



**MONASH** University

**The Video Artist as Performer: A Parafeminist  
Politics of Resistance**

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## Exhibitions during enrolment

### Solo Exhibitions:

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- 2020 ***Oops!*** Trocadero Art Space, Melbourne, Australia
- 2017 ***But, then ...*** Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- 2016 ***Indisposed***, The Counihan Gallery Brunswick, Melbourne, Australia
- 2016 ***Tock Tock***, Trocadero Art Space, Melbourne, Australia
- 2016 ***Thwack***, Rubicon ARI, Melbourne, Australia
- 2015 ***Masked***, Stranger Than Paradise, Melbourne, Melbourne Fashion Week

### Group Exhibitions / Screenings:

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- 2020 **Pink Flamingo Cinema**, Sydney, Australia
- 2020 **Videodrunks**, Oshawa, Ontario
- 2020 **S.I.F.F.** (Switzerland International Film Festival), Aubonne
- 2020 **No Flash Video Show**, N.J. U.S.A
- 2019 **Language and Liberty**, The Counihan Gallery, Melbourne. Curated by Victor Griss
- 2018 **Double Bind**, Testing Grounds, Melbourne. Cur. Nick Waddell/Georgia Banks
- 2017 **West Projections**, Footscray, Melbourne
- 2017 **Melbourne Central Art Loop**, Melbourne, Australia. (curated by MARS Gallery)
- 2016 **Larga Vida a la Neuva Carne**, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 2015 **The Human Futures Forum**, Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, Liverpool (curated by Kati Jägel)
- 2015 **Call of the Wild: Pioneers, Rebels and Heroines**, Vox Populi Gallery, Philadelphia, U.S.A. (curated by Katya Grokhovsky)
- 2017 **Totally Unco**, The Torrance Art Museum, Los Angeles. Curated by Ian Haig
- 2015 **Science Friction**, The Counihan Gallery, Melbourne. Curated by Victor Griss

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## Abstract

In this thesis, I argue that the Brechtian notion of *gestus*, which is a moment outside of the narrative, communicated through gesture, voice or action, exists in screen and gallery-based video art works rather than solely in the realm of live theatre. I contend that in this space, the video body is both embodied by the performer and engaged with by the viewer and that the technology of video is well placed to enact *gestus* in specific ways related to time, space and witness.

My approach to *gestus* is drawn from Elin Diamond's intertextual reading of feminism and Brechtian theory. Here *gestus* unmask the ideology embedded within the social norms that exist within a given production. Diamond argues that feminist *gestic* actions within the theatre are possible and that through these actions the viewer can experience gender anew, opening up new perspectives or throwing agreed upon meaning off balance. Diamond's approach to feminist *gestic* actions will be expanded to include queer and intersectional approaches, or what Amelia Jones terms a 'parafeminist' perspective: a fluid version of subjectivity that is not tied to codes of sexual difference. In this sense, I will be working in a parafeminist mode that draws on feminist and queer theories of performativity as exemplified by Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and José Esteban Muñoz. These theories critique uneven power relations and the way they work through and upon bodies while disavowing static and essentialising notions of women's subjectivity.

This thesis contends that Diamond's critical approach to political theatre-making, as exemplified by feminist *gestus*, can be combined with parafeminism and extended to include video art. My political project is to enact a challenge to heteronormative, patriarchal, colonialist notions of gender, producing cissexism, and to the violence that exists behind their imperial narratives. My contribution to knowledge is to create a Brechtian-inspired feminist, queer and intersectional theory of performance-based video art practice as *gestus*, which opens up the possibility for the viewer to disavow monolithic approaches to representing and viewing bodies.

Through this practice-based research, I aim to offer complex and intersectional perspectives on the gendered self: the being who is, seemingly, trapped in and controlled by relations of ideological power. Further, this thesis seeks to dissect how performance for and of video can actively and consciously create a relational and aware politics of opposition. An outcome of this project is to develop a practical vocabulary of parafeminist *gestic* actions for video art practice that also enacts the possibility of a queer utopia.

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## Glossary of Terms

**Chrononormativity:** A term created by Elizabeth Freeman to describe society's regulation of bodies that privileges industry. It makes the rhythm of life seem natural while slotting bodies into structured and synchronized indices of time. Here, we are human capital, as well as bodies that must move and adapt ourselves in a time-based sequence of events that follow a strict social script. This includes marriage, procreation, capital growth, future health, childrearing and death formalities.

**Epic Theatre:** A theatrical movement, most notably linked with the theatre of Bertolt Brecht, that emphasised the ideology behind the scenes and existed as a form of social commentary. Arising in Germany in the 1920s, it rejected naturalism and instead emphasised specific formal qualities that were meant to implicate the audience to engage with the politics of the piece beyond the narrative.

**Found Footage:** In this thesis found footage refers to pre-existing visual material such as films, videos, photographs and advertising re-appropriated to create a new artwork.

**Gestic Actions:** A set of processes laid out by Bertolt Brecht that are a part of *gestus*. Amongst them, the *Verfremdungseffekt*, *Historicization* and the 'not ... but'.

**Gestus:** A method designed by Bertolt Brecht that reveals a socially determined expression. This can take the form of a physical gesture, body language (that can reveal social class), or the posture or attitude that an actor takes in order to give weight to their words. These actions are always tied to the social and historical in any given context.

**Interpellation/Hailing:** Terms theorised by Louis Althusser that signify the moment when the subject is brought into being through ideology, by virtue of being addressed and responding to the address; thereby recognising oneself and being recognised as the subject named.

**Intersectionality:** An intersectional approach understands that structural forms of oppression move across different subject categories in similar as well as different ways, working across fields of intersection rather than monolithically. Here, subjects are formed around dynamics of power, so that power is held and then not held in differing contexts. Intersectionality also recognises, however, that there are structures that privilege some groups over others in a multiplicity of contexts.

**Montage:** Montage is the combining of two different elements, which can often be seemingly unrelated to one another, but where their juxtaposition creates an added meaning rather than if they were presented as singular entities. In this thesis montage is political, whereas, in general terms montage can be considered as the combining of disparate elements that do not have the political impetus that I have in this research.

**Parafeminism:** a fluid version of subjectivity that is not tied to codes of sexual difference. Parafeminism works alongside feminist practice, integrating queer and

intersectional approaches in its meaning making. In this sense para feminism rejects the essentialising ideas bound within cissexism and sees oppression as a force that works against numerous subject categories in changing circumstances within the social fabric rather than being singular and tied to one group of people.

**Performativity:** The understanding of performativity in this thesis starts at its inception theorised by John L. Austin as a set of speech acts that enact an outcome by their utterance, and then follows philosophers Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's expansion of the theory. In essence, performativity begins in speech, but can extend to social norms and performance. It communicates the practices of being acted upon as well as creates the terms and potentials for performing an act. A performative act belongs to a citational chain and is one that through its enactment creates an outcome or transforms a situation.

**Performative Montage:** The purposeful doing of montage that brings forth an awareness and suspension of violence. This violence can be both literal and symbolic in form. Performative montage exists as an ideological challenge to this violence.

**Presence:** When we grasp and recognise something as coexistent with our experience of it at this moment (the now).

**Queer Futurity:** Theorised by José Esteban Muñoz, queer futurity is the hope or potential that exists for a better world different from our current one that recognises all bodies, sexualities and ways of being and becoming. It is a continuous promise of the not-present, the non-static and a temporality that is not fixed in the here and now.

**Queer Performativity:** Queer performativity recognises that norms and speech that shape us do not always act in their intended way upon all social subjects. Therefore, something "queer" is at work, and the social subject cannot be presumed as fixed or static. If one is not addressed through language because of social non-recognition, then the performative is muddled and moves away from its original intent, and therefore becomes queer.

**Queer Time:** A new temporality that emerges when one rejects the social scripts that dictate a specific way to manage a life and a body. For example, a rejection of conventional frames of family and procreation, approaches to risk and security, and inheritance.

**Queer:** Queer in this thesis is a social practice rather than a subject category. In this sense queer can never be a fixed identity but is always dynamic and never resting on a singular definition. Queer practices reject essentialising ideas around fixed and innate sexualities and rejoices in an open embrace of however one wants to live their gender, rejecting binary assumptions around a 'proper' way to live a life. Queer practices understand the disciplining methods tied to subject formation that are created by patriarchal, racist, heterosexist, cissexist regimes of power.

**Relationality:** An understanding of a fluid subject formation that is created in relation to people as well as the environment and social structures. A rejection of a strict individualist approach to the autonomous subject and instead one that is built and changes in relation to and recognition of others.

**Theatrical Rage:** A term originally coined by Judith Butler in speaking about techniques used by AIDS activist demonstrators. Theatrical rage is an angry and bombastic performance that aggressively disavows accepted social norms as a shattering of complacency towards subjects who are not accepted within normative culture. The performance creates affect through its anger rather than any sense of ‘niceties’ and realism.

**The Curious Producer:** I have adapted Laura Mulvey’s term “the curious spectator” (see *Death 24x 191*). The curious spectator remaps the time of the cinema image by pausing, rewinding and fast-forwarding films and thereby creates new relations of viewing and time. The curious producer takes the images a step further by manipulating them and making them into video art works.

**The Decomposed Performative:** Theorised by Judith Butler, the decomposed performative is a gesture that interrupts an action in full flow, and thereby stopping it. Instead of an outcome being created as with the performative, the decomposed performative stops an action from taking place by interrupting it.

**The Material Body:** When referring to the material body in this thesis, I mean the body that is not mediated through the video image: The ‘flesh’ body, or the non-electronic body.

**Utopian Performative:** A utopian performative, theorised by José Esteban Muñoz, is the performance of future potential. It creates a space that is in the horizon but is also not static in time, that continues onward without being fixed to an end point. It does not dictate its futurity but critiques our present moment.

**Video:** (based on Westgeest 2, 3)

- An electronic medium and recording process.
- An audio-visual medium
- Can be digitally manipulated and altered.
- Immediate playback is possible.
- Current-day storage is on drives, chips or online.
- Images are electronically transmitted via cables
- Can be played on monitors, television and computer screens, smart devices and phones, and be projected.
- Can be made individually or with larger crews of people.
- There is an uninterrupted flow of electromagnetic signals in video creation and playback.
- Images can be created in-camera or through digitisation.

**Video Art:** The use of video as a medium in an art setting. Video Art does not have a singular mode of presentation/exhibition. It can overlap with other artforms such as film, sculpture, installation, performance, dance, animation, new media, sound and conceptual art. It has both temporal and spatial concerns. It can deal with narrative, abstraction and representation.

**Video Installation:** An artwork that is exhibited in a space rather than being on a portable screen that can be watched anywhere. Here, the video is not the only aspect of the work but also, the space it is presented in plays a role. Considerations such as where the video is placed/projected, where the viewer is situated and its relation to other objects are all taken into account. Video installation is immersive, and it also counts on the architecture of the space.

## Introduction: What Form Does Action Take?

What form does action take when it is radically unsupported? And when it is effectively de-authorized? How, if at all, can such an undertaking return us to the relation of performance to social embodiment?

(“Gesture Event”, Judith Butler 181)

*Why do you perform in your own video work?*

This is a question that I have been asked many times. My answer in the past was about turning representation on its head, unmasking the drag in all gendered cultural figures. I am (cisgender) female, but I perform ‘woman’. Like many of us, I remember those moments, most particularly at school, growing up and learning, or at least trying to learn what I as a girl was meant to do, how I should present myself, and the best ways to act. I had a strong enough sense of myself to half-fight it, but also enough under-confidence to fall into line just enough.

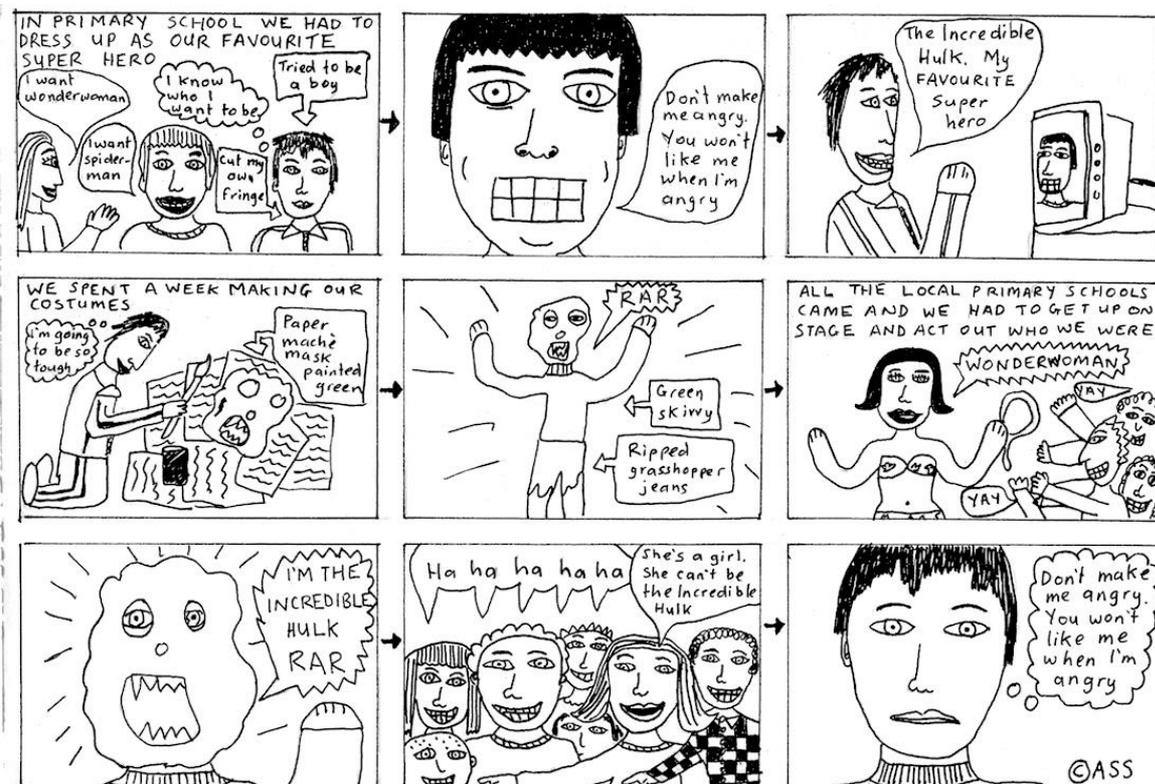
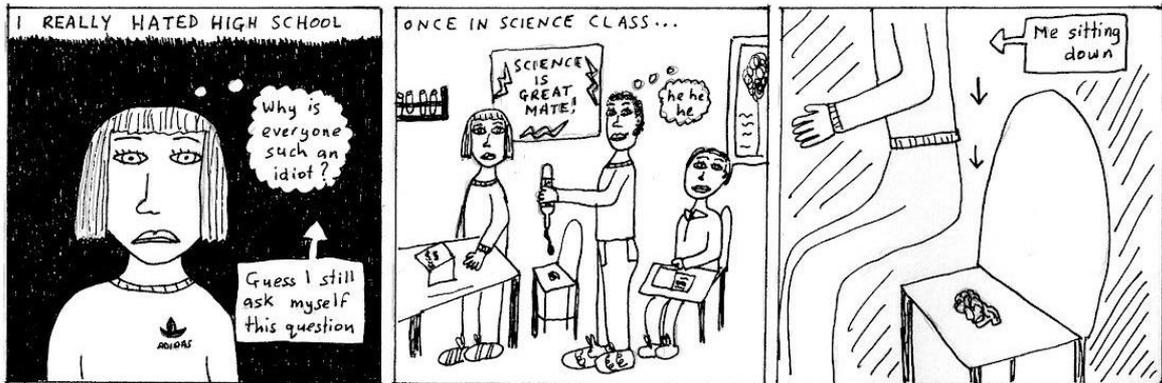


Figure 1. Cassandra Tytler, *The Incredible Hulk*, RelaxBaby, 1999, Ink on paper



Figures 2 and 3. Cassandra Tytler, *School Daze*, RelaxBaby, 1999, Ink on paper

These drawings inserted above, from the comic series RelaxBaby that I published in the late 90s and early 2000s, articulate some of the more conscious aspects of social pressure to conform to narrow gender norms that were a part of my childhood. I include them as a creative response to the question of my own performance in video art practice. These comics were made alongside my video art practice. Interestingly, the comics are autobiographical, while my videos are not, even when I perform in them myself.

This PhD project started with an interest in confronting what I saw as symbolic and real forms of violence enacted upon those gendered woman. It commenced with my own performance for the video camera, and later fanned out to a consideration of my performance also behind the camera/screen. The work has always been aware of the viewer's position within it. Relationality is part of its political project as will be discussed and forms a part of my acts of resistance.



Figures 4 - 7. Cassandra Tytler, *Thwack* (part 4), 2016, Video

In performance, through my own on-screen body and later through my control of the video technology, I explore ways that character, narrative and the viewer combine to play a part in upholding systems of discrimination: the narratives of belonging and righteousness that are used to justify acts of gendered, racial, sexual and class-based violence. For example, in the exhibition *Indisposed* (2016), (featuring seven video pieces, some of which are pictured below. See Fig. 8-12), I use the video camera as a direct address to viewers, similar to the style found in a YouTube tutorial. In each video the character is either revealing their 'disgusting' body (see Fig. 10-11) in an act of self-revulsion and humiliation, or they are advising viewers how to manipulate and improve their bodies, highlighting the class and race-based processes that exist in disciplining bodies outside of those that are socially sanctioned as 'beautiful'. (See Fig.

8). As an artist who uses their own body within their artworks, I am acutely aware of both my whiteness and able-bodiedness. In *White Women Race Matters*, Ruth Frankenberg describes whiteness as “a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination” (6). My own whiteness and able-bodiedness have had an impact on opportunities offered and therefore my social positioning in the world, and most likely my sense of self as I navigate through a racist, colonialist and white supremacist Australia. I take these aspects into consideration within my work and will discuss them going forward. The social sanctioning of beauty and disgust from *Indisposed* mentioned above, is one example.

Judgement, contempt and shame are heaped upon people in order to police a very narrow and specific form of femininity. As Judith Butler notes in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, “[d]iscrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ [sic] individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished” (522). Taking this idea further, in *Thwack*, (2016) (see Fig. 4 – 7) the physical violence is literalised on the skin of the character, alluding to domestic violence. The character runs a YouTube-like tutorial on how to cover any marks up with make-up, framing the session as a helpful make-up tutorial, and never speaking of the bruises on her body. Similarly, she advises viewers how to have an hourglass figure by violently contorting her body with a rope. Here the video connects the literal violence of the bruises to the symbolic violence of gender policing. These examples show the social exclusion and threat of violence possible when gender is not conformed to, and also the shame that exists in the person who feels they have failed the socially sanctioned notions of femininity.

Through performance in numerous guises within video art, I am aware of the power in disrupting the rhetorical moment: that moment a person with privilege leans in to their taken-for-granted assumptions and the idea that those assumptions are widely shared, unquestionable, will remain unchallenged, and will have no reply. In some ways my performances start with anger. I want to confront the viewer with the idiocy of the world and its unfairness. My antagonism comes from a personal space while also looking outwards. This research started as an angry cry at the viewer: *Come on! It's all so stupid!*

### **What Is Not There, But Could Be**

In starting this PhD, through the research my aim was to find and name tactics of performance that could be used within political art making, specifically within video art practice that displaced the viewer within ideology and unsettled regimes of

discrimination coming from it. My theoretical tactics straddle both performance theory, in art and theatre, and video art, existing within visual art and cinematic theory. My interest in having a comprehensive theorisation that I could apply went beyond the use of a singular form or visual strategy but was specific to performance in video art. Rather than simply describing oppression, my aim was to create a working method that activated in some way those watching. This is what led me to Bertolt Brecht, who created an approach to political theatre making that encompassed specific strategies outside of representation and realism. To quote Stephen Heath in *Lessons from Brecht*:

from within ideology, art, as realism in Brecht's sense, attempts to displace the formations of ideology by posing the specific relations of those formations in the mode of production (this is again the basis of Brecht's notion of the social *gestus*). (124)

Brecht's theories were mostly written for the theatre, and as Ben Brewster notes in his text *The Fundamental Reproach (Brecht)*, he was not convinced that cinema could achieve the alienating effect required within epic theatre. Brewster notes that:

distanciation is precisely possible in the theatre because of the co-presence of audience and actors. It is the co-presence that makes it possible to establish a distance from the actions which are portrayed on the stage. (45)

In this thesis I argue that the Bertolt Brecht's notion of *gestus* not only exists within the realm of live theatre, but also in video art works, where the video body is both embodied by the performer and engaged with by the viewer so that co-presence exists. My approach to *gestus* is drawn from Brecht, and also from Elin Diamond's intertextual reading of feminism and Brechtian theory. In *Unmasking Mimesis*, Diamond characterises Brechtian *gestus* as a "gesture, a word, an action, a tableau, by which, separately or in a series, the social attitudes encoded in the playtext become visible to the spectator" (52). It is a moment outside of narrative that goes beyond the play to make clear the ideology coded within its expression. Through *gestus*, the audience rethinks and therefore is led to question the ways their assumptions, which come from ideology of state apparatuses, have guided their outlook on the world. Similarly, in *Brecht*, Meg Mumford states that "[t]o 'show the *Gestus*' came to mean *to present artistically the mutable socio-economic and ideological construction of human behaviour and relations*" (Mumford's emphasis 54). Diamond's linking of feminist strategies with Brechtian ones is a launching off point for my own artistic and political concerns discussed above.

Diamond asserts that her intertextual reading of Brechtian theory and feminist theory has a “specificity to theatre” (43). She states that:

the differences between the Brechtian spectator and cinematic spectator are obvious. The last thing Brecht wants is a spectator in a ‘state of artificial regression,’ in thrall to her/his imaginary ideal. Brechtian theory formulates (and reformulates) a spectatorial state that breaks the suturing of imaginary identifications and keeps the spectator independent. (51)

She describes the cinematic viewing experience as “womb-like” where margins between the subject on screen and the viewer are tangled rather than maintaining the viewer’s separation and disrupting the identifications mentioned in the quote above (ibid). She uses an understanding of the Lacanian mirror phase, where:

the infant, lacking controlled motor development, sees its image in a mirror or in its caretaker’s eyes as a coherent whole. Misrecognizing [sic] himself (the male infant is specifically at issue here) as a complete autonomous other, he spends the rest of his life unconsciously seeking an imaginary ideal—and discovers ‘it,’ so the theory goes, at the movies. (ibid)

In her reading of “the movies”, Diamond follows Laura Mulvey’s essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* on the male gaze and the fetishisation of the cisgender woman actor. She argues that within the theatre, outside of the cinematic realm, feminist *gestic* action can and does take place. She posits that unlike in cinema, in the theatre the woman’s body connotes more than “to-be-looked-at-ness” (following Mulvey’s conception), instead unlocking the body so that it is both *within* representation and also unfixed and open to moving *beyond* it as a point of political challenge. In her text *Screening the Seventies, Sexuality and representation in feminist practice – a Brechtian perspective*, Griselda Pollock highlights the possibilities of moving beyond fetishisation of the woman’s body through Brechtian distancing:

Brechtian distancing aims to make the spectator an agent in cultural production and activate him or her as an agent in the world. The double edge of distancing theory feeds at once into structuralist insistence on the active role of the spectator-viewer and into post-structuralist semiotics which stresses that meanings are produced for and secure subject positions. (224)

It is this fixed position of the viewer that I as well as Brecht seeks to destabilise. Laura Mulvey's famous text *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, as the title implies, is focussing on *narrative* cinema, and even more specifically, *Hollywood* cinema. The Hollywood system itself exists on capital, which involves the star system and power hierarchies played out on and off the screen. As Mulvey says herself of her text, "[t]he idea was to dramatize Hollywood's masculine mode of address as an in-built sexist repression of the female spectator" (*Afterimages* 242). Furthermore, as well as writing about the male gaze in narrative cinema, Mulvey sent out a call to experimental and avant-garde cinema makers to change these visual systems of display, creating a new language that could be used. She herself, along with Peter Wollen made films that attempted to do this (see Mulvey's discussion of this in the appendix of *Afterimages: on Cinema, Women and Changing Times*).

While film language cannot be separated from video art, I am not approaching this research as a filmmaker, but a video artist. Therefore, this research explores how *gestus* can be opened up to be included within video art practice, using gestures and actions created through performance of the video artist. These modes of performance are used to expose ideology and its construction, and the social attitudes and constraints that are born from them. This allows for a reading of performance *in and of* video, which extends beyond the character and narrative. The aim is that through the tactics of *gestus*, the viewer is pulled out of their ideologically constrained position and recognises that the politics of a present that are, in José Esteban Muñoz's words, not yet good enough (see *Cruising Utopia*. This will be discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4). It makes an argument that Brecht's critical approach to political theatre-making, specifically *gestus*, can be extended to include the video body, the viewer, and the artist in control of the video technology. In particular, I argue that the performed body in video art practice signifies what Diamond terms "looking-at-being-looked-at-ness", and is "available for both analysis and identification, within representation while refusing its fixity" (52). Diamond foregrounds the need for "historicity" in theatre, where the actor's personal history is always also foregrounded in relation to social and historical considerations (see note 37, 194). In the research I consider this factor in performance, looking towards techniques that can be used where the video artist performs an unmasking of circumstances of existence beyond these illusory associations of representation.

In referring to the *refusal of fixity*, Diamond is speaking about an opening up or disavowal of a monolithic way of both representing and subjugating women's bodies. This leads to my political project within the research, which is to enact a political challenge to heteronormative patriarchal notions of gender, and specifically the violence that exists behind its imperial narratives. Hegemonic discourses around gender produce essentialising scripts that lead to cissexism, or hatred, hostility and

non-acceptance towards transgender subjects. To create a perception through relational performance-based video work, where the viewer sees the "possibilities emerging of another reality, what is not there, but could be" (145).

Diamond points to gender as a set of ideologically sanctioned physical and visual attributes, embodied within the body's physical form. In the next section, I will clarify Diamond's understanding of Brecht's *gestus*, as this is the understanding of it that I am bringing to my research.

### **Drawn and Gendered Through Culture**

Diamond outlines in brief Brecht's overall concerns over a thirty-year period, namely: the paradoxical influences within social relations, specifically class-based conflict; purposeful alienating techniques within theatrical signification; and an encouragement of an engaged and active viewership free of ideology through the literalisation of the performance. In doing so, she points to the similarities between a feminist approach that aims to uncover the apparatuses of ideology that control women, and the Brechtian proposition. Her aim is to re-consider Brechtian theory with a feminist lens, therefore cracking open "a female body in representation that resists fetishization [sic] and [is] a viable position for the female spectator" (44).<sup>1</sup>

Diamond points to the fusion of three of Brecht's approaches as the *gestus*: *Verfremdungseffekt* ('alienation-effect'), *historicization* and the 'not ... but', which are all interweaving parts of one another. She notes the appropriateness of aligning Brechtian theory with feminism, arguing that the purpose of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, "is to denaturalize and defamiliarize [sic] what ideology - and performativity - makes seem normal, acceptable, inescapable" (47). *Verfremdungseffekt* is used by performers to defamiliarise modes of delivery so the viewer can experience them anew, throwing their agreed upon meaning off balance and opening up new perspectives. This is done in the same way that feminist performers re-perform gender norms as a political unmasking of the ideological construction of gender. To state Diamond's claim:

A feminist practice that seeks to expose or mock the strictures of gender, to reveal gender-as-appearance, as the effect, not the precondition, of regulatory practices, usually uses some version of the Brechtian A-effect. That is, by alienating (not simply rejecting) iconicity, by foregrounding the expectation of resemblance, the ideology of gender is exposed and thrown back to the spectator. (ibid)

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that while Diamond refers to the sex term "female body" in her theorising, that within my research I use the gender term "women's body", which includes transfeminine people and trans women.

The re-performance of gender norms is a political unmasking of the ideological construction of gender. In this sense, the link between Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* and a conscious use of the performativity of gender within performance practice is made apparent.

Brecht believed that the actor's approach to performing character contained the means to alienate and detach the viewer. The actor's aim, according to Brecht, should be to enact not a set of psychological realisms, but an expression of the socio-historical position of their character. In this way, the character we see on stage is not a representation, nor an actor, but a set of processes within their own history: sutured and incomplete. This "divided performer" pulls the viewer between these two dimensions, activating them through watching and thereby keeping them independent and active (51). Brecht named this technique *historicization*, with its defamiliarising also integrated within the *Verfremdungseffekt*.

Diamond posits that if feminists understand women's bodies as drawn and gendered through culture, (and in this sense having their own historicity), then the Brechtian body, through his mapping of *historicization*, is not fixed and can be actively changed. It is through the theatre, Diamond states that women's bodies can exist within Brechtian *historicization*, opening them up beyond both actor and character.

The final approach that forms a part of *gestus* is the 'not ... but'. Here in the performer's action they must give the sense that there is always another action that they have not followed. Therefore, every action has another action enclosed within itself. In other words, the action not taken is confined in the action fulfilled. Therefore, through the 'not ... but', the viewer is acutely aware of what is not there, but what *could* be. In aligning Brecht's 'not ... but' with a feminist reading, Diamond points to its use in a disruption of gender identity: "deconstruction wreaks havoc on identity, with its connotations of wholeness and coherence; if an identity is always different from itself it can no longer *be* an identity" (48). I take up these Brechtian tactics of *gestus* through Diamond's feminist lens, pushing them beyond theatre to encompass video art performance, which I contend is different to cinema, while at times taking up its visual language. I also aim to activate feminism and queer theory within video art practice, taking Amelia Jones' call to work alongside or beyond it, and in the realm of what she terms para-feminism. Below I will foreground my decision in using the term para-feminism.

### **Why Adopt a Neologism?**

My approach to *gestic* actions is feminist, queer and intersectional, or what Jones, in her book *Self/ Image* (2006), termed para-feminist: a version of subjectivity that is not

tied to codes of sexual difference, but fluid, moving and unfixed. As Tirza True Latimer comments in her chapter “Improper objects: performing queer/feminist art/history”:

Since queer theory could be described in precisely the same terms that define parafeminism (‘pivoting around gender/sexual identifications as ongoing, in process, and interrelated to racial, class and other identifications’ with the objective of ‘messing up ... binary structures of difference’) why adopt a neologism? Because ‘parafeminism’ has one distinct advantage: the term avows feminist origins. Semantically, ‘Parafeminism’ refuses to engage in stalemated debates between certain feminist and queer factions within academic studies. (*Otherwise* 94/95)

Jones sees the *para* of parafeminism working alongside feminist modes of practice, rather than post or beyond them. Parafeminism engages with and builds on current models of feminist theory, rejecting normalising ideas of what women and feminists should be, and seeing gender as fluid and non-conscripted. Jones argues that identities and identity categories, such as one’s race, sexual preference, ethnicity, and nationality, while never static can still work meaningfully in social, cultural and political contexts as in relation to one another. To quote Jones:

Parafeminism ... is non-prescriptive, open to a multiplicity of cultural expressions and behaviors [sic], and focused on excavating power differentials. It makes use of (or even invents) new forms of power tied to the historical and present forms of feminine (not by any means necessarily “female”) subjectivities, while not assuming that power exists in certain obvious forms. It is inclusive of all cultural work investigating sexuality and/or gender as aspects of identity formation inextricably related to other aspects such as ethnicity, and yet specific in its insistence on messing up binary structures of sexual difference. (*Self / Image* 213)

In this sense, I am working in a parafeminist mode that draws on feminist and queer theories of performativity specifically taken up by Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, that critique uneven power relations and the way they work through and upon bodies, whilst disavowing static and essentialising notions of women’s subjectivity. Through the practice-based work, my aim is to unmask the normatively disciplined subject: the person who is, seemingly, trapped in and controlled by relations of ideological power, which include gender, sexuality, class, bodily ability and race, and further to understand how performance for video can actively and consciously create a relational

and aware politics of opposition to this. As Andrew Higson notes in reference to creating the Brechtian inspired alienation effect:

If a sense of distantiation is to be achieved, it may be necessary to refuse that system which centres the subject, and to somehow prise open, rather than close down, the apparently natural conjunction of camera-identification and character- identification. (120)

Through this research I decentre the subject, theoretically refusing a singular and binary assumption as to what a subject is. This approach comes from queer theory and will be discussed at length in chapter 2. Further, I will decentre the subject in the way Higson intends in his quote above, by using the technical means of video as a tool, within my art practice.

### Her Own Dancing Body

Because this PhD is practice-led, my own art practice, which is screen and gallery-based, forms the bulk of the case studies analysed within the research. As part of the practice-led research, I completed twenty separate video works, some of which were made as larger themed exhibitions. I use five of my works as in-depth case studies but have also included stills of other works, that due to space constraints I could not analyse in-depth. I choose to include some of them as examples in this introduction as well as earlier chapters, as these works helped drive the research.



Figure 8 - 11. Cassandra Tytler, *Hey Guys*, 2016, Video (from exhibition *Indisposed*)

Practice as research (PaR) according to Robin Nelson, involves:

a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/ performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry. (9)

For my purposes, the research is situated within the field of performance-based video art. The work of other video art practitioners is considered through three case study analyses. These are *I-BE AREA* by American artist Ryan Trecartin, who performs in his works along with his collaborator Lizzie Fitch and a cast of others; and *Primitive Nostalgia* and *Flygirl*, both by Australian artist Caroline Garcia, who uses her own dancing body to disrupt racialised representations of those bodies cast outside the realm of 'whiteness' and 'Western culture'. These case studies will form a context and set of working practices that allows me to situate my practice within the field. The theoretical framework of para-feminist *gestic* actions are outlined and used to analyse both the issues and concerns within the field of study of performance-based video art and my practice as it sits within and contributes to these conversations. I discuss my creative practice in relation to these historical and theoretical approaches, demonstrating how they feed into the process of discovery apparent within the practice-based work.

To get a better sense of how this is achieved, I outline the contrasting use of my voice within the thesis. By voice I mean my written mode of address. I take reference from Jillian Hamilton's writing on poly-vocality in her text "The Voices of the Exegesis". Within the research I am speaking from a singular, subjective position ("I", "my") as well as from the third person ("it", "he", "she", "they", "one" etc.). When I speak to my own practice I am speaking reflexively about both my methodology, practice and artistic discourse. I believe in this instance the research is best served by speaking in the first person. Further to this, I speak subjectively, using personal experience, knowledge and interpretation as part of what contributes to the practice. The coherence and relevance of this discussion relies on my ability to integrate the first person and subjective voice with that of the third person theoretical and historical voice. I don't divide my differing voices between segments or chapters of the thesis. Instead, my methodological approach in reference to my multiple voices is to weave them together. The third person voice that I use is my own subjective voice.

It is important going forward to highlight my own understanding of what video art is. As discussed, I am looking at performance in video art, but as video art is so shifting and expansive as an artform, I clarify what I consider it to be further below.



Figure 12 and 13. Cassandra Tytler, Installation detail from exhibition *Indisposed*, Counihan Gallery, 2016



Figure 14. Cassandra Tytler, *It's Me*, 2016, Video



Figure 15. Cassandra Tytler, *Monkey Suit*, 2016, Video

### A Most Difficult Medium to Define

Video art is a slippery medium, in that it has multiple modes of presentation and technique. It does not have a long historical cannon, with the first example of a portapak, (a portable video camera), being used in an art context apparently being in 1965 by Nam June Paik.<sup>2</sup> Artists such as Wolf Vostell and Paik, both of whom were involved in the Fluxus movement, were making work that utilised television sets with electronic signals on their screens as sculptural objects, before they were able to produce these images by videoing them with the portapak. In the early 70s, artists such as Joan Jonas, Hannah Wilke, Martha Rosler, and Lynda Benglis, exploited the immediacy of video to perform for the camera. Similarly, during this time artists such as Jonas did performances for a live audience that included video, again, its immediate feedback and recording capabilities being essential to the performances so that the 'live' moments could be played back instantly, blurring the differences between the 'subject' on stage and the 'object' on screen. During this early period of video art's rise, other artists such as Valie EXPORT and Peter Campus worked with video installation (amongst other aspects of both video and performance), where video was projected onto screens or other surfaces within the gallery space (see Mondloch ch 4 for further

<sup>2</sup> This narrative is questioned. The exact date that Paik could have used a battery powered portapak is disputed. See Sherman (2007): [http://www.experimentalstvcenter.org/sites/default/files/history/pdf/ShermanThePrematureBirthofVideoArt\\_2561.pdf](http://www.experimentalstvcenter.org/sites/default/files/history/pdf/ShermanThePrematureBirthofVideoArt_2561.pdf)

analysis of these artists' installation works). In these situations, the viewer's presence and bodily cohabitation is important to the piece. During the 60s, modernism was being interrogated within art practice, and numerous art forms questioned the focus on the objecthood of art. Movements that dematerialised artworks were explored within conceptual art, minimalism, performance, expanded cinema, experimental cinema, land art, dance and music. It was within this cultural and social milieu that video art became both possible (through the release of portable video equipment) and of interest to artists (and activists) already working within these ephemeral art practices. In *Mutant Media, Essays on Cinema, Video Art and New Media*, John Conomos expresses this confluence of styles:

Video art developed in this multifaceted context as a medium of techno-creativity, and expressed itself in a variety of different genres or forms, including documentary, essay video, feminist, installation, landscape, literary/new narrative, performance, and scratch, amongst other genres. (87)

This interweaving of other artforms and concerns, which also effected its presentation and reception, means that video art, to quote Helen Westgeet in *Video Art Theory, A Comparative Approach*, "is a most difficult medium to define" (2). She cites Philippe Dubois, who in *La question video*:

defines video not as an object, but as an experimental condition (*état experimental*) that instead of providing answers gives rise to questions and pondering. ... the image has even dissolved, turning video into a process only, one that is quite similar in a way to the wind. (2)

Indeed, there is video the *medium*, and the medium of video that is used to create *art*, which is *video art*. This research analyses video as an art practice, which means that it has an interdisciplinary theoretical schema. Due to video's multifarious nature, art-historical, cinematic and theatrical analysis all come into play. The case studies chosen and practical research done is presented in a range of different settings, from the screen, to the projection, to the installation where other objects are also present, to the live performance. In each of these instances, video the medium is the driving force of the work, and therefore I consider it video art. Within this research. I am conscious of historical practices within art and theory, using them as analytical foundations, while also being aware of present-day circumstances, where technology impacts our perception and capacity to use images in numerous ways and is constantly changing, and therefore the video art medium changes with it.

Contemporaneously, presentation has moved from square monitors on plinths or on the floor as the only option, to LCD screens that can now be hung on a wall or attached to a pole in the floor, to large screens outdoors placed within architecture. Projectors have improved, as has video mapping technology that can display content across whole buildings. Points of reception and output have also changed, where it is not unusual to see video art on YouTube (Art Thoughtz by Jayson Musson, a.k.a. Hennessy Youngman) or as a web series (Whispering Pines by Shana Moulton) or on Instagram (Meriem Bennani and Orian Barki's "2 Lizards" series). In comparison, galleries often have 'black rooms' specifically for screening video art, where start times are advertised so that viewers can begin their viewing at a specific point, bringing video art watching closer to that of the cinema experience. Changes in shooting technology also impact what is viable for the video artist. For example, drones have made aerial content much cheaper and easier to use, therefore impacting ways of working and conceiving of what is possible visually and subject-wise. I point these changes out to give a sense of the constantly changing nature of video art practice, and the multiple options for creation and viewing. This in turn impacts the conceptual and social nature of video art's form and content.

Video Art's activist roots also cannot be discounted, with the availability of video technology birthing video collectives such as TVTV and Ant Farm who made works focussed on disrupting the three-channel television options and monolithic messaging within the United States; and *les Muses s'amuse*, *les Insoumuses* and *Vidéo Out* in France. In *Raised Fists: Politics, Technology, and Embodiment in 1970s French Feminist Video Collectives* Ros Murray points to the feminist impetus of these French video collectives, who at the conclusion of a video titled *Maso et Miso vont en bateau* have an end credit that reads: "No televisual image wants or is able to represent us. We express ourselves with video" (qtd. in Murray 93). Murray cites this as an example of "video's capacity to disrupt and reinvent the hegemonic, bland, and watered-down politics of feminism shown on television screens" (ibid). Here we see the links of video to television and by extension popular culture, making it a medium that can use the tools of access to the moving image in order to thwart its message. This is akin to artists having access to the printing press, and more contemporaneously, the internet and social media. From a para-feminist perspective, this means that those subjects who are not recognised within the normative system, have the means to make work that either represents them, or messes with the representations already at hand. In this sense earlier on in its history, video art could be used as a trojan horse, gaining entry into systems of power previously only available to corporations that held up the patriarchal status quo.

My own use of video broadly exists within the contemporary art scene. Most of the practice led research has been exhibited in galleries, screened at art/film festivals, and

to a minor extent projected in public space. Where the work is viewed is important to its reception but was beyond the scope of this research. Instead, the focus is on *how* it is received, and the *strategies used* to create or consider these forms of delivery. Below is a mapping out of each chapter of the thesis. They work as a pathway towards creating a theoretical approach and vocabulary for para-feminist *gestic* actions in video art practice that are based around performance. I make clear delineations between different focal points of the investigation, breaking the research on para-feminist *gestic* actions into discrete chapters: Presence, Embodiment and Corporeality in Video Art; Performativity as Resistance; Para-feminism, Disruptions to Time and Space; and Video's Interruption as Resistance.



Figure 16 - 18. Cassandra Tytler, *Masked*, 2016, Video

### **Presence, Embodiment and Corporeality in Video Art**

Chapter 1 focuses on the body in performance-based video art. I look at notions of presence of the live body vs the video body and present a case through an agreement with Philip Auslander and Jones that it is an embodied *reading* that creates presence within performance, rather than the live body. Further to this, I present an example of the body as corporeal and embodied when presented via video. I discuss Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to the body because it enables me to open up an understanding of how vision may be embodied, and thus how the viewer

may relate to my own performances and body when viewing the videos. I consider Butler's critique of Merleau-Ponty's universal conception of embodiment for all bodies.

Butler (along with Frantz Fanon, who I also reference) argues that not all bodies are allowed to be orientated towards the world in the same way. This chapter accepts this argument while turning towards Sara Ahmed's avowal of Merleau-Ponty's sensitive body, where she argues queer orientations allow bodies, not usually within reach, to be seen by looking "slantwise" (*Queer Phenomenology* 107). In this sense, this chapter also sets the tone for the political purpose of the research, where I try to fulfill my political project of counteracting normative approaches to disciplining gendered subjects through video art practice. I argue that the video image exists as neither pure subject nor object but as embodied, corporeal and interconnected between the viewer and myself. It is my aim to argue against video as disembodied and immaterial and rather a space where presence, embodiment and relationality exist. Therefore, I am present as a performer, and the viewer is recognising me as 'live' for them at the moment of watching. If this is true, then a *gestic* action within video art practice is possible.

I argue that the video image exists as neither pure subject nor object but as embodied, corporeal and interconnected between the viewer and myself. I explore notions of presence, liveness and embodiment of the video body in order to justify it as more than a visual immaterial simulation within video, and therefore having the capacity to be *gestic*. As both Diamond and Brecht formed a critique of live performance in theatre, the research asks how a video body, which may not automatically be conceived of as 'live', and therefore disembodied and non-present, can have the capacity to enact a *gestic* action. Both presence and embodiment are central to *gestus*, as the body in performance is more than a representation and must be understood as the embodiment of a conscious subject. The performer must be recognised as a body who is consciously re-performing gender norms in representation and who is unmasking the ideological construction of gender through performance technique, therefore questioning the fixity of representation. It is through this recognition that a politics of resistance can be activated. A *gestic* action for video art is where the performance gives away the underlining political import of the piece. One that is not a part of the narrative but becomes the overarching sense behind the production. It is through performance as present and embodied, within but beyond representation that this can begin to be enacted.

I also focus on one of my own works, *Fiona71* (2015) as well as a case study of *I-BE AREA* (2007) by Trecartin in order to explore the interconnection between the video body and the viewer's body in order to make an argument for the importance of the

body in intersubjective, reciprocal viewing. I use *I-BE AREA* (2007) by Trecartin and his collaborator Fitch, as a premiere case study. I use *I-BE AREA* as a case study to focus on the material body as masked. I frame the body as a tool that can enact parafeminist *gestic* actions. In line with Butler's conception of repetition and reiteration of bodies forming gender (discussed further in chapter 2) and also of Ahmed, who argues that bodies are shaped by their positions and histories, where "[w]hat bodies "tend to do" are effects of histories rather than being originary", I argue that the phenotypic markers of the body are not essentialising, but at the same time I recognise that they can form and influence subject categories (ibid 9). This work is taken as a launching off point in an investigation of the body as a marker, while also being a fluid and unfixed entity.

### **Performativity as Resistance**

Chapter 2 traces a genealogy of performativity as theory starting with J. L. Austin through to Butler. It then looks towards theorists such as Sedgwick, Muñoz and Jones, who see performativity as a mode of enactment within performance and art practice that could work towards a politics of resistance, unmasking the unquestioned assumptions made within the ideological status quo, rather than as an unconscious repetition of citations.

In order to tease out an alignment between performativity within performance practice and the Brechtian notion of *gestus*, chapter 2 traces the genealogy of performativity from its inception as a number of speech acts to its use as a mode of considered performance within art practice. Within performance studies and visual art, performativity as a technique of performance has many faces. My interest is in those performances that reveal social relations, identity dichotomies and gender as a social construction that is enabled and constrained by power relations. I develop an understanding of how notions of performativity have been used in visual arts and performance as methods to expose and playfully debunk the ideological clichés that exist within gender representations. I use two case studies looking at how performativity is used both within speech and gender in my own work *I'm Sorry* (2016) and *I Still Call It Home* (2018) and analyse how it is used as a technique of political commentary.

A focused study of performativity in this chapter enables me to explore how performativity can be used as a mode of feminist, queer and intersectional (parafeminist) political challenge and a means of fighting the violence of ideological assumptions made in regard to the social body through performance. My argument is that techniques within *gestic* action can be similar to the conscious or considered

performative, and that the two methods can form along similar lines and can be used to create a relational para-feminist politics of resistance.

### **Para-feminism: Disruptions to Time and Space**

Chapter 3 delves into Jones' term para-feminism. Its specific interest to the research is its lineage within feminist theory, while opening it to the important work done within queer theory, intersectionality and anti-colonial theories. Here I discuss intersectionality theory and its understanding of relations of power that shift and change depending on the social groups and circumstances that one moves within. I highlight the need to view through an intersectional lens, where power relations move across groups and come in a range of configurations where subject categories are not fixed but move in dynamic forms.

This chapter also argues that the act of performance can be extended beyond the body performing on screen, and that within video art practice the artist controlling the technology is also a performer in their own right. In consideration of the controlled hand of the video artist, who may not only perform for the camera, but also perform the video material such as shot choice, timing and public display of the work, I contend that techniques of performance and therefore *gestic* actions are controlled through video art's technology and its presentation in time and space. I maintain that video art as a medium and the video artist as a subject can create *gestic* actions specific to this artform.

I assert that video has a specific language that can be used to manipulate conceptions of both time and space. For example, video's ability to slow or accelerate the image; to use still frames; to endlessly repeat; to change a body's visual and aural morphology with post-production technology; to present different plains of vision through changed focal length, focus or movement; to use pre-existing footage; and to manipulate sound by mixing from different distances, changing frequencies or re-recording spaces. Architecture and space can be presented (or hidden) in different ways depending how the camera is positioned and through installation work, the viewer is made aware of themselves within a space and can be directed to move within it by visual and auditory cues, positioning of the screens or objects.

This disruption of time and space is a part of my political project, as, returning to Butler and Ahmed mentioned above, repetition of acts in time and space shape bodies as well as notions of what bodies can do and those bodies that are accepted within the status quo. As discussed below, time is ideologically set and lived, in order to uphold specific ways of being that form the patriarchy. In chapter 3 I map out how and why

the performance of the video artist can warp and disrupt these fixed notions of the spatiotemporal and create *gestic* actions through the technology of video.

The notion of time is an important factor in this research. I argue, through Elizabeth Freeman and Jack Halberstam, that linear time that rests on historicity as a straight line based on narratives of procreation, wealth, career and property advancement, is normative time that advances a heterosexist way of being that in turn benefits heterosexuality and the patriarchy above other existences. Achievement in these spaces is mapped according to a privileged set of circumstances, most notably the ability to procreate and pass on capital to our progeny. This advances a very narrow way of being and promotes a conception of failure towards those who choose not to or cannot live within these simplistic confines. A disruption of time within video art practice, therefore, can be an act of resistance to normative time. I trace how the video artist can perform these disruptions, and consequently enact *gestic* actions that are parafeminist.

I do so using the performance-based video work *Primitive Nostalgia* (2014), by Australian artist, Caroline Garcia as a case study that explores the use of the performer's body keyed into found footage. This troubling of temporality through the use of images from the past underneath the video performer's dancing body is a tactical use of pre-existing images that I argue is a *gestic* action. Following Mulvey's conception that slowing down or freezing images when watching a DVD creates a pensive spectator who experiences time in a non-linear fashion, I argue that Garcia's *Primitive Nostalgia* is a work that both resists and responds to the sexism and racism inherent in the Hollywood films that frame non-white 'others' that she re-presents and performs within. This case study shows that the technology of video can also perform *gestic* actions rather than the screen performance alone.

Another case study that I use within chapter 3 is my own video installation *What You See* (2018). This work is used as an investigation of the video installation space and the viewer's body within it. This was the first work within the practice-led research where I did not use my own body performed for the screen. In this analysis I look at the three video bodies in relation to the viewer's body, all of which are reflected within the one circular object that displays the morphed images back as a warped mirror image. The separation between object, image and body is confused. I contend, through Jones' reading of Pipilotti Rist, that this non-binary, non-singular body (and voice) meshes the viewer with televisual bodies within space, so that a relational form of integration is achieved, and power is dynamic and fluid, not resting on a singular subject position. I contend that this intermingling of bodies, both material and immaterial is parafeminist, and further that it is through the technology of video that this intermingling can exist. Therefore, this is an example of the video artist controlling

the technology and presentation of video, as a performer. In the case of *What You See*, I am that performer, and I am creating para-feminist *gestic* actions in my treatment of the viewer's body through projection and reflection as well as the content of the video and its set up in space.

My assertion, from chapter 3 onwards, which is a part of my political project, is that the present time that we live amongst needs to be broken, dislodged and rejected. The present produces simplistic and unfair celebrations of how a life must be lived. It is a time that privileges certain skin colour above others, for example, the structural and cultural privileging of whiteness as the natural order over brown and black-skinned people as well as those who are not from an Anglo-Saxon/Celtic backgrounds. Further, our present time celebrates simplistic ways of living one's gender, such as the hegemonic assumptions based on how a man or woman should act and look. This further leads to cisgenderism, which promotes a singular body morphology as part of the 'natural' order and creates cissexim. The consideration around what a 'normal' body is also benefits able-bodied people over disabled people's bodies. Our current time also places the middle and upper class above the working class, and those who are without work are promoted by the Australian government as lazy or criminal. Currently, heterosexuality is the invisible norm so that those living outside this simplistic sexual matrix are 'different' or 'other'. The present can be a dangerous place to those bodies who do not fit within these one-dimensional universes, and as discussed above, violence is enacted upon those who do not measure up. It is for this reason that the politics of resistance that I aim to enact as part of this research aligns itself with Muñoz's notion that the present is not an acceptable place to live within. Muñoz looks towards what he names queer futurity, which the investigation tries to arrive at through the practice-led research.

### **Video's Interruption as Resistance**

Chapter 4 maps Muñoz's concept of queer futurity, which is born from his analysis of Ernst Bloch's conception of utopia. Utopia exists in the antithesis of present things. Therefore, in accepting utopia, one is also accepting that the present is never enough. Hope for the future moment is queer futurity. I have chosen to follow Muñoz's concept, making the aim of my final case study in chapter four, *Oops!* (2020) a work that creates queer futurity through an enactment of the utopian performative. The utopian performative creates queer futurity, and according to Muñoz, can be found in the aesthetic. The act of resistance that I enact is a resistance to the present. In rejecting the present within my work, I am creating hope for the future potential, or utopia. Chapter 4 finds this potential in the interruption.

The interruption is a form of montage that unveils the negative present and pauses it. In this sense it troubles temporality and clear linearity. The chapter charts this model of the interruption through Walter Benjamin's conception of epic theatre and its workings. In his theory, it is the interruption of a scene of impending family violence that produces shock and astonishment in the viewer, thereby unveiling the ideology behind the action in the suspended moment that the interruption provides. I link this suspension of action through interruption to a troubling of linear time, which confuses the present and creates an opening for queer futurity.

Following on for Benjamin's conception of the interruption/montage, I use Butler's theory that the interruption of an action enacts the decomposed performative, which is an inverse of the performative: instead of *doing* an action and therefore *creating* it, or bringing it forth, the decomposed performative interrupts an action mid-flow, and thereby halts it. In the case of Benjamin's illustrative 'story' of family violence being interrupted, Butler points to the decomposed performative as an act that stops violence taking place. To clarify, by interrupting an action, one is halting its violence. I draw on this idea, specifically in the temporality of video art, where I argue (following Benjamin and then Butler) that the use of montage is an interruption to violence. In my case study *Oops!* I also create the literal interruption through the entry of the stranger to a scene of impending violence.

In my investigation of montage of the video image, I look to Soviet Montage Theory, especially the ideas of Sergei Eisenstein, to consider montage as an interruption in line with Benjamin and Butler's theorisation of it, as well as a technique to create new meaning through the combining of two seemingly unrelated shots. Through Mary Ann Doane's writing on the stasis created by the close up, I also look at the use of the close up in *Oops!* as another disruption to linearity, which creates another interruption. As *Oops!* is also a three-screen video installation I research the use of montage across three screens, directing the viewer's body in space, where they become an intruding stranger to the work, explicitly linking them to the narrative, which rests on a stranger interrupting the action. I argue through Ahmed, that this disorientation in time and space is a queering of the viewing subject, where they are differently orientated towards things, becoming both actual and virtual. As stated above, the interruptions in all of these instances create a suspended moment where in the pause there is hope for something different to what is presently taking place. In the suspended moment, the utopian performative is enacting queer futurity. In the following section I map out the importance of this project.

## Feminist, Decolonizing and Intersubjective Effects

This subject is significant because it looks into the capacity of using Diamond's methodology of *gestic* feminist criticism and extends its reach to video artworks coupled with feminist, queer and intersectional modes of engagement. It elaborates an approach to viewing modes of performance of the video body that speak to feminist and queer performativity studies (Sedgwick, Muñoz and Jones), filtering it through Diamond's theory of the *gestic* feminist action in theatre. Diamond has noted that Brecht's Marxist approach does not present an engaged consideration of gender, but she sees the potential for it to re-invigorate debates around theatre and feminism (44). As Pollock notes:

[t]he legacy of Brecht ... qualified the uses of post-structuralism, psychoanalysis and semiotics by providing a bridge between political engagement and a commitment to develop artistic strategies which could have a political effectivity within the sphere of culture. (*Feminism Visual Reader* 94)

She suggests that Brecht has been re-read to encompass contemporary ideas within ideology and culture, all the while maintaining "a political baseline to debates" (ibid). Just as Diamond re-read Brechtian theory from a feminist perspective within the theatre, I am now furthering Brecht and Diamond's model to speak about video art practice and para-feminism. The continued but extended legacy of Brechtian theory in relation to video art practice opens video up, providing a bridge into further analysis of moving image performance outside of the realm of the theatre and televised programming, (which would previously have been named 'television', but is now presented via streaming platforms) as well as extending notions of what performance can be within video art. I aim at achieving a political form of video art making that responds to video technology within the realm of art practice in its multiplicity of forms and end the research with a set of tactics that the video artist can perform. Here, the video artist is the performer of the para-feminist *gestic* actions.

A para-feminist *gestic* reading of video performance creates the possibility for a split agency between art and the interpreter activating a relational mode of interaction which has the potential for a better understanding and empathy for all bodies who are considered lesser within Australia's dominant cultural, social, historical and political structures. For example, non-white, disabled, trans, intersexed and women's bodies, or those bodies that are not linked to relations of domination within the social order. This has feminist, decolonizing and intersubjective effects, meaning that through performance in video artworks, a politics of resistance can be activated by those

bodies who are either not interpellated within ideology, or who want to deactivate ideology's regulatory practices.

This work makes an original contribution to knowledge by filling an analytical and methodological gap in an approach to video performance. While Brechtian methods have been utilised in the cinema (notably by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Jean Luc Godard, Jean-Marie Straub and Juliet Huillet) as well as within the 1970s feminist avant-garde cinematic tradition (by Jan Oxenburg, Barbara Hammer, Yvonne Rainer, Sally Potter and Laura Mulvey)<sup>3</sup> there is yet to be any research into *gestic* actions of the video performer specifically within video-based performance practice and further, none that are specifically parafeminist.

As Pollock writes, “[f]or Brecht, each historical movement and social group had to discover its own appropriate strategies and these must be of a complexity adequate to their critical and instructional project” (*Screening Seventies* 96). While a Brechtian practice has been used through other artforms, social individuality has shifting constructs effected over time, and so the struggle continues at the moment of writing with changes to social and ideological apparatuses.

Capitalism has extended into Neoliberalism. Cultural practices ebb and morph and so the politics of the present moment as well as negative historical practices need to be recognised and displaced *at this moment*, just as was necessary during Brecht's time, and also when Diamond first wrote about feminist *gestic* actions. In order to propel forward in the fight, Brecht's *gestus*, with the *Verfremdungseffekt*, *historicization* and the “not ... but”, need to be used contemporaneously, because the present is still not what it should be. Therefore, the research concludes with a working vocabulary of parafeminist *gestic* actions specific to video performance that can be used and adapted in the *now*.

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<sup>3</sup> These avant-garde artists were concerned with exploring Sergei Eisenstein's use of montage and how it could be used as a distancing effect within the cinematic form. (See Ging "Politics Sound Image")



Figures 19 and 20. Cassandra Tytler, *Thwack (part 3)*, 2016, Video

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## Chapter 1: Presence, Embodiment and Corporeality in Video Art

[W]e have the choice to refuse to stand at the apex of the cone of vision offered to us ... instead pressing our wet, pulsating, smelly bodies against the clinically ungiving screen in an orgy of refusal. Or, downloading the film to our laptops, we could press hands hot against the smooth plastic and metal mouse, warping and mutating the surfaces of the images' container ... interactively thrusting our bodies into the picture.

(*Self/Image*, Jones, 21-22)



Figures 21 - 24. Cassandra Tytler, *Tock Tock*, 2016, Video

This chapter will focus on a discussion of the body of both the performer and viewer in performance-based video art. Because Diamond's theory of the feminist *gestus* is articulated in relation to live theatre, it is important that I map out how both presence and embodiment exist in video practice and explore whether the relationality between audience and performer within the theatre can translate to what could be considered visual immaterial simulation within video. Both presence and embodiment are central to *gestus*, as the body in performance is more than a representation and must be understood as the conscious embodiment of a subject.

The performer must be recognised as a body who is consciously performing and who is purposefully making decisions about how they perform. In the case of this research that conscious performance works towards unmasking the ideological construction of

social subjects through performance technique, therefore questioning the fixity of a stable subject category. It is through this recognition that a politics of resistance can be activated. A para-feminist *gestic* action for video art is one in which the performance gives away the underlying political import of the piece. This can be a singular action or a vocabulary of actions. One that is not a part of the narrative but becomes the overarching sense behind the production. It is through performance as present and embodied, within but beyond representation that a *gestic* action can begin to be enacted. It is my aim to argue against video as disembodied and immaterial and position it instead as a space where presence, embodiment and relationality are constituted.

In order to reach a better understanding of the body in space and time, its presentation, and further, its embodied presence in video, I will look to the work of Jones and Philip Auslander, who argue, counter to Peggy Phelan, that presence exists equally within live performance and performance made specifically for video. My aim in this chapter is not to compare performance art per se to performance-based video art practice. Instead, this discussion helps me argue for presenting a relation between the viewer and myself when I perform within video. This connection makes possible my argument that *gestic* actions can exist in video art practice as well as theatrical performance, and leads to a politics of resistance, relationally connecting with the viewer in video performance.

Diamond uses an intertextual reading of Brechtian theory and feminist theory, one that she says has a “specificity to theatre” (Unmasking Mimesis 43). Through both a reading of film spectatorship through the Lacanian mirror phase<sup>4</sup> where the audience is in “a state of artificial regression” (Jean-Louis Baudry qtd. In Diamond 51) and Laura Mulvey’s essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* on the male gaze and the fetishisation of the woman actor, Diamond argues that within the theatre, outside of the cinematic realm, feminist *gestic* action can and does take place. She posits that unlike in cinema, in the theatre women’s bodies connote more than “to-be-looked-at-ness” (following Mulvey’s conception), instead unlocking the body so that it is both *within* representation and also unfixed and open to moving *beyond* it as a point of political challenge. To quote Diamond, the “Brechtian-feminist body is paradoxically available for *both* analysis and identification, paradoxically within representation while refusing its fixity” (53). This research is using Diamond’s theory of the feminist *gestic* action within theatre, looking to include both feminism and queer theory (para-feminism) to develop a notion of the performance of the video artist within video art practice. I am not looking at cinema, but performance-based video art, which uses some of the visual codes of cinema, but exists within the visual art and performance

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<sup>4</sup> Where one is seeking a wholeness to their image having had this disrupted when they first recognise their uncoordinated body in a mirror for the first time as an infant (see pp. 6 of Introduction).

realm.

I also discuss Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to the body because it enables me to open up an understanding of how vision may be embodied and thus how the viewer may relate to my own performances and body when viewing my videos. I argue that my video body exists as embodied, corporeal and interconnected between the viewer and myself, therefore viewed in relation to those who watch. I use Ahmed's reading of Merleau-Ponty's vertical axis of vision not aligning at first sight, so seeing things off-axis and "slantwise". Ahmed maintains that bodies are produced and re-produced in space. If "slantwise" vision can remain uncorrected, then the seeing subject has different non-normative orientations to follow. She names this a queer orientation, and something to be celebrated. Going forward this styling of vision is something that the research tries to achieve through video. My understanding of queerness, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 2, aligns itself with that of Angela Jones:

queerness is not limited to the domain of sexual orientation or gender subversion. Queerness is a refusal; it is a dismissal of binaries, categorical, and essentialist modalities of thought and living. Queerness is always being made, remade, being done, being redone, and being undone. It is the quotidian refusal to play by the rules, if those rules stifle the spirit of queers who, like caged birds, cannot sing. (*Critical Inquiry Queer Utopias* 12)

This research also rejects binary categories and understands that the queer subject is dynamic and unfixed, changing with time, never to be centred or monolithic, as well as always being relational. This chapter argues that if embodiment and presence can exist through the performance within video art practice then it can encompass para-feminist *gestic* actions. To clarify, the material, 'live' body is not a *necessary* factor in creating *gestus* in video performance.

### **Being Involved with Something**

What does it mean to be present when experiencing an artwork? The sense of an original performance piece that cannot be repeated or experienced except 'in the flesh,' comes up specifically in discussions aimed at performance art and its 'liveness' versus its being experienced in documented or mediatized form. The debates around presence are useful when I look at the differences between experiencing a 'live' theatre piece in comparison to a performance that is video-based. I choose to delve into this differentiation in order to argue that Diamond's notion of feminist *gestic* actions can

be used affectively outside of theatre practice so that to experience a video performer can spark embodied connections through the use of *gestus*.

My understanding of ‘presence’ is taken from Jones from her article *The Artist is Present Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence*, who has written extensively on the notion of presence within performance-based art practice:

“Presence” as commonly understood is a state that entails the unmediated co-extensivity in time and place of what I perceive and myself; it promises a transparency to an observer of what “is” at the very moment at which it takes place. (18)

This co-extensivity in time and place forms many of the debates around presence within performance, particularly around liveness, and within this, concepts in regard to the ephemerality of a performance and how or whether it can continue to exist after its address. In her book *Unmarked. Politics of Performance*, Peggy Phelan takes the position that performance only exists in the present:

Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being... becomes itself through disappearance. (146)

For Phelan it is the ephemerality of human existence in time that creates liveness in a performance, and it is through disappearance that we are aware of this liveness. In this sense, the performance exists through and across time, but cannot exist in its duplication. A performance only happens according to Phelan, when it is outside of reproduction and the marketplace. Phelan states, “poised forever at the threshold of the present, performance enacts the productive appeal of the non-reproductive” (27). Performance in this sense exists as process rather than product. If performance only exists in its person-to-people realm, then it cannot live within representation and therefore cannot exist as capital. The question here is what constitutes liveness and further, how a co-extensivity between time and place can be understood in video performance.

Auslander disagrees with Phelan’s description of the ontology of performance, pointing to the mediatization of performance within the live event and noting that our sense of liveness changes over time depending on its mediatization. He argues that

our sense of the live being through the co-presence of performer and audience across time and space has changed due to the arrival of broadcast technologies such as radio, television, music recording and live Internet streaming. For example, a 'live' recording of a radio broadcast meets the criteria of the co-extensivity of time, but not of space, as the listeners are in many different places. In his article, *Digital Liveness A Historico-Philosophical Perspective*, he argues that when people are involved in a group chat online, they are thought to be communicating 'live' while also not co-extensive in space. Further, Auslander notes that nowadays our sense of the live does not necessarily include the co-extensivity of space *or time*. He contends that websites



Figure 25. Cassandra Tytler, *Lunar Swells*, 2016, Video

being launched 'go live' to the public and continue to exist across time and space but are felt as 'live' by those who interact with them at any given time, as users input their

searches in real time and get real time feedback from the site. He argues that it is the audience's affective experience that potentially gives them a sense of liveness. "*To the extent that Websites and other virtual entities respond to us in real time, they feel live to us, and this may be the kind of liveness we now value*" (emphasis in original 6). He uses Hans-Georg Gadamer's text on aesthetics in art to support his claim that the way we deal with new technologies is through the lens of liveness. Gadamer sees our interaction with artworks as contemporaneous, meaning that the artwork is present to us in the moment we experience it rather than the moment it is made. Of this presencing, Auslander writes, "A work of art from a past of which we have no direct experience becomes fully present to us when we grasp it as contemporaneous" (8). It is not the aesthetic of the artwork that is important, but our *recognition* and interaction with it, and the fact that we actively bring it into presence for ourselves. Auslander uses this assessment of engagement of artworks in order to create presence and transfers it to digital liveness. It is not the fact of its technology or that it is constructed by the audience, but its relational quality. To quote:

digital liveness emerges as a specific *relation* between self and other, a particular way of "being involved with something." The experience of liveness results from our conscious act of grasping virtual entities as live in response to the claims they make on us. (10)

Therefore, co-extensivity in time and space in video performance does not count on the physical presence of the viewer and performer, but instead on an embrace and recognition of the performance by the viewer, which brings it into liveness.

### **A Living Body does not Secure the Meaning of the Subject**

To use Auslander's claim on liveness as the viewer bringing the performance into presence for themselves, the very notion of presence exists through performativity. It is in this vein of non-fixity of subject positions that I would like to continue to develop my understanding of 'presence' within art practice. As Jones points out, a modernist understanding of the artist as an individual (male) genius, disembodied from his work, and instead transcending his position as a body, is tied in with our conception of presence in artistic terms. This approach is steeped in an ideology that privileges white male subjects, and pushes others to the margins, as Jones states:

where male artists were both present and transcendent, women artists absent and simultaneously brutally corporeal. ... A living body does not secure the meaning of the subject (the artist) or the artwork for us. It is dense, obscure, and takes on meaning for us only relationally, in terms of our own embodied experience, beliefs,

and so on (“Afterlife” 12).

Further, such bodies exist in multiple relationships and realms. Jones argues against the idea of the ‘original’, even in performance, as for gestures and actions to be read in a certain way, they must be repeated or reiterated, the social codes within them accepted and understood. Jones makes an argument for the experience of viewing the documentation of performance as being an embodied one:

There is no possibility of an unmediated relationship to any kind of cultural product, including body art. ... While the live situation may enable the phenomenological relations of flesh-to-flesh engagement, the documentary exchange (viewer/reader <-> document) is equally intersubjective. (“Presence Absentia” 12)

As such, performance needs the participation of the viewer in both live and representational realms. This relationality is at the crux of performativity and will be discussed in further detail in chapter 2. Presence exists with a performance being co-created by performer and viewer. As Jones notes, if the artist as live, durational body is understood as the original, authentic, present body, then it opens itself to otherness, of itself and the viewer, and is therefore not complete or coherent, and therefore not ‘original’. It is not the ‘live’ body that gives it its presence, but the affective recognition of a body in performance that is understood as embodied and relational. All art, including ‘live’ performance is mediated in some way due to its relational nature. Therefore, it is my contention that *gestic* actions can be created not only within theatre, but also within video performance.

### **Installed in the Midst of the Visible**

In order to further understand presence in video practice, I want to focus on the connection between the viewer’s body and the video body they see performed. Here I want to make an argument for embodiment of the performed video body.

In his *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), Merleau-Ponty considers the touching and seeing subject, both touching and touched, seeing and seen. He uses the example of his right hand touching his left hand. Through rubbing one hand over the other, the “touching subject” becomes the touched, and furthermore the object being touched (*Visible Invisible* 134). He says that the fact we ourselves can touch and therefore tactilely understand our bodies means that we also understand the bodies outside of our own. We therefore exist as also being touched by the look of others. We are not only touched and touching, but also visible and tangible, because we do not have touch alone, but also vision to see. Both are bound together. Merleau-Ponty says: “the

tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world” (134). He further examines the seeing subject, who is not only seeing, but also seen. In other words, the subject who does the looking is also always looked at. We cannot be only seeing, for as soon as we have the ability to see, we recognise that we are seen by the look of another.

As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision ... be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot (134).

While the visible and the tangible are knitted together, they do not become one; rather, our embodied subjectivity (as not pure subject or pure object in the world) is located in the intertwining of these two aspects where the lines of a chiasm, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, are *interconnected*. Seen from this perspective, the body is not a separate object in the world, but a knowing subject. And where vision and touch are doubled through an intersubjective engagement of seeing, touching, being touched and being seen, our bodies become our own point of view of the world, but not separate from it. Through Merleau-Ponty’s conception, we are both an embodied subject, a body and mind who sees, and an embodied object, a body and mind who is visible in the world. This understanding opens up the potential for embodied relationality, not just through our material bodies, but those we see on the screen. If embodied subjectivity lies in our ability to recognise and connect our bodies and others through our own bodily understanding of sight and touch, then the bodies we see within video by extension are deeply tactile and embodied, and move beyond immateriality.

The viewer sees my video body and then sees their own body on that spot, as it would be seen by someone else. Through this relational recognition at the moment of encounter, they view my video artwork contemporaneously, and presence is created. Through Merleau-Ponty’s recognition of embodiment, video can be seen as a space of reciprocal recognition between subjectivities. Along these lines, Jones says in *Self/Image Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject*:

The screen could thus be viewed not as a border separating self from other or as a purely two-dimensional “thrown off skin,” but as a deep site of interchange where self and other recognize [sic] their profound reciprocity and even *simultaneity*, or the fact that here is no “present” subject (or signifier or referent) but only subjects (signifiers/referents) who take on constantly mutating shapes and

meanings in relation to one another in an ongoing series of communicational and representational exchanges across and through various modes of screen/flesh. (141)

It is in this sense of the self-other recognition where the viewer brings the performance into presence for themselves and where the viewing process is an embodied one, co-created by performer and viewer. The moment exists in liveness because of the *interchange of self-other recognition, reciprocity and simultaneity*.

### Slantwise



Figure 26. Cassandra Tytler, Installation detail from exhibition *What You See*, Testing Grounds, 2019, Photo: Clare Rae

As well as this phenomenological conception of embodied relationality through our own bodies and those we see, in chapter 2 I connect relationality back to queer performativity. Here, the subject comes into being through the viewer/witness. The queer subject is always *relationally* understood, and therefore it is not fixed or universally the same. Butler critiques Merleau-Ponty's binary conception of a body that is open to the world. She questions the assumed "masculinism" of the self and other in his theorisation, enquiring whether "the criss-crossing between touch and sight and language is not reducible to a continuous and self-referential body" ("Sexual Difference as Question" 342; 346). Frantz Fanon also points to his own black body becoming an object through the look of others. To quote:

I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. ... But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. ... For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. (82; 83)

Taken from this perspective, both gender and race impact on how one may hold themselves in relation to others, as well as how they are seen and recognised as bodies within the social fabric. Bodies cannot be discounted from the lived experience that involves social subjectification (this will be discussed further in chapter 2), but I would like to take up Ahmed's queer reading of Merleau-Ponty's bodies in the world as a way of suggesting approaches to the subject/object/intersubjective that can work as parafeminst *gestic* actions against the generalisations towards all bodies.

Ahmed agrees with Butler against the universalised conception of bodies, but in *Queer Phenomenology*, takes a step sideways, using Merleau-Ponty's conception of the "sensitive body" to offer a queer reading of bodies and their direction in space:

If we presume that sexuality is crucial to bodily orientation, to how we inhabit spaces, then the differences between how we are orientated sexually are not only a matter of "which" objects we are orientated toward, but also how we extend through our bodies into the world. Sexuality would not be seen as determined only by object choice, but as involving differences in one's very relation to the world—that is, in how one "faces" the world or is directed toward it. Or rather, we could say that orientations toward sexual objects affect other things that we do, such that different orientations,

different ways of directing one's desires, means inhabiting different worlds. (67/68)

To orient bodies in a queer way is to find bodies that may be forgotten in the universal binary. Ahmed celebrates this way of reaching out towards as well as seeing these bodies. She readapts a quote from Merleau-Ponty, who says that when perception is disorientated, that one sees "slantwise" until they can straighten their view - "[T]he subject at first sees the room "slantwise" ... The general effect is queer" (qtd in Ahmed 65). Ahmed argues that bodies inhabit space according to a repetition of actions over time. This creates a vertical line of action that accords to straightness. This straight line is realigned over and over so that bodies exist in space on this straight, vertical axis:

If we consider how space appears along the lines of the vertical axis, then we can begin to see how orientations of the body shape not just what objects are reachable, but also the "angle" on which they are reached. Things look right when they approach us from the right angle (67).

While Ahmed contends that Merleau-Ponty did not use the word *queer* to insinuate a sexual orientation, she uses it as such, while also claiming it as a spatial term that originally meant "twist" (ibid). She therefore aligns queerness within space, twisted, and not in a straight line. While Merleau-Ponty writes about straightening the vertical line from being slantwise on first perception, Ahmed argues for a celebration of the slantwise:

Queer orientations are those that put within reach bodies that have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy. Queer orientations might be those that don't line up, which by seeing the world "slantwise" allow other objects to come into view. A queer orientation might be one that does not overcome what is "off line," and hence acts out of line with others. (107)

Ahmed applauds those bodies who are forced to inhabit space and are directed towards others differently. Her concept of queer orientations and her re-reading of Merleau-Ponty's perception of space and others in it, is what I would like to take up in going forward with this research. Chapter 2 will further discuss the multifarious queer subject and also relate it to parafeminism and my own politics of resistance. I would like to consider Butler's quote below as a coupling with Ahmed's slantwise approach:

If one is “implicated” in the world that one sees, that does not mean that the world that one sees is reducible to oneself. It may mean quite the opposite, namely, that the I who sees is in some sense abandoned to the visible world, decentered [sic] in that world; that the “I” who touches is in some sense lost to the tactile world, never to regain itself completely; that the “I” who writes is possessed by a language whose meanings and effects are not originated in oneself. (“Sexual Difference” 341; 342)

A celebration of the decentring and misplacement of the “I” can become a queer enactment. Going forward this research aims to decentre, to misalign, to disrupt. Through a reading of Merleau-Ponty through Ahmed, Butler and Fanon, the video performer is present, co-extensive, embodied and creates moments of slantwise or decentred visioning.

### ***I-BE AREA: “Because of Command-V”***

In order to enrich my research into the body as material in this chapter, I look towards video artist Trecartin and his collaborator Lizzie Fitch. I was first drawn to consider Trecartin’s work in reference to the video body because of what he said in relation to his video *I-BE AREA* (2007):

The basic idea of the film is that what identifies people is not necessarily their bodies anymore; it’s all the relationships they maintain with others. You are your area, rather than you are yourself (qtd. in Tomkins).

When Trecartin speaks of one’s *area*, I take it that he means the online identity-positions we align ourselves with. For example, our “likes” on Facebook identify us better than what our bodies look like. Trecartin makes this point of identity fluidity through his repetition of characters played by the same performers, just with a change of wig or face colouring. “I’m a clone. I exist because of command V”, states I-Be 2, a character performed by Trecartin in his video *I-BE AREA* (2007). This technique is similar to my repetition of characters in *Fiona71* through my own enactment of each body on screen. My point differs in that I wanted to highlight the absurdity in condensing one down to a ‘named’ subject category. (See chapter 2 for further discussion of Louis Althusser and the hailing of subjects into social existence). Fiona is not her “area”. In fact, her simulacrum(s) have used her performative identifiers to “become her”, but as she says, “It’s not me”.

For the research, I will focus on the video body in *I-BE AREA*. I contend that the video body is ever present in Trecartin's work, and necessary to be recognised as a body in order to express his idea above. I will outline this in my analysis below.

Trecartin is an American contemporary performance-based video artist who also uses the performances of a collection of family and friends in his work. He works in close collaboration with Lizzie Fitch. Characters wear masks, face paint, and address the camera in a series of first-person cries of identification lifted from those you might hear in reality television or YouTube advice channels alike. The change of a wig can often mean the change of character. In other words, the performers enact a series of character positions rather than upholding a set selfhood, and emotion feels self-consciously performed and affect driven rather than sincere.



Figure 27. Ryan Trecartin , *I-BE AREA*, 2007, Video, 1 hour, 48 minutes, © Ryan Trecartin, Courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles and Sprüth Magers

The video body is there to be seen as masked, “cloned” or performed. However, the physicality of the body is ever present, and while one of Trecartin's characters may call themselves an avatar, to the viewer they are a body claiming themselves an avatar. The performers in *I-BE AREA* perform with wigs or face paint, often masking their skin colour or biological sex. Yet their lived bodily experiences still exist, as do those of the viewer. For example, Trecartin plays Pasta, a “mixed media person” (see Fig. 27), who

plays a Los Angeles Valley Girl-type with a blonde wig and colourful paint all over her face. It is clear when watching this performance that it is Trecartin, a white man's body underneath this disguise. Trecartin is using his flesh and blood body to *enact* his idea that his body is not important. Jones points to the *The Second Sex*, by Simone Beauvoir, and her claim that in patriarchy transcendence is affiliated with masculinity, while the bodily immanence, is thrust upon femininity. According to Beauvoir, it is only white men who can imagine transcending the body, while women are thoroughly corporeal. Interestingly, this leads us back to modernism, where the sense is that the artwork and the artist transcend the work, and in turn, the viewer, erasing the reciprocal, relational relationship with them. Instead, I argue, that the body through relationality is always present.

### Behaving Queerly

While immanence versus transcendence may be a factor in the current configuration and understanding of bodies within the patriarchal, white supremacist and heterosexist society that we currently exist in, one of the goals of para-feminism is a disruption of essentialising body categories. In her article *Queer Heterotopias: Homonormativity and the Future of Queerness*, Angela Jones points to the queer project as a disruption of "any fixed identity/subject/body" categories (5). Through a reading of Donna Haraway, she calls for an unfixing of subject categories through the cyborg or technological body:

The cyborg or techno-body opens up the possibilities for asking new questions about subjectivity and destroys essential categories of organization. ... On a micro-level individuals can force society to slowly change merely by behaving "queerly." The hybridization of bodies and technologies forces people to rethink how they understand and perceive human life (12).

To read Trecartin's quote above through this lens, where subjects are their "areas" that can be cast off and put back on in a dizzying display of unfixity, is as an act of *behaving "queerly"*. It is one that unhinges binary subject categories and presents a space within video performance that is an example of a para-feminist *gestic* action through this destabilising act. Queerness as a dislocating of singular subjectivities will be discussed further in chapter 2.

As mentioned, skin colour and gender are visually obscured in *I-BE AREA*. Taking Trecartin's ideas into consideration, one reason this technique may be used is to delete body markers. However, the phenotypic body is still there to be seen *as* masked, and this is where the *gestic* action lies. Performance of persona is always

produced by a body, even if that body is changed, veiled or morphed. This recognition of the transformed body for the use of persona, points to its power through reinterpretation. Trecartin has masked his face to that of an insane looking creature, who dresses, walks and talks like a Valley Girl, including her blonde bob haircut. Very little is 'natural' about the way Pasta looks, but we read her as Valley Girl through the visual and auditory signs presented to us. Trecartin's performance is spot-on, but there is no question as to who is under this mask. Trecartin himself, or his co-performers, consciously perform as a body that is not marked as their own. The bodies' naming as *masked* through this process is necessary for the viewer to understand the signs that are being manipulated. Here we come back to the necessary participation of the viewer in recognising the body they see in video in order to understand its formation and negotiation through performance. The interconnectivity of bodies theorised by Merleau-Ponty is partly visual, and our visual recognition of these bodies is what connects us, creating embodied and material watching.

To reiterate, Trecartin and the other performers in *I-BE AREA* use their body as masked as a parafeminist *gestic* action. Their bodies must be recognised by the viewer as bodies that are embodied and co-present, and therefore consciously performing in the video. The de-gendering and re-gendering of the bodies as well as the de/re-colouring with face paint is a use of the *Verfremdungseffekt* that alienates and disorients binary considerations of bodies and morphologies as fixed within culture. *I-BE AREA* also uses *historicization*. By using the recognisable stylings that exist in reality television and YouTube culture and then pushing them to the extreme so that the bodies being presented come from culture but are being re-drawn by the performers, *I-BE AREA* demonstrates that subject categories are flexible. The changing of wigs and face paint so that singular bodies become different characters successfully questions the coherence of subject categories and is an example of the 'not ... but'. Trecartin is the techno-body that Jones speaks of, conceptually existing thanks to "command-V". Here, the look and utilisation of the video technology, with video layer on video layer, propels this idea forward. However, as stated, the performers' body as a body must be recognised for all of the above ideas to take shape.

### **Fiona71: "It's Not Me"**

Through a discussion of one of my own works, *Fiona71* (2015), I will explore the idea of embodiment via the body being viewed within the video medium. This work presents three video bodies, all of whom are my own. It is this repetition of the same body as three different characters that led me to include *Fiona71* in my discussion of the video body and the question of the existence of its embodiment. If the video body is copied, reworked and repeated, how is it embodied and present, and further, how can it enact *gestic* actions?



Figure 28. Cassandra Tytler, *Fiona71*, 2015, Video

Click image to watch video, or go to: <http://vimeo.com/134719755>

*Fiona71* is a single-channel video work that is about what makes up one's 'true' self, how subject categories are represented and read within the world, and ultimately the ridiculousness of the indicators that we are forced to choose to characterise ourselves. My inspiration came from mostly online interactions, but also corporate training sessions. I chose a set-up where the main character, Fiona, performed by myself, (see Fig. 28) speaks directly to the camera. Two other unnamed characters, also both played by me, are visually intercut into the sequence (see Fig. 29-31). They fight one another in a lounge room setting. The reason for the flight is unclear.

Fiona speaks directly to the camera in a single medium close up, acknowledging the viewer like one might in a conversation, making the situation seem like it is occurring at the same moment in time and space, and therefore creating presence. She angrily and bewilderedly explains that she is a victim of identity theft. She gives examples of how an unknown person ("she") has "become" her because they know the answer to her online security questions: "If you were a superhero, who would you be?" (Josey from Josey and the Pussycats) and "What's the meaning of life?" (Fuck you). My aim in creating the notion of stolen identity was to playfully tease out the question of how identity exists within us and is created for us, through condensing us down to a set of information bites owned and imposed by online corporations and social networking sites alike. Here within the direct narrative, identity is not connected to the body, but

visually it is, as Fiona and her identity thieves have exactly the same physicality. My allusion is that online identity is influenced by our bodies.



Figure 29 - 30. Cassandra Tytler, *Fiona71*, 2015, Video

Fiona and the other two characters look exactly the same, except for different make-up colouring and different clothing. Fiona has a black eye, and a cut on her lip, as if she has previously been in a physical fight (potentially made by the one who is intercut into her scene, but this is not answered). The two fighting characters punch at each other, react, and roll onto the ground. They have been digitally keyed into this lounge room scene using green-screen technology, whereas this is not the case with

Fiona. In giving Fiona a black eye and split lip, I was alluding to her link with the two characters who are fighting, and creating a physical, tangible reference to their connection. The physical traces of a fight were my attempt to show that these characters who are visually presented as digitally keyed into the scene, have had a physical effect on the character speaking to camera. The aftermath of violence is bodily, shown through bruises and gashes, not just a psychic combat which are the ramblings of an unhinged Fiona. While there are three characters whose bodies (and faces) are exactly the same in the video, in the digital plane where Fiona addresses the spectator from, they are not immaterial, because they have traversed the digital medium within the story, wreaking physical, material harm on Fiona's body, and she has the marks to prove it.

### "Good" and "Bad" Bodies



Figures 31. Cassandra Tytler, *Fiona71*, 2015, Video

Whether the women fighting are really Fiona, or in her imagination, or look-a-likes who have stolen her identity is not answerable. These are techniques used to create a persona in order to explore subject categories within the contemporary online world. Here, identity is fractured, changeable, and ripe for appropriation. In "Protocol and Performativity" Mikhel Proulx writes about the normalising of bodies in the online world, especially in relation to dating apps and social media where users make a distinction between "good" and "bad" bodies, following traditional social classes, and where through simplistic technical procedures, people are arranged into strict group categories. An example of this is gender or race bifurcation in trying to group and classify someone. Proulx argues that rather than being invisible, with digital

technologies, the body has become *hypervisible*. Proulx comments that “performing in social media means subjecting oneself to self-regulation and data management, and it also means participating in a system based on numbers” (115). This form of controlling the presentation of bodies is self-managed, where the individual polices themselves in order to fit into regulatory practices. In order to be present within social media, Proulx argues, one must keep up a constant stream of self-presentation, and this self-presentation condenses and categorises bodies into normative and easily classable groupings. Users are interpellating their subjecthood into online existence, performatively enunciating themselves as gendered, raced and sexualised. *Fiona71* explores this factor, humorously mocking the styles of questions that we use to justify who we are. By creating someone who knows everything about who Fiona is online, from the name of her first dog (Penelope) to the made-up name of her first primary school teacher (Barbara), but then having Fiona plead “It’s not me”, the work sets up the quandary of ‘who’ Fiona really is if she is not her passwords.

She states: “Maybe I no longer have a presence because she has become my presence.” Is Fiona’s video body a disembodied immaterial projection, or does it move beyond the role of visual object, given form through embodiment? In order to reach a better understanding of the body as embodied and material, the research looks towards Merleau-Ponty’s theory of embodied subjectivity and the body made tangible.

Following Merleau-Ponty’s conception of embodied subjectivity, *Fiona71* opens itself up to embodied and affective viewing. Fiona’s body has the tangible post-fight markings of bruises and wounds on it. The viewer may not have experienced a black eye personally, but they understand what the pain of a bruise feels like, so they already have this physical connection. Further, Fiona speaks directly to the viewer, looking at the ‘eye’ of the camera, which is a stand-in for the person watching. This is an enactment, following Merleau-Ponty’s theory of embodied subjectivity, of a seeing subject as well as one who is being seen, and an object who can be touched (in this example, physically abused). By extension if we consider the intertwining of the right hand touching the left, if Fiona has been touched, then she can also touch. In *Fiona71*, I as video body am both an embodied subject and embodied object. Fiona can be touched by the look of others, so she is material and further, the viewer reciprocally recognises Fiona as so because they themselves feel the touch of their left hand on their right, therefore actively bringing Fiona into presence for themselves.

As Merleau-Ponty has pointed out, the visible has its own texture, and the visible and tangible are intertwined. This reversibility of the visible and the tangible through Merleau-Ponty’s conception, creates an “intercorporeal being” that exists through movement, touch, vision, and sound where subjects are entangled and interwoven in one another (143). It becomes clear that the video medium, which incorporates all of these qualities, is indeed not only corporeal, or bodily, but intercorporeal. For video,

this means that its intercorporeality creates a deep reciprocity between viewer and video subject/object, creating a relation between body on screen and body watching, collapsing the distance between the two. Continuing down this line of argument, my own performance-based videos present a subject that is not only visible, but tangible, and is by extension interwoven with the viewer watching me. The question arises however, as to whether the two fighting characters in *Fiona71* are embodied. Like Merleau-Ponty's intercorporeal being, the two characters fighting in *Fiona71* exist through movement, vision and importantly, sound. Their punches can be heard throughout the video, as can their breath. While they may be bodies that are keyed into the shot, they are embodied through these bodily aspects. This generates a texture of movement and violence. The viewer knows their bodies through their visual, tactile and auditory existence, and the video has its own texture through these factors, whether the video body is digitally copied, keyed or otherwise. Like Trecartin, in *Fiona71*, I too use *my own body* to enact an *idea* of fleeting, fluid online identity. Referring to Merleau-Ponty's conception of embodiment through the intertwining of the visible and tangible, those bodies are understood as bodies, and further, as *my body* as performer *enacting* an idea.

### A Relation Between Self and Other

Returning to presence and Auslander's view that an artwork has presence when it is our relational recognition and interaction with it that brings it into presence: *a relation between self and other*. Then the recognition of the intercorporeality of video and its viewer brings it into presence. As Jones argues, for presence to exist, the viewing experience must be embodied and relational. It is never unmediated, but through the recognition of self and other can be deeply intersubjective.



Figure 32. Cassandra Tytler, *Fiona71*, 2015, Video

I argue that it is the differentiation between Fiona, who addresses the camera, and the fighting Fionas who are clearly keyed into the scene, that creates presence in 'Speaking Fiona's' video body. It is this visual as well as performance-based interaction that forms a *gestic* action. Here, the *gestic* action becomes a part of the technology of the video piece. The visual aspects to the fighting Fionas' copied, keyed in bodies, where slight blurs of green can be seen around the edges, and where her (their) physical placement in the scene is not 100% spatially correct, set them up as simulacrum within the piece, whereas the speaking Fiona is not. This distinction between Fiona's different video bodies, as well as her embodied address to camera revealing her passwords and identity questions, exist outside the narrative, but at the same time opens it up to make clear the performative nature of online identity. One which brings a body into being (doing something by saying something), while at the same time being both prescriptive and never enough. *Fiona71* uses a para-feminist approach in its unmasking of the essentialising nature of selfhood performed online.

In this chapter I have focused on the body in performance-based video art. I have looked at notions of presence of the live body vs the video body and presented a case through an agreement with Auslander and Jones that it is an embodied reading that creates presence within performance rather than the live body. Further to this, I have presented an example of the body as corporeal and embodied when presented via video. I have discussed Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to the body because it enabled me to open up an understanding of how vision may be embodied, and thus how the viewer may relate to my own performances and body when viewing the videos. I have argued that the video image exists as neither pure subject nor object but as embodied, corporeal and interconnected between the viewer and myself. Focusing so intently on the body as embodied and material was necessary in this chapter to address the corporeal materiality within my practice and where the viewer fits into this. It was necessary to focus on embodiment to give a better understanding of the connections that can be formed between myself as artist and the viewer, who is always present in the making of my artwork. Therefore, I am present as a performer, and the viewer is affectively recognising me as 'live' for them at the moment of watching. If this is true, then a *gestic* action within video art practice is possible.

Through the work of Merleau-Ponty, I have learnt that we both see and are looked at, and that it is the combination of these two things that creates an intertwining between bodies and further, subjectivities. When I consider my own mode of performing to the camera for an imagined spectator, then this intertwining makes sense. I expect to be seen. My performances do not exist in a void, and they are tangible, even through the medium of video. It is this corporeal materiality that is so

important to my practice, both for its connections with the viewer, and for its placement of my screen body as embodied.

Through this research I have learnt that the body cannot be removed from the performed body in video. Whether as representation or not, performance-based video art practice works corporeally. In *Fiona71* with Fiona and the two fighting characters, and *I-BE AREA*, with Trecartin's performance as I-Be and Pasta, the body is performed as a disguised representation. This conscious masking or recodification of the body points to the fact that there is a body under the mask, making the biological body on screen all the more important. If we look again to Merleau-Ponty, this awareness of the body implicates the viewer into the scene being enacted through this recognition of another body. If we consider Trecartin's conception of identity through the relationships one promotes, we must not forget the economic, cultural, gendered and racial factors that contribute to our own positioning, while not making binary assumptions because of these features. By extension, by removing our bodies from this realm we deny the diversity of subjectivities that exist, and meld everyone down to the same body, devoid of difference. Through my performance-based video practice, it is this recognition of the difference of bodies that is necessary to highlight the prejudices and stereotypes that still exist towards certain bodies. I do not want to create one and the same. Through performing as my body enacting a persona, I point to the mechanics of representation within cultural iconography, but still create a connection through embodiment between the viewer and myself. This opening of the viewing experience is para-feminist for its intersubjective connections between different bodies and fluid subjectivities.



Figure 33. Cassandra Tytler, *Tock Tock*, 2016, Video

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## Chapter 2: Performativity as Resistance

A feminist practice that seeks to expose or mock the strictures of gender, to reveal gender-as-appearance, as the effect, not the precondition, of regulatory practices, usually uses some version of the Brechtian A-effect. That is, by alienating (not simply rejecting) iconicity, by foregrounding the expectation of resemblance, the ideology of gender is exposed and thrown back to the spectator.

(Diamond, *Unmasking Mimesis* 47)

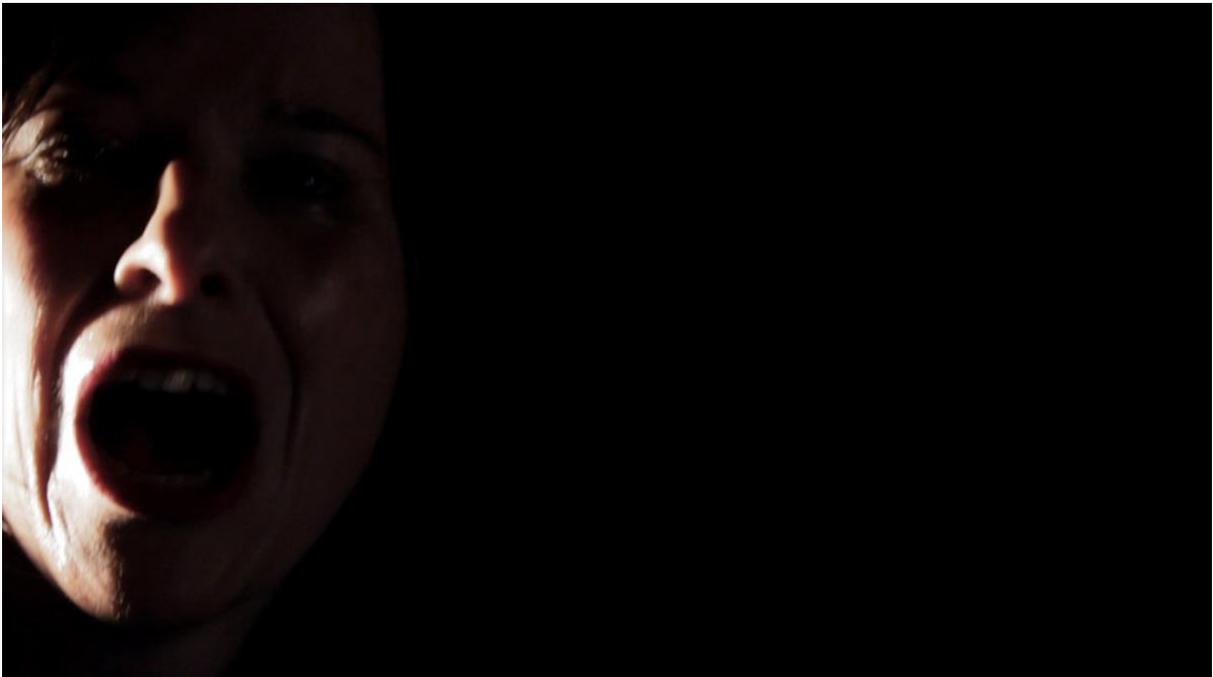


Figure 34. Cassandra Tytler, *There's Something*, 2016, Video

In order to tease out an alignment between performativity within performance practice and the Brechtian notion of *gestus*, this chapter traces the genealogy of performativity from its inception as a number of speech acts to its use as a mode of considered performance within art practice. Within performance studies and visual art, performativity as a technique of performance has many faces. My interest is in those performances that reveal social relations, identity dichotomies and gender as a social construction that is enabled and constrained by power relations. I write to develop an understanding of how notions of performativity have been used in visual arts and performance as methods to expose and playfully debunk the ideological clichés that exist within gender representations. A focused study of performativity in

this chapter enables me to explore how performativity can be used as a mode of feminist and queer (parafeminist) political challenge and a means of fighting the violence of ideological assumptions made in regard to the social body. I discuss performativity because I find that an understanding of its techniques within performance enables me to more deeply understand the Brechtian notion of the *gestic* action. It is my aim in this thesis to align these two techniques. My argument is that techniques within *gestic* action can be similar to the conscious or considered performative, and that the two methods can form along similar lines and can be used to create a relational parafeminist politics of resistance.

I will explore whether performativity can be used as a conscious approach to a politics of performance, as well as trace the various voices that have been a part of this debate. I will begin with a discussion of performativity as a type of speech act conceived by J. L. Austin, and from there through a discussion of Derridean citationality adapted by Butler in her research on gender performativity, will trace the arguments for video art performance as a space where performative acts can be used by myself as performer, and read and grappled with discursively by the viewer, in a conscious way.

By focusing on video performative practice as a deliberate and engaged form of praxis, my aim is to investigate how such performance can figure within the political, specifically in relation to an unmasking of gender norms and ideals. The disciplining of bodies is a form of symbolic violence in that it is a regulatory and coercive process enacted upon the subject that affects them physically, psychically and culturally. My aim is to unmask this through a considered use of performance, which uses a set of performative tactics traced through the research. I believe that modes of performative practice such as theatrical rage, disidentification and drag are part of the essence of my technique. In order to explore these ideas further I also look to performance scholars Sedgwick, Muñoz and Jones, who consider performativity as a mode of enactment that can be used within performance practice to open spaces of resistance to normalizing and disciplining ideological forces, and open up possibilities for multiple and unfixed representations of subjecthood and identity.

### **You Must Not Be Joking**

Philosopher John L. Austin defined “performative utterances”, or “performatives” as speech acts that enact the outcome that they perform. These acts are usually declarative statements that certify authoritative power, mostly through systems of law and governance. Austin differentiated between constative and performative speech acts, the former being words that describe a state of affairs, and the latter being declarations that achieve an outcome or action through being spoken. This was provided they met a number of conditions, such as being spoken in the first person

singular present indicative active form with verbs such as “promise”, “bet”, “bequeath”, “christen” “apologise”, “dare”, that make explicit “what precise action it is that is being performed by the issuing of the utterance” (61); also the speaker “must not be joking” (9); and the speaker must be recognised by witnesses to have the authority to enact the performative.

The speaking of an act into being means that it can be passed through law. In other words, a performative does not describe the act being done, but does or achieves the act by speaking it. As an example, when a celebrant marries two people, the act of saying “I now pronounce you man and wife (or wife and wife, etc).” fulfills the dual outcome of performing discourse while also legally enacting it upon a couple in the company of witnesses. Therefore, performatives succeed in both performing an action and also binding that action through law. Performatives often comprise legal sentences, baptisms, inaugurations and declarations of ownership, but they can also come in the form of a promise, a warning or a bet. In this instance, rather than being spoken by a person of authority, it is the witness to the event who is necessary. The witness’s presence finalizes its outcome. However, as Parker and Sedgwick state in their introduction to *Performativity and Performance*, there must be an agreement of values towards the act being spoken between speaker and witness for the performative speech act to be successful, or in Austin’s words, to have “uptake”.

Austin re-configured his approach to constatives and performatives in his later lectures, where he decided that they are really doing the same thing, as you can use the words to describe what you are doing, or not, but the outcome is still the same. For example, “I liken x to y” or “I analyse x as y” ... Here we both do the likening and assert that there is a likeness by means of one compendious phrase of at least a quasi-performative character ... We cannot assume that they are purely descriptive” (90). In his later writings, Austin distinguished between three types of speech acts: the locutionary, the illocutionary and the perlocutionary. The locutionary act is saying something that is understood to have a certain sense and reference “which ... is roughly equivalent to ‘meaning’ in the traditional sense” (108); the illocutionary act performs the act being spoken, and the perlocutionary is the affect the utterance has on those being spoken to. When the illocutionary act successfully performs what its speaker intended, it is described as having “uptake” and has “happily” been performed. For example, an apology, which has “the force of an apology and the fact that the apology was *accepted*” (Gould 29).

However, for Austin, speech cannot “act” in of itself. Austin gives the example of someone walking up to a ship, breaking a bottle, and “naming” the ship “Mr. Stalin” (23). Even though the person has gone through the act of naming, the action is void, because this is not the proper person recognised as the one to perform the naming.

Other speech acts that are excluded, and in particular most important for this research, are poetry and theatre. To quote Austin:

we are deliberately at present excluding. I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. (22)

Austin described these kinds of acts as parasitic. In *Signature, Event, Context*, Jacques Derrida took issue with Austin's exclusion of parasitic speech acts, arguing that citationality is necessary to make a performative 'successful'. He states:

Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a "coded" or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a "citation"? (18)

Derrida argued that for the performative speech act to have its power, then the speech used must *already* be recognised as having value, and it is through citation and repetition that its value has meaning and authority. That is not to say that if an actor priest says the marriage vows to two actors that they are legally married, but in the context of a play or film, they are *understood* to be married because of the words that are used having been citations and therefore universally recognised. This, according to Derrida, is the very nature of communication.

### **A Pervasive Theatricality**

This reading of the iterability of a performative utterance has been taken up by performance scholars, as it opens up the possibility of "a pervasive theatricality common to stage and world alike", (*Performativity and Performance* 4) for if the performative can be extended into theatre, art practice and the poetic as an iteration, then it expands its scope as a technique that cites and can therefore disrupt the power to speak the law. If a performer can enact the power of law through its citation, then a whole range of possibilities become apparent for a deflating of law or figures of the law in their appropriation of performative utterances. The question becomes about technique of performance in using performativity as a tool. Is the performative utterance achievable solely through language? Does the "theatricality" of world need to be made apparent through the register of the performance? How is it that the performance can create an embodied politics of resistance?

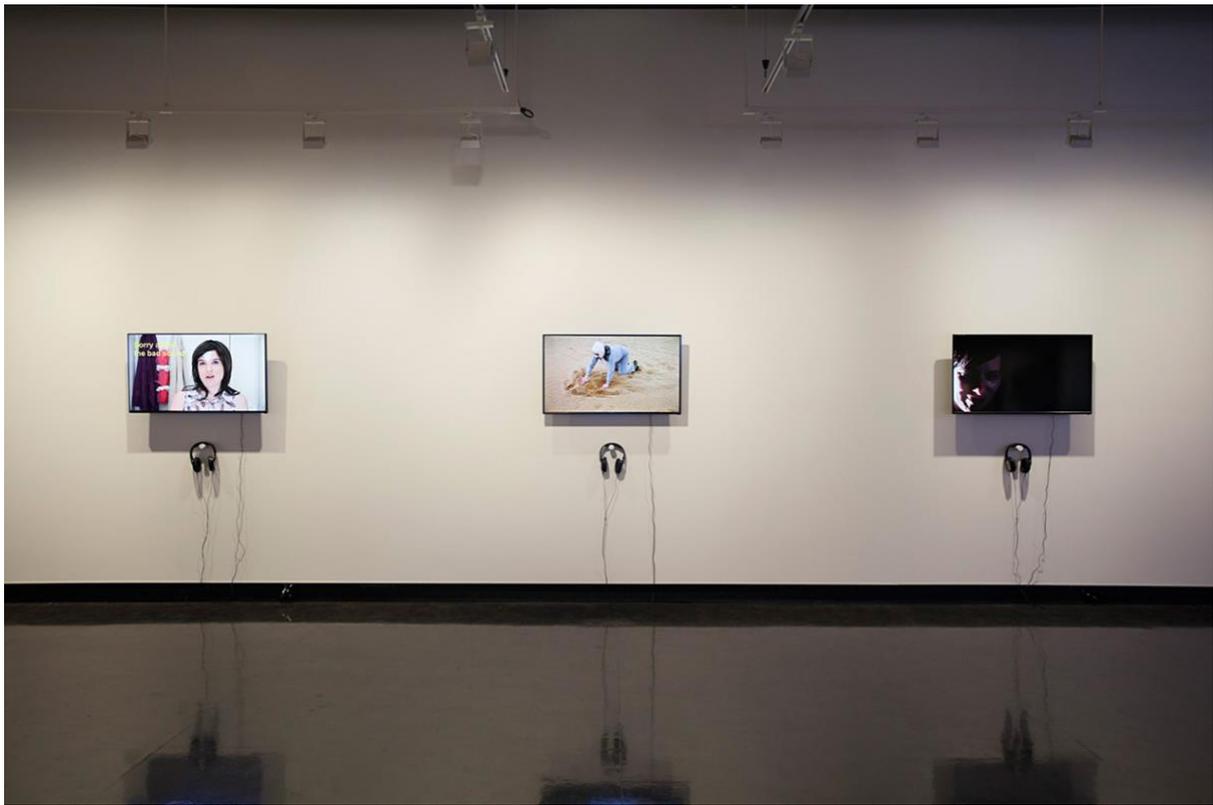


Figure 35. Cassandra Tytler, Detail from exhibition *Indisposed*, Counihan Gallery in Brunswick, 2016, Photo: Clare Rae

### It's a Girl

Butler extended performativity from Austin's original conception of it as a speech act embodied solely in *words* and opened it up further to gender as a performative *act*. Butler was influenced by Jacques Derrida's understanding of performativity as iterative (citational and repetitive). She believed that through the act of citation of law, power is endorsed. She agreed with Derrida that speech is citational and gains its authority through the repetition of discursive signals and systems of power. Butler points to the fact that it is not through the will of the speaker, nor through his or her subjectivity that power becomes binding, "but in the citational legacy by which a contemporary 'act' emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions". (*Bodies* 171) She goes on to argue that within these repetitive citations of power, that the subject or the "I" does not figure within the enunciated discourse but exists once it is named *within* it: "the discursive position of social recognition precedes and conditions the formation of the subject: recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms the subject". (171) Therefore, rather than a subject that preexists an utterance or a deed, the subject is formed as a specific gender in that premiere enunciation, usually by the doctor, that "it's a girl". That enunciation:

does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalized [sic] effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm (xvii).

Butler extended Austin's speech acts theory to (initially) focus specifically on the performativity of gender. According to Butler, we perform a normalised, heterosexual version of femininity and masculinity and have it performed to us unconsciously through citation and repetition from the moment we are born. In so doing, through this unconscious embodiment of one's assigned gender, what we enact becomes normalised and appears "natural". To quote Butler:

Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from the relations of discipline, regulation, punishment. Indeed, there is no "one" who takes on a gender norm. On the contrary, this citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a "one", to become viable as "one", where subject formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms. (Bodies 177)

Butler highlights the fact that we perform our gender in order to become a recognised social subject, rather than being born as one. It is for this reason that gender performativity is an obligatory, forced and regulatory activity. This means that one embodies gender as part of the social discourse, and our conception of our gendered subjectivity is in relation to often unconscious controlling factors within the social structure we are a part of, rather than coming from an innate ontology. Here gender becomes a bodily mode where ideals such as one's desirability, economic situation or involvement in social groupings are established in accordance to how one performs their gender in and through time. Those who do not fit normative and dominant principles (heterosexual, reproductive, etc.) valued in their enactments of gender are considered outsiders and can be socially punished and disciplined. White, cisgender, heterosexual men are at the top of this socializing system. To quote Butler:

We can understand this conclusion to be the necessary result of a heterosexualized and masculine observational point of view that takes lesbian sexuality to be a refusal of sexuality per se only because sexuality is presumed to be heterosexual, and the observer, here constructed as the heterosexual male, is clearly being refused. (Gender Trouble 67)

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler made sure to stipulate that one was not a free agent in determining or choosing their gender. She stated, “I never did think that gender was like clothes, or that clothes make the woman”, (231) and later:

In no sense can it be concluded that the part of gender that is performed is therefore the “truth” of gender; performance as bounded “act” is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performance and in that sense cannot be taken as a fabrication of the performer’s “will” or “choice”; further, what is “performed” works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake. (234)

This clear segregation of performativity from performance may seem to create a stumbling block for my research endeavor in aligning performance techniques within performativity to an engaged and political performance practice. However, Butler saw “gender parody” as a technique of revealing the essentialising, ideologically driven, assumptions of gender. She said, “*in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency*” (Butler’s emphasis *Gender Trouble* 137). Therefore, gender normativity is repeated through drag performance, but can be displaced through this repetition. One of the things that this thesis argues is that a considered performance practice that unmask ideological practices in relation to gender can exist through an understanding of performativity’s link with power relations that regulate and discipline. It is this unveiling of ideological practices through performance that creates a resistance to these norms through an embodied opposition.

### **The Shadow of Theory**

So far, I have focused my writing on performativity within the social and political realm. Through a reading of Jacques Derrida and his conception of the iterability of the performative utterance, I have traced a path where performativity can and does exist within performance-based works. I now want to go further in an understanding of how this can work on a practical level, but also as a mode of political engagement.

Diamond speaks to the possibility of theatrical performance working within modes of performativity, specifically in relation to the performer’s body. While she does not refute Butler’s notion that gender performativity is a compulsory act that is naturalised through regulating power relations and cannot be put on and shed at will,

she does find a narrowness in her exclusion of theatre as a mode of conscious enactment of performativity. She says:

Though ‘performativity’ is not an ‘act’ but a ‘reiteration’ or ‘citation,’ why should we restrict its iterative sites to theory and to the theorist’s acts of seeing? Theater, [sic] too, is theory, ‘or a shadow of it.’ Does that shadow always mean humanist recuperation into representation? Performance, as I have written elsewhere, is the site in which performativity materializes in concentrated form, where the ‘concealed or dissimulated conventions’ of which acts are mere repetitions might be investigated and reimagined. (*Unmaking Mimesis* 47)

It is here where my approach to performativity in performance lies. As Derrida writes, the performative is always a citation of something, and in order for it to be successfully enacted it must be understood to have the power to perform it. So too gender performativity, which is a continued reiteration of regulatory norms. It is through an extension of critical theory to include praxis as another site of enquiry that performance can and does have a place to explore and comment on power relations and its affects on bodies. Diamond further makes the point that when performativity is configured in a performance, “questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations, of emotional and political effects, all become discussable” (*Performance Politics* 5). It is through the highlighting of performativity *in performance* that I am able to discuss controlling and constrictive notions of gender, as well as work towards resisting the normalizing concepts enacted upon the social body through artwork.

In order to reach an understanding of where the viewer sits in regard to performativity within performance practice, it is necessary once more to return to theory to draw paths and create links between knowledge and practice.

### **Hey You There! Shame on You!!**

Going back to Austin, for there to be “uptake” in the performative utterance, the person speaking must be recognised as the correct and official person to do so, and the interlocutor must understand the dynamics of the utterance for it to be “felicitous”. Therefore, all parties in the exchange can be said to be performing the dominant ideology. To ground this point, I will look to Louis Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, particularly his notion of hailing and interpellation in highlighting the social subject’s participation in their own ideological formation:

That very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing ... can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!" Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one hundred and eighty degree physical conversion, he comes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized [sic] that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that "it was really him who was hailed" (and not someone else). Experience shows that the practical telecommunication of hailings is such that they hardly ever miss their man: verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes [sic] that it is really him who is being hailed (162-63).

According to Althusser, it is through or *by* ideology that subjects come into being. In the example above, the subject is brought into being *through ideology*, by virtue of being addressed and responding. To be "hailed" and recognise oneself as such, in the Austinian sense, is where "uptake" is enacted. As Shannon Jackson notes, "that famous "turn" was a form of uptake that ensured the felicitousness of ideology's performative reach". (Jackson 2014) Althusser believed that the subject comes to exist through our culture's values, which are internalized as if they are our own. In this sense ideology and the subject cannot be separated. Therefore, identity is assigned to us by culture, which is a product of the state. Althusser named this process "interpellation".

Butler spoke to the interpellation of gender saying that one is not a human until brought into the fold of gender, where the doctor names the "it" a "he" or a "she", "and in that naming, the girl is "girled", brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender". (*Bodies* xvii) From there the child's named gender is reiterated over and over, reinforcing the doctrine of "normality" of their gender. As Sarah Chinn notes, interpellation is the form of a performative speech act, where the naming of "it's a girl" or "it's a boy" by the doctor is simultaneously reiterating ideology and creating a subject.

If ideology is lived through the body through its interpellation into social structures and identifications, then it speaks to the *materiality* of ideology. It gives us an idea of how subjects are positioned and named within social systems by those with the authority and power to determine and class. This also opens up a space where performativity within performance-based art practice can have an impact. It is the body in performance, performatively enacting ideology through both citation and its very materiality.

In their introduction to *Performativity and Performance*, Andrew Parker and Sedgwick point to the contradictions within the performative, and how disruption can occur according to the consensus between the speaker and the witness; that is, the uptake. Further they point to the contradictions and potential holes in the uptake depending on the “space of reception”, the way speakers and those listening exist in the world through ideology and whether they are interpellated within the same social positionality (7). They use the example of the dare to push their point, saying that the dare might not be important to the addressee, depending on their relationship to “wussiness”, and therefore may not find it vital to fulfill the dare. Further, the witness may also have an unclear reaction to “wussiness”, and not expect or encourage the daree to fulfill the dare.

"I dare you" invokes the presumption, but only the presumption, of a consensus between speaker and witnesses, and to some extent between all of them and the addressee. The presumption is embodied in the lack of a formulaic negative response to being dared, or to being interpellated as witness to a dare. The fascinating and powerful class of negative performatives - disavowal, renunciation, repudiation, "count me out" - is marked, in almost every instance, by the asymmetrical property of being much less prone to becoming conventional than the positive performatives.  
(9)

They go further in analysing the performative's relation to the receiver / witness in their discussion of marriage. Within the marriage ceremony, there is the sanctioned power of the state; the “I” of the individual “I do”, which then becomes “we”; and the witness(es) to the declaration. Yet not everyone is free to marry. This creates an infelicity for those acting as witnesses. The “lie” of the uptake is hidden within the fact that the marriage ceremony does not in fact interpellate everyone. Those who approve of the union but are not sanctioned by the state to marry themselves due to their sexuality, may not be interpellated as true witnesses or further, true subjects, and therefore according to Parker and Sedgwick, are partaking in what they named queer performativity. As they ask: “where does that get us but to the topic of marriage itself as theater?” (9) The uptake of the marriage ceremony is infelicitous when the witnesses are not interpellated as subjects who can truly witness the performative.

Sedgwick further clarifies this in *Queer Performativity*, Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*, suggesting that for *queer* performativity, that the performative “shame on you” better illustrates the constitution of the queer subject. She argues that “shame on you” is a performative because it fulfills its illocutionary aim by transmitting shame to the person being spoken to, and also relies on a witness for its force to be enacted.

Importantly however, the pronoun “I” is missing from this performative and there is no explicit verb in the phrase “shame on you”. Instead, the “I” disavows themselves while still performing a performative act. Shame is being projected onto the subject but because of the very nature of feeling shame, the subject being spoken to, as well as the speaker who doesn’t announce themselves as “I” through the first-person pronoun, finds it hard to fully come into being. They are always in question. To quote Sedgwick:

The verblessness of this particular performative, then, implies a first person whose singular/plural status, whose past/present/future status, and indeed whose agency/passivity can only be questioned rather than presumed. (4)

Sedgwick finds a connection in shame and performativity because of its very creative, constructive iteration. It both alters and effaces; it avows and denies; it has the potential to transform through theatrical performance.

Returning to the grammatical nature of the phrase “shame on you”, Sedgwick says: “the emergence of the first person, of the singular, of the present, of the active, and of the indicative are all questions, rather than presumptions, for queer performativity”. (4) Sedgwick notes that the term “queer” itself, while reclaiming its original meaning as insult, also can never escape its original connotations, which commenced in shame. Further, shame is “contagious” and can be transferred from one person to another. (Touching Feeling 64) “That’s the double movement shame makes: toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality.” (37) Therefore, the subject is never fixed or stably identified, but instead fluid and changing. Further to this, queer performativity is only accomplished in relational terms. Performativity, and therefore queer subjectivity, requires the witness in order to come into being. As Sedgwick says:

“Queer” seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person’s undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation. A hypothesis worth making explicit: that there are important senses in which “queer” can signify only *when attached to the first person*. (Sedgwick’s emphasis *Tendencies* 9)

Queer in this sense is a dramatization of the “locutionary position itself” (9), where to speak about oneself as queer speaks to:

the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or

*can't be made*) to signify monolithically. (8)

In this sense, performativity can be seen as a relational dance between performer and viewer or a conversation between actor and witness. Sedgwick also makes the link between shame, performativity and theatricality: “Shame is the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity and – performativity” (*Touching Feeling* 38). Here, Sedgwick aligns the performative of the speech act, and the performative of the theatrical. In reference to the theatrical and its links with or disavowals of shame within performativity, Butler sees the political promise in what she terms “theatrical rage” of queer performance:

To the extent that shame is produced as the stigma not only of AIDS, but also of queerness, where the latter is understood through homophobic causalities as the - cause and - manifestation of the illness, theatrical rage is part of the public resistance to that interpellation of shame. Mobilized by the injuries of homophobia, theatrical rage reiterates those injuries precisely through an - acting out, one that does not merely repeat or recite those injuries, but that also deploys a hyperbolic display of death and injury to overwhelm the epistemic resistance to AIDS and to the graphics of suffering, or a hyperbolic display of kissing to shatter the epistemic blindness to an increasingly graphic and public homosexuality. (*Bodies* 178)

She argues that, “to oppose the theatrical to the political within contemporary queer politics is ... an impossibility” (177). Therefore, while Butler does not link performance to performativity, her embrace of the theatricality of the performative used within activism as an act of resistance, speaks to my own aims within my video art practice. In their discussion of the performer Divine, Michael Moon and Eve Sedgwick point to something like theatrical rage within her performance. They discuss how Divine consciously and aggressively disavows the “accepted” effeminacy within the typical drag performance, which uses the accretions of feminine disguise such as wigs and high heels. Instead, she inhabits effeminacy with her body, rejecting the agreed upon codes of size, colour, and gesture, and in that act “flings the open secrets of drag performance in the faces of her audience: that unsanitized drag disgusts and infuriates many people” (Divinity 220). Divine’s performance highlights the danger inherent within breaking the codes of gender. It is this theatricality of performance of gender, thrown in the faces of viewers that is the very aspect that can lead to violence, threatened or actual while holding oneself on the street. In this sense Divine is exposing the performativity of gender *through* the theatricality of her performances. As Sarah Chinn notes: “we can’t not choose shame, just as we can’t not choose our

gender, but Divine transforms that coercion into an embrace” (qtd. in Claeys 71).

It is here that the working method within performative art unveils itself through these different tactics used to shape meaning through artwork. Most specifically, the conditional and tenuous sphere of impact and influence that is brought about according to the space and environment (politically and otherwise) it is presented in, and relationally, through the viewer (or witness). Performative video performance is not only about what it represents. Instead, if we turn to Sedgwick, the question about performative art is what it does through what it says, and always in relation to its witness (or viewer or audience).



Figure 36. Cassandra Tytler, *Thwack* (part 1), 2016, Video

### Chipping Away at the Foundations

Michel Pêcheux took Althusser’s theory of interpellation in order to look at the construction of the subject within ideology further, breaking it down into three categories. The first is “identification”, where the “good subject” acts within the prescribed boundaries of culture and identity inside the social realm, not stepping outside or questioning what is understood as normal within this space. The second category is where the “bad subject” rebels against socially imposed identity, railing against images and ideologies and “counteridentifying” with other symbols of social subjectivity. Pêcheux saw this technique of rebellion as a possible negative. He argued that by going against the dominant ideology in such a marked way, one was actually propping its power up by reinforcing it through “counterdomination”. The third category however, was more hopeful as a site for resistance. This category was

“disidentification”. Disidentification was seen by Pêcheux as a space where resistance was possible from within, therefore giving marginalized subjects agency to work through the way they have been represented and placed within institutional discourse. The fight against dominant ideology here was considered as something coming from inside the existing culture, undermining it from within. Here structural change was seen as possible through individual agents, enacting critique through disidentification.

Muñoz has taken Pêcheux’s construction of disidentification, and focused it specifically as a mode of performance where the subject is inside ideology, working through and against its dominant form in order to chip away at its foundations, creating structural change from within while recognising localized and individualized spaces of resistance. In order to disidentify and therefore create acts of resistance to hegemonic and demonizing public discourses, one works within and around the dominant culture, rather than openly rallying against it. Disidentification is a theory about how people who fit into minority subject categories within the Eurocentric or American social sphere have used disidentification as a tactic to both combat and survive restrictive, hegemonic assumptions about their identities. It is a mode of reworking or reenacting social identity categories in order to claim an identity that circumvents one’s position as raced, gendered or sexualized within the normative status quo. In this sense, the seeming fixity of identity is un-fixed in performance. Its process is a play between production and reception, so is never determined, but is a working through of performative strategies. Muñoz argues against a universalizing conception of social subjects, citing disidentification as a technique that can crack open monocausal cultural messages and representations.

When looking towards my own practice and trying to find tangible ways that my performance-based video work can use performance as a political tool, disidentification is key to my approach. As mapped out above, performance can use techniques of performativity, which involve citation and unfixed and changing enactments of subjectivities. Performance includes a body in representation that can also resist representation’s fixity. Performance, like performativity, is relational and cannot disavow the viewer / witness. However, I am not outside of the dominant culture and ideologies that exist within the Australian status quo. Therefore, my performances have taken on disidentification as one of its tactics in order to point to disciplining and regulatory practices enacted upon gender, and within this create a space for my voice.

Muñoz points to the individual in these forms of disidentification and how this form of enactment is inside cultural codes, but outside harmful essentialist understandings of identity, turning understanding on its head through an individualised reworking of majoritarian understanding, and creating slippages and crevices of meaning through

this renegotiation of what it means to be subjects. He specifically looks at queer latino/a performers in the US who have used disidentification as a tactic to resist what he refers to as the majoritarian viewpoint of minoritarian subjects. The performances that he focuses on belong to the most part, within subcultures, such as underground performance and visual art.

Muñoz looks towards performance artist Carmelita Tropicana naming her performances “cubana dyke camp” (*Disidentifications* 124): a cultural rendering, which is a conscious performance both from her perspective, as well as that of the viewers. This enunciated performance, is important in that it clearly situates itself as a performance of characters who fit cultural stereotypes seen within dominant ideologies. The fact that Carmelita Tropicana is enacting these figures for us as performer, positions her within and outside dominant identity practices of race, gender and sexuality. She is not seen only as a performance artist, but as being in the process of performing these cultural texts and ravaging their very place within the hegemony to hold authority. This is a strategic move within camp performativity, where the use of characters who enact dominant identities in a heightened way, are attacking from the inside, collapsing the enacted identity’s authority as a realistic example of a social subject. These performative moves create emotionally captivating subjects who are anti-essentialist, hybrid and beyond stereotypes.

Turning to Brecht, disidentification is an act of the *Verfremdungseffekt*. The distancing between being a character while also being a performer, clearly divided between the two, then opens a space for the viewer where they can see the political positioning of the character, and further, themselves as society’s product.

In relation to this research, Eve Sedgwick’s argument for performativity as innately theatrical because of its changing or non-fixed uptake; Diamond’s expansion of the performative within theatrical praxis; Butler’s argument for drag as exposing gender performativity itself and theatrical rage as a technique that includes activism within performance; and Althusser’s theory of interpellation of the social subject, give me a working mode or method to see performativity as a technique that can be utilized in speaking through ideology and the body within my performance-based video art practice. I would now like to trace how I see performativity working within performance and then further, the techniques interpolated within it that are essential to my own practice as a mode of political resistance.

### ***I’m Sorry: Addressing the Viewer in the Gallery Space***

To explore how performativity and techniques within it are used within my own work, I will look towards one of my own video installations, *I’m Sorry*. *I’m Sorry* positions the

viewer inside a mock domestic setting. It is a wooden structure, which looks like a wooden shed from the outside that they must enter in order to experience the full artwork. Once the viewer enters the space, they are in a faux lounge room with two windows on either side of them (the windows are actually screens). The sound of footsteps can be heard circling the space. Suddenly a male figure starts knocking at one window. He is performed by myself, disguised as a man, who keeps saying: “I’m sorry”, knocking as if he wants to be let in. He walks around the space (the sound of footsteps circles the viewer) to the next window and knocks while apologising again. As time goes on the apologies become more and more aggressive and the knocking more violent.



Figures 37. Cassandra Tytler, Installation detail from exhibition *I'm Sorry*, Trocadero Art Space, 2016

Click image to watch documentation of installation, or go to: <http://vimeo.com/178697111>

It is here I would like to circle back to Austin and look further at the perlocutionary act. As Austin notes, language changes and is understood differently according to the way in which we use it. There are questions that arise as to our aim in the language we use – are we advising, suggesting, giving an order, promising, stating an intention and so on (*Words* 99). Austin describes perlocutionary acts as “what we bring about or achieve by saying something” (108). When I use a performative utterance, I am hoping that my illocutionary act has the perlocutionary effect of convincing / warning / suggesting and so on. The perlocutionary acts may not, however, have the desired outcome, or may be reacted to in different ways by different people. To quote Timothy Gould: “The perlocutionary consequences (alarm, influence, perplexity, resolve, and so on) may not be forthcoming” (Gould 29). This does not necessarily mean that the

illocutionary act does not have uptake, but points to the temporality of performative utterances. Gould names this gap between the uptake and lack of desired effect "illocutionary suspense" or "perlocutionary delay (31)."

Within *I'm Sorry*, if the man (myself) performatively utters "I'm sorry" (an illocutionary act, the locutionary act being "I am apologising to you") while violently banging on a window (video screen), then what is the perlocutionary act? If the performer repeats the same phrase again and again, slowly changing registers of the voice, how does this affectively change its reception? According to Austin, this performative would be "infelicitous" as it does not adhere to the conditions of the act, namely that I am a performer in a video artwork, and therefore parasitic, falling "under the doctrine of *etiolations* of language" (Austin's emphasis 22). However, Derrida's notion of iterability, makes possible this performative speech act ("I'm sorry") as a citation, and opens up a whole range of possibilities of meaning and reception. For one, the illocutionary uptake may be felicitous if the person believes that I as performer am really sincerely sorry; however, I am not apologising to them alone as individuals, or at least my apology is being experienced by a number of viewers who experience the apology.

This means that the "I'm sorry" uttered, is most likely experienced in different ways by each person it is said to. So, the perlocutionary act changes, or as Timothy Gould might say, there is illocutionary suspense and perlocutionary delay. According to Gould, this is not a negative, but allows a space "between the possibility of sense and the possibility of the tyranny of sense". ("Unhappy Performative" 41) The subject being spoken to is not automatically interpellated into the scene. They do not turn around to the hailing of "hey you / I'm sorry". Therefore through "illocutionary suspense" or "perlocutionary delay" a question-forms. This has the potential to place the viewer both inside and outside of the ideological "scene". They are either recognising the apology to themselves, or seeing the man from outside of themselves, speaking to other subjects who are interpellated. This delay and suspense speaks to the nature of queer performativity. It is not that the performative utterance "I'm sorry" is unhappy. Instead, the viewer / witness is unfixed, just like the queer subject. The illocutionary uptake is further suspended because it is unclear why I am apologising.

This is where citation becomes important. My performative utterance is the "I'm sorry" of domestic violence, the passive aggressive "I'm sorry" of anger at the victim, the "I'm sorry" for having been caught, the "I'm sorry" for the number of deaths within Australia due to violence in the home, the "I'm sorry" for the patriarchal systems that create this kind of violence. In argument against Austin's parasitical language as a distinction between normal uses of language and those that are etiolated, Derrida says that language has "its internal and positive condition of possibility" (Signature, Event,

Context 17) and that as with writing, even with speech, there is always the problem of interpreting the objective of the speaker.

the iterability of the mark does not leave any of the philosophical oppositions which govern the idealizing abstraction intact (for instance, serious/ non-serious, literal/metaphorical or sarcastic, ordinary/parasitical, strict/nonstrict, etc.). Iterability blurs a priori the dividing-line that passes between these opposed terms, "corrupting" it if you like, contaminating it parasitically, qua limit. What is re-markable about the mark includes the margin within the mark. The line delineating the margin can therefore never be determined rigorously, it is never pure and simple. The mark is re-markable in that it "is" also its margin (70).

Figure 38. Cassandra Tytler, Installation detail from exhibition *I'm Sorry*, Trocadero Art Space, 2016

It is through the iterability of the mark, speech act, or text, that it is obscured once it is communicated. Therefore, with the utterance "I'm sorry", I am performatively



enacting the politics behind the phrase through its repetition.

Further, as Butler says in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, the force and meaning of a performative utterance is not necessarily set by prior enactments or readings, but instead can gain its power through a break with its usual context, thus giving the performative a potential political force, and possibly authority. She gives the

example of acts of hate-speech being reworked and flipped so that the one being addressed can reclaim the words as their own and gain power over them. The words “assume a life and a purpose for which they were never intended.” (161) Or on the other hand, when a speech act adopts authorization in the course of a performance in a space where authorization was not originally given, it “may anticipate and instate altered contexts for its future reception” (160). Butler gives the example of Rosa Parks sitting at the front of the bus, where previous to this there was never a space for her to do so.

By understanding acts within social spaces as reiterations, if someone claims the right to do something when they have had no previous entitlement to do so, then this bestows authority on the act, thereby dethroning traditional codes of legitimacy. This is where performativity within performance practice can have very real and valid contestations to power and acts of agency. To recontextualise speech acts and physical spaces by reclaiming them, one is speaking to their citational legacy and flipping them with their renewed context. It also speaks to the perlocutionary act: the performative illocutionary act has the force in its new context to affect the viewer in new and politically authoritative perlocutionary ways.

With *I'm Sorry*, presenting the citation of a house, exhibited in a gallery, I am giving my performance political authority. The house fits within the dominant representation of family home. The family featuring mother, father and 2.5 children. To Quote Philip Brophy in his review of the work in *Realtime Arts* “[t]his work is not about where you are in the gallery: it’s about where this box comes from ... one is now trapped inside this portal to the domestic world where shit happens” (Brophy). This space of the house is used as a tool to chip away at the foundations of familial normativity. One that exists within patriarchy and whose victims are those dominated by the power relations that exist through the patriarchal supplement.

Further to this, I as performer am white, and I am performing as a white man. As mentioned in the introduction, whiteness is produced within discourse and also linked to social domination. (See Frankenberg 1993) Further, whiteness is structured as ‘natural’ (with the implication being that not to be white is ‘unnatural’) and therefore, structured as invisible. To quote Homi Bhabha in *The White Stuff*, whiteness “resembles what house painters call a primer, a base color [sic] that regulates all others, a norm that spectacularly or stealthily underlies powerful social values” (Bhabha). Whiteness, and even more specifically *cisgender male whiteness* in *I'm Sorry* becomes visible through its recontextualization through performance. Bhabha discusses that to reveal whiteness is to reveal its combative parts and thereby unmask the violence behind its existence:

Since "whiteness" naturalizes the claim to social power and epistemological privilege, displacing its position cannot be achieved by raising the "gaze of the other" or by provoking the "return" of the repressed or the oppressed. The subversive move is to reveal within the very integuments of "whiteness" the agonistic elements that make it the unsettled, disturbed form of authority that it is - the incommensurable "differences" that it must surmount; the histories of trauma and terror that it must perpetrate and from which it must protect itself; the amnesia it imposes on itself; the violence it inflicts in the process of becoming a transparent and transcendent force of authority. (Bhabha)

*I'm Sorry's* white, cisgender man at the window implodes the authority of white normativity promoted within patriarchal, cissexist, white-supremacist Australian culture through its existence as a quotation. It also grants authority to the act of my performance which unseats traditional codes of legitimacy of power being held by the cisgender white man.

I am not suggesting that *I'm Sorry* has the force to bring about a change in law; however, I would like to suggest that it is presenting a politics of resistance. One that is relational, therefore creating a space where the address or viewer is integral to the work. In this sense, there is a certain "asking of something" in my address. A request for a recognition for the violence enacted on bodies within the domestic space because of a simplistic heralding of an aggressive type of masculinity within Australian society. I enact the position of the "patriarch" within the house, who has lost control by being shut out of the space. The only way he can come back inside is to apologise to the person inside. The person inside is 'outside' in that they are 'audience' to a scene of violence from the inside. They are also symbolically keepers of the access to that space. So that the viewer becomes implicated in both the cycle of violence and also potentially active agents in preventing it. The repetition of the words and change in register of the man's delivery, positions the viewer in a relational mode of address. They are being spoken to directly from outside the house, and they are being asked to decipher what the words "I'm sorry" might actually mean. On the other hand, they are also being attacked by the man. He is circling their space, (the surround sound speakers create an imaginary sense of the movement of footsteps around the house to follow his movement from window to window) and getting more insistent and aggressive with his knocking.

As performer, (a cisgender woman) I am in drag (as a cisgender man), and my performance could be said to verge on the histrionic. My short hair is slicked back, my eyebrows have been thickened and there is facial stubble stuck to my face. I wear a

black shirt, with added padding to my shoulders. The aim of this performance was to try to both embody this figure of the angry man while rendering his version of masculinity hyperbolic and therefore innately posed. My point was that the gendered stereotype “man” is a construction that comes with imbalanced power relations that play out on the bodies of those within the family structure.

Butler points to the use of hyperbolic theatricality when queer subjects take up the interpellated homophobic cry of “queerness” as their own. Within this citation the theatricality of the queer subject comes to the fore “to the extent that it *mimes and renders hyperbolic* the discursive convention that it also *reverses*.” (*Bodies* 177) I would like to suggest that the mode of my gendered masculine performance constructs a similar outcome, where it is clear through my drag and hyperbolic performance that I am citing constructed masculinity while also disavowing its claim to “naturalness” and therefore undermining its power. Further, I am enacting a form of theatrical rage through placing the viewer in the space of symbolic attack. Within the claustrophobic confines of the lounge room space that they stand in, while being directly addressed, even shouted at, the viewer is witness to my theatrical rage. Through the theatricality of my performance, I force a hyperbolic display on the viewer to shatter complacency towards how masculinity is figured within the Australian hegemony and subsequently violently enacted upon its subjects. This distancing through the hyperbole of the performance is a tactic of disidentification that I use.

### ***I Still Call It Home: “You Can’t Handle the Truth”***

*I Still Call It Home* is an experimental video project. It mixes melodrama and horror to explore the restrictive ideas of feminine beauty that are forced upon women’s bodies. I see these as forces of symbolic violence prescribed upon the body deemed ‘woman’ through structural influences that are repeated and then collectively agreed upon and self-policed.

The video is divided into different scenes that interrupt one another. (Lounge room and bedroom scenes with Mother and Daughter / Teacher-Student / YouTube / Various people demanding-refusing the truth). While there is no narrative cohesion between the scenes, they work together as if in answer to or adding information to what preceded them. I chose this form as my interest isn’t in a narrative outcome, but on the performative subject positions that each performer inhabits.

(Mother/Daughter, Teacher/Student). Within these roles where differing power dynamics exist, discipline and regulation of ideological practices are enacted upon gender. Rather than tracing meaning through narrative, *I Still Call It Home* discursively traces ideology’s constraining practices on the body gendered woman.



Figure 39. Cassandra Tytler, *I Still Call It Home*, 2019, Video

Click image to watch documentation of installation, or go to: <http://vimeo.com/356302168> Password: home

The main sequence takes place in a domestic interior. It is an anxious and heightened conversation between a mother and daughter. The daughter keeps pleading that there is something in the house, while the mother insists that there is nothing. Through the conversation the daughter discovers that the mother has a disgusting red, crusty growth down her shoulder. The mother keeps insisting that there is nothing there, denying the presence of something in the house. She is insistent, but the growth down her back gets more extreme and ends up growing up onto her face.

The mother's growth is an allegory for the symbolic violence that is enacted upon women's bodies within Australia, and it attacks the mother because she is in denial, and actively encourages her daughter to ignore any problems by "covering them up with make-up". She also has her own YouTube channel, where she digitally makes herself both whiter and younger looking, giving make-up advice and judging women who do not present their bodies in the socially sanctioned feminine way.

There are also a number of scenes with a teacher at a blackboard lecturing two students. These lectures are there to both centre my argument about how bodies are constructed through power relations (ie. The "truth" is assumed through how history is framed, and it is people in power who "explain" the truth).



Figure 40. Cassandra Tytler, *I Still Call It Home*, 2019, Video

There are also a number of performers repeating the same lines: “I Want the Truth” and “You Can’t Handle the Truth”. This is a quote from Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson from *A Few Good Men*, it speaks to the covering up of “truths” within the army. It is also a quote which is recognised within pop culture, and repeated in various contexts (*The Simpsons*, *Seinfeld*). I chose to use these lines specifically for their recognition within a popular context, cited by two very well-known actors within the Hollywood system. Both of these actors fulfill a certain style of normative, heterosexual, masculinity within the world. My choice in using well known lines that they use was to point to the citational heritage that exists in them, as well as quietly nodding to the performative legacy that both Jack Nicholson and Tom Cruise exist in. Here the lines are used in reference to the denial of violences enacted towards women’s bodies and also as an answer to the “truth” spoken by the teacher. The sense being that “truth” is ideologically malleable.

The title *I Still Call it Home* references the Peter Allen song *I Still Call Australia Home*, placing it in a history of Australian suburban and colonial culture. The *home* in the piece is haunting the daughter. She feels unsafe, telling her mother “there is something in the house”, while the mother denies a presence. The daughter states: “My skin is not my own at night. It wants my body but hates my body”. The allusion here is towards sexual violence within the home, but also to the way women’s bodies are figured culturally as objects of sexualisation and disgust. The name “I Still Call It Home” relates to the contradiction of the home being a safe space but also where acts of violence take place, where one is haunted by presences or where one is conditioned to ignore and cover up improprieties because they are “causing trouble”. Fanning outwards, in the Peter Allen song, “Home” is Australia. Therefore “home” in *I Still Call*

*It Home* is framed both inside a house, and within Australia. Finally, Australia's colonial history exists in the forced reclamation of land as the settler's own, when in fact the Aboriginal people never ceded their sovereignty to the land.

In order to better analyse some of the language within this video, I am including excerpts from the script.

18. INT AGAINST BLACKBOARD

18.

---

TEACHER  
Repeat after me

She turns to the board and writes as she speaks

TEACHER  
I now pronounce you

STUDENT 1  
Guilty!

STUDENT 2  
Disgusting

STUDENT 1  
It's a girl

STUDENT 2  
It's a girl!

STUDENT 1  
Inhuman

TEACHER  
I now pronounce you

STUDENT 1  
Beautiful

STUDENT 2  
You are beautiful.

STUDENT 1

Beautiful

STUDENT 2

She's not ... (pause, then with contempt)  
Revolting ...

STUDENT 2

Filthy! Disgusting!

STUDENT 1

Faeces on the skin!

STUDENT 2

Brown on the skin

24. INT

AGAINST BLACKBOARD

24.

---

Written on the board: The Social Body

TEACHER

I am the teacher. I am telling you the truth!

The truth of the object is through my telling.  
Repeat and repeat again:

(she reads slowly, as if it is a list for  
dictation)

Emotional

Weak

Unclean

Revolting

Lazy

Stupid

Annoying

Difficult

Deserving

These scenes with the teacher addressing the students, is an example of performative interpellation. Here the teacher, the clear example of the authority within ideology is enacting a number of performative utterances, bringing subjects into being through her ideological enunciations. She is the authority or the “law” who performatively pronounces the social body. She interpellates subjects into existence. She uses words often aligned with women (stupid, annoying, difficult) and asks her students to repeat them, iteratively positioning and naming them within the social system. Both the student and the teacher, who are white skinned, use words aligned with people of colour (filthy, disgusting, faeces on the skin, brown on the skin). I will now discuss this in relation to disgust.

Sarah Ahmed points to feelings of disgust that are communicated within society, and the power relations that exist in claiming something as disgusting. She points to Darwin’s disgust at the ‘native savage’s’ naked body and goes on to discuss the condensing of the native’s body and dirt as if subject and object are the same thing.



Figures 4.1. Cassandra Tytler, *I Still Call It Home*, 2019, Video

This relies on a history with the object prior to the meeting. “It is this metonymic contact between objects or signs that allows them to be felt to be disgusting *as if that was* a material or objective quality” (Ahmed’s emphasis *Cultural Emotion* 89). Disgust exists through its repetition in connecting certain objects of disgust with certain bodies. There is the metaphorical spatial distinction between higher and lower body parts, which distinguishes between “higher” and “lower” bodies, and the power inherent in classing and othering the “lower” bodies as disgusting. At the same time, she notes, that to feel disgust is to leave yourself open to the “belowness” of the disgusting, and therefore means you could fall “below the native” (89). This sense of

risking becoming disgusting by feeling it yourself, is similar to Sedgwick's conception of shame as contagious. Ahmed points out that to proclaim something as disgusting is a performative in itself, as it "generates the object that it names" (93) and also requires a witnessing of the cry in order that it create its effect.

Imogen Tyler also points to the witness as a social agent within enunciations of disgust. She argues that it is the collective agreement on what is disgusting that works to influence and restrict the social body. Therefore, disgust acts as relational, where it is the social agreement and its repetition that creates the thing or person that is considered "disgusting". She says that "disgust is political" and gets enacted on certain kinds of bodies in relation to "social relations of power". "It is through repeated citation, then, that a disgust consensus develops which in turn shapes perceptual fields" (*Revolting Subjects* 24). To quote the teacher: "The truth of the object is through my telling. Repeat and repeat again". This performative interpellation of bodies as "beautiful" or "disgusting" is further explored in the YouTube scenes, where the mother is explaining how to make one's skin smooth. To quote: "You want to be fresh and white". Again, it is "whiteness" that the mother is aligning with beauty.

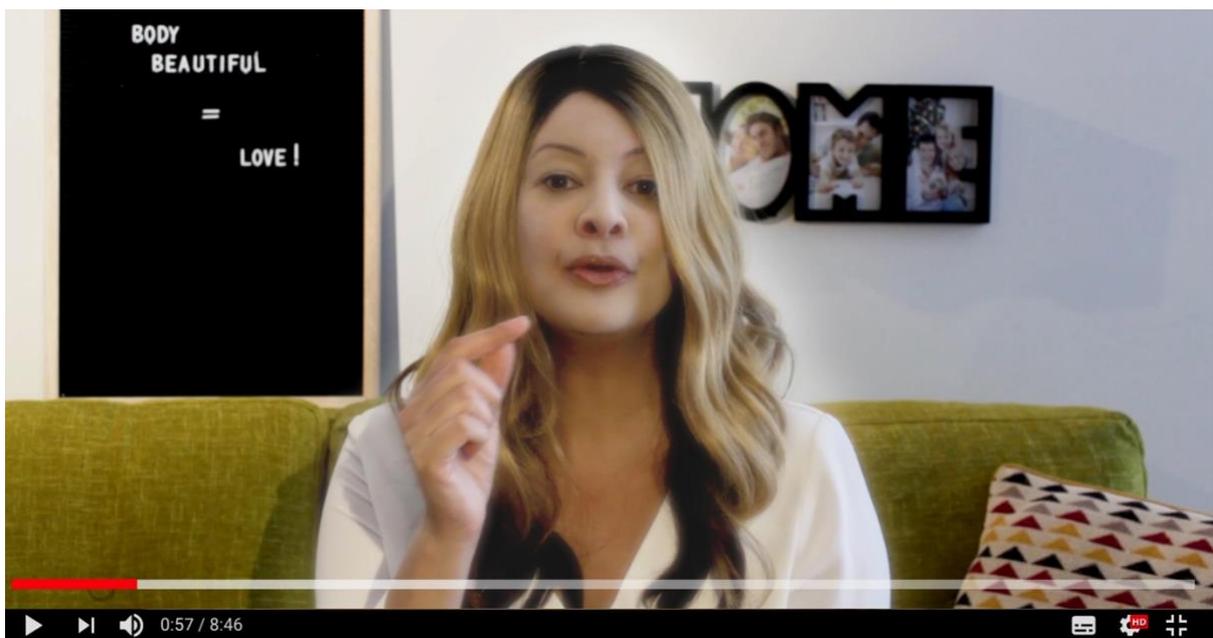


Figure 42. Cassandra Tytler, *I Still Call It Home*, 2019, Video

It is filth or faeces that the student is aligning with the non-white body of colour. Within *I Still Call It Home* disidentifications are being performed through a reworking of social subject categories, where the performers take on performative subject positions to enact restrictive and sometimes offensive subject categories, in this case conceptions around the privileging of whiteness within Australia and the disgust aimed at non-white bodies.

Work in this chapter has shown how power and ideological practices are enacted through discourse and upon bodies. I have focused on gender as constructed through reiteration and how performativity is a part of this, and also how queer performativity muddles the essentialism of fixed subjectivities. These are strategies of parafeminism. I have also explored how theatricality and performance can use performative strategies to play a part in disrupting or questioning the positioning of subjectivities and identities that are a part of restrictive hegemonic assumptions and regulatory practices. The hyperbolic, defamiliarizing technique of the performances exists as both a performative as well as *gestic* technique, opening up new perspectives for the viewer, while also enacting a parafeminist version of the fluid subject, written in ideology, but actively fighting through it.

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### Chapter 3: Parafeminism: Disruptions to Time and Space

The world of the heterosexual is a sick and boring life.

(Aunt Ida, Female Trouble)



Figures 43 - 45. Cassandra Tytler, Installation detail from exhibition *But ... Then*, Seventh Gallery, 2018

In this chapter I argue that para feminist *gestic* actions within video art practice are not created by the performance of the screen body alone, but also by the performance of the technology itself, as it is manipulated by the artist. Video holds a specific place within performance due to its unique ability to re-shape bodies in time and space in ways different from other art forms; such as its capacity to use editing, where time is expanded, contracted or repeated; camera work that uses different plains of vision through changes in focal length, focus or movement; digital manipulation, where the body can be morphed, cut or keyed into new visual situations; and sound, which can act alongside or counter to the vision (diegetic/non-diegetic), creating closeness or distance to a body through mixing, as well as shifts in how the video 'world' is received through re-recording of space or changes to its sonic frequency. These aspects in turn create their own spatiality within the video screen space by what is shown as well as what is hidden from the viewer's field of vision. Video therefore has a specific language, with certain values that can be consciously adopted in order to perform para feminist *gestic* actions. In addition to taking part inside the screen space, the space of reception that the viewer is situated within also becomes apparent. Roland Barthes expresses this when he writes about of the cinema space:

By letting oneself be fascinated twice over, by the image and its surroundings— as if I had two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which gazes, lost, into the engulfing mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishize not the image but precisely what exceeds it: the texture of the sound, the hall, the darkness, the obscure mass of the other bodies. (qtd. In Mondloch 348)

As was discussed in the introduction, video art practice is not solely received in the cinema, but through multiple fields of vision that involve projection across space, onto objects, or viewers, who are made aware of their material presence in a space in relation to but also outside the screen. As I will argue, the space that video is presented in and across can situate the viewer's perception of what they watch as well as their own body within that space.

In the case of video exhibited in a gallery, viewers enter at any moment of the work. There is not necessarily a beginning, middle or end. The space video is projected within and across creates a new configuration of a room's geography and the bodies that stand within that room. Video can be spatially three-dimensional or immaterial. John Conomos, arguing for video art as an artform that interacts with film, new media, television and photography in myriad complex ways, states that video produces "new anti-binary visual forms, visual forms that signify new nonlogical systems of representation, spatialization and temporality that contest the logic of binarism that still characterises our expanding dynamic non-linear world" (95). Video has the ability

to create a multitude of visual forms that incorporate viewers' bodies in ways that open up time, space, and representations. It is a medium that can create new ways of being and being seen that have the capacity to generate new situations of integration, beyond the binary. They are spaces that incorporate the many in open ways of political resistance to the binary logic of the socius. The components of the medium of video, most notably time and space, can be manipulated by the artist so that they create para-feminist *gestic* actions themselves. In other words, para-feminist *gestic* actions are performed through the multifarious medium of video art *as well as or alongside* the performance of the video body.

My research looks at the techniques of the medium of video, specifically in relation to time and space.<sup>5</sup> I believe that the present, which privileges very specific economic, reproductive and bodily ways of being, needs to be disrupted, so I am creating *gestic* actions as a political act of resistance through my artwork in order to enact this disruption. The essentialising scripts to which human endeavour and existence is reduced need breaking in order to escape the social hegemonies, which include heterosexuality and patriarchy, and in turn cissexism, that are a part of them. The severance from the present that my artworks disavow becomes part of a politics of resistance, not just through a tracing of linear time to the now, but a *rejection* of the now as the ultimate position to be in. If we are to create liveable lives for everyone this disruption as rejection of the present means that time itself cannot follow a linear trajectory of the past leading to the present followed by the future. (See Freeman 2010; Halberstam 2005; Muñoz 2009)

The manipulation of time and space within video art practice becomes a performative act through the way that realities are shifted by a cut in action, the shock of a sudden change, the disruption of spatial realities, the intermingling of bodies, and the presentation of bodies through projection or reflection upon spatial objects. These processes will be my focus in this chapter. Video art has the capacity to recreate what we see and believe to be the here and now. My work requires the viewer to bring it into being, but at the same time is reaching for other worlds better than this one. I think of myself as a teenager, watching *Female Trouble* by John Waters for the first time. Attempting as many teenagers do to be 'arty' and 'intellectual', I began to watch the only European arthouse films I could find at the video shop. Watching *Female Trouble* in comparison to these other films was a revelation. The performances were not trying to be 'realistic', and neither was the 'language' of the film. There were cuts from full shots to extreme close ups, jumps in movement and time and pans in, all

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<sup>5</sup> I am aware that sound can also play a big part in relation to video artworks. However, reckoning with how sound can create para-feminist *gestic* actions in a specific way is beyond the scope of this research. I do, however, make reference to sound in relation to voice.

revealing the technology behind the art. The overt construction of the film opened my eyes to the fabrication of all images. All films were a fiction, so in this sense, even those films claimed as ‘reality’ were also a construction. Through this revelation I learnt that by extension (and with the help of *Female Trouble*) that this deceit extended to notions of beauty, the family and sexual practices. Through an unveiling of construction, using Brechtian tactics of *Verfremdungseffekt* and the ‘not ... but’ (discussed in the introduction), *Female Trouble* activated my awareness that performance and the use of technology could become political acts of resistance to normative ways of being. In other words, both the performance *and* the aesthetics specific to video art practice can act politically. As Muñoz points out in his book *Cruising Utopia*:

Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. (1)

It is, following Muñoz’s quote above, the aesthetic that promised these other worlds for me as I watched *Female Trouble*, and as I will argue, through Jones, within the visual field. The following research investigates what it is about video as a medium, and the performance of it and within it, that can disrupt normative social scripts, unveiling the uneven power differentials of the hegemony and present a rejection of the here and now. These are *gestic* actions that are *parafeminist*.

In the following sections, I analyse my own practice as a performance-based video artist and extend the notion that the *gestic* action within performance-based video practice comes from the body of the performer to argue that the *gestus* also exists and plays out through the medium of video. I use one of my own video installations, *What You See*, as a case study, scrutinising how parafeminist *gestic* actions are created through a transformation of space and time. I also investigate the relational aspect of the piece, integrating the viewer’s vision and body into the artwork and how this is a parafeminist action. The relationality of this piece allows me to conceive of it through the lens of queer performativity discussed in chapter 2. I also look at how video can use projection or reflection to expand on bodily ways of being that move beyond binaries. To further clarify an argument around video practice that manipulates both space and time, I analyse a second case study, *Primitive Nostalgia*, by artist Caroline Garcia, who embeds her own performance within found footage dance performances of ‘primitive others’ in Hollywood films. This particular piece allows me to look at intersectional and decolonialist tactics within video performance. I also focus my analysis on the breaking of linear time as a political act, which creates queer time. As a grappling with the promise of the future moment, I turn to Muñoz’s concept of queer

futurity and his push for discovering a utopia by looking towards hope and what's on the horizon, while rejecting a dangerous and divided present. Queer futurity becomes the aim of my parafeminist *gestic* actions and extends into chapter 4 where I take the theory up further.

## Messing Up

Jones describes the conceptual term parafeminism, the politics of which I am using in order to create *gestic* actions that are intersectional, feminist and queer, as thus:

[Parafeminism] is inclusive of all cultural work investigating sexuality and/or gender as aspects of identity formation inextricably related to other aspects such as ethnicity, and yet specific in its insistence on messing up binary structures of sexual difference. (*Self/Image* 213)

This insistence on 'messing up' gender categories, acknowledgement of ethnicity and race, and focus on how power plays out in different ways on social subjects, with an eye to the visual order of art practice, makes parafeminism a prescient term for this research. I choose to use the term parafeminist in this thesis as it fits a particular trajectory within feminist and queer theory, as well as intersectional studies, which are political positions that I follow, and therefore find useful in articulating my practice. I believe, alongside Butler in discussing queer, that queer cannot and should not completely characterise those it represents, "not only for the purposes of continuing to democratize queer politics, but also to expose, affirm, and rework the specific historicity of the term" (*Bodies* 175). She argues that "queer" is not a static term, and to make it so stunts its use and inadvertently excludes those who do not find themselves within its spaces. She links this with the totalizing nature of identity categories, which can never speak as a unified voice for every singular subject (175). My approach to feminism is similar, and I go forward as a feminist with an understanding that there is not one way to be a woman. Jones uses the term *parafeminism* as an intentional approach in relation to the visual field of art practice and handles her analysis with the understanding that power differentials come in a range of different forms. As a practitioner who deals with performance and video art, I have an interest in positioning my research to art making within this parafeminist model.

The "para" in Jones' conception of parafeminism means "side by side" and "beyond"; both alongside and activating earlier feminisms that have come before it (*Self/Image* 213). For example, she cites Simone de Beauvoir's feminine 'immanence' vs male 'transcendence', where women are historically relegated as passive, while men are considered productive; and Laura Mulvey's 'male gaze', where the women characters

in film are presented as fetishistic objects to be looked at through the act of masculine scopophilia, (or the sexual pleasure of looking); as two theories that have greatly influenced her theoretical approach. Through her para-feminist methodology, Jones is seeking to build on existing feminisms, while looking outwards towards a greater openness towards how gender is considered, pushing feminism beyond stalemated arguments around what a true 'woman' is, and therefore rejecting cissexist ideas around gender. Her mode of inquiry is to engage with theoretical approaches within feminism's history and positively participate in a reconsideration of attitudes and methodologies. However, she rejects second wave feminists' normalization and thus homogenization of gender based on colour, class and sexuality (i.e. white, middle-class, heterosexual and from Europe or North America), as well as the associated policing of 'typical' bodily expressions and cultural habits deemed to be 'feminist'. She sees these as the limitations within visibility and identity presented through this strand of feminism. Jones sees gender:

as a question rather than an answer – and a question that permutates through an array of other subjective and social identifications (including sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, and so on) which can never be fixed but always take meaning in relation to each other. (*Self/Image* 213)

Para-feminism is thus interested in disrupting the binaries that have been historically present in configurations of gender, ethnicity and power structures in general. It recognises that power exists in many forms and spaces with its aim to reconfigure new forms of power linked to the feminine, rather than that which is explicitly cisgender "female". Jones states that Kimberlé Crenshaw's theorisation of intersectionality, to be discussed below, is important to her own revision of feminism. Her para-feminist approach is un-prescriptive, seeking to open up a set of practices that use an intersectional analysis.

### **Which Differences Make a Difference?**

The tactic that my research takes in grappling with its own politics focuses on both the power structures that influence and constrict marginalised peoples while also taking their lived experiences into consideration. This methodology, which originated in black feminism, follows Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Leslie McCall's analysis of an intersectional approach to research in their article "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis", where they highlight:

an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness

and difference and its relation to power. This framing - conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power - emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is. (795)

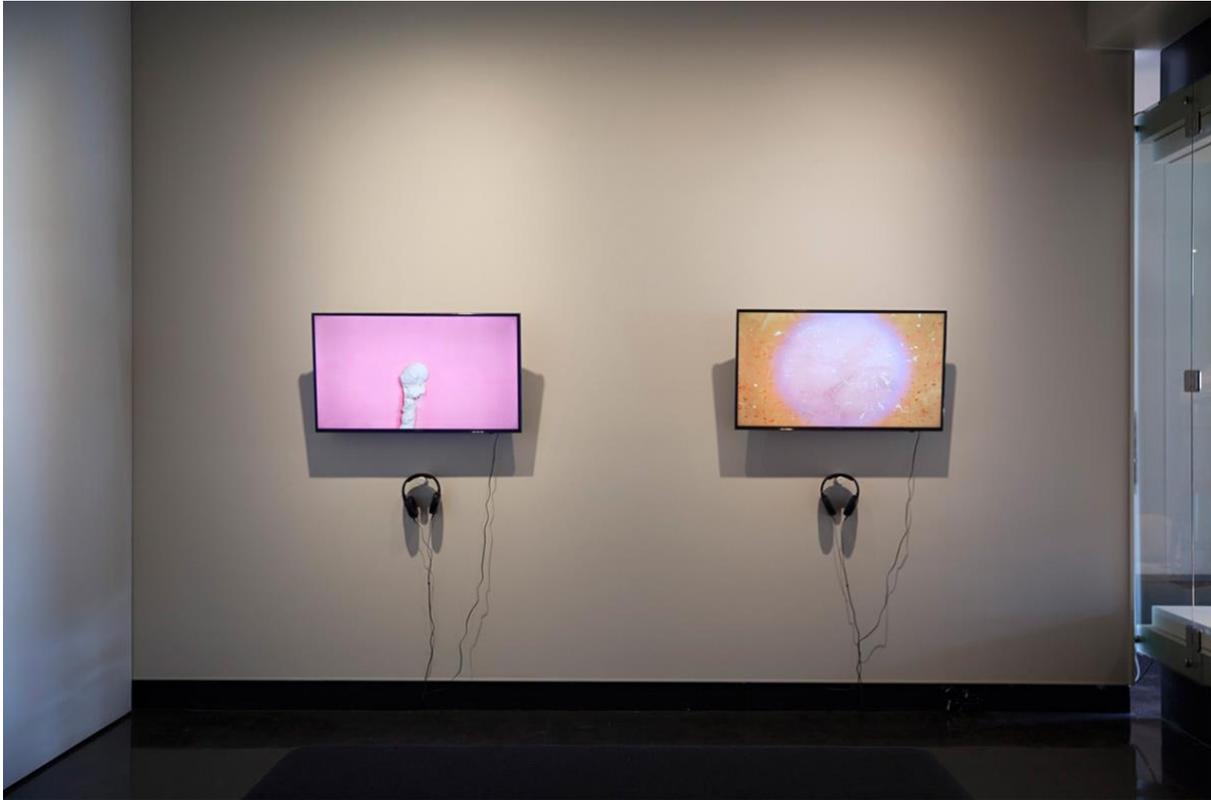


Figure 46. Cassandra Tytler, Exhibition detail from exhibition *Indisposed*, The Counihan Gallery in Brunswick, 2016 Photo: Clare Rae

They go on to state that they “emphasize an understanding of intersectionality that is not exclusively or even primarily preoccupied with categories, identities, and subjectivities. Rather, the intersectional analysis ... emphasizes political and structural inequalities” (797). My aim is to uncover and resist the constrictive, normalising forces within gendered subjectivities through video art practice.

I ask myself: Which power differentials am I speaking about, while using my own white, cisgender body within my performances and with this in mind, for whom am I creating a politics of resistance? My body is a visual marker that speaks to my privileged status within Australian society. Further, as has been mentioned in chapter 1 when discussing *Fiona*<sup>71</sup> and chapter 2 when considering *I’m Sorry*, I am not making work that simply or solely represents my subjectivity; rather my attack is on dominant ideologies of power and how they work to constrict those gendered ‘woman’. I question how I can speak to power hierarchies enacted upon gendered bodies, when I

use my own body alone. How does using my cisgender body challenge cisgenderism, which produces cissexism? What are some of the actions I can take as a performer and through performance to be clearly intersectional?

Jones refers to a para-feminist mode of viewing the subject that is beyond a static and fixed position of visibility, while admitting that the body/self of the artist is often entangled with the “identity” (Jones’ word) we attribute to the artwork. She draws on Butler’s 1995 essay, “Collected and Fractured: Response to Identities” in an evaluation of para-feminism, which specifically takes part in the visual order. Quoting Butler, Jones argues that the gaze of the spectator is clearly reciprocal, in the “very vacillations of the gaze between identification and desire” (*Self/Image* qtd. in Jones 215). Thus, according to Jones, identity is “a process of negotiation involving complex circuits of identification and desire primarily *in the visual order*” (ibid 215 Jones’ emphasis). Jones voices the importance placed upon the body within the visual realm in her consideration of Para-feminism, but also of its reciprocal nature. She states:

the para-feminist project is not to provide a coherent (and thus more or less stable) coalitional politics based on the identification of certain subjects as “women”. It is, rather, to explore in an open-ended, processual manner the way in which power and value accrue to particular subjects and objects (including works of art). (ibid)

In seeking to create para-feminist *gestic* actions, my aim is not to create a specific identity category or position myself and my body as fitting into a singular subjectivity, but rather to recognise the multiple and moving “identifications and desires” that come with looking and seeing.

Referring to queer performativity as a tactic enacted within my work (see chapter 2 for further discussion), the work is watched by multiple subjects, some of whom are not interpellated within the social hegemony, and therefore disrupt agreed upon social meanings and monocausal explanations. Jones highlights that bodies in performance and in art are always seen in the visual field, whether it is being used as a taking back of its agency or presented within fetishism/objectification. The body, Jones argues, is always “gendered, sexed, and raced” (“1970/2007”). In any performance, be it video or live, the body is identified through its visual markers, for example through skin colour and sex. These markers must not be read as a monolith, however. I will discuss how normalizing ideologies can have negative impacts through simplistic controls laid upon singular subject positions below.

As Patrick R. Grzanka points out, identity categories are always changing, being reworked or re-named. For example, when it comes to immigrants, their identity

status is controlled by the state and its institutions who have the power to name one's identity and also to remove it. (71) The same is apparent when filling in forms, naming your gender, your relationship status, your profession and so on. In this sense, individuals are being hailed as certain kinds of subjects through the workings of normalizing ideologies. Therefore, singular identity categories are restrictive rather than productive, as once named you are subjected to the binary understanding of who you are within society. Identities, while having the potential to bring groups of marginalized people together to form collectives of support or political combat, can also be constrictive and one-dimensional. As Barbara Tomlinson notes, "[i]f critics think intersectionality is a matter of identity rather than power, they cannot see which differences make a difference. Yet it is exactly our analyses of power that reveal which differences carry significance" (1012). To deny the power relations within identity formation is to close one's eyes to the structural influences that create repression and domination.

In saying this, focusing on lived experiences within structural inequalities and power relations accepts the nature of power and privilege as it works on people in different but also similar ways. In her article, "I/Me/Mine", Shuddhabrata Sengupta articulates the importance of looking beyond identity categories in an attempt to critique power relations: "It is only when we examine identities as fields of intersection and therefore always of contestation that we can imagine possibilities other than the binaries of ... "Are you critical of patriarchy within the African American community and of racism in the United States?" (632). This method means that we do not stop short in articulating and fighting the structures that privilege some groups over others in a multiplicity of contexts. The para-feminist project recognises the power that certain groups hold and do not hold in differing contexts. It sees subjectivities as non-static and changing, while also recognising that bodies are visually identified in reciprocal exchange. This visibility, specifically in the realm of art and performance practice is a space where power relations can be disrupted and corrupted through *gestic* actions.

Thinking through my own body on screen with all its visual markers mentioned above, I understand that identification cannot be erased, nor should it be. I am working with an awareness of the "power and value" (or otherwise) that is ascribed to bodies. Jones sums this up well from a queer perspective in her book *Seeing Differently*, when she says:

Queer rides that line of needing to be identified as not identifiable. It must be something we can talk and write about, something we feel we can *recognize*, [sic] without ever settling into the kind of punctual coordinates of conventional Renaissance to contemporary

conceptions of the subject as situated in a coherent site of knowledge. (176)

In a consideration of both my visually identifiable body along with an interest in creating work that messes up a coherent subject position, I decided that I would make a work that did not include my own video body within it. I will investigate this project below in reference to video installation's capacity to create para-feminist *gestic* actions.

### **Para-feminist Subjectivities**

In chapters 1 and 2, my research examined modes of performance of the video body as well as its reception by the viewer. Now, I would now like to focus on video art's presentation in space through installation. The flexibility of video as a medium, especially as an art practice, means that there are many ways that work can be exhibited, screened and displayed. Kate Mondloch analyses the paradox of the viewing position within video installation work where "viewing is simultaneously material (the viewer's phenomenological engagement with actual objects in real time and space) and immaterial (the viewer's metaphorical projection into virtual times and spaces)" (17). My own research is screen-based and projected. The space of reception is either in a viewing area such as a cinema, where one is seated; or in a gallery, where one encounters the work by physically moving around or within it.

As has been discussed in both chapters 1 and 2, the viewer completes the artwork, both through their embodied recognition of it and in order for the tactics of queer performativity to take hold. Space exists differently in these two contexts. For a linear piece, the space is created within the screen 'scene' that is watched; in a video installation the space of the artwork is also the room of the exhibited work and the way the viewer moves within it. As Mondloch notes in her discussion of the video experience as both material and immaterial, when watching a screen-based linear work "the conventional propensity is to look through media screens and not at them" whereas in video installation works "the screen object and the viewer's active, bodily experience with it can achieve a new centrality" due to the fact that the assemblage and the viewer's position within it is key (4). As I argued in chapter 1, while the screen-based image may be "immaterial", it is nevertheless embodied, with the performer seen and accepted as an embodied performer, even if they are playing a role. My aim in going forward is to consider how presentation of video *in a space* and a body *in a video space* can create para-feminist *gestic* actions that are specific to video art practice.

As an example of a para-feminist body within art practice, Jones cites the video installation work of Pipilotti Rist. She sees Rist's work as para-feminist in the way it

moves beyond earlier tactics of feminist art practice through its presentation and reception of the body. The body in Rist's work is projected in and through spaces. It connects other televisual bodies, meshing them in space, confusing what is image, what is body and what is space. "In this way, [they] articulate para-feminist subjectivities that do not "rest" in one place, or coherently speak in one coalitionally secured voice" (*Self/Image* 217). Additionally, Jones points to the fact that Rist relationally connects the viewer bodily and conceptually within space through her projections that the viewer walks within. This disrupts binary identifications, as the bodies form interrelationships through projection and immersion across spaces, reciprocally opening bodies up to one another. "Rist's televisual imagery of the body is itself *coextensive with the space inhabited, defined, and containing of the body.*" (*Self/Image* 220 Jones' emphasis) This video body that integrates the viewer within it, that cannot be viewed and known as a cohesive and obtainable body, that muddles both identity and power, is, according to Jones, para-feminist.

If Jones' approach to para-feminism is a celebration of a body that is non-binary through its dematerialisation in space, then where does this leave performance in video and where does the *gestus* come into play? Following Jones' conception of Rist's unfixed body projected across and onto space, it seems possible that the *gestus* within video performance is not just about the mode of the performance of the screen body, but also of the technology that synesthetically projects or cuts or meshes bodies together. Rist's work presents a body through space, digitally morphed with flowers and plants, kaleidoscopically weaving itself across architectural and textural plains. It is performative in the sense that it is creating a new body by doing (or in this case, projecting) and queer because of its integration of the viewer within itself, where they are reciprocal witness. The research took these factors into consideration in a video installation that I exhibited at Testing Grounds in Melbourne titled *What You See*. My aim in making *What You See* was to think through the relationality between the viewer and the work, and also the *body* of the artwork in relation to the body of the viewer. This was following on from my research into para-feminism and how an unfixing of the binary body could be conceived of as a *gestic* action, using both *Verfremdungseffekt* and the 'not ... but' as tactics. This was the first work as part of my PhD research where I did not perform within the artwork myself as part of my grappling with those questions of the visuality of my body that I write about above.

### **No Body, Nobody, No Body? ... A Giant Space Dildo**

*What You See*, was part of a group exhibition titled "Double Bind", where each artist was matched with another artist from the exhibition and was asked to make a work that responded in some way to that artist's creative influences or style, rather than making a work solely from their own perspective. I was matched with Aaron Martin,

whose artwork I really like but whose approach and outcomes seem very different to my own. Martin's artistic practice and research is focussed on the gesture within Minimalism. To quote a section of Martin's master's degree abstract, which he was completing at the time:

1960's North American Minimalism, with its slick "industrial elegance" instigated a rupture in abstract art by rejecting the gestural abstractionism of the preceding decades. This research argues that despite an apparent denial of the gesture, by many of the artists associated with Minimalism, it persisted. It identifies the critical role the gesture played in expanding Minimalist painting and sculpture during this period. It exploits contradictions within the Formalist doctrine of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried and returns to assess the Minimalists' objects themselves. (Martin)

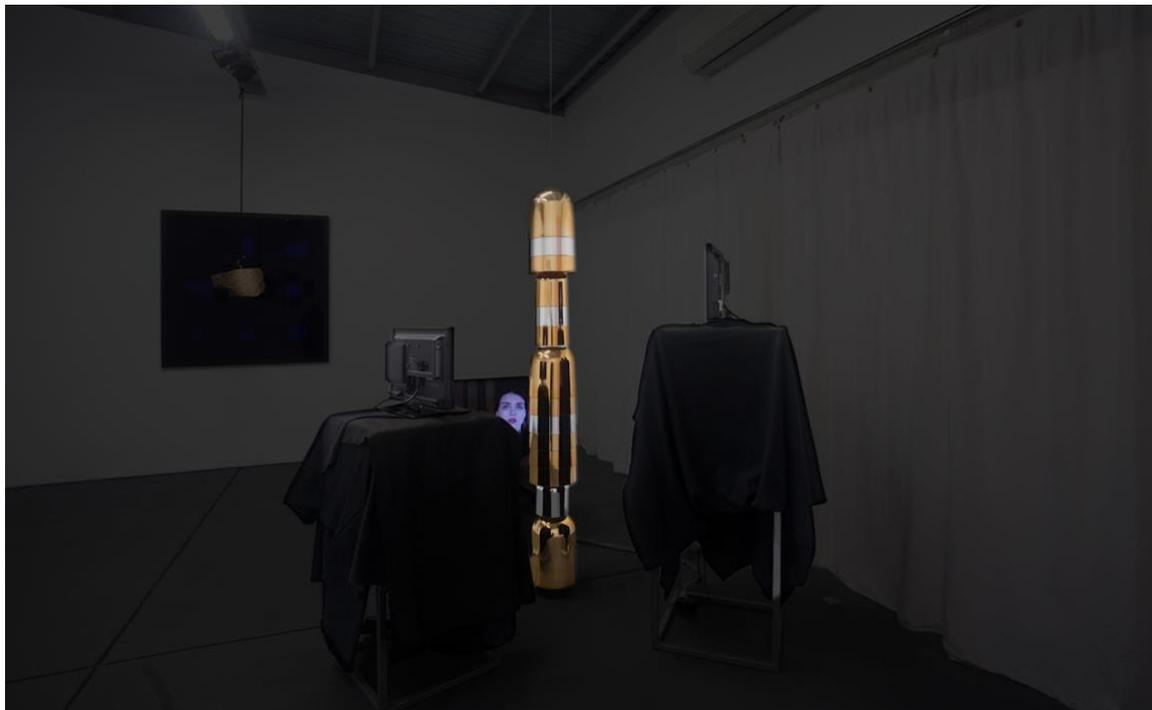


Figure 47. Cassandra Tytler, Installation detail from exhibition *What You See*, Testing Grounds, 2019, Photo: Clare Rae

Click on image to watch video documentation or go here: <http://vimeo.com/250403633>

In thinking through Minimalism and the gesture, I wondered why Martin was going back in time to try to claim gesture from an art movement that was clearly espousing one in order to remove the sign of the hand of the author. I must admit it all felt like a bit of a boys' club, harking back to a white, male-centred art form with well-known male art critics and an attempt to find the 'genius' author's hand within the work. The slight irritation I felt about this inspired me. I was further inspired after reading critic

and art historian Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood", which argues that Minimalism presents an object in space, which the viewer interacts with durationally. The art object's time-based presence pulls it into theatricality, an effect of which Fried did not approve: "*The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre,*" (Fried's emphasis 139) and an approach within my practice that I, on the other hand, embrace because of its relation with both time and the viewer. For this reason, I decided to frame my minimalist inspired work as a playful and theatrical disavowal of Fried's text and a championing of time-based works that disavow the ever-present. (Disruption of time as a *gestic* action will be discussed further below). The shape of my sculpture, a shiny phallic-shaped object (one viewer said it looked like a "space dildo") hanging approximately 2 metres tall from the ceiling, was a nod to the masculinist nature of art criticism in the past through a celebration of the male genius who transcends his work as well as his body. Using the dome-like phallus as my object choice was also a recognition that in its original guise, minimalist artists who were celebrated were nearly all cisgender white men.

The lights where the artwork was installed are low. An approximately two-metre dome-like (or phallus-like) object hangs from the ceiling. It is segmented into larger and smaller sections and is an orangey-bronze colour with silver sections throughout. It is also reflective, so the viewer can see their body echoed in it. Because of the circular shape as well as size difference between sections of the dome, the reflections are morphed, a little like a body in a fun-factory mirror that looks longer and then fatter in parts. Surrounding the hanging dome are three plinths of different heights with thick black material draped over each. On each one is a monitor with a different woman's face on it. Each woman speaks while looking at the dome. Their televisual faces are reflected in it, becoming slightly warped. They speak as if they are encountering the object in front of them and trying to speak through what it is. My aim here was humour. These faces look at the space phallus and speak as if they are explaining it — as if there is an overarching gesture that the object is giving us (referencing Martin's argument). The gesture does exist, but it is not through the object at hand, it is through the viewer's interaction with it, which indeed was the aim of minimalist art (Wolf).

The three videos are in synch, so they speak as if in answer to one another and sometimes in unison. At different moments they say: "what you see is what you see"; "presences", "timeless"; "your history is not my history"; "becoming"; "the unthought"; "no body, nobody, no body?" The phrase "what you see is what you see" are the words that minimalist artist Frank Stella used to describe what Minimalism is (Wolfe).

When you enter the room of the installation, what you see is a shiny "space dildo" hanging from the ceiling with three women speaking to/about it; their performance

repetitive and serious; filmed against a black backdrop, their faces illuminated through stage lighting; and the plinths that their faces (or monitors with their faces) stand on draped in black material that resembles a stage curtain. Then when you get closer, you notice your own body in the reflection of the phallic object. Your vision shifts so that you don't look at the object as a whole, but see yourself, warped in low light, cut into sections due to the change of size of the object. To the side of your reflection, you see the reflection of one of the performers in the object, the light of the monitor animating the reflection. Then you look at the monitor and see the object reflected in it, but also a reflection of another face from one of the other monitors. If you take a step back, your reflection changes, as does what you see. Now the black cloth over the plinths with the monitors on top of them, as if they are heads, are reflected on the circular object. At a certain angle, all three can be seen at the same time, and as you move around, the reflection of a different face from a singular monitor can be made out, changing as you move again.

What you see is indeed what you see, but sight is changing. There is no singular viewing position. One's own body is stretched and morphed and becomes a part of the other reflections. The sense of what a body is, is confused, as we see heads on monitors, placed at different heights, so that no humanoid body exists except the viewer's body, or the new body of reflection on the object. Connection between beings is through reflection. The distinction between object, image and body is confused. In this respect a para-feminist subject is created, where no one singular position is articulated or speaks in one allied voice.

This is an example of a dynamic queer subject, unfixed in space and in body, as well as an intersectional subject, not unified by a singular subject position, but multiple and mutating. Queer performativity takes place in the bringing forth of fissured and relational body reflections/subjectivities. (See chapter 2 for a further discussion of queer performativity). The insinuation is that we are all reflection, yet all connected. The performers chant "becoming, becoming", telling us that we, and they are not fixed and singular. Bodies overlap and mesh, and it is the video reflected alongside the viewer's reflection that allows this changing integration or becoming to take place.

As the three women on the monitors say, "no body, nobody, no body?" the body does and doesn't exist. The viewer is aware of themselves as a body that moves in the space, but what they see is something different, entangled with the forms of the other reflections. If we return back to Diamond's conception of feminist *gestic* actions, *historicization* takes place when (as an example) through performance it is revealed that one is gendered by cultural conventions. The body is exposed as non-static and something that can be actively transformed. In *What You See*, the body is again changed, but in this example, it becomes a shared body of multiple reflections. The

faces are not genderless, but I would like to suggest the reflected moment is intersectional in its mixing of bodies and presents them in a different way from the 'typical' humanoid shape. This opening up of physical ways of being, using *historicization* and *Verfremdungseffekt* with its defamiliarising affect, is an example of a parafeminist *gestic* action, one that is extended beyond the performers in the videos, where the video in the space, with the presence of the viewer, is what allows the *gestic* actions to take hold.

"Your history is not my history" is a verbal act of *historicization*, where each performer is expressing their own socio-historical position as separate from all others. This is an intersectional recognition that subjectivities are not fixed or monolithic. Each performer is a set of processes within their own history: divided and becoming. To be becoming has the sense that one is unfinished, or not whole, however, as noted throughout this thesis, there are many bodies who are considered more 'whole' than others and have acts of literal and symbolic violence enacted upon their beings for this very reason.



Figure 48 - 51. Cassandra Tytler, Installation detail from exhibition *What You See, Testing Grounds*, 2019, Photo: Clare Rae

Queerness is a dynamic theory, which is never finished, and parafeminism too, alongside and beyond previous feminisms points to the feminist project as constantly moving. To be becoming is to accept that the way one is now in the world that we inhabit is wanting, we are becoming in a sense of reaching for something more and something different. Arguing from a Deleuzian nomadic standpoint, Rosi Braidotti

says that “[b]ecoming works on a time sequence that is neither linear nor sequential, ... [p]rocesses of becoming ... rest rather on a non-unitary, multi-layered, dynamic subject” (118). It is the creation of this “dynamic subject” that becomes a parafeminist *gestic* action, but as Braidotti points out, time must also be dynamic. To be becoming one must cast aside a linear trajectory. The chronology of time needs revisioning, as feminists and queer theorists alike have noted, time and the organisation of life around it, is steeped in power hierarchies privileging capital, procreation and dynamics of power related to the patriarchy. To quote Laura Mulvey, “[j]ust as public speech and language is associated with the authority of patriarchy, so is this linear concept of time” (*Afterimages* 96). The medium of video not only has the ability to play with and corrupt linearity, but through this process to present a present that needs the future to fix it. In this sense video can reject the present through a hopeful leap into queer futurity. Before discussing this, I look further at time and its disruption as a politics of resistance.

### **Event-Centred, Goal-Oriented, Intentional, and Culminating in Epiphanies**

Judith Roof argues against a generational model of feminism that follows chronological time. She sees it as “a reproductive narrative that ... reflects and exacerbates Oedipal relations and rivalries among women, relies on a patriarchal understanding of history and a linear, cause-effect narrative, and imports ideologies of property” (71). The generational model means that younger feminists are always thinking backwards with a liability to what came before, creating an opposition through changes made rather than a co-operative exchange of vision through time. This generational narrative leads to a privileging of certain groups in its history, conveniently lumping together the many different subjects of feminist history.

Further, Roof argues that following chronological time within feminism means that the future is always being sort from a past perspective rather than the positionings of the present. Roof describes the proscriptive generational understandings of feminism as fulfilling familial relations in the sense that the younger generation are the ‘daughters’ of the earlier wave and must carry the ‘family name’. If current generations of feminists do not adhere to the goals of past generations, they are disappointing ‘mother’ with their rebellious miscomprehension of how they as a feminist should act, and what they should fight for. Similarly, Jack Halberstam discusses the Oedipal model of generationality (mothers passing on knowledge to daughters) within Women’s Studies departments of academia being “invested in white, gendered, and hetero normativity” and thus negatively affecting the “potential future of new knowledge formations” (*Queer Failure* 124). These examples ask for a disruption with chronology as a separation from patriarchal linearity and are also parafeminist in that

they see feminist struggle as non-linear and not based around singular subjectivities of belonging.

The familial example of time is further examined by Lee Edelman, who in his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, notes that queer time is different to heterosexual time, especially for those who do not reproduce, and are therefore considered within the prevailing culture, to be without a future. Categories of 'man' and 'woman' are considered in a simplistic binary, as is sexuality, which is assumed as heterosexual. Therefore, those who choose not to or cannot reproduce are positioned outside of society with no future potential. *Chrononormativity* is the term Elizabeth Freeman uses in explaining society's temporal regulation of bodies (3). Following calendars, wristwatches, timetables and the like creates a temporality, which seems natural, but in fact creates regulation of bodies that privilege industry. It makes the rhythm of life seem natural while slotting bodies into structured and synchronized indices of time. "These are teleological schemes of events or strategies for living such as marriage, accumulation of health and wealth for the future, reproduction, childrearing, and death and its attendant rituals" (4). Here we see a way to live life where not only are we human capital, but bodies that must move and adapt themselves in a time-based sequence of events that follow a strict social script. The assumptions are that a life lived is a life that follows these specific paths of societal integration. The gendered assumptions that exist towards the categories 'man' and 'woman' means that there is little room to move outside of these divisions.

People are recognised by the state and other institutions when they fit into these chronological timeframes, and can contribute as economic subjects through tax, privatized caregiving and property inheritance, redistribution of wealth through family lines, transport to jobs and being part of the military. As well as being bodily chronometrical, subjects are accepted by society when they can narrate their existence in and through time: "as event-centered, [sic] goal-oriented, intentional, and culminating in epiphanies or major transformations" (5). With the threat of physical violence, hatred, disgust and the weight of the gender binary, queer bodies are often not figured or allowed into these figurations of time. Freeman suggests that queer theory can recognise and celebrate a disruption of these time specificities as a way of looking back and forward, creating and enhancing communities of bodily belonging.

Jack Halberstam sees the potential in a disruption of temporalities listed above, which he terms "queer time": "Queer time" is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" (*Queer Time Place* 20). Halberstam sees *queer* as a rejection of these prescriptive aspects within society, namely non-normative organizations of and identifications with differing

communities, sexualities and embodiments. He points to the possibility for queer to create new relations to time and space through disruptions to expected temporalities within social scripts, and therefore establish a site where new futures are envisioned. To exist in a space where there are only limited ways of living one's life is the antithesis of a parafeminist approach, which celebrates difference in the struggle for livable lives. As a parafeminist method directly speaks to art practice, artwork that creates different temporalities and ways of being are doing so as a struggle against the constrictive hegemonies that we live within and have the potential to create *gestic* actions through these disruptions.

### How to Climb a Staircase

Video has the ability to challenge linearity through jumps in and out of time, to use freeze frames, and to condense and expand the length of an action through the use of montage. Following Gilles Deleuze, the act of montage creates a wholeness of time through its piecing of objects, crafting "the image of time" that is different from how time is lived outside the realm of film (34). An example would be the numerous ways a figure climbs the stairs in a moving image work. Do we see them moving from the bottom to the top in one shot? Do we cut from the bottom of the stairs to a close up of a face to the figure suddenly being at the top? Or do we reveal the scene in close ups alone, where we hear the sound of the feet on the stairs but only visually focus on the sweat on the figure's brow and their hand shaking on the bannister? Montage transforms perception of how time is lived while watching a film. Can this 'image of time' be disruptive? Can it become a political act? Indeed, if *gestic* actions are to take place, then both the 'not ... but' and *historicization* encompass an analysis of time: time as linear and time as history, which is steeped within the normative value systems of the hegemony and therefore ideologically framed. To disrupt or alienate our relationship to time is tied to the *Verfremdungseffekt*. To quote Laura Mulvey in *Death 24x a Second*:

[t]o delay a fiction in full flow allows the changed mechanism of spectatorship to come into play and, with it, shifts of consciousness between temporalities. By halting the image or repeating sequences, the spectator can dissolve the fiction so that the time of registration can come to the fore". (184)

Thus, 'dissolving the fiction' to make the spectator more aware of the mechanisms at play is an example of *Verfremdungseffekt*. Mulvey argues, following Raymond Bellour, that the use and manipulation of the still image in film changes the way that viewers watch and interact with the content. For example, the fact that viewers can now control the time of a DVD they watch by having the ability to press pause, means they

interact with the image in a different way, specifically in relation to time. “The now-ness of story time gives way to the then-ness of the time when the movie was made and its images take on social, cultural or historical significance, reaching out into its surrounding world” (*Death 24x 31*). This is an act of *historicization* at play, where situations from the past are seen anew through the eyes of the present, the ideology of history being seen with fresh eyes. The act of pressing pause, halting the image also means that the film’s aesthetics are emphasised, and its illusionary powers are unveiled. Raymond Bellour, speaking of the effects on the spectator once a film image becomes a still image, states that “[a]s soon as you stop the film, you begin to find time to add to the image. You start to reflect differently on film, on cinema” (92). Video’s ability to change time and engage the viewer so they see in a renewed and political manner means that it is a medium where *historicization*, the ‘not ... but’ and *Verfremdungseffekt* can take place. I will discuss below how a disruption of time within video art practice can be a para-feminist *gestic* action.

The video realm gives the video performer scope to transform or displace ways of being and watching through a deviation of time and spatial geography. Thus, video holds the means of creating queer time and unsettling chrononormativity. A figure can travel across time and space, having the capacity to borrow and shift bodies within their digital grasp. In her examination of the video piece *K.I.P.* (2002) by Nguyen Tan Hoang, Freeman points to “the malleability of filmic time to the sexually experimental body” (1). *K.I.P.* is a video work that features old worn-out found footage pornography from the 70s or early 80s screened on an old TV, which is then videoed. The reflection of the artist’s face on the TV monitor is revealed (an interesting resonance with *What You See*), mouth open, as he watches the scene of two men having sex. The degraded quality of the video image, which Hoang rented from Tower Video in San Francisco, is due to people fast forwarding or rewinding to the most erotic parts of the video (2). Freeman argues that the textual quality of the image through the past act of fast forwarding and rewinding, unites viewers as spectators through time, and re-works sex as an act that does not have a linear and set progression. She notes, “Nguyen’s reshoot and the overlay of his almost motionless face disconnect gesture from response, action from consequence, by separating them in time” (2/3). Sex exists outside its normative framework of foreplay, penetration, release, as the video’s sexual interconnection between different times connects people in a way that is beyond monogamous coupledness and heterosexual sex. In this sense time binds us as a *socius*, but in the case of video art practice, has the capacity to upset chrononormative time and therefore create queer time.

The act of using the technology of video playback, most notably the rewind, then play functions in the example found in *K.I.P.*, reveals a controlled version of watching that, as stated, automatically disrupts chrononormative time and creates queer time. I posit

that the act of seeing the degraded quality of the video image when watching the pornography, connects viewers and creates an awareness of community through sex. The degradation, which becomes its own aesthetic, links bodies and communities, and the rewinding, playing and again rewinding dislodges time in a celebratory act of sexual participation. Laura Mulvey argues for a variation of this interactive viewership in her expanded analysis of Raymond Bellour's *Pensive Spectator*. Bellour argues that once the image in cinema is changed to a still image, that the spectator reflects on the film in different ways beyond the narrative. They have the time to see the image anew "uncoupling the spectator from the image" (92). Mulvey maintains that the advent of technological tools that allow the spectator to slow down, pause, rewind and fast-forward footage creates a new mode of spectatorship. She states that in her well-known text 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', that there are three different versions of cinematic time highlighted: "the past of registration, the fictional time of the story, and the present, or remembered, time of viewing" (*Death 24x 191*), arguing that:

When celluloid cinema, viewed on video or DVD, is delayed by the pensive spectator, the presence of the past (the look and time of the camera) finds consciousness in the present (the look and time of the spectator), across the tense of fiction (the look and time of the protagonist). (191)

It is with this renewed look within cinema that the pleasure of "fascination and reflection" are produced and therefore new forms of spectatorship are generated (ibid). One form is the "curious spectator" who derives pleasure and joy from playing with the time and space of the film, and watches in a renewed and playful fashion.

Just like the "curious spectator", the video artist has control over manipulation of the film, not only in their video creations, but also through what they can do with existing film or found footage. Just as Nguyen Tan Hoang disrupted the heterosexual timeframe of sex through his reworking of existing footage in *K.I.P.*, so too can other artists use this manipulation of film or what is now mostly digital video footage to disrupt time and space, not as curious spectators alone, but as *curious producers*. Through this mode of curiosity, they create para-feminist *gestic* actions by breaking chrononormativity, creating queer time, and as a tactic of political resistance to the social hegemony. As Emma Cook stresses:

borrowing from the archive can be interpreted . . . as a specific tactic for resisting and responding to the pressures and accelerated temporalities of late capitalism, and the dislocation (from both present and past) experienced by the individual in relation to the

global and increasingly virtual context in which they are expected to perform. (qtd. in Beugnet 203)

Extending queer ways of *being* as well as *being queer* beyond sexuality, and considering a *parafeminist* approach to the visual field, I will now consider a performance-based video work that uses performance and found footage to disrupt chrononormative time and uses parafeminist *gestic* actions to question and de-rail representations of gender, sexuality, colonisation and race. This is done specifically in relation to a combination of performance and technology. Or, technology *as* performance.

### **Primitive Nostalgia: The Shape Shifter**

*Primitive Nostalgia* (2014), by Caroline Garcia, begins with a small group of Native Americans in traditional dress gathered around a railway line next to what looks like a broken train. The technicolour image with its heightened contrast tells us that this sequence is from a film, possibly made in the 1960s; the subjects and the train tell us it is a story of the wild west, Hollywood style. The next shot features Native Americans dancing in a large circle, the camera panning across them as if they are being watched from a moving train. The next shot confirms this with two white passengers, a woman and man, presumably cisgender, looking on from their carriage just as the camera does, at this 'primitive' dance.

Yet when the shot returns to the dance, there is something slightly out of place. One of the dancers is not moving quite in time, their costume lacks the shadow-depth of the others, and their body looks as if it has been digitally 'stuck' onto the moving tableau. The following shot confirms this. Now we see a different scene from a different film. It is in colour and looks to be of the same vintage as the previous film. There are also dancers featured in this tableau, but this time they are part of a scene from China. At the centre of the image, one of the dancers has clearly been digitally "stuck" into this scene. She is dressed similarly to the other dancers, but the colour temperature of her image is different to the softness of the others, and unlike those alongside her, her image casts no shadows. A vague tinge of green surrounds her body, clarifying the D.I.Y. of green screen keying effects. The central dancer, with her particularly 'digital' looking body, stands out against the scene of dancers filmed, lit and culturally figured in a different time and place. And so *Primitive Nostalgia* continues.

Garcia, an Australian woman of Filipino heritage, keys her own dancing video body into different scenes of the 'primitive' dancing for and being looked at by mostly white onlookers within (and beyond) the film text. She places her video self within Hollywood-spun dance scenes of non-American or European 'natives', reframing

constructed narratives of cultural representations of those considered ‘other’ through the colonial gaze.



Figure 52. Caroline Garcia, *Primitive Nostalgia*, Video, 2014



Figures 53. Caroline Garcia, *Primitive Nostalgia*, Video, 2014

Garcia describes herself as taking on the role of “shape shifter - sliding into the gaps between cultures, experiences of otherness and timeless clichés of exotic femininity” (Garcia). In *Primitive Nostalgia* her intersectional approach means that she shape-shifts as performer, using the technique of *historicization* (and the tactic of disidentification, discussed in Chapter 2) by clearly positioning her figure within its socio-historical context of the exotic woman sanctioned through the cultural production of popular film. This para-feminist and intersectional tactic makes clear

that it is the power of white figures in the narrative and the power of the white gaze that present these black and brown bodies as spectacle, controlled through the look.

The dancers Garcia enacts are from different cultures, and she as subject using the tactic of disidentification wearing the mask of 'coloured', 'othered' and 'exoticised', fulfilling *gestic* actions through *historicization*, which are parafeminist. She uses *Verfremdungseffekt* to present us with a series of images, which disrupt the figuring of the original through her clearly video body, alienating the viewer from a passive interaction with this work as a dance piece alone. It activates the viewer, asking them to consider how women of colour have been framed within popular film productions to be gazed at and objectified. Garcia herself, an Australian with Filipino heritage, figured as a 'woman of colour' within her own country explores the politicisation of her body. She cannot be every woman that she plays in her video, but the fact that she does so points to the blindness of settler thinking when it comes to representations of the non-Anglo-Saxon diaspora as if the colour of one's skin places all people of colour in the one group. This use of the '*not ... but*' problematizes a monolithic reading of people of colour. Garcia's choice in using the alienating effect of allowing her video image to look slightly off-kilter and out of place yet having her dance performance in time with the other dancers, points to the '*not ... but*' of her racialised positioning. These examples of *gestic* actions are also parafeminist in the way that they map as well as unsettle the varying relations and intersections of power tied to gender, race, colonialism and sexuality.

*Primitive Nostalgia* explicitly uses the video body as an intersectional gesture that interrupts what may previously have been viewed as fixed within filmic time. The viewer of these cinematic portrayals of colonised dancing bodies, sees the portrayals anew, not just through their re-presentation, but living through Garcia's clearly video corpus, which is unmistakably separate from, yet a part of this new scene. Her dance technique is thorough and skilful. She moves in time with the other dancers on screen, yet her position in the video space is at times uncannily not quite right or complete, to the point where dancers sometimes run through her video body as if she is a ghost. This affect displaces both Garcia and her fellow dancers in time, where through the mangling of past/present/future, linear progression becomes confused. Just as in *K.I.P.* where the degraded video reminds us of shared sexual encounters over time, Garcia's "stuck on" video body positions us as a *pensive spectator*. The footage is not presented as a still but is controlled in its re-use so that the look of time is traversed. We see the time of the video, which is both past and present because of its intermingling of bodies shot in different time frames. Garcia is telling us that the present is not enough, and that the past under colonialist sanctioned image culture never was. We the viewer are dislocated between these times, the shock, being an alienating effect and a realisation that what exists and has existed for women of colour living within

colonised spaces and under the watchful eye of popular cultural examples within this, needs ending. This act of *historicization* is a parafeminist *gestic* action.

Garcia uses her body *in* performance and *as* performance. Her skills as a dancer realistically embed her within each scene, yet her video self looks back and winks. Garcia deploys this performance gesture of the video body as both a performer and a technician, creating a disruption to normalising narratives set through patriarchal and colonial eyes. Garcia's body is a temporal incision that tells us that the social scripts we live and have lived, that form the dominant logic, need expulsion. Queer time, which promotes an active destruction of the dominant logic of our current temporalities which places bodies of colour below those of white bodies and enacts forms of violence both figurative and literal, is being reached for. The technologized body in performance, presented as digital spectacle, both within representation but also confounding it, can be used in similar ways. Ones that unveil the underlining political import of a piece, which are not necessarily a part of the narrative but become the overarching sense and feeling behind the production. Garcia is but also isn't 'primitive other'. She is, but also isn't in the film. It is her performance as video body, dematerialised in time and space, as well as herself as video artist, digitally manipulating her body, controlling the technology of the video image, that creates the *gestic* action.



Figure 54. Caroline Garcia, *Primitive Nostalgia*, Video, 2014

Further, most of the dancers we watch are cisgender women scantily clad in what we cannot trust to be traditional costume, seeing as we cannot trust the revisionist examples of the dancers as true subjects within the film. The re-framing of these film texts as an art piece outside of their original context clarifies the sexualised eye of the camera and the film viewer. This sexualised distancing is made clearer by Garcia's

body jumping through time out at us, her video image coming from a different time than the clips she is referencing so that their combining is strange.

We watch her repeating the moves that the dancers from the original texts have done, and we see through her body the passivity in which all the dancers are framed and looked at. Garcia is a part of the historical collective, but she also isn't. This use of the 'not ... but' and *historicization* aids us to see her more easily than the other dancers because she is marked in a visually different way through the technology of the video image. As she moves in time with the other dancers and is in similar costume, we end up seeing them more clearly and realise that we would never really have seen them at all if Garcia had not stuck herself amongst them.

Garcia unveils the different ways that power plays out on women's bodies of colour implicitly disrupting or messing up of the way these bodies are positioned and looked at. As performer and video artist controlling her video image, she makes her position clear through these parafeminist *gestic* actions. She uses video as a tool to distance the fetishistic way the dancers have been framed by presenting them back to us. The video is in its original form but not quite whole. It is thereby unstuck from its ideological beginnings.

### **Always Becoming But Never Enough**

This 'unsticking' of the present moment is a parafeminist *gestic* action that implicitly requires a future that is different from now. A future that stems from a rejection of what we are living in at present: A future potential. Can the future be a time that should be aspired to, where an acceptance of all peoples and bodies exists? In order to grapple with this question, I turn to Muñoz's ideas on utopia. Muñoz draws on philosopher Ernst Bloch's theorisation of utopia. Bloch made a distinction between abstract and concrete utopias, where according to Muñoz, abstract utopias "are untethered from any historical consciousness" and "akin to banal optimism" (3). He saw concrete utopia, however, as a collective hope for the future moment, existing through a relational recognition of battles from the past. This utopia draws on the educated perception of what could be on the horizon but is always not yet here and is therefore marked by a continuing indeterminacy (*Cruising*, 2009).

Muñoz quotes Bloch to describe the various facets of educated hope: "Not only hope's affect (with its pendant, fear) but even more so, hope's methodology (with its pendant, memory) dwells in the region of the not-yet, a place where entrance and, above all, final content are marked by an enduring indeterminacy" (qtd. in Muñoz 3). This indeterminacy, after Giorgio Agamben, Muñoz names "potentiality", as hope that can be defined as anticipatory (3).

Muñoz turns to the aesthetic in art as a place where the future possibility can be found, arguing that it is in the aesthetic qualities of things where maps for futurity can be found. He describes an “anticipatory illumination of art” where aesthetic qualities of the work reveal the “not-yet conscious” or the “utopian feeling” (3). In this sense, aesthetic practices can reveal not a fixed utopia, but the continuous promise of the not-present, the non-static and a temporality that is not fixed in the here and now. Muñoz, while recognising that the present is not a place where queer bodies are readily celebrated, sees the promise in the utopian performative, which recognises the potential in the future moment. To quote:

Potentialities ... although they are present, ... do not exist in present things. Thus, potentialities have a temporality that is not in the present but, more nearly, in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity. Potentiality is and is not presence, and its ontology cannot be reduced to presentness. (99)

Muñoz claims that in seeking utopia, one is accepting that the present or presence is never enough. That one has hope for something different or something more in the future. A present where one is always in the process of becoming. This sense of *always becoming* is a part of queer subjectivity, which is never fixed or fully determined. This research reaches for a new future by way of art practice that unsticks the present moment through parafeminist *gestic* actions. These actions enact a utopian performative seeing the horizon through their feats of resistance.

I began this chapter by considering the performance of video enacted through the video artist creating the work. In this sense, the *video performer* exists in an expanded field both *on* and *off* the screen. I laid out the politics that this research is following, most specifically, what parafeminism is, and the junctures of feminism, queer and intersectionality that it prescribes to, encompasses and works alongside. I highlighted that parafeminism is a term created, specifically in relation to art practice within the visual field. This both illuminates and, in some ways problematizes a relationship to bodies and their visual signifiers, however, as clarified, visualization does not capture a singular definition of the subject. I described specific ways in which video art practice, both screen-based and within installation practice, can represent and alter both time and space, and also the viewer’s multiple positionings in relation to these artworks. I discussed notions of time and its disruption as a political imperative, which acts as a separation to chrononormative time, and further, in relation to time, examined queer futurity as a goal of the parafeminist *gestic* action. Chapter 4 will investigate the utopian performative leading to queer futurity further. If video art practice has the capacity to recreate spatial and time relations in the present, while highlighting other

possibilities of being and consideration of others, then through the use of parafeminist *gestic* actions, a better future is possible.



Figure 55. Caroline Garcia, *Primitive Nostalgia*, Video, 2014

*Primitive Nostalgia* tells us that the present, just like the past, with its colonial and patriarchal violence needs disrupting. Garcia, as curious producer, muddles linear time and her body within it. Her “shape-shifting” happens through her dance performance as well as her performance as video producer, controlling both the time and space of the video images that she presents. Her use of found footage positions her politics, where the past is seen through present eyes through its dislocation, thanks to the technical tools of video. This manipulation between past and present shocks viewers, so they see the scene anew. In that moment there is the possibility through the aesthetic practice of video, that the not-yet-here exists. This occurs through a rejection of the now, which has just been unveiled within Garcia’s video work. The visual aspects of her video body, with the green sometimes apparent around it through the not completely ‘successful’ keying, make it clear that she is positioning her “primitive” figure as one that can be copied and pasted into all “primitive other” spaces, just as monolithic ideas of the subject are hailed into existence within Australia’s politics and culture. The clarity with which the aesthetic of video brings this to life is the battle cry of a parafeminist *gestic* action.

Returning to *What You See*, in the performative utterances of “timeless” and

“presences,” the work embraces these aspects of queer time where we are in undefined time, while our bodies are here and now. It also identifies the multiplicity of subjectivities through its recognition that “your history is not my history”. The circular dialogue, repeating and playing on a loop, a form of iteration, but to a subject who sees themselves changed in the morphed mirror reflection of the object, with the faces of the performers reflecting on top of them, also distorted and changing, is not static. The viewer is essential in making the artwork, as “what you see is what you see”, but what you see changes with each encounter, and reacts to each entity reflected by it. Time is not offering the viewer a stable body to see. As they move closer and further from the circular object their bodies reflected, change also. The performers say, “no body”, “no body?” “nobody”. This pushes presence into the past and the future where bodies do and don’t exist. They are unfixed and fluid. To quote the performers, they are always “becoming”. The present is here, but never quite enough.

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## Chapter 4: Video's Interruption as Resistance

For me, the question has mainly been to try and put into words an experience, such as it has constituted itself little by little, that started when it became clear that we have entered, via video and all its consequences, a new time of the image.

(Bellour 18)

It is September 2017, at The Substation, Newport, Melbourne. I sit in my chair in the Main Space looking at the huge green screen curtain curving down and continuing onto the floor. Lights at three different points are directed at the curtains and floor, flattening the lighting as is called for when shooting with green screen effects. There are four cameras set up on tripods on either side of the green 'stage' waiting for the performer, Caroline Garcia, to arrive. From my position I can see the pulled-out camera viewfinders so that I am witnessing what the eye of the device is recording. Finally, there is a large TV screen which, while watching and waiting, I assume is hooked up to the cameras. It's large enough so that I have an easy view, even though I am a few rows back.



Figure 56. Caroline Garcia, *Flygirl*, documentation of a live dance installation, 2017

“This looks technical”, I think to myself. I know that it is possible to key out a green screen live, as might be done for a weather person on TV, but I can’t quite work out how it will be done here with these cameras. I can’t see any kind of visual mixer. Already knowing parts of Garcia’s practice, where she keys her own dancing body amongst found footage of other dancers (in works such as *Primitive Nostalgia* (2014) discussed in chapter 3), I am anticipating something similar with *Flygirl*, the performance I am about to witness.

Garcia arrives dressed in all black with white runners. The music starts: “*You can do wha’cha wanna do, in living colour*”. She dances at the centre of the green screen, the four cameras picking up her material body and transmitting its image to the large TV screen in front of the audience so that we can see both versions of her figure at the same time; the body in the ‘flesh’ in front of the green screen, and the body on the TV. On the TV screen we see Garcia’s dancing body keyed into the scene of five women dancing to the music in time with one another. She dances along with them, her moves choreographed and in time with theirs. I realise that this is the song and a clip from the late-night (at least in Australia) TV show, *In Living Color*, and that the title “Flygirl” relates to the women dance troupe for the show, “The Fly Girls”. This dance sequence lasts 32 seconds (see <https://carolinegarcia.com.au/Flygirl>). Garcia leaves the ‘stage’ to the audience’s left, circling the camera, lights and TV screen surrounding her. There is a pause, and then ... “*You can do wha’cha wanna do, in living colour*”. The act is repeated, Garcia is back in place at the centre of the green screen, repeating her dance for the audience and the cameras.

There are 32 seconds of the *In Living Color* theme song, where Garcia dances on ‘stage’ and onscreen with The Fly Girls dance troupe, there is a pause, she walks around all the equipment, and then does the exact same dance sequence as the theme song starts again. Garcia has been repeating this arrangement for 10 minutes. I keep trying to work out how the technology can key her out so easily in a live situation such as this one. I am impressed at how in-time Garcia is with the other dancers, every single time. Her athleticism is striking. She has obviously crafted this dance to the point that every single flick of foot and ponytail are exact — “but hold on” — I exclaim to myself. “Her material foot didn’t kick as high as her video foot!” Was I seeing things? I had to wait again for the next 32 second sequence.

Twenty minutes have passed, and I notice the sweat on Garcia’s material-body. I try to look closely at her video image. Do I see perspiration there? I can see the fatigue on Garcia’s body between takes. Very small changes to her kicks and turns occur. I become obsessed in trying to discover it in the video image. “I have been tricked”, I chuckle to myself. The video is a pre-recording. The actions of her material body are

the same as her video actions, and both are happening live for me as an audience member, but the video dance is another variation of the material body dance.<sup>6</sup> “Isn’t it? I can’t tell!”. I don’t trust my eyes, and the repeated song is interfering with my perception of time. I’ve heard those 32 seconds over and over again.

My sense of Garcia’s body and what it is doing, where and when it is being projected into my vision, is confused and alienated. The theatricality of the set up through the positioning of the cameras and lights *as if* they are videoing her alludes to an assumption about the way Garcia’s body will be seen and experienced.<sup>7</sup> My original expectations are confounded, and I feel a little embarrassed. “Did everyone else know all along?” This unfixing of the subject speaks to queer ways of being, and as I have argued in previous chapters, is a political tactic that can be used as part of a parafeminist *gestic* action within video art practice. Unknowability or indecipherability is at the heart of the queer subject, if indeed a singular fixed subject can be argued within the realm of queerness at all.

As discussed in chapter 3, a parafeminist approach to the *gestus* does not rest itself on fixed and identifiable subject categories. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed writes that social relations are organised spatially, and that queerness disrupts and reorders them by orienting itself towards objects and people differently. She argues that there is an embodied interaction between the body and the space it inhabits so to live a politics of disorientation can be an act of opening space to different ways of being. If we stay within moments of disorientation, new orientations are achieved and “such moments may be the source of vitality as well as giddiness” (4). In this chapter, I explore a disorientation or ungrounding in time and space as a form of political resistance, both material and digital, looking in particular at the aspects of radical *possibility* that these moments can supply. I argue that these are instances of the performance of parafeminist *gestic* actions within video art practice.

I look towards disorientation of the body in time and space through the interruption, with specific reference to Walter Benjamin’s reading of epic theatre and its workings. By juxtaposing Benjamin’s writing on the interruption with that of Butler on the decomposed performative, this chapter maps how video, through the act of montage, can be used as a tool create queer futurity. As discussed in chapter 3, the politics of this research, following a parafeminist model which is feminist, queer and intersectional, aims to disrupt a present that fails those living outside of the normative, heterosexist, patriarchal, neoliberal and imperialist system. This chapter explores further how video, as well as the video artist creating work, can perform

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to chapter 1 for an analysis of liveness and performance for video.

<sup>7</sup> The intersection of race and femininity will be discussed further on in this chapter.

parafeminist *gestic* actions through the technology and the medium of video art through the use of montage, framing and shot combinations.

### The Mapping of Future Social Relations

As foreshadowed in the introduction, video art is a multiple and mutating art form that encompasses numerous practices from within the visual arts, including performance, photography, film and new media. In *Mutant Media*, John Conomos notes the hybridisation of all moving image art forms “contaminating each other” (95) and describes video art as “an art form whose unique complex past needs to be understood in terms of its pluralistic generic contexts, history and effects” (94). I started this research looking at my own performance for video, leaning on the histories of performance-based video art, itself influenced by photography, conceptual art, performance, body art, documentary practice, activist artwork and installation. My interest was in the tactics of performance that I could use within the videos I made as a politics of resistance to the symbolic violence enacted upon those gendered ‘woman’. Through further research it became apparent that the technology of the medium I was using, the way I was presenting it, and therefore its relationality with the viewer, needed to be considered in order to achieve an understanding of all the aspects of the *gestic* action achievable through working in this specific medium. “[T]echnical progress is the basis of political progress for the author as producer” states Walter Benjamin in *The Author as Producer* (91). Thus, as video artist I perform the video technology and its presentation in time and space. Further, as author and producer of my video works, the technical process of production is politically performed.

Performance of video is an art practice that has the capacity to perform the utopian performative in its creation of queer futurity. The utopian performative, which will be investigated further below, is a mode of performative doing that suggests a potential for a better future or horizon from our current moment. It acts as a critique of the present moment but opens up the potential for something different and something better. It is a performative of a utopia that is always becoming into a futurity that is dynamic and unfixed, but non-existent in the present. Further to this, video can be an active agent in a halting of screen violence within art practice through the interruption of montage.

To understand the political possibilities of the montage’s interruption, I turn to the work Muñoz, whose theory of utopia as queer futurity through a reading of Ernst Bloch aids my attempt to find not only a utopian halt to the present but also a way forward in creating the potentiality for new horizons through video art practice. I find hopefulness within Muñoz, whose arguments for the world-building that can be found within the aesthetic, are in line with my own feelings and approach to life. In his book

*Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, he states that “[t]urning to the aesthetic in the case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations” (1). The frustrations and deep sadness that I feel at the symbolic and literal violence enacted upon those peoples and bodies deemed lesser, and particularly those considered women, can be hard to reckon with. The vitality at which I feel when experiencing something outside of that world and this time propels me in different directions, and also folds me into a union with others. Experiencing this through art is a connector to something outside the context of the now. Connecting Muñoz’s linking of queer aesthetics with a charting of future ways of living, I take stock in Jennifer Doyle’s understanding of queerness through art when she states that:

the homoerotic possibilities embedded within bohemian circles are one of the things that have long been life-sustaining to queer people – meaning not only those whose desires can be described as “same-sex” but those who simply can’t live happily within the heteronormative matrix. (14)

In this sense it is through the aesthetic, and further the queer aesthetic, that a rejection of normative social scripts, gender assumptions, and life ‘goals’ can be lived. The queering of time also marks a rejection of the normative markers that celebrate a ‘successful’ life. Queer time, theorised by Jack Halberstam and discussed in chapter 3, is:

the dark nightclub ... It is a theory of queerness as a way of being in the world and a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity. (182)

Queer time is a rejection of the social scripts and markers that spell out how a life should be lived. It rejects the normative assumptions tied with how sex and gender should be managed and the outcomes they should perform. My parafeminist approach rejects these restrictive ways of living, which is also why the notion of time is integral to my politics. Queerness, through the aesthetic, charts future potentials within social systems. This includes an embrace of queer time, or a different way to live that is outside of the simplistic binaries of a ‘productive’ life, such as child rearing as a necessity, marriage, capital gains, and the nuclear family. There is a through line between Halberstam’s conception of queer time as a rejection of curated social scripts as life markers, and Ahmed’s questioning of happiness as a list of societal achievements. In *A Critical Inquiry in Queer Utopias*, Angela Jones refers to Ahmed’s conception of happiness as simply having the space to breath within an endurable life,

rather than a life full of accomplished desires. Jones argues that creating queer futurity is the act of making the present more bearable for everyone, rather than an unachievable ideal or the perfect life:

[W]e recognize [sic] that queer futurity is not so much about crafting prescriptions for a utopian society—in which everyone is happy and life is ideal—but by making life more bearable in the present because in doing so we create the potential for a better future. (2)

This chapter lays its claim in its enactment of queer futurity created by the utopian performative, through the act of the interruption of montage, which I name “performative montage”. This is where the performance of video enacts a parafeminist *gestic* action that through performativity creates the potential of a new future or in Muñoz’s words, a *queer futurity*.

The practice-led research that accompanies this chapter is a video piece titled *Oops!* (2020), which I will write about further below. *Oops!* opens up the contingency of queer time, through its constant interruption of the normative social scripts that it enacts. Each scene features a social group/family that is interrupted through montage as well as a literal interruption of a stranger. *Oops!* is a practical example of a video artwork that uses performative montage to enact parafeminist *gestic* actions that are feminist, queer and intersectional. I will also further discuss *Flygirl* in relation to its use of montage and in turn its troubling of the spatiotemporal realm, and how these actions are also executions of that are parafeminist and *gestic*.

### Breaking into the Situation

*Oops!* is an attempt to bring the theory to the practice in the most concrete of ways in this PhD, as it is an enactment of a concept written by Walter Benjamin in his attempt to describe how Brecht’s epic theatre works. “[T]he interrupting of action is one of the principal concerns of epic theatre” Benjamin claims (*Understanding Brecht* 24). In his explanation of Brecht’s purpose, he notes that epic theatre:

should not so much develop an action as present a situation. It attains that condition ... by allowing the action to be broken up. ... I am speaking of the process of montage: the element which is superimposed breaks into the situation on which it is imposed. (“Author as Producer” 94).

Benjamin argues that the process of montage, the *breaking into another situation*, was

accomplished by interruption. The interruption breaks up theatrical illusion by distancing the viewer, who sees the scene as a 'real situation' but one which is now also seen with the eyes of astonishment that reveal the scene's conditions for what they are. He writes, "In the midst of the action, [the interruption] brings it to a stop, and thus obliges the spectator to take a position towards the action, obliges the actor to take a position towards his [sic] role" (ibid). The interruption and then look of astonishment, unveils the social situations ever present in the scene. Montage is not specific to video art practice, but it has a specific history related to film and moving image work. Before expanding on Benjamin's analysis of epic theatre, which extends my argument and practice-led research, I would like to investigate the technique of film montage, more specifically, Soviet film montage.

My research around video art uses an approach that includes film montage theory as a political act and creative device, while also pointing to it within installation practice, seeing disparate combinations inside and outside the screen. In this sense, my practice combines filmic, theatrical and visual arts approaches to montage. The claims I am making for montage in my work act on Benjamin's conception of it as an interruption that unveils the social situation revealed within the scene, as well as film montage theory discussed below, which theorises that two disparate images placed next to one another create a new meaning, as well as the idea that montage disrupts the spatial geography of a moving image scene. As already outlined in both the introduction and chapter 3, video art practice exists within a cross-section of visual art practices, theatre, performance and film. Therefore, it has a specific tactic in the way it can create para-feminist *gestic* actions. My aim in going forward is to clarify how this occurs through various strategies of montage.

Montage is the combining of two different elements, which can often be seemingly unrelated to one another, but where their juxtaposition creates an added meaning rather than if they were presented as singular entities. In her book *Bertolt Brecht and the Theory of Media*, Roswitha Mueller makes the point that while montage is often allied with film, its development as a filmic technique can be traced to the visual art of dada, surrealism and Russian futurism. She notes that other critics argue it started with cubism, whereas Roland Barthes goes even further back, seeing the beginnings of montage in the theatre of Denis Diderot who cut the linear sequence out of narrative with the presentation of the tableau (68). The political motives within the use of montage during these early examples is ever-present. Nenad Jovanovic, in his text *Montage and Theatricality as Sources of Estrangement*, refers to Theodore Adorno, who argued that in order for montage to act as it was conceived, that this construction must shock, otherwise it loses its political value "and its interest dwindles to a cultural-historical curiosity" (qtd. in Jovanovic 117). Jovanovic's description of montage within film in comparison to editing is most helpful here:

In the context of cinema, and particularly in the English-language discourse on the medium, montage is distinguished from editing to suggest the former's divergence from dominant cinema's aim of creating the illusion of continuity of space and time within film scenes, as well as maintaining a sense of spatial and temporal relationships. (112)

The use of montage in comparison to editing is not to disguise the disjoint between shots, and referring to Adorno's quote above, often aims to highlight the disconnect in order to shock. Indeed, Rainer Friedrich points out that in montage each element is independent of the other, but that their connection creates "an inner tension" (158). Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, who used montage as a creative and political tool, saw montage as a violent encounter that creates another meaning: "from the collision of two given factors *arises* a concept" (Eisenstein's emphasis *Film Form* 37). This was apparent in the juxtaposition of two diverging shots, or differences within the singular film shot. He saw film as a medium to further exploit tension through conflict between graphic relationships such as disruptions of or differentiations between movement, scale, volumes, light, and depth. "[M]ontage is conflict", he states (38). The shock of the montage activates an awareness of the intellectual and ideological conditions, just as Benjamin's description of epic theatre's interruption does. As Friedrich points out in his article *On Brecht and Eisenstein*, when aligning filmic montage with that of the stage, "[t]he shock is to trigger a process leading to an intellectual experience. The objective of Eisenstein and Brecht is to emancipate the spectator, with the structure of montage being particularly suited to this" (164). In looking at montage within this research, I am searching for the inner tension created by combining two separate elements and the conflict or shock that this creates, which leads to an intellectual experience. The shock creates the thought that is the instance of recognition of the politics and the moment of *gestus*. Therefore, applied knowingly, montage can be a *gestic* action that is exploited by the video artist.

While montage theory within film is now a century-old concept, most notably taken up first within Soviet Russia, I would like to focus on its use contemporaneously within my own praxis in order to find a working method that can pinpoint its function as a creative tool that creates para-feminist *gestic* actions. As already mentioned, I am making an argument that as video artist, who controls the montage, I am performing the video. Viktor Shklovskii, the leader of the Russian Formalists, once wrote: "There is a question: does our montage-oriented cinema need the actor at all? Our actor is fragmented, analysed, and exists in the form of montage" (qtd. in Olinina, 299). This is not my question or my argument, but I use it to identify the historical discussion around montage within film, which inevitably seeps into contemporary video art, as an opening up of how performance can be conceived once the creative actor controls

much of the technical output, in this case, the montage of shots.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Lev Kuleshov, the Russian film theorist who was at the centre of Soviet montage theory, commented on the fact that montage per se is not what makes a film, seeing as its use changes according to the political and creative approach of the artist. He argued that, “it becomes clear that montage (the essence of all art) is inextricably tied to the world-view of the person who has the material at his [sic] disposal” (185). This supports my position on the video artist as performer of the *gestic* action.

As stated above, montage does not exist in film alone, and indeed Russian directors well-known for their use of montage in film, such as Dziga Vertov and Eisenstein, also worked within other artforms. Eisenstein directed several theatre performances within his lifetime, and his theory of The Montage of Attractions, which conceived of a mode of ideological conclusion being reached by the audience through singular shocks enacted upon them separate to the narrative whole, was originally theorised for the theatre (Robertson 2009).

Indeed, Roland Barthes sees the similarities between Brecht’s use of montage alongside Eisenstein’s: In Brecht, each scene is seen as its own segment, rather than meaning being created by the sum of each part; in Eisenstein “the film is a contiguity of episodes, each one absolutely meaningful, aesthetically perfect” (35). Barthes aligns the two approaches to montage as a series of tableaux or shots, each meaningful in their singularity and existing outside of linearity. They suspend time but make the history of an action clear, (“the presence of all absences (memories, lessons, promises)”) all fixed in one representation (36). Barthes describes this moment, borrowing from Lessing in *Laocoon*, as the “pregnant moment”. He maintains that it is the social *gestus* that expresses the pregnant moment. “It is a gesture or set of gestures (but never a gesticulation) in which a whole social situation can be read” (36).<sup>9</sup> The *pregnant moment*, where time is halted, is close to Benjamin’s conception of the interruption as montage, where the scene is re-considered and assessed within the moment of interruption. I will expound on Benjamin’s conception of epic theatre further below and relate it to my practice-led video art piece, *Oops!*

In order to elaborate his point on epic theatre further, Benjamin offers an example of a scene that is interrupted, and through its interruption, rendered both strange and familiar. Benjamin’s example takes place in a domestic setting where a family is having a fight. The mother is just about to throw a bronze statuette at her daughter, and the father is opening the window to call out to a police person for help, even though this

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<sup>8</sup> I cannot claim to have executed every aspect of technical output for *Oops!* the practical research in this chapter. While I directed crew towards my vision, I did not fulfill every task myself, such as the cinematography, lighting or sound design. However, my interest lies in the montage of *Oops!* as it is specific to Benjamin’s conception of the interruption, the basis of epic theatre according to him.

<sup>9</sup> Mueller disagrees with Barthes conception of montage in Eisenstein where the social *gestus* exists within singular shots, and she argues convincingly that within Brecht, singular segments also have a total effect through Brecht’s conception of the fable, which ultimately align each singular part with an overall sociopolitical idea within the play as a whole (70).

action will be too late. It is precisely at this moment, before the physical act of violence by the mother towards the daughter takes place, that a stranger arrives at the door. Here, “the stranger is confronted with a certain set of conditions: troubled faces, open window, a devastated interior” (Benjamin *Understanding Brecht* 19). It is through the interrupting look of the stranger that the audience sees the scene anew, as a “tableau” unveiling the social conditions of the scene, where the potential violence within the bourgeois family unit can be recognised (ibid).

It is not empathy with the scene or performers that Benjamin recognises as a technique of montage in Brecht’s epic theatre, but rather the shock or astonishment that a moment can induce in a viewer, making the once-familiar conditions of the situation in the context before them strange (an act of *Verfremdungseffekt*). The process of interruption brings up these reactions, uncovering the circumstances of the situation, by placing them within ideology. Benjamin figures the interruption as a technique of montage, “for montage interrupts the context into which it is inserted” (99). In other words, the critical perspective towards the scene created by its interruption arises due to its montage, or, bringing it back to Barthes’ conception, the cutting away from the linear narrative and suspension in time creates its *pregnant moment*. So, unlike the montage of film where two images come one after the other to make a new conceptual whole, here, the montage is the interruption of an action, the *breaking into a situation*, and thus, arresting its action.

In Benjamin’s family scene the action is never fully resolved, as it ends at its interruption. There is no insinuation of what happens after the stranger arrives. Therefore, the resolution exists in the act of montage / interruption, uncovering the violence of the bourgeois family unit that may not have been exposed without its intervention. Returning to Barthes’ pregnant moment, time exists in the moment, not as past, present, or future, but *all in one look*. To quote Barthes: “Does the tableau have a subject (a topic)? Nowise; it has a meaning, not a subject. The meaning begins with the social gestus (with the pregnant moment); outside of the gestus, there is only vagueness, insignificance” (37). It is this pregnant moment created by the interruption that I will refer to later in my discussion of the utopian performative, but first I would like to analyse the interruption as a para-feminist *gestic* action.

Here, the interruption is a gesture that plays with the temporality of the here and now through its halting of time, creating an image or tableau to be considered or reckoned with, as well as separating itself from what has come before (even though the machinations of historical action are apparent) and will arrive after it. In this sense, the gesture of interruption removes itself from the action and exists outside the context of the narrative, alienating or denaturalising itself, fulfilling the act of *de-historicization* by placing itself outside the continuous narrative or context of time. Being outside of the frame, interrupting its assumed context, provides a para-feminist

space of contingency, where the fixity of bodies and time is malleable and changing. The 'not ... but' is presented through the interruption, where numerous possibilities suddenly exist. Rather than one action being encompassed by what it is not, here the interruption unveils what it is, an example of the social *gestus* discussed above. This is a tearing off of layers to reveal the possibility of everything other than what is revealed in the tableau; through an interruption. Suddenly the scene is all too familiar.

It is the interruption of an action that, according to Benjamin, creates its form and is "the origin of the quotation. Quoting a text implies interrupting its context" (*Understanding Brecht* 19). This sense of the interruption being a quotation, was taken up by Butler in her conception of the decomposed performative, which I will now analyse.

### **Before it Proves Lethal**

Butler places Benjamin's interrupting stranger within the realm of performativity, but in a *decomposed* form. She argues that the quotation Benjamin recognises in epic theatre can be seen in the same way as the Derridean citation: a speech act cannot be understood as having power or value unless it is recognised as already holding an agreed upon meaning, therefore belonging to a citational chain, which is recapitulated through repetition.<sup>10</sup> She argues that the gesture of the interruption works along the same lines but differently from the speech act of performativity, as well as gender performativity. Instead of creating action or meaning through saying or proclaiming something, as the speech act does, or creating gendered bodies through a repetition and iteration of embodied actions that are considered woman or man, the gesture of the interruption halts violence, rather than creates it. She writes, "*The gesture, then, functions as the partial decomposition of the performative that arrests action before it proves lethal*" (Butler's emphasis "Gesture Event" 190).

The performative of the interruption is felicitous, but it does not create action; instead, it stops action. In Butler's words, "[p]erhaps this kind of stalling, cutting, and stopping establishes an intervention into violence, an unexpected non-violence through an indefinite stall, one produced by interruption and citation alike" (*ibid*). The gesture of the interruption is separate to and breaks the ordinary, repeated action, making the violence we think is about to arrive shocking or strange. In other words, the violence behind the potential of the act is rendered manifest whilst it is interrupted and thus does not happen. The temporal flow of the situation is suspended. We are in the present moment while recognising the family scene as

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<sup>10</sup> Derrida wrote about the citation in response to J.L. Austin's theory of parasitic speech acts. Derrida argued that citationality is necessary to make a performative 'successful'. He maintained that for the performative speech act to have its power, then the speech used must *already* be recognized as having value, and it is through citation and repetition that its value has meaning and authority. (See chapter 1 for further discussion).

something outside of time. This is a citation separate from where we are now through the interruption but recognizable within the context of the family unit. What might have seemed familiar or 'normal' is now rendered strange and astonishing.

Time cannot be escaped, but linearity is muddled in the gesture of the interruption. Butler notes the "distance from the original context is a precondition of quotability or citationality: there could be no citation without that distance, that break" (182). The interruption becomes a category that offers a reading of temporality as a synchronic and non-linear regime. *Historicization* takes place with the citation (Derrida) / quotation (Benjamin) happening in the present but also halting the present or turning the present-violent-moment into the past via quotation / citation. As argued in chapter 3, this troubling of linear time is a parafeminist *gestic* action as it unsettles both an acceptance of the present (leading on from our problematic past and bringing forth an unliveable future) as a place that is fair and equitable for everyone, and it also disrupts the social scripts of linearity steeped in power hierarchies privileging capital, procreation and dynamics of power related to the patriarchy. Also discussed in chapter 3, this breaking of linearity can be achieved within ways specific to the performance of video art practice such as the use of found footage and through editing. Butler notes that the gesture of interruption:

is meant to be extracted from the temporal flow of ordinary action, presented in relative isolation from what precedes and follows. Similarly, the gesture is no longer propped up by a taken-for-granted world, and so seems to have been deprived of its usual grounding in both temporal sequence and spatial context. (183)

The ungrounding within time and space is a way of alienating the viewer so that they cannot rest on linearity, or in Butler's words, the *temporal flow*. Following Ahmed, such disorientation of time and space means that people position or reorientate themselves differently, queering their positioning and opening up different possibilities for ways of being. Thus, the gesture of interruption can be seen as a parafeminist *gestic* action that disrupts linearity and hegemonic orientations.

### **Video's Undoing of a Deed**

Butler pinpoints Benjamin's description of performance as that which involves a way of seeing that is "attentive, considered, even critical" so that the audience is not singular, but united and "implicated together" (184). She goes on to describe performance in Benjamin's conception as something that astonishes the viewer beyond their comfortable identificatory positions. The experience of the performance places the viewer within a set of historical conditions, which "is the specific

‘performance’ of epic theater [sic], what distinguishes it from Aristotelian ‘action’” (185). To be made astonished within the historical conditions in which you exist in is a form of alienation from them. “They break out of the continuity of history, we might say, and the naturalised understanding of social relations” (ibid). The “performance” of epic theatre places the audience simultaneously within historical time but also de-historicises situations and makes them strange so that we are not following action through identifying with it but seeing it as directed through the vision of another. Here, performance exists outside of a singular subject performing and becomes the performance of the total, epic theatre piece. Therefore, following Benjamin, the video work that uses *gestic* actions, purposefully disidentifying, interrupting, de-historicising, and alienating, is the “performance” of video art. Continuing this thought, I am performing as a video artist through my work, and I as performer are choosing to follow a specific political intent, which is parafeminist.

Benjamin’s family in the throes of a violent confrontation is interrupted through the intrusion of the stranger. Their ‘look’ creates a new element of judgement and shock, which in turn creates additional meaning through the recognition of the viewer who sees the scene through the astonished eyes of the stranger as well as through their own position, which has now been disrupted and re-qualified by the interruption. This merging of family scene and sudden shocked look is the act of montage. The video body (which is the body of the image on screen or projected as well as the body of the figure in the image), through its capacity to change vision and sound suddenly, or to repeat itself over and over again, or visually morph itself, or direct the viewer’s physicality by multi-screen projection, opens itself up to its interruption / montage and therefore is an effective tool for alienating or making strange (*Verfremdungseffekt*) gender norms within ideological practices.

If montage is understood as the supplementary meaning or conflict created by the conjoining of two contrasting elements, either through an interruption of action, or visual and sonic elements; or their conjoining within video work to create a new meaning; then, from a parafeminist standpoint, it can be deployed as an interruption to prescriptive notions of gender (that also include race, nationality and religion) coming from within normative ideology. I can achieve this by highlighting that performers exist within a socio-historical position rather, than fulfilling a set of psychological realisms (*historicization*). Montage is the interruption to essentialised bodies that fit within strict gender categories, to strict assumptions about the bodily possibilities of those considered women and to the symbolic violence that is present through the regulatory practices of a heterosexist and cissexist society (*not ... but*). Thus, montage is a *gesture* of interruption that forms part of a parafeminist *gestic* action. The halting or stalling of time through the break of interruption means that the symbolic violence enacted upon those gendered women is paused and then

recognised. It is the decomposed performative that creates the pause and in that moment queer futurity is created, which will be discussed below. This is an undoing of a deed by its interruption, at least for a moment. I will discuss what can be born from this moment further on, but first I would like to return to Caroline Garcia's live video performance in *Flygirl* in order to investigate how montage is used with video and the live body, and how Garcia queers both time and space.

### Reclaiming the Filler

In *Flygirl*, I see montage present in numerous sophisticated ways that move from *shock* or *astonishment* to a purposeful disorientation that reveals a politics against colonialist and patriarchal examples of women's representation. *Flygirl* uses montage through the assemblage of the screen body and the 'flesh' body, and further, by the slight difference between their movements, creating astonishment that is meted out, slowly, over time, again and again and again. Montage is used within the video image by the combining of Garcia's body with those of the Fly Girl dance troupe. Finally, there is the montage of mediums. This is a live performance, but the video is pre-recorded and also live. Here there is also a montage of variations of 'liveness'.

These disparate combinations, all made possible by video technology in some way, converge upon the politics of Garcia's body where the intersection of race and femininity are pushed to the surface. To repeat Eisenstein, *a concept has arisen from the collision of two given factors*. The sequence that Garcia samples, *In Living Color*, was part of a comedy sketch show made in the United States from 1990 to 1994. According to Geri Speace, it was the first comedy sketch show to feature a majority African American cast (2013). Garcia, an Australian with Filipino heritage, spoke in the Q & A afterwards about turning to American television when she was younger, and particularly *In Living Color*, in order to see representations of non-white performers. This was something that she could not find on Australian television. In Garcia's own words about *Flygirl*:

This work examines the narrative of the female body, especially one of colour, used as filler, or as a device to fill in the gaps in male dominated territories. In the act of centering these peripheral or marginalised bodies that have been forgotten in televisual history, *Flygirl* playfully reframes nostalgia and cultural memories, by taking the platform of the 32-second dance interlude and executing it as the main body of choreography. (Garcia)

Garcia's "reframing" of "nostalgia and cultural memories" is a reclaiming of space in an extension of similar ideas within *Primitive Nostalgia*, discussed in chapter 3, where she morphs her dancing body into found footage of Hollywood dance sequences featuring

people from non-white backgrounds. The very fact that this reclaimed space only lasts for 32 seconds is an example in technical form of how little territory non-white bodies are allowed to occupy within colonised spaces. Garcia disrupts this given of whiteness, placing herself again and again within a space that previously only lasted 32 seconds. She removes whiteness as the focal point of the cultural space and in that sense both questions and highlights it as the given, or as Ahmed names it “as form of bodily inheritance” (121). Ahmed further contends that within social spaces that every non-white body is considered a deviation from whiteness and is therefore situated as other than white. She sees whiteness as the central position that other bodies are oriented around, where:

[R]acial others ... come to embody distance. This embodiment of distance is what makes whiteness “proximate,” as the “starting point” for orientation. Whiteness becomes what is “here,” a line from which the world unfolds, which also makes what is “there” on “the other side.” (121)



Figure 57. Caroline Garcia, *Flygirl*, documentation of a live dance installation, 2017

It is through montage where Garcia situates herself as central to her orientation as flesh performer and video performer, inserting herself into a 32-second sequence originally used as “filler” and orientated around the normalization of whiteness. Instead, in *Flygirl*, Garcia’s body, which is considered “non-white” within the spaces of Australian society, has re-orientated her figure as central through the repetition of the video (which is also a form of montage as it is clearly not how the original work existed), and also made strange or alienated the act of performing to mediatized representations through the interruption of bodily discontinuity between flesh and

video body. Garcia is “here” but shows us that outside of her performance within Australia, the representations of non-white bodies are not “here” but “there” and “on the other side”. In this case, Garcia literally traverses *the other side* by placing herself, *here* in this other space that is usually over *there* and then making the viewer see her within this space. The other dancing bodies are from the other side of whiteness and of time, but now also performing alongside Garcia, who shows her distance to white centralized bodies within culture, but places herself as the space from which the performance unfolds.

In *Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art*, Kate Mondloch furthers the point about orientation of the body in relation to the positioning of the video material and the viewer:

By foregrounding an active relationship between the spectator, media objects, exhibition space, and screen spaces, ... media art installations generate a self-conscious and troubled spectatorship explicitly contingent upon the articulated tension between actual and virtual times and spaces. We are simultaneously both here *and* there, both now *and* then. (Mondloch’s emphasis 75/76)

This tension, as Mondloch states, exists through the technology of video and its presentation. It is through technology that Garcia reclaims her space and situates her body within it, which is a para-feminist *gestic* action. Video works can reclaim found footage and rework its images, as well as its control the space of reception and the space inhabited. I will analyse these aspects further now. The mention of “nostalgia” on Garcia’s part, along with the word being used in her piece *Primitive Nostalgia*, investigated in chapter 3, orients my thinking towards Laura Mulvey’s analysis of the manipulation and therefore possession of the cinematic image through the use of digital technologies, which she names the possessive spectator:

When the presence of the past, the time of registration, rises to the surface, it seems to cancel the narrative flow. In almost any halt to a film, a sense of the image as document makes itself felt as the fascination of time fossilized overwhelms the fascination of narrative progression. (187)

This cancellation of the narrative flow is a variation on the tableau seen anew through the interruption conceived by Benjamin’s montage and following his theory of the action being broken up or broken into, is a form of montage. Further, Garcia’s possession of the televisual image, which she controls and repeats over and over, never allowing the symbolic violence of the coloniser’s image to be seen above and beyond the Fly Girls dance troupe, arrests its action so it can never be lethal. This is therefore

also an example of the decomposed performative conceived by Butler. As Mulvey states, the “[p]ose allows time for the cinema to denaturalize [sic] the human body” (163). In *Flygirl*, the pose exists in repetition. It is a moving pose or *tableau* enacted then interrupted again and again. The violence that is interrupted in *Flygirl* is the violence of the colonization of media representations. Here, Garcia has taken the “filler” of “male dominated territories” and controlled it, playing with its time, repeating it over and over. The violence of sexism and racism meted out through erasure is not being allowed to present itself. The “fictional present” cannot “reassert itself” and therefore its avoidance of that is a decomposed performative, the stalling of violence through an interruption before proving destructive. It is the possession of the cinematic image argued through Mulvey’s possessive spectator, that the parafeminist *gestic* action is taking place.

Garcia’s use of the Fly Girls image and dance sequence from *In Living Color* is a quote, interrupting its framework in the Benjaminian sense, and a citation in the Derridian/Butlerian sense. Further, the repeated montage of the video and flesh body, where the flesh body cannot keep up with the video body, slowly breaking the illusion between them both, speaks to normative media representations of women, and particularly ‘raced’ bodies who are figured in specific monolithic ways. She may try, but Garcia cannot perform these singular representations over and over again, even in her performance. This purposeful ‘failure’ creates a space beyond popular representation that we cannot see but know exists. Through the repetition of her body, Garcia plays with the ways that bodies are shaped within culture.

As Ahmed reminds us, “spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body” (9). Space exists in and on the body, and as Ahmed argues, shapes the body through repetition in time. Through repeating certain activities, we shape our bodies in particular ways over other ways, which are influenced by social aspects such as gender and class. “Gender could thus be described as a bodily orientation, a way in which bodies get directed by their actions over time” (60). Ahmed states that we orient ourselves towards a direction, which gives our life meaning. The way we position or orient ourselves can be in a straight line, following expected social norms, or we can “clear space” for differing directions, though this takes time (21). Garcia is clearing this space for herself, and taking the time needed to do so through the repetition of the 32 seconds of space allotted to the Fly Girls within *In Living Color*, and by extension the culture at large. Through repeating her actions over time she is re-shaping and re-orientating her position in cultural space and the space of the performance. The performance of video thus can reshape space through repetition, and in time. It can also change the way bodies take up space or orient themselves in space. I will now look further at a different space than that of the live video performance and focus on that of the screen-based video and also multi-screen

installation. I would also like to direct my attention to an analysis of montage within this space across screens and also of the singular video image, within a work that I made as part of this research.

### ***Oops!* "This is a Nice Family!"**



Figure 58. Cassandra Tytler, *Oops!*, Video, 2020

Click image to watch video or go to: <http://vimeo.com/499946875> Password: oops!

*Oops!* was made to be both a video installation projected across three large screens as well as a screen-based video. Unfortunately, due to the Covid19 lockdown in Victoria in March 2020, the exhibition was postponed until 2021. I will analyse it as a screen-based video and then go on to discuss how I envision it working in the installation space. The video material features three different scenes set within contemporary Australia. Each one is influenced by Walter Benjamin's fighting family scene that gets interrupted by a stranger arriving, (discussed above). Every scenario includes instances of symbolic violence through words and demeanour. These relate to gender, sexism, racism, class-relations and the environment.

Scene 1 takes place around the family dinner table. It features a mother, father and their two teenage daughters. Helen, the mother, passive-aggressively chastises her daughters, with them replying to her in monosyllables. David, the father, supports his wife in a very detached manner. When Ruby, Helen and David's daughter asks, "Can we get red curtains?" Helen answers, "Well I guess if you want it to look like we live in a brothel ... well knowing you, maybe you do", shaming her for her taste as well as an

insinuated 'unreasonable' sexuality. Helen claims that they are a "nice family", and when she is challenged on this, threatens her daughters with violence. The scene ends with the mother shouting at her daughters, "this is a nice family!" while at the same time menacing them with the wine glass that she has smashed onto the table, only to be interrupted by a stranger who suddenly, inexplicably enters the scene before the act of violence takes place. When the family see the stranger, they all stop what they are doing. The mother puts the glass 'dagger' on the table and looks down, ashamed of being caught in this act of violence.



Figure 59 - 62. Cassandra Tytler, *Oops!*, Video, 2020

Scene 2 is at a family/friend's BBQ. There are five characters: Bill, Jody, Shane, Josh and Jane. Bill and Shane are old friends, as are Jody and Josh. Jane is Josh's new romantic partner. Shane acts out the 'Aussie bloke', chastising Bill for being such "a woman" for cooking at the BBQ, with Bill insisting that "it's a barbie, it's different." The insinuation being that men can only cook when it is 'manly' and BBQ cooking is so because it happens outside the domesticated space.

"Coal all the way" Shane answers, a reference to coal apparently making meat taste good, but also to the blinded, anti-environmentalist view that mining for coal is still a positive endeavour within Australian economics. This reference is extended later on when Josh says that Jane is a vegetarian. Shane is furious, exclaiming, "Don't you give a shit about the farmers?" This is another coupling of the idea that doing well by the environment is inherently selfish because it takes money and livelihoods away from hard working Australians, specifically those who are not based in the city. The insinuation therefore also brings up the class division within the country vs city dynamic of the Australian psyche.

Both Jody and Josh do not have Anglo-Saxon heritage like the other three. Shane's blokey-ness is very different to Josh's demeanor and Shane seems uncomfortable as soon as the new couple arrive. He re-criticizes Bill for cooking, showing his simplistic sexism and misogyny: "He's pussy-whipped, that's what's up. Look at him, cooking like a little girl". His assertion of dominance through aggressively removing himself from womanliness and then quickly getting angry at Josh when he mentions veggie burgers reflects the casual aggression he has for women and non-white Australians. The scene ends with Shane trying to burn Jane's hand on the BBQ after she stands up for herself against him. A stranger interrupts the moment of violence, and Shane suddenly stops what he is doing, ashamed of himself.



Figure 63 - 66. Cassandra Tytler, *Oops!*, Video, 2020

Scene 3 takes place in a family lounge room where an extended family is playing a game. Eden, Travis' daughter, and Brenda's step-daughter reads out a quiz question she must answer: "What is Don Bradman's test batting average?" This was one of the questions on Australia's citizenship questionnaire in the early 2000s when John Howard was the Australian prime minister. In order to be considered worthy of citizenship, this was one of the facts you were meant to know.

Punctuating this case of hierarchies of power through cultural knowledge, in Australia's situation being about men and sport, is the fact that Eden and her father are not of Anglo-Saxon descent, whereas Brenda and her two children, Rosie and Jasper, are. They laugh uproariously when Eden says she doesn't know anything about sports people. Later, Jasper reads his quiz question: "What is the average age an Australian, aboriginal dies?" He pauses and says, "I'm bored now". Rosie exclaims that

they should play charades instead, in which instance everyone but Eden agrees wholeheartedly. “But he didn’t even answer the question! What’s the answer?” Eden asks. “It doesn’t matter, you were losing anyway, and, who cares?” answers Rosie.

These exchanges underscore the atrocious and active blindness prevailing in the psyche of many Australians and the government in regard to treatment of aboriginals within the colonial system. Further racism is enacted on Eden, who has to act out the title of the well-known racist film “Birth of a Nation” in the game of charades. As she does so, Brenda and Rosie shout out insults linked to those gendered ‘woman’: “slut”, “fat dirty slut”, “whore” etc. The scene ends when the son, Jasper, explodes and starts acting out physical violence as a charade until he is literally about to hit his stepsister, Eden. Neither of the adults does much until a stranger arrives unexpectedly and interrupts the impending violence. Jasper, realising he has been caught in the act, does not throw the punch he is about to.



Figure 67 - 70. Cassandra Tytler, *Oops!*, Video, 2020

The choice of the stranger in each of these scenes is a literalisation of Benjamin’s interrupting stranger story created to explain what epic theatre does and creates for a viewer, discussed above. He does not describe the stranger or whether they are man or woman, young or old, therefore their social positioning is not the focus of his story. In my own decision making deciding on the performers of each stranger, I chose people who may not be considered as holding positions of power within the Australian hierarchy (with the knowledge that power exists in different ways across different groups). Stranger 1 is a male of Sri Lankan heritage, Stranger 2 is me, a woman, over 40, with Anglo-Celtic heritage, and Stranger 3 is a woman over 70, with Anglo-Celtic heritage, who is actually my mother: bringing an invisible familial aspect to the drama

of families on-screen. I also chose to be Stranger 2 as a nod to my earlier artworks where I was the sole performer for the screen. While these decisions were informed by my own formulation, what is important following Benjamin's conception is their look, which comes directly after the interruption and creates a still tableau, or Barthes' pregnant moment. It is considered outside of the narrative and within ideology by the viewer because of the interruption and then the pause of action. To quote Benjamin:

The action is interrupted; what comes to the foreground in its place is the situation which meets the glance of the stranger: contorted faces, open window, smashed furniture. But there is a point of view from which even more common scenes of contemporary existence don't look very different. That is the viewpoint of the epic dramatist. ("Author as Producer" 94)

The social and family scenes depicted in *Oops!* are not uncommon. The interpellating through name-calling, the blame and aggression directed towards those who do not fit into a particular world view or subject category, the restrictive gendering; these are the points of view of contemporary existence that *don't look very different* from what gets interrupted on screen. The stranger and the viewer have this unveiled to them through the interruption of montage, and I as video artist control this montage.

In comparison to Eisenstein's approach to montage as two differing aspects creating tension that encourages a concept, Benjamin and Barthes' notion of montage speaks more to the tableau that is created by the look of the stranger, which I also took into account in *Oops!* where the 'look' of the interrupting stranger is framed in a wide shot, where everyone looks guiltily at them and the camera in a pause or "pregnant moment" (Barthes). Here the look is the stranger's within the video, the singular characters awareness of one another. As well as the literal interruption of the stranger on the family or friend scenes, in *Oops!*, further forms of interruption exist within the video montage, and the use of differing shots, mostly in close-up. In the next section, I focus on the use of these shots intruding into the temporal logic of the narrative.

### **As Big as a Cockroach**

The linearity of the video narrative is constantly being interrupted, with different shots from other scenes intruding on the story. My use of this technique was suggested by Kuleshov mentioned above, who encouraged the re-contextualisation of shots by placing them in non-matching sequences, reconsidering their meaning within a situation (Olinina 309). Similarly, the sudden changes created by different looks of characters, often coming from completely different scenes, interrupt the space of each moment, disrupting camera and character, and therefore viewer, identification.

Within *Oops!* the looks or actions (in the form of other shots) of characters from other scenes break into or interrupt the scene playing. In this sense, the other characters are also interrupting strangers, their faces suddenly suspending the flow of the narrative. For example, before the interrupting stranger arrives to halt the violence about to take place in each scene, there are the close-up ‘looks’ of other characters from different scenes presented as a quick sequence of images before we see the actual stranger. These close-up ‘looks’ are also found in singular shots interrupting conversation within the scenes. In addition, there are close-ups of acts of violence or reactions to violence placed within the narrative flow of a scene that come from one of the other scenes. As an example, the still but tense family dinner table scene (scene 1), where no one is talking, is interrupted by an abrupt shot of Rosie attacking Eden, harking to a future moment that occurs in scene 3, the family game. In the first segment of scene 1 there are also close-up shots of an arm being given a Chinese burn (which later happens by Rosie to Eden in scene 3), Jasper about to punch (scene 3), Jasper whispering to Travis (scene 3), Shane’s mouth in close up laughing (scene 2), his head quickly turning (scene 2), and Brenda laughing (scene 3).



Figure 71 - 74. Cassandra Tytler, *Oops!*, Video, 2020

Similarly, shots of Eden’s face reeling back in fear before Jasper punches her interrupts moments from other scenes. For example, when Jody tells Bill to look after Josh and Jane, Bill responds, “Of course, I’m a civilized man, you know that”. The image quickly cuts to Eden’s fearful face, and then David’s (from scene 1) disturbed face as a reaction to seeing the interrupting stranger (again showing a future moment). It then cuts back to the BBQ scene of Jody responding to Bill, answering his statement that he’s civilized with a sarcastic “sometimes”. The interruption by these two characters from the other scenes after Bill’s statement is used as a technique to bring into question the notion of

what is considered “civilized”. This word already has ideological implications, with the sense that certain groups must be cultivated to a set of standards that fulfill Enlightenment-era thinking that privileges white, patriarchal, and colonial ways of being. It also cuts through the notion that Bill is civilized, or at least that his world is. As we see towards the end of this scene, his visitors are not safe or welcome.

Another rapid shot of violence that undercuts the action within a scene, is the shot of Jane’s hand being forcibly held over the hot BBQ. For example, when Eden says she doesn’t know anything about sports people, Jasper replies, “so dumb”, but his sentence is interrupted so that he says “so” — shot of Jane’s hand being held over the sizzling BBQ (scene 2) — “dumb” back to Jasper in scene 3. These fleeting but constant acts of violence are constantly intruding in on what might otherwise be less antagonistic conversational moments.

As well as violent acts, there are also close-ups of laughing, or two people whispering, or people patting each other on the back. These shots that may be considered non-violent if presented separately, take on a violent tone because they interrupt in the same way as the other moments of violence. They are sudden and brief. As I was editing, I imagined them as a slap, as if they were fast, painful and then finished. I also asked the sound designer to make the sounds that accompanied these shots intrusive and unrelaxing. They were mixed in a way where they stood out separately from one another as punctuations rather than hiding the sudden changes. This purposeful act was to create shock through the montage of images. As discussed above, shock or astonishment lead to an intellectual experience, breaks illusionism and is a distancing effect that makes the familiar strange. The technique of montage places each context presented as simmering with an unspoken violence due to the sudden, uncomfortable interruption of the narrative with images that are either violent actions in a literal sense or feel like violent actions by the way they are coupled with violent actions. Watching people whisper and laugh in one’s presence can feel rude and uncomfortable, but the action is heightened by placing it within the same visual and time-based context of these other shots.

There are also close ups of objects, such as lamingtons, kebabs, red wine, board games, and food preparation. These are objects that exist within the Australian advertising psyche, signalling the families, fun and foods that are connected to this. This approach to montage is following that of Eisenstein, where through the connection of two non-related images, a thought is born. For Eisenstein, this juxtaposition of images created an effect that was “a leap beyond the limits of situation: a leap into the field of montage image, montage understanding, montage as a means before all else of revealing the ideological conception” (*Film Form* 239). He saw the close-up of objects, such as those mentioned above in *Oops!* as signs rather than representations, thereby

empowering the viewer to dissect the meaning held within each sign, seen in close-up on the video, larger than it realistically would be to the eye in the scene. He argued that realism was an operation of social structure, but not the only facet of discernment. “[T]he laws of cinematographic perspective are such that a cockroach filmed in close-up appears on the screen one hundred times more formidable than a hundred elephants in medium-long shot” (qtd. in Doane 92). This change that the close-up could bring to perception was political: “the principal function of the close-up ... is-not only and not so much to show or to *present*, as to *signify*, to *give meaning*, to *designate*” (*Film Form* 238).

The close-ups of objects in *Oops!* designate meaning through their size (as close-up) as well as through their juxtaposition with other shots. As an example, early in scene 1, Helen tells her daughters who are sitting staring at their plates, “Well come on, start. I’ve been slaving away over this meal” — cuts to a close-up of a sausage held in an Australia napkin with tomato sauce being squeezed on it, from scene 2 — cut back to scene 1 with Helen continuing, “you hope there’d be some kind of appreciation”. The connecting of the family meal with Australia and the Australian BBQ connects scene 1 to Australia, the country, along with its values of the nuclear family and the ‘fair-go’ for all. The size of the massive sausage on an Australia napkin, the same size as the wide shot of the four family members, makes the sausage just as imposing, and therefore is a sign that can be intellectually scrutinized. This nuclear family by comparison are not smiling or even communicating. David, the father from scene 1, agrees with Helen saying, “yes” — quick cut of Jasper from scene 3 punching at the camera — cut back to David “you’re right”. This added shot of violence soon after the sausage creates an added thought of violence within the Australian nuclear family, and Jasper’s close-up punch a moment of imposing violence in its largeness as a close-up.

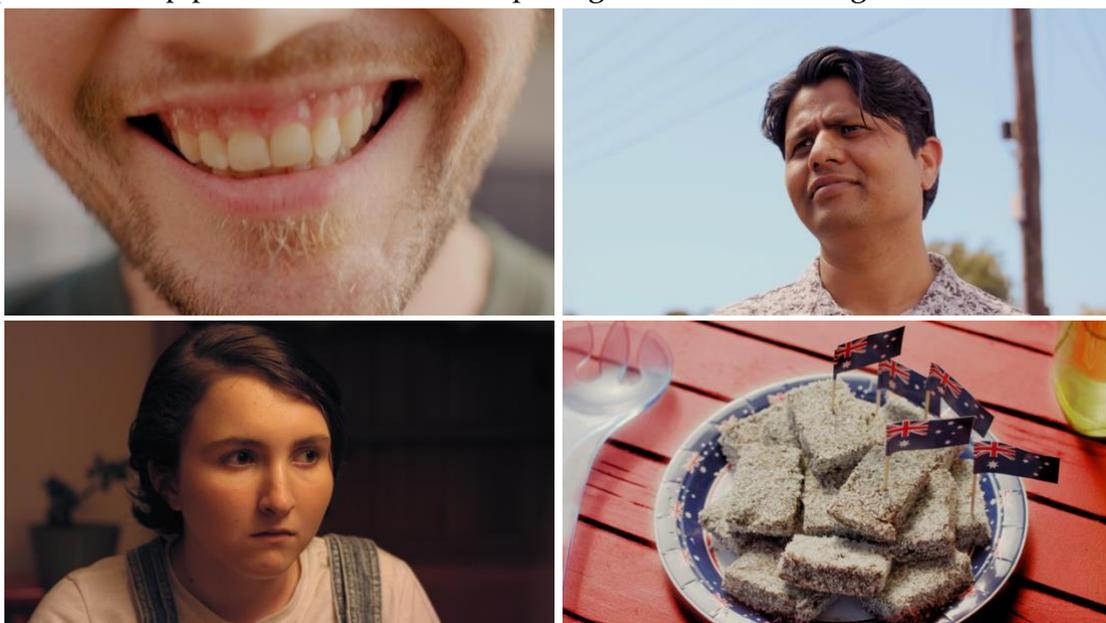


Figure 75 - 78. Cassandra Tytler, *Oops!*, Video, 2020

## A Desire to Stop

The disruption of time through the interruption of shots from other scenes also dislocates a secure sense of space in the video. Returning to the difference between editing and montage in the context of cinema, the technique of editing tries to create the appearance of a continuation of time and space within a scene, setting the geography of space so that it appears to fit within a 360-degree frame. Montage, however, disrupts this sense of space. In *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, Gilles Deleuze takes up Eisenstein's idea that the close-up of a shot creates a new way of conceiving of an object in space. Following Béla Balázs, Deleuze argues that the close-up exists outside of the 'geography' of the scene, so that it "abstracts it from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates, that is to say it raises it to the state of Entity" (96). He argues that when we look at the close-up, we do not see anything other than the face, so that it is disconnected from the space it exists in. Deleuze quotes Balázs who claims, "[a] dimension of another order is opened to us" (qtd. in Deleuze 96). I suggest that the combining of close-ups with other shots in *Oops!* creates an added thought that affectively signifies the ideology within each scene, and also that the use of close-ups used as an interrupting tool, as per Deleuze and Balázs, confuses spatiotemporal positioning. The fact that the close-ups are also from other scenes means they confound space and time even more than if they were from the same scene. Further to this, in her article *The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in Cinema*, Mary Ann Doane points to the close-up theorised as stasis, where it works outside of the narrative, indeed pausing the linearity of a film, illustrating:

a desire to stop the film, to grab hold of something that can be taken away, to transfer the relentless temporality of the narrative's unfolding to a more manageable temporality of contemplation. (97)

This halting of temporality through the close-up works in a similar way to Mulvey's conception of the *Possessive Spectator*, stalling the narrative through the use of the still image, and therefore the way the film as document is contemplated and possessed. As mentioned above, this is a variation on the pause created by Benjamin's interruption, which creates a tableau to be assessed ideologically. Indeed, in her article, Doane writes about Benjamin's conception of the close-up as an opening into the "optical unconscious, [the] making visible what in daily life went unseen" (90). It is through the pause created by the close-up that temporality is broken, which is also a form of interruption. One where the scene is assessed anew, but also one that does not rely on diachronic regimes of meaning. Therefore, when close-ups are used within the montage, they are a double interruption. They interrupt time as linear through inserting themselves upon a scene as well as halting time through the ungrounding of the spatiotemporal aspects of the scene, to a *temporality of contemplation*. This

purposeful ungrounding within time and space as per Ahmed, orients our bodies differently, and is a form of political resistance, where the straight line of orientation is troubled as a breaking of normative social models and temporalities.

As I have suggested above, it is not only the actor's performance, but the performance of montage itself that generates para-feminist *gestic* actions. These modes of *gestic* action are specific to video work, where the performance is enacted through the video body and also through the control the artist has over the video technology and how it is displayed. For example, the montage here produces alienation through defamiliarising, where the combining of shots creates a new meaning but also arrives at unexpected moments within the narrative. The choice of shots, most particularly close-ups change the forward driving temporality of the narrative, which is also a defamiliarising effect. The hand of the video artist manipulating the material is consciously present.

*Historicisation* takes place through placing characters within a larger history of social processes within the story, while at the same time not relating characters to a narrative that unfolds diachronically. The 'not ... but' takes place through the jumbling or overlapping of different scenes onto one another where there is an awareness that the actions are a set of processes that could be changed at any moment and where power, privilege and judgement exist in similar ways across family and friendship circles, where patterns of misogyny, racism, generic gender conceptions and imperialism are repeated again and again.

As discussed, video art is a multifarious medium, and in its short-lived cannon has encompassed a range of art forms that mean there is not one singular way to produce or present a video art piece. It is for this reason that *Oops!* was conceived as both an installation and screen-based work. Below I will analyse it as a work within a space that viewers walk amongst. Creating *Oops!* as an installation allowed me to extend my analysis of montage and its existence outside of the screen and also in relation to viewer's relationship to the screen.

**Oops!: Here and There, Actual and Virtual**

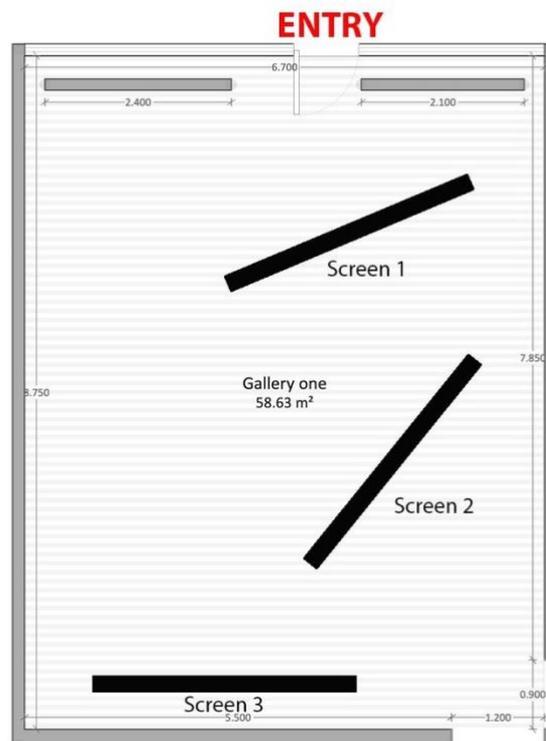


Figure 79. A bird's eye diagram of the gallery space and screen layout of *Oops!*



Figure 80. Cassandra Tytler, Installation detail from exhibition, *Oops!*, Trocadero Art Space, 2020, Photo: Clare Rae

Click image to watch documentation of installation, or go to: <http://vimeo.com/490061966>

The video is synched and plays across three screens. It is mostly on one screen at the one time but moves across the three screens for approximately thirty seconds to one minute on each screen so that there is not one fixed viewing position. There are moments where shots are interrupted by close-ups from other scenes, and sometimes these close-ups play on two or three screens at once, further confusing a set viewing position. In order to view all screens at the one time, viewers need to position themselves at a specific angle of the gallery, but even then, cannot see all screens as a whole and need to re-position their bodies and eyes when the image changes to another screen. There is no 'better' viewing position, however, and the placement of the screens means that viewers need to walk from one space in front of one screen to be in front of another screen when the image suddenly changes. The changes happen unexpectedly, not following any narrative or shot cohesion, forcing viewers to reposition themselves physically, and then quickly requiring them to change back when the images and sound change again. There is no pattern to follow, so that they are literally kept 'on their toes', often led by sound, rather than visual cues. This is another form of montage, where the viewer's field of vision is interrupted through its movement, as well as through the combining of two disparate elements.

This physical appropriation of bodies through movement, directed through montage and an interruption of a singular viewing position exists as a form of *Verfremdungseffekt* where viewers are reminded of their own positioning as bodies working to see the images and make sense of the work. The idea is to continually alienate and shock them in order to keep them actively engaged in the politics of the work inside of the narrative.

Following Benjamin's emphasis that "[t]he epic theatre does not reproduce situations, it uncovers them. The discovery of the situations is accomplished by means of the interruption of the action", *Oops!* works to align these ideas within epic theatre with both screen based and video installation as part of its politics that uncover the violence of the normative status quo ("Author as Producer" 94). *Oops!* in the form of video installation extends forms of interruption due to the viewer's physical movement, where they are present in temporal and spatial dimensions, and forced to be conscious of the material conditions they exist in. In this sense *Oops!* as installation is disrupting the typical spatiality of screen work, where the viewer is merged with and physically responds to the video.

Mondloch writes about the Brechtian influence within video installation where the display of technical tools, which Brecht considered within a domain of signification, is used to reveal the apparatus that makes up social and cultural institutions (68). Referring to Benjamin's quote above, video installation can work as an interrupting

tool by uncovering situations where the viewer's revelation of a manipulation of their body within the work, is an interruption in itself and therefore uncovers the situation that they watch and also reveals their place within it.

### Reshaping Bodies

Ahmed refers back to Butler's use of Louis Althusser's concept of "turning", where subjects are formed through their turning around when called (or hailed) by a certain name by the police (this is discussed further in chapter 2). Ahmed notes that bodies can defy or change the direction in which they turn, and therefore through repetition of that new or different turn, reshape themselves.

Depending on which way one turns, different worlds might even come into view. If such turns are repeated over time, then bodies acquire the very shape of such direction. ... in moving this way, rather than that, and moving in this way again and again, the surfaces of bodies in turn acquire their shape. Bodies are "directed" and they take the shape of this direction (15/16).

Ahmed notes that the lines that people follow in their life are performative, in the sense that through the repetition of following specific norms and customs, that one is *shaped* by them. We are made by the lines we follow, and our worlds are made by these shapes. In directing viewers to turn in specific directions, *Oops!* is disrupting the straight lines of perception. It is denying one form of perspectival vision and directing a turn towards something else. It reorientates the viewer's relationship to space where they are never fixed in the one position.

The reiteration of turning does not last long enough to reshape bodies, but it destabilises viewers within space, directing them so that they are orientated differently, while also shocking them into seeing the violence on the screen where normative orientation leads. In this sense, the directed turning of the viewer to see the different screens is a parafeminist *gestic* action.

Margaret Morse points to the video installation, where viewers (who she calls "visitors") walk within the artwork, thereby replacing the artist as performer of the work: "[S]he or he is in the piece as its experiential subject, not by identification, but in body" (158). I would like to suggest that while there is merit in this argument, that it is in fact more complex than this, as viewers' positioning and focus is directed to different screens due to both aural and visual cues rather than their own decision



Figure 81. Cassandra Tytler, Installation detail from exhibition, *Oops!*, Trocadero Art Space, 2020, Photo: Clare Rae

making in terms of movement. In this sense they are in the artwork in body, but their bodies move due to the montage between screens as directed by me. I do not mean that I am the puppet master, propelling the viewer in ways they are unaware of, but rather that the viewing relationship in *Oops!* is more complex than Morse insinuates. The physical set up of *Oops!* pushes viewers to be aware of the immaterial of the projected video along with the material aspects of the exhibition space as well as their bodies moving within it. They are interrupting through their material bodies walking in on scenes of potential violence, as well as being integrated with the immaterial video narrative unfolding amongst them. They are in essence being fused with the actions projected across screens while still having critical distance from them through their constant interruptions. In this sense, the viewers are also the interrupting stranger. Thus, they are both outside and inside the artwork.

Returning to Ahmed's notion of the spatial organization of social relations being disrupted by orienting queerness toward things and beings differently, video installation can embrace a disorientation of time and space — one that unlocks spaces to people in different and receptive ways. This troubling of the viewing subject, re-orientating them into both actual and virtual times and spaces queers the process of being in space through its de-orienting processes. In chapter 1, I discussed notions of

presence and liveness while viewing a video art piece and its embodied relationality, specifically respecting screen-based work. As discussed in chapter 2, the viewer / witness is necessary for the performative to succeed, but they remain unfixed and changing, enacting a queering of the performative. In chapter 3 I investigated further video's potential to disrupt linear time as a parafeminist *gestic* action. *Oops!* pushes all of these approaches further through its use of montage and its presentation as installation, where it interrupts the present, the impending future as well as aligning what has passed through the actual and virtual.



Figure 82. Cassandra Tytler, Installation detail from exhibition, *Oops!*, Trocadero Art Space, 2020, Photo: Clare Rae

In *Oops!* as an installation, the viewer's presence adds to the work: they are also its interrupting stranger. However, they are not interrupting enough to control the action on screen. They cannot stall the video, because the politics of the piece calls for unease or anger and therefore an understanding of the manipulation of social positionings. If the viewer were able to control the interruption, they may feel satiated as if they have actually changed the world they exist in, whereas this is a call of anger at this world. They must watch the narrative unfold in order to understand what is taking place for the characters. The affective unease created by disorientating shots interrupting scenes, coupled with harsh sounds as well as their viewing position constantly being interrupted by the changing vision on different screens, creates a further lack of control over the action. Following Mondloch, the viewer is both *here* and *there*, *actual*

and *virtual*. Time is confused and they as subject are dynamic, in the queer sense of being unfixed in space and time. This relationality where the viewer's subjecthood is fluid is part of the parafeminist *gestic* action created through video installation, but I would like to go further and look at what these acts of montage can create.

### **Performative Montage**

Parafeminist *gestic* actions are created through the post-production process of video montage as well as the montage generated through the artwork's physical set-up and reception. I have traced a number of ways that the video performer of video art practice can do this through: The pause in linearity of the close-up; Benjamin's concept of the interruption being an act of montage, which exists in both screen, installation, and live performed works; and Butler's decomposed performative, which interrupts the temporal flow of the scene and thereby the impending violence. To knowingly use these techniques as a political form of resistance is to enact *performative montage*. Performative montage is the doing of montage that brings forth an awareness and suspension of violence. This violence can be both literal and symbolic in form, where the act is interrupted by a stranger intruding, or through the disruption of the rhetorical moment: that moment a person with privilege leans in to their taken-for-granted assumptions, believing that those assumptions are widely shared, unquestionable, will remain unchallenged, and therefore will have no reply. Performative montage is the challenge and the reply to these tacit moments.

As a parafeminist *gestic* action, performative montage creates the decomposed performative, using montage to shock the viewer into seeing the impending violence within patriarchal discourse but also opens up a sense for possibilities outside of this frame, arresting the violent action through an indefinite delay and muddling linearity. It disrupts a secure sense of time and space for the viewer, turning linearity and chrononormativity (see chapter 3) on its head. It creates shock or astonishment, making a familiar scene strange due to the distancing effect that the shock produces. The shock further leads to an intellectual analysis of what has come before. Further, the combining of two differing non-related shots or objects creates a new meaning. This style of montage is a performative because its conscious use creates a new meaning, idea or contemplation.

Following Benjamin, the interruption of an action constructs its form and is a quotation. As per Derrida, a performative can only be successful if it is already recognised as a citation, so that it is already seen as having significance. (See chapter 2 for further discussion of this). If we follow that interruption is a form of montage and also a quote ("Quoting a text implies interrupting its context" (Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* 19)) then it is successfully acting as a performative. Performative

montage creates both a sudden pause to a scene as well as the decomposed performative, stopping violence before it takes place. The delay of violence is not answered but I will go on to argue that hope and potential exist within it. This unknown, is also a way of resting within the disorientation, as per Ahmed, and can create a vitality or giddiness, where new orientations to the world are reached. Butler speaks also of this future potential, stating that:

There is a horizon within which the threat of violent destruction suddenly emerges in the story that Benjamin tells us ... The mother, after all, does not throw that bronze statue, at least not in the scene that we are given; she is only poised to throw it, so what we have received is a “still”—a frozen image—and so, precisely, a gesture that does not convert to action. (“Gesture Event” 190)

Again, we are brought back to the sense of time stopped: *a still, a delay, a pregnant moment, a contemplative stall, time fossilised, a tableau.*

As I have mapped through the theory (specifically the work of Mulvey, Deleuze and Doane), video, in its temporality, does not rest upon and is not always experienced as linearity, even in its unfolding from what might seem like a start point until an end point. As has been shown, through montage, the inserting something into a scene, as well as through the close up, time can stand still. In reference to Butler’s quote above, the interruption of impending violence, which exists in Benjamin’s family / stranger example, can exist in the informed interruption / montage enacted by the video performer. The moment where the viewer can take a position towards the action that has come before. Therefore, it is the act of montage, or performative montage that creates the decomposed performative.

### **Suspended in Time**

But what of this stop? What happens in the pause? We are suspended in time for a moment, but this is not an end to things. There is no time limit on the stop; rather, it interrupts the temporality of the action that came before, so the suspension is enacted after the interruption of the stranger, where the mother does not throw the statue, and further by the interrupting strangers that suspend the violence in *Oops!* When an image is inserted into a non-related scene that doesn’t relate to its spatiotemporal set up, shock and astonishment is created, which leads to an intellectual analysis as well as the *Verfremdungseffekt*. Similarly, the unmasking of the technical tools used to create a work, such as is the case in *Flygirl*, also produces the *Verfremdungseffekt*: A suspension exists in these moment also. A suspension is also enacted in the use of close-ups, where the drive of the temporal is halted along with its spatiotemporal

anchor. Doane sees the close up as a trace of memory, seen apart from the narrative of the film and therefore held in the mind's eye later in time. Along similar lines, we can read the suspended moment alongside Jacques Derrida's conception of the trace, where the present moment is not a closed system. In this sense the suspended moment cannot be reduced to the present instant, but instead, can be used, to quote Derrida, to "indicate a way out of the closure imposed by the system..." (*Speech Phenomena* 141). For him the trace exists outside, or alongside presence and beyond.

The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace. ... In this way the metaphysical text is understood; it is still readable, and remains read. (156)

In this sense the suspended moment created by performative montage is outside of a singular time, and therefore, its linear length is unimportant. It exists and is readable even after another action has restarted. The performative montage creates the suspended moment, which is a trace. The act of suspending a person from something is to stop them from doing that activity for a time. In this sense performative montage is an interrupting tool that suspends activity, and can be politically motivated, or a political resistance to activities not agreed upon, thereby suspending them.

Potentiality, hope, vitality and giddiness exist within the suspended moment. We do not know what happens next, but in this untimed moment, new possibilities are conceivable. They do not exist in the reality we live in now, as they do not exist in the statistics and concrete examples that we are given. In the suspended moment, the viewer, as well as the characters in the video are made aware of themselves within a wider social construct of power differentials and violence. The recognition of our negative present creates the awareness that the future can be different. There is the chance to imagine a better place, a different position for everyone. Better worlds are possible and in the moment of interruption we exist on their threshold. Following Ahmed, we can re-orientate ourselves to a different space, or, celebrate the disorientation. "Such losses can be converted into the joy of a future that has been opened up" (20). This work is a resistance to the past that influences the present. Yet maybe through art practice, and more specifically, video art practice that uses performative montage, we are not stuck in the present but instead create moments of interruption, leading us to a moment of suspension where we get a glimpse of a future potential on the horizon. I will go on to argue that in that moment of recognition, the utopian performative is felicitous and queer futurity is enacted.



Figure 83. Cassandra Tytler, Installation detail from exhibition, *Oops!*, Trocadero Art Space, 2020, Photo: Clare Rae

### Potential Blueprints of a World Not Quite Here

As outlined in chapter 3, Muñoz takes the theorization of utopia from Ernst Bloch in his focus on the potentiality of the future, which he names *Queer Futurity*. An anticipation as he describes it, that does not yet exist, but is in the horizon. He states that “[u]topia is not prescriptive; it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema” (97). He quotes Theodore Adorno’s “succinct rendering of utopia” as standing in “the determined negation of that which merely is” and that this negation indicates “to what should be” (64). The “should be”, or as Muñoz frames it, the potential or the hope for a queer futurity exists in Bloch’s theorizing of the aesthetic:

A Blochian approach to aesthetic theory is invested in describing the anticipatory illumination of art, which can be characterized as the process of identifying certain properties that can be detected in representational practices helping us to see the not-yet-conscious. This not-yet-conscious is knowable, to some extent, as a utopian feeling. (3)

In this sense it is within the aesthetic that a better future can be seen where the not-yet-conscious becomes conscious, where our “ideas ... extend, in an anticipatory way, existing material into the future possibilities of being different and better” (Bloch 144). For Muñoz, this recognition that the future can and should be better is also a clear rejection of the impossible present that we inhabit. It is within art that we are activated towards future potential, but it is also within this realm that we are awoken to the fact that the present is a discriminating space. Vincent Geoghegan’s analysis of Bloch points to Bloch’s conception of *Vor-Schein*, which he says exists within art works, where one can experience senses of future possibility through them. These are not future fantasies, but they are also not definitive solutions. Rather, they exist as hopeful anticipations. Muñoz argues that, “hope ... is the emotional modality that permits us to access futurity, par excellence” (98). My own politics as well as those that position this research through art practice, finds possibility in Muñoz’s (via Bloch) idea of art work’s future potentiality and therefore, futurity, while staking clear resistance to the normative and restrictive politics of the present.

In speaking about the horizon of possibility that exists within utopia, Muñoz refers to an instance that transcends what is here and now to other spaces in time that have a better potential. Here, the present is surpassed into other time frames where utopia can be seen as a possibility that is productive, dynamic, unfixed in time, yet *not* here and *not* now. He is clear and precise in describing the present as a place that is dangerous for queer bodies, and especially those who are not white. While the potential for a different and better future exists now, it is not here in the present. As Bloch states, “*the essential function of utopia is a critique of what is present. If we had not already gone beyond the barriers, we could not even perceive them as barriers*” (qtd. in Muñoz *Emphasis his* 37). Muñoz takes his idea of potentiality from Giorgio Agamben, who differentiates it from possibility. Possibility, Agamben argues, exists in the present, whereas potentialities, while being present, do not lie in our present state. To quote Muñoz:

[p]otentialities are different in that although they are present, they do not exist in present things. Thus, potentialities have a temporality that is not in the present but, more nearly, in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity”. (“Stages” 99)

Potentiality’s temporality, therefore, moves outside the present and into the horizon. It is in the horizon, or the future potential that is futurity. Muñoz reads Giorgio Agamben’s theory of potentiality alongside Derrida’s conception of the trace (discussed above), where potential continues to exist after the performance has finished as an act. The suspension in *Oops!*, discussed above, arrives after the interruption of montage and exists as a trace or a temporal rupture to the present

moment. Further, through a reading of Miranda Joseph, who argues that performance exists beyond the moment of its enactment and into the future due to its connection with viewers, Muñoz argues that the temporality of performance's reception is not static but can exude futurity. He states:

[i]f we consider performance ..., we can see the temporality of what I describe as a utopian performativity, which is to say a manifestation of a "doing" that is in the horizon, a mode of possibility. (99)

A utopian performative is the performance of future potential. It creates a space that is in the horizon but is also not static in time, that continues onward without being fixed to an end point. As Muñoz says, "[u]topian performativity suggests another modality of doing and being that is in process, unfinished" (99). It does not dictate its futurity, but as mentioned above critiques our present moment. In the suspension created by performative montage in *Oops!* there is no end, just interruption. It is the suspension created by the montage that is this very expression of "doing" discussed by Muñoz. This act of montage is an act of the utopian performative. The moment of recognition of the ideology within a scene through the stranger's eyes, as well as the viewer's eyes is never its end, it is its potentiality, that exists in the present, but not in present conditions. In that suspension, however brief, temporality is fluid and there is potential in the horizon. Here, the utopian performative enacts futurity.

As Muñoz declares, "[q]ueerness, if it is to have any political resonance, needs to be more than an identitarian marker and articulate a forward-dawning futurity" ("Cruising the Toilet" 357). In this sense, queerness is yet to fully arrive, or as Muñoz writes, "is also not-quite-here and no-longer-conscious (both terms are central to Bloch's project)" (357), where the past and the future are invoked whereas the present is rejected, and queerness is dynamic. Muñoz points to the gesture, which reveals what is not-yet-here. It has no specific end point but exists as a visionary expression:

The gesture interrupts the normative flow of time and movement. ... The politics of queer utopia are similarly not based on prescriptive ends but, instead, on the significance of a critical function that resonates like the temporal interruption of the gesture. ("Toilet" 360)

This interruption, according to Muñoz, may not lessen present violence, but it creates an opening or a horizon for futurity, that is a *queer* futurity, resting beyond binary markers of ways of being and living one's life. The utopian performative enacts queer futurity. Futurity exists within our present hope. It "is both a utopian kernel and an

anticipatory illumination” (360). As Benjamin states, “the more often we interrupt someone in the process of action, the more gestures we obtain” (*Understanding Brecht* 20). So, the interruption of montage is a para-feminist *gestic* action, where normative time (or chrononormativity – see Chapter 3) is dislocated, queer time is apparent, and through which the critical politics of queer utopia are made possible.

My attempt in enacting the utopian performative is also an act of political resistance: a space where barriers are perceived, but in that perception a horizon is recognised as containing a future that is better than the present. Butler points to the relationality of the viewer in Brecht’s epic theatre, where events rather than outcomes are focused on, and when those events are incomplete, (or in the case of *Oops!* interrupted, and in the case of *Flygirl*, endlessly repeated), it is the moment where the viewer identifies itself as a collective. She states, “[t]he action may be the hero, but it is also, separated from consequences, an event; as partial and decontextualized, it is also a gesture” (“Gesture Event” 186). Following Muñoz, the gesture of the interruption is its performative montage, which exposes what is not-yet-here, with no end, but still a *visionary expression*. He highlights the need that utopia not be prescriptive of futurity, and that performances should highlight their means, not their ends. In this sense utopia is “an idealist mode of critique” that has just as much to do with the negativity of the present rather than having a definitive end point (100). The interruption makes the action incomplete, so that this is a performance without end, or a trace, and further, the viewer becomes not the individual, but the collective. As has been previously discussed, queer ways of being are built on a relationality and destabilising of the singular subject position.

### **Here, There and on the Other Side**

Garcia’s *Flygirl* also has no clear end point. It actively displays its means, but the point we first think is the end, after 32 seconds, is unfixed through its repetition. Similarly, her action is divorced from effects, which is the gesture of an event, creating a feeling of collectivity in the viewer. Garcia’s body is unstable because of the way it changes slightly with each repetition. There is never a singular totality, just like the queer subject, it is always in the process of becoming. As discussed above, her body is “here” and “there” and “on the other side” (see Ahmed 121). This reorienting of fixed time is a gesture that exists in the not-quite-here and no-longer-conscious, summoning a past and a future, but rejecting a present that exists outside of this performance. The constant repetition confuses the present moment, never resting on a conclusion. This trying and trying again for another take, or a better moment is a queer moment of utopian longing, which in its whole becomes a form of hope, where Garcia enacts the utopian performative. The suspended moment exists after the end of each 32 second sequence, where the viewer wonders if the sequence will start again. The tension of

wanting it to end creates astonishment when it doesn't, but also leads to an intellectual experience where one realises that these 32 seconds are very short in the realm of popular culture, where non-white women are rarely given space. Through this act of performance with video Garcia critiques the present but shows us that "you can do what-cha wanna do, in living colour"; a utopian performative of forward-dawning queer futurity.

Returning to the quote by Butler at the start of this thesis, she ponders the types of action that are required or possible when support, such as institutional, government or social assistance, are non-existent. How is performance possible in unsanctioned spaces in a way that leads to social embodiment? In this chapter I have taken Butler's attempt to reckon with this through praxis. My work is always conscious of the relational mode of video performance, where the relationship with the viewer is integral, but where the viewer's subjectivity is unfixed.

This chapter extends on the ideas present in chapters 1-3. Most notably, an augmentation of performativity, into a new form, the decomposed performative, and the utopian performative. As is clear from Butler's quote at the beginning of the chapter, her thinking through of the decomposed performative takes both performance and social embodiment into account. The queer performative discussed in chapter 2 accounts for a space where performance practice can create an opening of social embodiment through its recognition of the dynamic, fluid subject, who may not exist in institutional spaces, but instead through the world building of communities of belonging, most specifically through acts of performance.

Similarly, as discussed above, when an action is not completed, according to Brecht, it is when the viewer sees themselves as a collective. This is the very form of the interruption. Muñoz sees this through his vision of queer futurity where it is the gesture that is the hope for future moments. The performative montage in *Oops!* creates the decomposed performative as well as the suspended moment. The suspension is the moment of anticipation where the not-yet-conscious becomes knowable and within this, where the utopian performative enacts queer futurity. As discussed above, the viewer (collective) recognises the interrupted scene as something they have already experienced before, and therefore recognise that the present is not enough.

It is through the utopian feeling that this action is undertaken, where a consciousness of world-building that includes the not-yet-here, discussed by Muñoz, through Bloch, is performed. It is through art that our current world with all its inequalities is fought. I have looked at video art works that use performance in multiple ways from 'live' work, to installation as well as the possibilities of screen-based work. Here it is the

video performer, rather than the performer on-screen who is creating parafeminist *gestic* actions. The practice-led research started with an attempt to enact a story-concept created by Walter Benjamin to describe epic theatre. Through this making 'real' of a concept in practical terms through video, I discovered the potential of montage as a political tool, which creates the suspended moment, a trace where the utopian feeling is recognised, where the utopian performative has the space to enact queer futurity. I took montage theory from the past and extended its use contemporaneously. In all instances, video and its technology are central to the artworks and the political struggle. I have made clear the specific ways that video can be used as a performance tool that enacts parafeminist *gestic* actions, starting with its dislocation of the spatial and temporal normative. The gesture of the interruption enacted in numerous ways as discussed, is a stand-in for or extension of the arrival of Benjamin's stranger. The interruption works to disrupt the tacit assumptions of belonging within the normative status quo, where the inferred, invisible and unspoken forms of everyday discrimination are revealed. It explores the way that narrative and viewer combine to play a part in upholding systems of discrimination: the narratives of belonging and righteousness that are used to justify acts of violence. We are the collective and belong to present systems of injustice. The video performer reveals these things through performative montage, where the interruption shows us that utopia is not here, but that within video artwork a relational form of world-building can be enacted, that creates potential of something more in the horizon.

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## Conclusion: Breaking the World Open

*Who needs hope, after all, when you've got a crew?*

(“Utopian Pragmatics”, Malatino, 224)

### How to Move Forward in Gleeful Anger

In *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, Angela Jones follows Ahmed in arguing that the construct of happiness is a fallacy, and that instead the aim is to have a bearable life. She maintains that “the construction of queer utopian spaces does not hinge upon happiness, but rather are simply autonomous spaces in which to breathe” (3). I contend that it is through the relational community building of art practice that life can be more bearable, and that part of what makes it so is the recognition of forms of resistance to the one-dimensional logic of how one *should* manage themselves in the world. Taking my cue from the quote above, divided between optimism and collective battle, this conclusion is not an ending, but a launching forward. I embrace the possibility, or following Muñoz, the *potential* for something more, but it is through the collective or Malatino’s *crew* that this ‘more’ takes shape.

While this research’s aim is to forge a politics of resistance, it does so through tactics that might lead to a hopeful *what if* or *what else*, or *what other*. It believes in a better future that does not come from our present condition. Therefore, going forward involves, as Malatino so aptly names it, “exhilarated despair” (224). Despair exists in current conditions, whilst exhilaration comes in the form of a continued attack, knowing that things could be better, and moving forward in gleeful anger.

An aspect of much of my work not explicitly discussed in this thesis is the underlying humour in my videos. To quote Adrian Martin in the catalogue for the exhibition of *Oops!* and *I Still Call It Home*, “[t]here’s a comic (as well as Brechtian) aspect in the way she and her actors play with character stereotypes and dead, cliché-laden chatter” (see appendix). This humour exists as a form of community building amongst the odiousness, where recognition births laughter, which builds the collective through the relational affect created. Muñoz describes this well in his article “The Vulnerability Artist: Nao Bustamante And the Sad Beauty of Reparation”, in which he states, “our affect does not simply flow out of us, but, instead, tells us a story about our relationality to ourselves but also to groups” (194). As mentioned in chapter 3 and 4, through art practice I have found relational connection and hope, and it is my aim to create similar connections through the affective encounters and political positioning that my work creates.

As discussed in chapter 1, video artwork is 'live' to us at the moment we experience it rather than the moment it is enacted by the performer. The viewer is co-extensive with the performance at the moment it is taking place for them. Therefore, the viewer of a performance-based video artwork is involved with it as live for them as they watch it. Presence exists due to the affective recognition of a body in performance that is understood as embodied and relational. Echoing what I have continually stipulated in the thesis, relationality is key to the performance. Miranda Joseph points to this relationality within mediated performance works and argues against Peggy Phelan's claim that performance can only be experienced 'in the flesh':

In order to claim that performance resists exchange value, or equivalence, and thereby approaches the unrepresentable Real itself, Phelan discounts the work of the audience; their productive consumption of the work, their act of witness, is for her the mere memory of something presented by someone else. (*Against the Romance of Community* 66)

My approach throughout the thesis has embraced the relationality between the video artwork, the performer and the viewer. The research began by taking a position that relationality was necessary as a political tool as well as an tactic within video performance. In each chapter I have mapped how this is the case and then added further techniques to qualify and build on this position in the research. Relationality is the space where each chapter has returned as I trace how video performance as resistance might work. An embrace of relationality understands the non-singularity necessary within parafeminst politics.<sup>11</sup> In discussing the need for alliances to exist across different social groups in order to create equality amongst all individuals, Butler notes, that:

it is not from pervasive love for humanity or a pure desire for peace that we strive to live together. We live together because we have no choice, and though we sometimes rail against that unchosen condition, we remain obligated to struggle to affirm the ultimate value of that unchosen social world, an affirmation that is not quite a choice, a struggle that makes itself known and felt precisely when we exercise freedom in a way that is necessarily committed to the equal value of lives. (*Performative Theory Assembly* 122)

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<sup>11</sup> I have not discussed the anti-relational in queer theory, mostly coming to the fore in Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, as this does not propel my argument forward.

Here, relationality means that we do not choose our connections, but must decide how we value them. Butler goes on to say that, “[w]hether or not I can live a life that has value is not something that I can decide on my own, since it turns out that this life is and is not my own, and that this is what makes me a social creature, and a living one” (197). We cannot escape one another, but we can decide to value all people and bodies equally and can strive to make art that considers these connections and also understands the regulatory practices that work towards valuing certain bodies over others. If we can make artwork that strives towards this embodied recognition, then this is a step forward in the struggle. Also, if we recognise others as embodied, we recognise ourselves in their look. Thus, we change, we morph, and we become, *in relation* with others. It is relationality that is the foundation of my arguments in creating *gestic* actions, and it is also a firm political positioning that I have taken in pursuing a para feminist approach within video performance.

Chapter 1 also uses Merleau-Ponty’s theorisation of the visible and tangible, where, as viewing subjects, our ability to touch ourselves and look at others, means we understand others in the world as having the same material and subjective properties and are intersubjectively and thus relationally connected to them through these two lines formed across this chiasm. Through Merleau-Ponty’s conception, we are both an embodied subject, a body and mind who sees, and an embodied object, a body and mind who is visible in the world. This understanding opens up the potential for embodied relationality, not just through our material bodies, but those we see on the screen. To reiterate, the video performance work’s relationality creates presence for the viewer, and thanks to the performer’s recognised embodiment, co-presence exists.

In order to offer a reading that queers Merleau-Ponty’s, who neglects any argument about the way some bodies are restricted from positioning themselves towards others in the same way, I focus on Ahmed’s celebration of Merleau-Ponty’s *sensitive* body, a body that is sensitive to all the objects around it, and her embrace of looking at bodies “slantwise” or, not in a straight line (*Queer Phenomenology* 107). Going forward from Chapter 1, the research has attempted to embrace this mode of *slantwise* looking and being, where the subject does not see straight but “the body “straightens” its view in order to extend into space” (66). Through art practice, the body can be encouraged not to straighten its view, or never be presented as definitively straight.

This conception of the body’s different orientation in space and towards other bodies feeds into the discussion of queer performativity in Chapter 2. Performativity theory was outlined in Austin’s Speech Act Theory, where he argued that certain forms of law are brought into being through their verbal annunciation. As argued in chapter 2, performativity, from the speech act and beyond (such as Butler’s theory of gender performativity), counts on its reception and recognition by others to be successful.

Sedgwick's theorization of a queer performativity is about a destabilising of fixed subjectivity and a disavowal of this fixity, where subjects are, to use Ahmed's language, oriented within the social world differently, often by discriminatory laws. Therefore, performativity is never fully determined or 'complete' because of the fluid shifts between the performer and the person receiving it. It is never 'accomplished' in anything other than relational terms, that is, it requires a viewer / witness. This means that for video performance, parafeminist *gestic* actions can take hold in active ways for the viewer, as they are positioned within the work and alongside or in relation to the video artist performer.

In chapter 2 I also make an argument for the existence of tactics of performativity in performance, arguing through Derrida that in order for the performative to be recognised, that it must be understood as a citation. Therefore, citing a way of acting or visually constructing oneself through citational means within performance, can be a tactic that corrupts and makes commentary upon the original reference. It is useful to requote Diamond here from chapter 2, to further reiterate this point. She argues that when performativity is used in a performance, "questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations, of emotional and political effects, all become discussable" (*Performance Politics* 5). Here, Diamond successfully points to the fact that even though a performance is just that, that it is not removed from the lived experience within culture and ideology of those performing and those viewing the performance. It makes a clear argument that tactics of performativity can be used to disrupt or make comment on the ideological status quo. Going ahead from chapter 2, I use queer performative tactics as part of my performances. This means that I approach the work from the position that subjects come into being through regulatory and repeated 'namings' that fulfill simplistic subject categories that discipline specific ways of being socially managed. I also acknowledge the unfixity of the viewing subject. Both chapter 1 and 2 make claims for performance within video art practice that can be discussed and disseminated as performance, along the lines of theatre, rather than illusionistic, fetishistic images alone. In this chapter I use as case studies two works, *I'm Sorry* and *I Still Call It Home*. Both of these pieces are investigated in reference to their use of queer performativity, and disidentification, which will be discussed below.

Chapter 3 contends that the language of video art practice can be considered a performance in itself, created by the hand of the artist who presents the video artwork. This is because of the manner in which video can control time and space, by using techniques such as cutting, pacing, repetition, ellipsis; changing body morphology through technical manipulation or projection in space; creating different planes of vision mixing up the foreground and background of an image; the sound, which can re-create space through mixing and the sound effects used; and materialise objects and bodies in different ways. These techniques can consciously be used to create *gestic*

actions, and I argue that the video artist who manipulates these aspects is the performer who creates them.

Similarly, the space of acquisition that the viewer is situated within can affect reception and meaning of a work. This can be achieved by projection across space, onto objects, or viewers, who are made aware of their material presence in a space in relation to but also outside the screen. The space that video is presented in and across can situate the viewer's perception of what they watch as well as their own body within that space, and they can see other objects *slantwise*. Here, I focus on my own video installation work, *What You See*, as a case study that considers the body of the video, integrated with the body of the viewer through reflection and projection. One of Diamond's arguments is that *gestic* actions can only be successful in the theatre because the film image becomes fetishistic. Throughout the research I have countered this claim. Indeed, video art is different from cinema, even though it makes use of some of its visual and auditory tactics. I also investigate this further in chapter 4 when I look at *Oops!*, a video installation work made.

In Chapter 4 I position myself as video artist performing para-feminist *gestic* actions through the medium of video, having argued the case in the previous chapter. Here, I look at video as an interrupting tool that fulfills *gestic* actions through the interruption of montage, which creates shock and astonishment, allowing the viewer to re-see the scene they are encountering. I look at how this works through the montage of the video image, through the montage of the flesh body within it and inside the video image and through the montage of the viewer's body encountering the video across different screens in the exhibition space. Focussing on a text written by Walter Benjamin explaining how Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre works, I consider the video artwork, *Oops!*, which shows how video art practice can use montage in similar and extended ways to those conceived by Benjamin and Diamond via Brecht. *Oops!* is the culmination of the argument that the video can interrupt the image as fetishistic, constantly disrupting a singular point of view and interrupting the illusionism that Diamond claims exists in cinema viewing. This research creates new ground in opening up this in-between space amongst theatre and cinema and carves a place for it as a politically charged form.

I will now sum up the practical vocabulary of para-feminist *gestic* actions within video performance that I have used and can be cited by other artists going forward. The performance tactics used occur through the lens of queer performativity, which points to an un-fixed and fluid subject as well as one who comes into being through their very relationality to those around them. It identifies the theatre (to use the word coined by Sedgwick to describe the marriage ceremony) involved in the naming of social subjects, understanding that there are those who do not hold recognition or are

diminished in the eyes of the status quo and the law, and therefore are forced to partake in an 'unsuccessful' performative due to their misrecognition or exclusion as social subjects. This conception of queer performativity is taken up through my performance. Below is a vocabulary of the specific tactics within queer performativity that I have used that perform para-feminist *gestic* actions:

## **A Vocabulary of Para-feminist *Gestic* Actions**

### **On-screen Performance:**

#### ***Disidentification***

Through disidentification in performance, essentialising and universalising subject positions (and categories) are re-enacted in order to circumvent their power within normative and hegemonic contexts. This renegotiation through performance of simplistic conceptions of what and how it is to be raced, gendered, classed or sexualised undermines the power that these one-dimensional categories hold. In this sense, the seeming fixity of identity is un-fixed in performance. Its process is a play between production and reception, so is never determined, but is a working through of performative strategies.

#### ***(Hyperbolic) Theatrical Rage***

Theatrical rage is performance that acts out or uses "a hyperbolic display" as a way of restating injuries caused by a homophobic world (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* Butler, 178). This is an aggressive negation of the accepted norms of specific subject categories, such as heterosexuality, femininity and masculinity through a heightened or *hyperbolic* performance. This can be part of disidentification, the important factor being that it is an exaggeration of a social subject recognised from normative culture, and leans into the histrionic, creating affect through its anger rather than any sense of 'niceties' and realism.

#### ***Speech Outside Its Usual Context***

Breaking with the typical context that a speech act is used in can give it political force and can also be an act of disidentification. For example, re-working hate speech as a reclamation of the power it has in usual circumstances. Using performative utterances within a context where authorisation is not given to use them can also displace them in future usage and bestow authority on the act, dethroning traditional codes of legitimacy. Here, performativity within performance practice can have compelling and legitimate challenges to power and provide acts of agency. To recontextualise speech acts and physical spaces by reclaiming them, one is speaking to their citational legacy and flipping them with their renewed context.

### ***Directly Addressing the Viewer***

This works as an interplay between identity and difference. The performer addresses the viewer, recognising they are addressing a subject, but also knows that this individual cannot answer back and is always changing. This play separates the performer from the text, even though they are performing it. This is a *gestic* action, specifically the *Verfremdungseffekt* that creates distance and alienation from the work, with the disorientation of also being directly addressed by it.

### **Performance of video:**

#### ***Disruption of Linear Time***

The disruption of linear time becomes a political act. As feminists and queer theorists alike have noted, time and the organisation of life around it, is steeped in power hierarchies privileging capital, procreation and dynamics of power related to the patriarchy. Montage of the video image transforms perception of how time is lived while watching a film. Time can be expanded, contracted, repeated, interrupted or paused. For example, the act of pressing pause, halting the image also means that the film's aesthetics are emphasised, and its illusionary powers are unveiled. This is an act of *historicization*, where situations from the past are seen anew through the eyes of the present, the ideology of history being seen with fresh eyes. Similarly, repeating an image can be the making of space for something new, or something different. It is a different orientation towards the world. I will also discuss a disruption of linear time in my discussion of using found footage.

#### ***Montage as Interruption (see Performative Montage)***

As well as disrupting linearity, montage can act as an interrupting tool that unveils the ideology inherent in a scene, shocking the viewer into seeing what seems so familiar in a new politically charged way. The shock of the montage activates an awareness of the intellectual and ideological conditions. It can also create new meaning by the combining of two separate shots, as well as confuse time and space by combining shots that do not fit within the spatiotemporal continuum. To purposely use montage for these effects is the act of performative montage.

#### ***Montage as Assemblage (see Performative Montage)***

Montage also exists through assemblage. For example, the combining of the screen body and the 'flesh' body or juxtaposing one video body over others from a different time and place. These are interruptions that knowingly play on the alienation that is created through their combining, and a positioning of the scenes within ideology due to the shock that is elicited, or a making strange of the scenario.

### ***The Decomposed Performative (see Performative Montage)***

The interruption of montage also has the ability to arrest violence before it takes place, leading to Butler's conception of the decomposed performative ("Gesture Event" 190). Performative montage is the doing of montage, be that the choice of shots, changing those shots to be replaced by other ones, and interrupting actions within the narrative through the timing and choice of the video footage. This brings forth an awareness and suspension of violence, even if it is temporary. It is the act of performative montage that creates the decomposed performative.

### ***Reorientating Space***

Space becomes reorientated or disorientated as a political tool through the way it is presented in video. The vision that we see within a video due to its camera work that uses different planes of vision through changes in focal length, focus or movement; its editing/montage through what is shown as well as what is hidden from the viewer's field of vision; and its sound, which can act alongside or counter to the vision (diegetic/non-diegetic), creating closeness or distance to a body through mixing, as well as shifts in how the video 'world' is received through re-recording of space or changes to its sonic frequency, means that the viewer experiences space in a new way. Following Ahmed, queerness orients itself towards objects and people differently. Therefore, to reorient viewers within this new spatialisation opens space to different ways of being.

### ***Use of the Close-Up***

The close-up is disconnected from the space it exists in therefore, it disrupts the spatiotemporal organisation of a piece. This creates shock and thus alienation, and consequently the way the film as document is contemplated and possessed. It is through the pause created by the close-up that temporality is broken, which is also a form of interruption. One where the scene is assessed anew, but also one that does not rely on diachronic regimes of meaning. Hence, when close-ups are used unexpectedly within the montage, they are a double interruption: They interrupt linear time through appearing suddenly in a scene. They also halt time through the ungrounding of the spatiotemporal aspects of the scene. This orients our bodies differently and disrupts linearity. Used consciously by the video artist, the close-up can be a form of political resistance. Here, the straight line of orientation is troubled and normative social models and temporalities are broken.

### ***Found Footage as Disidentification and Historization***

A manipulation of pre-existing video or film footage also disrupts time and space in an added politically motivated way. Using found footage can work in a disidentificatory

way, where the original image is dislocated from its original signifier as well as from the past and the present. The viewer of the found footage sees the portrayals anew through their representation and recontextualization. Further, the manipulation of or adding to the original image, further displaces it in time and changes its original meaning, reframing the content through an act of *historicization* that distances the viewer from the content and recontextualises it. It is thereby unstuck from its ideological beginnings. It is the possession of the cinematic image argued through Mulvey's possessive spectator (2006), that the parafeminist *gestic* action takes place.

### ***The Reorientation of the Video Body***

Digital manipulation, where the body can be morphed, cut or keyed into new visual situations is another example that can create a parafeminist *gestic* action. Following Ahmed, reorientation of the body creates the space for different, non-normative directions to be followed (*Queer Phenomenology* 21). A video body can redesign and reorientate its position in cultural space and the space of the performance. The performance of video thus can remodel space through repetition, and in time. It can also change the way bodies take up space or orient themselves in space.

## **Video Installation**

### ***The Reorientation of the Viewer's Body in the Space of Reception***

Parafeminist *gestic* actions can be created within the space of video installation, which also takes into account the viewer's body. These are created through projection across space and onto other objects, distorting binary considerations of bodies within gendered signifiers; the morphing of the viewer's body within these spaces; as well as forcing the viewer to move with the action of the video, again their presence within the artwork a part of the *gestus*. This troubling of the viewing subject, re-orientating them into both actual and virtual times and spaces queers the process of being in space through its deorienting processes and unfixes the binary body. There is no singular viewing position.

### ***The Projection of Bodies Across Space***

The space video is projected within and across creates a new configuration of a room's geography and the bodies that stand within that room. Similarly, bodies become connected through projection, meshing them in space, confusing what is image, what is body and what is space. Thus, subjectivities become fluid and multiple through this conjoining, reciprocally opening bodies up to one another.

### ***The Reflection of Actual and Virtual Bodies in Space***

Reflection can also be used where the viewer's own body is stretched and morphed and becomes a part of the other reflections. Reflection confuses the sense of what a

body is, so that no humanoid body exists except the viewer's body, or the new body of reflection. Connection between beings is through reflection so that distinction between object, image and body is tangled. In this respect a parafeminist subject is created, where no one singular position is articulated or speaks in one allied voice. This is an example of a dynamic queer, intersectional subject, unfixed in space and in body, as well as not unified by a singular subject position, but multiple and mutating. The body is exposed as non-static and something that can be actively transformed.

### **What's New, What's Missing**

As noted, video art practice is not monolithic. It exists in multiple guises and is received by the viewer in numerous ways. It can be made by a single artist, or where other people fulfill specific roles, such as a camera person or editor or sound designer, who are often credited for their technical aid rather than as collaborating artists. As discussed in the introduction, video art has an entwining history with performance practice, especially in its early stages, but continues on, also in my own work as part of this research.

I have made an argument for the performance of video art that goes beyond the person on screen and into the hands of the video artist controlling the technology of the video. Most specifically my contention has rested upon a concept of montage, through my own work, and digital keying of the video body in the work of Caroline Garcia, to argue that this control of the image by the hand of the video artist is another form of performance. I have offered new insight using visual art, cinema and queer theory that makes the case for how video as a medium can be used in political art making with the video artist as performer.

Two aspects of video art practice that needs further research are how the camera is used as well as techniques of sound design within video art. In chapter 4, I discussed both of these factors in my analysis of *Oops!*, mostly for their alienating qualities, but my primary focus was in the use of montage as a performative tool. Whilst I gave direction to the camera person and sound designer, letting them know what I wanted, and at times correcting them to focus on those specifics, I cannot claim these aspects as my performance. (Although this does open up ideas for future collaborations).

Sound design in particular is an aspect of video art practice that can be explored for its creation of *gestus*. In my earlier analysis of voice in chapters 1 and 2, I focused on *what* was being said, as well as intonation, repetition and force, rather than a deep analysis of *how* changes in frequency, uses of the microphone, sampled sounds, or changes in spatiality could create *gestic* actions. There is much study on sound design for film, (see Bordwell & Thomson, 1979; Altman, 1992; Chion, 1994, 2003) and some of it can

also be used for investigating sound in video art, but more can be done to interrogate how it can be used politically and thus as para-feminist *gestic* action. This is rich territory to be developed for political video art making and I hope that it can be further analysed by others going forward.<sup>12</sup>

### **What If, What Else, What Other or *What Next* ...**

Returning to my earlier remarks on the potential difficulties of an intersectional approach through my video making with the knowledge that my perspective comes with the marker of white privilege within contemporary Australian society, I would like to end with a speculation on future ways of working. I write this with a small sense of sadness, as the video piece that was to be made as part of this future thinking was going to be my final piece of research as part of this PhD, and was to be exhibited at c3 Contemporary, Abbotsford, Melbourne in November 2020. Alas, like so many others' arrangements, plans had to be put on hold and the exhibition postponed for a future date due to the COVID 19 virus and the almost nine-month lockdown that was enforced in Melbourne. This video piece, tentatively titled *Trumpet*, will be made in 2021 and will encompass the proposition that I make here. Before elaborating, I will discuss "a commons" theorised by Muñoz, which argues for community building within artwork and culture, and then I will align this with my future project.

In the book *The Sense of Brown*, Muñoz writes about the film installation artwork *For How We Perceived a Life (Take 3)* by Yu Tsang. The exhibition features a 16mm projector that displays its film through a wall in front of it with a hole cut in it so that the image projects further through it onto another wall. The film being projected features performers who recite lines from *Paris is Burning* (1990) by Jennie Livingston as well as *The Queen* (1967). Muñoz points to the canonical film, *Paris is Burning*, as a text that is memorised, quoted and studied, especially within queer studies. As well as the lines within the original film that are reperformed within Tsang's text, she also voices the original questions that Jennie Livingston asked the documentary subjects but that were not included in the documentary (having researched the transcripts at the UCLA archives). To quote Muñoz:

It feels revelatory to hear Livingstone's words, cut from her documentary and now conjured from the trash bin of history. Indeed, much of the criticism of Livingstone's film amounted to a critique of the director for not including her own white queer lesbian voice in the film. Livingstone has gone to the balls, won the

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<sup>12</sup> See Ging 2003 for a discussion on uses of montage and sound from a feminist perspective within cinema

confidence of her interview subjects, and is encouraging them to make the extravagant statements they make. (139)

Muñoz is clear in noting that Tsang's move is not to highlight Livingston as non-objective but instead, to position her as a part of the ball community, enacting a feeling of communal belonging. It is this mode of "singularity as always plural" that Muñoz terms "the brown commons" and is why he believes that Tsang inserts herself into all her art works, alongside performers and documentary subjects alike (140). I will first discuss what "brown" is to Muñoz, and then trace it to his idea of "a commons", which is what I am trying to achieve in future work.

Muñoz's conception of brown comes from his own experience within the United States, but it does not need to be specific to this. Brown people for Muñoz in the most immediate sense are those individuals who have migrated from Southern America to its Northern United States, but he moves beyond this geographical understanding, naming brown people as also those whose:

accents and linguistic orientations ... convey a certain difference. I mean a brownness that is conferred by the ways in which one's spatial coordinates are contested, and the ways in which one's right to residency is challenged by those who make false claims to nativity. Also, I think of brownness in relation to everyday customs and everyday styles of living that connote a sense of illegitimacy. Brown indexes a certain vulnerability to the violence of property, finance, and to capital's overarching mechanisms of domination. Things are brown by law insofar as even those who can claim legal belonging are still increasingly vulnerable to profiling and other state practices of subordination. People are brown in their vulnerability to the contempt and scorn of xenophobes, racists, and a class of people who are accustomed to savagely imposing their will on others. Nonhuman brownness is only partially knowable to us through the screen of human perception, but then every *thing* I am describing as being brown is only partially knowable. To think about brownness is to accept that it arrives at us, and that we attune to it only partially. Pieces resist knowing and being knowable. At best, we can be attuned to what brownness does in the world, what it performs, and the sense of the world that such performances engender. But we know that some humans are brown in that they feel differently, that things are brown in that they radiate a different kind of affect. (3)

I quote Muñoz at length to show the many ways of being brown. To be brown does not rest within subject categories specific to the United States, or indeed subject categories at all. Therefore, going forward my consideration of brownness opens itself up to people within Australia who fulfill various modes of difference that impact them due to the ways that our contemporary, capitalist, colonialist society is set up. I am particularly interested going forward in Muñoz's conception of the brown *commons*, as this places itself within communities of belonging that involve art and performance, where to be brown is an affective comingling and understanding between people. The commons gives me a direction to consider through my art making that continues this research.

The brown commons for Muñoz, is the copresence of beings together, in both the social world and nature. He sees this affective sharing as a collectivity that moves beyond individualised subjectivities and labels, saying that:

The brown commons is not about the production of the individual but instead about a movement, a flow, and an impulse to move beyond the singular subjectivity and the individualized subjectivities. (2)

He goes on to say that “[t]he brownness of a commons, its very nature, is the response to salient forces that have rendered circuits of belonging and striving within the world brown (130). The brown commons is where performance and audience connect, together in a shared sense of brown and their collective places as brown or *browned* by the society we live in. It is also about thriving and moving forward together, even while being pulled down and displaced within the larger social hegemony. As an artist working across the different facets of video art that also involves considerations of performance and the relationality within all of these aspects, I embrace Muñoz's understanding of a commons that is beyond an individualised way of being in and experiencing the world. Here, I see video as a tool that affectively can create *gestic* actions, while also be a tool that unites. To be a part of a commons is to create a politics of resistance alongside others, folding together into copresence. This can exist through the experience of video art practice, but also through its production.

Returning to Muñoz's reading of Tsang, who performed Livingston's questions from *Paris is Burning*, and also includes herself in all her artworks, from art installations to documentaries, I would like to consider the future potentials of my own work, especially now that I am using other performers on the screen: *singularity as always plural* (140). *Trumpet* is to be a single channel video work, featuring subjects from differing backgrounds, nationalities, sexualities and genders, who may not consider themselves performers. They speak directly to camera through conversation, narrating

their lives, recounting what they did, what they wish they had done, dreams they have had, stories they've heard. Interspersed throughout these self-narrations, the interviewees are also performers, enacting what they speak, either through repetitive movement, character play or active invention. They do not necessarily re-enact the verbal description they are giving but interpret it through performing for video. My aim is to explore the diverging readings that become entangled when one *narrates* their life and when one *performs* their life. I pose the question: where does performance lie? What can be found in a creative construction of self or indeed is this a performance that is never singular and always changing in the fact of sharing and receiving? Can this project be a making of space and a reorientating space and straight lines in a way that is plurality, or a commons? I am collaborating with the performers to create and express their stories in new ways through their performance for video. Curation of speech to be used will happen through conversation and joint decision making. Performers will work with me to find the parts of their spoken words that they select to work with and perform. I have no interest in including material that performers do not want vocalised, as the aim of this project is about searching for the dynamic self through its creative construction, not about aggressively exposing people. I take stock in research done by Larissa Hjorth, Anne Harris, Kat Jungnickel and Gretchen Coombs in the creative practice ethnographic field who point out that:

As the relationalities between digital, social and material have become increasingly entangled, this has required more embodied and interdisciplinary approaches that acknowledge that real-world problems (and their solutions) happen in the intersections between disciplines and lived experiences. (150)

Through *Trumpet* I am trying to open and extend the relationalities already discussed, where the making of the work creates play and collaboration, and in turn is para-feminist through its multiple voices, its opening up of personhood through dialogue, and its queer performative tactics that recognise and live the dynamism of the subjects involved. These facets recognised and promoted will work towards creating *gestic* actions.

After reading Muñoz's writing on *For How We Perceived a Life (Take 3)* I became attuned to the fact that in order to make this work, I have to include myself, voice and body, in it. The interaction with the performers and the build-up of a repour and of our decision making in how the performances are enacted need to be included in the video. *Trumpet* should not just be about other people as singular subjects representing themselves within individuality. It is a commons, and our performance for and of video is a part of the collective. The for-camera performances do not exist until the participants have been recorded in conversation. From there we create the

performances together through experimentation and conversation. As Hjorth et al. note, “it is the *encounter* between playful and the performance that can provide new insights into the social and local” (their emphasis 10). I cannot make this work without listening and interacting; without existing in *the commons*. Creating para-feminist *gestic* actions is never a singularity. It involves the performer and the viewer, and as I have realised it also involves communities of belonging and expression. Going forward, I have my vocabulary of *gestic* actions that can be used with my own video body, the video body of others, and within video art practice both on screen and within installation space. These are tactics that I hope other artists can use into the future.

The research has come full circle, with a lot collected along the way. I offer it as an invitation to continue an analysis of video art and what it can achieve but stipulate the politics from where it began. I end here with both joy and sadness. I am hopeful for a collectivity to embrace in future work and for the creative conversations that I will achieve through words, images and sound. The sense of isolation I have felt because of the pandemic as well my peculiar place working on this thesis throughout it, is creating an enthusiasm in me that wants to create alongside others. To experience life within togetherness, through anger, exasperation and hope. In “Race, Sex and the Incommensurate”, Muñoz says that “queerness ... is about the incommensurable and is most graspable to us as a *sense* rather than as a politic” (Muñoz’s emphasis 153). This sense traverses a singular idea of the individual, and looks at collaboration amongst difference or asymmetry, where many senses exist and intersect. The relational way of experiencing the world through sense, which insinuates non-fixity, dynamism and sharing across difference, encourages me for future projects as I try to actively navigate a world that is breaking, in my attempts to break it open. In living colour we dance and dance some more — at midday and at midnight; in the dark nightclub or in the streets - fists metaphorically raised in ostentatious solidarity and delight.

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Figure 84. Catalogue with essay by Adrian Martin for the exhibition of *Oops!*

## Agitated Faces, Open Window, Disordered Furniture

by Adrian Martin

Imagine a family scene: the wife is just about to grab a bronze sculpture and throw it at her daughter; the father is opening the window to call for help. At this moment a stranger enters. The process is interrupted. What appears in its place is the situation on which the stranger's eyes now fall: agitated faces, open window, disordered furniture.

Walter Benjamin wrote this passage in 1934, as part of his lecture "The Artist as Producer", to explain the principle of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre. In fact, there is no specific scene exactly like this in any of Brecht's plays; Benjamin intended his description as an allegory or figure of a new kind of art.

But the scene now exists; Benjamin imagined it, described it and evoked it vividly for us. It's a script. A script that Cassandra Tytler shoots not once but three times, in successive variations, for her work *Oops!* – a piece that is designed both for single screen or (as in this presentation) multiple screen versions. In either format, Tytler takes Benjamin directly at this word, not just for the scenario but also for the method that this model scene is designed to embody: "the interruption of sequences".

Interruption is a figure of *montage*. Benjamin envisaged one prime moment of *cutting in*, interrupting a scene via the sudden appearance of a stranger. It is this moment that throws the naturalness, the dramatic flow of the scene out of kilter – freezing it, as it were, and showing it in all its disquieting weirdness. "There are eyes", Benjamin adds wryly, "before which the more usual scenes of present-day existence do not look very different". Meaning: the most banal situations of our everyday life are full of underlying, incipient violence, hatred, horror. Here, too, Tytler has taken the pulse of Benjamin's account and sped it up, made it her own.



Figure 85. Catalogue with essay by Adrian Martin for the exhibition of *Oops!*

*Oops!* multiplies the horrors of normal life as glimpsed by “the stranger” (a person whom we never need know anything about: the fact that they interrupt is all that matters, their only function). The settings are a family dinner, a communal barbecue, a round of games among friends. The points and levels of disturbance just keep getting darker and deeper: generational conflict, maternal resentment, racial prejudice, sexual stereotyping, male-buddy humiliation, female-buddy hurtful whispers, anti-vegetarianism, slut-shaming, cruel laughter.

Three faces of a suburban, Aussie Hell; enclosed spaces where mean-mindedness can trigger violence. Are domestic curtains meant to facilitate people looking out, or stop people looking in? An aesthetic of the grotesque is just a frame away: close-up mouths grinning, chomping, laughing. The issue of *taste*, in all senses, starts to infiltrate everywhere: the taste of food, how it is cooked, table manners; and cultural taste, who’s deemed in-the-know and who isn’t on very specific subjects (Bradman’s cricket record is “common” knowledge, while *Birth of a Nation* is not). And all this efficiently, economically dramatised in just under 10 minutes.

For Tytler, montage is an immense tool: not just a single cutting-in, but also intensive cutting-up, rearranging, repeating, comparing. For starters, the three stories are unfolded together, in simultaneous juxtaposition. And *Oops!* keeps leaping ahead to what are (on a first viewing) the shocking gestures yet to come: a raised fist, a broken glass held out threateningly, an arm being twisted, a hand being forced toward scalding heat. The usual syntax internal to a single scene – like people casting looks at each other – starts to knit together across the three stories, underlining the profound similarities in ideologically and culturally bound (bad) behaviour. Every gesture, even the throw of a dice or a slaking of salad, the clinking of beer bottles or the sizzling of a grill, becomes a sign of aggression. The sound design (by Bonnie Knight) bursts with abrasive thuds, agitates with sheets of pulsation, spooks with ghostly echoes and shudders with low tremors.

For two decades, Cassandra Tytler has traced a unique path. Her work often takes short, highly condensed audiovisual forms. She grabs elements of generic stories – and expertly reproduces their best and most vivid effects, like the tense build-up across the whole arc of *Oops!* – but doesn’t get locked into one story, one world, one illusion. The three-screen set-up guarantees this splitting of any unity. There’s a comic (as well as Brechtian) aspect in the way she and her actors play with character stereotypes and dead, cliché-laden chatter.

An earlier work, *I Still Call It Home*, creates its aura of the uncanny via a different bag of tricks. This one edges closer to Gothic horror: hideous welts on the skin, mysterious shadows in the corner of walls, unbound screams (more great sound work here). A performance-art monologue (“Hack, hack, hack”) collides with echoes of David Lynch – but this is once again suburban Australia, not Twin Peaks, so the interplay of guilt, haunting, identity and denial takes us straight back to local, national issues of racial dispossession and slaughtered sovereignty.

It is another montage of multiple, quoted, enacted texts, proceeding by a kind of free but perfectly logical, unconscious association. “I want the truth”/“You can’t handle the truth!” is voiced by a passing parade of extras, like in an audition. The host of a beauty commercial

Figure 86. Catalogue with essay by Adrian Martin for the exhibition of *Oops!*

dispenses advice about how to handle troublesome (non-white) skin. As well, there's a strained pedagogic tableau on the "materiality of ideology" – but the young students (all two of them, both female like their teacher) seem not too comfortable with what they are hearing. In fact, everything in *I Still Call it Home* is about not feeling at home in one's own body, one's own space, one's own place as a mother or a daughter, an expert or a client, an authority or a novice, a reciter of text or an embodiment of psychodrama.

"But it is at the end, not the beginning, of the experiment", wrote Benjamin, "that the situation appears – a situation that, in this or that form, is always ours". In these two works, Cassandra Tytler, the interruptive stranger, ceaselessly opens the door to our haunted homes.

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**Image credits:**

Oops! (video stills) 2020

I Still Call It Home (video still) 2019

Figure 87. Catalogue with essay by Adrian Martin for the exhibition of *Oops!*

## AUDIOVISION 23

### Domestic violence in the white cube

**Philip Brophy: Cassandra Tytler's I'm Sorry**



I'm Sorry, Cassandra Tytler,  
image courtesy the artist

I have never understood the hang-ups people have about white cubes. The more you try to remake and remodel its void—let alone vanquish it—the more you prove its power. Surely the white cube has become a most promiscuous public space wherein anything is acceptable and all is possible.

How many times have you walked into a gallery or museum whose white cube zone has been deterritorialised, deconstructed, demolished? Walls are punctured, flooring is covered, air ducts are exposed. Or, frames, partitions, boxes, shelving and rooms are constructed as metaphorical refugee encampments or sites of resistant occupancy. For many, this enlivens contemporary art's critique of architectural politics—a shallow view, considering the cultural context within which galleries and museums ape lifestyle trends of customisation and empowerment, while IKEA and Bunnings encourage you to transform your domestic space into a personalised white cube. The Block vs The Sydney Biennale. Grand Designs vs The Turner Prize. Is there really a difference?

In an exhibition featuring Cassandra Tytler's video installation, *I'm Sorry* (2016), this familiar scenography appears once more. Another artist-run space with concrete floor, white walls, track lighting. Another box-room built within the space, sitting like a defiant edifice, reclaiming the space to make a personalised art statement. That's how it looks from the outside, what with its

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Figure 88. Review of *I'm Sorry* by Philip Brophy

ugly exposed 'interior' wall studs and framing, the kind that Institutional Critique loves to 'expose' within a gallery or museum.

The difference with *I'm Sorry*, though, lies in its awareness not only of the pitfalls of even bothering to critique 'art' (what is it with artists doing it all the time?), but of the precise reasons for making a shitty Bunnings box construction inside a gallery space. This work is not about where you are in the gallery: it's about where this box comes from. Like a random container drop, it imports a plain suburban room into the gallery. You enter through a Bunnings door to find yourself inside a scaled-down living room of sorts—low ceiling, white walls, faux-Afghan carpet, a small table with flowers in a vase. Two 'windows' (actually flat-screen monitors) on the left and right walls are each positioned at chest height. It's neither a house nor a home; it's just a dumb space, a petite hell for its inhabitants. This room is a domestic void, placed within the void of the white cube. As a visitor to the gallery where art and reality pathologically mirror each other, one is now trapped inside this portal to the domestic world where shit happens.

All public galleries these days run boutique vodka tastings, kids' craft workshops, comedian talks, themed cooking classes and senior citizens' walk-throughs—for even the most rabidly, politically oriented contemporary art exhibitions. Like the medieval 'city square' notion of congregational activities which contemporary urban planners flaunt in all global cities desperate to be socially relevant while hysterically building pseudo-inner-city lifestyle developments, public galleries domesticate their space as an antidote to the solipsistic core which silently throbs in so-called socially motivated art. Amid this neurotic, curated reassurance that art and society miraculously mandate each other's co-dependency, how does an artist today even frame the outside world, let alone provide commentary from an artistic perspective?



*I'm Sorry*, Cassandra Tytler,  
image courtesy the artist

The 'window' flat screens of *I'm Sorry* feature Tytler dressed and made-up as a man. It's ineffectual and unconvincing: elfin short hair, some fake stubble, no lipstick or eye-liner—a drag king shopping at IKEA. He first appears on the right screen, banging on the glass, barking again and again and again, "I'm sorry." We know the story: he is the lover/partner/husband singing a pathetic refrain of repentance which fuels the cyclical nature of domestic violence. It's never a one-off or last time; only ever a loop, a return, a repeat. He exits the window on the right and appears on the window on the left. And starts up

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Figure 89. Review of *I'm Sorry* by Philip Brophy

again with his banging and pleading: insistent, dogged, irritated by having to state his case. He gets angrier with each mantric utterance. He moves to the right window again. Then the left. Then the right. Then the left. By now, he has dissolved into a breathless, indignant cartoon of frustration. The remorse faked earlier has been retracted; he's now insulted by having to even acknowledge wrong or be engaged in any ridiculous reconciliation. The apologetic has now transformed into the apoplectic.

It's a queasy performance. Firstly, Tytler moves from drama school acting into eventual full-blown melodramatic mime. Unlike most contemporary video art which now employs the Cate Blanchetts of the world to sycophantically infuse its art with cinematic performativity, Tytler's performance in *I'm Sorry* mirrors the inauthentic posturing of the repeat offender inured to both clinical strategies by therapists and passive-aggressive manipulation by do-gooders.

Secondly, I'm caught remembering how embarrassing it is when you see how pathetically people act when cornered, exposed, caught, tried. No-one hangs their heads in shame these days. Everyone feels they have the right to fuck up how they choose. The socio-cultural persistence of domestic violence is bound to send subliminal messages to the ethically-skewed mindsets of its perpetrators, who feel violated by the humiliating exposure of their private domestic hell. Like Tytler's 'everyman,' the abuser feels more wronged than wrong. Standing inside the crappy Bunnings room built by the artist, I thought of countless dads fixing up their houses, smoothing over their problems, patching up their relationships, plumbing their anger, building up their frustration, hammering away in self-loathing. The proliferation of TV reality shows predicated on constructing dream homes built by hunky metrosexual elves accrues an icky reactionary prescience under these conditions. The flaccid melt-down performance of *I'm Sorry* amplifies these connections: dad is just a dick.

And then there's that sound heard throughout the video. A non-stop banging on the window, like the Big Bad Wolf pleading to be let in. It's the distinctive sound of a hollow boxy boom, frail in force yet ungainly, articulated by upper-bass-range thudding. It's the sound of someone gagged and trapped in a box begging to be let out. Or the sound of yet another temp employee with a clipboard wandering through the suburbs trying to get you to change from one branded service to another, for no good reason other than flat-lined marketplace competition. Or the sound of a million tradesmen fabricating a million boxes for designer shanty towns, bashing away with tools bought at Bunnings. Or the sound of your neighbours banging on your wall. Or you on theirs. It's the sound of the outside world, never leaving you alone, even after you have modelled your petty square meterage into that IKEA image of retro-Euro-Modernism aping Bauhaus-revivalist contemporary art museum café design. Ironically, it's also the sound of pseudo-cinematic video art projections inside black boxes inside white cubes (or disused industrial sites à la mode) for biennales around the world. A psycho-acoustics demonstrating the deafness of video artists fawning over their hi-res imagery but deaf to anything sonic, aural or vocal. Here, it's the sound of the outside world banging on the windows of art. With its consistent performativity and tonality, *I'm Sorry* unapologetically has nothing to say about art, galleries, white cubes and their glorified relevance to the outside world. Apology gratefully accepted.

Cassandra Tytler, exhibition, *Tock Tock*, work *I'm Sorry* (2016), video installation, Gallery One Trocadero Art Space, Footscray, Melbourne, 18

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Figure 90. Review of *I'm Sorry* by Philip Brophy

May-4 June

Cassandra Tytler works with single channel video, performance and installation, focusing "on processes of embodiment of the gallery space and how movement, vision and audio can create an intersubjective feedback between viewer and artwork... [with] an ongoing examination of masquerade and mimicry in video-based practice." She has presented live video performances and exhibited works in Australia, Paris, Turku (Finland) and Miami, has a Masters degree (RMIT University, 2003) and is currently a PhD candidate at Monash University, Melbourne.

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Figure 91. Review of *I'm Sorry* by Philip Brophy