To attempt to write about the undocumentable event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself. Just as quantum physics discovered that macro-instruments cannot measure microscopic particles, so too must performance critics realise that the labor to write about performance (and thus preserve it) is also a labor that fundamentally alters the event (1993, p.148).

This thesis initially attempted to evoke a similar sensation when reading about the work, to be present with the work, as I indicated in my Oxford Q&A, by mimicking the strategies applied in the performances, in the document. But this turns out to be a failed attempt; there is nothing that can re-produce the event and eventually the work.

Laughter and tension

Looking back at *VIVA 2023* (2016), five years after its staging, something else emerges. The dystopian, at the time of staging, cynical and ironic prediction of the future, has collapsed into a grotesque reality. The most harmless of these now grotesque predications becoming reality is that *viva* are now (2021) held digitally, but for other reasons than I anticipated. The previous sensuous laughter that I initially evoked in my audience, now has faded. There is an uncanniness now inherent in this work in the way it knew more about itself than the performer performing it, me. My practice since 2016 transformed into the opposite direction, free from laughter and irony, but full of ambiguity and doubt. The communal liberating laughter which

Isaak (1996) stressed as a key factor in the creation of sensuous solidarity, similar to the audience's reaction in *VIVA 2023*, has ceased into private seemingly depoliticised jouissance given the key characteristics of the *feminist swinishness* that I developed as a performance strategy, and particularly given my own joy. But this does not mean that this development is a dead-end of individual laughter.

Caygill, in reference to Gramsci, in his discussion of resistance speaks of different temporalities and as does Comay (2015) point out that 'Meaning must be postponed in order to be articulated: judgment must be deferred; every decision about truth, value, or signification must be suspended' (p.258). (She refers to Freud's process of psychoanalysis; a process in which any immediate truth that presents itself is treated with suspicion). Journalist Lescaze asked in 2019 if the world has finally caught up with Andrea Fraser, sixteen years after *Official Welcome* (2003). Although she does not clearly answer it, it indicates to me that there is space for more deferred effects to occur out of this PhD.

When Chaplin produced *The Great Dictator* in 1940, he had little idea about the actual scope of the atrocities that were happening in Germany at that time. Chaplin himself afterwards questioned if he would have done the film if he had known about the Holocaust. Collins writes that in relation to the final scene that:

What's clear from its final moments, to say nothing of much of the rest, is the power in this tension. Insofar as it can sense but not see the future, you could say that *The Great Dictator* is a film made in a cloud of relative ignorance (2019).

I have no intention to compare the historical contexts between my work and Chaplin's film given the historical gravity of the different events. But there might also be another tension that arises from my conference presentations additionally to the moment when they emerged. And unlike Chaplin's film, my performance work was not made in a cloud of ignorance but awareness of the risks that a post-Fordist narrative poses next to its already extremely negative effects.

Porous boundary as the location of resistance

The initial intention of the research was to destabilize the sense that there is ‘no–outside’ notion of post–Fordism. The resistance proved to be possible, even though impure. Like in the performance itself, it was derived from a collapse; the collapse of the research frameworks with the performance. Milder writes in the context of lecture performance that:

Twentieth – century artists such as Chris Burden, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, and Joseph Beuys have used lecture performance to blur the lines separating art from discourse about art (2011, p.13).

The resistance to the narrative of post-Fordism in my research located itself at the porous boundary between research and the discourse around research. Rather than a single focus onto what happens in the performances as instances of practice as the basis for research, this research throughout discussed the interdependency of the performance as research and the frameworks in which it was produced.

German philologist Thomas Bauer (2018, p.20) writes that avoiding ambiguity is a condition for capitalism, which is similar to Gibson-Graham’s key argument on post-Fordism as politics in which contradictions are actively obscured. He writes that capitalism, by allowing assigning a value and a measurement to anything, holds the promise of providing definiteness for those who have a low tolerance for ambivalence. He refers to the psychologist Else Frenkel-Brunswick who found in 1949 that there are different levels of tolerance for ambiguity among individuals and that lower tolerance levels could indicate a higher likelihood to sympathise with authoritarian ideas. This is similar to the arguments that Fuchs pointed out (2020) in relation to Adorno’s studies of the authoritarian personality (see Chapter 3) which foregrounds a friend enemy relationship (as opposed to adversaries in agonistic pluralism). Bauer argues that there is a potential that these different levels of tolerance can be transferred to societies as individuals develop their tolerance for ambiguity also in dependence to their cultural environment. Within this notion I consider my performances as a test of my audience’s tolerance for ambiguity in a climate of intensifying polarities. I locate a moment of shared resistance in the context of post-Fordist politics in their ability to both question and sustain the ambiguity, like the chair of the Oxford panel did. My research showed how to evoke such a moment through performance art.

Politics of Ambiguity – contribution to the scholarship of practice as research

I locate the key contribution of my research as practice in the performance of a politics of ambiguity which is at the centre of my feminist resistance. In my introductory chapter where I discuss post-Fordism in relation to performance art, I point out that even the production of something that was impossible to quantify and grasp such as bodily affect, was turned into something measurable helped by social media tools. At the same time these tools were instrumental in intensifying polarisation and empowerment of radical-right wing forces by (also) providing a space for the appearance for a 'benign evil'. In the context of research, which I framed under the politics of post-Fordism, I sought to contest the assumed neutrality of performance measurement by indicators, such as follower numbers, being expressive tools for growth, productivity and competition. These tools represent an avoidance of ambiguity in assigning the quality of affect a value through numbers, measuring the unmeasurable. The key intention of my performances was to create resistance by embodying a benign evil and by holding onto ambiguity and not letting go of it. This resulted in the collapse of the boundaries of my research and its frameworks of production, which was not just a dead end but instead a probing of democratic principles. In this performance of a collapse, a machinery of growth and productivity was interrupted in the simulation of compliance. And in this interruption of its processes, key terms such as resistance, over-identification, and opacity have been imbued with new meaning in the context of a feminist performance practice, respectively being transformed into: sustaining ambivalence, feminist swinishness, and a blurred and unbound weave of positions. The result was the enacting of a politics of ambiguity instead of polarity in the context of post-Fordism. The outcome of my practice-based research was that rather than producing an opt in or out situation, for example in the participation of social media networks, my ambiguous position towards them enabled a different view on their coercive character of participation. And instead of a feminist position in which representation and the advancement of other women is the central concern, I enacted a position where this notion of feminism was both affirmed and negated in order to connect it to a wider political framework. Here the result was not the dis-empowerment of a politics of identity but a destabilization of the interpretative lens on the performer's body as a means to escape fixity and enable solidarity.

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'TAP talk #1'

-Live-streamed performance, 11 November 2016, <https://vimeo.com/191383372>.

- Live-performance, *ACTS REACTS* Lecture Theatre, Wimbledon College of Art, March 2017, <https://vimeo.com/227780389> Password: TAP.

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'TAP talk #2'

-Live-performance, Lecture Theatre, Chelsea College of Art, UK, 2 May 2017, <https://vimeo.com/210938406> .

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'TAP talk #3'

- Live-presentation, *Feminist Internet Seminar*, Central Saint Martins, UK, 27 July 2017, <https://vimeo.com/233192607> .

'TAP talk #4'

Live-presentation, *TECHNE student conference 'Emotion, Engagement, Experience'*, Amnesty International Headquarter London, 9th November 2017, <https://vimeo.com/244260251>.

Research Show Opening Speech. Live-performance, *TECHNE student congress 'Flow & Flux'*, Chelsea College of Art, UK, 11 January 2018, <https://vimeo.com/316548329>, Password: Flux.

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'Resignation 15 July 2016', <https://vimeo.com/174842539>

'Resignation 17 July 2016', <https://vimeo.com/175053306>

'Resignation 19 July 2016', <https://vimeo.com/175350629>

'Resignation 20 July 2016', <https://vimeo.com/175582732>

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Appendix:

List of conference presentations

2019

- *THE LIVED FEMALE BODY IN PERFORMANCE*, University of Leeds, UK
- *Theme Park @PSi25* conference, Calgary, Canada

2018

- *CARU Arts Re Search Conference*, Oxford, UK
- *Difficult research* symposium, keynote speaker, University of Warwick, UK+
- *PSi24* conference, Daegu, South Korea
- *Conference of the Journal of Languages, Texts and Society*, Nottingham University, UK
- *1968-2018 Protest, Performance and the Public Sphere* conference, University of Warwick, UK
- *Performance as Activism* @ Educational Theatre Forum, NYU Steinhardt School, New York, US

2017

- *Feminist Futures*, speaker, Central Saint Martins, London, UK+
Watch here: <https://vimeo.com/233192607>
- *Revisiting the gaze: Feminism, fashion and the female body* conference, Chelsea College of Art, UK
- *Psi23 Hamburg: Overflow*, conference for Performance Studies international, Hamburg, Germany
- *TECHNE Student congress*, Amnesty International HQ, London
- *Intersections conference*, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London, UK

2016

- *Absolute Demolition: Gender and Anarchy*, speaker, ICA, London, UK+
- *Feminism and Digital Art* symposium, speaker, Chelsea College of Art, UK+