

eSharp

Issue 32:

Transformation



ARTWORK INFORMATION

‘Transformation’ – Katie McClure

The front and back cover designs of this issue of eSharp are derived by original paintings by Katie McClure (acrylic on canvas board, 2024) which have been digitised and digitally altered to increase contrast and canvas size.

Both covers depict the transformation of water between states, a melting ice cube (front) and a boiling kettle (back). These are reversible transformations we observe and interact with every day. The cover designs look toward the fluid nature of personal and societal experiences – which can rapidly transform from feeling solid and steady to fluctuating and uncontrollable.

eSharp

Issue 32

Winter 2025

‘Transformation’

Editorial Board: Rebecca Alexander and Sara Stone

Cover design: Katie McClure

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Author Biographies

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Katie McClure is a final year postgraduate researcher in History of Art with an academic background in Chemistry and Archaeological Materials Science. Her current research uses analytical science and archival research to understand a group of twentieth-century textile dyes. Katie's research aims to explore the cultural and scientific significance of the dyes and understand how they can be identified and cared for in heritage collections.

Jay Collay

Jay is a historian focused on cultural histories and historiography, with a background in queer history and Celtic studies. He completed an MSc in Gender History at Glasgow in December 2024 focused on portrayals of women as context for 19th century Breton and Scottish Gaelic translation literature. They are now undertaking PhD research at Cardiff University. Her current work can be found at <https://profiles.cardiff.ac.uk/research-staff/collayj>.

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Dr Maria Ulrika Rossi is a researcher and artist working on the intersection of arts and science. Having acquired her PhD in History of Art – her thesis looking at art in contexts of war and displacement – at the University of Glasgow in 2024, she has since proceeded to study Clinical medicine at the University of Eastern Finland. She is interested in Baroque medical imagery, interdisciplinary histories of the early scientific community and the interplay between spiritual and early scientific worldviews. Rossi has been supported by the Leverhulme Trust, Creative Scotland, Scottish Funding Council, Scottish Music Centre and Finnish Cultural Foundation for her research.

Ben Warnock

Ben Warnock is a recent graduate of the University of Glasgow, earning an MA and MLitt in Film and Television Studies. His theses focused on the relationship between sensation and Japanese cinema. The first of which applied Deleuzian ideas to investigate the sensate body within Japanese horror films of the late 1990s and early 2000s, whilst the latter used Deleuzian theories to analyse portrayals of ritual suicide within Japanese cinema in three distinct historical contexts (the Second World War, the political upheaval of the post-war period, and the peak and subsequent bursting of the economic bubble in the 1990s). His research interests, therefore, include: Deleuze, Japanese cinema, theories of sensation, and the politicisation of bodies in film. Currently, Ben is seeking to undertake further academic research within his field of interest.

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Imogen Dobson is a PhD student at the University of Glasgow. She gained her BA and MA degrees in English Literature from the University of York and Durham University, respectively. Her thesis explores sex work and urban spatiality in twenty-first century British and North American literature.

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Minlin Yu obtained a PhD in Translation Studies from the University of Glasgow. She currently works as a lecturer teaching courses in Translation Studies at the Glasgow–Nankai Joint Graduate School and previously taught intermediate Mandarin Chinese. She holds an MSc in Translation Studies from the University of Edinburgh. Her doctoral project examines the translation and construction of gender roles and identities across a century of Chinese cultural history. She is fascinated by questions in gender, culture, translation, and technology, and her work traces their interdisciplinary connections.

Jamie Gladstone

Jamie Gladstone is a PhD student at the University of Glasgow, a lecturer in Race, Education, and Decoloniality, a podcaster, and a Capoeira Angola practitioner. His research project focuses on the development and implementation of anti-racist pedagogy through the Afro-Brazilian martial art of Capoeira Angola. His work is framed through lenses of Critical Race Theory and Critical Mixed Race Studies with a particular focus on the lived experience of British Caribbean children in the English education system.

Pastiches of Cultural Performance: Framed Clippings from the Magazine *Female Mimics*, 1963-1968

Jay Collay

Abstract:

This article is a creative response exploring the dynamics, expressions, and tensions of gender transformation playing out in selected issues of the American cross-dressing magazine Female Mimics between 1963 and 1968. Not only is drag performance, at its core, a dialogue with transformation, the first five years of this magazine capture some dimension of the mid-20th century as a time of change for cultures of cross-dressing as performance and as lifestyle. In particular, issues from these years capture some level of the complex discourse around gender transformation as a temporary theatrical act, as a full life transition, as an object of sexual interest, and as a niche market, at a time when all of these dynamics openly co-inhabited. The textual argument is structured around a series of five original collages made of images digitally clipped from the magazine and quotes from relevant gender theory. Each collage serves to illustrate a different point: the foundations of the magazine; the trend towards sexualized commercialization; the explicit presence of transgender performers and the debates they provoked; the various spaces of joy the magazine provided for readers and artists; and a dual emphasis on the exotic and professional nature of the performers, separating them from the rest of the population. By examining the multiple meanings of transformation in Female Mimics through the transformative element of collages, this article provides a glimpse at the striking visuals of its subject matter, invites the audience to engage with the artistry of the subject, and deepens the potential for analysis in a discourse so deeply entwined with appearances.

Keywords: *Transgender, queer theory, gender history, cross-dressing*

Introduction

In 1963, Selbee Associates, Inc.—a small publisher on New York City’s Fifth Avenue that also published a variety of erotic fiction—served as the inaugural publisher of a magazine on “The world’s foremost female impersonators.” It was called *Female Mimics* and sold, in its first year, for \$1.25.¹ In exchange, readers received 72 pages of black and white photos of performers in various stages of (un)dress, advertisements for products ranging from “Extra Long Stockings” to books on “Sexual Masochism,” international updates on the field of female impersonation, and full color photos of one or two featured performers as a center insert. Many of the performers, to modern eyes, fall into a category immediately identifiable as “drag queens,” and the word “drag” does appear in the pages, especially in the context of feature stories on drag balls in New York City. Other featured performers identified themselves on-page as “transsexual,” including figures such as Marie-Pierre Pruvot (stage name “Bambi”), who today self-describes as transgender. “Female impersonator” encompassed a multitude of symbols which I will be exploring in this paper.

The magazine would run in one form or another under a variety of publishers for the next few decades. The name was expanded to “Female Mimics International,” or F.M.I., in 1980; the last issue I have located is Volume 29, Number 1 (issue 111) from 1999, as preserved by the Digital Transgender Archive.² This analysis is concerned only with the twelve issues published in the first five years of the magazine, from 1963-1968. This focus is partially to complicate a common narrative of queer historiography that paints the 1969 Stonewall Uprising as the beginning of queer history. The events of 1969 that prompted an ascendancy of gay liberation as cultural movement and political strategy were momentous, but did not emerge from nowhere. Stonewall was a product of an extremely specific cultural and political climate that was years in the making. The contents of this magazine during those antecedent years map out one intersection of some of the many ways of being gender non-conforming in mid-20th century America.

Another reason to give this period particular focus is to explore certain ways of being gender non-conforming that are less present in modern conversations. Like many other aspects of society, the topic of cross-dressing has become funneled down certain absolute paths driven by current cultural factors. For example, drag has become an acutely visible art form in recent

¹ Roughly £10 when accounting for inflation and converted in April 2024.

² *FMI Female Mimics International*, Vol. 1, 29 (MAGCORP, the Magazine Corporation of America, 1999), <http://archive.org/details/fmifemalemimicsi2911unse>.

years thanks not only to the distribution of primetime television shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race*, but also to a series of anti-drag bills being loudly imposed in various regions of the United States and hotly discussed on social media.³ These bills often reflect a broader campaign of political transphobia, adding another layer to the long and complicated conversation about what relation, exactly, drag plays to gender. Given that they are written to ban performance—in front of minors, specifically—they also invite conversation about drag's history with theater and staged production. Drag occupies a multifaceted space in queer studies and modern life, as a performance style that can be done by anyone, of any orientation, but nevertheless retains an undeniable whiff of queerness.

The issues examined in this article demonstrate wildly different reader engagements with the magazine converging in the same space. The first five years of *Female Mimics* include images of performers explicitly identifying in ways that lead me to place them today in what Susan Stryker calls the “transgender archipelago” (further discussed in collage 3).⁴ They *also* include a 1965 letter from readers scolding the magazine editorial board for allowing the publication to “have become a ‘hand’ book for freaks, perverts, deviates, transvestities [*sic.*], lesbians, etc., which has absolutely no bearing on the professional art of Female Impersonation.”⁵ The letter is printed with a response from the editors expressing disappointment in the writers for “judgement passing,” but the initial letter remains evidence of hostile sentiments. Another letter from a reader in 1966 thanks the editorial board for having helped his wife understand his desire to dress as a woman—where before she had only been in favor of her husband wearing women's clothes at home, she was now happy for them to go out and about in public as two ladies.⁶ In contrast to that sentiment, yet another letter from a reader in 1964 congratulates the magazine for demonstrating that female impersonation is “a performance, rather than a way of life.”⁷ After issue 8, in 1966, the section offering reader letters appears only one more time, in issue 12. It disappears in favor of more ads and more photos of professionals, re-emphasizing that *Female Mimics* is principally a commercial endeavor concerned more with selling itself than providing a community space.

³ Lucas Hildebrand, “Opinion: Policing Drag Has a Long History. There's a Reason Politicians Are at It Again,” *LA Times*, April 3, 2023.

⁴ Susan Stryker, “The Transgender Issue: An Introduction,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4, no. 2 (April 1, 1998): 148, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-4-2-145>.

⁵ The Cast of Finocchio Club, “From Our Mail Box,” *Female Mimics* (Health Knowledge Inc.), Vol. 1, No. 6 (1965): 67.

⁶ B. & J.O., “From Our Mail Box,” *Female Mimics* (Health Knowledge Inc.), Vol. 1, No. 8 (1966): 66.

⁷ Terry Taylor, “the readers always write,” *Female Mimics* (Health Knowledge Inc.), Vol. 1, No. 4 (1964): 55.

I provide this explanation not to lift one aspect of this magazine above another, but to briefly sketch the many dimensions of meaning involved in giving *Female Mimics* full consideration from the overlook of the present. Gender transformation in 1960s America could be considered in many ways: as a temporary theatrical act safely bounded by professionalism, as a full life transition made possible through miraculous medical intervention, as an object of fetishistic sexual interest for onlookers, as a niche commercial market to be exploited, or as a comforting expression of self to be celebrated. All of these interpretations and more existed simultaneously, if not without friction, and operated in conversation with each other over the time period under examination. I present these themes through a series of five collages I created from the text and images of the magazine itself, as well as quotes from relevant academic theory. My intentions are to center and encourage engagement with the artistry of the content, visually display the juxtaposition of the various perspectives, and to embrace that, ultimately, the conversations around gender non-conformity rest and root themselves in the question of appearance. The discussion of the theory sampled is, by necessity, brief; the nature of this project is better suited to a survey of relevant theory. Furthermore, I understand that the audience of this publication may not necessarily be familiar with the authors cited, and preferred to provide an approachable introduction rather than potentially esoteric theory.

A final note on terminology. Most of the photographic subjects appearing in these collages can no longer be located and solicited for their opinion on what identity labels accurately describe them. As the driving impetus of this project was a desire to contextualize and decenter current gender theories by highlighting conversations from the past, I have avoided projecting terms like ‘transgender’ or ‘drag queen’ onto those appearing in the magazine as a whole. Instead I have chosen to use ‘female impersonators’ as a primary descriptor of photographic subjects, as appearing in this magazine indicates that if the phrase was not any individual’s preferred identifier, it was at least accepted.

markets with different points of entry. It offered titillating photos, published reader letters that fostered personal and community connections, profiled performers identifying as transvestite or transsexual. It also played a key role in constructing a narrative that sanitised ‘professional’ drag performers and denied the legitimacy of cross-dressing street sex workers and other individuals who did not confine their cross-dressing to the stage.

Esther Newton documented this discriminating phenomenon in action in her doctoral research and subsequent 1969 monograph *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. Her ethnography of female impersonators in the Midwest serves as a landmark piece of queer scholarship and the framing theory for this collage; her definition of female impersonation, informed by years of research contemporary with my sources and summarised for potentially unfamiliar audiences, is well-suited to introduce and clarify the concept.⁹ This quote is excerpted from a longer and more in-depth look at the cultures Newton was working with, and without quoting her to excess, there are a few points it is useful to directly incorporate for analysis. The first is that the terms “drag queen” and “female impersonator” co-existed, with drag queen serving as “the homosexual term for transvestite,” and female impersonator as a title for professionals used “for the benefit of the straight world.”¹⁰ This is to say, both words might be technically accurate when describing the same person, but “drag queen” carried more association with being gay. The second point to incorporate is Newton’s use of class analysis, and her framing of female impersonators as an “occupational group” rather than an affiliation indicative of sexual or gender identity.¹¹ She does include discussion of the near-universal belief among female impersonators that anyone who did female impersonation personally identified as homosexual.¹² An interview with one performer who says “he dates the girl next door and thinks she’s a knock-out!” in one issue of *Female Mimics* indicates this cannot always have been the case, but the widespread belief should be acknowledged.¹³

The third point is the side of the culture of female impersonation conspicuous in its exclusion from this magazine. Newton’s interviews and ethnography brought her to talk with “street fairies”—usually young, otherwise unemployed persons who “specialize[d] in public, confrontational deviance” and often engaged in sex work—as often as she spoke with

⁹ Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 5.

¹⁰ Newton, *Mother Camp*, 3.

¹¹ Newton, *Mother Camp*, 4.

¹² Newton, *Mother Camp*, 6.

¹³ Anonymous, “Randy Taylor...A Man-Sized International Star,” *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (1965).

“professional” female impersonators who currently had jobs as performers. She positioned “street pattern” impersonators as fusing their personal lives with the stigma of cross-dressing, whereas professional impersonators sought to segregate themselves from stigma by restricting cross-dressing to the stage. Numerous exchanges of insults and drawing of distinctions by informants also allowed Newton to identify the conflict between these two groups. *Female Mimics*, as a magazine, signals itself rather definitively as part of the professional impersonator faction, a topic that will be explored further in collage 5. *Female Mimics* is a magazine focused on selling an image of success to those who practice female impersonation themselves as much as it is on selling the image of tantalizing stigma to those who do not personally engage in the practice. The conflict Newton identifies is, paradoxically, only visible in its complete and total absence, and the focus reserved for successful, extensively groomed professional performers.

Collage 2: Pornographic Flesh: Audre Lorde and C. Riley Snorton



Despite wanting to culturally delineate female impersonators who were ‘true performers’ as unlike the street queens engaging in sex work, a significant amount of the magazine’s income visibly derived from selling sex appeal. The cross-dressing content of the magazine led to it being advertised as “For Adult Readers Only,” and given that it was already the kind of thing that had to be mailed in a discreet brown wrapper, it is consequently unsurprising how many of its ads are for products related to sex. There were no depictions of outright sex acts, photographed or drawn, but topless shots were a recurring element in profiles of individual performers, and every issue under examination featured photographs of participants only wearing lingerie. This is the collage with the most individual elements. Most of them are advertisements. The pen-and-ink sketch centered in the lower third, a feminine figure in lingerie sat at a desk with a quill pen, was used to illustrate the column publishing

reader letters. I used reader letters in other collages, but left them out of this one, as they don't grab attention on this point the way advertisements for products like 'Instant Pussy' do.

This collage is framed by quotes from two different authors writing on sex and gender. The upper quote is from Audre Lorde's essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power."¹⁴ This particular quote centers the contrast between Lorde's definition of the erotic, which she defines as a deeply felt power of the internal spirit of great significance to women, and the pornographic, which emphasizes sensation without feeling. Lorde's essay emphasizes the understanding of internal emotion as a way to make sense of the world, which is perhaps ironic for the collage in this project most focused on external appearances and sexualizing the other. On the other hand, perhaps the collage where the only face left unobscured is one from an advertisement is the most appropriate place to include a reminder that all of the people depicted existed outside of the images they sold, as individuals with their own feelings on the work they did.

I don't know if Lorde would have approved of this application of her quote. Her notion of the erotic deeply centers the power and spirituality inherent to women, something that they deserve to manifest outside the control of masculine-valourised logical thought. While some of these people did identify and seek to be identified as women, many did not. However, I found the image of people who would otherwise be classified as men taking time and effort and passion to move through a world as women compelling, even if many of them only confined it to the world of performance. This also seemed an appropriate place to highlight the notion of *sensation*—in this case in the sense of sensational. These photographed subjects are placed to be read as bizarre, as sexualised objects, as exotic and strange—not necessarily as people who should be understood to feel and be empathised with.

The lower quote is from scholar C. Riley Snorton's book *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, which focuses on the ways race has historically been (and continues to be) a crucial component of defining gender, most particularly in contexts of medicalization and transness.¹⁵ Specifically, the quote comes from Chapter 1, "Anatomically Speaking: The Gendered Flesh and the Science of Sex," where Snorton examines the unethical experimentation on enslaved Black women that birthed modern gynecology. Snorton writes in conversation with Hortense Spillers's writing on the body, which is important to consider when

¹⁴ Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches a Book by Audre Lorde* (Crossing Press, 2007).

¹⁵ C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis, United States: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 52.

contemplating this particular archive.¹⁶ In a magazine focused on the physical, the body is ever-present as an object of question—what is *real*, what is visible, what does it all mean, how does the flesh represent a man or a woman or someone meant to confuse the reader? Snorton’s quote also provides a touchstone for an important element of the nature of this collage’s material: sex and gender are coming into an arrangement in this magazine, as part of the mechanism that allows the eponymous *Female Mimics* to be seen as womanly is that they then become sexually available. For the models to enter and inhabit the space of imagination reserved for women in society, the flesh must become pornographic. To sustain their business, the editors of this magazine must make sure it sells itself.

This is the only collage with two different framing quotes, and therefore rather complicated, just as the subject itself is complicated. I didn’t want to make it simple.

¹⁶ Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 17.

Collage 3: Transgender Questions: David Valentine

Now in your third edition, supposedly devoted to Female Mimics, you seem to feature "freaks" instead of performers . . .

Unfortunately your publication seems to have become a "hand" book for freaks, perverts, deviates, transvestities, lesbians etc., which has absolutely no bearing on the professional art of Female Impersonation. Certainly it does not enhance our profession.

Hoping to see a radical change in future publications, we remain,

Sincerely,
**THE CAST OF
 FINOCCHIO CLUB**

P.S. Think you will print this ???

HANS IS GOING THROUGH AN IMPORTANT CHANGE! AFTER YEARS AND YEARS OF THINKING AND PLANNING, HE HAS DECIDED TO TAKE AN ALL IMPORTANT STEP. SEVERAL MONTHS AGO HE BEGAN HORMONE TREATMENTS IN PREPARATION FOR A MEDICAL CHANGE TO BEING A WOMAN. INTENSIVE PSYCHIATRIC CARE FOLLOWED, AND NOW HANS IS IN EUROPE UNDERGOING THE FINAL OPERATIONS! WHEN HE RETURNS TO HIS FANS AND FRIENDS, HANS WILL BE LEGALLY A WOMAN. HIS FELLOW PERFORMERS HAVE ENCOURAGED HIM ALONG THE WAY, AND WHEN HANS RETURNS WE PREDICT THAT AUDIENCES AND FRIENDS WILL BE THRILLED WITH THE RESULTS!

The flexibility of transgender can result in the listing of people at the edges of the boundaries, like feminine gay men or butch lesbians, while omitting others, whether male transvestites or FTMs. Alternately, it enables one group—frequently transexuals—to stand in for others while giving the impression of collectivity.

"DO CLOTHES MAKE THE GIRL?"
 by Carlson Wade
 Co-author of Transvestism Today

How is Bambi adjusting to her new role? She claims she has never before been so happy! She no longer has to use the excuse of being an impersonator to act and dress as she really feels. But—that does not mean she intends to give up her career. Currently she is playing to SRO audiences in Tokyo. Her next stop is the U.S. "I simply adore American men!" she confesses.

many gay male drag queens are insistent that they are not part of this category as are many butch lesbians

Who Has IT?

P.S. Think you will print this ???
 (Thank you for your letter. This is our reader's column, and we would not ignore your views. The tone of your letter seems to indicate a type of "judgment passing," which we at Female Mimics have tried, and with great success, to overcome. We feel that our honest, direct presentation of a subject, once looked upon with pure disdain, has helped not hurt! And, we are surprised that you resent knowing about some of your fellow entertainers who have faced serious problems with tremendous courage!

How do her colleagues, the men who prefer to remain in their natural state, feel about Bambi? "Just as we always did," one member of Le Carousel's cast reports. "She is like our little sister. We admire her bravery in risking this operation. And we are glad she is so happy. We're proud of her success, too. Her new fame and wealth have not changed her!"

The only color in this collage is from the background shaded to evoke the transgender pride flag; the three images are black and white, matching the text. The top left corner is an excerpt from the letter sent to the magazine by the cast of a particular club of impersonators, which I quoted in the introduction to demonstrate the presence of transphobic attitudes in the landscape of female impersonation. The central image asks, over a pen-and-ink drawing of a performer in the middle of applying makeup and a long-haired wig, "Do Clothes Make the Girl?" as the drawn performer makes eye contact with a black and white photo of a smiling

woman. A superimposed headline at the bottom asks “Who Has IT?”.¹⁷ The headshot featured on this page is Bambi, who, as certain quotes around the edges explains, has undergone gender affirmation surgery and “no longer has to use the excuse of being a female impersonator to dress and act how she really feels.”¹⁸ Other text reveals that someone the audience knows as “Hans” has also made arrangements to go overseas for a sex operation, and that the editors responded to the initial accusatory letter by noting that the writers seem to be engaging in “‘judgement passing,’ which we at *Female Mimics*, have tried, and with great success, to overcome.”¹⁹ The editors also felt that their “honest, direct presentation of a subject once looked upon with pure disdain, has helped not hurt!”.

The quotes framing this collage come from David Valentine’s 2007 book *Imagining Transgender*, noting how the flexibility of “transgender” as a definition seems to frequently position transsexual as a complete definition of the category, while also folding in certain boundaries of the definition and excluding others.²⁰ For similar reasons, Susan Stryker has introduced the concept of an “archipelago of identities,” where discrete identities people attach themselves to (e.g. transvestite, trans man, trans woman, genderqueer, non-binary) exist as individual components/islands of a broader concept/archipelago—the umbrella of ‘transgender’ is therefore useful but not specific.²¹ The second quote notes the insistence of both many gay male drag queens and many butch lesbians that they do not belong to this category, which seemed important to emphasize in this context.

This collage is intentionally spare, not from a lack of material in the archive, but from an abundance of it. The subject of this collage is one I could perhaps best expect a modern audience to find familiar. Multiple issues of the magazine incorporated profiles of transsexual women who used their profits from performing as female impersonators in order to access medical care. Bambi serves as a useful central figure because she is one of the rare figures who can be located in the modern day, where she has since published memoirs identifying herself as transgender. She also appears in the very first issue of the magazine, but in that feature a picture of Bambi is labeled “French Fooler” and “a man!” and the referential pronouns used in the article are he, him, and his. Without the context of the later article, or her later memoirs,

¹⁷ “Who has IT?” *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (1966): 51.

¹⁸ *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (1965): 38.

¹⁹ “82 Club Star Hans Crystal Sails Away for a Permanent Change,” *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (1965): 34; Ed. J, “From Our Mail Box,” *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (1965): 67.

²⁰ David Valentine, “Imagining Transgender,” in *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 33.

²¹ Stryker, “The Transgender Issue.”

there would be no way to explicitly identify Bambi as trans. I wanted to avoid falling into arguing ‘ah, only this woman is categorically transgender and therefore legitimate and good, making everyone else who engaged in this practice and did not identify as a woman therefore illegitimate and bad.’ There’s no clear dividing line that can be drawn declaring categorically which parties in this magazine were encompassed by any labels starting with ‘trans’ and which others were not; it was merely one path people could take to find themselves in that space.

That said, the world of female impersonation was not a monolith; those who participated were not necessarily automatically ready to have transsexual women—or lifestyle transvestites—as full and fellow members. This was a multi-faceted issue that people took different perspectives on, much as they do today. Interestingly, the magazine also documents one historical stage of an ongoing argument that those performers who medically transitioned through hormones and/or surgery were *less* legitimate, or somehow cheating at cross-dressing. The full article the cover image comes from (the same image which informs us the article was written by the co-author of *Transvestism Today*) featured many excerpts from interviews conducted with both those performers who identified as transsexual women and those who identified as men, each making arguments as to why those like them were better suited to performing.²² With its dependence on emotionally provocative quotes, general authorial tone of doubt, and lack of any clear resolution, this article read to me as something meant to engage and inflame debate rather than offer genuine insight on how people lived their lives. While it paints an accurate picture of contemporary debates, it was impossible to incorporate to an extent that would allow full understanding in the space available. I chose to leave the bulk of it in the archive, and draw out conclusions that contrast each other instead.

²² Carlson Wade, “Do Clothes Make the Girl?” *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 11 (1968): 43.

Collage 4: Gay Abandon: Kareem Khubchandani



This collage features a lot of what originally drew me to these magazines as archival documents. Kareem Khubchandani's book *Ishtyle: Accenting Gay Indian Nightlife* covers dynamics at a range of sites, including clubs and house parties, but offers particular devotion to the subject of drag queens and drag shows. *Ishtyle*, much like Esther Newton's book published five decades earlier, collects Khubchandani's doctoral anthropology work writing an ethnography of drag queens. Unlike Newton, who kept her lesbian identity professionally closeted in order to complete her doctoral program in the 1960s, Khubchandani was an open

participant in the community he worked with.²³ In the preface to *Ishtyle*, Khubchandani takes the time to discuss how his enjoyment of watching Desi drag queens perform as a young adult led him to begin performing himself, in order to fulfill the desires and pleasures of a community after moving somewhere Desi drag queens were otherwise absent.²⁴ Khubchandani writes compellingly and from personal experience on the emotional weight and significance drag queens offer to their audiences. This acknowledgement of joy in connection to drag queens and “those of us who traffic in her aesthetics” was enormously resonant with a particular way of being gender-nonconforming reflected in the pages of *Female Mimics*.

Until 1967, the magazine published a selection of letters and often self-shot photos from readers in every issue. Excerpts from those letters, layered over pictures of the models that drew those readers to the magazine, make up the bulk of this collage. One of the writers identifies as a shy “girlie-boy” admiring the poise of both professional and amateur models.²⁵ Another, who featured in the introduction of this paper, describes how the magazine has helped his wife understand his desires to dress as a woman—and though I was unable to include most of the letter, went on to describe outings he had begun to take with his wife while presenting as a woman.²⁶ Another letter writer simply appreciates the *Mimics* for expressing joy in their work rather than just professional or financial interest.²⁷

In contrast to the previous collage, which focuses on ‘transgender’ as a single if not specific category, this collage attempts to speak to a myriad of more nebulously defined experiences. It would be impossible to find a single word that describes all the ways people find joy and solace in this magazine’s pages for affirming their desire to dress and present in ways that fall outside the norm; furthermore, it strikes me as unnecessary. The angry letter outlined in Collage 3 makes it clear that the world of female impersonation was not some magical pre-identity wonderland, but there is repeated, generous evidence that distinctions of identity are not captured by images, and therefore largely meaningless when it comes with people’s ability to *identify* with what they see.

While discussions of clothing and dress today give extensive consideration to gender, there is very little commentary on casual cross-dressing, as conducted by people who still

²³ Kareem Khubchandani, *Ishtyle: Accenting Gay Indian Nightlife* (University of Michigan Press, 2020) xv; Esther Newton, *My Butch Career: A Memoir* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 108, as cited in Jules Gill-Peterson, *A Short History of Trans Misogyny* (Verso, 2024).

²⁴ Khubchandani, *Ishtyle*, xvi.

²⁵ “Pamela,” *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 12 (1968): 57.

²⁶ B. & J.O., *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (1966): 66.

²⁷ “Barbara,” “The readers always write,” *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (1965): 59.

identify with the gender they were assigned at birth but enjoy playing with their presentation. Women wearing pants has become an unquestioned norm, and to a lesser extent so has men wearing their hair long. Wearing a dress, a skirt, or make-up, however, carries such heavy connotations of femininity that the act is expected to indicate something more significant about a person's gender. Even in a person otherwise and completely seen as a man, wearing 'feminine' apparel is taken as a marker of sexuality or at the absolute least a critical personality trait.

In discussions of gender in a sexist society, the question is sometimes raised of why someone already identified by others as a man—a gender considered automatically to hold a more powerful position—would act to be identified by others as a woman, a gender considered automatically to hold a less powerful position. This collage is a rebuttal to the very premise of that question. For the individuals in these pictures, and the ones who wrote in to the magazine to record and share their appreciation, the question of power had long since been abandoned. Even for those who did not consider themselves women, dressing in drag was a matter of joy.

Collage 5: Professional Exotics: Jules Gill-Peterson

A SERIOUS STUDENT OF MAKE-UP

Exotique
CORRESPONDENCE CLUB

HARD, HARD WORK!

He works very hard, too!

"HARD, HARD WORK,."

not trying to be women by dressing in drag; they were merely performing. And by regarding themselves as professional performers—if poorly paid and highly exploited ones—they appealed to the class status that professionalism conferred on them in the gay world. Despite embracing the stigma of effeminacy, they carefully managed and monetized it, turning femininity into a job. Professional drag queens were admired precisely because they were professionals.

He prefers lush evening wear

a luxurious wardrobe.

it sets the mood

that as an old, respected form of stage art you can't learn it overnight!

IT'S LONG, HARD HOURS OF WORK. HISTORICALLY, MIMICRY IS ONE OF THE OLDEST AND MOST FAMOUS FORMS OF STAGE MAKE-BELIEVE... YOU DON'T JOKE ABOUT IT...IT'S SERIOUS BUSI-

Sexy South American Juanita TANTALIZING

The final theme of the magazine I want to highlight is the intertwining of two particular strategies *Female Mimics* used to frame its artists. The first strategy is a strict insistence on female impersonation being difficult, intense work. An emphasis on hard work intertwines with the professionalism which emerged as a theme in Newton's research discussed in Collage 1, where certain female impersonators were determined to separate themselves from street sex workers or lifestyle transvestites. The second strategy is an echo of Collage 2's displayed attraction to the explicit and exotic. While it may seem incompatible with the first strategy's

intense focus on professional work as a form of respectability, the two strategies anchor and reinforce each other such that an analysis benefits from simultaneous examination.

The central quote here is from “Queens of the Gay World,” the third chapter of Jules Gill-Peterson’s monograph *A Short History of Trans Misogyny*.²⁸ Gill-Peterson’s book examines specific historical situations where pursuit of control led agendas of colonial enforcement, repression of sex work, and policing of public spaces to make trans femininity and those who practiced it targets of violence. One site of examination is the queer social scene in the 1960s and 1970s, where the status of drag queens declined sharply as members with more social and political capital saw fit to sacrifice gender nonconformity in their own quest for respectability. The issues examined from *Female Mimics* predate this time period, but the tensions driving an impetus to divide are already visible. The three quotes on hard work in the upper right are taken from three separate issues. Even for the individuals who are secure enough in their position as performers to command work in major metropolitan areas and publicise in a commercial magazine, the almost compulsive reiteration of professionalism, hard work, and a masculine grit betrays a level of insecurity and fear. Laws against cross-dressing had been on the books in many US municipalities for more than half a century.²⁹ *Female Mimics* filled a niche that was only available because it stood alone, and it had already begun to aspire to the same respectability that would be weaponised against any participants.

This self-conscious sense of rarity becomes visible in the magazine’s emphasis on the exotic. Between issue No. 4 and issue No. 5, *Female Mimics* passed from one small publisher putting out raunchy pulps and magazines to another, and its precarious success depended on the norms of society that made their non-normative models all the more thrilling in their strangeness. The most common format for a feature on a single performer was to photograph them throughout their entire changing and makeup routine, a sequence that could be as tantalizing for voyeurs as it was instructive for aspiring performers. The text accompanying such articles alternately serves both purposes; in one issue challenging the viewers almost coquettishly to imagine entering the backstage while this performer was getting dressed, in the next providing insight into the exact process of applying makeup.³⁰ As Gill-Peterson says, the

²⁸ Gill-Peterson, *A Short History of Trans Misogyny*.

²⁹ Kate Redburn, “Before Equal Protection: The Fall of Cross-Dressing Bans and the Transgender Legal Movement, 1963–86,” *Law and History Review* 40, no. 4 (November 2022): 681.

³⁰ *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1963; *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1963).

forbidden territory of effeminacy was “carefully managed and monetized”—and furthermore, exoticised, in the name of sensual appeal.³¹

Frequently, anything that could play an exotic flavor up was emphasized. Parisian performers provided “exotic amusements.”³² Performer Emilio Tellez was featured as a “Puerto Rican Peach.”³³ Joey Baker from the West Indies is introduced as “Exotic Joey Baker.”³⁴ Certainly not all international performers and/or performers of color were so explicitly placed in the category of ‘desirable Other’; for one thing, they appeared too often to be very far removed from the norm. In terms of the distribution of photographic subjects across formality, flamboyance, race, and gender identity, I have chosen to offer a range of presentations in these collages rather than an average, but a wide range was available. The uniting factor of those who received individual profiles remained, once again, this professionalism and commitment to demonstrating that they were hard-working performers who should be taken seriously—even if, ultimately, the exoticism they sold saw them held at the same remove from society as the street queens they personally attempted to disbar.

Conclusion

In 1963, construction on the Berlin Wall entered its second year, six Buddhist monks committed self-immolation in protest of the South Vietnamese government, the first full color television program in the world was broadcast in Mexico, and Catholic services were still universally conducted in Latin. And the first issue of *Female Mimics* was published to uplift an entertainment style that “has suffered from obscurity...because one picture is better than 100 words.”³⁵ Six decades ago, the world we live in looked very different, a truism only emphasized by the premiere editorial of *Female Mimics* lamenting that female impersonation is the only kind of entertainment not shown in television or movies. For all that history serves to help us make human connections with the past, it’s important to remember that it would be irresponsible to claim full understanding of the world through which the subjects of these photographs moved. With that said, I would like to return to the metaphor of using the magazine

³¹ Gill-Peterson, *A Short History of Trans Misogyny*.

³² *Female Mimics*, Vol 1, No. 2 (1963): 58.

³³ *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (1965): 13.

³⁴ *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (1967): 27.

³⁵ “Let Us Entertain You!” *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1963): 5.

Female Mimics as a map of the crossings of some of the many ways of being gender non-conforming in mid-century America.

While the material of this magazine can make an important contribution to the cartography of being gender-nonconforming, it is important to remember the map is not the territory. *Female Mimics* is not a complete picture of anything. Esther Newton's street fairies are not visible in the pages of this magazine. Nor are those who were attacked for cross-dressing, or those who lost jobs, housing, and support because they were unable or unwilling to dress as society expected them to. It isn't even a picture of the full reality of being a female impersonator, as an enterprise that strives to entertain will understandably leave out negativity where possible. While acknowledging that this archive is prone to gaps even when undistilled, what *can* be said about the map it offers?

Fundamentally, the landscape it shows us is one of convergences, overlaps, and contrasts. The magazine's emphasis on images maintained a level of flexibility in fostering potential reader connections. There were any number of people who were interested in adopting exaggerated modes of femininity using the photographs and techniques of the performers on display as a guide for how to relate to the world. Not all of them were otherwise viewed as men—editorial remarks affirm the validity of women taking up the art of female impersonation, just as there are people assigned female at birth who perform as drag queens today.³⁶ There was plenty of sexual provocation: lingerie shots, provocative color spreads, sexual advertisements, and written erotica. Undoubtedly some of the models featured found sexual pleasure in their involvement with the magazine, just as there were undoubtedly readers whose only interaction with female impersonation was as a source of titillation. Other readers submitted entirely chaste photos of themselves standing in their living rooms wearing outfits their accompanying letters said they weren't comfortable taking out in public. Transsexual performers shared page space with those who unabashedly declared themselves entirely masculine men with a niche artistic hobby. The idea of men wearing women's clothing was treated in turn as strange and exotic and personally fulfilling and meaningful. All of these ways of being took place in the same space of imagination provided by this magazine; many of them took place in the same physical spaces, sharing stages at clubs and dance floors at ballrooms.

Ways of being gender non-conforming, various interpretations and claims on what it meant to be a female impersonator, did not just run parallel to each other. They overlapped,

³⁶ Ed., "The readers always write," *Female Mimics*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (1965): 5.

intertwined, and quite often deliberately clashed, defining their positions by opposition and contrast. 'Female Impersonator' as an identification, like the word 'transgender,' serves a useful but nonspecific function. It indicates an alignment with a particular tradition without providing any detailed information on an individual's approach, feelings, or choices. In a sense, the act of transformation embodied in the pages of *Female Mimics* was itself in constant flux, fluidly changing forms depending on who was enacting it. Like a river undergoing avulsion or mountain paths rebuilt around rockfalls, this was a feature of this landscape, not a flaw. Even when an interest in queer history derives from a desire to draw parallels between the past and the present, that history should not be simplified. The full scope of life embodied in *Female Mimics* demonstrates that demanding singularity of expression from a past as rich and complicated as our present is equally as unjust as pretending that past does not exist.

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‘Mortal bodies and immortal science:’ Gerard de Lairesse’s anatomical prints as mirrors to societal transformation

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Abstract:

In my paper I discuss Early Modern Dutch medical prints and their iconography as a reflection of societal shifts from the provincially focused communitarianism of an older world to an endeavouring, bureaucratised and capitalist modern world. This transformation from pre-modern to modern was reflected in medical prints in three key ways. Firstly, the images’ existence related to contemporaneous advances in medical education, exemplified by anatomy teaching at newly founded universities across the Seven United Provinces. In the context of an emerging market for images, medical illustrations were widely disseminated, representing a gradual popularisation of the transmission of knowledge. Prints, as well as public anatomy lectures held at universities, provided a new form of spectacle to a popular audience newly fascinated with concepts of the body and its materiality. Secondly, such imagery provided captive audiences with an illusion of moral control. Early Modern Dutch society was obsessed with the optics of decorum, exemplified by the ritual habit of scouring the stoop that did not appear to respond to necessity. Promoting an appearance of moral control had to do with simultaneous efforts at defining a Dutch national character, emerging after protracted wars with Spain as a call to rally somewhat disparate provinces under common, nationalistic auspices. Creating the outward image of good, moral aptitude became central in this nation-building effort. The use of medical imagery in connection with proving one’s inner cleanliness (or another’s dirtiness) also resonates with the Early Modern myth of the transparent body, a concept which wavers in-between worlds: An old world informed by superstition, and a new one, invested in collecting objective information. Finally, relating to this distinctly modern effort at creating a body of evidence-based knowledge, anatomical prints represented a shift to the optical mode, where information is gathered and transmitted by means of sight. Reproducing realistic renderings of the human body was pivotal in establishing a visual corpus around worlds being uncovered.

Keywords: *Medical history, art history, Early Modern Dutch society, medical prints*

‘I make the supposition that the body is nothing else but a statue or earthen machine, that God has willed to form entire, in order to make it as similar to us as is possible.’

(Descartes 1972, pp. 2-4)

Philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) influenced an early modern shift in how medicine and adjacent fields treated the human subject. Perceptions of the body shifted from those of a religiously controlled entity forbidding human intervention, to a distinct, machine-like form whose inner workings could be schematized and understood. In this paper, I map out contemporaneous advances in the philosophy of science as they became reflected in artistic autopsy prints. The very existence of such prints is telling of a shift in how bodies became seen: Quasi-mechanical and newly instrumentalised in learning. It was a new practice to carry out autopsies and to be able to picture the deceased with observational accuracy. To methodically map out bodily systems was reflective of fundamental philosophical shifts taking hold and being extrapolated into the medical field. First, I will consider the prints as a dualistic reflection moving alongside this continuum of change. Their formal dualism was borne out of their existence at the cusp of societal change, going from one steeped in religious superstition to one invested in objective knowledge. Second, the prints mirrored moral customs and fixations characteristic of early modern Dutch society undergoing religious and societal tumult. I will look at ways anatomical prints and public autopsies were located within this culture of prescriptive societal control. Lastly, I will consider the prints’ existence in the newly conceived optical field, and how the new focus on optics represented a crucial shift in contemporaneous perceptions of reality, generating ideas about how this reality could be recorded, observed and possibly controlled.

This new rationalism was defined by a Cartesian understanding of the limits of perception, and a subsequent striving to analytically describe the body’s mechanical properties in order to gain a more informed grasp of physiology and by extension, of the world. Descartes, while not a physician, was interested in and wrote extensively on the body, delineating a dualistic approach whereby the soul and the body were two separate entities. This led to a renewed perception of the human body, emerging as an instrument for learning and a site for scientific advancement. (Forsius 2001, p. 86) Descartes’ dualism was a freeing framework appearing in distinction to a prior notion of the body as intricately bound with the human soul. As such it could not be disturbed after death. The new rationalistic perspective allowed for research to be freed from religious constraints that had forbidden autopsies and the proliferation of anatomic prints up until that point. This paper contextualises engravings based on drawings by artist Gerard de Lairesse, created for anatomist and surgeon Govard Bidloo’s (1649-1713) anatomical atlas *Anatomia Humani Corporis* 1685).

Anatomia comprised of 105 plates and was divided into sections on the head, the trunk, the stomach and the viscera, the womb and fetus, the limbs and the skeleton. Its images were drawn by de Lairese and engraved by Abraham Blooteling and the brothers van Gunst. (Bernez 1994, p. 209) Its images employ a stylised baroque rendering, with decorative props and detailing, contrasting with the sober description of the bodies and their internal structures. This mixture of style and purpose reflects a desire to stay true to historicist style while looking forward. In the Netherlands, the role of the church in scientific matters was being reconsidered. The country was religiously multiple and divided. Its Southern provinces reigned under the Spanish Crown embraced Catholicism while the reformed North officially adopted Calvinism. The prints analysed here were produced north of this divide. Northern attitudes were relatively liberal, enabling autopsies to be routinely carried out. This gradually inched the medical profession from a realm of wonder and belief towards ratio and pragmatism, a shift within which the unconventional Bidloo treatise is nestled. Netherlands had rapidly gained a central status as a trading might, with its seafaring, trade and fishing ventures bringing considerable affluence. With plenty came advances in knowledge and cultural production, exemplified by treatises Descartes published locally: *Discours de la méthode* (1637), *L'homme* and *Un traité de la formation du fœtus* (published posthumously in 1662). His physiological meditations remained invested in theism and doubted sense-based observation as solid scientific basis, while looking into modernity by suggesting that the body, separate from the soul, consists of quasi-mechanical systems that as such could be observed, schematised and controlled.

I first became interested in early modern medical prints when I encountered an early copy of Bidloo's *Anatomia Humani Corporis* at the Osler Library of the History of Medicine. Its anatomy illustrations struck me as pragmatic and modern, drawn accurately from direct observation of dissected bodies. The baroque engravings that strove for representational accuracy displaying musculature, fasciae and tendons laid out and duly numbered made a lasting impression. Since then, I have investigated what canon this practice of drawing the interior of bodies, seemingly an early form of postmortem imaging subscribes to, and what these images tell us about the contemporaneous moment, pivotal for understanding the structures making up a body. Indeed, the lines of inquiry around medicine moved from superstitions and religiously controlled practices towards optically directed and empirically guided observations. This was reflected by physicians' practices of information collection and recruitment of artists to document findings. The contemporaneous moment was key for dissemination of printed imagery. Early modern print production and trading were saturated fields with Netherlands particularly an important centre of production and circulation. (Hoftijzer 2015) Susan Kuretsky pointed out that Bidloo's book lay

between viable worlds being ‘too large and expensive to sell widely to general readers,’ and furthermore ‘not considered complete or accurate enough [...] for scientific use.’ (Kuretsky 2014, p. 12) De Lairese’s prints rest between idealised images and functional diagrams geared towards a select, medically trained audience. The prints’ existence remains a historic curiosity which charts the beginnings of routine dissection as method, reflecting on the broadening of medical practices to newly encompass observation and evidence-based learning, while meditating on the renewed role of medical professionals as active extrapolators.

Anatomical engravings reflecting contemporary knowledge economies

Musician and painter Gerard De Lairese (1641-1711) was born in Liège to an artistic family. His father was a painter and he trained in the most prestigious art form of history painting, drawing inspiration from the classical world. Known as ‘the Dutch Poussin,’ de Lairese was drawn to antique and allegorical motifs and included some in the anatomical images he produced for Bidloo. (Bernez 1994, p. 208) De Lairese used classicizing poses throughout and some of the architectural and object detail in the images, vases, cloths, other ‘props’ also come from that world. In figure I. (appendix) we see a skeleton holding a drape and stepping into a tomb. In its background looms an imposing obelisk structure with Egyptianate detailing. Obelisks symbolised rebirth after death, and the presence of a skeleton here represents a more literal involvement of death symbols. Such visual language is reminiscent of *vanitas* or *memento mori* imagery, widely rehearsed in Netherlandish still life painting at the epoch. The role of *vanitas* elements was to act in a largely Christian context as a warning against excess and earthly pleasures, representing coded meanings in a society invested in cementing morality into the pictorial arts. Skulls in paintings acted as reminders about life’s ultimate transience and underlined the importance of a moral life. (Knoeff 2012) Here the skeleton occupies a more complex role, being nestled into both an anatomical and a historicist visual context. The picture shows allegorical props and elements drawn from the context of *vanitas*, as well as showing a history painter’s fluency in ancient cultures and architectural symbolism. A painting de Lairese created in 1665 for the city of Amsterdam, *De Steedenmaagd van Amsterdam* also rehearses obelisk symbolism as a backdrop to his allegorical figures. Motifs from history painting were reused in the new scientific context of *Anatomia*. As an introductory plate to the volume, the skeleton plate acted as a bridge between the metaphor-rich worlds of death and rebirth, owing to a historicist symbology despite espousing rational and scientific elements by purpose.

As a history painter de Lairese was interested in virtuous representation through bodily perfection. Bernez has pointed out that for de Lairese, antiquity was the pinnacle of virtue and when drawing from a human model the artist ‘must not be afraid of correcting nature.’ (Bernez 1994, p. 209) To note this is important because artistic interpretation possibly placed anatomical accuracy in danger. We can however detect an intention to be accurate in the detailed rendering of the skeleton’s bones, represented with great attention to detail and duly indexed for later explanation. The detailed and true-to-life representation of the skeleton attests to an educational intention. Its surroundings act as an aestheticising backdrop — establishing a visual context for educated audiences who would have encountered death themes both in history tableaux and muchrehearsed *vanitas* imagery. Allegory of death features strongly, but it is newly relegated to a supporting role around the skeletal and hybrid main-character-cum-learning-prop.

As well as persisting in an allegorical role and acquiring a new one steeped in pragmatism, the prints in the Bidloo treatise are curiosities, opening up familiar worlds in unfamiliar ways. In the context of an emerging market for images and other luxury objects, medical illustrations were increasingly disseminated, reflecting a gradual popularisation of knowledge transmission. Anatomy prints and lectures provided a new form of spectacle to an audience fascinated with concepts of the body and its materiality. The Bidloo treatise features many images of stillborn fetuses of different developmental stages and sizes, and a plethora of pregnancy images. These are presented with intricate detailing to underline the presence of distinct body tissues. In figure II. (appendix), a piece of paper is placed under the placenta to amplify its translucent texture, exemplifying the artist’s interest in observational accuracy and underlining *material* properties. Sixteenth-century German imagery showing anomalous and potentially complication-prone fetal positions adopted a more abstracting approach. Given that their purpose was also educational, Rösslin’s earlier obstetric depictions seen in figure III (appendix) remain unrealistic from a multitude of viewpoints. The focus was on aesthetics and fetuses are displayed smiling, with full heads of hair, their posing in the supposedly spacious, balloon-like wombs giving the impression of being swept up in motion. In contrast, the Bidloo plates aim high on accuracy and completeness, while aspiring to a marginal degree of prop-based aestheticisation. The Bidloo images favored a materially based world of empiricism and realism, in a move reflecting the Age of Observation and catering to an increasingly informed and curious audience.

The relegation of allegory to the background is reflective of changes in academic medicine. University medicine had been taught as one of the humanities, and physicians received thorough

groundings in classics. Medical training was on the cusp of pivotal changes whereby a new pragmatism replaced the religious superstitions having prohibited autopsies. Special theatres were built to house anatomy lessons. These sought to provide students with a better understanding of the body's inner workings but as Jose Van Dijck pointed out, the focus was on the anatomist, not the cadaver. (Van Dijck 2015, p. 122) Such events acted as advertisements for individual physicians' skill and highlighted the physician as a 'synechdoche' or a gatekeeper of sorts, to the 'medical body of knowledge.' (Van Dijck 2015, p. 123) The physician became seen as an expert mediator who opened up these unforeseen worlds to the viewer, contributing to a public perception of his field. Figure IV (appendix), an engraving by Willem Isaaczoon van Swanenburgh and based on a drawing by Jan Corneliszoon van't Woudt, shows the lecture theatre built in 1591 to house autopsies at the University of Leiden. We detect the importance of allegory, aesthetics and belief for the medical field through the image where symbol and pragmatism exist side by side. The lecture hall housed a curiosity cabinet with objects ranging from animal skeletons, taxidermy and corals, to mummy coverings, 'A Roman Lamp which burnes eternally' and 'The Entrailles of a Man, of which is made a Shirt.' (Schuyt 1697, p. 6) The collection's eclecticism, stretching from the natural-historical and the mythical to the macabre, shows that the site of learning portrayed itself between a cabinet of wonders purporting magic, and a purpose-designed site for the linear advancement of anatomic skill. De Lairese's drawings, existing between the allegorical and anatomical worlds, did not stand out in their hybridity.

Contrasting aesthetics were not just a reflection of a contemporaneous shift from the old towards the new in the practice and teaching of medicine. The early modern perception of science was not similarly isolationist as it is in view of increasing specialisation today. For natural scientists lacking the knowledge of classical and quantum mechanics we now possess, spiritual and belief elements became central to how they practiced as these served to fill the gaps in their understanding. The groundings in science were humanist but they were also religious. Regional differences were reflected in the practice of the Dutch anatomist Frederick Ruysch (1638-1731), who collected and portrayed medical samples in his personal curiosity cabinet, acting as a precursor to the Leiden anatomy theatre. The desire to make advances in the field was tightly bound with the curiosity to understand the world of anatomy through its materiality, through possessing, collecting and displaying medical objects. Collecting and displaying curious or unusual objects was part of a broader process of navigating the elitist discipline of medicine. The field was perceived as likenable to humanities in that it also provided its practitioner with access a certain social standing. Religion

still had a strong footing at these higher echelons of society and featured strongly in the practice of medicine and humanities alike.

In 1628, English physician William Harvey described in *De motu cordis et sanguinis* the circulation of blood in a closed circle, where it is recycled, departing from the previously dominant belief that blood was constantly consumed and produced anew by the human system. Blood circulation had been shrouded in mystery and remained the object of superstition and belief. Harvey described the heart as giving motion to blood, yet his contemporaries understood the body in the same way the followers of Hippocrates had described it, as a ‘microcosm of the greater cosmos.’ (Harvey 2007) Aristotle saw the heart as crucial not only physically but symbolically in that it moved around the humours. Yellow bile, black bile, blood and phlegm represented the four elements of fire, earth, water and air. The heart as that which moved the four elements within the body was seen as the centre of humanity itself. In the Baroque imaginary, a model of circularity was ideal for establishing connections between the human microcosm and the world. Descartes’ account builds on the Harveian view of the closed circulation system, in addition focusing on the selfenclosure of the body and its division into anatomically and functionally distinct systems. (Judovitz 1998, p. 23) What marked Cartesianism was the move from heart-centricity to thinking of the brain, and more exactly the pineal gland as the crux of humanity. Advances in science were bound by exactness, and characterised by methodically recording observations. Logic and precision was the stuff of the rational mind, relegating the heart, repetitive and mechanical, to an ancillary role. Relating to this desire to exude virtue by way of being exact, De Lairessels drawings were made directly *ad vivum delineatis*, rather than from earlier images, attesting to the heightened role of the brain as the site of mediation of all observation. At the same time, especially the pregnancy and miscarriage images in Bidloo’s treatise find a balance of describing and simultaneously edifying that which had moved to the world beyond. The images give a soul to the soulless, elevating matter to a realm of ideas forming new bodies of knowledge. The material bodies are treated as scientific concepts surpassing in importance mere curiosities, effectively granting them a place among exacting, informative imagery. The body which gives new life is given particular prominence within the book with reproductive organs and obstetric pathology getting a focused treatment. In another obstetrics image shown in figure V (appendix) we see a dissected pregnant womb with the fetus curled up and appearing peacefully asleep. What reveals this to be an illusion are the layers of the abdominal wall, meticulously dissected and shown. Methodical observation and minute detail is complemented by the fine motoric skills of poetic meditation of the two deaths. The

pregnant body is shown opened up as one would open a pomegranate, reminiscent of Renaissance philosophies linking childbearing to a more literal fruitfulness. Instead of opting for the squarely Cartesian, proto-industrial view of the womb as a childbearing mechanism, de Lairese applied his historicist training and treated his topic with the old-world symbolism at a time when the presence of classical themes remained status quo in academic medicine. The artistic portrayal ties into a desire to elevate the immediately material and observable to a realm of poetics and symbolism, heightening the tension vis-à-vis a precise and diagrammatic rendering style.

Anatomy prints reflecting the moral compass

Concepts of morality featured heavily in the art of Golden Age Netherlands. Often it was hidden under layers of meaning and evaded ready decryption. The growing body of knowledge also made some of these hidden meanings and messages easier to uncover. Thief Aris Kindt, deceased and dissected, was the object of Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp*, painted in 1632. Rembrandt reimagined anatomical aspects of Kindt's dissected left forearm, showing the flexor muscle group as originating on the lateral, or outer aspect of the humerus. The origin of those muscles is in fact on the medial aspect of the humerus, meaning the one closer to the torso when the palm is facing upward. This recalls the possibility of having used as reference an image of a dissected right hand's extensor muscle group, because those muscles do originate on the lateral side of the humerus. This breaking away from true-to-life depiction is possibly a moral commentary, provided as a reminder that our ability to grasp the inner workings of the human body are at best limited. Remembering this was central to the philosophy of Descartes when he posited in the annotations to his *cogito* that the premise of doubt is the only thing that cannot be doubted. (Descartes 1995) To posit one's doubt as that which is certain is a way of dealing with uncertainty in an uncertain and developing scientific landscape. Moral codes were another way to manage and control unpredictable human activity. The *Anatomy Lesson* is a Cartesian reminder of our epistemological limitedness. We can continually strive for the best knowledge and practice, but it is at best an extrapolation. This idea marked early modern philosophies of science, followed by bringing pragmatism and reasoning to the forefront. Focus moved onto the idea that the body is a set of closed systems that can be accurately measured, its innate workings grasped by way of close analysis. The notion of the all-pervasiveness of doubt birthed a new canon of seeking to understand the body as a set of systems that could and should be studied methodically and in isolation. Health and the study of disease thus became the world displaying a great amount of control and classification. Susan Sontag suggested that irrational beliefs inform perceptions around health: 'Any

disease that is treated as a mystery and acutely enough feared will be felt to be morally, if not literally, contagious.’ (Sontag 1978, p. 6) Dysfunctions of the body are more frightening the less is known about them. Each era has its own disease that captures the imagination. For the baroque observer, disease was a disorder of the humours, the four liquids defining individual behaviour and personality. Disease was then seen as something quite ontological, potentially threatening our very source. The disorders of the humors could not be seen or studied in any great detail. The way to deal with such an urgent level of uncertainty was to mediate it by other means. Moral mediation of bodies in the medical context was especially poignant as it related to anomaly. Bidloo’s bodies are not diseased, nor are they linked to moral degeneracy as in the case of Aris Kindt. Instead, their instrumentalised, autopsied status is indicative of the new role matter could have after death. Van Dijck pointed out that the interior of the body is always mediated. Mediation is needed when relating to bodies, at once objects we have perfect logistical mastery over, and foreign objects only a few grasp the hidden workings of. The Bidloo prints were among the first to look ‘under the hood’ of the human body’s system. Mediation provided an explanation for something inexplicable or apprehended. The bodies’ materiality as an object of mediation and study has elements of moral control to it — since recording, measuring and controlling in the material realm were crucial to the early modern social order.

Measuring as a gesture was indeed portrayed across a lot of early modern imagery, connoting an increasing focus on rationality and exactness. The anatomy theatre at Leiden boasted among its collections many whale-themed images. Whale beachings held moral significance as supposed reminders that the accumulation of earthly wealth was soon to be if not the single cause then a precipitator of moral decline. Whales symbolised the eventual great seaborne disaster in a country whose arable land was largely reclaimed from unforgiving bodies of water. The resulting discourse, thorough documentation of the beachings and measuring of whale appendages was an exercise in moral control, considered necessary to master these forms of natural (and moral) disaster. Pictures of beached whales portray the concerned public engaging in acts of measuring. We see similar concerns around morality and measuring in de Lairese’s image with a skull, notation and an inkwell (figure VI in appendix). In it we see the idea of measuring and scale as extended portrayals of moral aptitude, tinted with a *vanitas* sensibility. Measuring has connotations of justness and fairness. Meticulous and true to scale depiction of the skull coupled with the introduction of the notation page and inkwell as if ‘for scale’ indicate a desire to be exact. It was furthermore seen as helpful to mediate the image with mundane objects to render it intelligible and aesthetic in its scientific pallor.

The obsession with measurement comes from a need to make sense of a messy reality. The interest with it is to overcome a *de facto* entropy in nature, and to counter chaotic early modern life. The desire to control and predict is exemplified as a preference for the logos, the rational, the classifiable. Classing citizens according to how their bodies could be seen was a concrete manifestation of exerting moral control over the populace. This idea, and the newly popular interest in bodies and their functioning resulted in making autopsies public. Public autopsies doubled as a spectacle akin to public executions, possibly surpassing their cruelty by serving as post-mortem punishment for those on the autopsy table. Subjects were thieves, vagrants and others leading itinerant and impoverished lives, possibly without next of kin. Thus, they were forced to offer their bodies in the service of science and wonderment. Observers also received prescriptive ethics in the process. Gaining access to see the events unfold in the anatomy theatre not only represented an instance of morbid entertainment for the lay follower, it also acted as a deterrent from doing crime. Being involuntarily dissected after one's passing would have been seen as an ultimate punishment in that it reached beyond death, a process seen by the early modern observer as particularly sacred. Ultimately, given the fact that the autopsy tickets were expensive and the attendees had a high social standing, this spectacle appears as class tourism, comparable to the Amsterdam public prison tours of the Spinhuis, mainly housing prostitutes. (Schama 1997, p. 22) This is to say that in a stratified society, moral spectacles of various forms existed in order to cement class divisions into place, simultaneously underlining them and creating the comfortable illusion of their immutability. Peer or class-transcending observation extending into the medical realm had to do with a surveillance based social order, with sight implying moral control. Being able to see inside the neighbour's house held particular prominence in Netherlandish society where optical access allowed by the deliberate omission of curtains could be a measure of the observee's moral standing. By extension, to be able to see inside a body was to be able to discern that person's moral standing. Gaining access to view the inside of a body similarly became to connote assessments of that person's purity or impurity. The social strata implications of being laid bare was that this was seen as a way to control an 'unruly mass' of the lower classes. De Laire'sse's hand images in the Bidloo volume (Fig VII.) continued a tradition set by Andreas Vesalius, the likeliest source for Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson*. Such imagery provided captive audiences with an illusion of moral control by way of seeing. Through exposing the mechanism of a hand that stole the loaf of bread or the apple, is to take a closer look at crime itself. Gaining visual access was seen as a form of moral control. Early Modern Dutch society was concerned with the optics of decorum, exemplified by ritual habits of scouring and cleaning that did not appear to respond to necessity. Promoting an appearance of morality and cleanliness had to do with simultaneous efforts at defining a national character,

emerging as a call to rally culturally disparate provinces under nationalistic auspices. Maintaining the outward image of moral aptitude became central in this nation-building effort.

Looking to cure, looking one's best

Relating to a modern effort at creating bodies of observed knowledge, anatomical prints represented a shift to the optical mode, where information is gathered and transmitted by means of sight. Seeing was a first step towards being able to take informed action. This is a modern vision and it comes into focus in the myriad of imaging techniques in use today, appearing on the same nonlinear continuum of development having started with the early modern practice of recording autopsies. Reproducing realistic renderings of the human body was pivotal in establishing a visual corpus around worlds being uncovered. Cartesian philosophy preferred to look at the body as a mechanical entity distinct from or primary to concepts like soul or spirit. Susan Kuretsky pointed out that Descartes's position, published in 1637 in *Discourse on Method*, had 'profound consequences for developments in anatomical illustration' noting that '[de] Lairese's illustrations, with their emphasis on the internal systems and workings of the body isolated from the whole,' belonged to this new world. (Kuretsky 2014, p. 16) The Bidloo treatise reflected the isolationist turn with its focus on the optical. What we understand here by isolationism is that all body systems were best studied separately. We see quite directly the effects of such new lines of thinking of the body comprising of diverse systems in the Bidloo treatise, most strikingly in the arm pictures (Figure VII in appendix), with muscles and tendons pinned out to better display them to the viewer as parts of a functioning whole. The pinning of the tendons works to make the drawings akin to schematic images of mechanical parts, taking the treatise towards considering the body as schematically describable interlinked parts, comparable to pulley systems, central to Dutch mercantile imaginary. Pulley systems used to hoist up goods during the 17th century still remain visible in the upper part of old Dutch building facades. In the same way the mechanical workings of a pulley system could be schematically described, the body's inner workings could be broken apart and studied, aiding the process of understanding.

By isolating one bodily system, one could see and closely study that system, to analytically determine its inner workings. Autopsies, striving to see inside the body, are closely related with optics. The word autopsy is formed of two roots: the ancient Greek *autos* for self and *optos* for seen. It translates into 'to see for oneself,' or to 'self-reveal.' The early modern mind did not quite equate

the physician looking with curing. Rather, seeing was a step towards gaining the necessary understanding and thus a prerequisite of curing. Seeing was to understand more about the patient's condition, whereas earlier methods had involved secrecy, ritual and beliefs. Medical images' dissemination in illustrated treatises not only shaped perceptions about the healing process as based on optics, but also contributed to a collective understanding of disease and new therapeutic intervention. Van Dijck mapped the ideal of the transparent body, achieved by rendering the body's workings transparent through several layers of looking. The transparent body was conflicting for the early modern observer as its idea was sense-based and senses were considered the domain of empiricism. Descartes doubted empiricism, because to him our human senses were fallible. On the other hand, Descartes' own rationalism based on logical reasoning, and a lot of his scientific texts base on observed data, pointing to unmined potential of the senses as scientific basis. Seeing was akin to being informed and in certain cases a prerequisite to ascertaining more detail.

Looking as a method and the eye as a mechanical device was developed by Johannes Kepler, who in the late sixteenth-century developed his mechanical model of the eye, a trend inspiring painters to produce realistic pictures as if to precociously mimic the idea of the eye as a *camera obscura*-style device. The Keplerian model presented the eye as a system of lens and chamber, its mechanism gathering and inverting light rays onto the retina. The final interpretation of the image in the brain was a process his contemporaries placed firmly in spiritual and therefore unscientific domains. The implication of such a complex mechanical process preceding the conscious process of viewing naturally raised the Cartesian question of statistics. When so many stages were passed through by the light ray in order to form the basis of all observation, many things could go wrong on the way. The human-machine was fallible, and any perception of reality at best a wavering reflection. We see this principle of the eye as the best bad system at our disposal in de Lairese's print of a skull fragment laid next to an inkwell and a pen, later its concave interior exposed and this time laid on top of musical notation. (Figure VI in appendix) We are first presented with the illusion of a full cranium, but it is revealed on closer inspection to be a fragment. This tension between illusion and exactitude amounts to a reminder of our limited capacities for viewing. The fallibility of optics acts as a reminder of the growing scope of medicine, where new discovery raises more potential for uncertainty and doubt, forcing medical professionals to reckon with their limits.

Optics as a guiding principle for art and science was not without its subversions and opponents. Physicians' training did not involve human autopsies until the seventeenth century so

one relied on knowledge gained by examining corresponding structures in animals. Because reliable information was difficult to come by, anatomists had found other ways to practice and to partially ground their lines of inquiry in theatrics, belief and aesthetics. Southern practitioner Frederick Ruysch's cabinet of wonders was a prime example of a pre-rationalist aestheticisation of death and bodies. Aestheticisation predated but also laid the foundations for opticity, in that it represented finding meaning through vision in a time where meaning was rigorously sought but answers were difficult to obtain. Anatomy was long relegated to being aesthetic and mystical, its links to academy found in its classicising treatment. In the physician's cabinet of wonders the macabre met the poetic and music inspired matter. Theatrics were seen on the skeleton plate of the treatise, acting as introductory matter to an audience accustomed to seeing anatomy only in the context of sumptuous material cultures. The portrayal of allegorical and classical motifs was a way to secure the sympathies of an audience, before introducing them to new, more analytic ways of seeing.

Svetlana Alpers evoked the importance for early modern painters to look inside the materials they depicted, as she puts it, '[c]heeses are cut into, pies spill out their fillings,' lemon peels 'sliced and unwound to reveal a glistening interior [...] subject not to the ravages of time but to the probings of the eye.' (Alpers 1984, pp. 90-91) The philosophical implications of breaking something to look inside it is in line with the thinking of Kepler and Descartes, while meditating on temporality. Such ventures to break into one's subject matter were crucially prompted by the occasional attempt to self-aggrandize and to show one's skill. The moment was rife for the monetization of one's trade and this included medicine. As well as a way for de Lairese to assert his skill in observation and realistic rendering, in the same vein this book offered Bidloo to assert his professional and academic stature through displays of humanist and classical virtues, alongside claiming authority, knowledge and access in medicine. As a history painter de Lairese would have normally engaged with larger-than-life historical and allegorical motifs. While subscribing to the more modest genre of still life, drawing bodies' likenesses from the broken-open, stilled objects was evidently important to the artist given its radical potential for the depiction of an entirely new type of object. He was faced with previously unconquered terrain to further elevate his status as a painter in a saturated and high-competition image economy. As objects focusing on the process of showing, the prints absolutely attest to a level of self-promotion by their makers, encouraging audiences to be impressed by them, their level of access and expertise, as well as the novel objects themselves.

Conclusion

Gerard de Lairesse's prints for Bidloo's 1685 atlas reflected transformations to the Netherlandish society, such as the strengthening of the nation's commercial position. The country's material wealth compounded with its cultural heterogeneity made it a prime site for encounter and creation of value, allowing scientific development to take place. One key advancement was the use of autopsies to learn about the body. The emerging model was based on isolationism, propelled by the belief that to closely examine each system in the body would bring new knowledge. Indeed, this new information replaced falsehoods reached by extrapolating from animal cadavers. Anatomy prints by de Lairesse followed this pragmatism. De Lairesse did not produce diagrams, nor did he opt for purely aesthetic impressions. The pictures waver between the two prominent models for assessing reality, reflecting a shift from an affective and superstitious world towards a world of ratio, afforded by the advent of new knowledge. De Lairesse made a parallel gesture to Vesalius whose works were the first to correctly describe a human body's interiors. Indexical and methodical representation of the body's structures speak to a quintessentially Dutch habit of exerting control through exactness. Classical details acted as an appropriate aesthetic introduction to new ideas of body transparency, pandering to tastes prevailing among predicted audiences. Bodies became elevated beyond their status as reliquary detritus of the living, or as mere sites of godly judgement or pardon. They became seen as instruments for the cementing of prevailing moral standards and became the new instruments for the lofty goals of education — both anatomical and moral. Observing bodies predated knowing about them, and seeing bodies was analogous with controlling them. Processes of sighting were instrumental in gaining knowledge and also vehicles towards the ultimate realization that doubt only grew with new information.

The body being cut into and its systems exposed also made for complex implications for the body as a seeing object, an object which sees, and an object which could be seen. Through a contrasting mixture of the observed and the idealised, de Lairesse meticulously represented the bodies but also attempted to describe the limitations of representation — a characteristically modern gesture. Through the mixing of theatrics and allegory to a purely scientific style, the viewer of the prints is positioned like the observer of a play or a spectacle. The viewer as a fallible and susceptible being is proposed by introducing theatricality and self-promotion. These elements represent contemporary print economies and momentarily undercut purely scientific propositions laid out by the book. To describe anatomy in pictures was to conquer new ground and to take liberties outside one's artistic jurisdiction.

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Appendix: Plates

Figure I.





Figure II.

ist hat gessen/ und ob oher
r/hindernuß halb / so sol die
s zü samen bindē / mit einer
ürt senffrem zichen dē kind
die aller sorgklichst geburt.



¶ Wo aber das kind k̄
me mit einer seite an die
geburte So soll aber die
hebam̄ das kind schicken
richten und wysen ober
sich / wie es vo:hin in m̄
ter leib gefessen ist / vñ im
darnach zü bequēliche
rfigang helfen.

¶ So aber das kind kem mit ge
reutē füessen / So sol die hebam̄
die füeß zü samen thun / vñ dar
nach vfffürē / als obstadr. Doch
soll sie allzeit fleiß ankeren / das
die hend des Kindes neben seiner
seiten hinab gestreckt seynt / als
dieß gemelt ist.



12

Figure III.

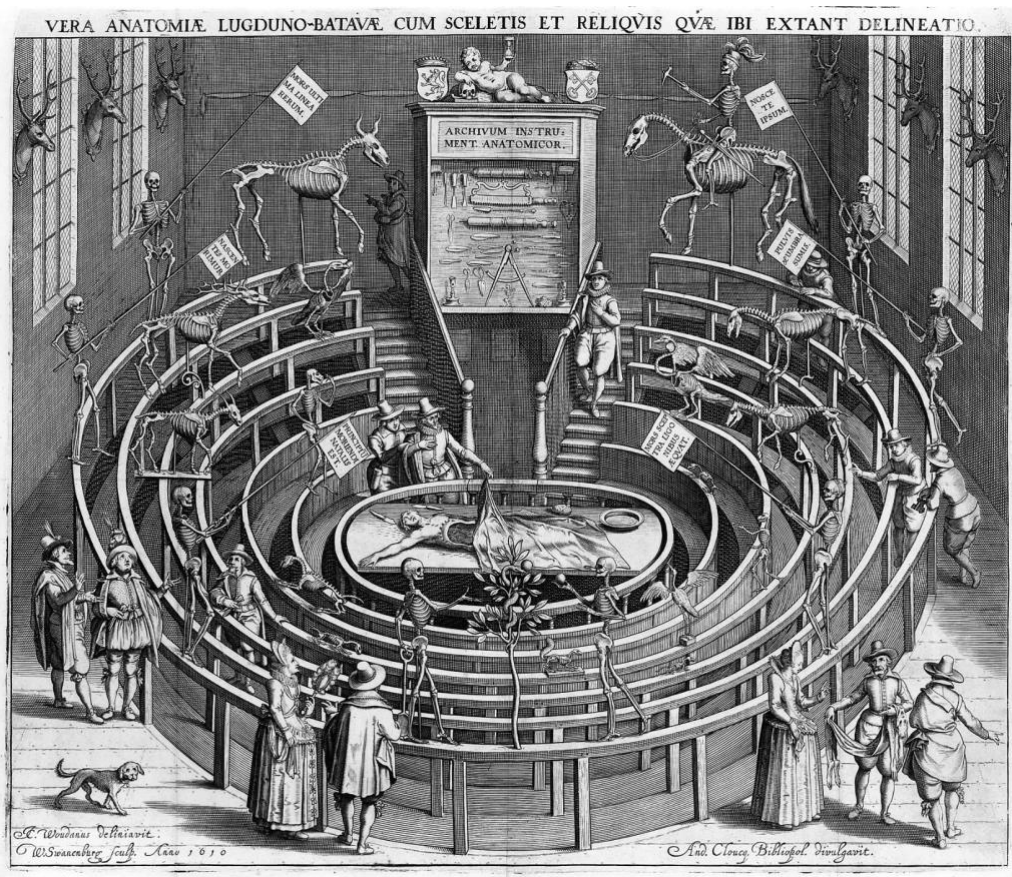


Figure IV.

Figure V.

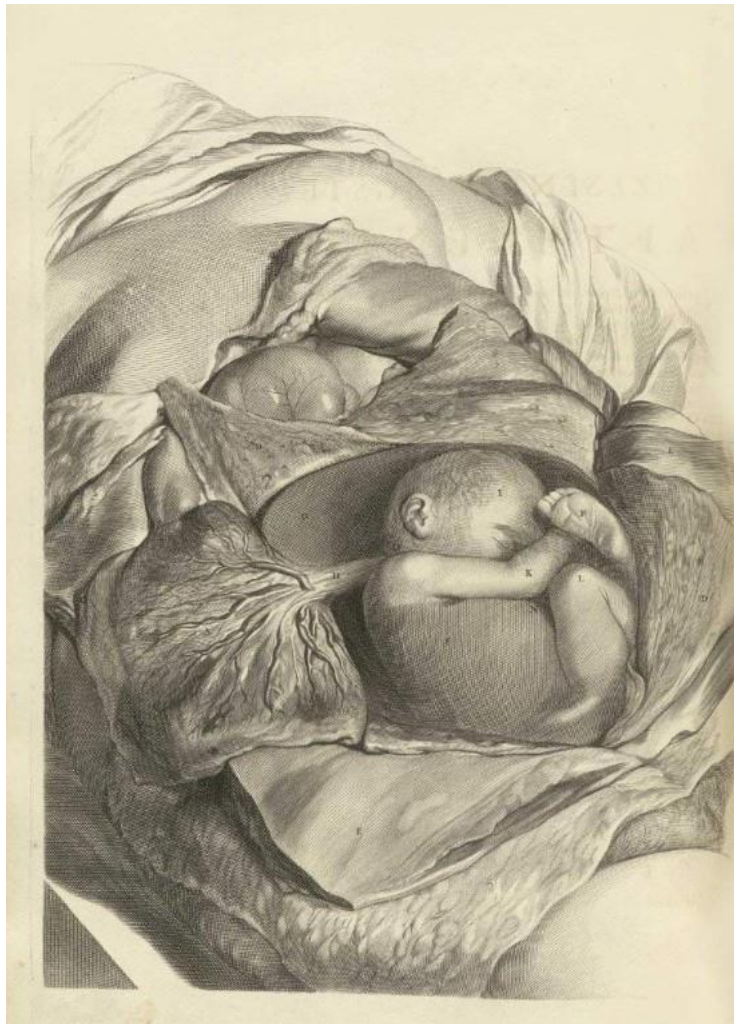


Figure VI.





Figure VII.

Figures I, II, V and VII. Gerard de Lairesse, for Govard Bidloo, *Anatomia Humani Corporis*, engravings by Abraham Blooteling and the brothers van Gunst, 1685.

Figure III. From Eucharius Rösslin, *Der Schwangern frawen und he bammen rosgarten*, woodcuts, 1513.

Figure IV. Jan Cornelisz. van 't Woudt, *Anatomy theatre, Leiden University*, engraving by Willem Isaacsz. Swanenburg, 1690.

Liberation Through the Body's Destruction: A Deleuzian Analysis of the Body in the Late-Capitalist Landscape of Kurosawa Kiyoshi's *Cure* (1997) and *Pulse* (2001)

Ben Warnock

Abstract:

*Japan in the late 1990s to early 2000s was in the midst of a seismic economic crisis that shaped a society that was overworked and desensitised. This malaise is reflected within the horror films of this period, colloquially known as J-horror. This paper argues that these films can be better understood through the application of Deleuzian affect theory. Contextualising the national situation allows for the use of a national understanding that brings Deleuze's focus on sensation to horror films reflective of a Japanese society in search of sensation. Furthermore, the horror genre's abundant on-screen representations of sensation provide a fertile ground for Deleuzian affect theory. Focusing on two films by Kurosawa Kiyoshi: *Cure* (1997) and *Pulse* (2001), this paper examines the transformation of both the individual and the societal body when faced with a massive upheaval. *Cure*'s transformation is one that unearths the evils lying under the surface of humanity. Bodies desperately starved for the sensation they once found in a period of economic prosperity begin to turn on one another and cannibalise themselves until all that is left is spite and the remnants of desire. *Pulse*, on the other hand, examines the transformations of a society left isolated amidst the ruins set aside by technological ghosts where bodies become transformed into perfect examples of the body without organs. Characterised not by a synthesis of desires but by an extreme repression that has hollowed out the body due to the overwhelming demands of a late-capitalist society, these ghosts are just one transformative outcome of the rigours of late-capitalism. This paper analyses the ways in which the physical and liminal transformations of the body in *Cure* and *Pulse* are symptomatic of a society in desperate search for self in a shifting economic paradigm.*

Keywords: Bodies, sensation, transformation, late capitalism, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *Cure*, *Pulse*, and Kurosawa Kiyoshi.

Introduction

Japan entered a period of economic prosperity between the years of 1986-1992 that is colloquially known as the country's bubble period. But as is the case with any bubble, it must burst and in 1992 the country found itself in a period of economic instability and uncertainty. Due to the increasing financial deregulations within the country, the banking system's short-term plans to increase profitability led to an unstable economy that collapsed in on itself and left the country in a state of transition.⁵⁶ Gone were the materialist pleasures that satiated the sensate bodies of the Japanese people (high-end cars, fashion, overseas travel and boutique home appliances to name a few) instead all that remained was a late-capitalist landscape that rendered the nation overworked and desensitised. The country's adoption of a capitalist system in the late 1800s was one that rendered the workers — in this case, farmers — and their interests obsolete in the pursuit of capitalism.⁵⁷ This continued throughout the years until the farmers became office workers, and other members of the working class, whose desires could only be answered through the consumerism of late capitalism. The cycle of consumerism that builds national identity through its purchases, services and the affectations that follow could readily be applied to the Japanese cultural body.⁵⁸ However, with the bubble bursting, opportunities to indulge in these desires became fewer.

This period of Japanese history can be defined by a search for stability whilst the country is in a state of socio-economic turmoil. Zahlten describes this period in Japanese history thusly:

“The 1990s are often —though somewhat simplistically— described as a time of increasing conservatism during which economic troubles provoked a reassertion of national identity, traditional values, and often reactionary politics.”⁵⁹

The national body can be described as desperately attempting to re-evaluate its sense of self — on both a collective and an individual level. Society's break from the pleasures afforded by the relative economic freedom of the bubble period now gives way to a societal malaise; an

⁵⁶ Monzur Hossain and Farhana Rafiq, “Asset Price Bubble and Banks: The Case of Japan,” *The Bangladesh Development Studies* 34, no. 1 (2011): 23.

⁵⁷ Yasuzo Horie, “An Outline of the Rise of Modern Capitalism in Japan,” *Kyoto University Economic Review* 11, no. 1 (1936): 114.

⁵⁸ Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka, *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 1.

⁵⁹ Alexander Zahlten, *The End of Japanese Cinema: Industrial Genres, National Times, and Media Ecologies* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017), 175.

emptiness and a desire for sensory experiences that can no longer be satiated by consumerist frivolities. Lacking a pronounced vision of self-identity that was not inextricably linked to the machinations of late capitalism, the national body found itself in a state of disarray; a malleable entity at a moment of cultural transition.

Horror directors of the time seized on this moment of cultural uncertainty and J-horror became popularised for its examinations of a transforming national body. *Ring* (1998, Nakata Hideo) — the most famous film to come from this emerging genre — focused on contemporary Japanese citizens being haunted and killed by a spirit of Japan's past in the form of Sadako. Identity and a re-examination of national identity was at the heart of many films of this genre. Conceptions of masculinity changed with the failing economy as the capitalist ethos of financial success correlating to masculine pride meant that more men were uncertain of their identity. As horror often does, it took the anxieties of the cultural subconscious and projected them onto the filmic body. These films focused on the various transformations the body undergoes — both in death and in life — as a response to a national body longing to be known by itself. Often these metamorphoses would be facilitated by indulging in a desire long since repressed in the wake of economic instability. Pushed to the extremes, Japanese horror cinema was indicative of a nation in search of sensation amidst the collapsing boundaries of the body itself. None more so incorporated its national context and this bodily uncertainty than *Cure* (1997, Kurosawa Kiyoshi) and *Pulse* (2001, Kurosawa Kiyoshi).

Kurosawa's films positioned the body in various stages of metamorphosis both literally and figuratively as they became emblematic of the national body. Sensate bodies that searched for extreme forms of stimulation and become transformed by their experiences. Deleuzian ideas on becoming and the body's sensory experiences become an apt tool in analysing the way that Kurosawa's cinematic bodies become altered by their desires. Using Deleuzian theories as a framework, I analyse *Cure* and its representation of people — starved of a sensation they once relied upon — cannibalising both the self and others in search of a sensory experience that will satisfy them. In mutilating the bodies of others and themselves, Kurosawa's film focuses on the repressed national body pushing itself to experience something new even if that experience is pain and suffering. Furthermore, with Deleuze's theories on becoming and the body without organs, I analyse *Pulse*. The film's inclusion of spectral figures existing in a state of liminality is emblematic of the body inhabiting a sensory experience as its final form. Deleuze and Guattari's theory on the 'becoming' as a liberating force is intensely linked to the shift to liminality evidenced by the film's ghosts. It is in this shift that the figures are

highlighting another of Deleuze and Guattari's theories in the 'body-without-organs' or the disorganised body. A necessary 'becoming' if one is to attempt to live in a late-capitalist society, however, these characters soon become despondent within this disorganisation. In the act of committing suicide, the sensation of the act has transformed these bodies into crystalised sensations; an indefinite corporeality of experience that ignites sensations in others. In using Deleuzian theories, Kurosawa's films present an idea of bodily transformation at a time when the socio-economic situation is just as malleable and shifting as one's corporeality.

Corporeal Liberation Through Mutilation: *Cure*

Takabe (Yakushi Koji) sits at a cafe table, tense and preoccupied with the events of his life. The detective is investigating a series of killings by different murderers who apparently have no connection at all. No real motive exists for any of the killings and the only line connecting them all is an X mark carved into the bodies of their victims. Alongside his professional worries, the detective also has a sick wife whose memory issues leave their relationship strained and Takabe needing to undertake most of the domestic tasks in the home. Into this pit of despair arrives Mamiya (Hagiwara Masato), an amnesiac hypnotist who meets each of the murderers before the time of their killings. His liberated attitude and silver tongue insert themselves into the lives of the soon-to-be murderers and the detective investigating them. Ordinary citizens become reflective of their innermost desires and act out violence that existed only in a darkened corner of their minds. Seemingly unfathomable acts of murder and mutilation begin to be carried out by the irreproachable masses. As a psychologist states: 'The devil made them do it is all I can guess'.

Each murder exists in isolation within the lives of the killers. Ordinary citizens who in a moment of disassociation find themselves giving in to a longstanding hate or desire to destroy one's body. In the moment of the killing, the citizen is transformed into a murderer; a moment of extreme violence to fill the emptiness brought forth by existing in late capitalism. Perhaps only in the sensation of indulgence can the overworked citizen find contentment in late capitalism's 'endless everyday'.⁶⁰ A monotonous existence where one becomes lost and is unable to imagine oneself present within one's own culture. Thus, the killers' actions represent a desire to find themselves in a culture they cannot identify with and only through a

⁶⁰ See Shinji Miyadai, *Living an endless everyday! A manual on how to defeat Aum* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1995).

transformation of the body — here it is the literal body of the victim and the figurative bodies of the murderers — can their body, their life be within their control. If late capitalism has repressed the desires of the Japanese cultural body, then the destroyed bodies act as the violent culmination of the anxieties and desires of a nation that finds itself lost amidst a changing economic paradigm. Kurosawa's use of the body becomes akin to Deleuze's affirmation that:

“It is through the body (and no longer through the intermediary of the body) that cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought.”⁶¹

Only through cinematic depictions of the sensory experiences of the body can one understand the thoughts of a nation. In its sensory experiences there exists the truth of a national body whose desires exist underneath the skin just waiting to be found; the X carved into the skins of their victims acting as treasure maps, pointing towards the desire hidden deep inside the body's pressed shell.

This desire hidden within the body of the repressed individuals is indicative of Japanese art's deployment of the body as subject. McRoy states:

“Japanese artists and intellectuals often employ the image of the body, and the integrity of its ‘boundaries’, within a larger allegorical framework; as such, it frequently provides a vital component for imagining modern and contemporary notions of ‘Japanese-ness’.”⁶²

Thus, the body in Japanese art becomes a medium for understanding the underlying anxieties and desires of the Japanese cultural body. By mutilating these on-screen bodies and pushing them to their corporeal limits, Kurosawa is attempting to liberate the repressed body; peeling back the skin and exposing it to the sensations of the flesh (Figure one). Only in the destruction of one's corporeal form can the repressed body be freed. As Midori states: ‘(a)ccording to each historical application, the return of the repressed Japanese “body” can be made either regressive or liberating’.⁶³ Thus, the murder and mutilations by citizens can be seen as an attempt to free not only themselves but the larger Japanese national identity from the shackles of repression in post-bubble Japan. In destroying these repressed bodies, one liberates instead of regressing into

⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1985), 189.

⁶² Jay McRoy, *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 2008), 19.

⁶³ Matsui Midori, “The Place of Marginal Positionality: Legacies of Japanese Anti-Modernity,” in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*, ed. F. Lloyd (London: Reakiton Books, 2002), 144.

the overwork expected of a late capitalist society. The body as fixed subject of their desire follows Deleuze's theory that no subject can exist without repression:

“Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack the object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression.”⁶⁴

If one's desire was regularly fulfilled then there would be no fixed subject but within the laborious demands of late capitalism, there exists no regular outlet for their desires. The film positions murderers as ordinary citizens (a cop, a teacher, a doctor, an office worker etc.), these figures are representative of a repressed proletariat body that cannot process desire in a landscape that owns them corporeally as another facet of capital. The body as a medium for desire thus begins to focus on itself, cannibalising other bodies in an attempt to liberate its own bodily desires.



Figure one: The mutilation of the Japanese body, pushing the limits of sensation and liberation.

One who wishes to 'save' these bodies from the depths of their repressed state can view oneself as a missionary figure. Mamiya is described as a missionary by a psychologist in the latter stages of the film who — upon seeing his secrets — refers to him as a 'missionary' preaching a salvation whose roots lie within the ruins of the body. The character's amnesia places them outside of the control of late capitalism. In being unable to remember their commitments to labour his body is ruled solely by desire and not informed by a socioeconomic hierarchy of capital. His mesmerism takes the forms of these desires. In hypnotising an individual, Mamiya simply smokes or gets a glass of water — base elements that are

⁶⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen Lane (New York: Penguin Classics, 1977), 26.

representative of a bodily desire for stimulation — to lure the citizens inside of themselves and liberate the repressed body by giving them freedom to act on their desires. Conflict is the only way for the liberation of the body from late capitalism. Bingham states that, in the films of Kurosawa, this conflict — as is the case in *Cure* — is one of mundanity: ‘the continuation of everyday life, of the minutiae that comprises day-to-day existence, remains the most potent struggle’.⁶⁵ The mundanities of late capitalist Japan drive the individuals to their base instincts and to understand the world through the sensations of the body. Mamiya is simply the catalyst for this change, a tool that breaks through the numbness of post-bubble Japanese society. As such, this liberation of the repressed body — literalised through the murders themselves — is one that uses the genre’s penchant for body horror to provide a visual allegory for the liberation of the worker. Azalbert describes the impact of late capitalism’s effect on the body accordingly:

“[...] the abstract stage of a bio-power that does not aim to punish the bodies, but to turn them into docile entities through processes of subjection (social, sexual or aesthetic) that individuals integrate unwillingly.”⁶⁶

This sentiment is one that can be found in post-bubble Japan where the individual’s body has been tamed so that it can fit the work environment. In reintroducing one’s base desires — the doctor’s fascination with the body, the salaryman’s lust and Takabe’s anger at his wife’s illness — Mamiya is simply allowing one to follow their bodily desires and not be tethered to the conventions of post-bubble Japan. As stated by Mes on *Cure*’s characters:

“Destruction is only a means to an end. The point of stripping away values is to arrive at the point of tabula rasa, the blank state. It is a necessary step in the process of rebirth. It is only with everything stripped away that we can begin again to redefine ourselves.”⁶⁷

The individual is not ruled by the role given to them by society but by the sensations of the corporeal body. Redefined in the image of one’s base desires and thrust forward on instinct alone, the body comes to the fore; a liberated being.

The implication that the body can only be liberated through the sensory experiences of bodily destruction renders those that exist whole as repressed bodies. Takabe and many other masculine bodies find their repression personified as the anxieties surrounding their masculine

⁶⁵ Andrew Bingham, *Contemporary Japanese Cinema Since Hana-Bi* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 113.

⁶⁶ The idea of ‘bio-power’ and biopolitics is a Foucauldian idea that governmental power is exhibited in the control of the nation’s bodies and lifestyles (including sexuality and personal expression amongst others). See Nicolas Azalbert, “Le Corps défendant – Dans ma peau de Marina de Van,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 574 (2002): 82.

⁶⁷ Tom Mes, “Embracing Chaos in Kurosawa Kiyoshi’s *Cure*,” in *Cure Booklet*, eds. J. Milligan & S. Southin (London: Eureka Entertainment, 2017), 12.

identity. Undone by the financial collapse, the stereotypical masculine role of breadwinner has become null. Working the same hours but for nowhere near the same pay, the family dynamics become untenable and — in the case of the detective — he has become both breadwinner and domestic worker. The engrained toxic masculinity of these dynamics becomes evident in a tense confrontation between Mamiya and Takabe. Upon probing from Mamiya in relation to his thoughts to his wife's condition and their new familial roles, Takabe states:

“I’m a detective. I’ve been taught never to show any emotion, even with my family. And this is the result! I don’t understand her. She doesn’t understand what I go through.”

Takabe's engrained misogynistic expectations of one's domestic life infects his view of the world. His innate masculinity has pigeonholed him into a role that no longer exists in post-bubble Japan; husband and wife may now need to work in a shifting economic landscape. Only through the destruction of the conflicts in his life — the killing of his wife to free himself from the role as caretaker and the killing of Mamiya to take control of his life as a detective — can Takabe become liberated in the expectations of his pre-bubble-burst mindset. White states on Takabe's rebirth:

“It is his strict adherence to social roles and expectations that has damaged Takabe's psyche. Only by dealing with his problems in a socially unacceptable way – shooting Mamiya, murdering his wife – can he be whole again.”⁶⁸

In going against the conventions of post-bubble Japan — a focus on work and family — Takabe can transform into the liberated version of Midori's repressed Japanese body by destroying that which he viewed as repressive.⁶⁹ At the climax of the film, Takabe has become ruled entirely by their base desires. He is once again sitting in the café where — earlier in the film — the detective sat agitated, unable to eat or relax (Figure two). Now the detective leisurely relaxes, eating the entirety of his meal and refusing to rush off to respond to a police call as he would have once done (Figure three). Takabe has become unbound by the conventions of post-bubble Japan; transformed into the liberated Japanese national body.

⁶⁸ Jerry White, *The Films of Kiyoshi Kurosawa: Master of Fear* (California: Stone Bridge Press, 2007), 129.

⁶⁹ Midori, “The Place of Marginal Positionality,” 144.



Figure two: The agitated Takabe sits on edge not indulging in bodily desires.



Figure three: A relaxed Takabe is now indulging in his bodily desires after killing Mamiya and liberating himself.

Transforming Beyond One's Corporeal Limits: *Pulse*

The corporeal limitation imposed upon the body by a post-bubble Japanese society was cut open — its boundaries exposed — liberating sensation from flesh in *Cure*, however, in *Pulse* the liminality of the body is instead transcended. Kurosawa's film transforms Japan into a desolate landscape. Disaffected youths — dulled by life in a late capitalist society — answer online messages of 'Would you like to see a ghost?' and subsequently release spectral figures that transform the living into similar formless figures. Spirits, or ghosts, have a longstanding

history within Japanese culture and are often used to symbolise a loss of identity through the lens of generational trauma.⁷⁰ However, Kurosawa's ghosts can be seen as ones of literalised sensations, indicative of Bataille's *formless*.⁷¹ This idea was a rejection of contextual form and a celebration of the base elements of art and humanity. In this context, the ghosts become formless by rejecting their late-capitalist context and embracing their sensate experience. Foster describes Bataille's concept as such: 'a condition where significant form dissolves because the fundamental distinction between figure and ground, self and other, is lost'.⁷² The corporeal body has extended beyond its own limits, becoming the embodiment of sensations and thus the antithesis of the repressed Japanese cultural body (Figure four). An encounter with a ghost is often followed by an on-screen sensation (diegetic silence, visceral sights, a cold chill, wind blowing, etc.). It is no coincidence that prior to their eventual demise, the affected Tokyo youths display similar behaviour to that of the hikikomori. Vogel describes hikikomoris as such:

“Japan has also encountered a growing phenomenon of social dropouts, first as children who refuse to go to school...and then later as adults who stay sheltered at home for most of the day (*hikikomori*) [...] to avoid facing failure, rejection or social disapproval.”⁷³

Vogel combines this statement with two graphs showing a general increase in these behaviours following the 1990s.⁷⁴ Therefore, this coincides with the bubble-burst of the Japanese economy in the early 1990s. As such, these behaviours typify that of one ruled over by society with the stage of hikikomori being a rejection of societal pressures due to the stress induced by such. The disaffected youth of *Pulse* then — after taking on the form of the hikikomori — became emblematic of the repression of bodily desire and sensation found within the fallout of post-bubble Japan. Pleasure is mitigated and only the necessities of survival are adhered to, the body is listened to but not indulged in, thus the numbness of sensation. The ghosts, however, have escaped from their corporeal shells and in the process become *formless* with no physical limitations. This metamorphosis allows for one to become the literalisation of bodily desire and sensations; escaping the limits placed upon them by post-bubble Japanese society and returning to the base of humanity, unbound by the regulations of society. Kurosawa hints at

⁷⁰ For more information on the Japanese ghost phenomena, see Michiko Iwasaka and Barre Toelken, *Ghosts and The Japanese: Cultural Experience in Japanese Death Legends* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1994).

⁷¹ Georges Bataille, “Formless,” in *Visions of Excess Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. A. Stoekl (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 31.

⁷² Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 149.

⁷³ Suzanne H. Vogel, “Japanese Society under Stress,” *Asian Survey* 52, no. 4 (2012): 691.

⁷⁴ Vogel, “Japanese Society under Stress,” 691-692.

this metaphor with the suicides by gunshot being strangely devoid of blood, as if the inside (base human desire and sensation) has simply escaped through a broken shell and not a human body.



Figure four: Bataille's *l'informe*; the repressed Japanese body that has broken its corporeal limits and become a literalised sensation.

Transcending one's human corporeality into something more liminal, a spatial sensory experience places the body in a state of flux. It has shed the limitations of its bodily form — the societal obligations and pressures of labour expected in a late capitalist society — whilst maintaining the core affectations of the bodily experience. To look at this transformation we must turn to Deleuze and Guattari and their ideas on 'becoming'.⁷⁵ The pair suggest that:

“A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both.”⁷⁶

It is in between corporeality and not that exists liminality, the spatial dimension in which these ghosts exist. These figures exist simultaneously as physical beings and *formless*; anchored solely by the sensory experiences they both exist as and affect. The ghosts are a result of the suicides that spawned them and — much like in *Cure* — it is only through the destruction of the corporeal shell that the liberated body can exist, and freedom is offered in a violent sensory upheaval. Deleuze and Guattari even adjudge that becoming is a form of liberation in their

⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 232-309.

⁷⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 293.

assertion of the wasp and the orchid ‘becoming’.⁷⁷ Thus, this sensory experience becomes trapped in a body which is *formless*. A crystallised sensation that lures others into its liberated liminality with the promise of escaping the pressures of late capitalism. In describing their concept of ‘becoming’, the philosophers interchange the word with ‘memories’ and describe the two concepts’ similarities as states of being.⁷⁸ The ghosts exist as ‘memories’ of sensation, that which has become unobtainable under the anxieties of late capitalist experience. In preaching to the disaffected youths whose late capitalist anxieties have repressed their desires, these ‘becoming’ sensations or sensory ‘memories’ exist as a reminder of what one can experience outside of late capitalist society. Liberation comes in the form of ‘becoming’ liminal.

Pulse’s spectral visages appear illusive in nature and temporal positioning with the beings moving at will, yet always perceptible to the human eye. Kurosawa’s framing of the spectral invaders can be what Beugnet describes as *décadrage* or the pulling of the audience’s eyes to the edge of the frame ‘where chaos might lie’.⁷⁹ These shadows that linger at the edge of the frame are the manifestations of sensations lost to the post-bubble era of Japanese late capitalism. The idea of the spectres being a form that should not be perceptible to regular human senses, but the numbness enforced by late capitalism’s gruelling demands allows the formless to be sensed. Beugnet’s description of the formless’ connection with sensation is heightened by cultural specificity:

“As if ‘probing a wound’, the cinema of sensation tends to move us closer, dig deeper into our perception of things, show that which normally escapes the naked eye and ear and, ultimately, immerse us in the pleasure and terror of the ‘formless’.”⁸⁰

Thus, in *Pulse*, the formless ghosts are ones of possibilities lost; sites of unique sensorial displacement. Unfulfilled desires and omitted pleasures rendered physical in the formless ghosts of late capitalism. Kawashima’s (Katô Haruhiko) final experience with a ghost is one based upon touch and the idea that reality is only confirmed through a sensory experience (Figure five). If the ghost can touch and be touched, it is a sensory body or sensation.

⁷⁷ This idea revolves around the deterritorialisation of both the wasp and the orchid. Both exist independently and ‘in-between’ one another. Deleuze and Guattari mention that the orchid becomes liberated from its own reproductive properties through the facilitation of the wasp. Thus, both are in a state of ‘becoming’; an experience that is liberating through its sensory properties and removal of responsibility. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 293-294.

⁷⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 294.

⁷⁹ Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 44.

⁸⁰ Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, 16.



Figure five: Kawashima experiences the physical sensation of touching a ghost and feeling its presence.

The characters are inescapably drawn to these ghosts due to their position as extreme sensations unobtainable through other means to the characters themselves. Only by becoming a ghost themselves can the extremes of sensation become literalised as the boundaries of late capitalism do not allow such pleasures of the flesh. Beugnet describes this allure in spite of the consequences accordingly:

“The figure that is beckoned by surroundings appears alternatively incorporated into a field of sensual inclusiveness or drawn into a formlessness that annihilates it.”⁸¹

This annihilation is one of sensory freedom for the people of *Pulse*'s Tokyo, it is an untethering to the regulations enforced by post-bubble Japan. Deleuze and Guattari's 'body-without-organs' is an apt description of these characters whose sensory organs have slowly been numbed by the demands of late-capitalism. As Deleuze and Guattari state:

“What we need to consider is not fundamentally organs without bodies, or the fragmented body, it is the 'body-without-organs', animated by various intensive elements.”⁸²

Formless ghosts become the revolutionary 'intensive elements' that animate and reignite the sensory organs of the characters. The obvious fear upon seeing their looming mass or the cold chills that follow every encounter; sensations are elicited where they once felt none. These formless ghosts are sensory organs-without-bodies whilst the characters are bodies without the

⁸¹ Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, 111.

⁸² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 171.

sensory organs that were deemed unnecessary in post-bubble Japan. If combined one might form a body with the entirety of human experience.

Human experience and one's perception of the world around us is omnipresent in the film. The director outlines the film's message in its two central allegories: Yoshizaki's (Takeda Shinji) computer programme and the flowers in the greenhouse where Michi (Aso Kumiko) works. The former of the two allegories is the more pronounced where the characters comment on the programme and its likeness to the society around them (Figure six):

“If two dots get too close, they die, but if they get too far apart, they're drawn closer [...] A miniature model of our world.”

Symptomatic of post-bubble Japan, the programme details the inability to connect with others in a world built by late capitalism, but the inherent human desire for connection keeps pushing people together. White remarks on the centrality of this concept: ‘More than anything, *Pulse* is about isolation, specifically the very human need to connect with another person’.⁸³ The inability to connect with others in a society that inhibits sensation and limits free time to the most basic needs does not allow for human connection to occur. This is further emphasised in the latter metaphor where the flowers represent the people of Japan whilst the greenhouse they inhabit is the post-bubble Japan created by late-capitalism (Figure seven). An artificial living environment that is akin to the slight illusions of freedom afforded by late capitalism. However, in the greenhouse, the flowers are unable to root — thus not able to connect with the other flowers — and are simply stationed there to serve a purpose just as individuals in late capitalism are simply conduits through which the economy aims to prosper. Human connection and sensation are severed. The style of which lends itself to Ihde's existential phenomenology, which is as follows:

“A philosophical style that emphasizes a certain interpretation of human experience and that [...] concerns perception and bodily activity.”⁸⁴

When bodily activity becomes stationary, inert and numb then one must question the root cause of such inactivity, thus the film leads the spectator to look at post-bubble Japan's involvement in this period of dissatisfaction and disassociation within the Japanese people. Kurosawa further alludes to the culprit being the fallout of the economic bubble burst with the flashback sequence to the origin of the ghosts trespassing. An employee (Aikawa Shô) appears to

⁸³ White, *The Films of Kiyoshi Kurosawa*, 163.

⁸⁴ Vivian Sobchak, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (California: University of California Press, 2004), 2.

discover the ghosts and attempt to seal them away (with red tape) in a building site only for the half-finished construction to be seemingly abandoned and destroyed. One such effect of the bubble period was an increase in land prices leading to an increase in construction.⁸⁵ However, the film's portrayal of the site's destruction implies that the film's setting is at the time of the bubble burst where the economy could not afford such constructions. Thus, the need for the Japanese body to become liberated — via the ghosts — only occurred due to the economic bubble bursting.



Figure six: The computer programme that serves as an allegorical comparison to the inability of post-bubble Japanese youth to communicate.

⁸⁵ For more information on the effects of the economic bubble, see Yukio Noguchi, "The 'Bubble' and Economic Policies in the 1980s," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 20, no. 2 (1994): 291-329.



Figure seven: The artificial living environment of the flowers in the greenhouse mirrors the artificiality of life under late capitalism.

Conclusion

In an era of repressed desires, liberation comes as a transformation of the body. Within *Cure* and *Pulse* by Kurosawa Kiyoshi, we can see the horror genre become appropriated to investigate the repression of the Japanese cultural body and transform it through violence. The murder and mutilation of the body in *Cure* is an attempt to open up the flesh to the sensations of the body that have become unobtainable by the labour expected under late capitalism. This focus on the opening of the body up to the possibilities of desire is indicative of the repressed body expressed by Deleuze. These are people in search of escape from the anxieties thrust upon them following the economic bubble burst and they try to find it within the body's destruction. Similarly, *Pulse* seeks to transform the body to escape repression but instead of through physical mutilation it is through Deleuzian 'becoming'. The body undergoes a metamorphosis into a state of formlessness that straddles the boundaries between corporeality and not; a perfect synthesis of sensory experiences in a form that likens to another Deleuzian idea of a 'body-without-organs'. The target of both films is those of the proletariat, overworked workers or disaffected youths who have become disillusioned by living in a late capitalist landscape. However, this system demands ownership of not only one's labour but, subsequently, also one's body. As such the only way to escape is through the destruction and transformation of the Japanese national body and Kurosawa's films do just that.

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**“I don’t want to be delicious, I want to make them sick!”
(Cade & MacAskill 2021, 1:12:00): *Burgerz*, *The Making
of Pinocchio*, trans performance dramaturgies, and
redefining the role of the cis spectator.**

Lois Hunt

Abstract:

*The position of the trans subject in the public consciousness is a precarious one as there is a notable hunger for a satisfying trans narrative, a shift from the dysphoric ‘before’ to the euphoric ‘after’ of a completed gender journey. This is no different in trans performance, as cis spectators seem to crave this narrative, this plot structure of trans experience with the trans performer as the spectated subject. In this paper, I explore how trans performance dramaturgies can work to instead turn the attention onto the cis spectator, to call for a transformation from their position of passive voyeur into something more conscious. I interrogate this by examining the specific strategies employed in Travis Alabanza’s *Burgerz* and Cade & MacAskill’s *The Making of Pinocchio* – both pieces existing in a very specific time and space in contemporary British trans theatre – and how their methods work to achieve such a transformation. I analyse how *Burgerz* uses Alabanza’s control of the performance space; their invitation for spectators into said space; and weaponised audience interaction to shift the cis spectator from a position in which they can passively witness transphobia to one where they recognise their responsibility to enact positive change. I then examine how *The Making of Pinocchio* instead utilises tongue-in-cheek metatheatricality and a disruption of the digital public and private. I argue that this refusal to condense MacAskill’s life into a dramaturgically satisfactory plot directly interrogates the cis spectator’s desire/need to mindlessly consume such an idealised narrative of another person’s life. Through their differing strategies, I conclude that both pieces do not position their performers as subjects of transformation, but rather the cis spectators watching. It is, in fact, their positionality as onlookers that requires change, that perhaps, they should watch what they eat.*

Keywords: *trans dramaturgies, queer dramaturgies, trans studies, spectatorship*

In the penultimate scene of *The Making of Pinocchio*, a queer retelling of Pinocchio through the lens of Ivor MacAskill's transition, MacAskill and his performance (and life) partner Rosana Cade find themselves in the stomach of a whale. The stage is washed in blue, sticks are visibly hung with string, and the couple moonwalk towards each other, realising they are soon to be digested. They wonder how they would taste to the whale; MacAskill hopes he doesn't taste good, in fact, he hopes that he tastes revolting. In a similar vein, in the article *Pedagogies of Becoming: Trans Inclusivity and the Crafting of Being*, Hil Malatino reflects on his experience as 'special guest' to academic trans-inclusive talks and having the weight of representing the trans/genderqueer/intersex experience (all at once) falling on his shoulders. He notes how he was compelled to divulge his suffering, give a narrative of healing, of his solo journey of triumph despite his individual trauma, or as he puts it, "I felt a bit like a genderqueer Tiny Tim."⁸⁶ There is a certain onus on the trans subject to play for a (predominantly cisgender) crowd, to tell a certain kind of story, one that those spectating can find palatable and satisfying, as Malatino affirms, "the lure of the pride narrative is strong, appealing and coercive."⁸⁷ Malatino, in this sense, knows exactly what his spectators hunger for. With this in mind, I raise the question - what happens when the spotlight is turned onto those watching, by which I mean, what dramaturgical strategies can be used in trans performance practices to redefine and blur the lines between spectator and spectated? To explore this, I have chosen to analyse Travis Alabanza's *Burgerz* and Cade & MacAskill's *The Making of Pinocchio* as their specific dramaturgies not only work to create meaning for the onlooking spectators, but actively utilise the role of the spectator throughout. For *Burgerz*, I will identify how Alabanza works to actively control and occupy the performance space, and how they use to full advantage the intimacy of live performance and sharing such a performance with their spectators. For *The Making of Pinocchio*, I will recognise how the piece still manages to speak directly to the spectator as a piece of digital theatre, as well as exploring the disruption of the performative public and private that it invites. Ultimately, I will highlight how they specifically tear apart the presupposed passive role of the spectator watching the spectated trans subject, and instead focus on the spectator's motivation for looking; criticising when they choose to look away; and troubling what they passively, perhaps mindlessly, consume.

In a Western theatrical context, the role of the spectator has been debated, defined, and redefined again. The most active debate surrounding this has occurred since the dawn of the

⁸⁶ Hilary Malatino, "Pedagogies of Becoming: Trans Inclusivity and the Crafting of Being," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (August 2015): 397, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2926387>.

⁸⁷ Malatino, "Pedagogies of Becoming," 397.

twentieth century, with many dramaturgical movements offering their own answers to the questions, “do spectators simply watch? Or are they gazing, or gawking? Are they impartial observers, innocent bystanders, or voyeurs?”⁸⁸. Indeed, one of the most influential writings on spectatorship, *The Emancipated Spectator*, vocalises the importance of activating the spectator from a state of unconsciousness, as Jacques Rancière writes, “to know that words are merely words and spectacles merely spectacles, can help us arrive at a better understanding of how words and images, stories and performances, can change something of the world we live in.”⁸⁹ There is a political potency in acknowledging a piece of performance as such, and in recognising how exactly it is working to create meaning. In relation to queer dramaturgies, the spectator’s relationship to the performance/performer becomes a key consideration and weapon in its arsenal. The relationship itself is queered, it becomes intimate, as written in *Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives on Where Performance Leads Queer*: “whether that is through a particular focus on the body (real blood! Objects emerging from internal parts of the body!) or on compositional strategies such as metatheatricality/Brechtian distancing/multiple role-playing or direct address to the audience.”⁹⁰ While Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier acknowledge their desire for more trans and POC voices to appear in this collection, it does offer a fitting starting point for this analysis and identifies some compositional strategies that function to trouble the concept of spectatorship. With this context acting as backdrop to my discussion, I introduce *Burgerz* and *The Making of Pinocchio* as individual case studies (from an extremely specific time and space in contemporary trans British theatre) not to hegemonise them as any kind of dramaturgical standard for trans performance, but to identify exactly how their dramaturgies work to disrupt the role of the cisgender spectator watching.

First premiering in the Hackney Showroom in 2018, *Burgerz* is a solo performance piece written and performed by Travis Alabanza, acting as both an act of reclamation against a transphobic attack and interactive cooking show. They go through the motions of creating a burger whilst reflecting on an attack where someone shouted a transphobic slur and threw a burger at their face, with no one doing anything about it. In their words, their motivation for creating the piece was to look at “how we can stop that, how we can change people from being

⁸⁸ Helen Freshwater, *Theatre & Audience* (Macmillan Education, 2012), 2.

⁸⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (Verso, 2011), 17.

⁹⁰ Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives on Where Performance Leads Queer* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 16.

people that walk past and do nothing to wanting to do something.”⁹¹ Dramaturgically, the performance is an act of transformation, not of Alabanza and the space they occupy as a black, nonbinary individual, but a transformation of the spectators watching, those who would question the space they occupy, who would allow this attack to happen. In particular, the performance’s construction and command of the live performance space, as well as the weaponised direct address, allow this transformation to occur.

As is the nature of live performance, Alabanza is in the position of being solely spectated in real time, an experience which is undoubtedly vulnerable, however, they are able to confront this in their command and manipulation of the space they share with the spectators. Starting as a warehouse of numerous boxes, the performance space comes into fruition through Alabanza’s unpacking of the items inside them. They get into one to change “out of their overalls into a dress and heels,”⁹² they push “out a kitchen island hidden in [one]”⁹³; they are in complete control of the performance’s metatheatrical creation of space and what will happen in it. In the interest of redefining spectatorship, this control of space is vital to their meaning-making, as Beck Tadman in article *Activating Cis White Fragility* – referencing Sara Ahmed – writes, “power structures are enfranchised through embodiment and materiality and thus inextricably entangled with space.”⁹⁴ There is a keen awareness of the power imbalance between spectator and spectated but now it has become queered, as Alabanza’s control of the performance space is enacted and reasserted. It is their own space, as glamorous yet domestic as Saturday morning TV, and it is in this setting where they can introduce a guest into the space, where they now command the spectator to occupy the space they created.

The most obvious intervention in the role of spectatorship happens when Alabanza invites a cisgender man from the audience to help them make a burger, where the true interactive nature of the performance becomes known. Inviting their cisgender guest into the space, Alabanza becomes the host of the kitchen, asking: “would you like a drink? I can get you white wine, red wine, rosé wine...”⁹⁵ before giving him recipe instruction cards as they begin to make the burger. This individual spectator becomes part of the spectated performance,

⁹¹ Travis Alabanza, “Edinburgh Showcase 2019: Hackney Showroom presents ‘BURGERZ’ by Travis Alabanza,” posted July 16, 2019, by British Council Arts, YouTube, 1:55, <https://youtu.be/OurIo1XW5HY?si=OrOtx8pCZ5VNa-NQ>.

⁹² Travis Alabanza, *Burgerz* (Oberon Books, 2018), 15.

⁹³ Alabanza, *Burgerz*, 16.

⁹⁴ Beck Tadman, “Activating Cis-White Fragility: The Oppositional Gaze in Travis Alabanza’s Left Outside Alone,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Queer and Trans Feminisms in Contemporary Performance*, eds. Tiina Rosenberg, Sandra D’Urso, and Anna Renée Winget (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 171.

⁹⁵ Alabanza, *Burgerz*, 20.

but most importantly is given the opportunity to share the space alongside Alabanza. The cisgender man is invited to spend time in the kitchen, he gets his drink of choice, he helps with chopping the vegetables, he experiences the smell and sensation of the space he occupies. There is an intimacy of co-existing together, something which original definitions of the passive spectator would reject. Alabanza, here, is able to completely trouble the role of the spectator in a demonstration of queer fun, in revelling in the absurdity, silliness, and presence of it all. Queer fun as a dramaturgical device is being increasingly recognised in queer dramaturgical literature, with Campbell, Farrier, and Manola-Gayatri Kumarswamy affirming in article *What's Queer about Queer Performance Now?* that “we know we have it, and that, historically, queer people have mobilised fun and joy in response to persecution and hatred.”⁹⁶ It's some sugar to help the medicine go down, not to soften Alabanza's dramaturgical messaging - or, perhaps, take away any unpalatable flavours - but to present a sweet and enticing offer for the spectator's engagement. They are fully present and acknowledging Alabanza's true embodied experience of subjugation, while binding two burger buns to their chest at the same time.

Alabanza's autobiographical account is itself a dismantling of the experience of hypervisibility, of being constantly spectated and scrutinised on the grounds of race and gender. It is a dismantling which engages with the questions offer by Che Gossett in *Blackness and the Trouble of Trans Visibility*, of “who gets to assume a body? Who gets to assume the integrity and security of the body?”⁹⁷ . In the visible crafting and manipulation of the performance space, and the invitation given to the cisgender spectator to join them in it, there is a redefinition of presence, one which is particularly potent in a performance responding to an attack that deemed their presence in public punishment enough. But it would be reductive to define the piece as simply a pride narrative of owning the space they take up, an individualistic (delicious) triumph over trauma. In fact, it is the combination of these dramaturgical devices that work to create one final intervention, one which turns the spotlight onto the spectator to not just call for cisgender sympathy and co-existence in shared space, but a call for cisgender attitudes to change, for Alabanza's right for protection in public.

⁹⁶ Alyson Campbell, Stephen Farrier, and Manola-Gayatri Kumarswamy, “What's Queer about Queer Performance Now?” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 33, no. 1-2 (August 2023): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2023.2170080>.

⁹⁷ Che Gossett, “Blackness and The Trouble of Trans Visibility,” in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, eds. Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (The MIT Press, 2017), 184.

Recalling the attack that framed the piece, Alabanza asserts that no one, not even the woman watching on that saw everything, did anything. In response, they ask a cisgender woman to enter the performance space, to hold the burger they have created in front of their spectators. This cis woman, reading what Alabanza instructs them to read aloud, says, “I will throw it, not to hurt you again, but to acknowledge that I have hurt you before.”⁹⁸ The burger will be thrown once more, and it will be over. Alabanza’s dramaturgical strategy has led to this point. The storytelling has developed from an interactive cooking show and personal account of embodied violence into a poetic wake of the cisgender spectator out of passivity and into action, to protect not just Alabanza but anyone facing targeted abuse. The transformation is complete, and the spectator must now recognise their own instincts of passivity in the face of transphobia, that inaction is still inherently violent. It echoes a sentiment recognised by Erika Fischer-Lichte in *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, that “from today’s vantage point there is no such thing as a passive spectator.”⁹⁹ The cisgender spectator, here, is placed in a fascinating position, they are now the one being spectated, and their actions almost work to define them. Perhaps she will throw the burger as Alabanza requests, with the promise to do better, perhaps she won’t, and will return home wondering if she was another spectator who didn’t do anything. Either way, she now actively has to make this final decision – there is nowhere to hide. Alabanza creates a place of glamorous domesticity, intimacy, and play; they allow both the invited cisgender spectator, and the spectators in their seats, to join in on the fun, before reminding them of why they are truly here, and what work *they*, the spectators, need to carry out.

Alabanza offers a story not of triumph, but of collective survival, and how to build a better future together. In this sense, the performance’s ending is one of optimism, as articulated in the final line spoken by the cisgender woman, “And I will go home. So will you. But outside, we are together. I’m sorry.”¹⁰⁰ My definition of optimism here is one offered by Stephen Greer in *Queer Exceptions* – in reference to Athena Athanasiou and Judith Butler - that “optimism is not present as a remedy for these experiences but instead marks their availability for reparative change.”¹⁰¹ To this end, Alabanza does not ask for the spectators’ sympathy, they do not want that, it is too easy to digest, instead they ask their spectators to simply do better. To do better

⁹⁸ Alabanza, *Burgerz*, 61.

⁹⁹ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (Routledge, 2008), 175.

¹⁰⁰ Alabanza, *Burgerz*, 61.

¹⁰¹ Stephen Greer, *Queer Exceptions: Solo Performance in Neoliberal Times* (Manchester University Press, 2019), 191.

so that, when exiting the stage door outside, they can continue to co-exist together. Alabanza's dramaturgical choices are informed with the spectator at the forefront, contesting with the ideas of space, being watched, and responsibility in aid of creating a better future. Now, in the final moments of the performance, Alabanza is truly spectating the spectator, and it is their turn to acknowledge the work to be done going forward.

An important point of consideration is raised in a roundtable documented in *Representation and its Limits*, as trans musician and performance artist Geo Wyex, describing his creative work, says, "I out myself constantly in many ways; I enjoy confusing people, and each place I perform in calls for its own terms of engagement."¹⁰² In the case of *Burgerz*, the performance demands to exist in a shared space, the liveness of the storytelling is a key component of Alabanza's dramaturgy. However, with the rise of multimedia and digital theatre, new ways of engaging with the role of the spectator and the spectated in trans performance can be identified. In particular, *The Making of Pinocchio* is a piece of digital theatre that offers a unique positionality of the spectator in its critique of consumption of the trans subject and transition stories.

The Making of Pinocchio initially premiered at Take Me Somewhere 2021 as a digital performance made specifically for the festival in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, before being reworked into a live performance in following tours. The digital performance is the production I specifically want to focus on, as there is a rich engagement with the role of the spectator to be unearthed. As described previously, *The Making of Pinocchio* is exactly that, a performance of the process of retelling a queer version of Pinocchio in line with Ivor MacAskill's transition. The Theatre, an empty stage covered in red fabric, is documented from multiple cameras at multiple angles, with both Cade and MacAskill actively performing in front and away from their gaze, the gaze of the spectator. The performance is wholly metatheatrical, it wears its motivation, and the nature of itself as a performance, on its sleeve; it is a piece about what stories people deem necessary to tell, made clear from the start as the Blue Fairy (a blue cube dangling from the ceiling) instructs MacAskill, "you have to tell them your story, Pinocchio! Tell them your story again, and again, and again, and again, until they believe you."¹⁰³ The performance's dramaturgical weaponization of its metatheatricality, sense of humour and irony, and disruption of public and private space work throughout to actively

¹⁰² Lexi Adsit et al., "Representation and its Limits," in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, eds. Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (The MIT Press, 2017), 196.

¹⁰³ Cade & MacAskill, "The Making of Pinocchio," *Artsadmin*, video, 7:03.

challenge the spectator on their preconceived notions of what they consider a believable, appetising, transition story, and what they demand of someone by asking that of them.

The narrative of the production follows the major plot points of Pinocchio's story, intercut with more colloquial, pointed address to the cameras offering anecdotes of how they believe the performance is going or should go, what they should do next, and what real life influences they are referencing. The theatrical exists alongside the 'authentic', and a direct pathway between spectator and spectated is immediately opened. The device is used to its full effect just before the creation of the puppet show scene, as the camera splits in two, and zooms into MacAskill's face as he, with Cade's help, begins to talk through a quick change. As he does so, he asks a favour of the spectator, that if during the puppet show they could "maybe think about your motivation, you know, just think about what has brought you here tonight to see this puppet, yeah?"¹⁰⁴ While stripping down to a red hat, white ruff, wooden clogs, and socks, he asks the spectator whether they want to be seen as supporting 'puppet rights', if they are a 'puppet' themselves, or if they hate 'puppets' entirely. The metaphor is purposely laid on thick, tongue-in-cheek, as he struggles to remove his shirt. due to the wires of his mic pack, and wonders aloud if he should keep his socks on. Metatheatricality is a significant queer dramaturgical strategy, one which is reinforced by Torsten Graff's assertion in *Gay Drama / Queer Performance* that "queer drama is metatheatrical drama. By theatricalizing theatricality, that is, exposing the necessary excess defining theatricality itself, queer plays aim at the naturalisation of sex and gender through strategies of resignification."¹⁰⁵ In this case, from the fact that MacAskill is riffing off a standard directorial exercise of naming one's motivation, to the recognition of how difficult quick changes are to execute in real time, the performance instead aims to denaturalise the relationship between the spectator and the spectated trans performer. The performance never once wants the spectator to get lost in the fantasy of a whimsical trans allegory with a happy ending, but, rather, negotiate the inner workings of it, and wonder about their positionality for wanting such a simplistic story.

The question of the spectator's motivation for watching only continues to be complicated. The spectator and the spectated do not share the same space; there is a screen barrier in the way, but, in the form of the camera lens, the spectator is always present. Cade and MacAskill lean into this and create a queer disruption of the public space, where everything is assumed to be open to the masses, and the private space, where things are assumed to be kept

¹⁰⁴ Cade & MacAskill, "The Making of Pinocchio," 37:35.

¹⁰⁵ Torsten Graff, "Gay Drama/Queer Performance?" *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 46, no. 1 (2001): 21.

behind closed doors. This is weaponised most potently in the form of a puppet show. A wooden curtain and figures align the lens borders, leaving a gap in the middle, as a wooden puppet emcee asks the spectator to “lean in and feast your eyes on his miraculous body! The magical, pitch shifting, metamorphosising wonder!”.¹⁰⁶ Through the use of perspective, MacAskill enters the ‘stage’ around the wooden figures, covering himself with wooden boards. What follows is MacAskill slowly teasing and revealing his naked body, with overlaid canned laughter and gasps, and a duet with himself pre-medical transition - a duet of two octaves. Writing on emerging contemporary digital theatre dramaturgies, Nadja Masura, in their book *Digital Theatre*, theorises that “public is defined in relation to the presence of others in society; public acts are those experiences connected to social interaction and a necessary mutual co-observation. Private on the other hand, refers to the deprivation of social or objective interaction and is linked to the safety of the domicile, to what is intimate and bodily.”.¹⁰⁷ It then becomes clear that the performance can take these understandings of public and private, and work to queer them, completely turning them on their heads. The sequence here is not framed as a public, liberating celebration, an enticing binary ‘before and after’ of his ‘completed gender journey’, but something far more violating. Private understandings of MacAskill’s transition are in full view, and after the duet is over he leaves the camera’s gaze without another word. MacAskill’s general unenthusiasm, and the staging as a circus act, places the spectator as part of a rowdy crowd, an invasive voyeur, a chilling reminder that there truly are no idle witnesses. It leads one to ask, does the spectator still have their motivation for watching in their head? Are they happy to continue watching this puppet dance for them? Are they happy to continue watching because MacAskill is not in the room with them? Are they uncomfortable yet? Are they satisfied yet?

In a performance so dramaturgically interested in the idea of the perfect transition story, it concludes that there is no possible way to tell one, implying that this is not a bad thing, and questions the spectator for expecting as much. This notion is articulated most clearly in a moment of pleasure: Cade fantasises about what scene could possibly happen next, which unravels into the couple overlapping each other, wrestling with inflatable, phallic wooden branches. The camera shakily zooms onto MacAskill’s face, taking up the entire visual performance space, and he says, “I am a liar. I don’t wanna be a real body. I don’t want to be bound by your laws of legitimacy. I don’t want to be diminished by trying to fit into your boxes.

¹⁰⁶ Cade & MacAskill, *The Making of Pinocchio*, 39:50.

¹⁰⁷ Nadja Masura, *Digital Theatre: The Making and Meaning of Live Mediated Performance, US & UK 1990-2020* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 210.

I'm not your real and I'm not your fantasy."¹⁰⁸ Spoken in sighs of relief and pleasure, joy and sexuality become powerful devices, in a way articulated by Park McArthur and Constantina Zavitsanos in their article on transness and ableness *The Guild of Brave Poor Things*, as they affirm that, "our ecstasy is a necessity and our resistance comes first. We don't make sense; we just feel it."¹⁰⁹ MacAskill says what the performance already knows, his personal life does not make sense dramaturgically, nor does it perfectly align with the story of Pinocchio, because he is not a story. He could never be something so simple and digestible, and he questions the spectator for wanting that of him.

As the performance reaches its conclusion, as mentioned previously, the couple find themselves inside the stomach of a whale. They wonder how they would taste to the whale, MacAskill actively hopes he doesn't taste good, in fact, he exclaims, "I don't want to be delicious, I want to make them sick!"¹¹⁰ Here, he finally expresses his wish to be unappetizing to his spectator. As they cuddle under a blanket on a makeshift bed, Cade wonders aloud what more they could do in the performance, as MacAskill softly sings and the camera slowly returns to the shot of red fabric that commenced the performance. The performance is complete but remains unfinished, because MacAskill's life is unfinished, and the spectator is asked to leave this metatheatrical world, perhaps unsatiated, and move on. *The Making of Pinocchio* does not, and never intended to, create an idealistic, delicious story of transition for spectators hungry for that kind of narrative. It is, in fact, a direct critique of such a motivation, for a wish to consume something so simplistic. It forces the spectator to confront how they approach 'representation' of an experience that is not their own, if they are still at ease with what they have consumed thus far, and if they can still stomach it now.

Returning to *The Guild of Brave Poor Things*, they declare that, "I am here to mess you up, drag you under, and, when or if I ever rise above. I'll remain in drag to bring you down so that we can even get down. If this sounds like a low blow, it is."¹¹¹ Following this, *Burgerz* and *The Making of Pinocchio*, to conclude, work dramaturgically to 'mess the spectator up'. Their unique dramaturgies seek to trouble the relationship between spectator and spectated, particularly in the context of trans embodiment. Rather than appeal to mainstream, cisgender

¹⁰⁸ Cade & MacAskill, *The Making of Pinocchio*, 53:30.

¹⁰⁹ Park McArthur and Constantina Zavitsanos, "The Guild of Brave Poor Things," in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility*, eds. Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (The MIT Press, 2017), 265.

¹¹⁰ Cade & MacAskill, *The Making of Pinocchio*, 1:12:00.

¹¹¹ McArthur and Zavitsanos, "The Guild of the Brave Poor Things," 238.

expectations of how they should perform, they actively work against the spectator to instil genuine change. They are performances that misbehave, attacking the notion of being passively spectated with a sense of irony, fun, and pleasure. They only speak to their own experiences, presenting vastly different dramaturgical strategies, and only claim to be an authority on themselves; they resist being silently, mindlessly consumed as pieces of hegemonised, 'good' representation. In the end, these performers are in front of an audience of passive spectators, they find themselves inside the stomach of a whale soon to be digested, and instead of tasting good, they opt for another option. They challenge the spectator's preconceived notions, they question their intentions for watching, they make them sick, so that the spectator will finally spit them out.

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The Gentrification of Cheryl Lavery in Fiona Mozley's *Hot Stew* (2021)

Imogen Dobson

Abstract:

This paper explores the physical and intrapersonal transformation of the character Cheryl Lavery in Fiona Mozley's Hot Stew (2021). This paper examines Cheryl's transformation from a social outcast to an ideal citizen, just as her neighbourhood, Soho, transforms from a hotbed of diversity and culture into another gentrified and homogenised area of London. At the beginning of the novel, Cheryl is a homeless drug-addict and sex worker who obediently follows her pimp as they sojourn the streets. One day she enters a crater in a construction site and ventures underground. As an earthquake hits Soho (after which it becomes gentrified), Cheryl emerges supposedly free of her drug addiction. This paper uses an agential realist approach to analyse the complexities of Cheryl's intersectional identity formation and transformation. It will also draw upon studies on underground spaces, as Soho displays transformative abilities that contribute to Cheryl's development into an epitome of capitalist ideals. Finally, this paper investigates the significance and consequences of Cheryl's transformation, as well as the liminality and potentiality of space. In particular, it questions whether Cheryl's transformation was worthwhile, and whether she is better off for it. While she was lucky enough to survive the earthquake (as many of the other vagrants did not), she seems unhuman, almost as if she was indoctrinated in the bunker and transformed into an exploited cog in the capitalist machine of Soho.

Keywords: *Gentrification, sex work, the subterranean, marginalisation.*

Introducing Fiona Mozley and *Hot Stew*

This paper explores the intersectional identity formation and transformation of the character Cheryl Lavery in Fiona Mozley's *Hot Stew* (2021). As a homeless drug addict and sex worker, Cheryl is socially and spatially marginalised to the underground areas of Soho. She has formed a holistic relationship with these subterranean conduits and as a result, her mind and body take on its topographical attributes. Eventually, the land's ambiguous powers regenerate her into a respectable member of society, reflecting events above the surface, where the neighbourhood becomes gentrified. This paper questions whether these transformations are beneficial, as Cheryl emerges obsessed with work and capitalist ideals, while Soho loses its diversity and eclectic individuality.

Before turning to the critical frameworks that inform this argument, I will draw a brief sketch of the plot and its socio-political background to ensure the reader is familiar with the text. *Hot Stew* is the second novel by English author Fiona Mozley and is set in Soho – a district in the West End of London. The novel's labyrinthine narrative follows a sprawling cast of characters that are either closely or loosely connected to a crumbling townhouse which comprises of squatters under the townhouse, a French restaurant on ground level, and a 'walk-up', or brothel, above. The squatters are led by the Archbishop, a narcissistic and delusional old man who believes he is a deity that has occupied Soho since its creation. One of his followers is sex worker and drug addict Cheryl Lavery. She and her pimp, Kevin Metcalfe, perform defective magic tricks for money, and are playfully known by the other residents of Soho as Paul Daniels and Debbie McGee (popular British television magicians from the eighties).

Impoverished sex workers like Cheryl move in complex spaces and this experience is inherently *intersectional*. This term functions as an analytic tool to help understand the multifaceted matrices of oppression that impact power dynamics within the human experience. This is expressed by sociologists Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge: 'when it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other'.¹¹² *Hot Stew* offers a narrative that presents the complex axes of Cheryl's victimisation in an oppressive system. For instance, as a sex worker, she inhabits stigmatised social and legal circles. The novel is set in the twenty-first

¹¹² Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Polity Press, 2016), 16.

century, suggesting that partial criminalisation is enforced in England. These laws legalise the act of engaging in sex as a transaction, but related activities, such as soliciting in a public place, owning or managing a brothel, and pimping and pandering, are illegal.¹¹³ This has adverse consequences for sex workers like Cheryl, who must work in high-risk locations with dangerous clients to avoid the police. Cheryl's damaging experiences as a sex worker are compounded by classism and poverty as well as misogynistic and pharisaic religious attitudes towards women.

Like other inhabitants of Soho, Cheryl's lifestyle is threatened by stony-hearted businesswoman Agatha Howard and her plans to blank-slate and gentrify the neighbourhood. The gentrification process is defined by social geographer Helen Jarvis as 'the superior purchasing power of one social and economic class [that] overwhelms and displaces another [...] [such as] the upgrading of run-down vintage property and the proliferation of coffee shops, wine bars and pricey independent boutiques.'¹¹⁴ This process affects the inhabitants as well as the establishments, as the sex workers and other working-class people are priced out and forced to leave their homes. This is illustrated through gastronomical metaphors, which is fitting as Soho was historically an area for elites to hunt game, and it remains an epicentre for food in London today. The most destructive consumer is the sinkhole (triggered by the earthquake) that swallows Soho's buildings, including the townhouse. This devouring is not unlike the process of gentrification, which, like a mouth, swallows the original buildings and regurgitates them into lesser versions, or shadows, of their previous form. Furthermore, the title of the novel is a homonym that evokes this elision between the city and food. Moreover, the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* clarifies that stews were another name for brothels during the Tudor era. The title also further consolidates the metaphor of food, stews are a mixture of different foodstuffs, representing Soho's diverse community.¹¹⁵ In this stew everyone consumes and is consumed, as is observed in the motif of snails in the novel, which are a delicacy in the French restaurant but also eat and destroy plants in the brothel's rooftop garden.¹¹⁶

One day, Cheryl wanders underground, accessed via construction sites where authorities are currently building a new tube line. She stays for a few months in an unknown

¹¹³ Molly Smith and Juno Mac, *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights* (London: Verso, 2020), 87.

¹¹⁴ Helen Jarvis, Paula Kantor and Jonathan Cloke, *Cities and Gender* (London: Routledge, 2009), 40.

¹¹⁵ "Stew," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed September 29, 2023, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/stew_n2?tab=meaning_and_use.

¹¹⁶ Fiona Mozley, *Hot Stew* (London: John Murray), 6.

wealthy Londoner's underground bunker. By the end of the novel, Cheryl emerges during the earthquake as ostensibly transformed. She is no longer an addict and is ready to be a productive member of society. However, there is something machinelike and inhumane about her. Mozley considers Soho to be the 'heart and soul of London', and the novel, along with Cheryl, are reminders to readers not only of the downtrodden outcasts routinely ignored and unaided in society, but also of the rich history and diversity London can lose to gentrification and homogenisation.¹¹⁷

Critical Frameworks

This paper uses an agential realist approach to analyse the complexities of identity and intersectionality within the novel. The space of Soho reflects the marginalisation of Cheryl and demonstrates transformative abilities that manifest in her transition into an embodiment of capitalist ideals. Philosopher Karen Barad's text, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), is a useful framework for capturing both the aliveness of space and intersectional social inequalities. Her study emphasises the inseparability and interconnectedness of gender, class, and space, 'advocating instead [for] a relationality between specific material (re)configurings of the world through which boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted'.¹¹⁸ In other words, everything is entangled, and as a result, 'bodies [...] are not simply situated in, or located in, particular environments. Rather, "environments" and "bodies" are intra-actively co-constituted'.¹¹⁹ Barad's neologism, 'intra-action', is the intermingling of people and things. It differs from 'interaction', which implies things are separate before a relationship is enacted. In contrast, 'intra-action' comes from within, and individuals emerge from it. These ideas are useful in understanding Cheryl's close relationship with Soho's underground spaces.

While Barad's work is multidisciplinary, it remains grounded in scientific origins: 'physics tells us that edges or boundaries are not determinate either ontologically or visually'.¹²⁰ Therefore, it would be suitable to draw upon feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), which provides a more anthropological reflection of space and human relations. This text is a close reading of how everyday lived emotions endow bodies with value and align them with powerful ideologies. Ahmed explores hate in both space and

¹¹⁷ Fiona Mozley and Betsy Gleick, "Hot Stew: An Evening with Fiona Mozley and her editor, Betsy Gleick," posted April 29, 2021, by Books & Books, YouTube, https://youtu.be/63RUM68p3gM?si=TneF4TU-BO5F_2Dp.

¹¹⁸ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (London: Duke University Press, 2007), 139.

¹¹⁹ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 170.

¹²⁰ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 156.

discourse, and clarifies that ‘it is the regulation of bodies in space through the uneven distribution of fear which allows spaces to become territories, claimed as rights by some bodies and not others.’¹²¹ That is to say, bodies like Cheryl’s are feared or hated, and spatially marginalised as a result.

Finally, historian Peter Ackroyd’s *London Under* (2011) is beneficial in understanding the historical precedents and subterranean representation in *Hot Stew*. Studies that focus on gentrification and homogenisation, like social geographers Helen Jarvis, Paula Kantor and Jonathan Cloke’s *Cities and Gender* (2009), also help provide historical, geographical, and anthropological context to the outcome of Cheryl’s transformation. Having offered a rounded approach that considers intra-actions of space and the emotional world of transformation, this paper will begin its analysis of Cheryl’s spatial-emotional development.

Cheryl as a *persona non grata*

This section will explore how Cheryl is a *persona non grata* within Soho due to her intersectional identity as an impoverished addict and sex worker. It will also investigate how this informs the space she inhabits, such as the underground crack den, the local pub, and the construction site. Analysing the stark differences between her physical and intrapersonal self at the beginning and end of the novel will help to fully grasp the implications of Cheryl’s transformation.

Cheryl is constructed as an outcast from society because of her intersectional identity. Firstly, she is a homeless drug addict. While readers do not see her using heroin, her compromised health is evoked in her physiognomy, particularly imagery of her as a corpse. She has cadaverous bones that are ‘dried and fractured’ and skin that is ‘withered’.¹²² She hardly speaks and seems to be in a continual state of apathy, as ‘there was also a period of her life when nothing but heroin made her happy or sad [...] that time also passed’.¹²³ Secondly, while it is never explicitly stated that Cheryl is trading sex for heroin, it is heavily implied to be a part of her vagrant lifestyle, as a policewoman confirms that ‘she has been convicted for shoplifting, public indecency and solicitation’.¹²⁴ Generally, the practice is pilloried, and this is exacerbated by the UK’s current legal policy of partial criminalisation. While the sex workers in the brothel do share a community, Cheryl is isolated even from them. Sex work activists

¹²¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 70.

¹²² Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 15.

¹²³ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 13.

¹²⁴ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 97.

Molly Smith and Juno Mac stress that ‘sex workers who use drugs are subject to the criminalisation of both drugs and prostitution [...] [this] creates even more risk of police attention and a criminal record, it also makes them illicit and therefore dangerous’.¹²⁵ Thus, Cheryl’s lifestyle and employment status is socially and legally stigmatised, emphasising her outsider identity.

Impoverished and eager to avoid the police, Cheryl is forced to inhabit marginalised areas of Soho. Her deteriorating body is reflected in the dark, underground environments she is drawn to, echoing Barad’s claim of the intra-active, co-constitution of bodies and environments. Her rotting body is aligned with the crumbling entrance to the Soho brothel, which is ‘dark [...] damp [...] [and] rusted’, as she lives underground, like a buried dead body.¹²⁶ Ahmed suggests that ‘fear works to contain bodies within social space through the way it shrinks the body, or constitutes the bodily surface through an expectant withdrawal from a world that might yet present itself as dangerous’.¹²⁷ Due to social stigma, Cheryl’s body and mind is effectively shrinking, as is evidenced through physical and mental decay. Her relegation to the forgotten, hidden areas of the city also points to her withdrawal from the world.

Specifically, Cheryl becomes so accustomed to the Archbishop’s dark, damp cellar that she takes on attributes of its subterranean topography. This aligns with Ahmed’s observation that ‘bodies take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others’.¹²⁸ Like the insects that surround her, Cheryl ‘creeps’ and ‘crawls’ around the small cellar, and listens to the earth on all fours ‘like a half-spider’, as if she has become one of the many insects scuttling below earth.¹²⁹ Even when she leaves the cellar, ‘she keeps to the sides of the pavements where the tall buildings cast shade’, like an underground creature demonstrating her preference for the dark.¹³⁰ This dehumanising language reflects society’s hatred towards Cheryl, as Ahmed continues, ‘the association between the roach and [...] the body works powerfully [...] [it] becomes an object of hate through “taking on” the qualities already attached to the roach: dirty, contaminating, evil.’¹³¹ The cockroach, like the other insects Cheryl is depicted as, spatially and socially demarcates her to a literal and figurative periphery.

¹²⁵ Smith and Mac, *Revolted Prostitutes*, 94.

¹²⁶ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 136.

¹²⁷ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 70.

¹²⁸ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 1.

¹²⁹ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 53, 37.

¹³⁰ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 16.

¹³¹ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 54.

Alternatively, the semantic field of insects points to Cheryl's strong connection with Soho. Insects, like 'woodlice[,] dwell in the cracks between the bricks of the cellar wall', and since a pub-regular describes Cheryl as having cracks in her skin, perhaps she is less an insect and more the underground walls that these creatures scuttle about in.¹³² This demonstrates an ambiguous reciprocity with the earth, intensified by her detection of the impending earthquake's tremors before anyone else: she feels the vibrations 'catch [...] unsettle [...] quiver' in all parts of her body.¹³³ This suggests that Cheryl is more acquainted with the land than the rest of the vagrants who live underground.

Despite this close relationship with the underground, it is the Archbishop, and not Cheryl, who functions as its figurehead. The underground may seek out a ruler as it is a spatial locus of power. Ackroyd reflected on Greek and Egyptian mythology and suggested that 'the further downward you travel, the closer you come to the power', because most ancient religions created temples and shrines underground.¹³⁴ This historical precedent intensifies the Archbishop's claims to be a spiritual leader, particularly as he is called the 'Archbishop', or a religious leader, his home is described as an 'archdiocese' or group of churches, and his vagrant followers are referred to as a 'flock', or worshippers of Christianity.¹³⁵ He also believes himself a monarch, as he dons purple, or the colour of royalty, and his crack den is referred to as an 'underground palace'.¹³⁶ This is ironic, as he preaches to addicts sat slumped on 'rancid mattresses or on the hard floors', surrounded by 'syringes [that] lie around in degrees of decay'.¹³⁷ Furthermore, Cheryl is ostracised even within marginalised spaces. The Archbishop rarely pays her attention and Kevin barely listens to her, remarking, 'I wouldn't listen to this mad cow'.¹³⁸ Just like Soho, which is controlled by the middle and upper-class elites, the underground is also in the grip of a dominant authority.

While Cheryl rarely strays from the underground crack den, she does occasionally venture into the local pub with Kevin. Many of Mozley's characters frequent the establishment, including the sex workers from the brothel. It has a traditional appearance that bears the signs of its old age: a brown colour palette, posters 'advertising defunct breweries', a 'fitted carpet,

¹³² Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 88.

¹³³ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 37.

¹³⁴ Peter Ackroyd, *London Under* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2011), 3.

¹³⁵ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 57, 54.

¹³⁶ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 54.

¹³⁷ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 53.

¹³⁸ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 57.

happily threadbare’, and ‘cracked paint of the exterior walls’.¹³⁹ The adjective ‘happily’ connotes that the pub and its regulars appreciate its elderly appearance and quirky charm, even though, like Cheryl, it is suffering from physical deterioration. Additionally, even Kevin and Cheryl are not completely excluded here. When a tourist belittles the pair, a regular defends them, conveying that although they are social pariahs, they are preferred over the entitled and wealthier outsiders.¹⁴⁰

The final space Cheryl visits prior to her transformation, with the rest of the Archbishop’s followers, is the construction site. They scavenge near underground conduits, where Cheryl finds a golden crown, hinting at the land’s approval of her. The crown catches her foot, and when she holds it up near a floodlight to see it better, it is as if a spiritual presence has marked her out as a ruler by bathing her in light. This alludes to Arthurian mythology where only Arthur can pull the sword from stone because he has been chosen as the predestined ruler. Eventually, Cheryl disappears under the construction site. Despite sharing similar qualities with the subterranean, it is not clear why Cheryl chooses to leave the Archbishop. She tells a pub regular that the Archbishop sent his followers out searching for tremors and ‘they’ve gone home, but I’ve stayed’.¹⁴¹ If she is continuing to search for the tremors, it is unknown what purpose she gains by locating them. Perhaps the tremors are the voice of the underground, calling her to the bunker, intensifying this development of the subterranean as the agent of Cheryl’s transformation away from a *persona non grata*.

The Transformation of Cheryl

This section will analyse the transformation of both Cheryl and the underground that surrounds her. When she descends into a crater on a construction site, she locates a luxury doomsday bunker that the one percent use to escape disasters. Unlike the Archbishop’s crack den, it is a natural sanctuary. Transgressing the social expectations of the space, as it is intended to be used by unknown members of the elite, Cheryl lives there for six months, weaning herself off heroin and learning to be a knowledgeable and productive member of Soho.

Cheryl’s descent into the underground can be viewed as a *katabasis*. In classical mythology, it is a descent into the underworld, or, as defined by Haewon Hwang, a ‘meta-narrative of descent that dominated images of heroic journeys [and] embraced eschatological

¹³⁹ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 290.

¹⁴⁰ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 13.

¹⁴¹ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 88.

themes of death, redemption and renewal'.¹⁴² Cheryl's storyline evokes similar beats as she emerges from the underground a revived woman. When reflecting on Cheryl's descent, Mozley uses allusions to the Greek underworld as she remarks, 'I was thinking of Persephone a little bit', or the Greek Goddess abducted by Hades, king of the underworld.¹⁴³ Subterranean London has been likened to the Greek underworld, as a traveller, cited by Ackroyd, described the Tube line in 1960 as 'like crossing the Styx [...] The fog had followed us down from the streets and swirled above the discoloured and strongly smelling river like the stream of Hades'.¹⁴⁴ The Styx is the river that separates the Earth from the underworld, thus implying that the London Tube is the gateway to this underworld, and, like Charon's boat, is used for ferrying the dead across the Styx. To get to the bunker, Cheryl does not use the Tube, but she does use the tunnels where authorities intend to build a new Tube line. Like Ackroyd's traveller, Cheryl finds the experience damp as 'she drank the water that dripped', and foul-smelling from the 'rotting timbers'.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, her journey underground follows a literary tradition of heroes like Aeneas and Odysseus descending into the dark and infernal underworld. When they leave, these heroes generally obtain a quasi-divine status, not unlike Cheryl's own rise of social importance.

Once inside the bunker, expectations of the underground are subverted as the space functions as a welcoming sanctuary for Cheryl. Historian Rosalind Williams observes that traditionally, 'the defining characteristic of the subterranean environment is the exclusion of nature – of biological diversity, of seasons, of plants, of the sun and the stars', or an inorganic environment devoid of wildlife.¹⁴⁶ But due to modern technology, the bunker becomes 'an underground eco-system, a subterranean oasis, a chlorine and halogen haven, a garden with walls' – with nouns 'oasis' and 'haven' connoting safety and refuge.¹⁴⁷ There are also tropical plants heated by UV lamps, pictures of beach fronts, and loudspeakers hidden in the plants that simulate noises from the rainforest.¹⁴⁸ Cheryl becomes accustomed to light here, whereas before she favoured darkness. When she enters the bunker, it is described as 'a fevered

¹⁴² Haewon Hwang, *London's Underground Spaces: Representing the Victorian City, 1840-1915* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 1.

¹⁴³ Fiona Mozley and Arianna Rebolini, "Fiona Mozley on Hot Stew with Arianna Rebolini," posted May 20, 2021, by The Center for Fiction, YouTube, <https://youtu.be/5nUL8DUPjc8?si=aw0YMTNKRQBAOUAv>.

¹⁴⁴ Ackroyd, *London Under*, 80-81.

¹⁴⁵ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 193.

¹⁴⁶ Rosalind H. Williams, *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society, and the Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 20.

¹⁴⁷ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 194.

¹⁴⁸ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 194.

Hollywood dream, a Kodachrome test-strip',¹⁴⁹ with the turquoise waters and vibrant plants creating an explosion of 'pinks, yellows, lilacs, reds'.¹⁵⁰ The underground space has been transformed, as if Cheryl has located a quasi-rainforest amongst a cold and dark English city.

The bunker also subverts the typical conception of the Greek underworld, as Cheryl is not reborn *after* she leaves, but *during* her habitation of the underground space. There is imagery of transformation, rebirth, and new beginnings, encapsulated by the chapter title 'Debbie McGee Redux', with 'redux' defined in the *OED* as 'brought back, restored'.¹⁵¹ Natural metaphors reflect Cheryl's rebirth, as there are 'flowers as large as a baby's cradle', reminding the reader of birth and innocence, and, when Cheryl sleeps, she is described as having 'cocooned herself' in linen sheets, like a caterpillar that has gone into hibernation but will emerge as a butterfly.¹⁵² Butterflies are typically lauded as beautiful whereas caterpillars are not, suggesting Cheryl is on her way to becoming more accepted by society. Furthermore, the archetypal vertical metaphor is subverted as Ahmed claims 'lowness becomes associated with lower regions of the body'.¹⁵³ Cheryl may be a sex worker, which aligns her with a 'lowness', but in this underground, she is no longer practicing and manifests as a *tabula rasa*.

Cheryl's transformation, with its connotations of innocence and rebirth, is emphasised by continual mythical allusions. For instance, the abundance of nature may remind the reader of an Edenic paradise, intensified when Cheryl takes her clothes off and is naked like Eve before the Fall. This alludes to Christian mythology's *tabula rasa* state of humanity before sin. Furthermore, considering the references to Greek mythology, the swimming pool could be inferred as one of the underworld's rivers. For instance, the river Lethe causes the dead to forget their earthly existence. However, when Cheryl swims in the pool, she recalls her childhood swimming lessons, along with the 'armbands and earplugs and swimming caps and Lucozade and KitKat afterwards'.¹⁵⁴ Instead of facing forgetfulness and oblivion, the listing and lack of punctuation gives the impression that Cheryl is suddenly awash with childhood memories, as if her former, childlike self is returning. Where the underworld is meant for the dead, Cheryl finds herself reborn into a natural, youthful state untouched by drugs and suffering.

¹⁴⁹ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 194.

¹⁵⁰ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 194.

¹⁵¹ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 193; "Redux," Oxford English Dictionary, accessed September 29, 2023, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/redux_adj?tab=meaning_and_use.

¹⁵² Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 194, 195.

¹⁵³ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 89.

¹⁵⁴ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 195.

Cheryl's body and mind are cleansed and healed in the bunker, echoing Barad's claim that 'bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties' and are capable of change.¹⁵⁵ For the first few weeks in this quasi-rehab, Cheryl is sick as the drugs are flushed out of her system, but, once she is better, she works at improving herself. She uses the sauna every day, where she 'scraped dirt from her pores [...] rinsing off, drying herself and coating her body with shea butter'.¹⁵⁶ The adjective 'coating' makes it seem as if Cheryl is covering herself with a new skin without the cuts and bruises of her drug-riddled past, acquiring a new flesh that is not corpse-white but can 'recess then bounce up and back into place'.¹⁵⁷ This suggests that her flesh before was stiff and inflexible, like that of a dead body in rigor mortis, but now she has been reanimated into someone that spatially belongs above ground with the rest of the society.

Cheryl then re-educates herself with books and films that focus on land ownership and community. She watches classic films like *Gone with the Wind* (1939) in the small theatre room, which unbeknownst to her, was her father's favourite film. This is important because one of the themes of the film is property ownership: 'land, it's the only thing that matters'.¹⁵⁸ Her father was also a landowner: 'he ran more brothels, and strip clubs, and underground gay bars, and he became achingly, blindingly rich'.¹⁵⁹ Thus, not only is the underground triggering Cheryl's growing respect for Soho, but it is also reacquainting her with the drive for profit and ownership that her father held. Moreover, it is through self-help books that 'she learnt about being a productive member of society. She learnt how to be 'happy' or to be a hard-working, model citizen'.¹⁶⁰ Perhaps the film and the books are less broad education tools and more propaganda. Her isolation in the bunker has probably exacerbated her susceptibility to this indoctrination, which results less in her empowerment and more her being possessed or instrumentalised by the underground.

While Soho's ambiguous powers have transformed Cheryl physically and mentally, the space should not be reduced to a quasi-drug rehab. It teaches her about land, profit, and the illusionary capitalist promise of a dream, and has consequently moulded her into an idealised, one-dimensional citizen. This paper will now move on to discuss the consequences of this

¹⁵⁵ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 139.

¹⁵⁶ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 196.

¹⁵⁷ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 196.

¹⁵⁸ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 196.

¹⁵⁹ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 100.

¹⁶⁰ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 100.

transformation, as once Cheryl has exhausted everything in the bunker, or been indoctrinated, she bids goodbye to the plants and ascends back to Soho during the earthquake.

The Impacts of Cheryl's Transformation

Just as Soho loses its diversity and charm, becoming a homogenised, bourgeoisie neighbourhood, Cheryl emerges from the bunker reborn as a gentrified version of herself. A social worker has been assigned to help her; she shares a flat with a roommate; and she holds a job butchering in a restaurant where she is working her way up to an official qualification. Cheryl has 'cleaned' her life up as well as her body, and now leads a socially productive and ideal existence. However, this section will explore how this transformation is not without issues, as echoed by Mozley, who suggested that she 'wanted us [her readers] to question whether she's [Cheryl] better or worse off after the experience'.¹⁶¹

After the earthquake, Soho's businesses are gentrified. The beloved French restaurant is swallowed by the sinkhole, but there were plans to tear it down before anyway, as expressed by Agatha: 'restaurants like this are quaint, but they aren't profitable'.¹⁶² The buildings that did survive are completely redeveloped, like the local pub. It is made 'stylish and joyless', as its traditional appearance and old inhabitants are eradicated.¹⁶³ A former regular feels 'sad, kind of hollow' when he visits, reflecting the pub's unrecognisably empty appearance with its 'motivational slogans, weird puns, fake antique advertising posters to replace the real antique posters'.¹⁶⁴ This regular no longer feels welcome here, while others no longer visit either because they died during the earthquake or because they moved away from the area, like the sex workers that lived in the brothel.

Sex workers were Agatha's main target in redeveloping Soho, but Cheryl escaped this suppression by conforming to the gentrification process. Jarvis clarifies that the 'labelling of the street prostitute as "other" and a threat to the reimagined metropolis [...] [causes them] to be physically removed from gentrifying neighbourhoods'.¹⁶⁵ Cheryl was also once this 'other', but now she functions as a spiritual champion of Soho's gentrification. When she emerges from the bunker she is 'illuminated from behind [...] her skin is bright and shining', affirming that the power of the underground, like a God, has miraculously healed her.¹⁶⁶ Her voice is also

¹⁶¹ Mozley and Rebolini, "Fiona Mozley on Hot Stew."

¹⁶² Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 9.

¹⁶³ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 290.

¹⁶⁴ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 290.

¹⁶⁵ Jarvis, Kantor, and Cloke, *Cities and Gender*, 230.

¹⁶⁶ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 284.

described as ‘unexpectedly ethereal’ and her laugh reverberates from the depths of the ground itself – ‘hahahahaha up from the belly of the city’, as if Soho has infiltrated her body.¹⁶⁷ Cheryl is not just an ideal citizen, but a personification of Soho’s gentrification. This emphasises that the process has not only shaped homogenised buildings that could exist in any other city in the UK, but also homogenised people.

Cheryl’s mind, specifically, has been gentrified. She is hyper-productive to the point that it alarms her colleagues, and work dominates conversation with her roommate.¹⁶⁸ It is as if she was indoctrinated while in the bunker as her transformation into a hard-working member of society is abrupt and quixotic. Her metamorphosis into a robotic, capitalism-driven worker could be reminiscent of Morlocks from H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895): exploited workers who became increasingly brutalised as their labour became more mechanised and repetitive. Likewise, she has no personality outside of her drive for profit. The Morlocks also live and work underground, and if Cheryl is likened to them, it can be implied that she has brought a subterranean influence with her above the surface. Additionally, the Morlocks are cannibals who feed on the innocent, empowering Cheryl and aligning her with the sinkhole and the ensuing gentrification that has hungrily consumed the original buildings and occupants.

Cheryl operates as an extension of Soho, and the ambiguous potential and limits of the underground space are observed within her. She was once decaying and deteriorating but, after the earthquake, is reformed into something shiny, clean, and obsessed with profit. Evidently, her life has improved drastically in both safety and health, but her mechanistic personality has left her a one-dimensional figure.

Conclusion

Mozley’s novel draws attention to Soho and its practises of marginalisation. As a result of social and legal stigma, Cheryl is initially spatially marginalised to subterranean Soho. However, the underground is subverted from a dark and claustrophobic space into a locus of change and refuge. This echoes Ackroyd’s claim that the subterranean can function as ‘the home of the devil and of holy water’ – it does not possess singular connotations.¹⁶⁹ In the underground bunker, Cheryl locates the latter in the form of an Edenic natural world. Due to her empathetic understanding of the earth, as she predicts the earthquake and is often depicted

¹⁶⁷ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 310, 311.

¹⁶⁸ Mozley, *Hot Stew*, 293-294.

¹⁶⁹ Ackroyd, *London Under*, 182.

with its topographical attributes, Soho appears to favour her. Williams suggested that ‘the earth’s inner space may no longer be regarded as sacred, but it still is a repository of spiritual value’, and, in *Hot Stew*, Soho’s ambiguous eschatological powers protect Cheryl.¹⁷⁰ Williams also suggests that some descents are a ‘journey [that] is intended as a temporary episode of moral education, not as a permanent self-exile’, and, while in the bunker, the underground frees Cheryl of her drug addiction and improves her physical and mental health.¹⁷¹

As Cheryl transforms, so does Soho, confirming Barad’s elision of the body and environment, as ‘there is much more to the question of where a body ends than meets the eye’.¹⁷² Embodying the ambiguous Soho townhouse that is buried and resurrected as another luxury building in a homogenous neighbourhood, the once crumbling Cheryl emerges gentrified and obsessed with work and profit. It remains ambiguous whether Cheryl’s life has improved. On the one hand, she is better off – healthy and drug-free in a safe home with secure employment. However, this comes at a price, as she is no longer Debbie McGee or Cheryl Lavery, but a slave to the subterranean with no other desires except to work. In a reflection of Ahmed’s observation that ‘the economy of fear works to contain the bodies of others’, Cheryl can only belong in Soho, gentrified or not, if she is completely purified and redeemed of peripheral intersectional identities like drug addict, homeless person, and sex worker.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Williams, *Notes on the Underground*, 24.

¹⁷¹ Williams, *Notes on the Underground*, 182.

¹⁷² Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 156.

¹⁷³ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 67.

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Dimming the Grey: The Socio-cultural Recasting of Ageing Women in Chinese Translations of *Jane Eyre*

Minlin Yu

Abstract:

*The early twentieth to the twenty-first century marked fundamental changes in gender roles and identities in China. As young Chinese women have become more empowered, transitioning from the rigours of Confucian orthodoxy to personal sovereignty, the authority and respect traditionally reserved for older women have been subtly eroded. During this time, translators act as key participants in this cultural transformation by introducing and adapting Western gender discourses to the Chinese landscape. This research analyses how women of advanced age in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* were represented in three translations spanning a century, focusing on the variations of the descriptors embodying societal status and respect. Drawing from the cultural turns in translation studies, this study contextualises each translation within its cultural history, illuminating how translators face an array of conflicting forces: from imported Western gender discourses and internal cultural reassessments to collectivist and individualist ideologies, as well as patriarchal norms and feminist values. The study employs Mona Baker's word-meaning model to analyse and contrast the cultural terms designating older women in translations. It reveals how the translations engage in "dimming the grey," a process of adapting language to reflect contemporary cultural norms and societal biases that increasingly marginalise ageing women. This study offers a localised perspective that both confirms and problematises the transformative power of translation, recognising its role in cultural transmission, while also highlighting its potential to perpetuate gender biases and marginalisation.*

Keywords: Translation as cultural transformation, Chinese gender discourse, representation of older women

At the close of the nineteenth century, China, under the rule of the Qing dynasty, faced an existential crisis following a series of military defeats by perceived Western powers. This spurred a period of national introspection and importation of Western literature, deemed vital for "enriching impoverished souls and remedying flawed human nature," according to Mao Dun.¹⁷⁴ In this receptive cultural climate, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was introduced. The novel has thrived in its Chinese translations and retranslations, conveying the beauty and power of gender ideologies across time and borders.

One of the earliest translations of *Jane Eyre* was carried out by Wu Guangjian (1867-1943), a prominent translator dedicated to modernising the nation.¹⁷⁵ Prefaced in 1927 and published in 1935, his translation was crafted in the new vernacular language "*baihua*," which facilitated the spread of literacy. In his preface, Wu elevates the heroine to a moral stature traditionally reserved for men, "being uncorrupted by wealth and honour, unswayed by poverty and obscurity, and unbent by power and authority".¹⁷⁶ His comments echo progressive discourses and debates on gender equality during the May Fourth New Culture movement (1915-1924). Additionally, Wu's approach to translation prioritises naturalness of expression over strict adherence to the source text. His translation procedure, including comprehension, mastery, and rearrangement, endorses a rewriting process, wherein imitation and creation are mutually complementary.¹⁷⁷ This authorial approach is further illustrated by his interpretative cultural additions, vividly exemplified in his rendition of *Jane Eyre*.

Among all Chinese translations of *Jane Eyre*, Song Zhaolin's 1996 edition stands out as the most frequently reprinted, with at least sixty-nine reprints by over thirty-eight publishers up to 2022.¹⁷⁸ As a celebrated literary translator and professor at Zhejiang University, Song (1929-2011) translated over fifty literary works, amounting to a cumulative word count

¹⁷⁴ Shouhua Qi, *Western literature in China and the translation of a nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹⁷⁵ Sin-wai Chan and David E. Pollard, *An encyclopaedia of translation: Chinese-English, English-Chinese* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2001).

¹⁷⁶ Guangjian Wu, *Guni piaoling ji 孤女飘零记 [Narrative of a female orphan adrift]* (Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Shudian, 2018).

¹⁷⁷ Xu Zhang, *Wu Guangjian yizuo xuan 伍光建译作选 [Selected translations by Wu Guangjian]* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2019); Lifu Wu, *Wu Guangjian fanyi yigao 伍光建翻译遗稿 [Wu Guangjian's translation manuscripts]* (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1980).

¹⁷⁸ Minlin Yu, "The male lens on Jane Eyre: Translating/Constructing femininity across a century of Chinese cultural history" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2024), <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/84987/>.

exceeding two hundred million.¹⁷⁹ His translations to the "World Literature Classics Library" reflect his commitment to delivering a range of culturally and historically resonant texts. In the preface, Song highlights Jane as a symbol of resistance and empowerment, "displaying a rebellious spirit towards society, life, love, marriage, and religion, especially in championing women's independence, autonomy in marriage, and gender equality."¹⁸⁰ This commentary reflects the translator's acknowledgement of and engagement with the feminist underpinnings of the novel.

Further aligning *Jane Eyre* with feminist values, Li Jihong characterises the literature in his preface "not as a Cinderella-style love story, but as a parable of financial independence, equality of character, and freedom in marriage and romance."¹⁸¹ Born in 1980, Li has established himself as a prolific literary translator. His translations exhibit both tendencies to provide extensive notes for culture-specific terms and to adapt them to the Chinese language and culture, maintaining "exotic flavour should not compromise readability".¹⁸² In public lectures, Li sharply criticised prior translations of Western literature, particularly those from the 1990s, as error-ridden and outdated, failing to meet contemporary needs. This criticism backlash over perceived disrespect for renowned predecessors. Furthermore, the "young genius" marketing associated with his translations has drawn criticism for self-promotion fervour.¹⁸³ Despite these controversies, his literary translation series of Western literary works has achieved substantial success in sales.

The analysis of three translators reveals their engagement with feminist ideologies in the prefaces to *Jane Eyre*, coupled with a sensitivity to the Chinese language and cultural context. Far from simply bridging Western women's literature, these translators actively participate in its interpretation and cultural integration. This role invites a re-evaluation of gender narratives within China's changing socio-historical and cultural landscape. While much scholarly attention on gender translation in *Jane Eyre*, including recent works by Huang Yunte

¹⁷⁹ Chun Zhao and Hongbo Gao, *Zhongguo zuojia da cidian 中国作家大辞典 [Encyclopedia of Chinese Writers]* (Beijing: Zhongguo Wenlian Chubanshe, 1999).

¹⁸⁰ Zhaolin Song, *Jian' ai 简爱 [Jane Eyre]* (Beijing: Zuoqia Chubanshe, 2015).

¹⁸¹ Jihong Li, *Jian' ai 简爱 [Jane Eyre]* (Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Chubanshe, 2019).

¹⁸² Bruce Humes, "Transparent translator series: Q & A with Li Jihong, "Kite Runner" Chinese translator," *Wordpress*, January 23, 2009, <https://bruce-humes.com/2009/01/23/interview-kite-runner-translator/>.

¹⁸³ "Mingzhu wuyi de wenti, Daodi you duo yanzhong? 名著误译的问题，到底有多严重？ [How serious are the problems with mistranslations in classic literature?]," Pengpai, January 10, 2020, https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_5481511.

and Zhang Lei, has focused on the protagonist and other younger and middle-aged characters, this paper focuses on the representation of the often-overlooked women of advanced age. Drawing on the cultural turns in translation studies, this study contextualises each translation and employs Mona Baker's word-meaning model to analyse and compare the cultural terms used to describe older women across three translations. Particularly, it examines how these variations reflect translators' perceptions and negotiations of gender and ageing, illustrating the role of translation as a cultural practice.

Theoretical Foundation: Cultural Turn in Translation Studies

Emerging in the late twentieth century, the cultural turn in translation studies challenges traditional views of translation as a linguistic transfer. Heavily influenced by poststructuralist and postcolonial thought, it conceptualises translation within the target polysystem, as an interplay among various cultural, social, and political systems, each vying for influence and recognition.¹⁸⁴ This perspective, derived from polysystem theory, moves the analytical focus from a source-oriented to a target-oriented approach. While scholars were gradually shifting to the cultural turn, it was Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere who firmly anchored its prominence.¹⁸⁵ As showcased in their collection *Translation, History and Culture*, the term "culture" was enriched, adopting a broader and more concrete meaning beyond its anthropological origins. Within this reconceptualised framework, Bassnett and Lefevere contend that translations are not fashioned within an insulated lexical chamber, untainted by power structures, historical context, or cultural idiosyncrasies.¹⁸⁶ Instead, they are crafted in response to the cultural exigencies and the needs of diverse groups within that cultural framework. The disciplinary landscape has consequently expanded, moving beyond mere linguistic comparisons between the source and target texts to embrace "cultural contextualisation," which situates translations with wider socio-historical contexts to explore cultural meanings and nuances, albeit at the risk of crystallising culture as monolithic or static.

In the cultural dialogue, translation emerges both as a means of empowerment and as an entity bound by established power structures. Translation is not the happy marriage of

¹⁸⁴ Theo Hermans, *Translation in systems: Descriptive and system-oriented approaches explained*. (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1999).

¹⁸⁵ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Translation, history and culture* (London: Cassell, 1990).

¹⁸⁶ Bassnett and Lefevere, *Translation, history and culture*.

cultures one might imagine; rather, it often represents a fraught terrain of cultural asymmetries and conflicting ideologies. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere argue that translation takes place on a vertical axis, denoting an implicit hierarchy between the source and the target.¹⁸⁷ Such a hierarchical arrangement reveals an asymmetry: one language, text, or culture often assumes a dominant role, relegating the other to a subordinate or even marginalised status. The power imbalance at play in translation not only dictates the nature of the works selected for translation but also sets the course for global currents of linguistic and cultural transmission. This inherent power imbalance is juxtaposed against the empowering narrative translation brings into play. The potency of cultural translation resides in its capacity to operate at the intersections of power, knowledge, and identity. Building upon Foucault's conceptualisation of power and knowledge, Román Álvarez and M. Carmen-África Vidal contend that translation serves as an arena for negotiating cultural self-images and subtleties.¹⁸⁸ Translators' agency is encapsulated in "discursive" elements—namely, the actual words, phrases, and sentences used in translation—and "non-discursive" elements, including tone, emphasis, and deliberate choices of omission or inclusion. Therefore, every decision the translator makes—what to include or omit, and how to arrange them—constitutes a voluntary act, revealing their personal experiences and the cultural knowledge or specific stages of sociological development that translators seek to communicate. In the intricate negotiation of meaning, power, and identity, translation unfolds as an essential form of cultural transformation, defining and redefining existing symbolic systems.

Methodology: Bridging Lexical Elements and Cultural Contexts

Building on the theoretical foundation of the cultural turn in translation studies, this research adopts Maria Tymoczko's micro- and macro-level analyses that bridge small-scale textual elements with broader ideological positioning.¹⁸⁹ This bifocal analysis begins with a socio-cultural scaffold that informs the textual elements. The microscopic lens evaluates how these linguistic subtleties reflect, reinforce, or even contest broader undercurrents of cultural norms and values. The dual approach affirms the integral relationship between micro and

¹⁸⁷ Bassnett and Lefevere, *Translation, history and culture*.

¹⁸⁸ Román Álvarez and M. Carmen Africa Vidal, *Translation, power, subversion* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999).

¹⁸⁹ Maria Tymoczko, "Connecting the two infinite orders research methods in Translation Studies," in *Crosscultural transgressions: Research models in translation: Historical and ideological issues*, ed. Theo Hermans (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2002).

macro dimensions of translation studies, emphasising how language and cultural dynamics are intimately linked and mutually informative.

Translations are like mosaics, pieced together by foundational or "lower-level" linguistic elements like words, phrases, and syntax. These components are not merely a collection of letters or strokes, but the threads that weave the meaning of the text, enabling resonance across cultural landscapes and historical epochs. The importance of lexical items in translated texts, as stated by Gideon Toury, tends to be overlooked, particularly in the theoretical, methodological and practical implications.¹⁹⁰ With attention to these finer details, this study focuses on the linguistic choices and their significance in shaping the texture, tone and tenor of translated narratives and cultural representation. To this end, I am employing the linguistic analytical model synthesised by Mona Baker presented in *In other words: A coursebook on translation*, which draws upon the works of linguists such as D.A. Cruse and Michael Halliday.¹⁹¹

The propositional meaning is the foundational layer, establishing the basic connection between the word and its referent in the natural or imaginary world (Baker, 1992, p.13-14).¹⁹² For instance, for locals in Xiamen, a city on China's southeast coast, the mention of the popular local dish "*shacha mian*" 沙茶面 (satay noodles) brings to mind soup noodles with rich broth and a customised range of accompaniments such as shrimp, tofu products, and blanched leafy greens. This direct relationship between word and object not only forms the baseline of understanding but also provides the basis for judging a word as true or false. Beyond this objective layer lies the expressive meaning — the emotional, subjective undertones a word might carry. In the context of food choices, for lovers of "*shacha mian*", merely uttering the word might evoke emotions of enthusiasm, yearning and nostalgia. In contrast, those who dislike it might use a more disdainful tone. Notably, in the same language system, synonyms or near-synonyms, despite sharing a core denotative meaning, can exhibit different expressive meanings, imbued with the imprints of historical usages, societal changes, and cultural shifts.

¹⁹⁰ Gideon Toury, *Descriptive translation studies and beyond (Revised edition)* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2012).

¹⁹¹ Mona Baker, *In other words: A coursebook on translation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁹² Baker, *In other words: A coursebook on translation*, 13-14.

Words often carry multiple layers of propositional meaning. Dictionaries provide a structured, researched foundation of established linguistic practices. These references provide basic definitions and concrete examples that elucidate the cultural and emotional subtleties of language, particularly in how words describe different individuals across varied contexts. Recognising the importance of the comprehensiveness of dictionary entries, I have primarily used the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* online edition for the English language and, for the Chinese language, the twelve volumes of *Hanyu Da Cidian* 汉语大词典 (Comprehensive Chinese Word Dictionary) in its first edition reprint version, accompanied by a correction volume.¹⁹³ To deepen the understanding gained from these dictionaries, I include consideration of the literary context, along with broader cultural and historical analyses in both source and target texts.

Gendered Ageing: The Shifting Cultural Landscape for Older Women in China

Gender history, as Maud Anne Bracke, Penelope Morris, and Emily Ryder contend, "represents an ideal setting for the re-thinking of histories of translation practices and the very nature of translation."¹⁹⁴ The cultural and historical narratives of older women, in particular, provide essential backgrounds for understanding translators' perceptions of gender and ageing. In turn, translators' descriptive references to older female characters variously reflect the changing cultural perceptions and treatments of older women in China from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. These processes involve multiple degrees of negotiation by translators, who balance the imported Western gender discourses and domestic customs and values, the rise of neoliberal and individualist ethics and the enduring influence of Confucian family values. Additionally, translators address the tensions between national interests, such as preserving traditional cultural norms and addressing contemporary demographic crises. The following section contextualises each translator's work, charting the dynamics of older women's roles and perceptions across a century of societal change.

Imperial Tradition and Early Republican China

¹⁹³ Chen Qi, *Hanyu Da Cidian Dingbu* 汉语大词典订补 [Revised supplement to the Comprehensive Chinese word dictionary] (Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chubanshe, 2010).

¹⁹⁴ Maud Anne Bracke, Penelope Morris, and Emily Ryder, "Introduction. translating feminism: Transfer, transgression, transformation (1950s–1980s)," *Gender & History* 30, no. 1 (2018).

Traditionally, older women, like older people in general, have benefited from the Confucian tradition of respecting age, experience, and accumulated wisdom. Central to this tradition is filial piety, a core value of Confucianism that mandates children to respect, obey, support, and care for their older parents.¹⁹⁵ In this sociological framework, a woman's life trajectory typically progresses upward, starting as a young wife and mother, subordinate to her mother-in-law, and, with time and age, transitions into the role of a respected grandmother or matriarch, albeit within the limits of a patriarchal structure.¹⁹⁶

Following Chinese military defeats, the May Fourth New Culture Movements in the 1910s and 1920s saw Chinese intellectuals challenge Confucian patriarchal institutions and traditional family ethics, emphasising individual freedom over familial obligations. Women's roles and identities, in particular, were extensively debated and discussed. Reformers like Cai Yuanpei and Hu Shi championed women's transformation from merely "virtuous wives and good mothers" to "autonomous individuals," pushing for their educational and equal rights.¹⁹⁷ While this movement centred on the potential of young girls and women to drive social change, it often overlooked older women, despite their continued roles in household management and childcare. They were often portrayed either as enforcers of patriarchal norms in the form of domineering mothers-in-laws, or as victims oppressed by these very structures. Following the 1930s and 1940s, new civil and criminal codes were introduced to recognise each member as autonomous, reforming laws that differentiated between family members based on status. Despite these ideological and legal shifts, the social perception of familial relations evolved much more slowly. As noted by Du Yue, many older generation members continued to uphold traditional filial piety, while both young men and women increasingly asserted their autonomy, often in opposition to their parent's wishes or interests.¹⁹⁸ As these young Chinese women became more empowered, transitioning from the rigours of Confucian orthodoxy to the realm

¹⁹⁵ Michael Nylan, "Confucian piety and individualism in Han China," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 1 (1996).

¹⁹⁶ Diana Lary, *China's grandmothers: Gender, family and ageing from late Qing to twenty-first century* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2002).

¹⁹⁷ Yuanpei Cai, "Yangcheng youmei gaoshang sixiang: Zai Shanghai chengdong nüxue yan shuo ci 養成優美高尚思想：在上海城東女學演說詞 [Cultivate noble and elegant thoughts: Speech at the Shanghai Eastern Girls' School]," in *Cai Yuanpei quanji 蔡元培全集 (1910-1916) [The complete works of Cai Yuanpei (1910-1916)]*, ed. Pingshu Gao (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1913); Shi Hu, "Nüzi wenti 女子問題 [The women's question]," *Fünü Zazhi*, no. 5 (1921).

¹⁹⁸ Yue Du, *State and family in China: Filial piety and its modern reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

of personal sovereignty and enlightenment, the hierarchy and authority traditionally reserved for older women was gradually eroded.

Post-reform China

This trend of diminishing traditional values persisted through the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Under Mao Zedong, the nation's leader, the subsequent social and cultural reforms targeted old ideologies and practices deemed incompatible with the socialist ethos. Following Mao's death and his controversial legacies, China initiated economic reforms to decentralise, modernise and industrialise the economy. This shift aligned the country with broader global neoliberal trends emphasising market efficiency, deregulation, and individual autonomy. Concurrently, notable shifts in demographics and family structures unfolded, marked by the implementation of the one-child policy in the 1980s to control population growth, the two-child policy in 2016 and the three-child policy in 2021, aimed at addressing demographic imbalances and the ageing population. The rapid changes in demographics, socio-economics, technology and contemporary culture have undermined Margaret Mead's concept of "postfigurative culture," where knowledge predominately flows from older to younger generations.¹⁹⁹ Instead, there is arguably a shift towards a "cofigurative" or even "prefigurative" model, where peers and younger generations increasingly influence learning and cultural norms.

As these traditional frameworks become less applicable or relevant, the customary reverence for the wisdom of elders—traditionally sought and heeded—is now more often honoured in principle than in practice. For older women, parental authority and control over household decisions have become a nostalgic recollection. The generation of older women, who may have once envisioned being served by younger generations as they themselves had served their mothers-in-law, now find the tables turned. Many are expected to support their working daughters and daughters-in-law with childcare and household duties. Childcare roles have evolved from tending infants and young children within family homes to providing extended sole care, lasting weeks, months or even years.²⁰⁰ The shifting treatment of older women in the domestic sphere is further complicated by the physical realities of ageing. As

¹⁹⁹ Margaret Mead, *Culture and commitment: A study of the generation gap* (New York: Natural History Press, 1970).

²⁰⁰ Lary, *China's grandmothers: Gender, family and ageing from late Qing to twenty-first century*.

these women grow older, their caregiving capacities naturally diminish, and their level of dependence increases both emotionally and economically. This change occurs, paralleling the fading of the youthfulness and sexual attractiveness that society values in women. This transition from providers to dependents, and from "desirables" to "undesirables", often heightens their marginalisation—a reflection of both familial dynamics and broader societal attitudes that increasingly devalue the roles and experiences of older women.

Indeed, this societal shift is corroborated by research studies documenting a decline in traditional notions of filial piety following economic reforms, a trend increasingly observed from the early twenty-first century onwards.²⁰¹ While this decline does not signify an abandonment of traditional values, it extends beyond reduced obedience to older family members, also invariably impacting the respect, support, and care afforded to the seniors. This trend is particularly concerning as China, among the first developing countries in the world to have become ageing, grapples with inadequate social welfare and eldercare services. Recognising these challenges, the Chinese government has promoted the revival of traditional family virtues such as respect, support, and care for older women, casting young women in the roles of caregiving wives and daughters-in-law.²⁰² From required elderly care in their youth to expected childcare in old age, women of advanced age find themselves trapped in a caregiving cycle, shaped by changing societal norms and family dynamics. Their substantial contributions, however, have not garnered the deserved respect and recognition, overshadowed by the very structures they help sustain.

Cultural Shades of the Grey: The Ageing Woman in Chinese Translations

The older women in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, often overshadowed in analysis, are integral to the unfolding of the narrative. Among them, three figures assume the most narrative significance in the source text: Alice Fairfax, the housekeeper at Thornfield Hall; the unnamed gypsy fortune-teller; and Hannah, the maid at the Rivers' home. Specifically, the characters' societal roles and perceptions are evident through the descriptors and appellations used in the

²⁰¹ Loreta POŠKAITĖ, "Filial Piety (xiao 孝) for the Contemporary and Global World," *Asian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 99-114; Longtao He, *Care work, migrant peasant families and discourse of filial piety in China* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

²⁰² Neena L. Chappell, "The cultural context of social cohesion and social capital: Exploring filial caregiving," in *Global ageing in the twenty-first century: Challenges, opportunities and implications*, ed. Zachary Zimmer and Susan A. McDaniel (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013).

novel. A thorough search shows that the primary descriptors for Alice Fairfax are "older/old lady", contrasting with those for Hannah, who is referred to as either "old woman/person". The consistent use of "lady" in reference to Mrs Fairfax suggests a recognition of respectability in her role, hinting at a higher social standing and perception than Hannah. Nevertheless, both characters embody a sense of loyalty, duty, and service, while also displaying a nurturing, maternal warmth, representing the societal norms and expectations that define their existence. In contrast to the consistent descriptions of the other characters, the gypsy is depicted with a wide array of terms, including "mother," "old creature," "old woman," "beldame," "old crone," and "eld." This variation in descriptors reflects a range of Victorian stereotypes of gypsies, from mystery and deception to cunning and even danger. Historically, gypsies have resided continuously in England since the early sixteenth century, often portrayed in gothic novels as "impoverished vagrants" and "criminal underclass".²⁰³ Despite living on the fringes of society, they were considered free and enigmatic individuals who were simultaneously admired and feared for their purported supernatural powers.

In each of the three selected Chinese translations, Mrs. Fairfax is uniformly referred to as "lao taitai" 老太太 (old lady), a term that connotes respect for older women, as evidenced in the *Hanyu Da Cidian: Volume Eight*.²⁰⁴ In contrast, Hannah's descriptors are translated into more neutral terms, such as "lao fu(ren)" 老妇(人) (old woman), across all of the translations, mirroring their social distinctions as depicted in the source text.²⁰⁵ Significantly, the character of the gypsy fortune-teller, marked by her narrative ambiguity, commands a broader spectrum of translations. Paradoxically, this ambiguity allows translators to engage in their own interpretation and characterisation of older women against the backdrop of the changing Chinese socio-political environment and gender history.

In Chapter Eighteen of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, an enigmatic gypsy presents herself as a fortune-teller from a nearby encampment. Hidden beneath the gypsy cape, Mr. Rochester sheds his identity as a man of wealth and prominence. Arriving uninvited at Thornfield Hall, she requests to read the fortunes of only the young, unmarried women present

²⁰³ David Mayall, *Gypsy identities 1500-2000: From Egipcians and Moon-men to the ethnic Romany* (London: Routledge, 2004).

²⁰⁴ Zhufeng Luo, *Hanyu Da Cidian 漢語大詞典 [Comprehensive Chinese word dictionary]*, vol. Eight (Shanghai: Hanyu Da Cidian Chubanshe, 1991).

²⁰⁵ Luo, *Hanyu Da Cidian 漢語大詞典 [Comprehensive Chinese word dictionary]*, Eight.

at a social gathering. The footman initially notes the gypsy's arrival, describing her on two separate occasions as a troublesome "old woman" and "a shockingly ugly old creature." Applying Mona Baker's linguistic analytical model, these terms establish the propositional content, identifying her as an elderly and unsightly woman, and convey an expressive response of repulsion and dismissiveness toward her presence.²⁰⁶ Blanche Ingram, Jane Eyre's romantic rival, demands the entrance of the gypsy she calls "beldame," a term with depreciative connotations and historical links to witchcraft.

As the narrative progresses, the gypsy, having attended to the other ladies, turns her attention to Jane. In the library setting, Jane encounters the fortune-teller, described by Brontë as "seated snugly" with a "bold and direct gaze".²⁰⁷ Despite the gypsy's attempts to engage her, Jane's reserved and discreet responses reflect her "moral equilibrium"—a balanced, ethical sensibility she has developed in adulthood.²⁰⁸ Jane addresses the gypsy as "mother", a term blending the Yorkshire dialect and archaic language, which refers to an older woman of lower social standing, limited means, or education, and indicates either respect or mock respect. This word choice reflects Jane's attitude towards an elder of lower status, influenced by Jane's own nuanced position as an "upper" servant and her acute awareness of societal marginalisation. Despite her cultivated sensibility, Jane neither fits into the working class nor is fully integrated into the upper social echelons. Continuing with the main storyline, Jane's discerning observations gradually lead her to suspect the disguise. Her use of the terms "old woman" and "eld" signifies women of advanced age, while the former is more general, the latter is particularly archaic, with both terms used neutrally or descriptively. Additionally, Jane describes the character as an "old crone," a depreciative term traditionally associated with women believed to possess magical powers, as noted in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Collectively, these descriptors blend realistic attributes of age with mythical and cultural elements. To explore how these nuanced descriptions are interpreted within different historical contexts in China, the translations provided by three translators are presented in the table below.

Table 1-1 Translating descriptors for gypsy

²⁰⁶ Baker, *In other words: A coursebook on translation*.

²⁰⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁰⁸ Harold Bloom, *The Brontës* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008).

	Reference and Source Text	Wu Guangjian 1935	Song Zhaolin 1996	Li Jihong 2019
1	House staff: 'old woman,' quite troublesome.	lao pozi 老婆子 old woman/servant	lao taipo 老太婆 old hag	lao taipo 老太婆 old hag
2	Blanche Ingram: I have a curiosity to hear my fortune told: therefore, Sam, order the beldame forward.	lao pozi 老婆子 old woman/servant	lao pozi 老婆子 old biddy	lao taipo 老太婆 old hag

3	Jane: I don't care about it, mother ; you may please yourself: but I ought to warn you, I have no faith.	lao taipo 老太婆 old woman	dama 大妈 auntie	dama 大妈 dama
4	Jane: But, mother , I did not come to hear Mr Rochester's fortune: I came to hear my own; and you have told me nothing of it.	lao taipo 老太婆 old woman	dama 大妈 auntie	dama 大妈 dama

5	Jane's observation: She muttered the words to herself, as most old women do.	/	lao furen 老妇人 old women	lao taipo 老太婆 old hags
6	Jane's observation: The old crone 'nichered' a laugh under her bonnet and bandage.	lao pozi 老婆子 old woman/servant	lao taipo 老太婆 old hag	lao taipo 老太婆 old hag
7	Jane's observation: The old woman's voice had changed:	lao pozi 老婆子 old woman/servant	furen 妇人 woman	lao taipo 老太婆 old hag
8	Jane's observation: It was no more the withered limb of eld than my own	lao pozi 老婆子 old woman/servant	lao nianren 老年人 older person	lao taipo 老太婆 old hag
9	Jane's reflection: I knew gypsies and fortune-tellers did not express themselves as this seeming old woman had expressed herself;	lao pozi 老婆子 old woman/servant	lao furen 老妇人 old woman	hen lao de nüren 很老的女人 very old woman

In the cases provided, translators most commonly use three terms to refer to the gypsy: "lao pozi" 老婆子, "lao taipo" 老太婆, and "dama" 大妈. All three terms contain semantic components of "old" and "woman," yet their expressive meanings have evolved, reflecting changes in social status and level of respect.

The term "lao pozi" 老婆子 could historically denote: (a) an older woman generally; (b) an older female servant; or (c) one's wife or women, as outlined in *Hanyu Da Cidian*:

Volume Eight.²⁰⁹ In classical Chinese literature, "lao pozi" is frequently employed in a neutral manner to refer to older women or female servants, emphasising their functional roles and responsibilities within the narrative household. Despite its historically neutral connotations, the *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, initiated by the State Council in 1956 to promote Mandarin and standardise the Chinese language, has marked a change in the perception of the term. According to this edition, "lao pozi" is defined as (a) an old woman, carrying a connotation of disdain or dislike, or (b) a colloquial term used by a husband for his wife.²¹⁰ Subsequent editions of the dictionary have maintained this definition. While the servant-related meaning of "lao pozi" has faded, its denotation of older women continues, albeit taking on a more negative nuance.

In his 1935 translation, Wu Guangjian consistently employs "lao pozi" (old woman) across various narrative voices—Jane Eyre, house staff, and Blanche Ingram—and in different scenarios when referring to the gypsy, as demonstrated in examples one to two and six to nine. Wu also uses it to describe an incidental elderly maid of lower social standing. This broad and consistent application suggests Wu was leveraging the term as a generic descriptor for women in servile positions rather than as a marker of respect or disdain, without necessarily implying derogatory qualities. Turning to Song Zhaolin's 1996 translation, there is a connotative shift in his use of "lao pozi" (old biddy). In example two, it is used exclusively to translate Blanche Ingram's pejorative reference "beldame," aligning with the negativity attached to this expression in his time. The juxtaposition of these two translations illustrates a broader linguistic and cultural transition that I refer to as the "dimming of the grey". This expression illustrates how a traditionally neutral term for older women subtly shifts toward more negative connotations to the extent that it can no longer be used in a neutral sense.

The term "lao taipo" 老太婆 offers further insight into this linguistic transformation. Employed by all three translators to describe the gypsy, its connotation and frequency of use vary across each version. Historically, it functioned as a relatively neutral descriptor for an older woman in Chinese. In this cultural setting, Wu's application of the term to address the gypsy in examples three and four likely maintains a neutral connotation, reflective of Jane's

²⁰⁹ Luo, *Hanyu Da Cidan* 漢語大詞典 [*Comprehensive Chinese word dictionary*], Eight.

²¹⁰ Shuxiang Lü and Shengshu Ding, *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian* 現代漢語詞典 [*Modern Chinese Dictionary*] (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1978).

refined sensibility as a governess. Over time, however, the connotation of "lao taipo" has shifted toward contempt and derogation, casting ageing women broadly as nuisances, as elaborated in *Hanyu Da Cidian: Volume Eight*.²¹¹ With the expression acquiring an increasingly pejorative overlay, Song's 1996 use in two specific scenarios: one articulated by house staff and another by Jane, intensifies the negative portrayal of the gypsy in the narrative. Li Jihong's 2019 application of "lao taipo" across scenarios in examples one to two, and five to eight increases its frequency, amplifying the negative portrayal.

This changing interpretation is similarly reflected in "dama" 大妈. As elucidated in *Hanyu Da Cidan: Volume Two*, "dama" carried two primary meanings: (a) the wife of one's father's elder brother, essentially an aunt in a familial context; and (b) a respectful form of address for an older woman.²¹² Traditionally, "dama" was a term of endearment and respect, emphasising the Chinese cultural norm of reverence for older people and recognition of their roles in familial and social contexts. In Song's 1996 and Li's 2019 translations, "dama" is used to translate "mother," specifically when Jane addresses the gypsy, as demonstrated in examples three and four. In Song's cultural context, this term lends familial warmth and respect to the interactions, suggesting a more personable and respectful attitude than might be inferred from Jane's mockingly respectful demeanour. Over the subsequent decades, the semantic drift of "dama" coloured Li's portrayal of the gypsy with contemporary stereotypes and social biases.

Since the Wall Street Journal highlighted their frenzied gold buying in 2013, "dama", the pinyin transliteration of the Chinese term "大妈", has emerged as an internet buzzword describing their irrational investments. Over time, the word was adopted by popular media outlets and used pejoratively to denote women, typically those late middle-aged or older.²¹³ These media sources often portray "dama" as troublemakers, infringing on personal privacy, monopolising public spaces, and scrambling for bargains on items as trivial as eggs or cabbage.²¹⁴ They are also targeted for their energy and enthusiasm in public square dancing –

²¹¹ Luo, *Hanyu Da Cidan 漢語大詞典 [Comprehensive Chinese word dictionary]*, Eight.

²¹² Zhufeng Luo, *Hanyu Da Cidan 漢語大詞典 [Comprehensive Chinese word dictionary]*, vol. Two (Shanghai: Hanyu Da Cidian Chubanshe, 1988).

²¹³ Claudia Huang, "Becoming Dama: The new old age in urban China," *Journal of Aging Studies* 57 (2021).

²¹⁴ Ho Hon Leung, "Lifestyle sport identity and national identity: Thoughts on the Chinese government's (re)creation of the dama image," in *Lifestyle sports and identities: Subcultural careers through the life course*, ed. Tyler Dupont and Becky Beal (New York: Routledge, 2022).

performing to music in urban squares or parks. However, the media often overlooks how their shared lifestyle and philosophy reflect on society's value systems, particularly the "dying breath of collectivism and the ongoing creep of capitalism into families, social lives and living environments" Teng.²¹⁵ Instead, the sensationalist portrayals associate dama with unculturedness, irrationality, and domination without acknowledging their contributions to and challenges within the fast-changing society. The portrayal of older women through the "dama" stereotype highlights the prevalent sexism and ageism in contemporary Chinese society.

Altogether, the evolving connotations of terms like "lao pozi," "lao taipo," and "dama" illustrate a "dimming" process where descriptors traditionally denoted respect associated with older women gradually take on negative, gendered connotations. This linguistic dimming parallels the translational dimming of the grey, portraying older female figures from neutral to negative across translations, as evidenced by the eight instances listed above. These translational changes occur with the socio-cultural changes that have diminished the stature of older women. Historically, older women were revered within the Confucian traditions, which emphasised filial piety and respected the wisdom of age. From the early twentieth century onwards, a series of cultural tides—including the May Fourth New Culture Movements, social and political reforms under Mao Zedong, and post-Mao economic policies—gradually moved society away from these traditional family ethics. Accompanying transformations in family structures, socioeconomics, and technology have further devalued older women's roles and societal perceptions. Notably, an extensive analysis across all twenty-seven instances throughout the three translations corroborates a broader, systemic pattern of the "dimming" of older women over a century.

Wu's 1935 depiction of the ageing woman emerges as the most neutral. These thirteen instances include the use of "lao pozi" 老婆子 (old woman/female servant) and "lao taipo" 老太婆 (old woman) to depict the gypsy, and "nianji shao da de nüren" 年紀稍大的女人 (a woman of slightly advanced age) to describe the elderly maid Hannah at Moorhouse. Contrastingly, Song's 1996 translation uses three neutral descriptors, including "lao furen" 老妇人 (old woman), "lao nian ren" 老年人 (old person), and "fu ren" 妇人 (woman), applying

²¹⁵ Teng Wei, "Rise of the red retirees? China's 'dama' are no red guards," *Sixth Tone*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1003462>.

them not just to the gypsy, but also to other older servants like Hannah, in a total of seven instances, suggesting a reduction in descriptor neutrality. The trend toward less neutral language becomes more evident in Li's 2019 translation, which includes only three instances of the more neutral "lao fu" 老妇 (old woman) to describe the household female staff.

As neutral descriptors for ageing women decrease over time, there is a corresponding increase in the use of negative terms. Wu's 1935 translation appears the least negative, with two instances of disparaging terms: "lao dongxi" 老東西 (old thing) to describe the gypsy and a former governess. In contrast, Song's 1996 translation employs more overtly negative terms such as "lao jiahuo" 老家伙 (old fellow), "lao taipo" 老太婆 (old hag) and "lao pozi" 老婆子 (old biddy) for the gypsy, and "lao mutou" 老木头 (old blockhead) for a former governess, totalling five instances. Li's 2019 translation marks a notable increase in the use of pejorative descriptors, with two instances of "dama" 大妈 (dama) referring to the gypsy, and eleven instances of "lao taipo" 老太婆 (old hag) applied not only to the gypsy but also to older women from various social classes. These women include the upper-class Mrs Reed, Hannah, the housemaid, and the post office caretaker across different contexts, amplifying negative sentiments on the senior female characters.

Once revered as respected matriarchs, older women are increasingly cast in contemporary narratives as dependents or caregivers, or depicted as burdensome relics of a bygone era. The portrayal of older women in translations, from Wu Guangjian to Song Zhaolin and Li Jihong, mirrors changing cultural narratives and sensibilities from the early twentieth century to the early twenty-first century. Translators, consciously or unconsciously, align with rising neoliberal and individualist trends that clash with hierarchical family structures and generational authority. At the same time, their translation choices also echo patriarchal norms that perpetuate gender discrimination, standing at odds with feminist empowerment trends over the century. By introducing stereotypes and stigmas around ageing and gender into their renditions of *Jane Eyre*, and leaving them unchallenged, translators subtly endorse, solidify, and reinforce these perceptions within the target culture. Far from being passive nor neutral, translators participate in shaping target cultural discourse and public perceptions through their interpretative choices. This study affirms the translators' role in cultural transmission and

transformation while also problematising such power and influence. It highlights the potential of translations to perpetuate existing gender biases and marginalisation if not approached with cultural sensitivity and gender awareness. Advocating for translation practices that promote respect and fairness across all demographics, the study calls for more inclusive and equitable methods in contemporary translation practices.

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Straddling the Lines of Whiteness: Exploring Mixedness in a Binary World

Jamie Gladstone

Abstract:

This paper explores the complex lived experiences of individuals of mixed heritage within the context of racial binaries, with a particular focus on the UK. This is done utilising critical reflection to bridge the gap between theory and experience. It examines how societal constructs of race, rooted in historical power dynamics, often force mixed heritage individuals into a state of 'racialised limbo,' where they are simultaneously identified as Black yet can be excluded from Black cultural spaces. Drawing on W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness, the paper discusses the implications of this duality and highlights the psychological and social challenges faced by mixed heritage individuals as they navigate their identities in a world that seeks to categorise them. Through an analysis of historical and contemporary examples, including the impact of the one-drop rule and the dynamics of conditional whiteness, the paper argues for the necessity of 'border thinking' to dismantle binary racial classifications and embrace a more fluid understanding of identity. Ultimately, it calls for greater recognition of the unique experiences of the mixed heritage community and the need for more inclusive narratives that reflect their diverse identities.

Keywords: Race, racial identity, racial discrimination, Du Bois, colonialism

Introduction

A lot has been said about people of mixed heritage yet far less has been written.²¹⁶ Often, the perspective of writing has taken the positionality of racialising people of mixed heritage as Black and not taking into account the fluidity of identity. In a society where the binary signifier of race equates to Black and White, how does this play out in the lived experience of people of mixed heritage?²¹⁷

Over the past centuries, many countries across the world have been segregated by the arbitrary binary of skin colour; a classification that Fryer, Dyer, and Saini agree is not rooted in science but in power.²¹⁸ Whilst some countries enforced their segregation through law (for example, the Jim Crow laws of the USA and apartheid in South Africa) others such as the United Kingdom made use of unwritten societal codes in an attempt to maintain a divide between those racialised as White British and those racialised as ‘non-White’ or ‘Other’.²¹⁹ In the decades post the Second World War in Britain, institutional racism existed in the most overt and intentional forms with regard to discrimination in the labour market, the housing market, in pubs, clubs, dance-halls, and the education system.²²⁰ Through these institutions, a clear distinction between ‘Black’ and ‘White’ was being drawn up.

With the increase in immigration came the growth in the number of children of mixed heritage. Many of these children found themselves being racialised as Black whilst simultaneously being rejected from the Black culture, providing a precursor to a feeling of double consciousness or of a racialised limbo; a feeling which appears to have extended into

²¹⁶ Stephen Small, “Black People of Mixed Origin and the Politics of Identity,” in *Black Identity in the 20th Century: Expressions of the US and UK African Diaspora*, ed. Mark Christian (London: Hansib Publications, 2002), 167–194.

²¹⁷ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela Harris, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 94.

²¹⁸ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 165-190; Peter Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire*, new ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 66; Richard Dyer, *White*, 20th anniversary ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 18-30; Angela Saini, *Superior: The Return of Race Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019).

²¹⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2019 [1978]), 206-207; Mike Cole, “‘Brutal and stinking’ and ‘difficult to handle’: The historical and contemporary manifestations of racialisation, institutional racism, and schooling in Britain,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 7, no. 1 (March 2004): 35–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332042000187298>.

²²⁰ Mike Cole and Satnam Virdee, “‘Race’, Racism and Resistance,” in *Education, Equality and Human Rights*, ed. Mike Cole (London: Routledge, 2022), 42–46; Mike Cole, “Racism, history and educational policy: from the origins of the welfare state to the rise of the radical right,” (Unpublished PhD diss., University of Essex, 1992), 146-147; Mike Cole, “‘Racism and education,’” in *Education, Equality and Human Rights: Issues of Gender, ‘Race’, Sexuality, Disability and Social Class*, ed. Mike Cole (London: Routledge, 2022), 83-108.

twenty-first-century Britain.²²¹ Over the past two decades, the mixed heritage community has grown rapidly, with the empirical evidence showing that the mixed heritage population of England and Wales increased from 168,900 in 2003 to 388,868 in 2017 – a growth rate of 130%.²²² Yet, with an increased amount of multi-cultural unity, darkness underlies these figures. With some 30% of adults that have parents of different ethnicities identifying as mixed heritage, why are so many reluctant to occupy the realm of mixedness?

When straddling the lines of whiteness in the context of the UK, the act of inconsistent segregation, racialised categorisation and, at times, utilisation as a colour swatch to establish how closely the melanin in their skin positions them with regard to whiteness.²²³ This suggests that an embedded and deep-seated colour consciousness separates the coloniser and colonised and that the epidermal schema means that assimilating into the neutrality of whiteness becomes the implied desire.²²⁴ Trying to find one's place in a world socially and politically constructed as White is challenging enough. However, when you are being pushed and pulled to and from whiteness, cast into racialised limbo, thrust into a perpetual state of transition, the notions of ethnic borders cease to exist. We will discuss how it is in border thinking that the mixed heritage community can destroy the antiquated notion of binaries to explore a new consciousness.²²⁵ Whilst straddling the lines of whiteness may suggest a life of double consciousness, this paper explores the social impact for those that don't tick the binary box of Black or White.²²⁶

²²¹ Karis Champion, "You Think You're Black? Exploring Black Mixed-Race Experiences of Black Rejection," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 16 (June 2019): 196–213, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1642503>.

²²² Feyisa Demie and Andrew Hau, *Mixed Race Pupils' Educational Achievement in England: An Empirical Analysis* (London: Lambeth Council, 2017), 2; Kirstin Lewis and Feyisa Demie, "The school experiences of mixed-race white and black Caribbean children in England," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 12 (August 2018): 2065-2083, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1519586>; Lucinda Platt, "Royal wedding: The UK's rapidly changing mixed-race population," *BBC News*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44040766>.

²²³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986 [1952]), 2-3.

²²⁴ Dyer, *White*, 19.

²²⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 25th anniversary ed., 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2012), 99, 104-105; Zimitri Erasmus, *Race Otherwise: Forging a New Humanism for South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017).

²²⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Norton Critical Ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 184; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 52; Nasar Meer, "W.E.B. Du Bois, Double Consciousness and the 'Spirit' of Recognition," *The Sociological Review* 67, no. 1 (April 2018): 47-62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026118765370>.

Sitting Here in Limbo

Check the dilly many years ago

A man who looked just like my father

Came and took a man who looked just my mother

From his home

Put him shackled in a boat, made him row

Made him work for Jim Crow²²⁷

To be neither here nor there; to peer into cultures at once exotic and home; to straddle the lines of whiteness has been a challenge faced by many mixed heritage people globally. In 1999, W.E.B Du Bois introduced the world to the concept of double consciousness in the context of the African American experience.²²⁸ Du Bois explored the conflict of simultaneously being oppressed and seeking to fit into the oppressor's world. As a result, the self-image of African Americans was at risk of damage as the constant pressure to conform to White American standards implied the erasure of their own cultural roots. This internal conflict is played out in the daily lives of many people of the mixed heritage community across the twenty-first century world, living at once with the blood of the oppressor and the oppressed coursing through their veins.

Within a lived culture characterised by difference, blackness is made visible simply by not looking White.²²⁹ Therefore, on the epidermal level, people are metaphorically categorised as being either one or the other, White or non-White. Herein lies the crux of conflict for anyone of mixed heritage. Modern British society seeks to place its citizens into ethnically specified boxes regardless of how someone identifies.²³⁰ Official figures indicate that the mixed heritage community has been growing quickly, with a growth rate of 130% between 2003 and 2017.²³¹ With approximately 30% of people with parents from different ethnic groups identifying as the one which aligns most to them, a different narrative becomes evident – one of choice and

²²⁷ "Burn Down This Place," track 7 on Natty, *Man Like I*, 2008, Warner Music UK Limited, Spotify.

²²⁸ See Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

²²⁹ Dyer, *White*, 42-45; Erasmus, *Race Otherwise*, 1-2.

²³⁰ Small, "Black People of Mixed Origin," 167-194.

²³¹ Demie and Hau, *Mixed Race Pupil's Educational Achievement in England*, 2; Lewis and Demie, "The school experiences," 2065-2083.

agency.²³² However, it is estimated that approximately a third of the figures are missing, thus the ‘unique and specific aspects of mixedness’ are essentially rendered invisible.²³³

Invisibility recurs in the lived experience of many mixed heritage people and appears to be closely coupled with the contradiction of social exclusion and seemingly universal acceptance. By attempting to occupy various racialised spheres, a fine psychological balance must be struck; an internal tightrope traversed in which one must fall neither here nor there for fear of betraying one ancestral line or the other, particularly if ‘you’re told to hate yourself and those who look like you’.²³⁴ Such balancing acts further muddy the waters of identity, especially if one line or the other has the potential for rejection. What ensues is a ‘dual or multiple personality [...] plagued by psychic restlessness’.²³⁵ This restlessness can manifest in the use of language and behaviours. Take, for instance, the Caribbean community in the UK – a community known for mixedness/creolisation – where pressures exist to be both British and to embody the spirit of the Caribbean, such as wearing dreadlocks and speaking a creole language.²³⁶ However, by embracing these very features associated with many Caribbean communities, the age-old stereotypes of laziness, a lack of applicable intelligence and a ‘no worries’ attitude can become prominent. The conflict this produces for modern British Caribbean children manifests in them facing an obstacle course of barriers throughout their time in education, such as placement in lower ability groups and a disproportionate level of school exclusions, whilst their comportment is heavily scrutinised alongside their ability to assimilate into the dominant White culture of Britain’s classrooms.²³⁷ The scrutinisation of the Caribbean community and the behaviour of Caribbean children appears to have created an

²³² Platt, “Royal Wedding”; Small, “Black People of Mixed Origin,” 174-175.

²³³ Remi Joseph-Salisbury, “Black Mixed-race Male Experiences of the UK Secondary School Curriculum,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 86, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 450, <https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.86.4.0449>.

²³⁴ Natty, “Burn Down This Place.”

²³⁵ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 100.

²³⁶ Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville, VA: Caraf Books, 1989), 105.

²³⁷ Zahra Bei and Helen Knowler, “Disrupting unlawful exclusion from school of minoritised children and young people racialized as black: Using critical race theory composite counter-storytelling,” *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* 27, no. 3 (2022): 231–242, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2022.2146225>; Demie and Hau, *Mixed Race Pupil’s Educational Achievement in England*; Lewis and Demie, “The school experiences,” 2065-2083; “Ethnicity facts and figures: Permanent exclusions,” Gov.uk, last modified December 11, 2024, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/absence-and-exclusions/permanent-exclusions/latest/>; Joseph-Salisbury, “Black Mixed-race Male Experiences,” 449-462; Jessica Perera, *How Black Working-Class Youth Are Criminalised and Excluded in the English School System: A London Case Study* (London: Institute of Race Relations, 2020); Derron O. Wallace, *The Culture Trap: Ethnic Expectations and Unequal Schooling for Black Youth* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2023); Campion, “You Think You’re Black?” 196; Kirstin Lewis, “Helping Mixed Heritage Children Develop ‘Character and Resilience’ in Schools,” *Improving Schools* 19, no. 3 (May 2016): 197-211, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480216650311>.

environment of hypervisibility in which they face the highest rates of fixed and permanent exclusion; with only children from the Roma community facing comparable exclusions.²³⁸

So how can the mixed heritage community be at once invisible and hyper visible? Their proximity to the whiteness of the nation may play a large part.²³⁹ For when a person of mixed heritage displays behaviours in which their ‘blackness’ is rejected, marginalised or demonised, their ‘whiteness’ credentials are seemingly augmented.²⁴⁰ Yet this is plagued by a caveat in itself; one in which the Black body remains out of place in the White space it has entered thus this ‘whiteness’ becomes conditional.²⁴¹ The position of being a buffer between whiteness and blackness foments a psychological conundrum of occupying two or more worlds; conflicting realities in which the narratives of ancestral lines oppressing one another are played out like a morbid re-run. This places the mixed heritage psyche as carrying the historical weight of both the oppressor and oppressed; bound in an ethnic and social limbo in a world still suffering from the racialised binaries of Black and White.

This oscillation between invisibility and hypervisibility is framed through a lens of dominance in modern society.²⁴² Historically, in imperial Britain and other European colonisers, this has been a white lens which has overlayed the impression of blackness over racialised bodies informed by a stereotype created as a means to strengthen whiteness.²⁴³ This gaze has been utilised to permit or deny humanity to groups classified as ‘non-White’. In the context of the mixed heritage community, the directionality of white gazing can be dependent

²³⁸ Gov.uk, “Ethnicity facts and figures: Permanent exclusions”; Bei and Knowler, “Disrupting Unlawful Exclusion”, 231; Perera, *How Black Working-Class Youth Are Criminalised*; Derron O. Wallace and Remi Joseph-Salisbury, “How, Still, Is the Black Caribbean Child Made Educationally Subnormal in the English School System?” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45, no. 8 (October 2021): 1426–1452, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1981969>; Marguerite Anne Fillion Wilson, Denise Gray Yull, and Sean G. Massey, “Race and the Politics of Educational Exclusion: Explaining the Persistence of Disproportionate Disciplinary Practices in an Urban School District,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 23, no. 1 (2020): 134–157, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1511535>.

²³⁹ Dyer, *White*, 18-19; Ghasson Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, 1st ed. (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), 52; Virginia Lam and Gordon Smith, “African and Caribbean Adolescents in Britain: Ethnic Identity and Britishness,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32, no. 7 (July 2009): 1248-1270, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870802298421>.

²⁴⁰ Champion, “You Think You’re Black?” 196.

²⁴¹ Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2004), 8.

²⁴² Ramón Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing Political-Economy and Postcolonial Studies: Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality,” *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 80 (March 2008): 115-147; Mere Skerrett, “Countering the dominance of a global north in early childhood education through an Indigenous lens in the global south,” *Global Studies of Childhood* 7, no. 2 (June 2017): 84-98, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610617703830>.

²⁴³ Sara Ahmed, “A phenomenology of whiteness,” *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (August 2007): 149-168, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139>; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 92; George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race in America*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 243-245.

upon which side they choose. That is not to say that this choice is voluntary in all cases, as it can also come from a combination of being categorised by a person with some degree of authority and societal pressures, or even through physical proximity.²⁴⁴ In my own experience, the difference between entering a space with my friends who have lighter or darker skin than me defines who will be subjected to surveillance. If we observe the classroom, teachers, senior leaders and even other children may place a child of mixed heritage where they themselves want mixed heritage children to be without regard for how they self-identify.²⁴⁵ What does this say to a mixed heritage child? It says that any agency over one's identity is beyond the control of the person occupying their particular skin and that you will be placed in one box, or another based on where others wish you to be, ultimately being racialised by the tint of your skin. Of course, this applies outside of the mixed community as the racialised binary system strangles progressive movement in society.²⁴⁶ However, with more and more communities mixing and breaking down the barriers of binary thinking, border thinking then takes priority in the twenty-first century. By destroying the binary borders of Black and White, a new consciousness forms, one in which multiplicity – whereby gender, class and ethnicity are interactive rather than summative²⁴⁷ – is normalised and incorporated as the way of seeing the world.²⁴⁸ When we look realistically at societies such as the one in Britain, we can see multiplicity at work. A short walk down many high streets in major towns or cities will reveal not only a mix of people but also cuisine, highlighting that 'we are all just coloured souls in these black and white towns we roam'.²⁴⁹ The nation's supermarkets are filled with imported food, football teams contain players and managers from all over the world. David Olusoga perfectly breaks down the national drink of tea to its constituent multicultural parts and finds the only thing inherently 'British' about it is the use of the heritage of their colonial power to control the production and distribution of it.²⁵⁰ With the borders torn down, 'blackness' no longer becomes a burden for

²⁴⁴ Small, "Black People of Mixed Origin," 182.

²⁴⁵ Lewis, "Helping Mixed Heritage Children," 3.

²⁴⁶ Winnifred Brown-Glaude, "The Fact of Blackness? The Bleached Body in Contemporary Jamaica," *Small Axe* 11, no. 3 (October 2007): 34-51; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 40.

²⁴⁷ Bart Landry, *Race, Gender, and Class: Theory and Methods of Analysis* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), 4-5.

²⁴⁸ Alexandra J. Rankin-Wright, Kevin Hylton, and Leanne Norman, "Critical race theory and black feminist insights into "race" and gender equality," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43, no. 7 (July 2019): 1111-1129, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1640374>.

²⁴⁹ "Coloured Souls," track 11 on Natty, *Man Like I*, 2008, Warner Music UK Limited, Spotify.

²⁵⁰ Afua Hirsch and David Olusoga, "In Conversation with... Afua Hirsch & David Olusoga: London's BIG READ," March 13, 2018, posted April 18, 2018 by Library London, YouTube, <https://youtu.be/dIYfWsFRGyA?si=Y6Qgh1NuL80lJuAo>.

‘non-White’ people to carry until they can prove they are fully assimilated ‘good immigrants’ as the entire idea of national purity is challenged.

Fanon suggests that an embedded and deep-seated colour consciousness separated the coloniser and colonised and that the epidermal schema ensured that ‘the more the colonized [...] assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he [...] escaped the bush [therefore] the whiter he will become’.²⁵¹ Thus, assimilating into the neutrality of whiteness becomes the implied desire.²⁵² However, for people of mixed heritage, this racial threshold comes with the erection of borders and becomes a distinct world to try and inhabit.²⁵³ As Tim Ingold states, ‘The problem with borders is that they are lines of domination, lines of occupation that divide people, restrict their movement and disrupt their lives’.²⁵⁴ To combat this, border thinking acts as a means of epistemic and disciplinary disobedience which includes disobedience against any form of policing thought and practice, irrespective of its intention.²⁵⁵ It emerges from the very necessity for a world which is ever expanding as many more mixed heritage families grow and the absurdity of choosing ‘one side of the epistemological divide’ or the other becomes ever clearer.²⁵⁶ Mignolo argues that ‘there are no *original origins*’²⁵⁷ – be these epistemic, cultural, political or biological – to revive or to which to return’, thus we are all mixed or, as Édouard Glissant said, creoles.²⁵⁸ Therefore, navigating these borders requires a conscious bending and breaking of hegemonic knowledge while continuing to establish one’s own place in society. However, this potentially still leaves the mixed heritage community in a racialised limbo. Gloria Anzaldúa described this ambivalent position as one ‘plagued by psychic restlessness’, and a ‘state of perpetual transition’.²⁵⁹

Contributing to the state of perpetual transition is the conflict of oppressor and oppressed vying for dominance within the self. In the context of Du Bois’s America, the creation and struggles of the ‘black spirit’ which emerged from the ‘cultural and political strivings’ and which was consistently and continuously ‘exposed to antiblack American “racial” politics’ was the spirit which was seen to be a threat to the racialised status quo of north

²⁵¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 2-3.

²⁵² Dyer, *White*, 80, 102.

²⁵³ Erasmus, *Race Otherwise*, 25.

²⁵⁴ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 81-84.

²⁵⁵ Erasmus, *Race Otherwise*, 25.

²⁵⁶ Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 17.

²⁵⁷ Original emphasis.

²⁵⁸ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 26.

²⁵⁹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 100.

America.²⁶⁰ This imbalance of domination fomented ‘conditions of impaired civic status’ for African Americans.²⁶¹ Du Bois stated in *The Souls of White Folks*:

[...] the Negro is [...] born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world, - a world which yields to him [sic] no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.²⁶²

The duality evident in the lives of the African Americans Du Bois was describing can be seen in the lived experiences of the mixed heritage communities in the UK, as evidenced through the Caribbean community’s struggle to evade racialised stereotypes. For the notion of seeing oneself through the lens of another, of having no true self-consciousness renders people of mixed heritage in a racialised limbo. Du Bois spoke of the gift of second sight, a gift in which the marginalised view the world from the other side of the veil.²⁶³ The veil which for those on the side of whiteness reflects that in society they wish to see, distorts the image of people of the global majority to the extent that their humanity becomes unrecognisable to others.²⁶⁴ For those racialised as being in opposition to whiteness, they see themselves cut off and imprisoned in the dominant world of Whites.²⁶⁵ With this duality prevalent in the racial binary of many countries across the world, in the context of being of mixed heritage and living in the UK, this duality, this ‘twoness’ manifests as ‘two warring ideals in one dark body’.²⁶⁶ Ideals which can create a schism within the self, can manifest as feelings of betrayal for one part of self or the other. The mirror can thus become a cruel place to look; reflections of oppression carried around like manacles. For, to carry at once the histories of oppressor and oppressed, of ruin and riches, is to shoulder the burden of the global narrative.

²⁶⁰ Ronald R. Sundstrom, “The Prophetic & Pragmatic Philosophy of ‘Race’ in W.E.B. Du Bois’ ‘The Comet’,” *Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 99, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 5.

²⁶¹ Meer, “W.E.B. Du Bois,” 51.

²⁶² Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 10.

²⁶³ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 10-11.

²⁶⁴ José Itzigsohn and Karida Brown, “Sociology and the Theory of Double Consciousness: W.E.B. Du Bois’s Phenomenology of Racialized Subjectivity,” *Du Bois Review* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 231-248, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X15000107>.

²⁶⁵ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 36; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90; Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, 19.

²⁶⁶ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2.

Feel it in the ‘One-Drop’.

My poor, un-white thing! Weep not nor rage. I know, too well, the curse of God lies heavy on you [...] [d]o your work in your lowly sphere, praying to the good lord that into heaven, where all is love, you may, one day, be born – white!²⁶⁷

The concept of ‘race’ is pre-scientific and pseudo-scientific.²⁶⁸ Yet, the pervasiveness of ‘racial science’ has and continues to plague modern society.²⁶⁹ In the 1920s, the United States of America brought forth the ‘one-drop rule’ which essentially racialised anyone with at least one ancestor from the global majority as Black, thus positioning them as subaltern; that is, of a lower status than the dominant racialised group.²⁷⁰ Ultimately, the rule was a means to further justify, in the eyes of oppressive lawmakers, the subjugation of the African American community. Known as hypodescent, the automatic assignment of children of mixed heritage to the group with the lowest social status, regardless of proportion of ancestry, effectively perpetuated acts of white dominance. With the notion that ‘race’ is a social construction in mind, the basis of the one-drop rule to categorise a person as being removed from one lineage of descendants and solely placed into another can be viewed as both farcical and offensive.²⁷¹ The concept of mixture has historically spurred arguments of ‘racial purity’ which, in the late 1920s in Liverpool, gave rise to an investigation into what Muriel Fletcher called ‘hybrid children’.²⁷² Fletcher’s argument related to the social and psychological pathology of ‘half-castes’ in Liverpool, and she convinced the University of Liverpool’s social sciences committee of the need to ‘scientifically’ research the plight of those ‘wretched’ beings.²⁷³ Through the study, Fletcher reported that children of mixed heritage (specifically a Black father and White mother) were more likely to be consistently ill. This claim was attributed to the evidence she provided, although scant, based on the inferior sexual health of Black seamen as opposed to White seamen. Essentially, the Fletcher report appears to be a pamphlet supporting

²⁶⁷ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, xiii.

²⁶⁸ Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire*, 65.

²⁶⁹ Saini, *Superior*, 44-61.

²⁷⁰ See Nikki Khanna, “Ethnicity and race as ‘symbolic’: The use of ethnic and racial symbols in asserting a biracial identity,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 6 (February 2011): 1052-1054, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2010.538421>.

²⁷¹ Dyer, *White*, 22.

²⁷² See Muriel Fletcher, *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and Other Ports* (Liverpool: Association of Half-Caste Children, 1930).

²⁷³ Muriel Fletcher quoted in Mark Christian, “The Fletcher Report 1930: A Historical Case Study of Contested Black Mixed Heritage Britishness,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21, no. 2/3 (June/September 2008): 218, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6443.2008.00336.x>.

eugenics.²⁷⁴ The report contained measurements of eyes, noses, and comments of either ‘negroid’ or ‘English’ features. Such use of eugenics, in early twentieth century Britain, it could be argued, was no different to that in use in America, in central Africa or in Nazi Germany during the Second World War.²⁷⁵

Eugenics and the unfounded ‘science of race’ are only part of the grander use of ‘racial purity’ to categorise people of mixed heritage.²⁷⁶ The influences of ‘choosing a side’ are at times too much to bear. There is, of course, not one singular identity, as we are all creoles that are mixed in some way. Identity is, also, not monolithic.²⁷⁷ The whole idea of ‘Black’ and ‘White’ are in themselves examples of racialised identities and not ‘racial’ identities. What this suggests is that identity cannot be defined as ‘racial’, that is, biological. Instead, a ‘racialised’ identity implies that the colour of someone’s skin is being used as a marker of their identity but that colour may not be the most important element. However, when thinking about people of African descent, the ‘fact of Blackness’ is the overarching factor in how people of mixed heritage are instantly categorised.²⁷⁸ What Fanon describes is the ways in which Black bodies are made to be Black under the gaze of whiteness ‘for not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man’.²⁷⁹ This racialises the Black body and brings into existence the positionality of blackness through whiteness.²⁸⁰ For someone of mixed heritage, this assumption can be both disturbing and dehumanising in much the same way as it is for a Black person (presumed to be unmixed).²⁸¹ Alongside this, the context of the location of the racialised body is a considerable factor. For example, generally in the United Kingdom, the mixed heritage body is racialised as Black. In the context of many Caribbean nations, specifically Jamaica and Antigua, the mixed body is often racialised as White. What is the relevance of this contextual categorisation? It illustrates conditional whiteness in action.

Conditional whiteness for people of mixed heritage is both fabled and lived. Nobody can be truly sure of the ways that the plantation owners and enslaved people treated mixed heritage people during the times of transatlantic slavery. There are only anecdotal

²⁷⁴ Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, expanded ed. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 19-22.

²⁷⁵ Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), 84-87.

²⁷⁶ Saini, *Superior*, 76-78; Wilkerson, *Caste*, 279-280.

²⁷⁷ Small, “Black People of Mixed Origin,” 178-179.

²⁷⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 89-90.

²⁷⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.

²⁸⁰ Dyer, *White*, 52; Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, 243-245.

²⁸¹ Small, “Black People of Mixed Origin,” 168-189.

representations through modern media. For example, novels such as *Roots* (1976)²⁸² and films such as *Sankofa* (1993). Looking to Jamaica specifically and the racialised hierarchy of the country, Brown-Glaude asserts that, in modern times, privileges are afforded to some Jamaicans based on the lightness of their skin.²⁸³ This appears to demonstrate a sliding scale of blackness with the darkest skinned citizens most often found in the lowest paid positions and the lightest skinned citizens sitting in positions of economic power. However, the binary is not simply positioned in the extremes of Black and White, instead there is an elevated status for lighter skinned²⁸⁴ people of mixed heritage as their White European lineage is given such salience that opportunities for their social mobility face fewer barriers. That is not to say that their lives are easy, it is to say, however, that there are more doors open as they are afforded some degree of white privilege, so much so that the controversial practice of skin bleaching in Jamaica has become less about whitening the skin, and more about ‘browning’ the skin.²⁸⁵ This ‘browning’ comes with the belief that for mixed heritage people it is easier to claim European heritage and thus access to higher paying positions within the labour market. However, it has also been shown that, at times, when the political tide of nations turns, one’s proximity to whiteness and the melanin their skin contains will be what pulls them from whiteness to be racialised by people other than themselves as anything other than White; thus, the conditions that come with their proximity to whiteness.

Frantz Fanon coined the phrase ‘epidermalisation’ to describe how the blackness of his body was inscribed unto him ‘like a dye’ and ‘fixed’ him in relation to whiteness via a colonial construction.²⁸⁶ This posited the Black body as inferior and thus blackness as inferior when related to whiteness. How could this epidermalisation of blackness manifest in the mixed heritage community? Considering the value proffered to lighter skinned Jamaican’s due to their proximity to whiteness, and the benefits this provides, we can see that the racialised positionality of the mixed heritage community is fluid and completely reliant upon context.²⁸⁷ In the United Kingdom, location also contributes to how a mixed heritage person is racialised, and the influences of the communities in which they live can determine how they identify

²⁸² Alex Hayley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (New York: Doubleday, 1976). Hayley’s novel was later turned into television miniseries *Roots* (1977) and *Roots: The Next Generations* (1979), both originally aired on ABC.

²⁸³ Brown-Glaude, “The Fact of Blackness?”, 40, 45-49.

²⁸⁴ Some island nations such as Antigua and Jamaica would refer to mixed heritage people as being of ‘high colour’ and instantly ascribe them to the middle class.

²⁸⁵ Brown-Glaude, “The Fact of Blackness?” 39-40.

²⁸⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 88-90.

²⁸⁷ Brown-Glaude, “The Fact of Blackness?” 48.

themselves.²⁸⁸ Therefore, for those that live outside of Black communities, less identification with ‘blackness’ and the Black community can be expected, and the reverse can also be expected although this is not a fixed outcome. Yet, within these conditions comes the weight of African ancestry and the hangover of the one-drop rule continuing to constrict racialised options.²⁸⁹ In the context of twenty-first-century Britain, when there are arguments around immigration, the melanation of the skin becomes a considerable factor in how a mixed heritage person is posited. This was evident for not just Britain to see but also the rest of Europe during the Brexit referendum during which immigration and immigrants became synonymous with ‘brownness’ as a ‘wave of racist hate unleashed against migrants as well as the long-established black and brown British’.²⁹⁰ Whilst the racialised element of the campaign was in full swing, Caribbean migrants from the Windrush Generation were being deported despite being British commonwealth subjects and British citizens for decades.²⁹¹ The deported Caribbean citizens had found that their proximity to whiteness was predicated on the condition that they were filling niches in the labour market, thus the privileges of whiteness afforded to them were revoked once that time had passed. So, for the mixed heritage community, particularly those of Caribbean heritage, Britain became more of a hostile environment than it had been in the past and the notion of racialised limbo, the double consciousness of being everyone and no-one at once, came to the fore on a personal level but not on a public one.

Dialogic of mixedness

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot exist between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming [...] [t]hose who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanising practice.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Small, “Black People of Mixed Origin,” 183-184; Stephen Small, *Racialised Barriers: The Black Experience in the United States and England in the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1994), 22.

²⁸⁹ Khanna, “Ethnicity and race as ‘symbolic’,” 1049-1050.

²⁹⁰ Satnam Virdee and Brendan McGeever, “Racism, Crisis, Brexit,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 10 (August 2017): 1808, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1361544>.

²⁹¹ See Mike Slaven, “The Windrush Scandal and the individualization of postcolonial immigration control in Britain,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46, no. 16 (November 2021): 49-71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.2001555>.

²⁹² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed., trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York, London: Continuum, 2005), 88.

Édouard Glissant (1989) spoke of the mixed heritage community as a creolisation of cultures and that this creolisation is evident all around us.²⁹³ Glissant's notion of creolisation asserts that the world is 'permanently changing and creolising itself' and that as a contact of cultures does not produce a simple *métissage*.²⁹⁴ Rather, creolisation is a poetics of relation, which, as an ongoing process, is impossible to stop, has no morality, eludes capture, and produces unexpected results.²⁹⁵ This cultural contact connects with his discourse of 'world-chaos' in which creolisation cannot be predicted in contrast with *métissage* therefore, contesting the creolisation of society would be to challenge the very fabric of modernity. According to Glissant, the Caribbean is composite by nature due to its birth under colonisation.²⁹⁶ As creolisation diffracts the binaries of the epidermal racial schema, the purist definitions of racial identities must be necessarily replaced by 'rhizome identities' whereby 'certain forms of *métissage* can concentrate one more time'.²⁹⁷ The coming together of these identities crosses over into the use of language, particularly in the Caribbean context. The Caribbean community, which has often been homogenised in the political West, is commonly identified by its most obvious symbol, the Creole language.²⁹⁸ Whilst many of these creolised languages are recognised as languages in their own right, a shadow has hung over them as being inferior to the 'official' languages; that is to say, the European languages of domination that subjugated indigenous peoples in the Americas and Africa. Creolisation, then, embodies the adventure of 'multilingualism [and] the incredible explosion of cultures'.²⁹⁹ However, this explosion of cultures does not mean that the communities have found themselves scattered or diluted. The *métissage* which ties the threads of the communities together is a sign of their consensual, not imposed, sharing.³⁰⁰ The creolisation of the world is occurring every day as more and more children are being born into mixed families. The languages they speak within the home are not always singular. Neither are the ways in which people of mixed heritage have been spoken about. John Agard famously penned the poem *Half-caste*, in which the use of language to describe people of mixed heritage can be extremely offensive and to highlight that, as a person

²⁹³ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, xxviii, 140.

²⁹⁴ Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, xlv, xxviii; French word for 'mixed' translates into the pejorative 'mongrel'.

²⁹⁵ Édouard Glissant in Mickaella L. Perina, "Beyond Négritude and Créolite: The Ongoing Creolization of Identities," *The CLR James Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 71-72.

²⁹⁶ Édouard Glissant in Perina, "Beyond Négritude and Créolite," 72.

²⁹⁷ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2010 [1997]), 34

²⁹⁸ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 34.

²⁹⁹ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 34.

³⁰⁰ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 34.

of mixed heritage, you are not ‘half’ anything.³⁰¹ Pejorative phraseologies such as ‘half-caste’, ‘quarter-caste’ and ‘mixed-race’ are terms which are as archaic as the notion of racial binary. Their only purpose has been to serve the power of the White community to define racial identities and to impose inferiority onto those that can’t be racialised as purely White.³⁰² This, essentially, reproduces the pseudoscientific messages of genetic inferiority which formed the spine of Muriel Fletcher’s report.³⁰³

Aggression can often manifest in the suppression of language. Whether the use of patois in the Caribbean, indigenous languages in the Americas, Arabic in Britain or any other tongue, the emphasis on the use of language and the ‘correct’ language to use can be viewed as a violent act or even a form of epistemicide against the speaker. For language is more than communication; it is history, culture, identity, spirituality, and sentimentality. We exist in unique spaces in each language and multilingualism should be celebrated as a means of traversing the racialised borders of society and utilised to take advantage of the fluidity of multiple ethnic identities. The suppression of language can often find itself locked to nationalism, for if one wants to occupy space (i.e., invade), they must obey the language rules of that space.³⁰⁴ This could be referred to as conditional tolerance, much like the kind that appears to haunt one of the fundamental British values which hangs over the nation’s educational institutions. With the suppression of language, an entire part of the self is suppressed with it. Whilst this is not a situation unique to the mixed heritage community, ethnically speaking, it affects all creolised people that call Britain their home and that speak another language either as their mother tongue or as part of a duality, for example, children born in the UK to parents who were born elsewhere that wish for their children to know the language of their heritage. Living in two languages already creates a sense of double consciousness in which the speaker can inhabit two cultural worlds which may differ greatly in customs and traditions and, symbolically, the diminution of one’s mother tongue is in effect a means by which to gag, to silence, to marginalise, and erode a person’s cultural identity; thus, causing a constant transition between the coloniser and the colonised.³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ John Agard, *Half-caste* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2019).

³⁰² Small, “Black People of Mixed Origin,” 182.

³⁰³ Eddo-Lodge, *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People*, 19-22.

³⁰⁴ Puwar, *Space Invaders*, 111-112.

³⁰⁵ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfield (Boston, MA: Beacon Press Books, 1957), 107; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 12, 16-27.

Fanon undertook a significant effort to make his readers aware of the socio-historical and psychological impact that language has on the colonial subject. He asserted that language is akin to assimilation in that the more the language of the coloniser is assimilated, ‘the whiter he [sic] gets’.³⁰⁶ Furthermore, he highlighted a phrase which ascribed language to whiteness: ‘in France they say “to speak like a book”, [i]n Martinique they say “to speak like a white man”’.³⁰⁷ Fanon further explains that the possession of language implies empowerment as it confirms peoples’ cultural adequacy referring to the citizens of Martinique ‘bettering themselves’ by learning the French of France which elevated them above the creole speaking islanders.³⁰⁸ In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon explained how language becomes a weapon used by the oppressor to dehumanise the oppressed in that the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms: ‘when the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary.’³⁰⁹ Here, Fanon makes a point of asserting the real-life implications that language has for the oppressed and the impact that this can have on one’s self-image. Even after Fanon’s research, the politics of language in the Caribbean are seldom evaluated outside of a purely literary context.³¹⁰ Literature was often employed to deflect attention away from the importance of language in influencing perceptions of cultural identity whilst simultaneously serving to suppress criticism from those opposed to the way it restricted viewpoints.³¹¹ For many scholars in the Caribbean, language became a matter of form and fiction, taking a positionality similar to that of Glissant in looking at the creolisation of language and culture rather than meaning and truth. To this day, language remains a site of cultural struggle in the Caribbean.

Ultimately, it would appear that a sacrifice of one’s core identity is the criteria for assimilating into ‘Western’ culture. This can manifest as an internal battle between the languages of the coloniser and the colonised; a double consciousness of the soul plagued by the panopticon of the white gaze, deeply entrenched in the epidermal racial schema. Therefore, by having command of the language of the colonial power, the more respected you are likely to be in that particular society. Thus, you’re still not considered an equal, but you are more respected.³¹² For example, when viewed in the context of native languages in communities

³⁰⁶ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 2.

³⁰⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 4-5.

³⁰⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 21.

³⁰⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 42.

³¹⁰ Daynalí Flores-Rodríguez, “Language, Power and Resistance: Re-Reading Fanon in a Trans-Caribbean Context,” *The Black Scholar* 42, no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2012): 28.

³¹¹ Flores-Rodríguez, “Language, Power and Resistance,” 28.

³¹² Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 96.

across the world, particularly the ways in which European languages have been used as tools to colonise the tongue, the conflict of being neither here nor there becomes even more salient. As persons move from one location to another, this language-based oppression can manifest in multiple ways. In the context of colonial bilingualism, Albert Memmi stated that: ‘the colonised is saved from illiteracy only to fall into linguistic dualism [although,] many of the colonised will never have the good fortune to suffer the tortures of colonial bilingualism.’³¹³ This colonial bilingualism creates a cultural paradox in that the possession of two languages simply provided two tongues in conflict: a double consciousness of communication. Furthermore, the tongue in which the colonised expressed their feelings, emotions, wishes and desires, the very things which make us human, was the same tongue which was valued the least.³¹⁴ Thus, many people may never learn their ancestral language. With language holding such power in societies, occasionally the difference between life and death, the use of language as a means to build as opposed to destroy could be a way to understand the fluidity of identity.³¹⁵ The progressive evolution of identity through the continued vilification of blackness in British media and that of many other countries, shows that people of mixed heritage have needed to adapt to the fluid positionality of mixedness in place of a singular racialised identity.

Conclusion

Precious little literature exists on the mixed heritage community, partly due to the vastness of what it means to be of mixed heritage and partly due to a lack of voices being out in the academic sphere. It would be remiss to form sweeping statements as more research needs to be conducted on the psychosocial impact of mixedness. Being of mixed heritage is just as complex as trying to unravel the intricate network of genealogy; after all, ‘we are all just coloured souls in these black and white towns we roam’.³¹⁶ In order to move forward as a society on both a local and global level, the binary thinking which erects borders must be deconstructed.

The enforced categorisation of people of mixed heritage is not only degrading, but also offensive to assume the identity of another in much the same way as making assumptions

³¹³ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 106.

³¹⁴ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 107.

³¹⁵ See Flores-Rodríguez’s discussion on “The Parsley Massacre” in “Language, Power and Resistance,” 29.

Also see Jamie Gladstone, host, *Coloured Souls*, season 1, episode 4, “Do we Subjugate Ourselves with Language,” Capoeira Angola Sheffield, January 8, 2022, 27 min., 45 sec.,

<https://capoeiraangolashffield.co.uk/podcast>.

³¹⁶ Natty, “Coloured Souls.”

regarding sexuality and gender. Identity is a combination of behaviours and associations to not only one's ancestry but also to their community. There is a fluidity in the ways that we as humans can identify ourselves. Our sense of being resonates at distinct frequencies and identity can be influenced by countless internal and external factors. What identity is not, is based on scientific fact; such notions have been debunked over many years.³¹⁷ When discussing people of mixed heritage, what should be at the forefront of the mind is the internal conflict many endure. The constant battle between oppressor and oppressed, each vying for space, attempting to become the singular consciousness. However, even this internal conflict can too easily be reduced to a binary of 'good' verses 'evil' 'black' verses 'white' and neither the mind nor the world is so simplistic; within every society, there exists a spectrum relative to the morals and ethics to which they align. The positionality of people of mixed heritage has historically been dependent upon their proximity to whiteness and how much value they have been given from the societies in which they dwell. Sliding up and down this scale may seem like a way of coasting through modern society with ease, almost blending in like a chameleon, 'passing' as White where necessary.³¹⁸ The reality is, when political thought changes, as seen in the context of immigration in the Brexit debate, the 'blackness' of the mixed heritage community becomes far more salient as racialised borders are once again erected and fortified. The dialogue and the precariousness of straddling the lines of whiteness means that every step becomes weighted by the importance of how much one is tolerated, that is, how closely can one assimilate into the dominance of whiteness.

³¹⁷ For example, see Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People*; Saini, *Superior*; Wilkerson, *Caste*.

³¹⁸ Brown-Glaude, "The Fact of Blackness?" 23.

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