DO

tijdschrift

CU

voor theater

MEN

TA

||

Documenta: tijdschrift voor theater

Documenta is een belangrijk forum voor de studie van het theater in de Nederlanden. Het is een tijdschrift waarin plaats is voor grondige, wetenschappelijk gefundeerde bijdragen over alle aspecten van het theater, alsook voor essays en kritische beschouwingen. Hoewel het hoofdaandeel van de artikels in *Documenta* theater en performance is, worden ook bijdragen met betrekking tot muziek, film en nieuwe media in overweging genomen, voor zover zij betrekking hebben op de podiumkunsten. Het tijdschrift werd in 1983 opgericht door Jozef De Vos in de schoot van het Gentse Documentatiecentrum voor Dramatische Kunst. Sinds 2015 wordt *Documenta* uitgegeven door S:PAM (Studies in Performing Arts & Media) van de Vakgroep Theaterwetenschappen van de Universiteit Gent. De redactieraad is samengesteld uit theaterwetenschappers van diverse universiteiten en hogescholen. De hoofdredactie wordt waargenomen door Christel Stalpaert, in samenwerking met Jozef De Vos die het blad gedurende 32 jaar heeft geleid.

Contents

On Colour & Spectacle

Evelien Jonckheere & Tessa Vannieuwenhuyze

For a very long time, spectacle and colour have been associated with joyful festivities, such as carnivals or fairground attractions, liberating people from periods of hard work and 'dark days'. However, spectacle and colour are closely intertwined with suppression and power as well. Colourful fireworks were traditionally a strategy of ruling powers to demonstrate their dominance over their spectators, as fireworks were the result of expensive chemical explosions and strong military forces who had the skill to handle them and the willingness to take the necessary security risks. For many centuries using colour in spectacle meant luxury as it implied hazardous chemistry, colourful gems, expensive colour pigments or colourful exotic birds and flowers. This resulted in an 'aristocratic' connotation for colour. In brief, colour meant exclusivity, luxury and partying.

Fig. 1. Feu d'artifice tiré à la place de Louis XV le 30 mai 1770.
Gallica, BnF

Colour and spectacle are inseparable friends that share a similar sense of viewing. It is a relation with a deep historical character. The word 'spectacle', deriving from the Latin verb 'spectare' or 'to watch', as well as the word 'theatre' from the Greek 'theastai' or 'to look attentively', unveils an ocular-centrism in Western performance culture. In *The Denigration of Vision* (1994), Martin Jay describes how 'sa-voir' and 'pou-voir' were the foundations of our Western knowledge. From Plato to Descartes, the eye was seen as 'the noblest of the senses'.

The relation between colour and spectacle was not very stable, however. From the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, theatre critics like Denis Diderot prescribed a move away from bright colours and their association with luxury and aristocracy. Brown and dark colours were preferred in more democratic 'bourgeois' spectacles. At the same time when colour is theorized and linked with several theories, a shift in ocular-centrism is announced. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Goethe's *Colour Theory* (1810) was groundbreaking, as Goethe discovered that the eye could also mislead the mind, for example, in the perception of after-images. This discovery called into question the separation of body and mind and initiated the subjectivity of 'vision' or 'subjective vision', which was further explored by scientists such as Joseph Plateau, Jean Purkinje, Gustav Fechner, and many others throughout the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth-century scientific insights into subjective vision paved the way for optical devices such as stereoscopes and colourful moving images such as kaleidoscopes and phenakistoscopes and, ultimately, cinematography. The observation that colour was the result of an interplay of physical, psychological and physiological processes made more thinkers aware of phenomena such as synaesthesia or creative confusions of the senses to which spiritual dimensions were quickly attributed, as can be read in poems by Charles Baudelaire or George Rodenbach (see for example his ode to Loïe Fuller on page 62).

The rapid technological evolution of colour depiction throughout the entire 20th century, such as the arrival of colour cinematography, provoked further philosophical thought, building on Goethe's propositions. The Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, for example, persistently refers in his fragmentary collection of observations *Remarks on Colour* (1950) to experiences of colour in cinema. As he wonders about the projection of these colours on the big screen – black and white movies were still more common at the time -, one of his translators draws the parallel with how Wittgenstein constructed "a prose that was as sharp and contrasting as Kodachrome" (125). Colour as a language game

stands at the core of his consideration of physical and phenomenological colours, emphasizing its inherently constructed character. This paves the way for further connections enhancing colour in dialogue with spectacle culture, especially in the second half of the century during which mass media such as television and the Internet consolidated their dominant positions. And although theoretical foundations are rarely of direct importance to the contributions in this issue, they do touch on similar phenomenological aspects of the matter in all their different manifestations.

Shades of spectacle

This special issue of Documenta is dedicated to the themes of Colour & Spectacle, and through a wide range of artistic practices, disciplines and research topics, explores how colour in the past and present directly or indirectly occupies a key position in human perception, as a means of expression or as strategy. As theatre often serves as an antidote, by bringing people together for reflection in one physical space, colour takes centre stage in this experience of creative theatrical presence. This is not only the case in the theatre but also in various forms of spectacle such as the magic lantern and other optical projections, luminous fountains, as well as more contemporary forms such as video clips, social media, art, circus, drag and street performance.

Colour as spectacle and spectacle in colour keeps on affecting us. As we question their different roles in connection to different histories, various questions are being raised. What does colour actually mean, for example? How do artists and researchers represent and challenge colour? How do they incorporate ideas about colour and spectacle? How can colour be perceived as an expression of identity?

Colour still plays a leading role in the work of many contemporary artists yet we can pose the question whether it is prominent and thought-through. Colour, especially in the context of spectacle culture, needs a contemplative, layered reading. Has colour become too evident in our technicolour world as we joyfully swipe through our endless archives on a little screen?

The festive character began to descend from the aristocratic throne several centuries ago and ultimately conquered the everyday through the mass media. As colour is undeniably an essential aspect of how we perceive the world we can also conclude that spectacle has become our everyday context, as situationist Guy Debord already formulated in his The Society of Spectacle in 1967: "The spectacular cannot be understood as a mere visual excess produced by mass-

media technologies. It is a worldview that has actually been materialized, that has become an objective reality." (12).

Debord essentially anticipated how commerce is currently developing all kinds of initiatives, such as, for example, 'Wondr. Experience the Art of Play' in Amsterdam. This latter describes itself as a 'confetti sprinkled playground of color and sensation', and it is indeed a lucrative business model tailored to the instagramming millenial inhabiting a digital world of likes and shares. Another curious case whose product name alludes to the ambiguous character of spectacle these days is the pair of glasses that social media application Snapchat has developed. Users with *Spectacles* can share the colours as directly seen through their eyes and transform their vision into a spectacle image or video that they can post online on their social media accounts. Thus, after gradually taking over the material everyday world through classic outlets such as magazines and television, the spectacular now finds a comfortable home base in social media, where colour remains a protagonist.

Spectacles of the past…
In contrast to all the eye-catching imagery of everyday life, as always and everywhere a spectacle, art reacts once more with a spectacle of banality. However, spectacle and colour are still inextricably intertwined with a modern demand for novelty and therefore primarily characterized by 'variety'. This variety is reflected in this festive issue with a broad range of contributions with an interdisciplinary character intertwining both the historical and the contemporary. As editors, we gathered academics and artists with expertise in various disciplines: literature, film, theatre, circus and performance studies, from our personal network. With coloured lenses, these authors shed light on colour and spectacle from interfaces with history, technology, science, anthropology, sociology, the visual arts, performance studies, circus and urban arts, collecting spectacle and colour in past and present.

This issue opens with a contribution by **Bart Moens**, PhD student at the Centre de Recherche en Cinéma et Arts du Spectacle at the ULB, who investigates the use of colour throughout the development of the magic lantern and its lantern slides. Starting from a materialistic media-archeological point of view, he explores the technical evolutions and their influence on the development of a visual language of colour. By questioning the role of colour as a mode of expression in photographic series, such as the life model slide series popular between the 1880s and 1920s, he unveils the melodramatic qualities of colour.

Evelien Jonckheere follows a related research track within her contribution on another spectacular technological device from the fin de siècle, which was, however, closely intertwined with the magic lantern. She presents the colourful luminous fountain in a multimodal way by analyzing its spectatorship in schools, theatre, fairground and world fairs and traces its impact on the shifting perception and innovative synaesthetic scenography of artists like Loïe Fuller at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Yet we should not always interpret the notion of colour in its most literal sense. Stereotyping, for example, is also an expression of colour, though not always one with the best connotations**. Sarah Adams**, researcher at Ghent University's Literature department, zooms in on more negative representations of colour in her article, as she explores the phenomenon of Dutch late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century blackface performances and consequently delineates the impact of skin colour on identity and perception.

… and spectacles of the present
Colour thus transcends literal interpretations and technical aspects, and this has not been lost on artists and academics alike. Although this issue partly shows that the past and the present concerning colour and spectacle are inextricably linked by overlapping themes, we can argue that the second part of this special issue turns more towards contemporary performing arts practices, negotiating the ensemble of colour and spectacle. We therefore start with an overview by **Christel Stalpaert** who looks into how (post-dramatic) theatre copies the colours and mechanisms of popular culture. She challenges the dominant aversion to the flashiness of mass media aesthetics in a high culture discourse, which links back to colour as culturally connoted. Relying on Andy Warhol's work and Jan Fabre's performances, she constructs an argument on how recuperation of spectacular images from popular culture in the black box theatre can actually challenge the scopic regimes we have acquired.

Fig. 2. Mårten Spångberg, *The Internet* (2015).
Jens Peeters

The lamenting of the levelling of high and low art that Stalpaert touches on, sketches the complex landscape of new technologies and more specifically social media. These elements do not make it any more straightforward to grapple with the appeal of appearances in the performing arts. Current tumultuous political times likewise emphasize how besides representing a (social) identity, colours are these days still heavily charged with the task of representing entire cultures or nations within a spectacle context, as nationalism highlights identifications with the colour codes of flags and emblems. But the characteristic of a geographical place can also be described in terms of *colour locale*, originally a pictorial term to describe the dominant colour in a landscape.

PhD candidate in Literary Studies at Ghent University **Lisa Vancauwenberghe** works exactly on this representation of ordinary life and urban experience from a literature and media perspective. In her article she presents a counter reading of the *couleur local* stereotype of 'postcard Italy'. Analysing how the urban environment is depicted in the music videos of Italian rapper Capo Plaza, she sets up a multi-layered lens for what she calls the infra-ordinary. She connects it to historical elements of spectacle culture, such as, for example, early industrialization. By opposing the bustling metropolis Milan, as site of the society of spectacle par excellence, with the small southern town of Salerno, she contests the popular phantasmagoric allure of Italian cities through the visual narrative present in the Italian (t)rap scene.

As one of the editors who mainly curated the contemporary part of this issue, **Tessa Vannieuwenhuyze's** article deals with similar material on the platform of YouTube. This not only opens up spectacle culture to the analysis of music videos but also of social media as an additional stage for physical spectacles in general. Unfolding the foundations of her recently started research project on musical persona performance and its omnipresence on the recent online stages of social media, the article investigates the work of music artists who centralize marginalized identities, whilst carefully curating the colours of their own universes. Even though these performances between an actual and virtual stage sometimes aim to challenge acquired identity scripts, the gendered use of colours, such as baby blue and powder pink, stays firmly anchored in our society. A recurrent artistic strategy that emerges in this article, not only through pop star Lana Del Rey but also in the tradition of drag, is to fully embrace and even exaggerate the stereotypes.

The tradition of drag fully embraces spectacular culture. Whereas a collision between the urban and the spectacular was already evident from the previous articles, we thought it would also be enriching to have a look at the pigments present in the streets of Ghent. Since 2018, drag queen collective House of Lux has been spicing up the queer scene in Ghent and far beyond, floating their fierceness at parties and events. Drama graduate from KASK **Simon Baetens** performs under the name of **Electra,** together with queens Mauve Lux, Susan From Grindr, Scandilouse and Krietjur. He uses this occasion to self-reflect in tactile theoretical collages woven around his artistic practice as a drag performer and the notion of drag as present in popular discourse, music and visual art.

Joost Rekveld gives the reader an insight into the evolution of his colourful artistic work, abstract films and installations with his artistic contribution 'Grounding Colour'. Driven by his research into alternative cinematic languages and music, Rekveld is inspired by the genealogy of colour theories such as those of Aristotle, Newton and Goethe and all kinds of colour experiments, ranging from eighteenth-century colour organs to abstract 'visual music'. These insights, theories and experiments lead him to alternative visualizations of the physicality and weightlessness of colour, which at the same time offer contemporary reflections on music and film. In this way Rekveld tries to lift the curtain in front of the audiovisual technological objects with which we articulate ourselves today.

The eye-centred discourse around spectacle and colour does not exclude the sonic element. Rekveld's creations already show that we need to concentrate on more than meets the eye and that both components reinforce each other. The performance Concert for Signal Flares, created and performed by sound collective **VA AA LR**, offered a proper opportunity to reflect on colour and spectacle in the context of experimental sound art. Mailing questions and answers back and forth resulted in an interview about the interaction and relation between auditive and visual elements in their performance oscillating between immediate visual attraction and auditive contemplation.

In line with this dynamic of turning stereotypes inside out and playfully engaging with traditions, we present at the end of this issue another interview with "new circus" duo **Mardulier en Deprez**. Ruben Mardulier and Michiel Deprez, both graduates from the Fontys School for Circus in Tilburg, manage to evoke a curious universe characterized by a rather personal interpretation of spectacle, or even anti-spectacle as they suggest in the interview on p. 230. They shine a fresh light on the tradition of circus that we now see as the perhaps slightly outworn

10

epitome of colour- and spectacle-related practices in the performing arts. The interview might make the reader realize, however, that circus in a new guise is back as never before.

A critical palette

As eclectic as the inspirations that fuelled our curation of this issue, we hope this special issue does shine a light on colour and spectacle and challenge the familiarity we actually have with those established concepts. As curators, we hope to lead the reader to a refreshed and more wondering gaze. By bringing together contributions on spectacles past and present, on scientific and artistic contributions, this special issue wants to colour the reader's mind and soul in a synaesthetic way. Tackling notions of colour and technology, expression and identity, the authors have challenged issues of perception and ocular-centrism, as well as celebration, vitality and spectacular culture.

Acknowledgements

We could have never made this colourific splendour happen without the help of many people. First of all, this special issue would not have been realized without the support of the scientific research community (WOG) on Spectacle Culture. The community has been active since 2016 and is a collaboration between the Institute for Media Studies' (KU Leuven) members Roel van de Winkel and Leen Engelen, and several Scientific Research Communities such as Studies for Performing Arts and Media (UGent) and Research Centre for Visual Poetics (UA) with Prof. Dr. Christel Stalpaert (UGent) and Prof. Dr. Kurt Vanhoutte (UA) as spokespersons.

All of their expertise and support was crucial in bringing these many-hued voices together in order to reflect the current scope of practices relating to spectacle culture. It is a reflection of the hard work conducted in several fields of the research community, with openings to future possibilities. We therefore also wish to thank all our contributors, (young) researchers in the field and artists, for granting us their time and engaging in this joint dialogue by adding their own colour to the spectrum of our special issue.

Works cited

Debord, Guy and Donald Nicholson-Smith. *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books, 1995.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, Elizabeth Anscombe (ed.) and Paul Wijdeveld (transl.). *Over Kleur*. Amsterdam: Boom, 2014.

The Luminous Colours of the Magic Lantern

Shedding Light on the Palette of Life Model Slides

Bart G. Moens

The heyday of the magic lantern was a visually exciting time.[1] By the turn of the twentieth century visual technologies such as photography and colour printing techniques underwent rapid innovations. Thanks to synthetic and affordable pigments and dyes, as well as oil paints in tubes, new pictorial languages emerged. Besides magic lantern shows, other types of colourful media entertainment and popular attractions, such as panoramas, dioramas and the cinema, made extensive use of colour in their visual practice (Yumibe, The Phantasmagoria).[2] Coloured lantern slides are omnipresent in many lantern slide collections. Colour obviously does add visual qualities to the medium and can serve as a means to support the expression of emotions. The latter can be observed when we compare a monochrome slide (Fig. 1) of a melodramatic life model slide series by York & Son called *Little Jim*, which depicts the story of a boy and his mother at his deathbed, with its carefully tinted counterpart (Fig. 2).

Nonetheless, a popular expression within lantern circles at the time was: "A lantern slide colored is a lantern slide spoiled" (Bagshaw 147). Where then does such a popular saying come from? To find an answer to this question, I will analyse several issues in this contribution. First, there are the technical aspects of the matter, which requires specialized knowledge of the historical perception of colour as well as understanding of the materials and techniques regarding the production process of lantern slides. Second, and moving from the technical to the aesthetical, I focus on the use of colour in a particular genre of fictional slide series, so-called life model slides, in which colour plays an important role.[3] This combined approach allows the technical and aesthetic potential of the medium and its wide diversity in both its technological context and its cultural environment to be explored, as well as the colour palette of life model slide series to be investigated for the very first time.

Fig. 1. Slide 5 of *Little Jim*. (York and Son, 6 slides, 1885)
Collection 2018 Nicholas Hiley, Lucerna Magic Lantern Web
Resource, lucerna.exeter.ac.uk, item 5022074.
Accessed 6 November 2019

Fig. 2. *Slide 5 of 'Little Jim'* (York & Son, 6 slides, s.d.).
Collection Bart G. Moens

A colourful medium

Discoveries in optics during the second half of the seventeenth century were crucial for both the study of colour and for the development of the art of projection. While experimenting with the refraction of light through prisms, Isaac Newton (1643-1727) demonstrated that white light consists of a range of colours: the visible spectrum. It is believed that around the same time, Christiaan Huygens (1629-1695) discovered the principle of projecting transparent images by means of an instrument. This apparatus would develop into what would become known as the magic lantern, or later as the optical lantern, and which was to entertain and inform people for the next three centuries. The instrument consisted of a light source within the body of an apparatus that was combined with an optical system so as to project a transparent image applied on a glass plate —known as a lantern slide—onto a larger screen.[4]

Light and colour both lie at the core of the functionality of the lantern and contribute to its power to attract and astonish spectators. From the second half of the seventeenth century, transparent hand-painted images on glass slides were projected onto white walls and screens, producing images in which the smallest details could be magnified. In a darkened surrounding, these images astounded the audience with their bright and luminous colours. The projection of colours contributed to the magical resonance of the medium, according to the physicist Pierre Le Lorrain (1649-1721) in his *La Physique occulte ou Traité de la baguette divinatoire* of 1693: "On tend sur la muraille un drap blanc, sur lequel les fantômes des objets se trouvent peints avec des couleurs très belles, et d'une grandeur gigantesque et monstrueuse" (qtd. in Mannoni, Le grand art 73).

Technically, the projection process of the magic lantern involved the so-called subtractive system in which the light, or wavelengths of light, emitted by the light source were selectively absorbed by the colours applied on the glass plate—which acted as a filter—and subsequently transmitted through the glass plate to be finally reflected onto the screen.[5] Thus, a slide coloured entirely with red transparent paint transmits a red colour and absorbs all the other colours. Although the colourful properties of these projected images were an essential aspect of a lantern show, the lantern performance also consisted of spoken words and was often synchronically performed with music, which made it into an audio-visual *dispositif*. Notwithstanding the fact that magic lantern shows offered spectators a multimodal experience that addressed the different senses, in this article I focus on one aspect of the visual potential of the medium, namely, the use of colour in lantern exhibitions.

Colour and the production of lantern slides

Various types and shapes of lantern slides were produced and projected in many different contexts, including child and adult entertainment, illustrated lectures of a religious or political nature, and scientific projections.[6] Based on production techniques, three stages in the manufacturing of these lantern slides can be distinguished: painting, printing and photographic techniques, which are all directly linked to the application of colour (Frutos 3). The earliest magic lantern slides were painted by hand, usually in watercolours or oils, on thick glass that often contained irregularities. At the time, watercolours were preferred to oils for their greater degree of transparency and shorter drying time. These images were projected and narrated by itinerant showmen, and the quality of the projected images was generally poor in comparison with slides produced later due to the opaque nature of the paints, weak light sources and unrefined lenses of the lanterns (Mannoni Le Grand Art 7, 105, 112). Little is known about the makers of these early slides; they could be renowned painters, miniaturists or simple craftsmen (Mannoni Le Grand Art 115).[7] In general, it can be said that, compared to the study of the material development of early cinema, for example, there is an important absence of documentation and resources as regards the production of magic lantern slides and their manufacturers.

From the nineteenth century onwards, the artisan production of slides was gradually replaced by a more industrialised production and mechanical reproduction print techniques. These technologies were developed for other media, such as the printing press, and made the production of lantern slides on a large scale commercially viable. The copperplate method, for example, made use of black ink mixed with varnish on the plate to print image outlines on the glass. The colouring, however, was most-often still done by hand within the printed outline to ensure a certain quality. Another printing technique was lithography or stone printing. Usually, a porous limestone in combination with an inked grease-treated image was used to print slides. Lithography later developed into chromolithography, which allowed for the combination of different coloured inks to form a multi-coloured print, and really paved the way for the mass production of lantern slides, particularly for toy lanterns (Roberts 10).[8] In Britain, full-colour printed slides were first commercially produced around 1870, although the quality was rather poor. The chromolithographic process was also used for printing colourful images on transparent paper, which could be placed between two glass plates, and thus be projected. These so-called *vues chromolithographiques* (Fig. 3, 4 and 5) were sold for a much lower price than regular glass slides.[9]

Fig. 3. Slide 19 of *Un poison mortel* (TOLRA, 29
slides, s.d.). Collection KADOC-KULeuven

Fig. 4. Slide 24 of *Un poison mortel* (TOLRA, 29 slides, s.d.). Collection KADOC-KULeuven

Fig. 5. Slide 26 of *Un poison mortel* (TOLRA, 29
slides, s.d.). Collection KADOC-KULeuven

Another, even more crucial technology for the evolution of the magic lantern was photography. This is especially the case in the development of the magic lantern into the more scientific or professional lantern, the so-called 'optical lantern', which projected mainly photographic positives on glass slides. Photography had been developed several decades before the photographic lantern slide,[10] but in the second half of the nineteenth century, the albumen process made it possible to register black and white photographs onto glass plates. Albumen was used to fix photosensitive emulsions to glass with high translucency resulting in a brownish image with very fine detail. This technique was, however, soon followed by the wet collodion process, which was more stable, cheaper and faster. The latter had the advantage of reducing the exposure time to several seconds, although the production itself was rather complicated due to the fact that the plate had to be exposed while still wet.[11] The development of the dry plate process based on a gelatine emulsion in the early 1870s was improved by the end of the decade, shortly followed by industrially produced dry plates coated with a very thin gelatine-silverbromide emulsion, which were highly appropriate for projection.[12]

Different photographic processes were thus modified and used to produce lantern slides, which were particularly suited to scientific, documentary and art historical subjects (Robinson 8). The photographic images were generally monochrome, although there had been experiments with colour photography since the emergence of the medium. To produce colourful photographic images, techniques were employed that harkened back to the beginnings of the magic lantern, specifically the hand-painting of lantern slides. This method proved to be an efficient and affordable option, whilst the development of commercial colour processes in the early twentieth century was pending.[13]

The colour(ing) of the lantern slides
Commercially produced photographic slides were most often marketed both in monochrome and in colour, and tinting slides was often considered an option for aesthetic and economic reasons. As a guideline, the price of coloured slides was approximately double that of monochrome photographic slides. Film scholar Tom Gunning interprets the more expensive alternative as an indication of "added value and greater attraction" and noted that "[…] color appeared as a superadded feature, an additional sensual attraction literally superimposed over the original black and white images" (Gunning 9).

The colouring of lantern slides, and the drive to achieve similar exhilarating effects to the colourful slides from earlier periods, could also be executed by the

end-user, whether an amateur or an expert skilled in painting on glass. The most common practice was to apply colour directly onto the slides, and this was done by either the slide producers or the end-user. Slides were hand-coloured using various techniques and materials such as aniline or albumin dyes, watercolours, oils[14] and pastel crayons. By the end of the nineteenth century, various articles and manuals on how to work with the lantern were available on the market and often provided detailed descriptions on how to colour photographic lantern slides.[15] Without exception, they all pointed out the difficulty of colouring the slides, noting that the tinting of slides was laborious and required a trained hand and an eye for detail. When asked about the mysteries of his profession Chathan Pexton, a renowned English slide painter and dealer based in London, answered: "[…] we have no secrets here; we trust to skill alone, and not to any fanciful methods of mixing or applying colors" (Welford and Sturmey 327). Trained skills and know-how were thus necessary to obtain an acceptable visual result. This is strikingly illustrated in the advice given by the American lanternist and slide maker Dwight Elmendorf (1859-1829) in his *Lantern Slides: How to Make and Color Them*: "Unless one has real artistic feeling and a knowledge of tone and color, the slides had better remain as the developer made them" (59). Elmendorf concluded firmly: "In conclusion, allow the author to beseech anyone without "an eye for color" to leave coloring severely alone" (68).

Specialized hand work was done by manufacturers of slides or by artists with experience painting on glass or as miniaturists. However, Robinson *et al.* emphasized that photographic slides were not hand painted but rather "hand-coloured on a photographic outline" (230).[16] As the following quote in *The Engineer* from 1894, as cited by Frutos, illustrates: "Practically speaking, photography has about killed lantern slide painting as an art, although colourists are now numerous […]" (10). This statement also confirms that the colouring of photographic slides was interpreted as being in the service of the photographic image rather than an autonomous practice. Nevertheless, it was common practice to tint photographic slides, particularly life model slides, and although these were mass-produced, through hand-colouring these pictures became unique images. Producers such as York & Son and Chatham Pexton & Co in the U.K. and the C. W. Briggs Company in the U.S. employed many colourists, mainly young women.[17] Borton estimates that a colourist worked between half an hour to three hours to colour one image and points out that slides that were meant to be coloured were probably printed more lightly than the ones remaining black and white (5-6). Oil-based paints were the most used but they had to be transparent; certain colours, such as vermillion, could not be employed because of their

22

opacity (Robinson 73). As for the colouring, the artists who tinted the images often did not follow any precise rules but instead coloured the pictures according to their own tastes (de Roo). Frequently, colours were used differently in comparable slide sets (Fig. 6 and 7), as MacDonald also observes: "It is common to find examples of the same set with completely different coloring [...]" (26). Moreover, even within one and the same set the colours could differ considerably. This is illustrated in the slide series 'The Death of Paul Dombey'—an adaptation of a scene from Charles Dickens' lengthy novel in six scenes—preserved in the collection of the Cinémathèque royale de Belgique (Fig. 6 and 8). Without additional sources, however, it is impossible to find out exactly why this is the case. Were several colourists working on the same series, or have the plates been replaced or put together later on with plates from a similar series? We can suggest several hypotheses but at this moment it is impossible to answer the question with certainty. The hand colouring of slides remained an important part of the production process until the 1920s. Later, colour photography and the trichrome printing processes, such as Kodachrome by the Kodak Company, signalled the end of professional, hand-painted colouring of photographs.

Fig. 6. Slide 3 of *The Death of Paul Dombey* (York and Son, 6 slides, s.d.). Collection of the Royal Belgian Film Archive
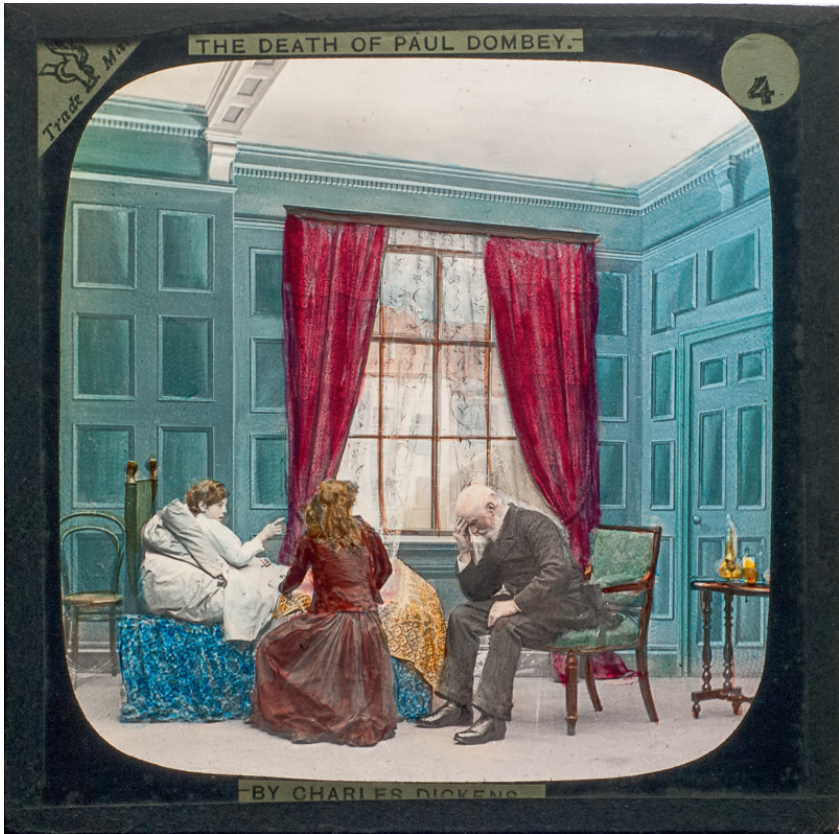
23

Fig. 7. Slide 4 of *The Death of Paul Dombey* (York and Son, 6 slides, s.d.). Collection of the Royal Belgian Film Archive

Fig. 8. Slide 6 of *Death of Paul Dombey* (York and Son, 6 slides, 1893). Collection Ludwig Vogl-Bienek / Media Studies, Universität Trier, Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource, lucerna.exeter.ac.uk, item 5021374. Accessed 6 November 2019

Photographic slides of commercial origin or homemade transparencies could also be hand-tinted by the end user. For that purpose, ready-made transparent oil paints in tubes, dyes, watercolours, inks and pastel colour crayons were available, often in complete kits. The aforementioned author of *Lantern slides. How to make and colour lantern slides* advised the use of aniline dyes (Elmendorf 59). However, by the turn of the century, albumin colours were preferred for amateurs because of their transparency and the ability to apply them more easily in layers to intensify the colours.[18] The E. Mazo company in France offered a box of 12 aniline dye colours for 16 frs.: carmine red, brown red, violet, bright yellow, orange, light green, Sienna, brown n° 2, neutral brown, *rouge ponceau*, *bleu verdâtre' and 'bleu violacé* (E. Mazo, Catalogue, p. 119). In addition, they sold albumin paints for 15 frs., which were softer and more delicate, and available in the following colours: red (Vermilion, Carmine, *toile*), green (dead leaf, green grass, green), blue (purple, blue water, blue sky) and brown (yellow, Siena, burnt Siena) (E. Mazo, Catalogue 120). Before applying the tints, E. Mazo's manual advised that the secret of spreading the colours lay in moistening the photographic emulsion with a solution of water and a few drops of ammonia applied carefully with a pencil (E. Mazo, Manuel 101). After the colour had been applied the painted layer was sealed with varnish, which also helped to increase the brilliance and transparency of the colour, and to protect the paint from the heat emitted by the light source (Borton 5).

The enclosed directions for colouring argued that no prior knowledge was required—the painter just had to follow the contours and shadows of the photograph. But tinting, as already demonstrated, set numerous challenges, especially for amateurs. For example, the final visual effect projected on the screen was not immediately evident when painting, as freshly applied colours on the glass plate turned out differently when projected onto the screen. As Elmendorf noticed: "If the slides are colored by ordinary daylight the effects will be rather surprising when viewed at night by means of the lantern" (67). Special retouching desks were used, consisting of a desk equipped with a glass table plate and a light source or mirror reflecting the light beneath, through which the slide could be illuminated. Elmendorf continued, emphasizing the importance of the light source with respect to the colour of the projected images due to the relationship between colours and light:

> Slides should be colored for the light used in projecting them on the screen, and used with that light and no other. After one slide has been colored successfully so that the worker is satisfied with its

effects on the screen, other slides may be colored by ordinary daylight, using this slide as a guide to color. (67-8)

Next to painting, there were also external mechanical techniques to provide colourful projected images. The magic lantern could transform uncoloured lantern slides into a single tone by making use of a so-called 'colour wheel' or a 'revolving lantern tinter' during the projection. These tinters were in the shape of a disc and could be mounted on a lantern objective and contained several uniformly tinted gelatin or glass plates to add a particular colour to the projected images and was used for colourful effects such as sunsets, moonlight, and seasonal changes. (Robinson *et al.* 273). For example, the French producer E. Mazo sold such tinters, which contained five different colors: blue, red, yellow, green and orange (E. Mazo, Catalogue 134). A similar technique involved certain lantern types that were equipped with an opening behind the projection lens or between the condenser and the lantern slide in which a colour filter, also called a tinter, could be inserted to adjust the colour scheme of the projected image (Robinson *et al.* 2001, p. 302; Yumibe, Colour as Performance 297).

Fig. 9. Chromatrope (E. Mazo, second half of the nineteenth century). Collection Cinémathèque française, PLM-00597-047

To obtain spectacular colour effects, so-called chromatropes were popular from the 1830s on (Robinson 7). These mechanical slides consisted of two glass plates painted with colourful abstract patterns and equipped with a mechanism to rotate the slides in opposite directions to create colourful kaleidoscopic images (Fig. 9). They were also called "artificial fireworks" and projected an exhilarating colour effect on the screen (Robinson *et al.* 67). Other 'effect slides' were used to display double or triple colour effects, such as a mechanical slide that could be used to simulate day, sunset and night, or, for example, a chameleon changing its colour.

Colour theories in magic lantern circles

Nevertheless, it was a common assumption at the time that "a good photograph is better without any colour at all; on the principle, I suppose, that "good wine needs no bush"", as stated by Thomas Cradock Hepworth, lecturer at the Royal Polytechnic Institution in London (145). In the *Indispensable Handbook to the Optical Lantern*, authors Walter Welford and Henry Sturmey indicated that colouring slides was a hotly debated topic within lantern circles: while some exhibitors preferred plain monochrome slides, others liked coloured ones because "Colour lends to objects a new charm - a charm which they would not possess without it", as long as the tinting is properly executed (324). A manual of the French manufacturer E. Mazo even noticed a geographical difference in the appreciation, although it is difficult to review this statement: "Les vues peintes sont toujours très appréciées dans les campagnes. A la ville, on est plus exigeant : on demande un coloris artistique" (100).

This geographical explanation seems of rather minor importance compared to other reasons for the care taken in adding colour to lantern slides. The main reason why the colouring had to be executed with great precision is probably the fact that images on the slides could be magnified up to 80 times when projected onto a screen. Mistakes and irregularities such as visible streaks or spots would thus be mercilessly magnified and would spoil a photographic slide and its realistic slant. In other words: "Colour may be so applied to objects as to render them infinitely more ugly than they were without it" (Welford and Sturmey 324).

Moreover, another explanation for the cautious use of colour comes from an aesthetic perspective. Colour is traditionally dismissed as inferior to design or drawing, which is associated with rationality, and this was certainly the case in the scientific and technological context of photography during the nineteenth century. The photographer produced a monochrome image based on principles of physics and chemistry, but then an artistic intervention was needed to give the

28

image a more lifelike appearance using the colours of nature. However, the realistic qualities of the indexical photographic image and its capacity to reproduce a scene in black and white directed the artistic intervention of adding colour. The colouring was largely determined by, and in support of, the qualities of the photographic image, as the following citation illustrates: "Colour assists in the separation of objects and parts of objects, and thus gives assistance to form" (Welford & Sturmey 324).

Alongside the use of colour in lantern slide projection, different colour theories were developed and particularly emphasized the combinations of colours and their possible contrasts rather than the use of specific tints (Borton 23). The importance of understanding colour theory in selecting colour combinations was ascertained by Hepworth:

> Should he be quite unused to working in colour, he had best begin by procuring some book upon the general theory of colouring, so that he may understand the difference between a primary, secondary, and tertiary tint, and may learn how to combine them together. (1888, 14)

Colours had to be subtle and elegant, as Welford and Sturmey wrote: "Colours, when placed together, can only please and satisfy the educated when combined harmoniously, or according to the laws of harmony" (325). This issue is also addressed by Joshua Yumibe in his research of the use of colour in early cinema. He writes that colours should be applied tastefully and not be overwhelming, and he also points to contemporary colour theories that espouse colours as having an influence on the sensuous and emotional experience of the viewer, which can also be applied to lantern slides (Yumibe, Moving Color 136).

Besides theoretical reflections, instruction books contained practical advice on technique and materials.[19] For example, it was important to "never try to apply another color to the slide until the first one has dried, unless blending is the object in view" (Elmendorf 67). But they also contained very specific instructions, for example: "In coloring trees, first give them a general pale tint of green and then work out each tree in detail with various tints of green" (Elmendorf 67). In an article in *The Photo-Miniature* about the making of lantern slides, cited by Borton, it was said that "[...] in lantern-slide work we are, first and last, impressionists; that is, we do not separately touch each leaf, or blade of grass, or minute detail. A slight, even wash over the whole of the mass gives it

the requisite variety and contrast of tint" (6). The directive was to avoid colouring every detail since, given the properties of the paints and the need for transparency, detailed painting was extremely difficult. The colours had to be applied evenly, although they could be adjusted on the glass slide, which is not the case in the colouring of film, for example. From the above, it is evident that the technical properties of the medium and the required techniques had a profound influence on the aesthetic outcome of the images and colours ultimately projected on the screen.[20]

Colour use in melodramatic life model slide sets: a palette of emotions?
As demonstrated, colours have always played an essential in the production of lantern slides of various sizes and shapes, which were employed for a variety of purposes. Next to technical matters, the use of colour was also closely intertwined with the stylistic and diegetic function, and with the expression of emotions. To illustrate this, I will now focus on the use of colour in fictional melodramatic slide sets, so-called life model slides. These series consist of staged photographic images of people in fictional situations with melodramatic and sentimental elements. These illustrated stories share often dramatic situations and moral dilemmas, featuring manicheistic characters and pathetic emotions. As they are photographed in black and white, the saturation of applied colours is directly influenced by the gray and black undertones in the photograph. This is clearly visible when we examine the monochrome image of a short slide series by York and Son titled 'Little Jim' (Fig. 1 and 2). Clearly, the photographic outline has a negative influence on the purity and intensity of the colours so that they appear to be more dim than primary colours. Consequently, the palette is not elaborate or sophisticated, and subtle colouring with a truly naturalistic colour gradient is simply impractical (Fig. 10). Only a handful of colours are used, which results in a dozen diluted colours for tinting the characters, props and decors to create contrasting images with a dramatic feeling (Fig. 11).

Fig. 10. Detail of slide 5 of *Little Jim* (York & Son, 6 slides, s.d.). Collection Bart G. Moens

Fig. 11. Slide 5 of *Little Jim* without backlight (York & Son, 6 slides, s.d.). Collection Bart G. Moens

At the same time, emotions are therefore expressed visually through theatrical gestures and the exaggerated positioning of the limbs of the characters. Their bodily expressions were in function of the action and intensity of the scene and were meant to attract the audience. In contrast, non-photographic fictional slide series such as chromolithographs on glass and cellophane made much more use of intense hues and contrasting colour combinations to emphasize action in still images. Their simple and uncomplicated lines—without the underlying photographic outline—were coloured extensively and expressively resulting in a visually appealing image. In these series, we witness contrast and tension through rich tones and the heightening of emotions through the use of intense and highly saturated colours (Fig. 3, 4 and 5). Another noteworthy aspect is that characters could be stereotyped through colour-use, as in this example of a drunk having a distinctive red nose in a series for anti-alcohol propaganda (Fig. 3).

Unlike many chromolithographs, the life model slides mostly made use of the advised harmonic colour combinations according to the aesthetic principles of the time in photographic circles. Therefore, the sensory and emotional experience was less abrupt and rather created a general atmosphere that supported the emotional tone of the story. A striking example of achieving such an atmosphere is the use of colour in a French melodramatic life model series of 19 slides created by Honoré Le Sablais for La Maison de la Bonne Presse, 'Noël de la petite aveugle', produced between 1910 and 1924. The dominating colour for the interior scenes is a rich and melancholic purple (Fig. 12), thereby illustrating the present sorrow filling the family house. This unrealistic chromatic emphasis is an example of the use of colour to provoke a melancholic mood that supports the emotional state of the main characters and thereby functions as a conductor of feeling towards the spectator.

Furthermore, colours were also used to improve the readability of the images and comprehension of the linear structure of the slide sequence and story. Used consistently, colours facilitate the recognition of location and the identification of characters that reappear in a slide set. As said, the interior is painted in purple, in 'Noël de la petite aveugle' while the outdoor settings are tinted in a dark blue to indicate nighttime (Fig. 13).

Fig. 12. Slide 1 of *Noël de la petite aveugle*
(Maison de La Bonne Presse, 19 slides, after 1910)
Collection Mundaneum, Mons

Fig. 13. Slide 8 of *Noël de la petite aveugle*
(Maison de La Bonne Presse, 19 slides, after 1910)
Collection Mundaneum, Mons

Fig. 14. Slide 11 of *A Gambler's Honour* (Bamforth &
Co., 24 slides, 1910). 2008 Robert MacDonald, Lucerna
Magic Lantern Web Resource, lucerna.exeter.ac.uk, item
5012841. Accessed 6 November 2019

Moreover, because of the use of a rather small number of colours, the visual complexity is reduced to direct the attention to the essential elements in the story. As a visual stimulus, certain colours are used to draw attention to specific parts of the image that support the narrative or to a protagonist. For example, the clothes of less important characters were often left uncoloured, while clothes of main characters received an eye-catching colour, as we witness in 'A Gambler's honour: and what led to it' of Bamforth & Co (Fig. 14). Another regularly used technique is applying colours to clothes to contrast with the colours of the background and the ground, in order to make the characters stand out. In this way, tinting also adds depth and structure to the image. Through the use of colours, forms stand out more clearly, specific shapes in the image are outlined, and the perspective is reinforced. Emphasizing certain lines, shapes and surfaces entails impressions of space, texture and light.

Conclusion

We can conclude that colour plays an essential role in the visual language of many different types of lantern slides, and particularly in life model slides. The bold assumption by photography purists that a coloured photographic lantern slide is a spoiled slide, is definitely not representative of the historical development of the practice of the magic lantern, as colour is a crucial factor in the production of slides and for the experience of the lantern exhibition.

Through their aesthetic qualities, colours are a vehicle for the expression of emotions and ideas. On the one hand, colour adds to realistic characteristics and to a specific atmosphere, and as such supports the emotionality of the depicted story, while on the other, colour can decrease the feeling of realism when badly executed, as shown in the case of the photographic slides. Colour thus has an immediate impact on the intensity and credibility of the projected images and can also be coded to add meaning. It is, however, difficult to track down the intended meaning of the manufacturers, given the lack of sources about the production and colouring in the case of these life model slides.

As I demonstrated, the application of tints is strongly embedded in the technological and media context of the lantern area, and it showcases strong connections between historical, technical and aesthetic factors. The stories and the iconography of the life model slides are inter-medial by nature and the colouring of the photographic slides is heavily determined by the materiality of the slides and the available transparent paints and dyes. Therefore, further research on the material and technical aspects of this type of heritage is necessary,

together with archival research in company archives and the contemporary specialized press.

Acknowledgements

Works cited

Bagshaw, Walter. "Colouring Lantern Slides with Aniline Dyes." *The Optical Lantern and Cinematograph Journal* (1904): 147.

Borton, Terry. "Outstanding Colorists of American Magic Lantern Slides." *The Magic Lantern Gazette* 26:1 (2014): 2–23.

Bottomore, Stephen, et al. "The Early Film Colorists Speak." *Film History: An International Journal* 28:4 (2016): 159–68.

Catalogue B. Projections Lumineuses: Séries de Vues. Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1927 .

Catalogue Spécial Des Appareils Construits Par La Maison de La Bonne Presse. Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1912.

de Roo, Henc. *Just a Lot of Beautiful Life-Model Sets of Magic Lantern Slides. Part 4*. Web. 28 Aug 2019. <https://www.luikerwaal.com/newframe_uk.htm?/zomaarlife04_uk.htm>.

E. Mazo. *Manuel Mazo de Projections*. Paris: E. Mazo, 1910.

E. Mazo. *Catalogue N°46 E. Mazo. Fabrique d'appareils, d'accessoires et de Vues Pour La Projection. Années 1910 et 1911*. Grande imprimerie du centre, 1910.

Elmendorf, D. L. *Lantern Slides: How To Make and Color Them*. New York: E. & H. T. Anthony & Co., 1895.

Frutos, Francisco Javier. "From Luminous Pictures to Transparent Photographs: The Evolution of Techniques for Making Magic Lantern Slides." *The Magic Lantern Gazette* 25:3 (2013): 3–11.

Groom, Edward. *The Art of Transparent Painting on Glass*. London: Winsor and Newton, 1855.

Gunning, Tom. "Colorful Metaphors: The Attraction of Color in Early Silent Cinema." *Living Pictures: The Journal of the Popular and Projected Image before 1914* 2:2 (2003): 6-9.

Hepworth, T. C. *The Book of the Lantern. Being a Practical Guide to the Working of the Optical (or Magic) Lantern*. London: Wyman & Sons, 1888.

Lavédrine, Bertrand, and Jean-Paul Gandolfo. *The Lumière Autochrome: History, Technology, and Preservation*. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2013. Trans. from French by McElhone.

MacDonald, Robert, ed. *The Illustrated Bamforth Slide Catalogue (Booklet)*. London: The Magic Lantern Society, 2009.

Malthête, Jacques. "Les Bandes Cinématographiques En Couleurs Artificielles. Un Exemple: Les Films de Georges Méliès Coloriés à La Main." *1895, Revue d'histoire Du Cinéma* 2 (1987): 3–10.

Mannoni, Laurent. "La Collection Des Plaques de Lanterne Magique de La Cinémathèque Française." *Journal of Film Preservation* 82 (2010): 41–46.

Mannoni, Laurent. *Le Grand Art de La Lumière et de l'ombre. Archéologie Du Cinéma*. Édition Nathan, 1994.

Projections Molteni. Éditions de Diapositives Pour Conférences Scientifiques et Mondaines. Paris: Radiguet & Massiot, 1897.

Roberts, Phillip. "The Early Life of Philip Carpenter." *The Magic Lantern*. 2016. 10–13.

Robinson, David. "Shows and Slides." *Magic Images. The Art of Hand-Painted and Photographic Lantern Slides*. London: The Magic Lantern Society of Great Britain, 1990. 5–8.

Robinson, David, et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of the Magic Lantern*. London: The Magic Lantern Society, 2001.

Usai, Paolo Cherchi. "Color." *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*. Ed. Richard Abel. Routledge, 2005. 138–41.

Welford, Walter D., and Henry Sturmey. *The Indispensable Handbook to The Optical Lantern. A Complete Cyclopaedia on the Subject of Optical Lanterns, Slides & Accessory Apparatus*. London: Iliffe & Son, 1888.

Yumibe, Joshua. *Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism*. New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2012.

Yumibe, Joshua. "Colour as Performance in Visual Music, Film Tinting and Digital Painting." *Performing New Media, 1890-1915*. Eds. Kaveh Askari, et al. New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing Ltd, 2015. 294–304.

Yumibe, Joshua. "The Phantasmagoria of the First Hand-Painted Films. How the Silent Screen Burst to Life with Color." *Nautilus*, no. 26, 2015, http://nautil.us/issue/26/color/the-phantasmagoria-of-the-first-hand_painted-films.

---

[1] By the end of the nineteenth century, the term 'magic lantern' was mainly used to refer to small toy lanterns. Sophisticated lanterns used for more serious and professional purposes were called 'optical lanterns. These instruments were equipped with powerful light sources and refined optics to project large and high-quality images.

[2] In the case of cinema, many of the films produced before the First World War were also abundantly coloured, sometimes by artists who also coloured lantern slides (Usai 138; Malthête 6). For the hand-colouring of film the same expertise and techniques were used as those by lantern slide and photograph colorists, who had been colouring their images for decades (Bottomore et al. 166). Whereas Borton indicates that, due to the much smaller format and the number of images, "the coloring was often no match for lantern-slide quality" (18). Yet the hand-colouring of films was time-consuming and very expensive, therefore films would be tinted (frames uniformily coloured to mostly indicate physical features—however, in a phototographic or magic lantern context 'tinting' just means the hand-colouring of a photograph or lantern slide) or toned (the chemical colouring of the sensitized portions of the scenes) amongst other techniques such as colouring with stencils (Usai 139-140). On the other hand, delicately painted lantern slides, were used as title slides or 'vues d'annonces' during film exhibitions.

[3] A large amount of digitized life model slides can be found on the Lucerna website, an online resource on the magic lantern which is managed by lantern researchers from universities in the U.K. and Germany: http://lucerna.exeter.ac.uk/. Last consultation 14 November 2019.

[4] The optical system contained a set of lenses (a condensator) to concentrate the rays of light onto the slide, and a set of lenses placed behind the lantern slide (the objective or projection lens) to enlarge and project the transparent image.

[5] The intensity of the light source has an important impact on the sharpness of the image, and as colour is relative to light, it also has a defining influence on the brightness of the projected colours and the surrounding colours. Throughout the history of the magic lantern different illuminants were used for projection: candles, oil, petrol and alcohol lamps, gaslight and electricity. In the 1820s, professional projectionists made use of gas mixtures (e.g., hydrogen and oxygen with the flame pointed to a piece of lime), to produce a strong and bright white light.

[6] Scientific purposes for example to explain the colour spectrum, using a prism in front of the objective to defuse the white light of the lantern. Or for art history lectures, for which reproductions of renowned works on glass slides were coloured, and of which manufacturers such as E. Mazo boldly assured they were in exactly the same colours as the originals due to their trichrome process (Catalogue 187).

[7] In his 'Le grand art de la lumière et de l'ombre. Archéologie du inema', Laurent Mannoni describes an exceptional series of slides painted by the Italian master painter Giuseppe Maria Crespi (1665-1747) that survived the time (114-5). Mannoni also refers to an announcement by Paul Philidor (17??-1829), who gave phantasmagoria shows in Paris at the end of the eighteenth century, when looking for painters: "On désireroit trouver un Peintre au fait de peindre sur verre, en miniatures et en couleurs transparents" (Le grand art 140).

[8] I would also like to draw attention to the often beautifully coloured lanterns themselves, especially toy lanterns such as the tin lanterns of the French manufacturers Louis Aubert and Auguste Lapierre.

[9] In 1910, such images on cellophane paper were sold by the French company E. Mazo for 3 frs. For 48 slides, with an explanatory booklet. For comparison the price of an uncoloured slide was generally between 0,50 and 0,60 frs. And a coloured slide between 1,5 and 1,75 frs. A slide made with a colour photograph was 2,50 frs. For 1 slide (E. Mazo, Catalogue).

[10] The first photographic lantern slides were manufactured by the U.S. based Langenheim brothers; after projecting daguerreotypes using a setup with two limelights, they modified Niépce's process in 1848 to produce positive pictures on glass for projection in 1848 (MacDonald 8).

[11] The wet collodion process was used by English manufacturers of life model slide series up until the twentieth century. Given the fact that pictures were taken in studio conditions with controlled light conditions and close to the darkroom, the disadvantages were limited.

[12] Along with being low cost and user-friendly, the industrially produced dry plates coated with a very thin gelatin-silverbromide emulsion boosted the commercial production of lantern slides by major companies such as Agfa (c. 1873) and the Eastman Kodak Company (c. 1888), amongst others (Robinson et al. 231-232).

[13] Following the experiments of pioneers such as Edmond Becquerel (1820-1891) and Gabriel Lippmann (1845-1921), the Lumière brothers commercialized the first process for colour photography, called the 'autochrome process' (Lavédrine and Gandolfo 94). At the beginning of the twentieth century, colour photography emerged and was also used to produce lantern slides. In their catalogue for the years 1910 and 1911, the E. Mazo company proudly presents their "trichromies", named after the process developed by Auguste Jean-Baptiste Tauleigne (1870-1926) (Catalogue 187).

[14] These are the same products used by oil painters, but the colourist of lantern slides was confined to those colours which are naturally transparent: Prussian blue, indigo, Italian pink, raw Sienna, yellow lake, Chinese orange, neutral tint, brown pink, brown madder, rose madder, purple madder, crimson lake, ivory black, burnt Sienna and McGilp (Hepworth 148).

[15] Elmendorf, D. L. (1895). *Lantern Slides: How To Make and Color Them*. New York: E. & H. T. Anthony & Co; Hepworth, T. C. (1888). *The Book of the Lantern. Being a Practical Guide to the Working of the Optical (or Magic) Lantern*. London: Wyman & Sons; Welford, W. D., & Sturmey, H. (1888). *The Indispensable Handbook to The Optical Lantern. A Complete Cyclopaedia on the Subject of Optical Lanterns, Slides & Accessory Apparatus*. London: Iliffe & Son; Groom, E. (1855). *The Art of Transparent Painting on Glass*. London: Winsor and Newton. And several articles in the specialized press, such as in The Optical Magic Lantern Journal.

[16] Although mass production and economic reasons were often implicated in the decline in the quality of the images and their colours, professionally painted slides were still made and were sometimes real works of art in themselves. A stunning example are the slides currently in the collection of the Cinémathèque française, which were made for the Royal Polytechnic Institution by professional slide painters, and which excel in bright images with overwhelming colours (http://www.laternamagica.fr/ Last consultation 14 November 2019).

[17] In an article on lantern slide manufacturer Chatham Pexham & Co, their colouring practice is described extensively by the reporter: "While watching the painting of a lantern transparency on a photographic basis, we could not but admire the skill displayed in making a sky possessing uniformity, and which is considered a difficult feat. This was effected in the following way :— The transparency having been placed on the easel, and the palette set with a range of colours from oil tubes, the blue pigment, previously modified with an admixture of varnish, was applied at the top with broad sweeps from left to right in such a manner as to become lighter and lighter as the horizon was approached. But just previous to this stage being reached, other colours of the rose-madder class were blended so as to bring the sky down to the horizon in a warm and pleasant tone. The sky was now ready for having the colours blended together and made to run into one another with such imperceptible grading as to present the appearance of one harmonious and continuous whole rather than a succession of tints. The deft application of the point of the finger effected this, and although it appeared to be accomplished with much ease, yet we could plainly see that it required great care and skill to ensure a uniform result" (Welford and Sturmey 327).

[18] Furthermore, there were the colours in varnish used for mechanised slides and for the tinting of slides that were painted with albumin or aniline colours and sold for 0,60 fr. to 1,25 fr. per tube (E. Mazo, Catalogue 120).

[19] If starting from scratch on a glass plate without a photographic outline, the outlines and contours would be drawn with fine pointed pencils with camel hair, followed by the colouring, which was worked from the background to the foreground. The smaller details of the picture were left until last and were carefully picked out with a fine brush. The finishing was done with a varnish to protect and brighten up the colours (Frutos 5).

[20] An important consideration for today's researchers regarding the final result on the screen is colour degradation that has taken place over time. In addition to storage conditions, slides were projected and thus have probably been exposed repeatedly to strong UV light and heat, a combination that makes discoloration unavoidable.

Luminous Fountains and Fairies

Fin-de-siècle Colourful Lighting Techniques and Mutating Scenography

Evelien Jonckheere

Recently, the organization that runs the Křižík's Luminous Fountain, a well-known tourist attraction in Prague, announced the end of its performances, 128 years after the fountain's first luminous projections.[1] This luminous fountain was named after its creator, František Křižík, the Czech inventor, electrical engineer, and entrepreneur who built this fountain as a main attraction at the General Land Centennial Exhibition of the Austro–Hungarian Empire in 1891 (Česálková & Svatoňová 384). In that year, the Křižík Fountain's many visitors to the exhibition marveled at "colours changing in rapid succession, each mutation was welcomed by thunderous applause, and a veritable storm was unleashed upon the display of a composition comprised of the hues of the tricolour: red, blue, and white".[2] Other visitors perceived the fountains as enormous bouquets of multi-coloured flowers or precious stones (Česálková & Svatoňová 392).

The installation was refurbished in 1991 in honour of the Universal Czechoslovakia Exhibition.[3] It survived until recently as a tourist attraction with computer-controlled lights, synchronized with the tones of Dvořák's *New World Symphony* as well as more popular tunes by Abba, the Scorpions, and Queen. However, reports by contemporary audiences testify to reduced enthusiasm:

> We were a little bit disappointed. The show was OK - beautiful lights and sound but the arena looks ruined. It needs refreshing. If you haven't seen anything like that before then it's a "must see" attraction :) Otherwise you should consider spending your money elsewhere.[4]

It is evident that the experience of watching luminous fountains (or "magic" or "fairy" fountains) nowadays is far removed from the astonishment they produced in 1891. This is the result of profound changes in discourse and perception over time. The "magic" of 1891 was partly due to the sensation caused by its novelty, but at the same time, there was more at stake. Luminous fountains were embedded in discourses of education, nationality, the promotion of new engineering systems and the advent of electricity, which gradually changed human perception during the late nineteenth century.

In this contribution, I aim to investigate how these discourses influenced late nineteenth-century lighting techniques and scenography within spectacular contexts. By laying bare a problematized position towards coloured light in theatre scenography and by demonstrating colourful visual experiments related to the fountain, such as *la fée d'électricité* by Loïe Fuller, I will illustrate how new conceptions of theatre lighting and scenography gradually found a way to the stage towards the turn of the twentieth century.

As such, a new dimension is brought to studies on stage lighting, which are traditionally written from the perspective of light sources, such as candles, oil, gas and electricity. At the same time, I will demonstrate how the evolution of theatre lighting was closely connected to the development of human perception and optical devices such as the "magic" or "optical" lanterns.[5] In brief, by shedding light on the genealogy of the luminous fountain, this article at the same time re-investigates theatre lighting and its slow embracing of colour in scenography.

The luminous Fountain as educational device: making the invisible visible
The Křižík Fountain made electromagnetic waves visible as dynamic water jets, and in doing so, it praised the enormous advances in technology. The visualization of these electromagnetic waves had long been problematic, until improved optical devices such as the "scientific lantern" or "optical lantern" were able to visualize vibrations and waves in liquids or water jets, resulting in a "luminous fountain". This invention is usually attributed to the Swiss engineer and physicist Jean-Daniel Colladon who was famous for developing several improvements to the technology of hydraulics that were used in techniques to tunnel the alps and to expand the mining industry. The invention of the luminous fountain was said to be an accidental discovery made at the moment he was teaching the physics of water flow in 1841 (Hecht 12). To enhance the visibility of the water jet for his students, a scientific light projector was added to make the natural law of total internal reflection of light in water visible. As light has a higher refractive index than water, it seemed to be locked in the water jet and was therefore propelled in a water jet, following the water in all possible directions.
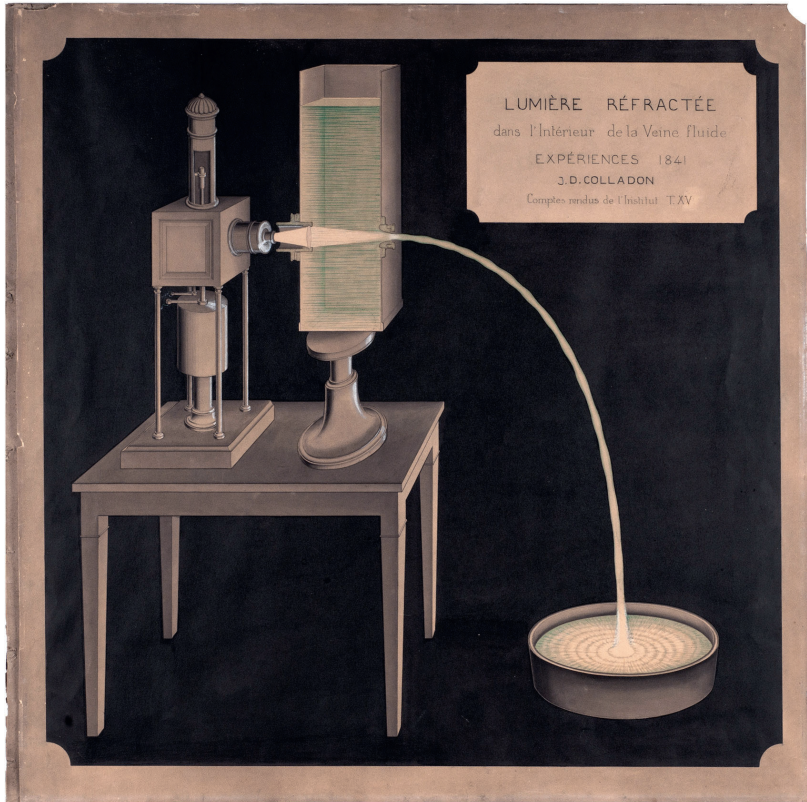
Fig. 1. *The Colladon Fountain*, s.d.
Private Collection Patrice Guérin

Colladon gave an illustrated lecture with the luminous fountain at the Conservatory of Arts and Sciences of Paris in October 1841, and probably gave another demonstration in London too. Only the following summer did Colladon publish anything on this invention, probably after a rumour was spread that a Belgian scientist, Joseph Plateau, was developing something similar (Hecht 14). Abbé Moigno, a famous French populariser of science, made mention of another inventor of the luminous fountain, Jacques Babinet, and claimed that Colladon merely extended its design (Moigno 132).

However, less important than the exact attribution of its inventor is the fact that the luminous fountain spread rapidly in scientific circles. In the second half of the nineteenth century the luminous fountain was marketed by lantern producers. These scientific lanterns were sold to schools, associations and private individuals, so that they could magnify all kinds of physical objects and visualize natural phenomena, including the "total reflection" by means of a luminous fountain. How teachers should educate a group by means of the scientific lantern was described in accompanying manuals such as the handbook *Les projections scientifiques et amusantes* (Scientific and entertaining projections) by lantern constructor Georges Massiot, dating from 1907. Massiot emphasized that demonstrations with a fairy-like character such as the luminous fountain or colourful rainbows were extremely interesting for introducing children to the scientific world. The enchanting character of the luminous fountain is compared with colourful gems:

> The jets start to sprinkle, they cross and break, matt like silver jets, red like bloody rockets, purple like amethyst flows, yellow like gold like the persistent trace of miraculous topazes. (Massiot 35)

On the continent, a man named Louis Jules Duboscq played a major role in the optimization and dissemination of the scientific lantern (Moigno 73). This French optician and lantern manufacturer had a shop with Jean-Baptiste Soleil at the Rue de l'Odéon in Paris (Robinson, Herbert and Crangle 95). He was specialized in manufacturing lenses and optical devices and had been selling the *lanterne photogénique* since 1850. This lantern projected microscopic particles and with the right accessories, one could demonstrate physical laws of *phénomènes naturels*, such as reflection, refraction, dispersion, spectra, recomposition of light, et cetera (Manoni 228).

One can state that these scientific lanterns contributed enormously to the knowledge of the natural composition of light and colour. In addition to the luminous fountain, experiments with transparent glass prisms made it possible to visualize and investigate in detail the refraction of white light beams into colour prisms and rainbows (Chadwick 115-138). In this way, knowledge concerning the composition and properties of light and colour increased rapidly. This knowledge made it possible to further develop the colour theories of Goethe, who had laid bare the subjective nature of colour. The existence of deceptive after-images of colours and the role of the retina's response to the perception of colour, illustrated that the perception of colour could not be regarded as 'stable' and was a result of an interplay of biological, chemical, physical and psychological elements, which were further explored by scientists such as Joseph Plateau, Jean Purkinje, Gustav Fechner and many others throughout the nineteenth century.[6] They illustrated what Jonathan Crary described as 'subjective' or 'embodied' vision, in which vision became dependent on the complex and contingent physiological makeup of the observer, rendering vision faulty, unreliable, and arbitrary. This broke with a classical regime of visuality and grounded the truth of vision in the materiality of the body (Crary 12).

The luminous fountain at the Exhibition: promoting national technology
However, the luminous fountain was not limited to the classroom. It was at the World Fairs that the popularity of the luminous fountain reached its greatest heights. In addition, national competition at the World Exhibitions may have contributed significantly to the development of the luminous fountain. At the World Fair, the luminous fountain was seen as a powerful means to convey the wealth of a nation, symbolized by the display of the colours similar to beautiful gemstones, as illustrated in following description of the luminous fountain in a catalogue of the World Fair of 1889 in Paris:

> This illumination is, in fact, magical and well placed to provoke the amazement of the crowds. We had never experienced these plays of light and these rapid colour changes; nothing as wonderful as these sparkling jets of such bright yet soft colours, as this continuous rain of diamonds, pearls, sapphires and emeralds! These flowing jets glow as if on fire, these silver sprays, these sparks, these sequins, all this water that seems inflamed, boiling, gushing, cascading down with dazzling scintillations, this orgy of light that seduces the eyes. It is like being in fairy-tale world. (*Exposition Universelle 1889 Paris* 392)

This Paris exhibition was designed to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution and attracted hundreds of people a day around the fountain located in the vicinity of the brand-new Eiffel Tower, at the heart of the exhibition. As soon as the sun went down, a spectacle of colourful floating water jets was launched at the Paris exhibition. The exhibition presented the latest innovations in science, technology and their industrial applications. As an exhibit, the luminous fountain in this context was an illustration of the latest trends in hydraulics linked to new techniques in the field of coloured light. Since the world exhibitions in London (1884), Manchester (1887) and Glasgow (1888), luminous fountains had become regular crowd pullers, with each new exhibition intended to surpass the previous one and glorify nationalistic sentiments (*Exposition Universelle 1889* Paris 392).

Inspired by the luminous fountains presented at previous expositions, one of the three basins was provided with the English Galloway light projection system whereas two other basins were provided with an innovative French projection system, more specifically one with the Bechmann and the other a Sautter-Lemonnier light projection. By adding reflecting devices, the French light projections were able to lighten up greater volumes of water, coloured by shifting combinations of five superimposed coloured glass slides, positioned in between a lantern or spotlight and the water jet (*Exposition Universelle 1889* Paris 330-333). These projection and colour devices were operated in a subterranean room, where machinists changed the colour slides in front of the lantern by pulling levers in order to achieve several combinations of the red, blue, green, gold and white glasses, by means of a mechanism that was said to be based on a railway signalling system. In addition, an above-ground observation room in the vicinity of the water basin was equipped with a mechanism of levers to control the water activity and with a so-called *porte-voix*, to correspond with colleagues in the subterranean room about the colour shifts (*Exposition Universelle 1889* Paris 339-348).

Fig. 2. Georges Garen, *Embrasement de la Tour Eiffel.*
The Eifel tower and luminous fountain during the World
Exposition in 1889. Wiki Commons

Fig. 3. A lantern technician in the underground of
the Luminous Fountain in: C.-L.Huard (ed.)., *Livre
d'Or de l'Exposition*, Paris: Boulanger, 1899

Fig. 4. "Les Dessous de l'Exposition". In: *Petit Bleu de l'Exposition,* 12 May 1897

Fig. 5. *Théâtre A. Casti,* 1890
Collection Vliegende Bladen, University Library
Ghent, VLBL.HFI.PGF.006.01

In its turn, the Parisian fountain inspired many other expositions such as Křižík's Luminous Fountain and the presentation of a fountain at the Brussels exposition of 1897 with similar "lumière merveilleux, apparaissant féeriques."[7] Corresponding to the Parisian precursor, attention was given to the subterranean mechanics. However, in Brussels, a different technique was used to provide colour to the water jets. An illustrated Belgian press report entitled *Les Dessous de l'Exposition* designed and described the arc lamps and mentioned how colour in the Brussels fountain was produced by revolving discs, divided into triangles of red, green, blue and yellow, making it possible to shift colours more easily.[8] The fact that various World Fairs competed in surpassing each other by making the luminous fountain larger and using the latest techniques in the field of colour projection, stimulated the progress of both hydraulics and lighting techniques.

The luminous fountains were technical highlights and their magical character was further enhanced by the impressive technology, invisible behind the visible fountain. As in theatre, the audience of the fountain at the world's fair was fascinated by the machinery that was set in motion at invisible levels and through impressive mechanical suspension systems. However, compared to theatre, they offered an immersive spectacle, as the spectator could walk freely around the fountain and feel the freshness of the water jets. The synesthetic quality of the fountain, combining visual spectacle with tactile experience, probably explained the popularity of the luminous fountain in many other spectacular domains such as municipal festivals, hotel lobbies and foyers in theatres or summer gardens, and even private living rooms.[9]

Luminous fountains on stage: limited special effects
A festival of food, drink, mechanical merry-go-rounds, waxwork models and spectacular attractions characterized the multisensorial local fairground in the late nineteenth century. In this synesthetic environment, where taste, smell, touch and vision blended together in one happening, luminous fountains were a regular feature. First staged by illusionists,[10] and later by fairground showmen such as the French A. Casti, who demonstrated luminous fountains at French and Belgian fairs in 1890 and referred in his announcement to those at the Paris World Fair from the year before.[11] Casti staged them as the 'apotheosis' of a *féerie*, the genre of spectacle that most used new techniques to stage fairy-tale-like stories.

The *féerie* originated in the Baroque courtyard theatre where, from the eighteenth century onwards, an allegorical and illusory phantasy world of fairies, caves, rocks, fires and fountains was unveiled with the help of impressive machinery

and quite dangerous lighting techniques such as Bengal fire (Ginisty 12-24). The dramaturgy of the *féerie* was therefore completely subordinate to the effects or attractions (Kessler 74). The spectacles belonged to the so-called "boulevard genre", named after the famous Boulevard du Temple in Paris, where *féerie* spectacles were mainly located. They attracted a large and diverse audience. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the popularity of the *féerie* declined sharply as it was increasingly dismissed as a children's spectacle (Kessler and Lenk 117-127). Nevertheless, the genre continued to exist and the famous Parisian Théâtre du Châtelet almost acquired a monopoly at the end of the nineteenth century (Kessler 72). In addition, the genre continued to live on at the fairground as well.

While in the first half of the nineteenth century the *féerie* mainly relied on mechanics in which, with the help of gears, ropes and hydraulic systems, two-dimensional decor pieces were set in motion, more and more optical experiments were added in the second half. The so-called *phénomènes physiques*, simulating a rising sun, a rainbow and lightning, spread out from the *féerie* across the more traditional theatres.[12] These *phénomènes physiques* on stage were again closely connected to color experiments as demonstrated in illustrated lectures with the scientific lantern. It is not a coincidence that many of these *phénomènes physiques* were made to perfection by Jules Duboscq who was not only the inventor of highly sophisticated scientific lanterns, but also a technician in charge of *le service de l'électricité* in the Paris Opera since 1855. Duboscq commercialized the *phénomènes physiques* as theatrical effects, as illustrated by the *Catalogue des appareils employés pour la production des phénomènes physiques au théâtre* in Paris 1877.[13] This catalogue contains a pricelist with the prices quoted for each apparatus, which theatres in the provinces or abroad could order from the author. It illustrates the abundance of lanterns of various kinds and their dimensions in theatre as early as the 1870s (Bergman 279).

In addition to suns, rainbows and lightning, a popular "fairy" effect presented in the Dubosq catalogue was the luminous fountain. This fountain was already introduced on stage in the ballet *Elia and Mysis* in 1853, with the help of Colladon's advice (Alglave & Boulard 424-425), and in many more similar *pièces à grand spectacle* where the luminous fountain often appeared as an apotheosis (Bergman 280). Moynet mentions in *Trucs et Decors* (1893) the role of the fountain in theatre as nothing more than a special effect (Moynet 296). Nevertheless, the popularity of similar special effects continued to grow during the nineteenth century. This was partially due to the spread of electric light,

which was much stronger and had a greater range than gas or oil. The electric lamp was introduced in 1849 at the Paris Opéra in Meyerbeer's opera *Le Prophète* to achieve a unique sunrise effect (Bergman 275-278). In the following years, electricity was employed to stretch a rainbow across the stage or to achieve electric moving projections (Alglave & Boulard 418-420). In Wagner's *La Walkyrie* in the Paris opera in 1893, floating clouds were designed with the aid of five electric projectors, projecting the clouds against veils, which were synchronized and placed behind set pieces (Moynet 359-376). These floating images were the result of revolving discs with transparent colours, representing clouds with varying lights and shades (Bergman 282).

Despite the fact that coloured light projections had a spectacular character on stage, coloured light was not yet institutionalized in theatre before the turn of the twentieth century for several reasons. Electric light was mainly limited to a few special effects, as well as the illumination of the exterior of public buildings, as its generators, steam engines and battery cells, took up a lot of space that was often lacking in the local theatres (Essig 17). Furthermore, for a long time electric lamps were considered too bright and too white, as indicated by Paul Lindau in the following quote from the 1880s:

> The disproportionately strong and intense light washes out all the surrounding colours and because theatrical devices become crudely apparent in the bright light, it destroys all illusion. Instead of a tree one sees the painted canvas and instead of the sky, a sail cloth. (Baumann 199-200)

This quote exposes another underlying problem at the same time, namely the dominant visibility of the painted backdrop as interface, which could not tolerate too much light because it damaged the pictorial illusion of central perspective (Schivelbusch 193-195). According to theatre historian Linda Essig in *A Primer for the History of Stage Lighting,* theatre lighting first had to revolutionize the "tug-of-war between art and technology". Too much bright light could expose the inaccuracies in the canvas and break the illusionist effects. A luminous fountain was, however, even worse than stage lighting. Being a three-dimensional prop, the luminous fountain on stage disturbed the pictorial illusion of the painted backdrop much more with its illusory central perspective and liberated the spectator from the inflexible, subject-object positions of classical subjectivity, which was associated in the perception of classic pictorial illusion with central perspective (Yumibe 267).
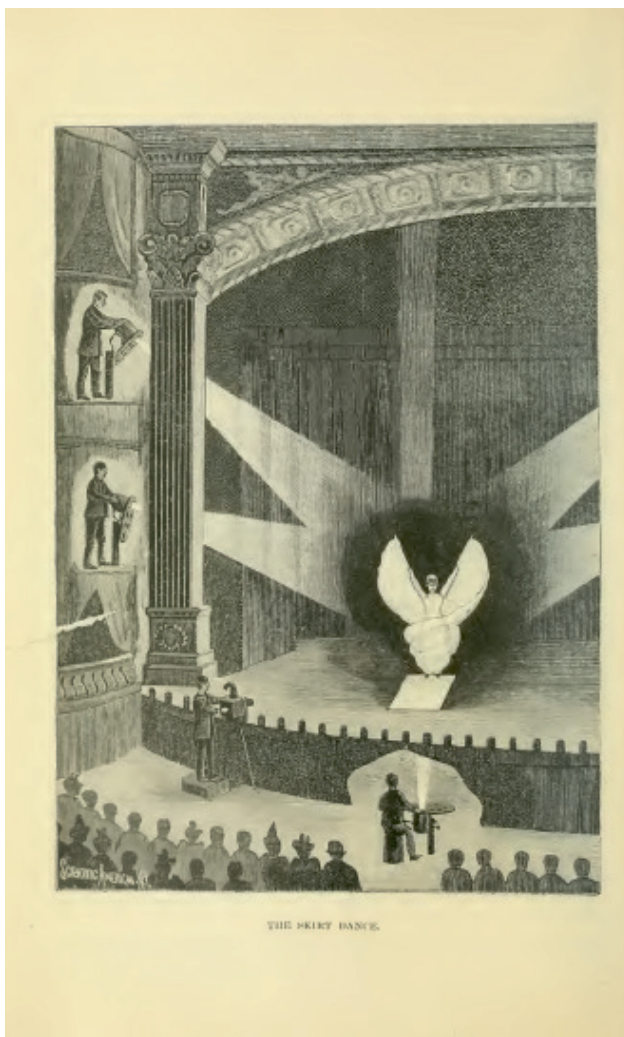
56

Fig. 6. *The Skirt Dance*
In: Albert Hopkins, *Magic. Stage Illusions and Scientific Diversions* (1897)

Fuller and fireworks: towards a new scenography

Appia, according to Essig, was the first director to radically opt for an expressive use of stage lighting and to overturn the classic pictorial illusion with a rejection of two-dimensional scenery (Essig 12). In *Music and the art of the theatre* Appia wrote:

> lighting is the more expressive (than spatial arrangement). This is so because it is subject to a minimum of conventions, is unobtrusive, and therefore freely communicates external life in its most expressive form. (Essig 17)

The most influential of Appia's ideas was his rejection of two-dimensional scenery. He felt that the three-dimensional human form, lit three-dimensionally by electric lights, should not appear in front of flatly painted illusionist scenery. In addition to Appia, Craig is also regularly referred to as a decisive influence in scenography within academic studies, as are Reinhardt and Meyerhold, who in turn would also profoundly influence Diaghilev's views on staging (Jackson 3).

In my opinion, Essig's claim that "the tug-of-war between art and technology" was unleashed by directors like Appia or Craig needs some qualification. I would suggest that the path was smoothed by light projection effects such as the rainbow, moving clouds and fountains, as indicated above. In my view, these fairy-tale-like spectacles, and especially the luminous fountains, were the first manifestations of colourful synesthetic effects on stage, challenging the classic pictorial illusion with expressive lighting and a rejection of two-dimensional scenery and backdrops with their inflexible subject-object perception.

In addition to these light projection effects, the influence of the American dancer Loïe Fuller on classical scenography needs to be taken into account as well. Fuller's dance was closely intertwined with light projection effects and especially with the luminous fountain. Fuller swapped the water of the luminous fountain for dust, as it were, and in this way, she created a similarly magical spectacle in which vibrant reds, blues and yellows merged together into mauves and greens in a constant flux. Projectors beamed coloured lights from several sides, above and beneath the dancer, resulting in colourful kaleidoscopic images on her white dress (Albright 52-61). To project from below, lantern operators were situated under the stage, directly beneath a glass plate on which she stood. The positioning of these coloured light sources is sketched in Albert Hopkins' famous book *Magic. Stage Illusions and Scientific Diversions* (1897) in which this dance is

58

described as the result of a magical interplay with light, space, colour and fabric (Hopkins II and 342-344).

Fig. 7. *Loïe Fuller at the Folies-Bergère*, s.d.
Collection Vleeshuis/Letterenhuis Antwerpen

According to Richard and Marcia Current in *Goddess of Light* (1997), Fuller saw an illuminated fountain for the first time in the Grand Hotel on the eve of her Folies-Bergère debut. "There was a female figure in it, and it was lighted from below. The effect struck me at once. I said to my mother: 'I can use that in my dance'" (Current and Currant 96). Although the above-mentioned quote probably says more about the mythologizing of Loïe Fuller as a self-proclaimed *fée d'électricité* since the Paris Exposition of 1900 (Albright 90), the parallels between Fuller's serpentine or skirt dances and the luminous fountains are inevitable. Since her debut at the Folies-Bergère in 1892 in Paris (Albright 33), Fuller achieved international fame for her idiosyncratic interpretation of the popular but often considered to be vulgar skirt dances that made the moulin rouge an iconic place. By adding substantially more fabric to the width of the skirt and by introducing novel lighting effects, she created an innovative 'free' dance and conquered stages all over the world. At first, her spectacle was based on the effect of light on the movement of the brilliant white material itself and the billowing patterns she produced. Gradually more and more colour-wheels were added to the projection, similar to those used in the luminous fountains at the world exhibitions in Brussels and Prague.

Fuller was, just like the luminous fountain at the World Fair, a 'theatrical' promotor of science and technology. In her autobiography, Fuller presents herself primarily as a scientist with a great interest in chemistry, physics and biology. She consulted Thomas Edison, Pierre and Marie Curie on developments in electric lighting, phosphorescent salts and the use of radium on stage.[14] Although the use of radium on stage could never be realised, it typified her search for continuous technological innovation. This constant search for innovation in lighting techniques and treatments of the canvases in which she was dressed, ensured that Fuller staged colour with remarkable intensity. This desire for innovation resulted in the creation of a theatre of her own at the world exhibition of Paris in 1900.

In addition, Fuller also performed experiments off stage, with light and coloured glass and with her own body as a scientific instrument to absorb and register the effects of pure colour. This is how she detected that yellow causes enervation and mauve engenders sleep (Trainor 103). In transferring this knowledge to the theatre, Fuller demonstrated that the use of coloured light in theatre was a synesthetic spectacle in which more than just one sense was stimulated. Consequently, Fuller's shows could be perceived as the performative counterpart of modernist painting. Like Fuller, modernist painters renounced pictorial illusion in favour of synaesthesia.

60

The synesthetic power of Fuller's dances was beautifully expressed in the poetic ode to Loïe Fuller by the symbolist Belgian poet, Georges Rodenbach. In this poem, Rodenbach depicts the synergy of colour with natural phenomena, of science and various sensory perceptions. Fuller's colourful experimental shows not only attracted the attention of poets and world-famous artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec, but also of men of science such as the famous astronomer Camille Flammarion, with whom Fuller shared the fascination for exploring the effects of coloured light on the natural world. Fuller's findings were also investigated by contemporaries such as the experimental psychologist Charles Féré who conducted medical experiments in Chromotherapy in 1895. This therapy claimed to cure madness by administering precise doses of coloured rays to mentally disturbed people (Trainor 109). The interest of late nineteenth-century scientists and artists in colour and synaesthesia was an interplay between arts and science and encouraged both a scientific debate on colour as well as numerous Fuller imitators (Heard 3), preparing the audience for a radical new positioning of lights and their synesthetic effects on stage.

Conclusion: towards a new perception and scenography
Today, the luminous fountain is still in use in amusement parks such as De Efteling, where it constitutes the closing attraction after a long day of marvels in a fairy-tale world. However, traditional luminous fountains like Křižík's Luminous Fountain no longer attract the same number of spectators as they had done at the end of the nineteenth century. By then, their success was embedded in a rich discourse of scientific discoveries and technological progress, illustrating faith in 'a new world', rooted in modern experience with its taste for enchantment, science, technology and spectacle.

By exhibiting a synesthetic scenography, the luminous fountain, as well as Fuller's dances, symbolized a modern sensorium of synaesthesia. This modern sensorium initiated growing ambivalence towards the reign of ocular-centrism and, according to Martin Jay's "Scopic regimes of modernity," "the disincarnated Cartesian spectator" (Jay 8). Eventually, with innovators such as Appia and Craig, theatre lighting began to dominate in a more effective non-naturalistic stage picture (Jackson 6). With the breakthrough of switchboards or light organs in the first decades of the twentieth century, the amplification of light and the use of coloured light was simplified considerably.[15] It is no coincidence that mainly optical lantern manufacturers began to commercialise both coloured lights and associated control panels in the first half of the twentieth century.

We can conclude that the late-nineteenth-century luminous fountains and their scenography at exhibitions or on stage reflected a fundamental shift in perception, prepared by visual innovations in lecture halls, fairgrounds, theatre stages and world exhibitions. This shift was embedded in a change in perception where vision moved from an inflexible subject-object position of classical subjectivity towards embodied subjective vision. This shift reflected the evolutions in colour theories used during the nineteenth century and resulted in new scenographical choices. Classic pictorial illusion with central perspective and two-dimensional backdrops were exchanged for empty stages with coloured light and movement as the main décor, as already illustrated by the luminous fountains and Loïe Fuller.

La Loïe Fuller by Georges Rodenbach

Déchirant l'ombre, et brusque, elle est là: c'est l'aurore !
D'un mauve de prélude enflé jusqu'au lilas,
S'étant taillé des nuages en falbalas,
Elle se décolore, elle se recolore.
Alors c'est le miracle opéré comme un jeu :
Sa robe tout à coup est un pays de brume ;
C'est de l'alcool qui flambe et de l'encens qui fume ;
Sa robe est un bûcher de lys qui sont en feu ;
Dans ses chiffons en fleur du clair de lune infuse ;
Ensuite, il émane une fraîcheur d'écluse ;
Et, comme l'eau tombant qui s'engendre de soi,
Les gazes ont jailli par chutes graduées ;
Telle une cataracte aux liquides nuées !
Or, dans ces tourbillons, son corps s'est tenu coi :
Tour qui brûle, hissant des drapeaux d'incendie ;
Cep d'une vigne aux clairs tissus en espalier.

Un repos. De nouveau, voici qu'elle irradie !
Une chimie en fièvre a su multiplier
Ces jaunes en halos, ces affluents de rouge,
Que c'est presque un vitrail en fusion qui bouge,
Presque une éruption qui pavoise la nuit.
Or, comme le volcan contient toutes ses laves,
Il semble que ce soit d'elle qu'elle ait déduit
Ces rivières de feu qui la suivent, esclaves,
Onduleuses, sur elle, en forme de serpents

Arbre du Paradis où nos désirs rampants
S'enlacent en serpents de couleurs qu'elle tresse !

Un repos. La voilà, prodige d'irréel,
Qui, pour se rassurer en émergeant du gouffre,
Toute s'est habillée avec de l'arc-en-ciel.
Seuls ses cheveux, un peu d'orage encor les soufre
Mais le jardin en fleur de sa robe est calmé ;
Sa robe est jardin exclusif d'azalées
Où, dans les plis qui sont de l'ombre en des allées,
Des papillons brodés mettent un temps de mai ;
Cependant qu'avec des envergures nouvelles,
Déployant ses tissus, soi-même se créant,
Elle aussi se transforme en papillon géant
Et n'est plus dans le soir qu'un rêve de deux ailes.

Un repos. Elle vient, les cheveux d'un vert roux
Influencés par ces nuances en démence
On dirait que le vent du large recommence ;
Car déjà parmi les étoffes en remous,
Son corps perd son sillage ; il fond en des volutes
Propice obscurité, qu'est-ce donc que tu blutes
Pour faire de sa robe un océan de feu.
Toute phosphorescente avec des pierreries ?
Brunehilde, c'est toi, reine des Walkyries,
Dont pour être l'élu chacun se rêve un dieu
Mais comment, plongeur ivre en route vers la perle,
Traverser tant de flots de satin embrasé,
Et toute cette robe en flamme qui déferle ?

C'est fini. Brusquement l'air est cicatrisé
De cette plaie en fleur dont il saigna. L'étreinte
De l'Infini ne nous dure qu'un court moment ;
Et l'ombre de la scène où la fresque fut peinte
Est noire comme notre âme, pensivement.

1897

Works cited

Albright, Ann Cooper. *Traces of Light, Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007.

Alglave, Em & J. Boulard. L*a Lumière Electrique. Son histoire, sa production et son employ.* Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1882.

Current, Richard and Marcia Ewing Current, *Loïe Fuller: Goddess of Light.* Boston: North-eastern University Press, 1997.

Exposition Universelle 1889 Paris, *l'Exposition Universelle. Causeries Scientifiques, découvertes et inventions, progrès de la science et de l'industrie. Vingt-neuvième année, l'exposition universelle.* Paris: J. Rothschild, 1890.

Bergman, Gösta M. *Lighting in the Theatre*, Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksell, 1977.

Blalock, Thomas J. "Stage Lighting Control Before Computer." *Theatre Design and Technology* (Spring 2008): 16-23.

Česálková, Lucie & Kateřina Svatoňová (2012) "Between painting and illusion: [Im]material imagery of Czech modernity." *Early Popular Visual Culture* 10:4 (2010): 383-406.

Chadwick, W.J. *The Magic Lantern Manual.* London: Frederick Warne & Co, 1878.

Crary, Jonathan. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. Cambridge/Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999.

Duboscq, Jules. *Catalogue des appareils employés pour la production des phénomènes physiques au théâtre.* Paris: J. Duboscq, 1877.

Emeljanow, Victor. "Erasing the Spectator: Observations on Nineteenth Century Lighting." *Theatre History Studies* 18 (1998): 107-116.

Essig, Linda. "A Primer for the History of Stage Lighting." *Theatre Design & Technology,* (Spring 2016): 10-23

Hecht, Jeff. *City of Light: The Story of Fiber Optics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Heard, Mervyn. "Pose Slides: The Sellers-Ray Collection," The Magic Lantern, 4 (2015). 1-6.

Hopkins, Albert A. *Magic. Stage Illusions and Scientific Diversions,* London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1897.

Huard, C.L. (ed.) *Livre d'Or de l'Exposition.* Paris: Boulanger, 1899.

Howells, Bernard. "The Problem with Colour: Three Theorists; Goethe, Schopenhauer, Chevreul." In: Peter Collier and Robert Lethbridge, *Artistic Relations,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, 76-93.

Jackson, Barry. "Diaghilev: Lighting Designer," *Dance Chronicle*, 14:1 (1991): 1-35.

Martin, Jay. "Scopic Regimes of Modernity" In: Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality,* Seattle: Bay Press, 1988. 3-23.

Kessler, Frank. Dossier. "La féerie: un spectacle paradoxal" in: Andreas Gelz & Christian Papilloud, *Lendemains, La féerie autour de 1900 – une figure de la modernité? BD* 38:152 (2013): 71-80.

Kessler, Frank and Sabine Lenk. "Georges Méliès et la série Culturelle de la féerie" in: André Goudreault and Laurent Forestier (eds.), *Méliès, Carrefour des Attractions. Suivi de Correspondance de Georges Méliès (1904-1937).* Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes. 117-127.

Lefèvre, Henri. *L'électricité au théâtre*, Paris: A. Gelot, 1894

Manoni, Laurent. *The Great Art of Light and Shadow: Archaeology of the Cinema*. Exeter, Exeter University Press, 2000.

Massiot, G. *Les Projections Scientifiques et Amusantes.* Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1907.

Barbara L. Miller, "'He' Had me at Blue: Color Theory and Visual Art" *Leonardo,* 47:5 (2014): 460-465.

Moigno, Abbé. *L'Art des Projections,* Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1872.

Moynet, George. *La Machinerie Théâtrale. Trucs et Décors. Explication raisonnée de tous les moyens employés pour produire les illusions théâtrales,* Paris: La Librairie Illustrée, 1893.

Rees, Terence. *Theatre lighting in the age of gas.* London: Society for Theatre Research, 1978.

Robinson, David. Stephen Herbert and Richard Crangle (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of the magic lantern.* London: Magic Lantern Society, 2001.

Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. Angela Davies (transl.), *Disenchanted Night. The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century.* Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1988.

Trainor, Sebastian. "Loïe Fuller's 'Orgy of Color': Modernity, Eternity and the Folies-Bergère" In: Paul Fryer (ed.), *Women in the Arts in the Belle Epoque: Essays on Influential Artists, Writers and Performers,* Jefferson & London: McFarland and Cie, 2012, 97-117.

Yumibe, Joshua. "On the education of the senses: synaesthetic perception from the 'democratic art' of chromolithography to modernism" *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 7:3 (2009): 257-274.

---

[1] https://www.krizikovafontana.cz/en. Last consultation, 19 July 2019.

[2] *Národní listy*, 29 May 1891 supplement, 2 in: Česálková & Svatoňová, 392.

[3] http://www.travel.cz/guide/597/index_en.html. Last consultation, 29 October 2019.

[4] https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g274707-d1118764-r314207469-Krizik_Fountain-Prague_Bohemia.html. Last consultation, 20 September 2019.

[5] Gösta M. Bergman's *Lighting in the Theatre* (Uppsala, Almquist & Wiksell, 1977) is still a key reference work in the history of stage lighting. Others are Henri Lefèvre, *L'électricité au théâtre*, Paris: A. Gelot, 1894; Terence Rees, *Theatre lighting in the age of gas*, London: Society for Theatre Research, 1978; Linda Essig, "A Primer for the History of Stage Lighting" *Theatre Design & Technology,*(Spring 2016): 10-23; Victor Emeljanow, "Erasing the Spectator: Observations on Nineteenth Century Lighting" *Theatre History Studies* 18 (1998): 107-116; Not restricted to stage lighting but interesting regarding the discourse of light in the nineteenth century: Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night. The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century.* Angela Davies (transl.) (Berkely/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1988).

[6] The following essays provide more background on the perception of 'instability' of color in art history and philosophy: Bernard Howells, "The Problem with Colour: Three Theorists; Goethe, Schopenhauer, Chevreul." In: Peter Collier and Robert Lethbridge, *Artistic Relations,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, 76-93; Barbara L. Miller, "'He' Had me at Blue: Color Theory and Visual Art" *Leonardo,* 47 nr. 5 (2014): 460-465; Joshua Yumibe, "On the education of the senses: synaesthetic perception from the 'democratic art' of chromolithography to modernism" *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 7 nr. 3 (2009): 257-274.

[7] "Les Dessous de l'Exposition" in: *Petit Bleu de l'Exposition,* 12 May, 1897.

[8] "Les Dessous de l'Exposition" in: *Petit Bleu de l'Exposition,* 12 May, 1897.

[9] *La Meuse,* 11 June 1984, *L'Indépendance Belge,* 28 February 1897, *Le Soir,* 6 August 1888, *Le Patriote*, 2 September 1897, *La Réforme: Organe de la Démocratie Libérale,* 4 February, 1893, *La Réforme: Organe de la Démocratie Libérale,* 13 September 1897, *Le Soir,* 4 August, 1890; *Le Soir,* 16 August, 1888; *La Meuse,* 2 March, 1895; *La Meuse,* 29 October, 1889 et cetera.

[10] *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche courant : staats-, handels-, nieuws- en advertentieblad,* 10 August, 1867.

[11] *Le Grand écho du Nord de la France,* 14 december 1890.

[12] A good overview of these *phénomènes physiques* and their technicality can be read in the following publication: Em. Alglave & J. Boulard, L*a Lumière Electrique. Son histoire, sa production et son employ.* Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1882, 417-428.

[13] Jules Duboscq, *Catalogue des appareils employés pour la production des phénomènes physiques au théâtre.* Paris: J. Duboscq, 1877.

[14] https://www.nypl.org/blog/2012/04/03/150-years-loie-fuller-modern-dance-pioneer. Last consultation: 29 October 2019.

[15] Essig, "A Primer for the History of Stage Lighting," 17 - 18. For more information on light organs, see: Thomas J. Blalock, "Stage Lighting Control Before Computer," *Theatre Design and Technology* (Spring 2008), 16-23.

Blackface Burlesque

Changing Praxes and Poetics of Blackness in the Dutch Repertoire before
Minstrelsy, 1790-1830

Sarah J. Adams

On a winter evening in 1808, the popular Amsterdam theater-café De Ooijevaar
billed a scene starring "the Black from *Paul & Virginia*" (Simonsz 94). This opera
by Edmond G.F. de Favière had premiered in Amsterdam in 1797 and soon
thereafter became a staple of the antislavery repertoire of the Netherlands. In
itself an adaptation of Bernadin de Saint Pierre's famous novel, the opera revolves
around the pleasures and perils of two young lovers in the bucolic French colony
Isle de France. In the scene performed at *De Ooijevaar* the youngsters meet the
runaway slave Zabi, who describes to them the horrors of the institution of
slavery. When Paul and Virginia offer him a place as their household servant,
Zabi is ever so grateful and sings about his joy in a faux-black dialect. According
to a lengthy review of the performance, the blacked-up actor playing Zabi
appeared in an extremely professional manner: after delivering a flawless adagio,
he successfully imitated the loose movements and the comic gestures of "a very
cheerful Indian" (Simonsz 89).[1] The management of the theater-café was famous
for presenting separate scenes from operas and comedies, alternated with
burlesque melodies and duets. By isolating this particular scene, however, they
seem to have parked the antislavery disposition of the opera and obscured the
emotional framework for reviewing slavery and colonial policies. While various
theater halls across the Netherlands continued to stage *Paul & Virginia* in its
entirety, thus allowing Zabi to be redeemed in the closing act, the episode in De
Ooijevaar negated the black character's agency and reduced the melodrama to a
happy-go-lucky farce.

The origins of Dutch blackface performances as a way to ridicule and stereotype
Afro-diasporic people are generally situated in the second half of the nineteenth-
century, when Anglo-American minstrel troupes such as the "Lantum Ethiopian
Serenaders" arrived in the Netherlands in the 1840s (Koning; Groeneboer;
Klöters). Scholars seem to presume that minstrel shows entered the Dutch
performance culture in an aesthetic and moral vacuum: wearing black make-up
had been a common theatrical practice in the Netherlands for hundreds of years,
but it was not used to stereotype black people until the mid-nineteenth century
(Koning 555). As Zabi's appearance in *De Ooijevaar* suggests, I will argue, this

claim is not entirely valid and disregards some forms of already existing entertainment in which people of color were presented as subservient, forbearing and comic subjects to please white audiences.

Dutch theater-goers had been occasionally confronted with representations of the colonized territories, their subjugated inhabitants, and enslaved Africans since the seventeenth century (Kuruppath; Paasman).[2] Along with an increasing flow of information and visual representations about the overseas colonies, however, theaters in the second half of the eighteenth century theaters increasingly produced, translated, (mostly from French and German) and performed a great variety of dramas, ballets, pantomimes, operas, and expositions that either confirmed or contested imperial fantasies and atrocities.[3] While critical plays disseminated abolitionist and humanitarian sentiments, it seems that new obsessions with people of color generated a string of romanticizing entertainment and exotic ridicule at the same time – often in the very same performances. Although this repertoire provided a unique and lively canvas through which Dutch audiences understood human variety as well as their own white identity, it has been largely neglected by scholars of Dutch colonial culture and history.

This article will explore some of the ways in which blackness was constructed and designed in the theater repertoire preceding the apogee of minstrelsy in the Netherlands, and examine how these modes of representation were invested with power and white supremacy. In doing so, the present article hopes to extend the history of Dutch blackface brutalities, which has been predominantly understood (and rightly so) through mid-nineteenth-century minstrelsy (Groeneboer; Klöters) and its manifest legacies in the contested Black Pete figure in the yearly children's celebration of Saint Nicholas (Koning; Smith). In his standard work *Love and Theft*, Eric Lott contends that minstrelsy as a genre emerged from a "nearly insupportable fascination and a self-protective derision with respect to black people and their cultural practices" (7). White spectators, including Dutch, could watch a jumble of songs, dances and burlesque skits based on a paramount investment with black physicality and the aspiration that slavery was amusing and self-evident (ibidem; Koning; Groeneboer). While the racist politics of these shows differed substantially from those of the earlier repertoire, this article will argue that the impersonations of nonwhite people in Dutch performance culture around 1800 capitalized on the very same delusions, fears and fantasies, and in many ways anticipated the stock minstrel characters of the mid-nineteenth century.

In the sections to follow I will first briefly discuss the theory and praxes of stage blackface in the Netherlands of 1800 in relation to (changing) social attitudes towards blackness. A closer analysis of three Dutch productions – *The Negro Slaves* (1796), *Robinson Crusoe* (1806), and *Paul & Virginia* (1797) – in the next two sections will enable me to connect my observations about blacking-up in the first part to other "minstrelizing" discursive and performative strategies that produced notions of racial difference, innate servility, and white supremacy. Thus I will look at recurring tropes, character types, linguistic variations, and bodily engagements on stage. Throughout this article, I will connect my own findings to some excellent studies that have mapped the historical and fictional imaginings of race and stereotypes in visual culture of the Netherlands, as well as scholarly work about the constructions of nonwhite persona in Anglo-American theater.

Blacking-up around 1800

In her book *Performing Blackness on English Stages (1500-1800)*, Virginia Mason Vaughan has charted how blackface as a theatrical pattern carried a recognizable set of meanings that repeated, expanded and modified over time. In medieval Europe, blacking-up was a performance practice to discriminate good from evil, for example for religious, comic and moral purposes.[4] When imperial ambitions grew, however, skin color became an important racial signifier and blacking-up developed into a device to elicit empathy, as well as to ridicule and oppress the colonized other (Vaughan; Ndiaye; Hartman; Worrall). There were myriad ways to blacken an actor's countenance. Until well into the eighteenth century, British actors used velvet or leather masks to blacken their faces. A memo of the Theater Society in Haarlem (1785-1817) indicates that comparable masks were worn until the late-eighteenth-century Netherlands: impersonations of colored characters required "a black cap made of crepe paper, which was held together with a pearl necklace and had holes in it for the eyes and mouth" (Noord-Hollands Archief 3163.624).[5] Obviously, Vaughan notes, such vizards limited the actor's scope of emotional facial expressions and were exclusively used for non-speaking roles and dancers (10).

For lead characters, other methods were used.[6] In his *Theoretical Lessons in Gesticulation* (1827), the Dutch painter and drama theorist Johannes Jelgerhuis devoted an entire chapter to theatrical make-up. He made a list of the diverse colors that could be used to cover the face of an actor, such as white chalk, carbon black, Van Dyke brown, umber, Persian red/brown, ochre, vermilion, and regular red. Jelgerhuis also provided detailed descriptions of the material basis of theatrical make-up, and explained the do's-and-don'ts. For example, he noted that

carbon black make-up is in many cases too garish on white skin and he suggests using Persian red instead, sometimes mixed with umber (181). Theater theorists across Europe devoted much time to present characters they had designated into varying colored racial categories (Worrall 39). Leman Thomas Rede's frequently used *Road to the Stage* (1827) had a whole section on "How to Color the Face for the Representation of Moors, Negroes &c." (38-39). Rede discusses the color tinges used for different racialized identities. Actors impersonating "Moorish" and Indian characters should use Spanish brown, while performers playing Afro-diasporic people,

> should cover the face, neck, and hands with a thin coat of pomatum, or what is better, though more disagreeable, of lard; then a burn a cork to power, wet it with beer (which will fix the colouring matter), apply it with a hare's-foot, or a cloth. Wearing black gloves is unnatural, for the colour is too intense to represent the skin, and negroes invariably cover themselves with light clothing. Arms of black silk, […] have a very bad effect; armings dyed in a strong infusion of Spanish annatto look much more natural, for a negro's arms, it will be observed, are generally lighter than his countenance.

I have found no indications of Dutch performers using burnt cork in the decades around 1800. Usually, they put on plain black or brown pomatums (creamy stage make-up) and wore, like Rede suggested, colored "armings" to approximate the skin color of Afro-diasporic people – who were alternatingly referred to as "Blacks," "Negroes," "Moors," "Indians," or "Ethiopians" (Schreuder 14; Meijer 56). In his diaries, the respected Dutch author Adriaan van der Willigen recounts how he dressed up like a "Negro" to surprise his guests at a party in Haarlem in 1794: "I wore those very delicate stockings which they also use in the playhouse to represent naked skin, and I covered my face with a black pomatum, as well as my hair, which I had burnt with frizzy curls" (ed. Van der Heijden & Sanders 221).

Impersonating a black man, Van der Willigen recited a sentimental scene from his recently published abolitionist drama *Selico* (1794). In the context of antislavery sentiments, black make-up was employed to achieve a convincing representation of enslaved Africans and to elicit sympathy with the audience. As Heather S. Nathans has shown in *Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage (1787-1861)*, however, the spectators' underlying awareness of the actor's true white identity sometimes obstructed the possibility of evoking antislavery

sentiments (61). If Van der Willigen had no distinct comic intentions, at the very least he intended to amuse the party guests when he decided to do the Selico impersonation. According to his notes, the performance was received with great enthusiasm. It seems only fair to ask whether he was cheered because his act was moving and convincing or because it was hilarious. Indeed, scholars have listed numerous examples of blackface performances that produced effects contrary to the probable purposes of the plays, and tended to make people laugh more than cry (Worrall 35; Nathans). Was black make-up simply not alluring on stage, or were Afro-diasporic subjects difficult to sympathize with altogether?

To make it even more complicated, the anonymous Dutch author of the play *Stedman* (1806) insisted that his mixed-race character Cery, a Surinamese slave and mistress to the European title character Stedman, would be rendered as a white and blonde girl (2).[7] It is possible that the author responded to recurring critiques about the ambivalent reactions to blackface characters as well as to the objections made by actors. For example, an early nineteenth-century theater critic suggests that some actresses did not want to perform in blackface, "because [they] preferred not to make [themselves] hideous like that" (*Kritisch Lampje* 185). As I have argued elsewhere, this "Westernization" of Cery might have also served as a foil to justify an otherwise provocative and still rather unrealistic "interracial" marriage between an enslaved woman of color and a white European officer (Adams 162).

Whereas human difference was predicated on climatic, religious, and cultural understandings of variation until the 1770s (embodied in dress, class, custom, language, and level of civilization), Roxann Wheeler has demonstrated in her book *The Complexion of Race* that the closing decades of the century marked an increasing emphasis on skin color and physical appearance as the hallmarks of essential and graded racial difference (145). Albeit with varying intentions, systematic efforts were made by anatomists and physiologists across Europe to find parameters to categorize, and subsequently classify, the overwhelming diversity in nature. For a growing number of scientists, not only whiteness but also the large and shapely skull of Europeans equaled intellectual and moral superiority (Wheeler; Blakely; Meijer; Sens). Such polygenetic conceptions of race started to gain importance in the late-eighteenth-century Netherlands as well, and resulted into dehumanizing representations in literature, science and visual culture in which Afro-diasporic people were increasingly imagined as an infantile and servile race (Pieterse 30; Blakely). In an age of burgeoning racism and increasing debates about the (il)legitimacy of the slave trade, the dominant

72

poetics of representing the Other in the theater was in relation to his/her inherent subordination and servitude. The ambivalent ways in which Cery's identity is shaped, I suggest, are symptomatic of new suppositions about an innate inferiority connected to blackness as opposed to a privileged white identity – and, subsequently, the increasing fear of miscegenation. If her subordinate status as a slave could be counterbalanced through marriage, her skin color had to be synthetically bleached to overcome essential difference.

While a thorough study of blackface practices in Dutch (early) modern theater and its relation to contemporary debates on race is urgently needed, the tentative evidence presented above seems to indicate that Dutch authors, playwrights and actors in the closing decades of the eighteenth century combined the technicalities and aesthetics of stage make-up with an engagement in sophisticated social assumptions and desires of race to determine a character's "racial type". Tawny and black make-up had metonymic properties, signifying both moral behavior and social stratification. Blacking-up was for a long time widely accepted as a legitimate technique to evoke antislavery sentiments, yet it lost its immunity for criticism along the way (Worrall 35). Actors and audiences alike started to express objections because blackface made plots unrealistic and produced hideous or clownish looks. While the underlying consciousness of a white actor's true racial identity hampered processes of compassion, it was of course the premise of success in burlesque entertainment rampant from the 1840s onwards. As hybrid cases such as Zabi's appearance in *De Ooijevaar* or Van der Willegen's impersonation of Selico at the Haarlem party show, the black(ened) body engendered emotions of pain and pleasure alike. In other words, the decades around 1800 mark a turning point in the poetics of theatrical blackface. Combined with the representational strategies and tropes I will discuss below, black stage make-up seems to have been used in ways that preface minstrelizing representations of Afro-diasporic people.

"A negro needs little to enjoy his life"
In the first place, blackface minstrelsy meant to (re)assure white audiences that people of color were having a good time on the plantation and were in fact happy about their servile position. In her standard work *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman has influentially termed this trope the "cultivation of contented subjection," or the simulation of willful submission and the emphasis on the innocent pleasures of the colonized subject (49). The reflection of agency and "orchestrated amusement", whether they appeared in minstrelsy or melodrama, forcefully dissolved any possible form of resistance (Hartman 52). In the preface

to his sentimental melodrama *The Negro Slaves* [*Die Negersklaven*] of 1796, August von Kotzebue encourages his audience to sympathize with enslaved Africans and claims that his labor would be rewarded only if "the tears of the spectators mix with those of the author" (*DN* 3). Despite its unambiguous abolitionist disposition, the melodrama does not only valorize European superiority by the constellation of a white savior, it also generically lapses into musical plantation enjoyments and stereotypes of Afro-diasporic characters in ways that effectively anticipate black minstrel entertainment.

In the Netherlands, the German author Kotzebue was one of the most popular playwrights of the time: no less than 304 of his plays were performed in Dutch (Groot 45). *The Negro Slaves* was immediately adapted to the Dutch stage by P.G. Witsen Geysbeek [*De negers*] and it was performed multiple times in playhouses across the country (Amsterdam, The Hague, Groningen, Leeuwarden, Middelburg). The play revolves around a fraternal conflict between the cruel English planter John and his philanthropic brother William. During his visit in the British colony of Jamaica, William sincerely commiserates with the barbarously treated Zameo, Ada, Truro, Lilli and many other enslaved on John's sugar plantation. In order to "reward the slaves with at least one cheerful day," William urges his brother to let them have a little party. The moment John agrees, stage directions indicate that "we hear the emerging sound of kettle drums, cymbals and other negro instruments" (stage directions italicized in original). A few seconds later a "choir of male and female Negroes" enters the stage and starts to sing (*DN* 86):

> Welcome joy to every breast!
> Welcome to the heart oppressed!
> Live today,
> Dance and play,
> Thought and care be far away.
>
> Shall tomorrow's slavish toil
> Present joy and freedom spoil?
> Live today,
> Dance and play,
> Thought and care be far away.[8]

As this plantation melody suggests, the enslaved seemed able to temporarily forget their pain and sorrows at William's festivity. In reality, this scene verges the

mode of a romantic pastoral that depicted bonds of domination as enchanting relationships of paternalistic dependency and slave labor as "merely another extension of black's capacity for song and dance" (Hartman 53). Lilli, a young woman from Loango (north of the Congo estuary), enthusiastically encourages her "brothers and sisters" to come and dance with her, and "she grabs a negro by the arm": "Come, compatriot of Kongo! Dance with me" (*DN* 88). A lively tableau follows: "The drum sounds, male and female Negroes dance their favorite dance, the Calenda, clapping their hands to the rhythm of the music".[9] Dressed in ragged clothes, made up with facial blacking, holding "kettle drums, cymbals and other negro instruments", and performing the "favorite dance of the Negroes", white actors heedlessly appropriated what they presumed was "black" culture. A watercolor drawing by the famous Amsterdam stage designer François Joseph Pfeiffer shows black characters with exactly these "typical" features: darkened skin, ragged waistcloths and holding a tambourine as if it were an essential or natural property.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha reminds us that the ideological construction of the racial Other depends centrally on the concept of "fixity". The stereotype, he argues, "is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha 66). *The Negro Slaves* attests to this kind of ambivalence: an innate African sense of rhythm seems to be generally accepted as fact, but at the same time the play constantly seeks to prove this "predilection". From the very beginning of the play, for example, Lilli's presence on stage is a cordial and lively rendezvous with music and happiness in general. In the first act, she tries to cheer up her friend Ada, who is mourning the loss of her husband Zameo, and convinces her to start dancing and stop worrying (3). As Lilli narrates of Congo and Loango, she claims that her "people are ever cheerful; and live in the moment […]." Moreover, they "are excellent mummers and know how to imitate several animals; they are always enlivened whenever they hear music, and dancing never fatigues them" (*DN* 34-35). Lilli's description is a desirable and romantic conception of Africa, and at the same time a nervous defense of it. *The Negro Slaves* seems to broadcast what Toni Morrison famously called "an invented Africa" (8), that was constructed around false interpretation, delusion, and simplification.

Central to (the representation of) plantation amusement was the reflection of agency and the simulation of self-directedness, even though these festivities were always induced by the white master (Hartman 54). Indeed, the enslaved men and

women in Kotzebue's melodrama are directed to celebrate by John and William – albeit in very different ways: whereas John commands his overseer "to go get them with the whip, and make them dance" (*DN* 83), William's approach seems more encouraging as he says, "Enjoy yourselves, children! And celebrate this day" (*DN* 84). William's well-intended paternalism works as a repressive device that arrested enslaved people in the early stages of education and childhood. Their easy-to-please and happy-go-lucky mentality supported the conventional depiction of black people as infantile and artless. As Truro explains to William at some point: "A negro needs little to enjoy his life: give him a glass of pure brandy, and he will labor for weeks without complaining!" (*DN* 49). He recalls how his former master, John and William's father, allowed his slaves to make merry after a whole day of labor: "Our old master would sit down in the middle of the circle and refresh us with all kinds of drinks; and he loved for us to scream cheerfully while we danced and clapped our hands to the rhythm of the music" (*DN* 49).[10]

To be sure, *The Negro Slaves* contained explicit slave violence and very convincing antislavery sentiments, and it is instructive to remind ourselves that this will definitely have had its effects on the middle-class audiences (Köhler; Adams). Yet these romanticized scenes of revelry and recreation played out on stage mitigated the burden of slavery and magnified the allegedly celebratory dimensions of servitude. Importantly, these displays of "genuine Negro fun" (Lott 140) were received very enthusiastically by the Dutch audiences. While no extensive reviews of the Dutch productions of *The Negro Slaves* were published, let alone that its radical antislavery tone was mentioned, newspapers did invariably focus on the staged plantation amusements. According to theater announcements, the melodrama was "always performed with great satisfaction" (*Groninger Courant* 42, 1799). Newspapers reported "a specially created Pas de Deux with Tambourines" (*Groninger Courant* 38, 1799) and promoted the "choral singing, *characteristic* of the Negroes" (*Leeuwarder Courant* 26, 1798, my emphasis). Also, several theater halls scheduled an additional ballet-pantomime spectacle with all the enslaved characters to conclude the performance – the *Amsterdamsche Courant* announced this as a "closing celebration among African friends" (62, 1798), facilitating the improper notion of black togetherness and community (Hartman).

Although little is known about the performances of either the entire melodrama or these "side events," we can assume that *The Negro Slaves* developed into a permit for stereotyping exploitations of Afro-diasporic people and their harmed bodies. The "Africanist personae" produced on stage were sites on and through

which collective fantasies regarding Africa(ns) could be mediated (Morrison 17). They marked a reckless investment in and appropriation of "black" culture. As Eric Lott emphasizes, blackface was the most visual strategy to appropriate black peoples' alleged identity, but not the only one (41). It seems that melodrama as a genre allowed white audiences to enjoy the pains as well as the pleasures of enslaved people, and disseminated racist ideologies by the aesthetization of plantation amusement and the constant (re)activation of stereotypes such as the essential musical temper of African people, their easy-to-please mentality and their natural subordination.

The simulation of forbearing servants

One of the most significant episodes of "contented subjection" appears in René C. G. de Pixérécourt's stage adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe* (1805). The Dutch translation by Cornelis van de Vyver (1806) was performed multiple times in the Amsterdam City Theater, and in various other theater halls across the country.[11] The story of the shipwrecked Robinson who survived on a desolate Caribbean island with the native Friday [Vrijdag] penetrated the popular imagination of the Dutch audiences as soon as Daniel Defoe published his original novel in 1719 (Staverman 44). Friday, who is "very attached to Robinson," opens the melodrama with the following lines (6-7):

> There, two loafs of barley bread and a small bottle of rum, which Robinson has asked me to bring him as he returns from hunting. Oh! I perform whatever he demands. He is such a good master! He has rescued Friday from the Cannibals that wanted to devour him. Now, I do not own myself anymore; Friday is savage indeed, but also beholden. Friday belongs to Robinson only, whom he adores with his whole heart, and he would sacrifice all, yes all his blood, until the very last drop, for his generous master. […] I am with Robinson for *(He counts on his fingers)* twelve months, and I am so happy, cheerful and ever more contented.[12]

Friday seems unable of critically reviewing his servile position. Instead, he is comfortable with and even grateful for being a servant to the white castaway Robinson – Friday's "second father" (7). The relationship between Robinson and Friday has received much scholarly attention (Hulme; Islam; Sudan). For Syed Manzoorul Islam, Robinson does not only imperiously claim the island by "obstinately digging his heels in but, predictably enough, installs himself as a master with a slave of his own" (3). Although Friday is never called a "slave," the melodrama too clearly presents him as such. When Robinson eventually returns from hunting, stage directions indicate that "Friday runs towards him, falls on his

77

knees, kisses the earth, takes [Robinson's] foot and places it on his own head, as a token of his loyalty" (*RC* 8).[13] Enacted on stage, this event literally embodies black willfulness and subjugation guised as genuine complacency. It advances a colonial order which depended on mutual affection and paternal protection rather than subjugation and inequality. Such benign representations, as Hartman puts it, "transformed relations of violence and domination into those of affinity" (88). No sooner does Friday criticize colonial brutality than he enthuses that he has "such a benevolent master!" and that he does not want to be free; he is "very happy, cheerful and ever more contented" (*RC* 6-7).

The colonized subject in Pixérécourt's *Robinson Crusoe* also definitely engendered comic relief. In the original French version, Christopher Smith explains, Friday's linguistic limitations were "the cue for a good deal of dumb show" and served a comic purpose (136). European theater conventionally racialized characters by means of language and presented linguistic distortion as a congenital feature of people of color. As André Belo argued in his thought-provoking essay "Language as a Second Skin", incorrect language immediately "indicates the presence of a black figure, regardless of its physical appearance on stage, all the more so when one reads it on the page, away from the performance and the bodily representation" (16). Although Friday in Van de Vyver's play is still able to produce well-turned sentences, his language is childish and restricted. He refers to himself in third person and needs his fingers as a mnemonic device to count to twelve. Moreover, Friday keeps referring to Robinson's fire weapon as "the Thunder," even though his master repeatedly corrects him: "did I not tell you it is called a rifle?" (*RC* 10).

Throughout the melodrama, Friday is presented as a wild Carib with distinct European features and perspectives: "savage indeed, but also beholden". His character is constructed around ambivalence and exemplifies Bhabha's notion of colonial mimicry, or "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (86). Whereas Friday's unholy fear for "the Thunder" initially serves as a metaphor for his social and cultural deprivation, it comes to embody the Other's propensity for the imitation of the colonizer as soon as he learns to use Robinson's rifle in a combat against the hostile "Cannibals" in the fifth scene. The gunshot, however, frightens Friday so that he falls on the ground yelling that he has died. Only as Robinson assures him that he is not, Friday "touches himself as he rises from the ground" and realizes that "It is true! ….. Here are my head, my arms, legs, oh! I am so glad that I am alive […]" (*RC* 21).[14]

Friday, Zabi and early blackface burlesque

Although Friday is a Carib and therefore "not black: [but] tawny yellowish, or lightly burnt by the sun" (*RC* 4), it is not difficult to imagine that Friday's subjugation was a veiled reference to black Atlantic slavery (Hulme 205; Wheeler 86).[15] Not only was slavery almost exclusively connected to Afro-diasporic people, the first illustrations accompanying the novel depicted Friday with distinct sub-Sahara features. The reception in Dutch popular culture equally concedes Friday's relatedness to Atlantic slavery. In 1833, for example, the Dutch writer-duo Jan Willem de Crane and Wopke Eekhoff published a successful youth book in which they merged the adventures of the shipwrecked European, here the Frisian Thomas Havinga, with the story of Zabi, whose "heart is right and true, even though [he has] a black skin" (17). Naturally, the Dutch audiences knew Zabi as the enslaved African from Edmond G.F. de Favière's *Paul & Virginia*, which was still being performed in the early 1830s.[16]

As Roxann Wheeler has argued in relation to Defoe's novel, we are to read Friday as a "pleasing mixture" of Carib and European people (78). He is "not quite" the same as his white master, but he is also distinguished from the other inhabitants of the island – who are frankly dehumanized and figured through inaccessible grunting, peculiar musical instruments and weaponry, typical customs and "ridiculous gestures" (*RC* 120). As much as this "pleasing mixture" engendered comic and darling sketches on stage, Friday's enigmatic position made him deeply dependent on his colonizer. Robinson's mentorship produced "knowledge as of a form social control" which induced his servant to remain under his protectorate (Bhabha 87). Thus the fabrication of Friday is a reflexive scrutiny of the white European self. As Gayatri C. Spivak (1985), Toni Morrison (1992), and Rosemarie Buikema (2017), among others, have pointed out, the colonized character tends to be an instrument to codify and invigorate white identities and mentalities. Consequently, s/he is fixed as an only "partial" or incomplete presence (Bhabha 86). Friday's characterization, although simulated otherwise, is an essential negation of will and ambiguous at best. He appears as a harmless bootlicker who desires to mirror himself with his master – culminating in the final act as he leaves his biological father Iglou on the island and joins Robinson to England. Friday's readiness to please his white master and the ways in which he *almost but not quite* resembles him in language and culture, anticipated the mid-century stock caricatures of the contented and naïve black servant.

In *Paul & Virginia* too, black characters are presented as gullible and fundamentally forbearing. After running away from his cruel master Dorval, Zabi

is found in the woods by the young couple Paul and Virginia. Moved by his misery, they "invite" him to become their second house servant: "Come, unfortunate man! Come with us: you will help Domingo; from now on you will lack for nothing" (9).[17] Zabi is grateful to have met "such generous whites" and ecstatically sings of his contentment in a simple faux-black dialect – unlike Friday, he is *not* able to produce grammatical sentences. Domingo himself rarely speaks, unless to express affection for his benevolent masters. Even if the melodrama conventionally transmits an abolitionist model of slavery, the romantic prospect of protection by compassionate masters ultimately annuls the possibility of redress and (re)establishes the notion of blacks' inherent subordination and suitability for bondage.

As Eric Lott argued, early minstrel shows emerged as entr'acts, dances and solo songs in legitimate repertoire; it "remained an art of brief burlesque and comic relief throughout much of the 1830s" and only became a fully-fledged genre in the decades to follow (Lott 76). Although blackface minstrelsy developed as a distinct American genre in the specific social, cultural and economic context of the Antebellum United States (Lott; Jones), it seems that Dutch theater poetics of the early nineteenth century had created a fertile ground for the appropriation of blackness in very similar ways. Like *The Negro Slaves*, Favière's melodrama was replete with sentimental and racialized musical intermezzos by the famous French composer Rodolphe Kreutzer, including a "choir of negroes" in the sixth scene. Moreover, and as noted in the introduction, Zabi's song was performed in isolation from the rest of the melodrama in the theater-café *De Ooijevaar*, which was famous for showing short burlesque skits and musical entertainment. When deciding to bill "the Black from *Paul & Virginie*" (Simonsz 89) the management presumably aimed to provide vaudeville entertainment rather than sentimental commitment. The performer in "the role of the black negro slave" is explicitly called a "comic actor" in Simonsz's review of that night (89). Interestingly, Simonsz also alludes to the minstrelizing ironic distance demarcated between the blacked-up actor and his persona: his praise particularly goes to the performer's ability to successful *imitate* the "movements and gestures, *representing* those of a very cheerful Indian" (89, my emphasis). In Hartman's words, blackface in the frame of melodrama was "a masquerade no less than in minstrelsy" (28).

Whereas most large theaters in the Netherlands catered for white middle-class audiences, (Ruitenbeek 504), theater-cafés such as *De Ooijevaar* attracted people from all walks of life. In his review, Simonsz attests that the auditorium presented "a mixture of all orders, Burgers, Farmers, lower and higher classes". Yet he was

surprised to see, "besides these usual spectators, a large number of Blacks and Moors; it appeared that all Black servants from Amsterdam had gathered there" (93).[18] Little is known about the presence of Afro-diasporic people in the Netherlands, but the fact that they appeared in (at least some) white cultural spaces testifies of the increasing number of people of color the larger Dutch cities of 1800 (Haarnack, Hondius & Kolfin). Although it is difficult to retrieve these peoples' experiences, Esther Schreuder assumes that they would have been confronted with racism in the white public sphere (238).[19] This seems not at all surprising, given that popular representations of blackness had helped to crystallize racist ideologies and stereotypes since the late eighteenth-century.

With the arrival of the "Lantum Ethopian Serenaders" in the late 1840s, the Dutch audiences were confronted with American minstrelsy for the first time.[20] As Elisabeth Koning has recently mapped out, these serenaders were received with great enthusiasm. Newspapers invariably praised how Dryce, Laurain, Adwin, Morly and Steiner, "acted as if they came from the interiors of Africa" (*Utrechtsche provinciale en stads-courant* qtd. in Koning 556). They were scheduled in large theater halls and smaller playhouses across the country, and (twice) even at the royal court in The Hague. Their standard performance consisted of two parts, in which the blacked-up actors "sang the cherished songs of the Negroes and imitated their dances" (*Nieuwe Rotterdamsche courant* 191, 1847). Among the many songs, the Dutch apparently even had their favorites: the harmonious refrain of *Mary Blanc* moved every single spectator, and the comic *Buffalo girls* made them roar with laughter. The same newspaper encouraged "all devotees of cheerfulness to go visit these *darkies*" (ibidem, italics in original). As Koning points out, a key element in these blackface performances was the anti-emancipatory humor, which was realized through a combination of dandy costumes, funny gestures and linguistic distortion. Although these "darkies" may wish to resemble their white counterparts, they will never fully succeed (Koning 563). They are, to quote Bhabha again, "*almost the same but not quite*" (86).

Then in the early 1850s, audiences went crazy about the Dutch stage adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's infamous abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Koning 562).[21] Today, both the novel and the numerous dramatic adaptations are criticized as key texts of romanticized slavery and minstrelizing stereotypes (Lott; Hartman; Sharma). Stereotypes included the carefree happy-go-lucky in the character of Sam, the "dark mammy" in the character of Mammy and the "pickaninny" stereotype of black children in the character of Topsy (Sharma 51). And Uncle Tom was not undisputed himself: in his essay "Everybody's Protest

Novel," James Baldwin referred to Uncle Tom as the illiterate and long-suffering slave, who was "phenomenally forbearing" (17).

Dutch (theater) historians rightly claim that the epitome of blackface ridicule in the Netherlands started from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and that it is still exhibited today in the figure of Black Pete. As I hope to have demonstrated, however, several of the components for blackface stereotyping were already present in the earlier Dutch repertoire. That is not to say that productions such as *Selico, The Negro Slaves* or *Paul & Virginia* were direct predecessors of blackface minstrelsy – this would be impossible as, again, minstrelsy emerged in very specific circumstances (Jones; Lott). What it does mean, I propose, is that Dutch audiences were not unfamiliar with some of the tropes, aesthetics and politics of the Anglo-American genre that enters Dutch performance culture in the 1840s and 1850s. Melodrama and ballets performed in the opening decades of the nineteenth-century Netherlands were unmistakably embroidered with minstrel fare: the keen efforts to resemble Afro-diasporic people by wearing skin colored stockings, putting on tawny make-up and even imitating frizzy hair; the nearly obsessive investment with "black culture"; the simulation of agency and willful subjection; the *almost the same but not quite* contented servants; the use of musical amusements as a core rhetoric to illuminate the celebratory dimensions of slavery and servitude; and in some cases even the demarcation of generic ironic distance.

If the racializing practices of the pre-minstrel repertoire are not brutal in the candid ways of mid-century blackface ridicule, at the very least they were essentializing and fixated difference and subordination in very similar ways. Almost without exception, Africanist characters were presented in terms of their servility, naïveté, and physical aptitude.[22] Blackface impersonations developed into a disgraceful appropriation and a controlling submission of black people at the turn of the century. Hartman's central argument that pleasure and entertainment are significant sites for the (re)production of racialized (as well as gendered) subjection, seems valid for Dutch performance culture of the early nineteenth century.

Works cited

Adams, Sarah Josephine. "Democratizing Abolitionism. Antislavery Discourses and Sentiments in August von Kotzebue's *Die Negersklaven* (1796)." *Cultural History* 9:1 (2020): forthcoming.

Albach, Ben. "Morianen en morendansen op het toneel van de Amsterdamse schouwburg 1648-1651". *De zeventiende eeuw* 13:2 (1997): 385-399.

Amsterdamsche Courant 62, 1798.

Baldwin, James. *Notes of a Native Son.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1955 (ed.1984).

Bhabha, K. Homi. *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge, 1994.

Belo, André. "Language as a Second Skin: The Representation of Black Africans in Portuguese Theatre (15th to early-17th century)". *Renaissance and Reformation* 36:1 (2013): 3-29.

Blakely, Allison. *Blacks in the Dutch World.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Bressey, Caroline. "The Black Presence in England and Wales after the Abolition Act, 1807 – 1930". *Parliamentary History* 26:1 (2008): 224 - 237

Buikema, Rosemarie. *Revoltes in de cultuurkritiek.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017.

De Crane, Jan Willem & Wopke Eekhoff. *De Friesche Robinson Crusoë, of De lotgevallen van Thomas Havinga en den neger Zabi.* Sneek: F. Holtkamp, 1855 (5th edition, 1833).

Gerstin, Julian. "Tangled Roots: Kalenda and Other Neo-African Dances in the Circum-Caribbean." *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 78:1 (2004): 5-41.

Geysbeek, P.G. Witsen. *De negers* (transl. August von Kotzebue, *Die Negersklaven*). Amsterdam: Joannes Roelof Poster, 1796.

Geysbeek, P.G. Witsen. *Paulus en Virginia* (adapt. Edmond Guillaume François de Favières, *Paul et Virginie*). Amsterdam: J. Helder en A. Mars, 1797.

Gerzina, Gretchen, (ed.), *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana.* New Brunswick: NJ, 2003.

Groeneboer, Joost. "De ommezwaai van een zwarte acteur op het Nederlands toneel." *Cultuur en migratie in Nederland. Kunsten in beweging 1900-1980.* Eds. Rosemarie Buikema and Maaike Meijer. The Hague: Sdu Uitgevers, 2003. 223-242.

Groninger Courant 42, 1799.

Groninger Courant 38, 1799.

Groot, Klaartje. *Gelief en gevreesd: Duits toneel in Nederland rond 1800*. Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2010.

Haarnack, Carl, Dienke Hondius & Elmer Kolfin. "'Swart' in Nederland: Afrikanen en Creolen in de Noordelijke Nederlanden vanaf de middeleeuwen tot de twintigste eeuw." *Black is Beautiful: Rubens tot Dumas.* Eds. Elmer Kolfin & Esther Schreuder. Amsterdam: De Nieuwe Kerk, 2008. 88-107.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection. Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hulme, Peter. *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the native Caribbean, 1492-1797*. London & New York: Methuen, 1986.

Islam, Syed Manzurul. *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996.

Jelgerhuis, Johannes. *Theoretische lessen over de gesticulatie en mimiek*. Amsterdam: P. Meijer Warnars, 1827-1830.

Jensen, Lotte. "Spectakel en amsusement: Robinson Crusoe op het Nederlandse podium rond 1800." *Jaarboek De Achttiende Eeuw.* Eds. Sarah J. Adams et al. Hilversum: Verloren, 2019. Forthcoming.

Jones, Douglas A Jr. *The Captive Stage. Performance and the Proslavery Imagination of the Antebellum North*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2014.

Klöters, Jacques. *100 jaar amusement in Nederland*. s-Gravenhage: Staatsuitgeverij, 1987.

Köhler, Sigrid G. "Beautiful Black Soul? The Racial Matrix of White Aesthetics (Reading Kotzebue against Kleist)." *Image & Narrative*, 14:3 (2013): 34-45.

Koning, Elisabeth. "Zwarte Piet, een blackfacepersonage. Een eeuw aan blackfacevermaak in Nederland." *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 131:4 (2018): 551–575.

Koninklijke Courant, 2 March 1807, Delpher online.

Kritisch Lampje, 4. Amsterdam: J.C. Van Kesteren, 1823.

Kuruppath, Manjusha. *Staging Asia: The Dutch East India Company and the Amsterdam Theatre*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2017.

Leeuwarder Courant 26, 1798.

Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 (ed. 2013).

Morisson, Toni. *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Meijer, Miriam Claude. *Race and aesthetics in the anthropology of Petrus Camper (1722-1789)*. Amsterdam: Atlanta, 1999.

Nathans, Heather S. *Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage, 1787-1861: Lifting the Veil of Black*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Ndiaye, Noémie. *Racecraft: Early Modern Repertoires of Blackness*. Forthcoming.

Nieuwe Rotterdamsche courant 191, 1847.

Paasman, Bert. *Reinhart: Nederlandse literatuur en slavernij ten tijde van de verlichting*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984.

Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. *Wit over zwart. Beelden van Afrika en zwarten in de westerse populaire cultuur*. Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, 1990.

Rede, Leman Thomas. *Road to the Stage; or the Performer's preceptor*. London: Joseph Smith, 1827.

Rotterdamse Courant, 21 February 1807, Delpher online.

Ruitenbeek, Henny. *Kijkcijfers: de Amsterdamse Schouwburg 1814-1841*. Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2002.

Schreuder, Esther. *Cupido en Sideron. Twee moren aan het hof van Oranje*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans, 2017.

Sens, Angelie. *Mensaap, heiden, slaaf: Nederlandse visies op de wereld rond 1800*. Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 2001.

Sharma, Raja. *Ready Reference Treatise: Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Los Gatos: Smashwords Edition, 2012.

Simonsz, Arend Fokke. *Amsterdamsche Burgers-Winter avond-Uitspanningen. Met Karikatuurplaten*. Amsterdam: C. Timmer, 1808. 80-94.

Smith, Joy L. "The Dutch Carnivalesque: Blackface, Play, and Zwarte Piet." *Dutch Racism. Intersecting: Place, Sex, and Race*. Eds. Philomena Essed & Isabel Hoving. Amsterdam & New York: Editions Rodopi B.V, 2014. 219-238.

Smith, Christopher. "Charles Gilbert de Pixérécourt's *Robinson Crusoé*." *Robinson Crusoe: Myths and Metamorphoses*. Eds. Lieve Spaas and Brian Stimpson. London: Palgrave, 2016. 127-140.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism". *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (1985): 243-261.

Staverman, W.H. *Robinson Crusoe in Nederland. Een bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van den roman in de XVIIIe eeuw*. Groningen: DeWaal, 1907.

Sudan, Rajani. *Fair Exotics: Xenophobic Subjects in English Literature, 1720-1850*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

Van der Heijden, C.J.M. & J.GM. Sanders. *De levensloop van Adriaan van der Willigen (1766-1841): een autobiografie uit een tijdperk van overgang*. Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2010.

Van der Vyver, Cornelis. *Robinson Crusoe* (adapt. R.C. Guilbert-Pixérécourt, *Robinson Crusoé*). Amsterdam : W. Holtrop, 1806.

Vaughan, Virginia Mason. *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Wheeler, Roxann. *The Complexion of Race. Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000.

Worrall, David. *Harlequin Empire: Race, Ethnicity and the Drama of the Popular Enlightenment*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007.

---

[1] Original quote in Simonsz: "een zeer verheugden Indiaan" (89). Unless stated otherwise, all translations to English are my own. The term "Indian" here does not correlate with an American ethnicity. From the eighteenth century onwards, it was a rather unambiguous marker of human variety, "Otherness," and subordination altogether. An important note on language in general: many of the historical sources used in this article contain problematic and offensive terms, phrases and ideas. I am aware that by citing them, I reproduce them. I hope to provide a critical context in which these citations can be read for purposes contrary to those for which they were initially used. I would like to thank Gurminder K. Bhambra, Jeff Bowersox and the anonymous reviewer of this article for their generous feedback on earlier versions. This publication was made possible with the financial support of the Research Foundation of Flanders – FWO.

[2] One of the oldest Dutch plays referring to slavery is G.A. Bredero's *Moortje* (1613), in which Ritsart denounces it as an inhumane practice and a blasphemous villainy, but later offers his lover a black servant (Moris) as a gift. As Bert Paasman noted, it is also one of the earliest contestations of how slavery was rejected from the perspective of Christianity and humanity, but accepted in terms of self-interest (116). In *Staging Asia*, Manjusha Kuruppath has studied the function of seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century theatre in shaping the Dutch imagination of Asia (one the plays she examines is Joost van den Vondel's famous tragedy *Zungchin* from 1667).

[3] As will become clear throughout this article, many popular plays in the Netherlands of 1800 are translations from French and German, for which the Dutch audiences around 1800 seem to have had a distinct predilection (Ruitenbeek 502; Groot). I am greatly indebted to Anna de Haas, who offered me a repertoire list of the Amsterdam City Theater in a searchable Word-document some years ago.

⁴ The rich farce culture and chambers of rhetoric of the early modern Low Countries also engaged with black stage make-up, for comic or moral purposes. In the *Seven Works of Clemency* [*Zeven Spelen van die Wercken der Bermherticheyd*], for example, blackness is associated with unsightliness and immorality. I thank Youri Desplenter and Dirk Coigneau for their help in this matter.

⁵ The Noord-Hollands Archief in Haarlem holds all the memo's, costume designs, resolutions of the Theater Society of Haarlem, Leerzaam Vermaak. See https://www.archieven.nl/.

⁶ From the mid-seventeenth-century onwards, the Amsterdam City Theater started to occasionally cast black boys ("Morianen") for non-speaking servant roles or for mere "decorative" purposes (Albach 389). The first black actor playing a leading part in Amsterdam was the African-American performer Ira Aldridge in 1855, on his European tour in the role of Othello. Until that time, and long after, white performers blacked-up their countenance to race their characters.

⁷ This play was a translation of the play *Die Sklavinn in Zurinam* (1805), which was in itself a stage adaption of John Gabriel Stedman's *A Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796).

⁸ To retain the adjusted rhyme scheme, I here quoted the song from the English translation of the play (Anonymous 48). The content of the song does not differ from the German original, nor from the Dutch version.

⁹ The "Calenda" was a popular slave dance on the Caribbean islands. Médéric Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry (1796) described the Calenda as an "animated, metrical and graceful" dance in which one pair of dancers (or more) advances to the centre of a circle and begins to dance as a couple. The "dance is based on a single step in which the performer advances successively each foot, then several times tapping heel and toe [...]. One sees evolutions and turns around the partner, who also turns and moves with the lady... The lady holds the ends of a handkerchief which she waves" (Moreau qtd. in Gerstin 7-8).

¹⁰ Original quote in *De negers*: "Hoe dikwyls hebben wy s'avonds, na volbrachten arbeid, op deze plaats gezongen en gesprongen! Dan zat de oude heer in 't midden van den kring, verwikte ons met allerlei dranken, en hadt het gaanre dat wy lustig schreeuwden, als de ketteltrommel klonk, en wy by den dans de maat wakker in de handen sloegen. [...] de neger behoeft zo weinig tot vreugde: geef hem een glas onvervalschten rum, zo arbeidt hy weeken lang zonder morren" (49).

¹¹ This article focuses particularly on the Dutch melodrama and does not attempt to offer a comparative with the original French version, nor with Defoe's novel. In her recent article, Lotte Jensen compares Van de Vyver's melodrama with the anonymous play *Robinson Crusoe op zyn eiland* (1790).

[12] Original quote in *Robinson Crusoe*: "Zie daar twee garstenkoeken en een klein fleschjen rum, die Robinson mij gelastte voor zijn middagmaal hier te brengen; wanneer hij van de jagt terug koomt. & Ik moet nauwkeurig alles doen wat hij beveelt. Het is zulk een goede meester! hij heeft den armen Vrydag van de Cannibaalen verlost, die hem wilden opëeten. Ook behoor ik niet meer aan mij zelven; Vrydag is wel wild, maar echter ekentelijk. Vrydag behoort nu alleen aan Robinson, bemint hem met al zijn hart en zou al, al zijn bloed, tot den laatsten droppel, voor zijnen, edelmoedigen meester geeven. […] Ik tel nu reeds – (Hij telt op zijne vingers) twaalf maanden bij Robinson, en ben zeer blijde, vrolijk en steeds meer te vreden" (67).

[13] Original quote in *Robinson Crusoe*: "*Vrydag hem ziende, gaat naar hem toe, valt op zijne knieën, kuscht de aarde, neemt een zijner voeten, zet dien op zijn hoofd, ten teken van getrouwheid.*"

[14] Original quote in *Robinson Crusoe*: "Het is waar! ….. Daar is mijn hoofd, mijne armen, beenen, ô! Des te beter, ik ben regt blijde dat ik leve […]" (21).

[15] This quote also signals an enduring climatic understanding of race until the early nineteenth century. See also Roxann Wheeler's *The Complexion of Race*.

[16] I have traced Dutch performances in Leeuwarden (4 February 1832), Vlissingen (26 December 1832), and Breda (4 January 1834), but the melodrama was also performed in French and German until the late 1830s.

[17] Original quote in *Paul & Virginia*: "Kom, ongelukkig man! kom, ga met ons: gy zult Domingo helpen; u zal voortaan niets ontbreken" (9).

[18] Original quote in Simonsz: "dan vinden wij een mengsel van allerlei standen, Burgers, Boeren, meer en mindere klasse van den burgerstand, […]; den avond, welke ik aldaar doorgebragt hebbe, was de Zaal, behalve met de overige gewoone aanschouwers, nog bovendien met een groot aantal Zwarten en Mooren voorzien, zoo dat het scheen dat alle de Zwarte dienstboden uit geheel Amsterdam aldaar voor dien avond beurs hielden" (93-94).

[19] Schreuder does not explain how racism in these contexts took shape exactly. As studies on the presence of black people in the early nineteenth-century British metropoles show, white responses to Afro-diasporic people ranged from social discrimination resulting into beggary to blatant racist comments (Bressey; Gretchen). In relation to Simonsz's account of the event in *De Ooijevaar*, many questions arise about the implications of the social stratification and experiences of black people in Amsterdam: Did the anti-slavery politics of these plays and the uses of blackness to try to evoke sympathy mitigate the effects of the crass stereotypes? Did black audiences find humor in these burlesques, even if understood differently from white audiences? Were black servants welcome in other (theater) venues or was *De Ooijevaar* an exception?

[20] Koning claims that the "Lantum Ethiopean Serenaders" were British minstrels. This is not correct; they were American (Lott). The troupe first traveled to Great Britain, were they were immensely popular and were even plagiarized by other performers who also copied their band name. The "Ethiopean Serenaders" performed in the Netherlands in the Spring and Summer of 1847, and in the German states in the Autumn. At least some of them (Dryce for sure) came back to the Netherlands in the Summer of 1849.

[21] The version performed in the Netherlands was a translation of a French vaudeville production (1854). It was titled *De negerhut van Oom Tom. Drama in acht bedrijven van Dumanoir en* Dennery, *naar het Fransch door Cornelissen en Beems* (Koning 562).

[22] I should note here that in some critical dramas, characters of color actively protested against their enslavement. Examples are *Monzongo, or the royal slave* (Nicolaas Simon van Winter 1774), *The white and the black* (Johannes Kisselius after A.G.P. le Brun 1789), *Adonis, or the loyal negro* (anonymous after L.F.G. Béraud & A.J.N. de Rosny 1798), and *Kraspoekol, or slavery* (Dirk van Hogendorp 1800). However, their agency is denied and black resistance or anger was always represented in terms of bestiality and primitiveness.

The Double Poetics of Popular Images

A Dialogue between Popular Culture and Postdramatic Theatre

Christel Stalpaert

In exploring the relationship between popular culture and (postdramatic) theatre, the amount of formal traces of popular culture in contemporary performances is striking. Think of the dance performances by *Hush Hush Hush* in the Nineties, incorporating spectacular break dance battles, electric boogie, hip-hop dance styles like b-boying, popping and locking, and other elements of popular street culture. Think of the references to Barbie dolls in Jan Fabre's *As Long As the World Needs a Warrior's Soul* (2000) (Stalpaert 2005) and of Wayn Traub's imitation of Michael Jackson's moonwalk in *Beasts* (1999). For his *Orgy of Tolerance* (2010), Fabre chose the revue, the popular leisure time activity in the first quarter of the twentieth century, as a format. In *SOAP* (2006), the young Ghent collective Ontroerend Goed copied the formal structuring device of popular television series and had popular Flemish TV-stars act 'soapwise' in a series of episode-performances on stage. Each episode began with a recognizable tune, a live 'what-happened-before'-summary and ended with a typical 'cliff-hanger'.

Popular culture in contemporary theatre, however, does not only concern the question of how popular formats – such as the music hall, revue, fairs, television soaps and street dance – are transformed and incorporated in theatre. The topic also entails the ideas, perspectives and attitudes that are connected with the phenomenon 'popular culture'; that is the discourse connected with what is *supposed* to be 'mainstream' or mere 'entertainment' in a given culture. From the nineteenth century onward, popular culture is often labelled 'trivial', 'superficial', belonging to a 'lower' culture. Because of its close connection with mass media, popular culture is said to be commercial and 'flat', to be produced for mass consumption, hence levelling the quality to the benefit of quantity. Similar to mass media, popular culture is said to dumb down and to undermine critical thinking, to immerse people in trivia; in a "strange compensatory decorative exhilaration" (Jameson 197).

In this contribution, I will trace the discourse lamenting the supposed stupefying and isolating effect of popular culture back to Walter Benjamin's influential article

On Some Motifs in Baudelaire in order to explore two central notions in the popular culture debate; first the notion of the image devoid of substance; and second the spectator's individual notion of pleasure and the consequent demise of social responsibility. Instead of looking at formal analogies between popular culture and contemporary theatre, I will look at the way art *plays* with representational practices that have been attributed to popular culture; such as the abundance of so-called flat images, illusionism, immersion, the spectacular and sensationalism. I will argue that by inciting 'popular' ways of seeing in the black box constellation of a theatre context, contemporary postdramatic performances such as Jan Fabre's *Glowing Icons* (1997) playfully explore and even dismantle 'popular' scopic regimes[1] and regimes of imageness.[2]

Fabre's "gallery of celebrities and fairy-tale characters we know from film and television" features Snow White, Dracula, Jackie O., Napoleon and Einstein, among others (De Brabandere 31f). The way these popular images are 'quoted' in a postdramatic performance will be compared with Andy Warhol's celebrity portraits of the 1960s, depicting iconic clichés of Elvis Presley, Liz Taylor, Jackie O., Muhammad Ali and Marilyn Monroe. In his well-known mass-production method, Warhol appropriated images that were intended for mass distribution in American popular culture. The fact that also Andy Warhol appears in Fabre's *Glowing Icons* in the form of an almost perfect lookalike, provides an interesting point of reflection on the critical potential of pop art with regard to popular scopic regimes, regimes of 'imageness' and the logic of consumption.

Modern leisure-time man and the addiction to *Erlebnis*
For Walter Benjamin, one of the most significant developments of modernity is the replacement of experience (*Erfahrung*) with *Erlebnis*; the sensate registering of the world in the moment of experience. Man's capacity to assimilate, recollect and communicate experience to others (through storytelling) is replaced by the sense of life as a series of shock experiences; disconnected impressions with no common associations. The glut of *Erlebnis* is meaningless in the sense that it is no longer registered as *Erfahrung*; it lacks a shared discourse of experience. Baudelaire already observed how mere sensual and sensational pleasures kill interest and receptiveness (Benjamn 155); it isolates information from experience and paralyzes the imagination of its consumers. Bergson, too, advises to stay clear of the mere sensual and sensational experience, for it "manifests itself in the standardized, denatured life of the civilized masses", in the "inhospitable, blinding age of big-scale industrialism" (Benjamin 156-157).

The modern leisure-time man filled his Sundays with visiting the revue, strolling along the arcades, gambling and getting bored. While apparently divided into separate activities of work and leisure time, factory work and gambling, however, are both to be considered drudgery devoid of substance.

> The jolt in the movement of a machine is like the so-called *coup* in a game of chance. […]; each operation at the machine is just as screened off from the preceding operation as a *coup* in a game of chance is from the one that preceded it, the drudgery of the laborer is, in its own way, a counterpart to the drudgery of the gambler. The work of both is equally devoid of substance. […] They live their lives like automatons. (Benjamin 177-178)

Variety theatre and fair attractions such as 'looping the loop' also were a substantial element in the leisure time of modern men. These 'free-time' activities function *apparently* autonomous from capitalism. In fact, however, consumption and spectacle are partners in crime, in preventing that one thinks things through, in dumbing down spectators and participants, leaving them capable only of reflex action, becoming automatons, "no matter how agitated they might be" (Benjamin 178). Popular theatre forms such as the revue are in that perspective part of the dream-filled sleep of capitalism. It has that specific structure that reflects the aesthetics of *Erlebnis*; a multi-act popular theatrical form of entertainment providing disconnected impressions with no common associations, seeking sensation without reflection, loosely connecting music, dance and sketches, and bluntly displaying the 'other' body.

It is the never-ending hunger for the individual *Erlebnis* that in postmodern times would lead to further dehumanization. While Benjamin wrote his comments as a witness of the relatively new phenomenon of leisure time and mass culture at the end of the nineteenth century, the Flemish philosopher Lieven de Cauter observes how contemporary society promotes the dictate of the kick. In *Archaeology of the Kick* he observes that our culture of the kick cultivates the enjoyment of the superficial thrill of the momentary excitement. Man is eager for sensations and accumulates one moment of experience after the other. During survival trips and adventure tracks, sports like rafting and bungee jumping, man continually acquires what de Cauter calls *Erlebnis-Kapital* (7-8). Under pressure of rapid technological developments, man seeks what he calls continuous intensification; the nervous collecting of ever stronger and ever more varying stimuli. "Getting your kicks" is no longer the slogan of beatniks like Jack Kerouac

and William Burroughs, de Cauter explains, it is a common life style that penetrates every filament of society. One gets a kick out of life if one cultivates the art of consuming the bearable lightness of the shock, not realizing that the hunger for *Erlebnis* is – just like capitalist hunger – insatiable.

Several poets and critics lamented the *individual* notion of pleasure in these entertainment forms, and the consequent demise of social responsibility. The dictate of *Erlebnis* would lead to the moral isolation of people from one another. Like Poe's "man of the crowd" who lacks the reflective skills of the *Flâneur*, the gentleman of leisure is immersed in an atmosphere of isolation and comfortable entertainment.[3] In his book *The Condition of the Working Class in England* Engels already observed "the brutal indifference" of the Londoners roaming the streets and rushing past one another "as if they had nothing in common or were in no way associated with one another":

> […] these Londoners have had to sacrifice what is best in human nature in order to create all the wonders of civilization […] a hundred creative faculties that lay dormant in them remained inactive and were suppressed […] There is something distasteful about the very bustle of the streets, something that is abhorrent to human nature itself. (Benjamin 166-167)

Paul Valéry similarly observed how "the inhabitant of the great urban centres reverts to a state of savagery – that is, of isolation. The feeling of being dependent on others […] is gradually blunted in the smooth functioning of the social mechanism. Any improvement of this mechanism eliminates certain modes of behavior and emotions". "Comfort isolates", agrees Benjamin, "it brings those enjoying it closer to mechanization" (174), in this way further illustrating his comparison of the leisure man and the factory worker with an automaton. Or, as Gilles Deleuze put it; "*automatic movement* gives rise to a *spiritual automaton*" (*The Time Image* 151).

Postmodern depthlessness and the waning of affect
The rise of aesthetic populism in late capitalist and postmodern times made Fredric Jameson observe the emergence of "a whole new culture of the image". Its constitute features were the notion of "a new depthlessness" (193) and the consequent "waning of affect" (196). In order to illustrate this whole new culture

Fig. 1. Publicity photograph for *Niagara* of Marilyn
Monroe, 1953

of the image, and the changed attitude on the part of the spectator, the circulation of images of tragic heroines such as Marilyn Monroe is particularly interesting. For the features mentioned by Jameson are not only characteristic of popular culture, but also of the pop art movement of the 1960s. In his well-known mass-production method, Andy Warhol brought one particular publicity photo of Marilyn Monroe for the film *Niagara* to the 'high-art' canvas. In the photo, Monroe is portrayed in the typical Hollywood portrait lighting that was nearly universal for depicting female stars at the time. The so-called Butterfly or Paramount lighting had a feathery effect and bestowed godlike qualities on facial features.[4] It aided in establishing the sexy 'Monroe look' that reflected the character of the femme fatale and her overtly sexual performance in the film.[5] The iconic values communicated by the still photo have little to do with Marilyn Monroe as a person, but all the more with stardom, female beauty and physical awareness. In favour of glamorous close-up devices for mass distribution, Norma Jeane Baker's corporeality has been put in a frame, on a pedestal, to become the icon Marilyn Monroe.

Francis Bacon already noted how "the photo tends to crush sensation into a single level and is powerless to put into sensation the difference of constitutive levels" (Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 64). Some photographic images even come to stand in for an entire life or historical event. The portrait of a tragic hero becomes an icon. Being in constant circulation, photographs hence encourage a short-circuited thinking. The photographic image has become an iconic cliché. Gilles Deleuze's use of the concept of the *cliché* is of particular interest here. Deleuze plays on the double meaning of *cliché* in French, which indicates both the reproductive mechanism at the basis of photography and at the basis of stereotyped thinking. A *cliché* denotes an image or an idea that has lost the force of its originality through overuse. Central to Deleuze's thinking on photography is that the use of clichés entails "a particularly dangerous sort of short-circuited thinking and representation, since its chemically based realism gives it an air of authenticity, of innocent directness that anchors and supports all its stereotyping" (Polan 245).

In his pop art style, Warhol appropriated images, icons and clichés of popular culture in order to foreground this logic of (mass) consumption. In his silkscreen Marilyn printings, collectively titled *Marilyn Diptych*, he reproduced the glamorous and glossy image of the actress's face fifty times, as in a sheet of postage stamps. Half of the reproductions are in bright pop art colours; shocking

Fig. 2. Andy Warhol, *Marylin Diptych,* 1962

pink, canary yellow and deep blue. The others are rendered in black and white, gradually blackening or fading, eventually rendering blurred shades.

In repeating the images extensively, Warhol points at the original context of the photo as a mechanically reproduced cultural product. He brings to the fore the 'smooth' mechanism of reproduction that has the human being Norma Jeane Baker become part and parcel of an industry. Behind the "photograph as relic, possessing a spiritual aura" lie reproduction technologies with economic interests; culminating in the capitalist logic of consumption (West 145).

By infusing the mass-production method with the unrealistic pop art colours, Warhol in fact brings to the fore how the Hollywood film industry erased every trace of the uniqueness of Norma Jeane Baker as a person. The black and white pictures with blurred shades are in that perspective reminiscent of how the cliché or photo negative turns the corporeality of the actress into an 'overexposed' cliché and commodity. But, in applying the same mass-production techniques as popular culture did, could Warhol escape the logic of capitalist consumption? Is it possible to recover corporeality and emotions from flatness through appropriation and critical repetition? The critical potential of 'quoting' or appropriating popular images in 'high art' has been the topic of many debates. Baudrillard wondered in his analysis of mass media culture: "Is it (pop art) not simply an effect of fashion, and thus a pure object of consumption itself?" (16). "Quite simply", he adds, "Pop artists fail to see that if a picture is to avoid being a sacred super-sign (a unique subject, a signature, a noble and magical object of commerce), then content or the intentions of the author are not enough; it is the structures of cultural production that decides this" (21).

Postmodern depthlessness in pop art
Jameson argued that "flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality, in the most literal sense" also befalls pop art productions (186). While Warhol's images hematise death – for example in his traffic accidents or the electric chair series – "the glacéd, x-ray elegance" of these images has nothing to do with "the death anxiety on the level of content" (Jameson 196). Pop art has lost its symbolic depth. Human figures, such as Warhol's Marilyn Monroe, have in that sense little to do with expressing (universal) pain. Whereas the alienated and isolated figure in Munch's painting *The Scream* is projecting out and externalizing cathartically the uttermost feeling of fear and pain as gesture or cry, as outward dramatization of inward feeling, the *Marilyn Diptych* depicts a tragic heroine that communicates nothing of her innermost feelings. Warhol completed the *Marilyn Diptych* during

the weeks after Marilyn Monroe's death in 1962, but despite the fact that the final years of Monroe's life were marked by illness and personal problems, the portraits do not reveal any sign of suffering. "Depth is replaced by surface", says Jameson (198). Pop art is a 'cool' art; "it demands neither aesthetic ecstasy nor affective or symbolic participation ('deep involvement')" (Baudrillard 22).

The flatness or depthlessness of the image has in that sense less to do with the level of content, than with what Jameson calls "a more fundamental mutation both in the object world itself […] and in the disposition of the subject" (196). Human relations have become media-fuelled. Our 'real' emotions of empathy, fear and love have been replaced by melodrama images, photos, picture postcards and film icons. "A strange compensatory decorative exhilaration" (Jameson 197) covers the loss of corporeal affects, but flattens the human faculty of the senses even further. The isolated individual has become impersonal in postmodern times. "There is no individual subject, and no distinctive feelings, only intensities of an impersonal type" (Buchanan 94). Pathologies of the ego have lost their relevance in a postmodern world, as the subject is scattered. "The alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject" (Jameson 199). There is no longer a Subject to produce the feeling.

It is true, Warhol himself became part and parcel of the logic of capitalist consumption. He turned stars into art, but in the course of his career, this process turned himself – the artist – into a star. His stardom gave him access to exclusive celebrity circles and parties and this turned him into an icon of American popular culture as well. Not coincidentally, the term diptych refers to hinged paintings of religious icons that form an altarpiece. Is Warhol's *Marilyn Diptych* in the end nothing but a mere homage to the superficial iconic cliché of the sex symbol-actress who died far too soon?

'Depthless' popular images in theatrical seriality
Jan Fabre seems to intervene in this debate by including Warhol in his gallery of *Glowing Icons*. But despite the meta-reflective level, depthlessness also seems to afflict this performance. In displaying one icon after the other on stage, *Glowing Icons* also replaces corporeality by images. Human figures become iconic signs and hence "pure exteriority" (Baudrillard 15). The performance is devoted to bodies that possess an external aura only by the grace of their immortality as collective heroes or icons.

Fig. 3. Jan Fabre, *Glowing Icons,* 1997. Picture by
Wonge Bergmann

> Here we witness the disappearance of the erotic body. It is nothing but a narcissistic reflection, an illusion. The body is above all an image. An image that is made independent by the media and whose referent is unclear. […] The body disappears through overexposure. (De Brabandere 32-33)

The pessimism that guides Jameson in his diagnostic process, is striking. It is balanced by a profound sense of optimism, however. In his observation on dephtlessness and the waning of affect, Jameson stresses the fact that the cultural products of the postmodern era are not utterly devoid of feelings, emotions and anxieties. Rather, "such feelings – which it may be better and more accurate to call 'intensities' – are now free-floating and impersonal" (Jameson 200). Such feelings have been scattered, as the subject itself has been. The problems he addresses here, might be translated into a new challenge to postmodernity. This challenge is precisely "how – in the absence of an ego – to think the relation between all these new intensities thrown up by postmodern experience" (Buchanan 93). I will now develop the idea of how postdramatic theatre like *Glowing Icons* might meet this challenge.

In *Glowing Icons*, the spectator easily recognizes the celebrities the way mass-media has depicted them endlessly on posters and picture postcards. These images might be called flat, easily consumable images in the sense that they merely depict the glitter and glamour that voids the deep realities of fear and tragedy, of corporeality and life. But, this is but one function in the possible constellations of image-functions. Following Rancière in *The Future of the Image*, there is no such thing as a flat, superficial image. Art is a game of 'operations', consisting of shifting constellations of different functions of the image. Art history is in that case not a history of different sorts of images; it consists of shifts of different relations of functions of images.

> The images […] are not primarily manifestations of the properties of a certain technical medium, but operations: relations between a whole and parts; between a visibility and a power of signification and affect associated with it; between expectations and what happens to meet them. (Rancière, *The Future of the Image* 3)

By putting the icons in a seriality, Jan Fabre outwits the 'easy' consumption of the iconic clichés. In Rancière's words, he connects disruptively. When Einstein shakes hands with Napoleon on stage, or when Dracula is crawling beneath

100

Warhol's feet, his eyes covered with blood, Fabre links and has the icons 'Einstein', 'Napoleon', 'Dracula' and 'Warhol' collide with one another to install "*le non-lien de ses phrases*" and hence "*le shock des hétérogènes*" (the shock in heterogeneity) on the part of the spectator. In this case, a series of disconnected impressions with no common associations does not entail mere *Erlebnis* or comfortable entertainment. Whereas the smooth mechanism of the series of disconnected impressions in comfortable entertainment kills interest and receptiveness (Baudelaire), paralyzes the imagination of its consumers (Benjamin) or suppresses creative faculties (Engels), the seriality in *Glowing Icons* entails montage in a Benjaminian sense. Its disruptive connecting demonstrates a potential for a dialectics of seeing. Montage demonstrates its power "to interrupt the context in which it was inserted, and as a result to serve as an antidote to illusion" (Buck-Morss 67). Instead of emphasizing the connection between heterogeneous elements, the dialectics in montage or seriality "accentuates the heterogeneity of elements in order to provoke a shock that reveals a reality riven by contradictions" (Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* 58).

In the seriality of *Glowing Icons*, the iconic cliché is not formally altered; its function and relation with other images change, and hence its inherent readability. The perfect lookalike resembles the iconic cliché Warhol. One of the main challenges in Fabre's proclaimed 'battle' against clichés is – in accordance with the thinking of Deleuze in *The Time Image* – to have the spectator rediscover everything that one does not see in the image. In order to escape easy consumption, the iconic cliché should then "enter into internal relations that force the entire image to be 'read' no less then viewed, readable as much as visible", and must take on "the functions of thought" (22-23). The pure optic image of the iconic cliché 'Warhol' opens itself to the readable image (*l'image lisible*), the thinking image (*l'image pensante*) and shock thought. Instead of accumulating the bearable lightness of the shock in a chain of kicks (de Cauter), there is a shock in thought, "without thought being able to assimilate that shock within a coherent set of rational coordinates" (Bogue 176).

Deleuze's aesthetics of intensities is not concerned with mere spectacle in the sense of sensationalism or *plaisir-décharge,* mere thrills or pleasure of the senses. The intensity of the shock is not a letter of safe-conduct for the corporeal; it is also and at the same time an invitation for creative thinking, beyond common sense, cognitive recognition and representational idea(l)s. There is a movement "from the image to the thought, from the percept to the concept" (*The Time Image* 157). The concept engendered by the collision of montage is that the

101

images in their seriality have "a shock effect on thought, and force […] thought to think itself as well as to think the whole" (Deleuze, *The Time Image* 158). Consensus in interpretation – the envisaged effect of the function of popular cultural images – is disrupted and becomes dissensus again.

In fact, the dialectics of seeing is also at work in Warhol's *Marilyn Diptych*. The main difference between pop art and popular culture is that the ethos of popular culture is based precisely on "unambiguous realism, on linear narration […] and the decorative […]. It is only on a rudimentary level that Pop can be mistaken for 'figurative' art, colourful imagery, a naive chronicle of consumer society, etc. Their candour is immense, as is their ambiguity." "Pop is a 'cool' art", but, Baudrillard significantly adds, "one preserving something of childhood curiosity or the naive enchantment of discovery". This sounds trivial, but it is not; it points out that pop art "above all […] (is) triggering those intellectual reflexes of decoding, deciphering, etc …" (22).

The so-called smile of collusion that Baudrillard observed in the scopic regime of pop art, is also part of the game in *Glowing Icons*. In watching the performance, we are stimulated to think the relation between all the new intensities thrown up by the postdramatic and postmodern experience. We do not necessarily know what the chain of moving icons means, why some iconic characters behave as they do on stage (symbolic depth), but we do see how the double poetics of the image works.

The smile of collusion belongs to the spectator as accomplice. It resembles the schizophrenic smile of the bewildered viewer, which is not to be confused with the smile of the bewildered madman, having no reason whatsoever. It is the smile of the creative thinker, seeing beyond the singular perspective of 'common sense'. For the smile of collusion not only demands to rediscover everything, but also demands the impossible perspective to see everything at once. In his quest for possibilities for art to conceive of new modes of relationships between the intensities, Jameson himself pointed at "the advent of a kind of schizophrenia (in Lacan's sense)" (Buchanan 97-98). This might be interpreted as a condition of the spectator in his attempt to rediscover the depth of the image beyond the symbolic mould. To think the relation between all the new intensities thrown up by postdramatic and postmodern experience is to rediscover the perpetual modulation of meaning in the image.

The schizophrenic points at the "breakdown in the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning" (Jameson 209). When that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of "a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers" (Jameson 210). The schizophrenic or bewildered spectator is invited to "do the impossible, namely, to see all the screens at once, in their radical and random difference" (Jameson 31). The abundance of images in Fabre's *Glowing Icons*, resulting in a saturation of the signaletic material (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 91) or plethora or plenitude (Lehmann 89), gears a similar schizophrenic gaze on the part of the spectator. However, this is not a mere overloading as such that leaves the spectator perplexed with astonishment or dumbed-down – a characteristic attributed to popular culture. The body and mind of the spectator are overwhelmed, but at the same time put at a distant, in a place where the courage of critical and creative thinking is required. This dialectics of seeing and gazing is reminiscent of "the madness of vision" ("*la folie du voir*") that Christine Buci-Glucksmann attributes to the baroque and that Deleuze in his notion of 'the fold' called "a sort of schizophrenic 'stuffing'". The abundance of iconic images in Fabre's *Glowing Icons* is hence not a process of blurring, but a process of doubling, of schizophrenia, seeing both functions of the image at the same time. The spectator is being overwhelmed *and* incited at the same time.

Ethics of evenly hovering attention

To return to the discourse lamenting the supposed stupefying and isolating effect of popular culture; will the abundance of images and the accompanying waning of affect lead us to moral isolation? To a flattened faculty of the senses? To dehumanization? Not necessarily so. Abundant image-constellations enhance a double poetics, at the same time immersing us and putting us at a distance. This might call for a mental exercise in flexibility, becoming schizophrenic in the sense that we open up towards several possible meanings, relations and identities. To accept the split gaze, the schizophrenic experience in watching popular culture in a theatre performance constellation is to endure "a state of indecision" (Rancière, *The Future of the Image* 38). It is an exercise in undecidedness, in the skill of what Hans-Thies Lehmann referred to as the "evenly hovering attention" ("*gleich-schwebende Aufmerksamkeit*"). Lehmann borrowed the term from Freud to describe the changed attitude on the part of the spectator in postdramatic theatre, where "everything depends on not understanding immediately".

> Rather one's perception has to remain open for connections, correspondences and clues at completely unexpected moments, perhaps casting what was said earlier in a completely new light. (Lehmann 87)

This mode of perceiving requires an openness in encountering the 'other'. Deleuze's argument for becoming schizophrenic no longer works with common sense to recognize otherness on the basis of easily recognizable external features such as stardom, beauty, physical appearances, or – at another level – on the basis of race, gender or age, but to meet or encounter according to an *accord discordant* or discordant harmony, according to an agreement to differ and disagree, to postpone interpretation and hence judgment (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 183). The way the abundance of popular images challenges the boundaries of common sense might then be interpreted as an exercise in mental flexibility in encountering otherness, even if it occurs only in the (popular) cult of the intensive time of momentariness. To rephrase Rancière, wouldn't that be a nice future for the (popular) image in theatre?

Works cited

Baudrillard, Jean. "Mass Media Culture. Pop: An Art of Consumption?" *The Jean Baudrillard Reader*. Eds. Steve Redhead. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. 14-32.

Benjamin, Walter. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Transl. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1989. 155-200.

Bogue, Ronald. *Deleuze on Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Buchanan, Ian. *Fredric Jameson. Live Theory*. London: Continuum, 2006.

Buci-Glucksmann, Christine. *La folie du voir. De l'esthétique baroque*. Paris : Galilée, 1986.

Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge (Massachusetts): MIT Press, 1991.

Churchwell, Sarah. *The Many Lives of Marilyn Monroe*. New York: Picador, 2005

De Bolla, Peter. *The Education of the Eye. Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

De Brabandere, Adri. *Jan Fabre*, Brussel: Vlaams Theater Instituut, 1997. (*Kritisch Theater Lexicon*, nr. 10)

De Cauter, Lieven. *Archeologie van de kick. Over moderne ervaringshonger*. Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2009.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Transl. Paul Patton. London: Continuum, 2004.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon. The Logic of Sensation*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith. London: Continuum 2005.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2. The Time Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: Continuum, 2005.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *The Jameson Reader*. Eds. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004. 188-232.

Jay, Martin. "Scopic Regimes of Modernity." *Vision and Visuality*. Ed. by Hal Foster. Seattle: Bay Press,1988. 3-23.

Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. Trans. Karen Jürs-Munby. London: Routledge, 2006.

Polan, Dana. "Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation." *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*. Eds. Constantin Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski. London: Routledge, 1996. 229-261.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Future of the Image*. Transl. Gregory Elliott. London: Verso, 2006.

Rancière, Jacques. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*. Trans. Steven Corcoran. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.

Stalpaert, Christel. "Jan Fabre's As Long as the World Needs a Warrior's Soul: The Reconfigurative Power of Desire." *Arcadia. International Journal of Literary Studies* 40:1 (2005): 177-193.

Stalpaert, Christel. "Re-Enacting Modernity. Fabian Barba's A Mary Wigman Dance Evening (2009)." *Dance Research Journal* 43:1 (2011): 90-95.

West, Nancy Martha. *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*. Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2000.

[1] Martin Jay's term 'scopic regime' is borrowed from the French film theorist Christian Metz who introduced the term in his 1975 study *The Imaginary Signifier* to distinguish between the cinematic and the theatrical scopic regime. Peter de Bolla wrote that "a scopic regime provides the envelope within which practices of looking play out their variations; it gives shape and form to aesthetic productions, orders the relation between the artwork and the viewer, and gives definition to the subject who looks. Such regimes are not always hegemonic, nor are they always antagonistic to different ways of ordering visuality – and indeed more than one regime may operate at a given time" (De Bolla 16).

[2] In *The Future of the Image* Jacques Rancière points at a regime of 'imageness' as "a regime of relations between elements and between functions (of an image)" (4), as "a particular regime of articulation between the visible and the sayable" (11).

[3] Benjamin explicitly pointed out that the man of the crowd is no *flâneur*. The man of the crowd is "the pedestrian who would let himself be jostled by the crowd", while the *flâneur* would demand elbow room and would be "unwilling to forgo the life of a gentleman of leisure. Let the many attend to their daily affairs; the man of leisure can indulge in the preambulations of the *flâneur* only if as such he is already out of place. He is as much out of place in an atmosphere of complete leisure as in the feverish turmoil of the city" (172 – 173).

[4] For a similar analysis of the circulation and mass distribution of photographs as icons, possessing spiritual aura in popular culture, see also my analysis of Fabian Barba's *A Mary Wigman Dance Evening* in the light of the fashionable sales technique of inserting collectible cards of famous dancers and film stars in cigarette packs in the 1930s. See Stalpaert 2011.

[5] Not coincidentally, it was in *Niagara* "that the (Monroe) look was established" (Whitey Snyder in Churchwell 62).

Performing the City
Urban Discourses and the Representation of Italian Cities in the Music Videos of Italian rapper Capo Plaza

Lisa Vancauwenberghe

Despite the recent increase of attention given to popular culture, music videos are not often seen as valuable or possibly insightful art forms or products, instead being dismissed as mere promotional and thus commercial devices for musicians to increase their visibility and earnings (Railton and Watson 1). With some exceptions, like Vernallis' exploration of the medium's formal characteristics and cultural relevance, or Tamburri's semiotic approach to Italian-American video clips, not a great deal of work has been done on the medium. This article, then, aims to show the relevance of music videos as well as explore the potential of such an analysis in the light of urban studies debates. The representation of the urban environment in music videos is an untapped source with regards to the popular imagination of the city.[1] McQuire's book on the media city, for instance, does not deal with music videos at all, even though the urban is quite present in this medium.

In this article, I will focus exclusively on the Italian city. This is, in a way, to counteract the preferential treatment of leading world cities like New York and Paris. In addition, the Italian city has a certain allure to non-Italians that is quite prominent in the popular imagination. The city is also a popular and common element in many Italian video clips. It is ubiquitous in the classically urban genre of hip hop, but also appears in other genres. Liberato, for example, is a Neapolitan artist who has made a contemporary Romeo and Juliet story set in Naples, where a girl from the rich neighbourhood of Vomero and a boy from the impoverished Scampia neighbourhood fall in love. Other examples include Calcutta's depiction of the Roman periphery through the eyes of an immigrant child ('Cosa mi manchi a fare') and Ketama126's vision of Rome ('Dolcevita' and 'Giovane e Selvaggio').

In this article, I will present a case-study of the video clips of Capo Plaza, a hip hop artist from Salerno. His video clips are filmed both in Salerno and Milan and contain a multitude of urban imagery. I will analyze how the urban is represented in his music videos, relating it to a number of discourses that are prevalent in urban studies like the post-modern city, the modern metropolis and the

marketing of cities for tourists. I argue that the use and mixing of multiple discourses, as well as the usage of specific formal techniques like camera choice and editing, leads to the undermining and nuancing of prevalent urban discourses. The goal is not only to trace how academic discourses are found in his work but also how it questions and nuances those discourses. As the discussion will include both Salerno, a small Southern city, and Milan, a bustling metropolis, it will also revolve around how elements like scale and international prestige tie into the representation of the urban. By doing so, this article hopes to provide an exploration of a new medium for urban studies and turn it into a new, valuable area of research, as well as shine a spotlight on different cities and urban phenomena.

This article opens with a discussion of the most prominent visual elements of Capo Plaza's videos, relating them to discourses that are prominent in urban studies debates. Then I will move on to an analysis of the formal techniques used and how they relate to the content discussed in the previous section, followed by a comparison of the portrayal of Salerno and Milan. The last section is a discussion of the interpretations suggested in the previous sections, as well as a reflection on the use of the music video in urban studies.

Urban performances: the visual language of Capo Plaza videos
Capo Plaza (Luca D'Orso's stage name) is an Italian musician from Salerno, working mainly in the genres of hip hop, rap, and trap. He has been dabbling in music since 2014, released official singles and music videos in 2016, and his first solo album "20" in 2018. What stands out in his work is the importance of the city and his immediate environment both in his visual and lyrical work. Lots of his lyrics deal with his difficult youth, the hardships of growing up in Salerno's periphery, life on the streets as a drug dealer, etc. The lyrics in his biggest hit 'Giovane Fuoriclasse' are indicative of the weight the city carries in his work. The song opens and closes with the same line: "si, 'sto blocco mi ha fatto così (yes, this hood has made me the way I am)". His chosen pseudonym is another indication since it is derived from the mafioso term *capo piazza*, literally the boss of a square, but meaning someone who oversees the drugs network of a certain section of the city.

In what follows I will discuss six video clips where Capo is the main artist. Four take place in Salerno: 'Nisida' and 'Non si ferma' from 2016, 'Allenamento 1' and 'Allenamento 3' from 2017, as well as two video clips set in Milan: 'Giovane

Fuoriclasse' (2017) and 'Non cambiero mai' (2018). All video clips are set in an urban environment, with the city in a prominent role.[2] The videos do not have clear narratives. Instead, they are characterized by a quick succession of seemingly unrelated short clips showcasing different places, people and activities, without integrating them into an overarching story line. However, there are certain recurring elements and prominent signs that, when taken together across multiple videos, certainly have something to say.

1. Cars, trains, construction sites

There is a set of images that recurs in variations throughout Capo Plaza's visual work, I call them his 'core images'. One of them is the car, or most often, cars, shot from a bird's-eye view meandering through the city ('Nisida') or driving on motorways, like ants around their colony. Another core image is the train, either just the train tracks ('Non si ferma', 'Allenamento 1') or as a moving train ('Giovane Fuoriclasse'). The closing image of this trinity is the large construction site, most often including a massive crane ('Allenamento 3', 'Giovane Fuoriclasse', see figure 1).

Fig. 1. Construction site with a crane in Capo
Plaza, *Giovane Fuoriclasse* (1:57)

These images relate to the omnipresent discourse of the modern metropolis resulting from rapid industrialization and modernization processes. The metropolis is characterized by high-rise buildings, lit up skylines, broad boulevards and busy streets where one is merely a face in the crowd. These visual characteristics are often linked with a uniquely metropolitan lifestyle: daily life increasingly shaped by rationalization, impersonality, and bureaucracy (Gold 155), as well as a blasé attitude, developed as a protective measure against the sheer volume of superficial interactions and stimuli encountered in the city, combined with a greater personal freedom (Simmel 48-56, GUST 1999). The city is also seen as the place where 'it' happens: fashion trends, but also new currents in art, music, culinary innovations, etc. are born in the city. Culture is considered to be synonymous with metropolitan life (Chambers 17). This imagery is still extremely popular today, even in these times of suburbanization, urban sprawl and the internet increasingly taking over the city's claim to cultural innovation (see GUST 1999). Just google "city" and the image results show that the popular image of the city still heavily relies on the modern metropolis.

Capo Plaza's use of the metropolitan discourse, however, seems limited to those images that function as a synecdoche for modernity's dream of progress and innovation. The car, the train, and massive construction projects are all strong symbols of the modernization process. The rational side of modernity predominates, which is further underlined by the image of high story office buildings (in 'Giovane Fuoriclasse' and 'Non cambierò mai', see figure 2). To Capo, it seems, the modern metropolis is bureaucracy and rationalization. The other aspects of the metropolitan experience, that is to say, the crowds, the unique lifestyle and the city as the origin of creative processes is completely absent. In the parts of his video clips that play on the metropolitan trope, impersonality reigns. There are no people, only images of material symbols of modernity.

Fig. 2. Office bulding in Capo Plaza, *Giovane Fuoriclasse* (0:03)

2. Peripheries and non-places

While Capo Plaza's videos are exclusively set in cities, time is mostly spent in the periphery of those cities. The car, that I interpreted above as being a shiny symbol of modernity, can also symbolize the surge in automobility and the accompanying suburbanization and proliferation of urban sprawl. Most of Capo's videos seem to be located in those anonymous, grey, concrete parts of the city. Non-places, i.e. places that are anonymous spaces without a particular identity or local history, seem to dominate: "once inside a shopping mall, or on a motorway interchange, one could be almost anywhere in the world," (Savage and Warde 74).

In his videos, Capo seems to live in those places, it is often impossible to tell where he is, or what the portrayed space is supposed to represent. In 'Nisida' (see figure 3), for example, he is shot squatting on rooftops, but we are only shown his face and torso against a roof or an anonymous sky. All identity is lost in these shots, the Adidas logo on his shirt is the only remaining signifier. It is impossible to tell whether he is still in Salerno, it could be any other city in the world. As suggested, the places are anonymous, meaningless, with only brands left as signifiers. This is another element that surfaces often in his work – the glorification of consumption. In 'Nisida', the video is interspersed with images of Capo Plaza himself, dressed in prominently-branded clothing, rapping while walking next to a shiny, white and expensive looking BMW. The car acquires a third possible meaning, as a symbol of (hyper)consumption in a post-modern world and returns in this shape in later videos ('Allenamento 3', 'Non cambierò mai').

In fact, all the above elements are closely related to the post-modern urban discourse, which is, of course, an ambiguous notion. My own definition encompasses tendencies of suburbanization and what has been dubbed as the *città diffusa* or *zwischenstadt* (see Sieverts), as well as more 'traditional', qualitative characteristics of post-modern urbanity, like fragmentation and placelessness, but also processes of globalization and de-industrialization. I believe that all these elements move beyond the image of the traditional modern metropolis.

Fig. 3. Placelessness in Capo Plaza, *Nisida* (1:11)

Fig. 4. Sunset in the bay of Salemo in Capo
Plaza, *Allenamento 3* (1:31)

3. La Dolce Vita

Although the majority of the music videos take place in peripheries and non-signifying places, city centres and identifiable places are not entirely absent. In 'Nisida', Capo walks the streets of the historic centre, while the camera shows the sunset over the bay of Salerno, as well as quick snapshots of a picturesque church against the backdrop of lush green hills. In 'Allenamento 1' and '3' the bay at sunset returns, as well as wide-angle shots of the lights illuminating the sea and the city (see figure 4). 'Allenamento 3' even spells out the place and time: "Salerno 19 ore (7 pm)", anchoring his visuals in a specific time and place. These images relate to what I alluded to in the introduction regarding Italian cities, namely that they have a certain allure beyond the borders of Italy that is quite prominent in the popular imagination. They are 'cozy' and 'charming', brimming with authenticity and historicity. Historic centres are full of picturesque squares lined with olive and citrus trees, ancient monuments, churches, and UNESCO heritage sites. The city is turned into a map dotted with landmarks that one 'simply has to see'. Via clever marketing strategies, tourists are presented with a coherent and highly stylized symbolic commodity (Parker 140).

However, the space covered by the lenses of the tourists is far less than that of the post-modern urban discourse. Indeed, this discourse is more conspicuous through its absence. The way Salerno is portrayed diverges dramatically from the 'postcard Italian city' as we know it. There is no *duomo*, no *lungomare*, no cute *piazza* and no locals indulging in *la dolce vita*. Salerno is nestled on the Amalfi coast - a prime honeymoon destination known for its picturesque towns, rocky coastline, and abundant lemon trees. However, none of that is shown in Capo Plaza's videos. He even raps: "credi qua tutto è bello, ma c'è niente di buono (you think everything is beautiful here, but there is nothing good)" ('Non si ferma'). By not portraying the images of Salerno considered to be 'picture perfect Italy', and by erasing any genius loci from his visual material, Capo seems to contest the popular, phantasmagoric imaging of Italian cities.

4. Doing laundry, groceries and drugs

Apart from the big stories of (post)modernization and the influx of tourism, Capo Plaza's videos are also packed with imagery relating to ordinary, daily life. Particularly favoured by him is the detailed image of laundry hanging out of windows, drying in the sun (see, for example, 'Nisida'). The focus on a white sheet, blowing softly in the wind, evokes a feeling of day-to-day life and the sense of the city as a place where ordinary people live, build a home and carve out relationships of community and belonging (see figure 5). Other examples of

115

infra-ordinary scenes consist of people buying fruit and children playing on the streets (Allenamento 3).

Fig. 5. Laundry hanging from windows in
Capo Plaza, *Allenamento 3* (1:52)

This representation of the city that foregrounds the ordinary, daily, banal urban experience relates to what I would call the infra-ordinary city discourse. The term was coined by Georges Perec, who dedicated a great deal of work to the study of the mundane, particularly in the context of the city. The infra-ordinary approach to the city is often propagated by writers who have first stipulated that the contemporary city has become a capitalist phantasmagoria or an embodiment of the society of the spectacle.[3] An approach that foregrounds the infra-ordinary can thus be conceptually used to map experiences that otherwise remain in the shadows. Like historians who have started to focus on ordinary people, forgotten urban stories, testimonies and even places themselves can be be brought back to the surface by a focus on the ordinary (Highmore 1-5).

Similarly, Capo's videos also show the 'other side' of the city – one that does not see or is not supposed to see, daylight very often. His video clips also feature many scenes suggesting illicit activities, mostly relating to the selling and smoking of Marijuana. This theme is dealt with extensively in the lyrical part of his work. The title of the song 'Nisida' already says a lot, as Nisida is a small island off the coast of Naples that houses a juvenile detention facility, just like his name referring to a mafioso term. He brings into focus a shadowy side of the city, an aspect of urban life that more idealized representations (especially the one for tourists) suppress. Both the infra-ordinary and 'criminal' images question those discourses on the city, showcasing a Salerno far-removed from stereotypical depictions.

In 'Non si ferma', for example, most of the video consists of an exposition of what seems to be an ordinary night in Salerno for Capo and his friends. The main part of the video is shot on an anonymous street, with the Salernitana youth having fun: they are dancing, singing, smoking and performing stunts with their motorbikes. They use public space, claiming their place in the city as Capo Plaza raps about the hardship of his youth in Salerno's periphery. This representation of a banal night in Salerno can be read as an attempt to reclaim the city, to strip the city of its other discourses and demand a piece of it, while recounting the struggle of growing up in that city: "urla per una città che non sente" ("he screams for a city that doesn't hear"), as an Italian blog put it (Rochira).

Formal techniques: melancholy montage & the language of consumption
The contrast I sketched above between phantasmagoric urban discourses and the infra-ordinary can also be perceived in the cinematic techniques employed in the video clips, specifically in terms of the choice of shots and editing. A substantial

amount of screen time of every video I discuss is filled with both long, and extremely long shots. Most of those seem to be filmed with drone cameras, showing the expanse of the city and creating a distance between the viewer and the subject matter. The images portrayed by this cinematic language are not arbitrary and nearly always belong to the set of what I called Capo's core images: the city at night, cars moving along city streets or motorways and massive construction sites, but also the few touristic images of landscapes and a church are filmed in this way. Most of the images evoke modernity, hankering back to the early 20th-century city symphony that also portrayed the modern metropolis.

The other cinematic language puts its feet back on the ground, presenting a view from below, mainly making use of medium shots and close-ups and relaying infra-ordinary subject matter, like the shots of laundry hanging out to dry in the summer breeze. 'Allenamento 3' in particular makes extensive use of this discourse, showing snapshots of children playing on a square and between graffiti-clad apartment buildings, people visiting the local fruit vendor and young boys running away from police officers (see figure 6). Often these images are transmitted via close-ups which hone in on details like the wind rattling the fence of a playground or focusing on human faces. Those close-ups, in stark contrast with the distancing drone images, seem very personal and affectively laden. This is particularly so for the close-ups of children's faces, as they linger on them for longer than most other images in the video clips, and also especially in light of the lyrics he raps over it: "questa città è piena d'odio, non mi da un cazzo (this city is full of hate, it doesn't give *a shit* about me)".

Editing is another cinematic technique that Capo Plaza's visual work engages in to elaborate on the contrast and interplay between the representations of modernity and tourism, and the wide array of images suggesting infra-ordinary life. 'Allenamento 1' is a video shot in black and white, consisting mostly of Capo walking through a deserted, nocturnal Salerno. The vibe and images are reminiscent of the *noir city* (see Prakash). On the one hand, the city is portrayed as a fascinating metropolis (minus the crowds), with a lit-up skyline and alluring neon advertising promising a quick way to riches. On the other hand, however, just like the traditional noir crime story which attempts to puncture the ideal of the modern metropolis, Capo juxtaposes these images with a rougher representation of Salerno.

118

Fig. 6. Elderly woman with her laundry
in Capo Plaza, *Allenamento 3* (1:42)

Fig. 7. Image of neon lighting and image of a
homeless man sleeping on the street, both in Capo
Plaza, *Allenamento 1* (1:34) and (0:42)

For example, phantasmagoric shots are followed in quick succession by images of a homeless man sleeping on the streets (see figure 7). This editing carries a distinctly melancholic tone. Whereas the previously-discussed 'Non si ferma' shines in boisterous self-assertion, 'Allenamento 1' is coloured by a threatening dreariness, mirrored by the lyrics: "Il mio quartiere è questo [...] sempre quelle stesse facce/sono passati gli anni e sono ancora nella trappola" (this is my hood [...] always the same faces/the years have slid by and I'm still trapped)". The lyrics and the editing choices express a melancholy portrait of a city where hopelessness reigns and a different, improved future seems unimaginable. In doing so, the common discourse of both the metropolis and Salerno as a tourist paradise are subverted.

'Allenamento 3' employs the same technique of editing to undermine different discourses. The video opens with a close-up of rubbish on a playground, and the hint of a corner of a football goal, only to be promptly alternated with the drone images of the bay of Salerno "at 7 pm at night" (written on screen). The constant switching between these two cinematic languages dominates the video, with the editing emphasizing the contrasts. A shot of a construction site, flanked by enormous cranes, is immediately followed by a close-up of a hole in a building in an area that seems to be the periphery. Likewise, images of automobility and a nocturnal Salerno are interspersed with those of an elderly lady hanging out her laundry and children playing in a rundown playground. The editing here is less desolate compared to the previous video but is still very suggestive. The visual language of the modern metropolis is being questioned through the insistence of a banal, infra-ordinary life in Salerno. In between the overwhelming, extreme long shots of Salerno, a small space is found for what seems to be a sense of community.

However, this binary opposition is not as simple as it seems. The two series of images, which can be interpreted as polar opposites or mirror-images, are complicated by another central thread in the video clip, namely the more post-modern oriented discourse. Capo is filmed on the passenger seat of a shiny luxury car or rapping right in front of it. This series of images is nearly as prominent as the other ones, making the fancy car an ambiguous symbol (see figure 8). It could be interpreted as a vindication of the story of his background as portrayed in this and other videos, or as a symbol for the American dream, or as the embodiment of the hyper-consumption in the post-modern city. It is striking that the images closely related to the urban post-modern are the ones in which Capo himself most often appears. Because of his successful music career, he has

121

been able to leave behind the hardships of his youth, however, now that has been achieved, there does not seem to be much else to do. He often raps that all he wants is *soldi* (money). Even though the videos seem to undermine phantasmagoric images of the city as a modern metropolis or tourist paradise, and he successfully questions modernity's dream of progress by juxtaposing its symbols with images portraying the 'other side', and can thus be called critical, he nevertheless also seems unable to provide an alternative to late capitalism's glorification of consumption. The celebration of infra-ordinary life, Salerno's invisible citizens and a sense - or at least a possibility - of a community stand in stark contrast to the post-modern images. The critique apparent in the videos is written in the same language as the criticized content. This ambiguous role of the use of the post-modern discourse is only amplified in his later videos.

Fig. 8. Capo Plaza in front of a luxury car in
Capo Plaza, *Allenamento 3* (0:32)

From Salerno to Milan

After four videos filmed in Capo Plaza's hometown Salerno, the next two clips are set in Milan. The difference between those two cities is apparent. One is nestled in a bay in southern Italy, with only around 130,000 inhabitants, the other lies at the foot of the Alps and houses well over one million people. Salerno is known, indeed if known at all, for its position on the popular Amalfi coast, whereas Milan is synonymous with fashion, design, business and the rich north of Italy. Keeping these differences in mind and the way Salerno has been portrayed, it is interesting to see how a city like Milan is depicted. Due to the difference in scale, one would expect the metropolitan imagery to be more prominent, even more so considering Milan's reputation as a hip and fashionable city. Similarly, as Milan is a prime 'city trip' destination, one would also expect tourist landmarks. If we repeat the earlier exercise and take a Google image search as an indication for the collective imagination, Milan's primary symbol seems to be the *duomo,* as the gothic cathedral is by far the most prevalent image.

The first Milanese video clip opens as expected, repeating in an exaggerated way the metropolitan imagery that has already been encountered in the Salerno videos, again relaying it in the familiar language of the drone images. The first image is of a humongous glass office building, its lights contrasting with the dark evening outside, strongly suggesting the city as the place where things happen and where working towards the future never ceases, while also highlighting the bureaucracy and rat-race aspect of the metropolis. This image is followed by a typical image of a nocturnal big city: high-rise buildings, myriad lights, and, in this instance, also a threatening blood moon completing the picture. After that, the typical car images that also appeared in the Salerno videos make a comeback. What follows, however, defies expectations. Neither hip, fashionable and contemporary Milan, nor historical 'postcard' Milan makes an appearance. Instead, after showing images of Milan as a modern metropolis, the camera swings out of the centre to showcase high towers, residential blocks under construction and factories. Finally, the camera reaches ground level with Capo and his gang coming into view - the only people that populate this video. The metropolitan imagery of the start is followed by strong post-modern elements. The camera shows deserted warehouses, urban sprawl, empty industrial sites with a definitive sense of anonymity. The images of Capo against an undisclosed building or just with the sky as background, as in 'Nisida', return. Nothing really betrays the fact that they are in Milan. In this way, the vision of Milan as a metropolitan hub is being undermined.

'Non cambierò mai' elaborates on the image of Milan as a post-modern city. The video opens with a nocturnal Milan, although it is once again not clear that it is Milan at all. There are lights and warehouses and Capo driving in an ostentatious car, driving alongside fences in what looks like the periphery of Milan. In other shots he is out of the car, rapping next to a motorway, electricity cables prominent in the shot, trucks rushing past in the background (see figure 9). The post-modern imagery also includes a spiral underground parking space, a nightclub filled with Capo and friends dressed in extravagant designer clothing, as well as expensive cars. About halfway through the video, a massive, square-shaped apartment block with a big inner courtyard takes centre stage. Capo Plaza is standing in the middle of it, the camera turning around him in circles, and then the visuals proceed to the surveying drone images. The video also ends with him, wearing rather obnoxious designer glasses, in the middle of the residential block.

Fig. 9. Capo Plaza, a car, a truck, an apartment block in peripheral Milan in Capo Plaza, *Non Cambierò Mai* (0:29)

The Milan portrayed in this video clip is the post-modern urban environment driven to the extreme. The city lacks any local identity, consisting only of anonymous concrete shapes that appear everywhere in the world (GUST 1999). In tandem with that, the video focuses exclusively on the periphery, except perhaps the fancy nightclub, which is, however, portrayed without revealing any links to a specific place. The locations chosen are highways and apartment blocks. There are no people, only cars and trucks. The expensive car as a symbol, already encountered in 'Allenamento 3', appears here too, becoming the only signifier in a deserted, desolate and completely impersonal city.

The Milan that emerges in Capo Plaza's two videos set in the city is void of both the infra-ordinary and tourist city discourse. The feeling of a sense of community - or at least the possibility of it - is completely lacking in his representation of Milan. Likewise, imagery of the modern metropolis is subverted by the insistent focus on the urban periphery. The absence of a historic centre, or indeed any kind of centre, for tourists and locals alike, can be read as a protest of this widespread imagining of the city, that, phantasmagoric in nature, pushes out other aspects of the city. By drawing attention to other sides of the city, Capo at least manages to expand the popular image of the/a city. It could also be read as that he - or youth in general – can no longer find a home in the city.[4] The Milan that remains is a post-modern, desolate landscape, made up of motorways, concrete apartment blocks, and automobility. In this Milan there are no people, only cars. This city has no identity, no history, no memory. The only signifiers left are cars and designer clothing - status symbols. The city is no longer a palimpsest of multiple stories, it is merely a collection of commodities. Whereas in the Salerno videos the phantasmagoric discourses were used in contrast with the daily life of impoverished inhabitants, thus highlighting the possibility of an alternative, what remains in Milan is only the Society of the Spectacle.

Discussion

1. Performing the urban

This analysis of Capo Plaza's visual language, formal techniques and a concrete comparison between the representation of two different cities has shown, first and foremost, that the representation of a city is not clear-cut. Capo Plaza's videos contain a wide variety of urban settings, characters and events. Images of luxury cars are interwoven with images of grandmothers living in run-down apartment flats, postcard shots of the bay of Salerno and huge, ugly construction sites. A wide variety of often clashing discourses is readily available and used, with formal techniques employed to enhance the discord, as demonstrated above.

125

Representing a city is thus achieved by always making choices. Every representation of a city or urban environment is necessarily a selection, a cumulation of choices of what to show and what to ignore in a city and is thus fundamentally incomplete. Hence, a particular representation can be very meaningful. In this light, a video clip can be seen as a performance. In the video, the city is performed as a set of backgrounds, characters and events. These performances often follow certain blueprints, sets of images and a certain language that are popular and often used to fall back on to express the city. I have traced (at least) four of those performances in Capo Plaza's work: the touristic postcard town, the modern metropolis, the post-modern/post-industrial wasteland and the 'infra-ordinary city'.

Most of these discourses can be deemed 'phantasmagoric'. The term originally denoted a nineteenth-century form of entertainment; it was a kind of lantern that enabled figures to be projected onto the wall, which was used as a framework for performances (Keunen e.a.). Marx, and later Benjamin, used the term metaphorically to interpret the fantastical and illusory elements of the commodity (ibidem). Benjamin especially broadened the concept and showed that the modern metropolis was, like a commodity, alluring: in the arcades, Haussmann boulevards and warehouses of Paris, Benjamin discovered a phantasmagoria of modernization and progress (Moore 62). The modern metropolis was no longer a mere material manifestation but also housed dreams of modernity and progress.

The Benjaminian phantasmagoria has been mainly linked to the modern metropolis. My interpretation, however, of a phantasmagoric approach to the representation of the urban, is a gaze on the city that has its roots in a dream image, leading to an idealized and stylized portrait of a city. The phantasmagoric aspect of the metropolis, for example, lies in its yearning for modernization and change. However, I do not think that is the only possible application of a phantasmagoric approach. For instance, the tourist city discussed earlier also departs from an idealized image of the city as a tourist paradise (see also Urry). Multiple stylized discourses of a city are possible: the city as a metropolitan hub, the city as a tourist postcard, the city as a hotbed of tech-innovation, the "green" city, the tolerant city, the global and hyper-connected city... the list is almost endless.

What all those discourses share, however, is that they are necessarily a limited
126

representation of the city and can thus be used to contest, nuance, aggravate each other. Capo Plaza's music videos mix and contrast multiple urban discourses to undermine widespread conceptions of (Italian) cities. The prevalent image of a city, that is to say the Modern Metropolis, is contested through an insistent representation of the urban periphery. The phantasmagoria of the modern city and the image of the Italian city as a tourist paradise, are undermined through the portrayal of the 'other side' of the city. In general, the phantasmagoric discourses are questioned through the continuous attention to the banal, infra-ordinary details of city life. The use of formal techniques like the choice of camera and editing enhances these tendencies. The prevalence of the post-modern discourse introduces some ambiguity, however. In Salerno, a sense of community and an alternative still seem possible, whereas Milan is portrayed as a desolate, post-modern city.

2. Music videos as research object
As stated in the introduction, the music video is not often used as an object of research, especially not in urban studies. This is surprising, given how much attention is paid to the city symphony, the early twentieth-century genre depicting the visual phenomena of the industrial, modern metropolis and its effect on inhabitants' mental life (Skvirsky 426, see also Simmel). Films like Joris Ivens' 'Regen' (1929) or Ruttmann's Berlin Symphony (1927) showcased the rhythms and motions of an ordinary day in the big city, as well as invoking hallmark symbols of modernity such as high-rise buildings, machines, people working in well-organized, big offices and factories - evoking both the dream of modernization and the critique of its rational organization and bureaucracy.

In my opinion, the recent medium of the music video clip portraying a city can be seen as a descendant of the genre and should receive as much attention as its historical counterpart. Just like the city symphonies, music videos are short films consisting mostly of vignettes and short clips, usually non-narrative in nature (Vernallis 3-4). Instead, as in the city symphony, in a music video, the emphasis is put on images of visual phenomena. Just like the city symphony, music videos can be very meaningful in showing how the city lives in the imagination, and even more so because they reside in the sphere of pop culture.

The aim of this article was to explore the possibilities of this medium of music video, especially in the light of urban studies, and has shown that an in-depth analysis of the various elements of a video clip such as the subject matter, lyrics, camerawork, and editing, can lead to new insights. As video clips are firmly

rooted in popular culture, they are particularly interesting in terms of analyzing the vision of the city in the popular imagination. This article - because it was explorative - was limited to one artist, but an expansion to more artists or indeed across national boundaries, could prove very fruitful. Interesting results could also be produced by focussing on one particular place and then collecting as many videos and artists as possible. To conclude, music videos are unjustifiably overlooked when in fact they could be stimulating additions to urban studies debates.

Works cited
Calcutta. "Cosa mi manchi a fare." *YouTube,* uploaded by Bomba Dischi, 27 May 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVi82wB1_Is.

Capo Plaza. "Allenamento #1 (Prod. AVA, Mojobeatz)." *YouTube*, 10 February 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfecCapWaZc.

---. "Allenamento #3 (Prod. AVA, Mojobeatz)." *YouTube,* 14 June 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTYFy86kMGg.

---. "Giovane Fuoriclasse (prod. AVA)." YouTube, 18 October 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eTlrAUNxuY.

---. "Nisida (Prod.AVA)." *YouTube,* 18 August 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8ch_CFjyMI.

---. "Non Cambierò Mai (Prod. AVA)." *YouTube*, 11 April 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJM3XxO0q5M.

---. "Non Si Ferma (Prod. AVA, Mojobeatz)." *YouTube,* 24 November 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQI8pOQHFE0.

Chambers, Iain. *Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience*. Methuen, 1986.
Debord, Guy. *La Société Du Spectacle*. Gallimard, 2000.

Finch, Jason. *Deep Locational Criticism: Imaginative Place in Literary Research and Teaching*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2016.

Gold, J. R. "Modern City". *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, edited by R. Kitchen and N. J. Thrift, Elsevier Science, 2009, pp. 150–56.

GUST (Ghent Urban Studies Team). *The Urban Condition: Space, Community, and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis*. 010 Publishers, 1999.

Harvey, David. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. Verso, 2012.

Highmore, Ben. "Introduction: Questioning Everyday Life". *The Everyday Life Reader,* edited by Ben Highmore, Routledge, 2002, pp. 1-34.

Ivens, Joris, director. *Regen*. 1929.

Ketama126. "Dolcevita (Prod. Tama)." *YouTube,* uploaded by Soldy Music, 26 April 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTM33-pxIA0.

---. "Giovane e Selvaggio (Prod. RayGotGems)." *YouTube*, uploaded by Soldy Music, 10 November 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNwwlrM2v9A.

Keunen, Bart, e.a. *Ik En De Stad: Fantasmagorie-, Ideologie- En Utopiekritiek in Literatuur En Cultuur 1800-2010*. Academia Press, 2015.

Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*. Special ed. London: Verso, 2008.

---. "Right To The City". *Writings on Cities*, translated by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1967, pp. 61–181.

Liberato. "Intostreet." *YouTube,* 2 May 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhs0fuubs1I.

---. "Je te voglio bene assaje." *YouTube*, 2 May 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tB0ApQWQTLs.

---. "Tu t'e scurdat' 'e me." *YouTube,* 9 May 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWQcDlHoE4o&t=168s.

Maccioni, Germano, director. *Gli Asteroidi.* 2017.

McQuire, Scott. *The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space.* SAGE Publications, 2008.

Moore, Ben. 'Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project'. *The Palgrave Handbook of Literature and the City*, edited by Jeremy Tambling, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 59–74.

Parker, Simon. *Urban Theory and the Urban Experience: Encountering the City.* Routledge, 2004.

Perec, Georges. *Tentative d'épuisement d'un lieu parisien.* Bourgeois, 2008.

Prakash, Gyan. *Noir Urbanisms : Dystopic Images of the Modern City.* Princeton University Press, 2010.

Railton, Diane and Paul Watson. *Music Video and the Politics of Representation.* Edinburgh University Press, 2011.

Rochira, Riccardo. "Salerno to Heaven: la scalata di Capo Plaza." *Chiamarsi Mc,* 8 September 2017, http://chiamarsimc.com/blog/salerno-to-heaven-la-scalata-di-capo-plaza/. Accessed 29 May 2019.

Ruttmann, Walter, director. *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt.* Fox Film Corporation, 1927.

Savage, Mike, and Alan Warde. "Modernity, Post-Modernity and Urban Culture". *Cities and Society*, edited by Nancy Kleniewski, Blackwell Pub, 2005, pp. 72–80.

Sieverts, Thomas. *Cities Without Cities: An interpretation of the* zwischenstadt. 1997. Spon Press, 2003.

Simmel, Georg. "The Metropolis and Mental Life." 1903. *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, edited by Richard Sennett, Meredith, 1969, pp. 47–60.

Skvirsky, Salomé Aguilera. "The postcolonial city symphony film and the 'ruins' of *Suite Habana*." *Social Identities,* vol. 19, Nos 3-4, pp. 423-439.

Sorrentino, Paolo, director. *La Grande Bellezza.* Medusa Film, 2013.

Tambling, Jeremy. "Prologue: City-Theory and Writing, in Paris and Chicago: Space,
Gender, Ethnicity". *The Palgrave Handbook of Literature and the City*, edited By Jeremy Tambling, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 1–20.

Tamburri, Anthony Julian. *Italian/American Short Films and Music Videos: A Semiotic Reading.* Purdue University Press, 2002.

Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze : Leisure and Travel In Contemporary Societies.* Sage, 2000.

Vernallis, Carol. *Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context.* Columbia University Press, 2004.

Westphal, Bertrand. *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces.* Translated by Robert Tally, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

---

[1] For example, recently certain works in the field of literary urban or spatial studies (Westphal, Finch) have emphasized the need to include sources beyond literature in the analyses of the imagination of places, like city advertisements and traveller guides. I think music videos could also be a stimulating addition.

[2] I have excluded video clips where he is only a featuring artist, 'Allenamento 2', which is filmed in a studio and thus not relevant for this article, as well as 'Tesla', which features two other rappers and focuses more on these guest appearances, even though the city is still quite prominent. He has also made two video clips in New York, but as my focus lies here on Italian cities, those videos are beyond the scope of this article.

[3] See Guy Debord and the Situationists, for example, who emphasized daily experience in the city with their technique of the dérive. Henri Lefebvre also wrote extensively on the link between the ordinary and the urban. To him, a focus on the mundane enables a revelation about how space is used, whom it belongs to and how this can be contested (Tambling 3, Harvey X).

[4] In the 2017 film 'Gli Asteroidi' (Maccioni), for example, the main characters live in the urban sprawl on the periphery of Bologna, a desolate, post-industrial wasteland with high unemployment rates. At the end of the film, the nineteen-year-old main character Pietro is given the option of moving to Milan, something that he vehemently protests against and refuses to do. Compare this to the most popular Italian 'city movie' of recent years, 'La Grande Bellezza' (Sorrentino), where, during the entire film, no young people seem to live in Rome. Perhaps the metropolitan, touristic Italian cities are no places for the young anymore.

"I got 99 performances and Facebook ain't the only one"

The Musical Persona Revisited: music performance and self-staging on social media

Tessa Vannieuwenhuyze

Over the past decade, social media has taken centre stage in our daily lives, affecting almost every aspect of contemporary society, including the prominence of digital technologies in the field of Performance Studies (Bay-Cheng 39). Nevertheless, social media itself as a performance platform has only been addressed superficially from a theatre and/or performance studies perspective. The importance of digital technologies is mostly considered either in relation to how they are introduced onto the classical theatre stage, or within the debate on performance documentation. The intrinsic value of social media as a platform for performance has not been thoroughly tackled yet. This is probably due to the long and ongoing debate regarding the notions of *liveness* and ephemerality which still dominate the field of performance. (Auslander, *Liveness*, 40) Even though performance studies certainly show a heightened interest in social media, its omnipresence still appears to be largely neglected in favour of the generally-accepted *conditio sine qua non* of theatre: physical presence. In relation to the performance of music, the live shows still seem to be considered the most legitimate focus of research, neglecting the plenitude of musical marginalia on the World Wide Web contributing to our experience of (popular) music.

The discourse rendering social media as the mere practice of superficial entertainment and a triviality needs to be counteracted. In this article I want to highlight the performative potential of, specifically, those music artists playing with theatrical presence on social media in a way that challenges conventional spectacle qualities. Within this framework, the new stage that has been introduced by twenty-first century social media will be the central focus, potentially creating a virtual space in direct dialogue with the actual public space. Using three illustrations from different backgrounds – the American hip-hop artist and queer symbol Mykki Blanco, pop princess Lana del Rey and New-Zealand indie artist Connan Mockasin - I want to point out how the tension between the *staged performances* of musical personae and the *performed stage* of social media demands investigation. By taking a closer look at these two phenomena, I will argue that the performative weight of the musical persona

Fig. 1. Boston and Dobsyn in Connan Mockasin,
Con Conn was Impatient (0:15) and (2:54)

Fig. 2. Boston and Dobsyn in Connan Mockasin,
Con Conn was Impatient (0:15) and (2:54)

proliferates beyond the live show. Musical persona performance on social media platforms can no longer be neglected from a performance studies perspective. First, I will take a look at the umbrella term 'persona', in order to dissect it specifically in terms of social media and music performance. Second, I will build on theatre scholar Charlotte Gruber's research about performing virtual spaces and bring it into contact with performances of music artists on social media. In addition, I will draw a parallel with the Foucauldian concept of the heterotopia, which will conclude my thoughts on the dual nature of online musical persona performance, as I aim to introduce a framework necessary to help comprehend the current ubiquity of selfies, videoclips and Instagram-posts in the specific context of music performance beyond the live show.

Performing a persona

Connan Mockasin is an indie artist who creates a visually and musically alienating universe by applying different forms of theatricality in his oeuvre. In October 2018 he released *Jassbusters:* an album made by a fictive band of music teachers. The way Mockasin implements a fictional narrative and accompanying characters aligns closely with the notion of a concept album, which became very popular during the last decennia of the twentieth century in rock music. Entire albums were set up as visual spectacles, very similar to the narration characterizing operas and other forms of musical theatre. Interestingly enough, Mockasin goes even further and starts playing with the phenomenon of the concept album on a meta-level.

The album culminates in an absurd melodrama in five parts called *Bostyn 'n Dobsyn:* the names of two characters which were introduced by means of video fragments posted on YouTube and Instagram prior to the release of the new album. Mockasin himself plays the role of lead guitarist Bostyn in the orange-hued 80s universe of music teachers, who have a band of their own. The main storyline then revolves around the rather bizarre infatuation of this music teacher with his pupil Dobsyn, who he mistakes for a girl (Fig. 1 and 2). The structure of the concerts during the Jassbusters tour was quite remarkable and innovative in that it was divided into three parts. The show begins with the movie *Bostyn 'n Dobsyn*, continuing with a live concert by Jassbusters, then finishing off with a gig by Connan Mockasin. All these three parts of the one-show event are creations of one and the same artist. More recently a YouTube video of Connan Mockasin doing a record signing session as Mr. Bostyn at the alternative record label and shop Rough Trade in London was also released.[1]   All of these different

appearances belong to the same entity that is Connan Mockasin.

The most obvious precedent staging similarly curious shows was the rock star David Bowie who, as an artist, repeatedly introduced the technique of inserting a conflicting and autobiographical framework into his performances (Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock* 114). A lesser-known example, which particularly highlights the endless possibilities present in this early-mediatized time frame is the French artist Serge Gainsbourg. In 1971 Gainsbourg released the concept album *Histoire de Melody Nelson,* a loosely woven story about a tumultuous, tragic and surrealistic love story between an older man – Gainsbourg himself – and a teenage girl called Melody, played by his muse and model Jane Birkin. The couple's real life relationship was a hot topic in French media at the time. Despite not performing any live shows in a classic concert format at the time, Gainsbourg was very present in terms of performance: he regularly animated the entire country during appearances on television shows. He also created a visionary film accompanying the album *Histoire de Melody Nelson,* which was broadcast just once during prime-time television (Fig. 3 and 4). The way different public appearances of Gainsbourg's personality and persona combined into something that can be recognized as an overall performance, is what Philip Auslander calls a 'musical persona'. Although the musical persona is still highly relevant, the concept needs to be seriously updated in the current media climate.

In his approach, Performance Studies pioneer Philip Auslander makes it very clear that the music is not the only the crux of the artistic practice of a music performer. The presentation of a persona is the most important element of performance (*Kunstlicht* 69). In more recent research Michael Waugh also elaborates on the weight of personae in contemporary music performance in the online realm. In his analysis, he concludes that (post-internet) music, as Auslander also previously pointed out, embraces much more than just *sound,* even though it remains the starting point of most artists (247). Despite the fact that the merging of performance and music is clearly to be situated at the intersection of theatre studies and musicology, Auslander still notes a certain reluctance by a variety of scholars towards actual engagement with these sorts of performances. He acknowledges how this mix of two artistic disciplines is usually considered from a more sociological or ethnographic angle – where the accent shifts from creation to audience reception (*Performance Analysis* 3).

Fig. 3. Serge Gainsbourg with Melody Nelson in
Serge Gainsbourg, *Histoire de Melody Nelson* (13 :
46) and (10 :19)

Fig. 4. Serge Gainsbourg with Melody Nelson in
Serge Gainsbourg, *Histoire de Melody Nelson*
(13 :46) and (10 :19)

Another striking example of the importance that online presence has gained in the context of music performance, is the way composer and sound artist Holly Herndon talks about the impossibility of disconnecting American rapper Mykki Blanco's music from his overall online presence:

> Your online presence can be part of a greater artistic gesture. An example of this is someone like Mykki Blanco. ... I don't even think he's released an album yet, but he releases all these videos and has an amazing Instagram account and is super active on social media. . . . All of this other stuff creates his whole practice. Another example would be Lil B. The idea of a Lil B album doesn't capture everything that he is. There's the 'cooking dance,' the Twitter beef, all of this other stuff that creates his whole practice. I'm looking at that a little bit. (Rogers)

The availability of the social media platforms Herndon refers to extensively expands the total performance practice of a persona. In his article focusing on *digital queering* and post humanism, Waugh advocates the consideration of the entire online self-representation of an artist (247). In hindsight, *Histoire de Melody Nelson* can be considered an early example of an artist playing with media where fiction and life already continuously infect each other. Parallel to this, Connan Mockasin's complex three-part live performance becomes a reflection on the way this self-staging of musicians has proliferated exponentially. Mockasin playfully delves further into an increasingly complicated question: where does the reality of the music performer end and the creative process of the artistic persona start?

A representation of self within the discursive domain of music?
Auslander has been working on the concept of persona in the context of theatre for more than thirty years. The basic definition describes a musical persona as a "performed presence that is neither an overtly fictional character nor simply equivalent to the performer's "real" identity" (*Musical Personae* 102). The persona concept has a broad theatrical history, linked to the use of theatre props and sound-enhancing masks that help the enhancing of certain emotions in ancient Greek theatres (Allport 27). One of the founders of the recently-established research group Persona Studies, David Marshall emphasizes how the broader definition of the word that he introduces (touching upon domains such as marketing or sociology) points out two crucial aspects of personae. By highlighting how a persona is the work of both the voice of the actor and the

mask, he shows how authenticity - the reality of the performer so to speak- and the artistically created construction, are entangled (Making Intellectual Room for Persona Studies 5-6).

David Marshall and Kim Barbour established this research domain of Persona Studies because they observed a proliferation of the "publicization of the self" (*Mapping the Proliferation of the Public Self* 154). A decade ago, Auslander was one of the first to demand more attention for the persona within the context of theatre studies, advocating the need for "a performer-centred theory of musical performance" (*Musical Personae* 103). He called it a form of non-conventional acting, something that essentially links together performance art and music. (*Kunstlicht* 63). The dynamic he pinpoints and which follows the shift to a sociological approach of a performance-based subject, is the fact that he, contrary to others who have engaged with the performance aspect of music performance, not only focuses on self-expression, but explains himself in terms of self-presentation (*Musical Personae* 103). Persona Studies as an academic discipline relies precisely on this point of view.

Auslander concurrently points out how the musical persona embraces several levels in his division between a real performing persona and a created persona: the fictional body. Meanwhile he also introduces the fictional body as a changeable entity during the performance of certain tracks, which he conceptualizes as the "song character" (*Performance Analysis* 11). Ultimately, however, his categorization remains rather rigid. Although Auslander created quite a comprehensive schematization concerning the intertwining of different genre conventions and possible personae, it is difficult to transfer this framework to contemporary musical persona performances spread out across different (social media) platforms. Likewise, the unique position of personae within the field of music studies has been picked up in a recent edition of the Persona Studies journal, even though, remarkably, most authors only briefly touch on social media performance in their essays.

An illustration of how this model does not cover the contemporary complex context of persona-performance is the way Mockasin presents the figure of Don Dicaprio. Mockasin's take on American actor Leonardo DiCaprio appears within the context of his second album *Caramel,* but also exists as a stand-alone performance. There are several amateur videos on YouTube featuring the impersonation of this actor. He appears as a cameo in his sultry videoclip for *I'm*

140

The Man That Will Find You and features in an interview where Mockasin interviews himself performing a caricature of the actor. His gimmick requires only a few facial expressions, a baseball cap and some mumbling. Making a direct connection between Mockasin's performance of Don DiCaprio and his musical legacy might seem like a very futile movement, nevertheless it is crucial to understanding the whole of Mockasin's artistic practice and his characteristic performance-aesthetics. He performs in a place where alienation and marginality reign; Don DiCaprio is just another facet partaking of that parallel world.

A large variety of other examples could be placed alongside this embodiment of a character on different levels, but Mockasin also has the tendency to profile himself as 'Conch' on other social media platforms. By doing this, he brings in a layer of digital language to his persona in a very ironic way that once again complicates Auslander's schematization. Although his Twitter-profile seems to be intended for the promotion of his music and concerts, he displays a number of quite remarkable performative actions closely related to what language philosopher John Austin termed the 'performative utterance' (6). He changes his usual tone of self-promotion as well as the channel for his direct contact with fans into something that resists categorization, revealing the performativity at stake (Fig. 5).

An even more recent example which veers into the same direction is that of the YouTube sensation Timothy Gonzales who became an internet sensation in 2018 under the moniker of Jimothy Lacoste. Jimothy entered the scene with homemade music videos that he posted on YouTube, which were characterized by "his trademark hip wiggle in a succession of primary-coloured slacks" (Samways). Besides the colour palette of the personal style that makes up his DIY-musician persona, the traces of digital words that he leaves behind also play an important role within the overall set-up of his persona (Fig. 6). He regularly uses the catchphrase "LIGQE": an abbreviation of "Life is Getting Quite Exciting". As a youngster who grew up in the streets of London without much stability and surrounded by rich children, he appropriates this sort of motivational speech to build his own universe where he focuses on making a career and building a successful future for himself. Such (digital) statements are yet another element contributing to Jimothy's world of groovy dance moves and flashy designer items which clearly stand out from the classic script of rap music and street style.

Fig. 5. @ConnanMockasin. *Twitter,* 26 December
2015, 7:51 a.m.
https://twitter.com/connanmockasin/status/
680642047347310596

Fig. 6. @jimothylacoste. People get frustrated when they
see us using clothes as art. Link in bio #ExpressUrself."
Instagram, 28 September 2018.
www.instagram.com/p/BoRvfWilEJA/

The online musical persona in an *Age of Performance*

The online musical persona deserves particular attention in an age where performance is being labelled by thinkers such as John McKenzie as being one of the most pervasive phenomena of our time (176). Although the idea of online musical personae has occasionally cropped up in specific literature, in most cases it is being used to work on persona appearances in explicitly virtual worlds that are no longer connected with music performance on an actual stage. Ethnomusicologist Trevor S. Harvey, for example, uses the concept of online musical personae to write about artists performing in the virtual world of the online game Second Life (181). This is not the equivalent of what I situate under the label of musical persona, because I believe it is crucial to include and investigate the connection with classic live shows which have certainly not disappeared. I do not assert the existence of a radical opposition between online performance on the one hand, and artists performing during a live show on the other. Rather than supplanting the classic conception of a live show by musicians, I want to suggest how online performance becomes an essential element within a total assemblage in Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) sense, taking into account "complex configurations that are heterogeneous, transitory, and fluid" (O'Neill, 84).

This is partly connected to the ever-complicated definition of notions such as 'theatricality' and 'performativity'. Based on the foundations created by Judith Butler in relation to gender performativity and John Austin's performative utterances, performance philosopher Teemu Paivolainen describes their oscillating character as:

> (..) metaphors of human existence, the idioms of theatricality and performativity both fluctuate between values of novelty and normativity: theatricality, between the essence of an art form and a cultural value variously opposed or embraced, performativity, between doing and dissimulation. (172)

Paavolainen's assumption reappears in the main argument following feminist musicologist Sheila Whiteley's analysis of American pop star Taylor Swift. In *Sexploitation and Constructions*, she focusses on the SM-references in the work of mainstream pop star Taylor Swift. In this specific case she tackles the idea of onstage femininity, which is clearly a magnified version of the role of women in daily life. A performance can only exist because of present performativity: it entails a voluntary movement or act contrasting with the prevalent norm.

Performative elements always rely on repeating and confirming certain social scripts, directly connected to a certain degree of normativity. Despite the SM-references present in Swift's show, Whiteley concludes that Swift does not really contest already-existing frames of reference or representations of women. She denounces it as a mere repetition of already fixed conceptions about the female pop star (18-19). The same critical approach is interesting to extrapolate to other categories of so-called performances including self-staging in the realm of music. It is not unimportant to once again draw attention to the fact that persona practice can be both play as well as possible critique, mirroring the actual difference between theatre and performance.

Yet the online persona cannot be completely disconnected from theatricality in its most traditional sense. Focusing more strongly on the specific circumstances social media introduces, media scholar Zizi Papacharissi sees a direct link in her research between Twitter communication and the conventions of theatre: a written script, symbolism, accessories, requisites, drama and last but not least: an (imaginary) audience (1989). All of these elements play an equally important role in the personae of Mockasin, Lana Del Rey and Mykki Blanco, the case-studies I rely on as interesting exceptions to the neoliberal performance that characterizes the majority of online presences. Precisely the persona as an explicitly theatrical concept simultaneously implying a 'real' presentation of the self, opens up alternatives highlighting the interplay between spectacle and performative potential.

Showing one's true colours: selfies as staged performances

A glance at the already-mentioned examples shows the importance of the social component connected to online performance practices, simultaneously aligning and conflicting with traditional theatre and performance studies frameworks. The contested absence of physical co-presence as a prerequisite is what Marshall depicts as directly connected to the shift from a representational cultural regime to a cultural regime of presentation complicating our use and understanding of media (*Celebrity Persona Pandemic* 5). It not only inherently broaches the notion of persona with the ambiguity between real and artificial, but also with a changed media regime. Gender and music specialist Christa Brüstle emphasizes this duality in *Popfrauen der Gegenwart* when she claims that both voice and body these days function within an entire performance set-up and self-staging strategies (7). A curious example closely related to persona performance these days, is the act of taking selfies[2]
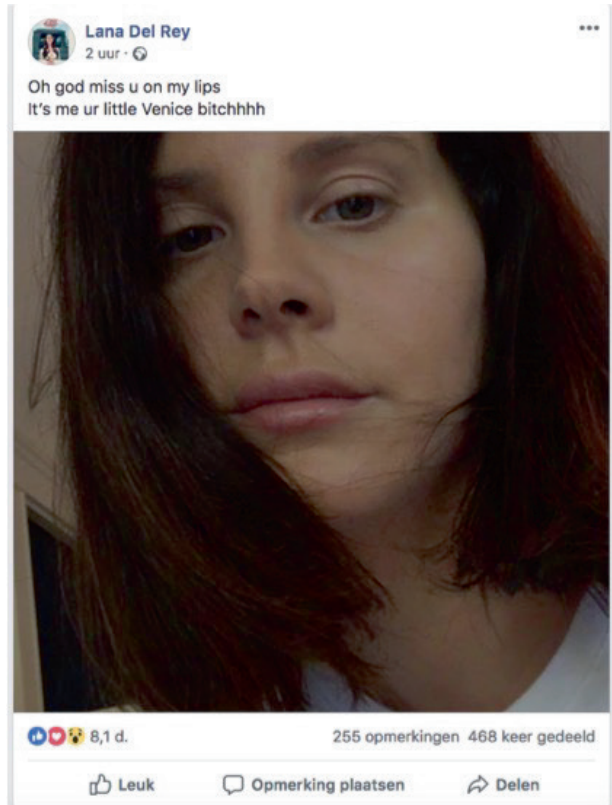
Fig. 7. Lana Del Rey. Selfie with lyrics. *Facebook*, 17
September 2018, 10:08 p.m.
https://www.facebook.com/lanadelrey/photos/a.
720244504684669/2262967527079018/?type=3&theater

Around the release of her 2018 single *Venice Bitch*, pop star Lana Del Rey posted a selfie accompanied by lyrics on her Facebook page (Fig. 7). On her Instagram account she regularly uploads similar content. The phenomenon of selfies introduces yet another debate regarding performance and performative elements. Performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan approaches this form of self-generated digital portraiture (Senft & Baym 1589) as a *staged performance*, connecting self-portraiture and performance. Referring to visual artist Cindy Sherman, she emphasizes the discord between, on the one hand, the selfie as a very normative practice, motivated by a neoliberal discourse (Lepecki 175) and, on the other hand, the possibilities it offers for contesting the same norms by appropriating the script connected to it. Phelan underlines this connection by showing how Sherman inscribes herself with her photography in historical representations of women, opening up towards self-performance. Her embodiment of representation, as a very porous given, then becomes the central element (Phelan).

Besides being an avid selfie-poster, the ambiguous nature of the selfie is also typical of the artistic performance of Lana Del Rey. On the one hand, she approaches her audience in a way that suggests directness, for example with the amateur approach of the short video snippets she posts on social media, as well as in her music videos. On the other hand, the entire aesthetic she has been exploring during the last decade, reminds us of times long gone, introducing a kind of historical distance concerning the various scripts of what it means to be a woman and a superstar. Faded video colours, outfits in pastel pink and baby blue and the film noir detail of the femme fatale with blood red nail polish and lipstick quickly became her trademark and often-recurring themes in song lyrics.

The videoclip for her hit single *Videogames* shows several short snippets of Del Rey posing for her webcam, a predecessor to taking selfies with a smartphone. Meanwhile, she emulates the exact look of old school celebrities: Priscilla Presley, Marilyn Monroe and Jackie Kennedy in the clip for her single *National Anthem* (Fig. 8)*,* or even Virgin Mary in her movie *Tropico* (Fig. 9).

Fig. 8. Lana Del Rey as Jackie Kennedy in Lana Del
Rey, *National Anthem* (2:30)

Textually, she also appropriates the figure of Lolita, writer Vladimir Nabokov's nymphet, as she opens the song *Off With The Races* with the famous words "Light of my life, fire of my loins". More recent looks and imagery show how she does not limit herself to this explicit vintage approach, or at least she is gradually making it less explicit whilst still holding onto her retro image. She does not aim to be very exact anymore when copying historically correct fashion looks. She just adopts the elements that fit her narrative. Her ambiguous approach once again emphasizes how the musical persona is primarily a multi-stable construction. The importance of online appearance was underlined even more clearly when the American artist deleted everything from her Instagram account in September 2017 (Britton). This caused a considerable amount of online turmoil, something that also characterized her entry into the world of show business. During her appearance on the popular show *Saturday Night Live* in 2012, numerous critics interpreted her mediocre and nervous appearance as evidence of inauthenticity, which was along the same lines as the rumours that she had undergone plastic surgery in order to create her signature plump lips.

Fig. 9. Lana Del Rey as Virgin Mary in Lana Del Rey,
Tropico (13:51)

Del Rey obviously plays with the homogeneity characterizing certain crystalized patterns regarding femininity. The main question is whether she is just trying to iconize herself using these new strategies of self-staging, or effectively questioning certain adopted scripts. Referring to Adorno's and Horkheimer's rather pessimistic view on popular culture, literary scholar Cathérine Vigier actually interprets the case of Del Rey as a counter- example. Contrary to most observations, she extracts a different reading from the nostalgia for a different gender relation typical of her overarching narrative. In the light of the complex character of a musical persona in the twenty-first century, I partly agree with this. According to Vigier, Del Rey actively engages with gender performativity through constantly re-embodying already existing images of women, whilst simultaneously questioning them (8). The more diffuse boundaries created by leaping from representation to presentation, graft onto an operative framework of values. Staging becomes executing, changing gender identity in everyday life, which brings about that "(…) aufführen zum Ausführen wird und damit rückwirkt auf das Konstituieren von Geschlechteridentitäten im Alltag" (Flath, 42).

Although this tends to be interpreted as Del Rey re-inscribing certain old-fashioned stereotypes, and subsequently not being of any critical value, I precisely think that it is necessary to highlight the embodiment of so-called problematic stereotypes that are being used as a tactic in order to tackle them from the inside. Aesthetic attraction opens up in her work a critical questioning of traditional images without necessarily destroying them, which is the power of creative appropriation. Both the anonymity and extreme exposure that social media platforms provide enable these features. The accessibility of a screen that we carry around at all times; a stage that we can access with only one swipe of the omnipresent mobile device, has major repercussions for artists' self-staging.

A space of appearance
In the previously-cited article on the contemporary music world, Waugh emphasizes the interplay between *staged performances* on social media and social media becoming a *performed stage.* Due to the disappearing distinction between online and offline, our understanding of spatiality in relation to performance has shifted. Children of the post-Internet era are less and less able to distinguish between online and offline identities. Waugh observes " (…) digital media's impact on the 'real world' that is critical to Post-Internet identity politics" whilst also recognizing that "real life' activities simultaneously inform the construction of these networks and the personas presented on them" (237). The mix of both is

shown when he explores the music project of duo Justin Swinburne and Samia Mirza. On stage, the duo introduce images referring to virtual worlds that resemble our daily environment, such as the virtual world of *Second Life*, whilst at the same time underlining the inherent intertwining between performing a persona in an actual space and a virtual one by performing live on stage (241).

Waugh's work is useful in making sense of Instagram as a site for performance in the virtual public space. Instagram stories are a feature that the social network platform has provided since 2016. It allows users to share images as ephemeral 'stories', meaning that these images disappear after 24 hours, in contrast to usual Instagram posts. American rapper Mykki Blanco uses the application frequently, also during his time at the Brussels' arts festival Kunstenfestivaldesarts. As he was invited to present some of his poetry during the evening programme *Beyond the Codes* in 2017, Blanco not only performed on the stage set-up in the Dynasty Building, he also did so on the social network. The queer idol that started her career as a performance artist –by posting YouTube videos - was dressed during this event in a cream wedding gown with a bustier. Even before spitting around rap verses during the actual scheduled concert, she had already started to dance outside the venue in public in this outfit and running around in the surrounding gardens while her fans were left inside the hall (Fig. 10). Her assistant captured this performance with a smartphone camera which almost none of the fans that were actually present witnessed directly. The heavy white material of her dress created a visually enchanting scene for Instagram followers watching the continuous online performance of Mykki Blanco. In his most recent publication, Auslander defends the idea of a "fusion of horizons" to make sense of live art and theatre performances and their documented pendants. Similarly, Mykki Blanco's persona performance needs to be read in terms of a "fusion of physical and digital selves" (Waugh, 242), including both self-staging online and on an actual stage.

Blanco performing her persona in a real public space, a park around Brussels' central station, and sharing it on the social networking application Instagram, raises the question whether these social media platforms can be a virtual equivalent or only an addition to our current comprehension of public space? Can social media actually fulfil this function? The display of a so-called authentic identity is central to this, which in our current cultural climate flies in the face of the contradictory force of staging multiple identities.

Fig. 10. @MykkiBlanco. "Running around in wedding
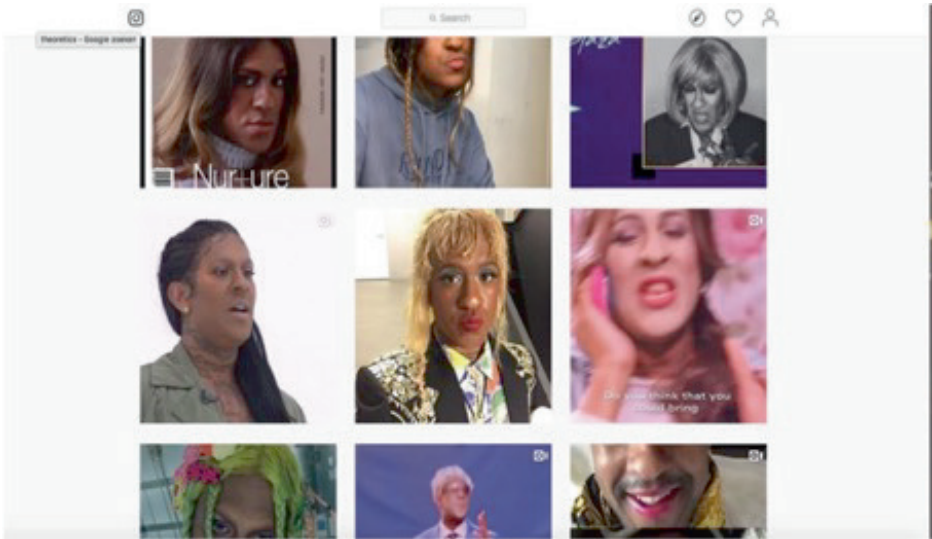gown" *Instagram stories*, 6 May 2017

Fig. 11. @MykkiBlanco. *Instagram,*
www.instagram.com/mykkiblanco/

Theatre scholar Charlotte Gruber investigated a dynamic that relates to these questions in her research on virtual performances *InterActions. Performing Actual and Virtual Spaces as Stages of Inter-est.* In order to show how spaces can be performed, introducing a valuable performance practice negotiating alienation inherent to the human condition, she bases her theoretical framework on the work of philosopher Hannah Arendt. She looks mainly into interactive performances using network devices to occupy and regenerate the potential of public space, which renders them inherently political. The key questions at stake in her research are actually only a step away from considering musical persona performance and its possibility of resurrecting a virtual public space.

In her selection of alternative performances that she considers worth analyzing, Gruber draws on an analogy with the terminology Arendt uses in her research to conceptualize human essence. In *The Human Condition,* Arendt discusses public space as a locus parallel to that of a performed stage. To resurrect a *performed space,* whether virtual or actual, a *space of appearance* is needed. Arendt's argument that these spaces need to be actualized all the time, bleeds into what Judith Butler later called 'iterability', a constant repetition of this negotiation. The disclosure of identity should intertwine interaction and performance. Although Arendt's theory in a historical perspective seems to deal with a more radical understanding of both authentic and true identity, I propose a reading of Arendt's identity and self-disclosure, connected to her definition of politics per se, adapted more closely to our present context of fragmented performance. It is essentially a construct, an endless assemblage of elements that we group together into what we consider to be an identity that we can stage.

In order to make sense of this more ambivalent understanding of performing an identity, without dismissing authenticity, the persona as an equally transitory zone can help to make sense of it. Its inherently dual character takes into account both the roots of personality and the theatrical history that the persona adds as a tradition on the one hand, with the superfluous stage of social media inherently connected these days to being a music artist, on the other.

Due to an extreme use of spectacular elements entangled with underlying political intentions, Mykki Blanco is an interesting case-study (Fig. 11). Blanco doesn't shy away from engaging in political discussions on his Facebook artist page, just as he doesn't separate the colourful imaginings (both literal and figurative) of being a queer, HIV-positive, black artist. Because of the impact

these celebrity figures can have, interaction lies at the core of their musical persona. What looks like an explosion of elements of spectacle assembling into one stage identity, does not distort his or her personal political agency, and vice versa.

Taking a step back once more and returning to the question of online and virtual public space, it should be recognized that not every public space necessarily has the ability to become a *space of appearance* in the sense that Arendt initially intended it to have. More common are forms of pseudo-agency, as Gruber calls it (30). This is also the case for the majority of musical personae we can detect, both online and offline. Their intention is not only to challenge ideas dominating our daily environment and social relationships; it is based on the disclosure of their true private selves, beliefs and deep desires. Despite this, I would argue that some of them succeed intervening in current discourses in ways that can be considered political. However, they do so by employing a creative, playful, artificial and, ultimately, thoroughly performed persona. The accent needs to be on the *performative utterance* and its constant actualisation as a main condition that needs to be fulfilled. Gruber gives the general example of a YouTube channel in her research to illustrate a related statement. A music performer, as well as any other user, is free to present anything he wants on there. Nevertheless, this doesn't guarantee it to be a *space of appearance*, as much of the content is more or less usurped by a neoliberal and capitalist logic.

The way Phelan looks at the selfie as both a threat and an opportunity comes down to the same thing. A space characterized by a certain degree of performativity, does not automatically constitute a valuable performance, does not spontaneously call into question accumulated assumptions about identity and self-staging, and hence does not correspond to Arendt's use of the term *inter-est.* Gruber's interpretation of the state of *inter-esse* in some interactive theatre performances, generates a framework just as interesting in order to interpret certain musical persona performances as a negotiation of a place where a person can fully express an identity, without being subjected to norms or traditional scripts – although the latter should probably be re-evaluated in a day and age when it has become impossible to escape these.

Places of transgression and the heterotopia
In the final section of this paper, I want to tie together both the dual character of performing the persona as a practice rooted in the foundations of performance

studies and the previously discussed understanding of public space as a stage for the persona. I would like to posit that contemporary online persona performance in some cases could be understood in terms of creating a heterotopia with more or less powerful political implications.

Foucault defined the idea of heterotopia during a lecture he gave in 1967 precisely as a space in-between the mythical and real: "ces espaces différents, ces autres lieux, une espèce de contestation à la fois mythique et réelle de l'espace où nous vivons." He calls these spaces mythical, because they rely partly on a thought construction, but at the same time stay very close to the physical experience of the spaces we encounter in daily life. Some spaces connected to persona performance also open up a demarcated location where traditional norms are reversed. Brüstle calls this: "Gegen-Raume, in denen die moralische Normen der traditionelle Räume ausser Kraft gesetzt werden" (105). Although these spaces regulate reality differently, they ought to be distinguished from utopias, as the utopia is pronouncedly more undefined and intangible.

An interpretation of the contemporary musical persona in relation to heterotopia includes contested 'realness', appropriating attributes of the real (Halberstam 51), yet setting up an alternative universe. Although this was already possible on a physical stage in a sense, its expansion with a virtual equivalent enhances the heterotopic qualities even further. Both the oscillation between theatricality and performativity and the selfie as an ambiguous practice point towards a liminal space, a space where transition towards a different reality might begin to be imagined. The musical persona in a contemporary Internet culture possesses the possibility of resurrecting a stage where marginalized identities can be seen. The overlap between the online and physical stage only enhances heterotopic qualities, which relates to Arendt's notion of *inter-esse* in terms of centralizing interaction and identity.

The musical persona spreads its wings and does not solely (re)present an identity, but also centralizes this identity within our complex day-to-day universe. Reinforcing this point of view is the way in which Auslander has actually already labelled the musical persona as a laboratory, a place for experimentation: "A performance practice through which alternative realities could be enacted and tested" (*Performing Glam Rock* 228). Exactly this aspect of the concept that Auslander pinpoints opens up a whole new perspective for research on musical personae.

The recurrence of spaces deviating from common understandings of social relations and/or identity is striking in theatre scholar Vito Pinto's analysis of Del Rey's music video *Ride* from 2012 (Fig. 12). He brings to the fore the way in which the depicted locations in the video emphasize her earlier role of 'the other woman' as discussed previously. Places such as the motel, the highway, the hotel room, the night club or the desert function as "Orte(n) des Übergangs", places of transition. Essentially, these more common places of public space dealing with deviant identities concentrate just as much on the transgressive character of a liminal space where a certain display of identity is being critically questioned (127).

It makes sense to approach Del Rey as an artist who cites these transgressive spaces in her own performed intermediate universe that she presents mostly online, as an element within her entire creation of a musical persona. The heterotopical quality of the spaces is key to her colourful narrative as a music artist. It is always a game whereby she uses physical, imaginary and (by extension) digital spaces through which she negotiates her identity around the topoi of what it means to be a woman in the twenty-first century. Her contested views on feminism also play a role within this, although there is no room in this paper to expand on this.

Music sociologist Rosa Reitsamer gives yet another interpretation of the heterotopic space as a crucial part of the musical persona in her essay *Popfrauen der Gegenwart,* as she uses the word "pornotopia" for what American artist Peaches does as a musician (105). The word, derived from Foucault's heterotopia, indicates female sexuality as its main target. In order to create her controversial musical universe, Peaches appropriates and adapts the conventional male-driven framework of pornography to her own preferences. Nonetheless, Peaches' work does not become any less sex-centered because of this, or indeed less spectacular, quite the opposite. Approaching the spectacle of music performance from this perspective touches upon the afterlife of situationist Guy Debord's works. Peaches' universe accesses this criticality not just by rejecting what she's reacting against, but by staying within (Best 129). As such, she fulfils Debord's demand to critique the spectacle on the one hand, whilst realizing that there is no way to go beyond it, to really criticize it from within an ivory tower, on the other. Colour and play will always be a necessary element and acknowledging the spaces where these can transform into critical thought, is the first step towards further exploration of the phenomenon.

Fig. 12. The motel in Lana Del Rey, *Ride* (1:05)

Apotheosis

Social media as a performance platform and the performances of musical personae therein remains relatively unexplored terrain. They touch, however, on core issues of performance studies by oscillating between triggering social change and spectacle. The examples discussed here reveal themselves to rely, to a large extent, on a digital space that has much in common with the actual public space. Gruber's reading of performances in the public space, which she connects to Arendt's *space of appearance*, makes it possible to gain a more thorough insight into the self-staging of musicians, just as the Foucauldian understanding of a heterotopia does.

The apparent merging of online performance and live performance supports and likewise questions the conventional comprehension of live music performance and the radically different character of its documented forms, which Auslander already pointed out. Mykki Blanco, Connan Mockasin and Lana del Rey each highlight in their own way how embodiment, performative language utterance and image processing are essential parts of their self-staging, a chiasmic and performative dynamic between the *staged performance* of a musical persona and the *performed stage* it has been occupying in recent times. Online appearances of musical personae can be considered as a dense assemblage of various performative pieces of the puzzle; something that will hopefully be taken into consideration and examined more closely in the future.

Works cited

Allport, G.W. *Personality: A psychological interpretation.* New York: Holt, 1937.

Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a mediatized culture.* London: Routledge, 1999.

---. *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009.

---. *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018.

---. "Digital Liveness: A Historico-Philosophical Perspective." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 34:3 (2012): 3-11.

---. "Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto". *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14:1 (2004): 1-13.

---. "Musical Personae." *The Drama Review* 50:1 (2006): 100 – 119.

---. "On the Concept of Persona in Performance," *Kunstlicht* 1 (2015): 62-79.

Austin, J.L. *How to do things with Words*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975.

Bay-Cheng, S. "Digital Culture." *Performance Studies: Key Words, Concepts, and Theories.* Eds. Bryan Reynolds. London: Palgrave, 2014. 39-49.

Best, Steven, and Douglas Kellner. "Debord, Cybersituations, and the Interactive Spectacle." *SubStance* 28:3 (1999): 129-56.

Britton, Luke Morgan. "Lana del Rey deletes all her Instagram photos and most of her Tweets." 5/09/2017. *NME,* 15 September 2017, www.nme.com/news/music/lana-del-rey-deletes-instagram-photos-tweets-2134305#disqus_thread. Accessed 30 October 2018.

Brüstle, Christa. *Popfrauen der Gegenwart: Körper – Stimme – Image. Vermarktungsstrategien zwischen Selbstinszenierung und Fremdbestimmung.* Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015.

Del Rey, Lana. "National Anthem." *YouTube,* 5 September 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxDdEPED0h8.

---. "Ride." *YouTube,* 12 October 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Py_-3di1yx0.

---. "Tropico (Short Film)." *YouTube,* 6 December 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwuHOQLSpEg&t=307s.

---. "Video Games." *YouTube*, 16 October 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cE6wxDqdOV0.

Engdahl, Christopher. "The Transtemporality of Online Performance." *Performance Research* 21:5 (2016): 107-10.

Fairchild, Charles and P David Marshall. "Music and Persona: An Introduction." *Persona Studies* 5 :1 (2019): 1-16.

Foucault, Michel. "Des Espaces Autres." *Empan* 2:54 (2004): 12-19.

Gainsbourg, Serge. "Histoire de Melody Nelson." *Vimeo,* uploaded by LeGouter, 17 October 2011, https://vimeo.com/30678737.

Gruber, Charlotte. *Interactions: Performing Actual and Virtual Spaces as Stages of Inter-est.* Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2013.

Halberstam, Judith. *In Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

Harvey, Trevor S. "Avatar Rockstars: Constructing Musical Personae in Virtual Worlds." *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality.* Eds. Sheila Whiteley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 171-191.

Hess, Aaron. "The selfie assemblage." *International Journal of Communication* 9:1 (2015): 1629-1646.

Keunen, Bart. *Ik en de stad: fantasmagorie-, ideologie- en utopiekritiek in literatuur en cultuur 1800-2010*. Ghent : Gent Academia Press, 2015.

Lepecki, André. *Singularities: dance in the age of performance.* Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.

O'neill, Susan A. "Young people's musical lives." *Handbook of musical identities* Eds. Macdonald. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 79 – 104.

Marshall, P. David en Kim Barbour. "Making intellectual room for persona studies: a new consciousness and a shifted perspective." *Persona Studies* 1:1 (2015): 1-12.

Marshall, P. David. *The Celebrity Persona Pandemic.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

McKenzie, John. *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance.* Abingdon: Routledge, 2001.

Mockasin, Connan. "#1 Amsterdam Acoustics "in depth"- Connan Mockasin." *Vimeo,* uploaded by Jeroen van der Poel, 17 April 2010, https://vimeo.com/10996702.

Mockasin, Connan. "Con Conn Was Impatient." *YouTube*, 15 August 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBf-EBSgWnw.
Paavolainen, Teemu. "Fabric Philosophy: The "Texture" of Theatricality and Performativity." *Performance Philosophy Journal,* 2:2 (2017): 172-188.

Papacharissi, Zizi. "Without You, I'm Nothing: Performances of the Self on Twitter." *International Journal of Communication* 6 (2012): 1990 – 2004.

Pinto, Vito. "Geboren um zu sterben. Lana del Reys melodramatischer American Dream." *Popfrauen der Gegenwart: Körper – Stimme – Image. Vermarktungsstrategien zwischen Selbstinszenierung und Fremdbestimmung*. Eds. Christa Brüstle. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015. 115-134.

Phelan, Peggy & Ashley Farmer. "The Selfie as a feminist act." 15 May 2015, http://gender.stanford.edu/news/2014/selfie-feminist-act. Accessed 20 September 2018.

Rogers, John. "Future aesthetics: Holly Herndon pushes the boundaries." 8 February 2016, https:// grapevine.is/sonarreykjavik/2016/02/08/9944689/. Accessed 12 October 2018.

Rymarczuk, Robin. "The heterotopia of Facebook." *Philosophy Now* 107 (2015). https://philosophynow.org/issues/107/The_Heterotopia_of_Facebook. Accessed 18 October 2018.

Samways, Gemma. "Jimothy Lacoste preaches the positives of aspiration, acceptance and convincing the world that he's a spoilt rich kid." *Loud and Quiet, 29 November* 2018, https://www.loudandquiet.com/interview/jimothy-lacoste-preaches-the-positives-of-aspiration-acceptance-and-convincing-the-world-that-hes-a-spoilt-rich-kid/. Accessed 28 August 2019.

Savigny, Heather et al. *Media, Margins and Popular Culture.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Senft, Theresa en Nancy Baym. "What Does the Selfie Say? Investigating a Global Phenomenon." *International Journal of Communication* 9:1 (2015): 1588 – 1606.

Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play.* New York: PAJ publications, 2004.

Waugh, Michael. "'My Laptop Is an Extension of My Memory and Self': Post-Internet Identity, Virtual Intimacy and Digital Queering in Online Popular Music." *Popular Music* 36:2 (2017): 233-51.

Whiteley, Sheila. "Sexploitation and Constructions of Femininity in Contemporary She-Pop." *Pop-Frauen der Gegenwart: Körper -Stimme - Image. Vermarktungsstrategien zwischen Selbstinszenierung und Fremdbestimmung.* Eds. Christa Brüstle. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015. 17-32.

---

[1] Mockasin, Connan. "Connan Mockasin as Mr Bostyn – Live at Rough Trade." YouTube. 16 July 2019. https://youtu.be/9NlloV4V6BA.

[2] A selfie is a form of self-portraiture typically created using smartphones or webcams and shared on social media networks (Hess 1629). The word was added to the Oxford Dictionary in 2013.

Portfolio

Why Drag?

Observations and Notes on Drag & Drag Performance during a Time of Drag Popularity

Simon Baetens

Fig. 1. *Face it*
Collage by Simon Baetens

1. What is drag?

> Drag can be used as an adjective or a noun. As a noun it means the clothing of one sex when worn by the other sex (a suit and tie worn by a woman also constitutes drag). The ability to "do drag" is widespread in the gay world, and many of the larger social events include or focus on drag ("drag balls","costume parties", etc.) [1]
> (Esther Newton - *Mother Camp: female impersonators in America*, 1972)

The tradition of drag performance is not a recent phenomenon. With records of cross-dressing in Elizabethan theatre, folk traditions and opera, it has a rich, yet rather sparsely documented, history. Recently, drag has made a remarkable mainstream resurgence. Social media such as Instagram, YouTube & Tumblr (to name but a few) as well as television shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race* and *Dragula* give the art of drag a platform widespread visibility. Drag representation in popular culture is increasingly driven *by* drag performers, resulting in a more accurate and varied representation of drag in the media.

Before this, drag was mostly something straight cis male characters engaged in for amusement (with the execution of make-up and clothing often being intentionally trashy rather than polished) and when real drag performers were actually cast, it was mostly as a prop or extra. There is, however, also an impressive amount of underground cultural activity that has been far more successful at including drag in ways that do justice to the art form. Now that drag is more easily accessible and that more interesting forms of drag have gained visibility in mainstream media, a rapidly increasing number of people enjoy the entertainment drag provides. This has resulted in a vast business including drag merchandise and worldwide tours starring fans' favourites from *Drag Race.*

Drag is also a hot topic in both the beauty and fashion industries, with numerous endorsements and collaborations between famous drag queens and big brands currently being forged. Countless make-up artists, so-called 'gurus' when they have a large following, have delved into drag-inspired make-up looks and a number of drag performers have extended their platform through online content.

2. Why drag?
The effects of drag's increasing popularity are not strictly commercial, however. By introducing the age-old tradition of drag to a new, younger audience, more

and more people have become interested in getting into drag themselves. What often starts as a Halloween costume, quickly evolves into a very expensive and time-consuming hobby. Drag has a way of taking over: first your house, then your life. What was once a *niche* activity and something to be ashamed of (and which, depending on the milieu, often still is), has almost become a high-brow, hipster activity, a lifestyle even. Rather, it presents itself as a lifestyle. Drag performers who are financially dependent on drag alone often spend more than they earn, thereby sometimes marginalizing themselves in the process. Even queens who are able to make a decent living from drag (notably the ones who have been on 'Drag Race'), invest large amounts of their income back into their drag activities in order to keep developing something new.

If not for financial gain, why would someone choose to do drag? Most people who dabble in drag describe how this hyper-real art form helps them discover and express parts of their identity that had previously remained uncharted territory. *Liberation* is a word that is often used to describe the feeling people experience when they are in drag. Incidentally, it is not just gay cis men who do drag. The trans community and drag community have been closely intertwined from the beginning and despite some people believing that doing drag as a trans person is 'cheating', numerous trans drag performers exist.

The art of drag is closely connected to gender identity: many people start to question the gender they were assigned once they start blurring conventions of wardrobe, hair and make-up. Cis women do drag too. They are sometimes called *hyperqueens* or *bioqueens,* though the latter is deemed insensitive because it assumes that gender is a biological, irrefutable fact. In general, drag celebrates *genderfuck* attitudes: pointing out that gender expression is constructed precisely by *deconstructing* it through subversion and exaggeration.

Fig. 2. *Becoming Electra, Nightshift*
Vooruit Ghent, September 2019.
Picture by Leontien Allemeersch

Fig. 3. Pre-show *Electra* with Susan from Grindr,
Urban Art Festival Bruges, April 2019.
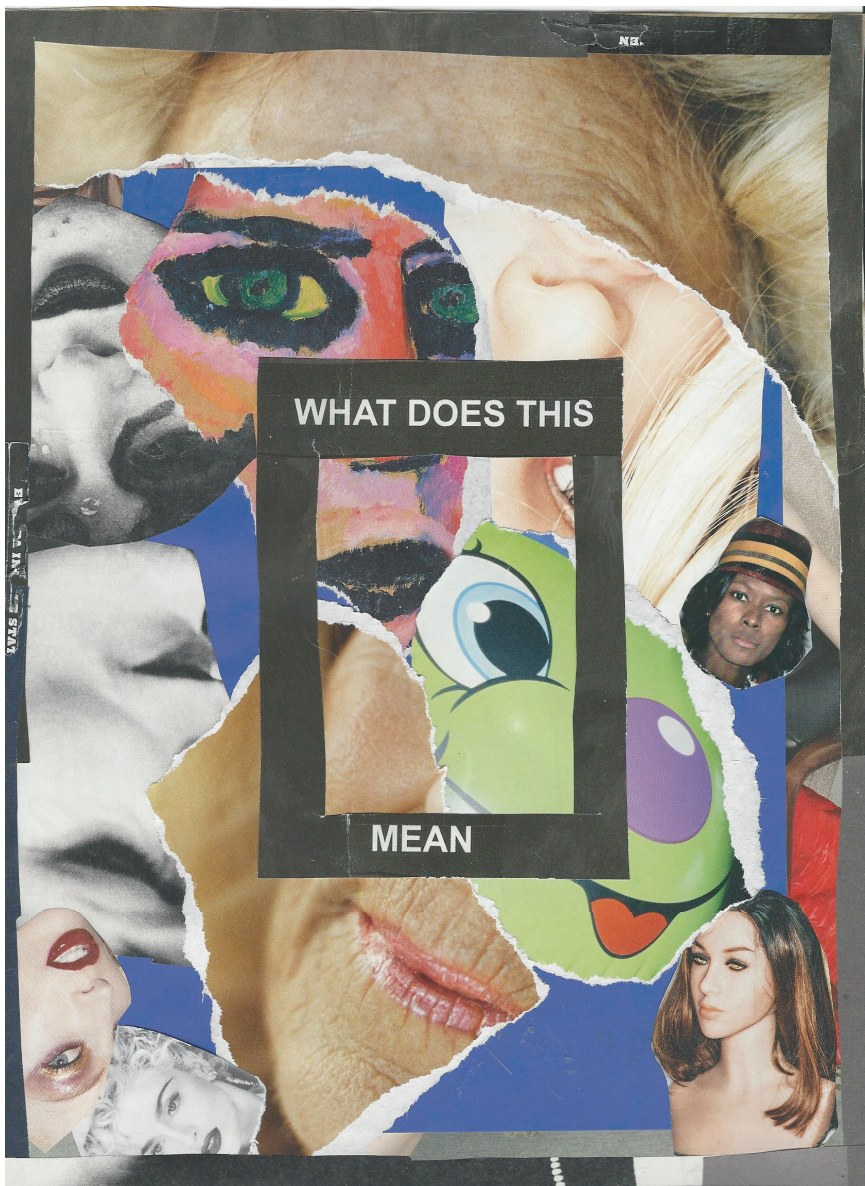Picture by Louis Kerckhof

Fig. 4. *What does this mean*
Collage by Simon Baetens

3. What does it mean for a body to be *in drag*?

Drag is an art form that uses the human body to question the conventions that are traditionally linked to it. Originally, it was a tool for exclusion, (e.g. in both the Greek and Elizabethan theatre, men would dress up as women to play female roles since women were not allowed on stage). The term 'drag' is believed to find its origin in Shakespeare's time: male actors had to get accustomed to *dragging* their long cross-dressing garb which lead to the coining of the expression being 'in drag'. Drag has, in many ways, emancipated itself since then and today it aims to turn even the most marginalized body into a body with agency. Agency to disguise, to transform, entertain and to claim a (political) voice. Although it is agency that is self-proclaimed, it is nonetheless one with history and tradition.[2]

A body in drag is always a mediated body. There is no original, there is only construct. This construct cannot exist outside reference. Drag is always a citation, whether it is a conscious choice made by the drag performer or not. Drag is not outside convention, rather it exists *through* convention. By enlarging, questioning, celebrating, ridiculing, idolizing, embodying and *performing* convention, drag proves the impossibility of being outside of it. Without convention there would be no drag, no need for drag and, arguably, convention would not be what it is without drag either. It is in the dialogue between what is 'conventional' and what is 'being dragged' where the performance is located. Drag is therefore always *out of place; s*ubversion and drag go hand-in-hand.

Without subversion, drag is merely self-referential and therefore renders itself uninteresting as far as gender performativity goes. When there is nothing to *drag*, drag seems to lose its point. This is, of course, a very subjective notion, depending on factors such as the drag performer's personal stories, the political climate in which the *dragging* takes place, what kind of history the performer describes themselves as etc. There is a certain point where drag becomes flat: when only entertainment remains, when being 'passable' as someone of the opposite gender, rather than transcending any kind of gender binary altogether, becomes the goal. This is what I would call *travesty* rather than *drag* [3]

Essentially; travesty is drag without medium reflexivity from *within* the drag manifestation itself. Travesty does, however, represent a rich history of drag and often makes the existence of more experimental drag possible by providing a scene to perform in and a tradition to relate to or rebel against. In addition to this, travesty performers who have been active for years have often faced much

more reactionary political climates than the one young performers live in now. I want to emphasize that the distinction I make here between travesty and drag (with drag pointing to a more recent, fresh form of travesty) relates mainly to aesthetic and performative aspects of the genre and does not automatically render the one more valuable than the other. There are many interesting correlations as well as oppositions between the two. In Belgium, for example, it is noticeable that travesty generally reaches an older, cis/straight audience while drag manifests itself in a more underground setting, with a largely queer, younger audience as result. While the difference between travesty and drag is not the main focus of this article, as well as very much being a construct made by me, it is important to shed some light on it while aiming to describe a history of drag and the current state of drag performance. The introduction of this distinction is my own proposition therefore.

4. Drag in and versus popular culture

Pop culture is at the core of drag and drag is, especially in recent years (at least visibly so), at the core of pop culture. Drag is the height of iconoclasm, taking whatever is available and endlessly re-mixing it. The speed at which some drag artists respond to online trends or memes, for example, is astounding; in fact, drag could be the non-virtual art form most suited to keeping up with the status of the image in this post-internet era. Interestingly enough, at the same time drag *resists* digitalization. Even though social media and digital photo editing are highly lucrative for drag artists and certain aspects of drag thus become increasingly virtual, a YouTube video cannot quite replace nor replicate the atmosphere of a drag show performed on a stage the size of a milk crate in some insalubrious bar.

An almost shamanic ritual takes place when a drag queen or king, and everything beyond and in between, embodies a piece of music, exists in between the performer and their (live) audience, between inspiration and interpretation, between reality and fiction. The performer is simultaneously the medium and the source, the reference and the referent, creating the cited material anew in the moment of making it performative. It is no longer possible to differentiate the live performance from the body of references it cites; the two become intricately intertwined at a moment in time that is both singular and hyper-associative for it is undeniably *live* yet could not be live without its links to prior and contemporary events and artworks. Last but not least, this crossbreed-hybrid of

popular culture often becomes popular culture itself, making the entanglement even more complex and idiosyncratic.

> Even if an image or object is able to be traced back to a source, the substance (substance in the sense of both its materiality and its importance) of the source object can no longer be regarded as inherently greater than any of its copies. When I take a moving image and represent it through an object (video rendered sculpturally in styrofoam for example), I am positing an alternative method of representation without ever supplying a way to view the source. A source video exists. The idea of a source video exists. But the way the object is instantiated denies both the necessity of an original and adherence to the representational norms that follow the creation of "video" as both technical device and terminology.[4]
> Artie Vierkant - *The Image Object Post Internet* (2010)

5. Meta-drag

To illustrate my point about the complex citational character of modern-day drag, I would like to introduce the term *meta-drag*. Meta-drag occurs when one drag performer imitates or alludes to another. One of the most popular episodes of every season of Drag Race, for example, is the 'Snatch Game'. Modelled after the 'Match Game'[5], the competing drag queens dress up as a celebrity and have to answer questions as the character they are portraying in a comedic way. Increasingly, the queens choose other queens that have or have not been on the show before them as their 'Snatch Game' character. The fact that an audience 'gets' such references, proves drag's place in media today. One could argue that drag is now *being dragged*, but iteration is inevitable. It is in this iteration that the potential for exciting meta-drag lies. *Drag culture* is a growing subdivision of popular culture and the borders between the two are not always clear or even existing. Drag is everywhere nowadays, and the drag queen is rapidly becoming a trope or archetype in online, BuzzFeed-style content.

Fig. 5. All members of *House of Lux*,
Urban Art Festival Bruges, April 2019.
Picture by Louis Kerckhof

Fig. 6. *Electra* at *Nightshift*, Vooruit Ghent,
September 2019.
Picture by Leontien Allemeersch

Fig. 7. *Drag becomes her*
Collage by Simon Baetens

Drag is thus becoming a body of reference in itself, available to a large group of people, altering its historically underground character. In many ways, drag has always been referenced in mainstream media (think of vogueing, make-up techniques such as highlighting and contour, over-the-top red carpet looks etc.), but often not as consciously or openly as it is today. Furthermore, a large part of the art of drag and related subcultures such as the ballroom scene have originated from black and Latino culture. The growing popularity of drag tends to overlook this politically important part of its history while at the same time allowing for attention to cultural appropriation and its consequences. In response to those who say that drag is becoming too mainstream, one could say that drag has always been mainstream, or at least has always influenced the mainstream, but is only now getting recognition for it, even if it tends to lose significant nuance in the process. A more interesting question to focus on is what *kind* of drag is becoming mainstream and what this means for drag itself. Before we can elaborate on either of these questions, we must first try to define what 'mainstream' really means.

6. Is drag mainstream?

What does 'mainstream' mean anyway? When we say somethings is mainstream, does it mean that it is appreciated by many, or that it passes seemingly unnoticed? It is one thing to *enjoy* a drag performance and another to *get* it. Not that every drag performance either succeeds or fails through the communication of a clear message or idea; not all drag is conceptual. There are, however, layers to drag that will always remain hidden to anyone who's not part of the 'in-crowd'. Rather than being concerned about whether or not drag is becoming mainstream, for this is a notion that is both too difficult and uninteresting to grasp, I wonder if the 'in-crowd' is growing and if so, what this means. It is strange to witness how RuPaul's Drag Race has introduced a huge audience to drag (I myself would probably not be a drag performer nor writing this article were it not for RPDR) and in doing so, inevitably at the same time dictates what drag *is* or *should be*. This creates an audience with a shared knowledge about drag, with one-liners galore, with an admiration for the queens who have been on the show (Drag Race has only recently allowed trans women to compete, drag kings or cis females who do drag have never appeared on the show so far). This has resulted in a large number of people loving Drag Race but yet having no idea who the queens in their city are, if they are even aware of the local drag scene at all. Moreover, when they do go and see live drag performances, more often than not they draw on Drag Race references. This is the predicament drag finds itself in today: it is thriving and

viable thanks to a commercialized television show but that inevitably limits and defines it at the same time. So why would anyone still *do* drag? Is it still political in any way?

Fig. 8. *Human in flux*
Collage by Simon Baetens

Fig. 9. "The only thing that is permanent is destruction." *Electra channelling Sarah Kane through Naomi Velissariou. Queerly Beloved,* Theatre Scala Ghent, April 2019. Picture by Louis Kerckhof

7. Again: why drag?

Has the show set paradigms? Definitely. Should it try to break them? Or is this up to drag performers everywhere? Is it still truly drag if there is a paradigm at all? Drag has been demystified in many ways. Now that 'everyone' can do drag, we could ask ourselves the question if there is still a need for drag at all? RuPaul says "we are all born naked and the rest is drag", alluding to businessmen in suits, police officers in uniforms etc. But beyond dressing up to fulfil specific tasks in society, more than anything drag is an *attitude*. Uniforms, for example, grant their wearer respect and power. These qualities, however, are synonymous with the profession, not its wardrobe. Drag is different in the way that it actively *claims* visibility and agency, making it extremely vulnerable and powerful at the same time.

This is why drag is still relevant and even necessary. At the height of its popularity, it has the unique opportunity to diversify itself and resist categorization. This is not the end of drag. It can become the newfound celebration of (local) drag culture, both existing and new. It can become the basis for a substantiated body of knowledge and research which sheds light on drag's history thereby informing its present and future. It can be the start of dialogue about the importance of underground art, starting from that underground itself rather than from the institutions that claim to know it when they appropriate it. This is the age of drag and we cannot let it go by unnoticed. Let's be *critical* of drag, let's *celebrate* drag, let's go see *live* drag, let's *diversify* drag, let's *do* drag.

———————————————

[1] Newton, Esther. Mother Camp: female impersonators in America. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979.

[2] This history and tradition, however, are rarely written about. This is the reason I am writing this text in English (in addition to the fact that all of the sources I cite were written in English), in an attempt to contribute to the analysis and preservation of the art of drag.

[3] Not to be confused with transvestism or cross-dressing, which are terms used to describe the more general phenomenon of people who like to dress in clothes that were designed for the opposite sex. The biggest difference between transvestism and drag is that transvestism is not usually meant for entertainment but rather express a (non-normative) gender identity through clothing in everyday life, whereas drag or travesty is more about creating a character that can be put on and taken off. I borrow the Dutch word 'travestie' and make it my own in English to make a distinction between two styles of drag.

[4] Vierkant, Artie. "The Image Object Post-Internet". Published on http://jstchillin.org/artie/pdf/The_Image_Object_Post-Internet_us.pdf , 2010.

[5] 'Match Game' is an American television show that has been running on and off since 1962 and in which contestants fill in blanks in sentences, often with comedic double entendres. If their answers matches the one given by a celebrity panelist, they score a point.

Grounding Colour

Joost Rekveld

Colour is central to my work. It is an aspect of my images that all kinds of viewers readily connect to, the pleasure of colour creating an opening for more reflective modes of viewing. Also, as a viewer of my own work, the gratifying experience of colour in motion remains an important motivation to make it. In this text I would like to give a broad overview of the development of my approach to colour in my abstract films and installations. I will discuss examples of projects and point to some historical sources. Some of these were sources of inspiration at the time, others helped me retrospectively to understand what I was doing and prepare for next steps. A common thread through these projects and references is that they represent different ways to anchor decisions about colour: in our experience of daylight, in an analogy to music, in our perceptual system, and finally, in our tools for modelling and manipulating physical manifestations of colour. Taken together they show a gradual shift in my underlying interests: from developing my own tools and systems for composing colour, to an interest in the act of toolmaking itself as a process of formalization and conceptualization, colour remaining the medium of choice.

Day and night colours

I started to make films out of admiration for the films in the tradition of what is now commonly called 'visual music'. In the early nineties, the only way to see these experimental films was to organize film screenings and travel to see film screenings organized by others. Seeing the films by filmmakers such as Oskar Fischinger, Hy Hirsch, James Whitney and Jordan Belson made me see colour in the world around me and those experiences of colour became the inspiration for my first film, *#2* (1992).

Whereas the musical instruments for auditory music are ready at hand as the result of thousands of years of cultural evolution, this is not the case with visual music. Similar to electronic music, composers of visual music often develop their own tools, notation and musical language as part of their process of composition. I wanted to make *#2* on film, and the only image-manipulating instrument to which I had access was a contact printer built to make copies of super-8 films. Most of the images in the film consist of visual textures constructed by layering copies of the same super-8 sequence on top of each other, slightly shifted in time

and using different colour filters for each layer. In the layering of the colours I tried to achieve a range of effects going from subtle variations that resemble the sudden shifts in tone that can happen when clouds pass in front of the sun, to the more saturated colours I associated with dusk and dawn but also with synthetic light and film. The colour choices in this film were very associative; it was the idea of colour changes during the day, more than actual analysis of them, that served as the starting point for this film. I was looking for a foundation for my colour choices and convinced myself that our colour experience must be rooted in the affective power of atmospheric colours, and especially the colours of dawn and dusk. Much later I found a somewhat cryptic quote by visual music pioneer Mary Hallock Greenewalt (1871-1950) that seems to capture a very similar mindset:

> From midnight darkness to midday brightness has been a scope playing on the emotional development of man in a natural state. This formed a basis for the artificial, in other words, for this form of fine art speech. (Hallock Greenewalt 113)

Hallock Greenewalt is a good example of the heroic and often also tragic pioneers that make up the early history of visual music, such as Alexander Wallace Rimington (1854-1918) and Thomas Wilfred (1889-1968) just before and after her. Greenewalt was a classical pianist of a certain fame and developed her art of light at first as a possible visual accompaniment to her piano recitals. In the course of several years she designed and built various devices to modulate and control electrical light, leading to the first private demonstration of her colour instrument at the Capitol Theatre in New York in 1921 (Klein 21). She invented a very interesting interface to control lights as a form of live performance, together with the equivalent of a musical notation, in order to conceptualize and record her colour compositions. Her version of colour music was an art that resembles dynamic theatrical or architectural lighting, using several light sources arranged in spaces such as concert venues or churches, capturing as much of the field of vision of the audience as possible. What is remarkable about her ideas is that they focus on the psychophysical notion of "least perceptible differences" in light intensity and colour, and that especially the articulation of light intensity was a central aspect in both her notation system and the design of her interface. The main element in that interface was a very large and very finely graded linear commutator, calibrated in the smallest perceptible steps of intensity from 'starlight' and 'moonlight' via 'auroral' all the way to 'diurnal' and 'zenith' (Hallock Greenewalt 307-310).
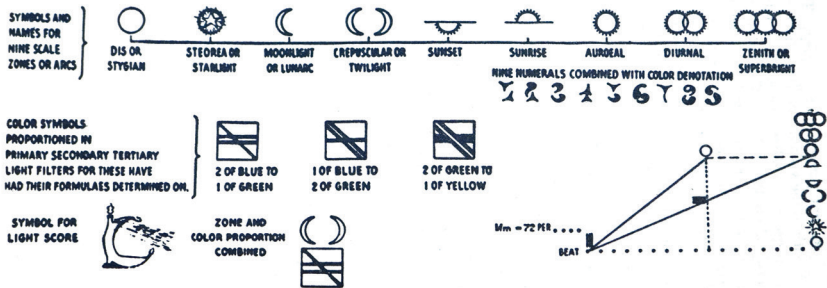
184

Fig. 1. Notation for light intensity by Mary Hallock
Greenewalt (1946)

Colour scales and colour spaces

My next film was a result of my studies in electronic music composition and especially my encounter with the person and conceptual world of John Cage. In 1989 he was a visiting composer at the Conservatory where I had just started studying, straight out of secondary school. His lingering influence led me to apply serial music procedures to the parameters of my animation techniques on the one hand, and to leave other aspects of my films open to systems that are not deterministic on the other hand. Film *#3* (1994) was a very important film for me because in it I developed an approach that I still use, which also manifests itself in how I treated colour. I started to use notation not only to write compositions down, but also as a tool to generate and extrapolate ideas. What remained of my previous approach was a sense of the film as an abstract narrative of evolution but the development of colour was formalized into a sequence of five basic colours. The images in *#3* are the result of the orchestration of this sequence, through the combinatorics made possible by working in multiple layers and sections.
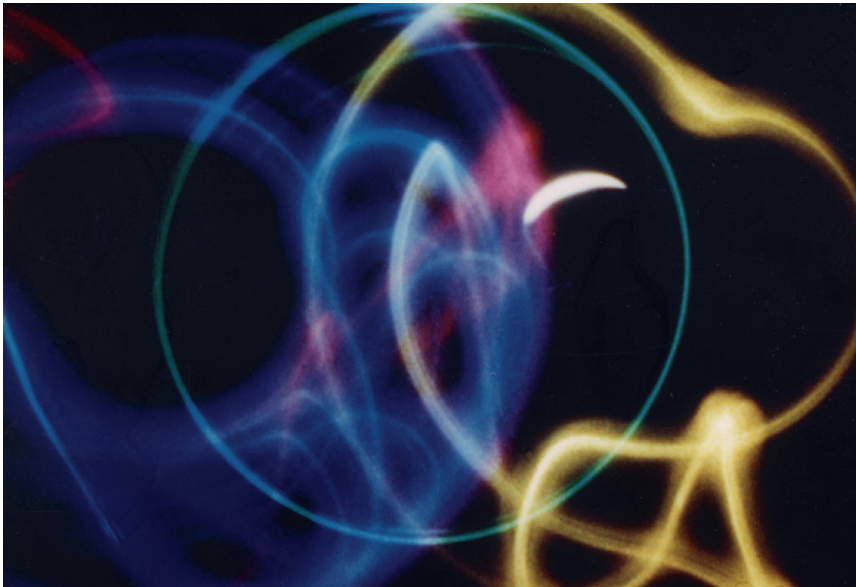
Fig. 2. Still from film *#3* by Joost Rekveld (1994)

In the history of visual music, the archetypal formulation of a fundamental colour scale was triggered by Isaac Newton's *Opticks* (1704). Newton had drawn the first colour circle after his discovery of the decomposition of sunlight into the solar spectrum. He chose this circular form because of earlier circular representations of the diatonic scale in music, in connection to the fact that he distinguished seven colours within the spectrum (Gage 232). He linked these seven colours to the seven tones in the octave and to the seven planets known in his day, and in query 13 at the end of his *Opticks* he speculated on a possible common vibratory origin of colour and tones.

In 1725, Louis-Bertrand Castel suggested building an instrument, the *Clavecin Oculaire* (Castel 1725, 255-257), to demonstrate his improvement on the colour-tone correspondences proposed by Newton. Castel's life seems to have taken a particular turn as a result of the fame he acquired following his idea to actually perform a *musique muette* of colour variations in time. In follow-up articles he expanded on his idea, sketching what a music of taste could be like, or for instance a music of touch. More than a decade later he started serious attempts to actually build an ocular harpsichord, succeeding to some extent, but also leading to bitter complaints at the end of his life that he wasted too much money and time chasing this vision.

In one of his earlier follow-up articles Castel attempts to make the analogy between colours and tones more precise "in the manner of geometry" and expands on the notion of harmonious and unharmonious intervals (Castel 1726, 277-296). According to him, colour combinations are more or less pleasant depending on the simplicity of their ratios of vibration on the retina, similar to musical intervals. Already during Castel's lifetime, the science behind such a Pythagorean view of colour harmony was thoroughly disproven (Franssen 42-44). Moreover, when applied to Castel's colour scale, it leads to counter-intuitive implications claiming that complementary colours are actually harmonious and combinations of adjacent colour-tones such as red and orange inharmonious. Later in his life he departed from strict analogies with music in his conviction that all colour harmonies had a *basse fondamentale* that was absolute; it consisted of the colour blue because we see all colours against the background of the sky.

I developed my own approach specific to composing colour relationships in the process of making my film *#7* (1996). The images in that film were produced by stamping transparent dyes on clear 16mm film leader and using the resulting painted film as a negative to make film prints. One reason to use this technique -

187

apart from it being exceptionally cheap - was that the mixing of dyes allowed me to precisely manipulate colour. I was attracted by the interplay between the additive primary colours red, green, blue and the subtractive primary colours yellow, magenta, cyan that this method implies; using painted film as a negative as it were converts paint into light and one triad of primary colours into the other. This interplay I found represented very elegantly in the colour space invented by the German colour scientist Harald Küppers and described in *Die Logik der Farbe, Theoretische Grundlagen der Farbenlehre* (1976).
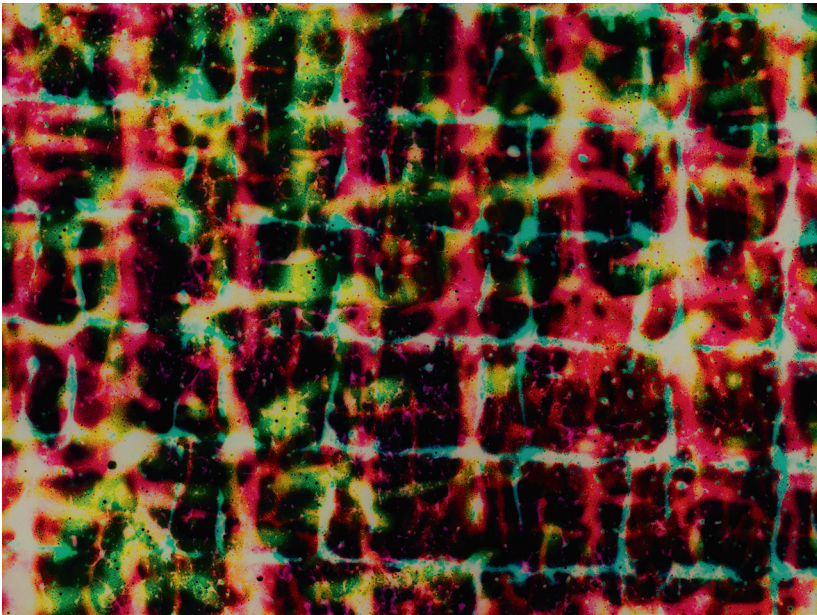
Fig. 3. Still from film *#7* by Joost Rekveld
(1996)

As in other three-dimensional colour models by Runge or Munsell, the central vertical axis runs from black to white, but in the model of Küppers the additive and the subtractive primary triads are given separate levels. This model visualizes very clearly the fact that white light minus two subtractive primaries yields an additive primary and that darkness plus two additive primaries yields a subtractive primary. All human colour is grounded in the fact that the human retina contains elements with three different spectral sensitivities but many other aspects of colour are dependent on context and culture. I needed a model to work with colour and for this I was less interested in a model that describes the particularities of colour perceptions in narrowly defined circumstances. What I needed was a colour model that describes operations such as mixing light and overlaying filters.

The starting point of film *#7* is the idea that colours arise from the clash between light and dark, an idea that was already mentioned by Aristotle, and that was later restated by Goethe, amongst many others (Kemp 264). The film is essentially a slow fade from black to white, travelling through Küppers' colour model from bottom to top. The colours for each section of the film are taken from an equal division of the perimeter of the colour model at the respective height, most of the time only using a selection of those colours, so that the sections can have very different colour palettes. With this system I could orchestrate the colours of the many layers of paint in that film.

#7 was perhaps the most ambitious and articulate colour composition I made, and in retrospect I think that making that film was necessary for me to be much freer in the colour compositions for later projects. For those later projects I still often use the Küppers colour model as the colour space but with specific constraints or palettes that fit the project. For my film *#11, Marey <- Moiré* (1999) for instance, the images were made by combining high-contrast black and white positives and negatives in several layers and with different colour filters for each combination. In this way, the whole image can be coloured in four distinct regions by the four possible combinations of the positives and negatives of two originals. With three originals there will be eight possible combinations, and so on. For this film I developed a kind of colour logic based on what happens when two colours meet. In some sections of the film, the line patterns that comprise the film behave like beams of light, whereas in other parts they behave like overlapping filters, culminating in parts of the film where the colours that appear do not correspond to anything we know from physical interactions of objects.
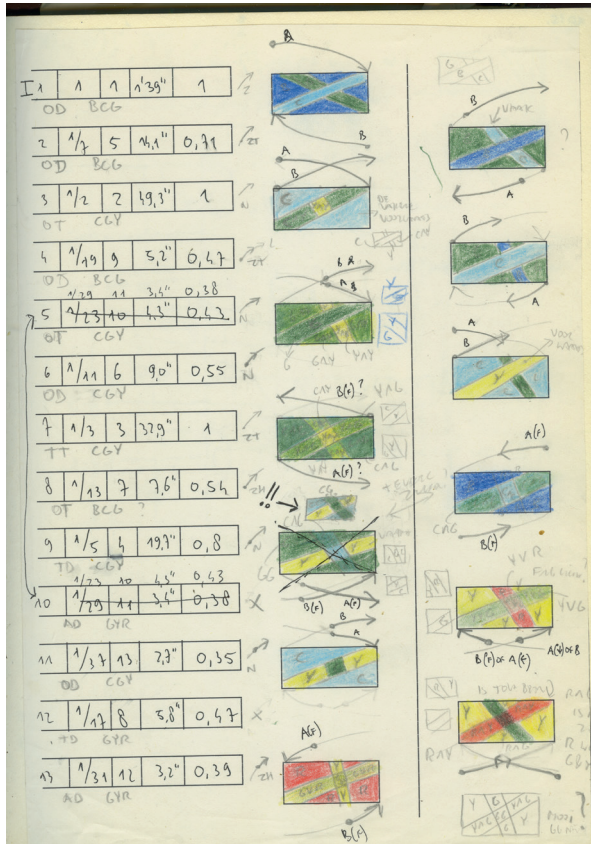
Fig. 4. Work notes with colour logic for film *#11,*
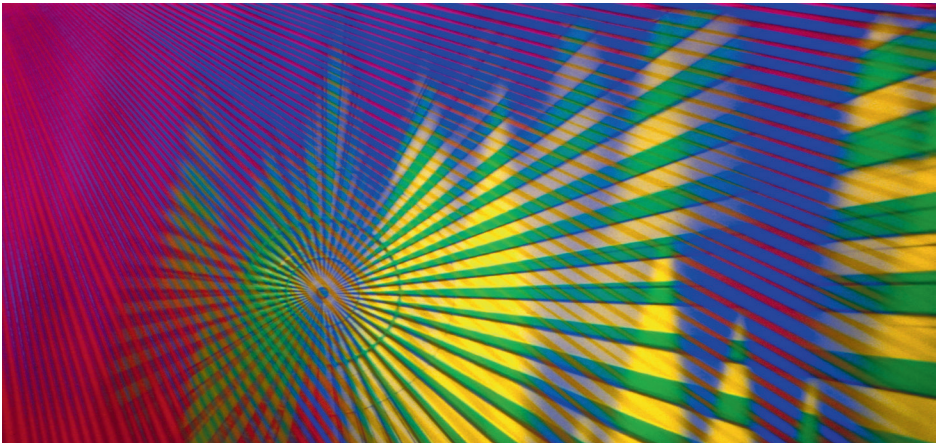*Marey <-> Moiré* by Joost Rekveld (1999)

Fig. 5. Still from film *#11, Marey <-> Moiré* by Joost
Rekveld (1999)

Another project was the light installation *#31, RGB* (2001) that I made in collaboration with Gerard Holthuis. This installation consisted of 80 dimmable fluorescent lights in the colours red, green and blue, arranged in a curved shape in a space that was completely painted white. The intensities of the individual lamps were controlled by software and the composition consisted of a number of situations characterized by different speeds and spatial patterns of colour change. The main factor in composing the colours for this installation was the fact that the lamps themselves are always on and always look a rather pale red, green or blue, while the light mixtures in the space could be extremely intense and saturated. The composition exploited the different possibilities of this contrast between local lamps and the total field of colour in the space.

Fig. 6. Installation view of *#31, RGB* by Joost Rekveld
and Gerard Holthuis (2001). Photo by Hein van
Liempd

Air colours

In recent projects I have become curious to explore particular colour systems that are inherent in a certain physical phenomenon or material. Two of these projects are the collaborative audiovisual performance *Ursae Minoris* (2017) and installation *#73* (2019), both inspired by a beautiful little book that I found by accident: *Luft-Farben*, a short monograph about the colours of the sky from 1912. The author was Albert Heim (1849-1937), a Swiss geologist who in this book admits he is no expert but who developed an interest in atmospheric optics through his fieldwork in the mountains. It contained explanations for many phenomena that were new to me. For instance, he explains the blue colour of the sky, caused by scattering of the light from the sun, in a detailed comparison to how light travels through water that is not completely pure. He also talks about the changes in ratio between direct sunlight and light scattered in the air, and about how the shadow of the earth travels through the atmosphere, relating this to the variously coloured phases of dusk and dawn. And he complains about air pollution, which seems rather astonishing for Switzerland in 1912.
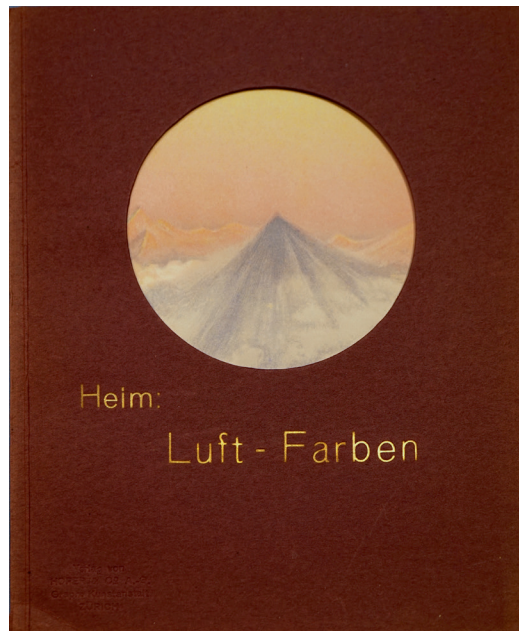
Fig. 7. The cover of Albert Heim's *Luft-Farben* (1912)

Through Heim's descriptions, one gets a sense of air as a medium around us, influencing and partly causing the colours we perceive. This is a perspective that is very different from looking at the coloured sky as something that is always 'up there' or 'out there' at the horizon. That difference in perspective is perhaps the strongest at the end of the book, when he talks about 360-degree rainbows one can see in fog and rain in the mountain, experiences most of us now tend to have in planes rather than on mountain tops.

Ursae Minoris was a collaboration with composer Claudio Baroni and double-bass performer Dario Calderone, based on a musical score that is the result of an idiosyncratic translation of star maps. My visual contribution to this project was inspired by Albert Heim. I was looking to simulate phenomena that result from interactions between light and air molecules, small waterdrops and ice crystals.

I was thinking to use one very poetic historical moment as a starting point: the theory of the rainbow by Francesco Maurolico in his *Photismi de lumine etc. etc.*, written around 1523. This text is the first explanation of the rainbow that considers the internal reflections of light inside each raindrop and Maurolico assumed that the light reflects eight times. This then explains the octave of colours produced as well as the angle of approximately 45 degrees at which the rainbow is visible. In the end I built a software instrument based on the mathematical model made by Gustav Mie to describe how electromagnetic waves are scattered by small spheres. Our current understanding is that the colours of the rainbow are produced by the interference of light waves as they are diffracted by raindrops. This was first formulated by Thomas Young, mathematically described by George Airy in 1838, and subsequently refined by Gustav Mie (1868-1957) at the beginning of the twentieth century, which is why it is still referred to as Mie-scattering.
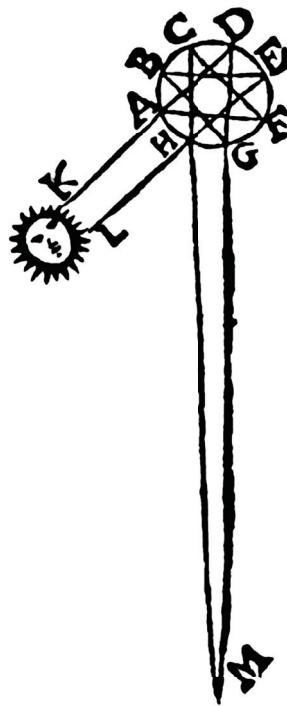
Fig. 8. Diagram explaining the rainbow from the 1611
edition of Francisco Maurolico's *Photismi de lumine etc.
etc.*

The visual material that results from this is to some extent summed up in the 'Lee Plot' in figure 10; a diagram of colours and light intensities that has a visual angle relative to the sun on the x-axis and the logarithm of the size of the waterdrops on the y-axis. The angles run from 90 degrees on the left to 180 degrees on the right, and the drop sizes run from the finest drops that can be found in fog to drops that are about one cm in size. The vertical line a bit to the right in the lower half of the plot corresponds to the primary rainbow we most often see in the sky, the other vertical line corresponds to the secondary rainbow, and the dark band between them is Alexander's band.
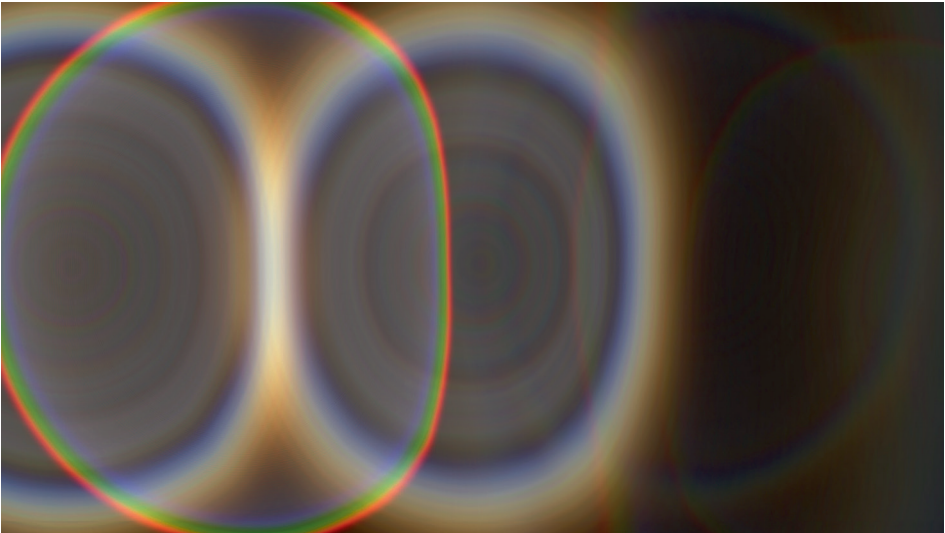
Fig. 9. Still from *Ursae Minoris* (2017), live projection by Joost Rekveld

If we would zoom in, we would see that these two 'rainbows' are accompanied by many small echoes that become larger and fuzzier as the drops get smaller; the supernumary arcs. What I like in this colour-space are the non-linear and very unpredictable interference patterns that arise, for instance, with very small drops. This is what theoretically could happen in fog but the variations in drop size in real fog are normally much too large for these phenomena to actually occur. Composing in such a colour-space becomes similar to devising a guided tour along the most interesting sites in a landscape. We performed *Ursae Minoris* at a number of music and film festivals, as well as in a number of small planetaria. With the same software I later made the monumental installation *#73*.
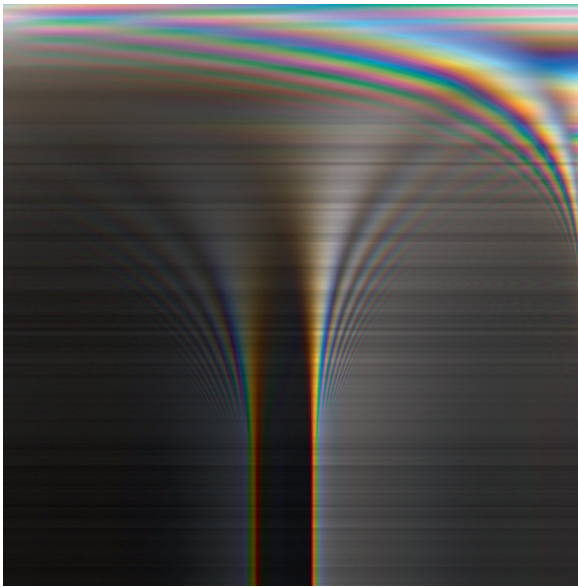
Fig. 10. A 'Lee plot' diagram showing colour as a function of
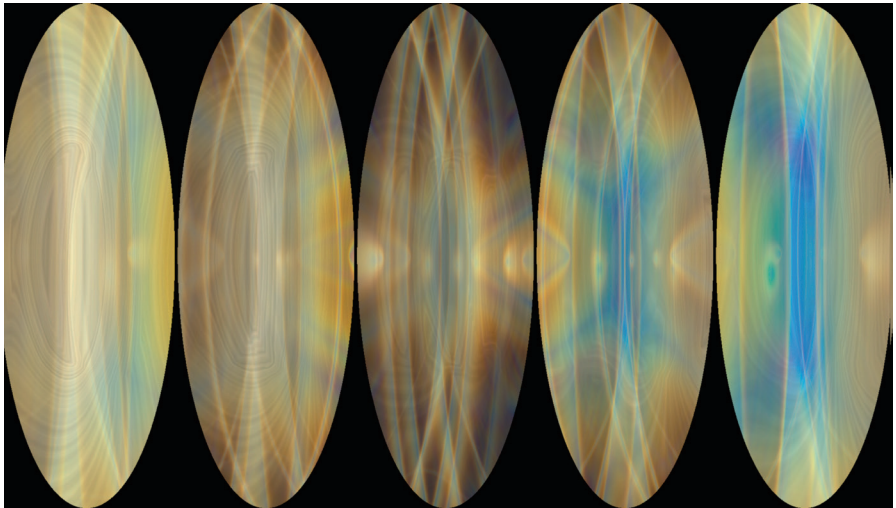angle with the sun (X) and log drop size (Y)

Fig. 11. Five screens overview of installation #73 by
Joost Rekveld (2019)

Fig. 12. Installation view of *#73* (Muziekgebouw Amsterdam, 2019). Photo by Pieter Kers

A very recent project takes this fascination with found colour spaces a step further by starting from a historical artefact. My installation *#71.1* (2019) is an early tangible result of my research of the past few years into analogue electronics. I have become interested in the early history of analogue electronics as a way of looking back at the origins of our current thinking about computation, simulation and control. One way this interest manifests itself is in experiments with cathode-ray tubes. These were invented by Braun already in 1897 and are the direct ancestor of the radio-tube, the display tube used in radar and television, the particle accelerator, the electron microscope and the lithographic devices that produce most of our current nanoscale electronics. It was the first device in which electrons could be controlled, as a way to amplify and control signals, or as a way to direct energy. In a vacuum, electrons behave similar to light, focused and deflected by electric and magnetic fields instead of lenses.

#71.1 is the first in a series of works that aims to explore this analogy and brings us closer to the particles that form the substance of electronics. In a cathode-ray tube, electrons are made visible by their collisions with the phosphor on the inside of the screen. In this first installation, I chose a particular kind of tube that was developed for radar in early 1939, just before the second World War (Keller 71). These tubes have a special phosphor that shows current signals as bright blue, with a very long afterglow in yellow-green, so that the past and current locations of planes on the radar screen can be clearly distinguished. The quality and presence of these phosphor colours are very beautiful and it is very interesting to work with the quirky and severely limited colour space inherent in this material.

Grounding

The gradual change in my thinking about colour reflects a change in the question that drives my work. When I was making my first films, I very much felt part of the tradition of visual music. Informed by contemporary music and structural film, I was trying to develop my own way of composing moving abstract images in time. I tried to develop a form of visual music that was at the same time a reflection on the medium, and *#11, Marey <- Moiré,* was an important work in that respect. In film *#3* I had started to compose by structuring the space of possibilities opened up by the tools I was using. While making *#11* I realized that these tools are also cultural artefacts, embedded in a technological and scientific culture, carrying their own meanings and political connotations. Experimental film has always been political, being defined in opposition to a film industry and in its attempt to explore alternative cinematic languages.
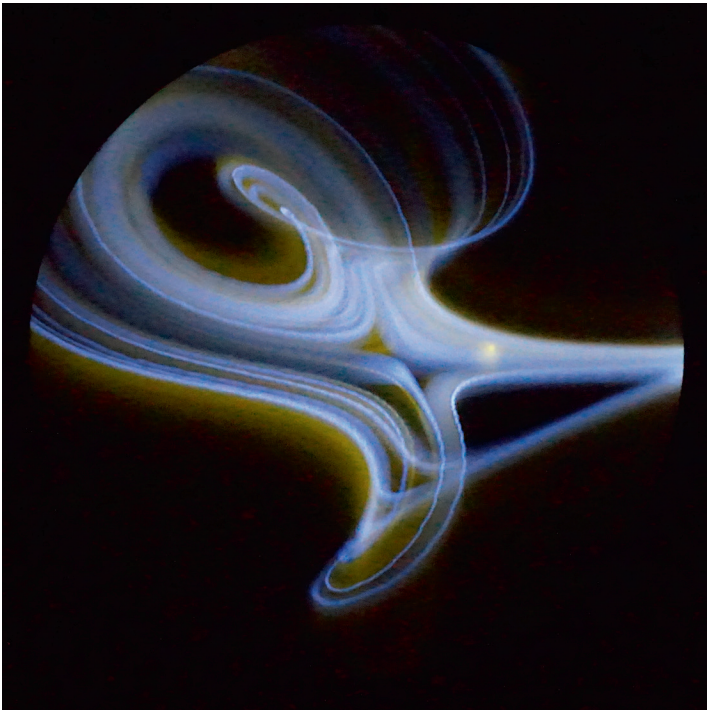
Fig. 13. Still from installation *#71.1* by Joost Rekveld (2019)

On a deeper level, I realized that the origin of the medium of film is also the origin of the assembly line and of the concept of scientific management, and that any technology comes with similar meanings. In my work I have always been looking for some kind of foundation, defining my building blocks before starting to build compositions out of them. One obvious way to do this is to retrace a genealogy, which is one of the reasons why I am interested in history; choosing a point of origin opens alternative possible trajectories. After *#11* I started to focus on genealogies of scientific theories and technological objects rather than on artistic precursors.

Leroi-Gourhan has a beautiful description of technology as a 'curtain of objects' through which we assimilate our surroundings (Leroi-Gourhan 353). This thin film of clothes, houses and tools is the interface between our inner world and the exterior world and defines us just as an amoeba is defined by its cellular membrane. Thus, while I started out making work as a modernist, looking for solid ground, I am now mostly interested in probing the curtain of technological objects with which we articulate ourselves. No longer a question that is directly related to colour therefore, but in its peculiar combination of physicality and weightlessness, colour still seems a great medium to do so.

Works cited

Castel, Louis-Bertrand. *Clavecin pour les yeux, avec l'art de Peindre les Sons, & toutes sortes de Pieces de Musique*, Mercure de France, 1725.

Castel, Louis-Bertrand. *Demonstration Geometrique du Clavecin pour les yeux & pour tous les sens, avec l'eclaircissement de quelques difficultez, & deux nouvelles Observations*, Mercure de France, 1726

Franssen, Maarten. "The Ocular Harpsichord of Louis-Bertrand Castel, The Science and Aesthetics of an Eighteenth-Century Cause Célèbre." *Tractrix* 3 (1991): 42-44.

Gage, John. *Colour and Culture, Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1993.

Hallock Greenewalt, Mary. *Nourathar, The Fine Art of Light Color Playing*. Philadelphia: Westbrook, 1946.

Heim, Albert. *Luft-Farben*. Zürich: Hofer & Co, 1912.

Keller, Peter A. *The Cathode-Ray Tube; Technology, History and Applications*. New York: Palisades, 1991.

Kemp, Martin. *The Science of Art, Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat*. New Haven: Yale, 1990.

Klein, Adrian Bernard. *Colour-Music, The Art of Light*, second edition. London: Crosby, Lockwood and Son, 1930.

Küppers, Harald. *Die Logik der Farbe, Theoretische Grundlagen der Farbenlehre*. München: Callwey, 1976.

Leroi-Gourhan, A. *Milieu et Techniques*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1945.

Rekveld, Joost. "Transformations de la Couleur." In Nicole Brenez and Miles McKane (eds.) *Poetique de la Couleur, Une Histoire du Cinema Experimental*. Paris: Editions Auditorium du Louvre, 1995.

VA AA LR: On the Spectacle of Sound

An e-conversation with Adam Asnan, Louie Rice and Vasco Alves

Tessa Vannieuwenhuyze

The Oxford Dictionary's definitions regarding the notion of spectacle primarily stress the visual character. One of the definitions speaks about "a visually striking performance or display", the other about "an event or scene regarded in terms of its visual impact." It is as if the only thing that seems to matter is what the eyes get to devour; yet what about the sonic impact? When we talk about spectacle in general, we usually indicate interplay between various elements contributing to a total experience that we experience as spectacular. Yet the visual component usually occupies a privileged position in our society full of tantalizing screens as it is. This assumption, that we are seduced solely by what we see spectacle-wise, is precisely what the work of sound collective VA AA LR counters with their performances, staged to affect more than just our eyes.

Concert for Signal Flares is an undeniable feast for the eyes. Upon arrival at the outdoor site during Ghent's *Ear to the Ground Festival* in 2017, three performers awaited the audience with a pile of distress flares. These flares are normally intended for use as an emergency beacon or a distress signal to indicate a location at sea. The constellation formed with the curious and captive audience almost resembled a festive fireworks celebration, whilst simultaneously a more unsettling atmosphere lingered in the air. Harsh sounds and visual astonishment intertwined, and three guys wearing masks added a pinch of danger into the mix when they moved around the audience. Despite the dominant visual undertone of the sparkle and hiss brought about by the trio of Adam Asnan, Vasco Alves and Louie Rice, it was not the harsh illumination of the flares that the artists found most interesting. On the contrary, it was the sound of these instruments that intrigued them most.

In order to understand the functioning of the notion of spectacle in this particular performance, and in sound art more specifically, London artist, location sound recordist met up again with one third of VA AA LR, Adam Asnan, during the Brussels' sound festival *Oscillation* (April 2019), and it resulted in a good old joint e-mail interview with all three members. Certain questions about the set-up of the *Concert for Signal Flares,* and particularly about its connection to the allure of colour and spectacle, were fired in their direction.

Live Arts Week IV Bologna 2015
© Luca Ghedini

Where did the idea for this *Concert for Signal Flares* originate?

The idea for *Concert for Signal Flares* started at a time when we were exploring different means to emulate the kind of electronic instrumentation (and *Crackle Party* aesthetic) we had developed previously. The signal flare was one of a handful of (slightly hazardous) items that we had appropriated for performance purposes. We decided to work further with it, because of the quality of its sound. Simultaneously, we started experimenting with CO2 fire extinguishers as another method to harness a particular sound. But at some point, we decided to focus on signal flares as a performance piece in itself.

Was there also a certain visual curiosity, or were you thinking straightaway more about the acoustic and auditory aspects?

From the earliest stages we maintained directly that the auditory aspect of our use of the signal flare was primary and would become the main subject of promotion. The fundamental point of this use is and always has been to harness the sound. The accompanying visual display is not to be mistaken for anything artistically intended, but as inherent to the objects' design.

The signal flare burns hotly and violently, which is why it produces a wideband, high-pressured rasp and crackle. The flame is extremely bright, and as such it becomes the most immediately recognised and spectated aspect of this performance. For better or worse.

Looking at descriptions of the performance, I stumbled upon labels such as "a visual concert". What do you think about that term then?

The origin, and subsequent development, of the work has and will always be about the interplay of proximity, movement and distribution of the sound as an instrument in a spatial context. Anything that could appear to be a visual gesture results from the fact that we have a setting in place for the staging of sounds. We think about how these will function in a performance arc or structure.

However, we do think there is an interesting variety of (pseudo) audio/visual implications and interpretations assigned to the performance and therefore we do not propose that the audience should only access the work by averting their eyes. The performance remains interesting to observe, but it should bear no influence on its core premise.

Ear to the Ground Festival 2017
© Philip Van Ootegem

Live Arts Week IV Bologna 2015
© Luca Ghedini

Live Arts Week IV Bologna 2015
© Luca Ghedini

When does sound (art) become spectacular for you? How would you tie together spectacle and sound?

It's impossible to pinpoint only one way in which sound and spectacle relate. Some works rely on spectacle to transmit uninteresting ideas where scale, for example, is assumed to be analogous to power, although that is not always the case. The whole effort becomes very unspectacular in these set-ups. By virtue of being a 'spectacle' something receives a set of prerequisites or implications, but generally, we believe that the most powerful instances to 'spectate' are related to physicality and something along the theme of common ground between performer and audience – where both are susceptible to the same forces. Spectacle should inspire contemplation between one's own body or position and the subject of that spectacle. It should be able to have that kind of influence.

The concert also becomes spectacular in a sense because of the risks involved. You need to control and concentrate, like an acrobat. How did you develop that?

Practice and familiarity, trial and error… The performance can never be rehearsed, and always has to be site-specific, meaning it is unique. By now, we have all experienced when a flare malfunctions. Some misbehaviour is typical, but others react in totally surprising ways. All of us have had very minor burns at some point.

How does the colouration of sound play a role within this performance? And how is it affected by the locations where you perform?

Colouration as an auditory phenomenon is actually an important factor in the way the sound is choreographed. The kind of inharmonic, broadband 'noise' that the flare emits is very effective for demonstrating shifts in sound colour with every movement. When the flare is placed closer to the ground, the reflection has more of a comb-filtered effect, and when held high, it's sound propagates further. So between open air, hard surfaces or unusual architectural locations, interesting variations of the sound can occur.

We have performed the piece on two occasions with makeshift wooden screens. The concept with this was to try to promote these aspects of colouration but using the surface to reinforce the sound as a kind of acoustic reflector, and conversely, as acoustic obstructions.

We have been fortunate to perform the piece in variety of different settings already. In Porto we performed on the rooftop of the Town Hall, which was one of the occasions where we built and used right-angle wooden screens. For this

performance air traffic was redirected for approximately 30 minutes. Another location was in a concrete turret pit in Newhaven (UK), where the audience looked down, while we built up the array of flares in that confined space. Others include a large set of stone steps in a former hospital courtyard in Bologna, an empty car park in Ravenna, a Dutch school playground and a woodworking factory courtyard at the Milanese art space Standards.

Distress flares inevitably carry the connotation of danger and violence. How does the performance work with this?
We do not collectively associate the flares with a grim scenario any more than maritime safety, or even with celebratory events (as gloriously demonstrated by supporters at certain football games). Having said that, we are forced to order the flares from a pretty questionable Polish website, because a license is required in certain locales. We can only assume they are regulated for safety.

***Concerto per Fumogeni* can be understood as a colourful event in a classic way. Sound-wise it is definitely an experimental work. Is there some kind of friction you tried to create there?**
There is already friction in the fact that the performance is first and foremost a piece for listening, accompanied by an intense light show, which may be difficult to disassociate from the auditory experience. The light has actually never influenced how we work or how we create a performance with the flares, but remains an aspect inherent to the performance, which is necessary to create the sound quality of the piece.

Another factor in our performances is to surround or bear down on the audience, in an attempt to have them experience the sound from different angles and proximities. Sometimes we attempt to displace and disperse them. There's undeniable friction to this.

What is the (aesthetic) experience like as a performer? You are right in the middle of the colorful chaos, yet you also probably frighten the audience a little.
Given that we handle the flares, we always have the most direct point of audition, so we try to get as close as possible to promote this direct sound on occasions. We embraced the confrontational element of this proximity in that in subsequent performances it became a way to disperse the audience and force them into different listening positions and perspectives, in addition to simply having the sound sources moving around them.

We have to wear gas masks because the smoke can sometimes be very nasty for prolonged periods. On top of that the masks help us assume a role without getting uncomfortable. Something we do want from the audience. Our aim is that they experience a concert, without being too comfortable, it's not a fireworks show, after all.

Are you questioning spectactorship as well within the framework of sound art, contesting the role of a passive audience?
Yes, absolutely. It is quite an appropriate definition of what we aim to do with this piece. As a matter of fact, we may only have the initial steps of the performance agreed beforehand, how we then proceed is in response to our feeling for the audience's degree of passivity and how the space may allow for different ways to engage with and disrupt that passivity.

Live Arts Week IV Bologna 2015
© Luca Ghedini

"**Unusually superficial**"
An Interview with Artistic Duo Mardulier and Deprez

Tessa Vannieuwenhuyze

© All pictures by Astrid Theunynck

The long history of the circus still evokes romantic images of spectacle: a red-and-white striped tent where one goes to gasp in awe at acrobatic *tour de forces* and marvel at the sight of dangerous, exotic animals. Although the days of this old-fashioned trope might have passed, there is still a great deal of fuss about how circus acts are practiced these days and, moreover, how to define them. Most notably, artistic researcher Bauke Lievens continues to dig into the different possible interpretations of contemporary circus from a dramaturgical perspective which started during her earlier research project, *Between being and imaging: towards a methodology for artistic research in contemporary circus.*[1]

The current follow-up, called *The Circus Dialogues*, defends circus as a locus for experimental thinking, which makes it impossible to pin down just one particular definition.[2] In the exchange of open letters she initiated in the cultural magazine *Etcetera,* Lievens established a dialogue with other thinkers in the field, such as artist and theorist Sebastian Kann. In his letter of reply, Kann touches upon various topics that also shape the work of circus duo Mardulier en Deprez. The unlearning of a circus school system, the plurality inherent in the field of circus, and the Internet as an alternative performance space, are crucial elements in the universe Ruben Mardulier and Michiel Deprez have created during the last few years.

During a studio visit and accompanying interview, I tried to gain some insight into the magic of Mardulier en Deprez's circus. The attempts at theoretization I tried to initiate, although unsuccessful, recurred throughout the conversation. The obvious parallels I set out between historical antecedents related to spectacle culture and the experimentation within their creations, were met with the claim that it was not really something they consciously worked with or were aware of. They called themselves 'rather superficial'. It connects to what Kann criticizes in his letter as the problem of overdetermination. According to him, circus artists are continuously plagued by personal expectactions of what 'good circus' is and should be, usually fuelled by what critics expect of them. As a result, it rules out a certain element of suprise and excitement that is so crucial to the circus tradition.

It might be precisely this that Mardulier en Deprez try to safeguard through their unpretentious attitude. As Kann comments on Lievens' first open letter, contemporary circus does indeed promise a space of agency for the artist to reflect, but should not be reduced to only "making clever jabs at social and aesthetic conventions".[3] The duo do indeed exchange the rational, reasoning body for a primordial element of almost child-like fascination and intuition. During

the dreary afternoon on which I visited the two artists in their place of residence, something as simple as the schizophrenic weather, oscillating between extreme rain showers and bright summer sun, managed to captivate them. Whilst showing us around, the small corner of the warehouse that they occupy next to one of Antwerp's hip summer bars, Bar Paniek, appeared to be completely covered by a gigantic rain puddle. It adds an extra dimension to their latest creation *Doemdenken* (feeling low). It consists of a cart which you have to lie down on, putting your face through an opening in order to watch the ground pass by when someone pushes the cart around. A simple rain puddle suddenly gains a whole new dimension from this unusual perspective. "Look at those colours!", admires Michiel, whilst his companion pushes him around.

Mardulier en Deprez do also definitely like to have fun. A few weeks after this interview took place, I found myself drinking a 'golden colada' (Belgian beer served in a coconut) and eating 'stoempia's' (an Asian take on the typically Belgian dish of mashed potatoes and sausage) whilst both of them attacked a piñata filled with Flemish sweets. The occasion for this vibrant event was their retrospective *Retrospectie* at the Nona arts centre in Mechelen. Mocking the way exotic foods are often turned into more indigenous forms in this way fits the idea of approaching circus as a laboratory for executing all kinds of fantasies and cherishing the uninhibited, wondrous gaze of a child. "Sometimes we still see things that people consider to be part of their daily environment, without any questioning," Ruben says. Take a look into the irrepressible minds of Mardulier en Deprez.

Tell me, what do you see that others no longer notice?

R: For example, we've just come back from a residency in Lithuania where some new architectural styles caught our eye. Newly-plastered façades. Somehow, they always leave a tiny square of the orginal wall visible, so that you can still see the original bricks in the wall. A few square centimeters of the original wall peeps through the new layer. We wanted to explore this detail further. Lots of people in Vilnius wore ripped jeans which is, in a sense, a similar way of showing the original structure underneath. We photographed those people, in front of these walls, confronting those two forms of layering with each other. The end result is a series of photos called 'Punk is not Dead'.

How do you start creating? Do you have any rituals?

M: Actually, we only need two essentials: a table and some coffee. Very simple. Add some walking around exploring the surroundings to that – here we can even do that inside – and you have our recipe. I usually find the reception hall of a building the most inspiring place to start brainstorming. Then we start working with the stuff that we find on location. We were actually not able to bring a lot with us this time, as we cannot even enter Antwerp with our car anymore… (laughs).

We get most inspired by our surroundings… or by things that we have done before and want to extend. During the 12-hour long event Night Shift that took place in Antwerp in May 2019, we were able to use two tiny rooms. So we wanted to make something very intimate. We wanted to develop further the idea of doing a survey in the most literal sense. How can we keep asking the audience questions?

And what did you present precisely then during this event?

R: We did several things. We showed our recording of a triptych of experiments *opmerkelijk zijn*, *onzichtbaar zijn* en *aanspreekbaar zijn* (being remarkable, being invisible and being approachable). As a way of research, we explored the city and set up a direct dialogue with the environment we were in. Michiel managed to be invisible on a terrace of a bar for 2 hours and 8 minutes. Placing an empty cup in front of you is apparently a very effective strategy.

We also performed another short-lived one-to-one experiment, *Geven en nemen* (Giving and taking). We asked one person one question at a time, and they were asked to reply with either yes or no. During the 'giving' part, we asked them to do something with us, during the 'taking' part we asked their permission to perform some acts on them. When they said no, they were simply allowed to leave the room. In this way we managed to slap lots of people in the face whilst being naked (laughing).

Welcome to the circus

How did you actually start working together?

R: We studied together at Fontys Academy for Circus and Performance Art in Tilburg. It is hard to really pinpoint the moment when our collaboration started. At school we already felt a connection, but as a student you are way too focussed on your solo practice. You are really self-centred and concentrate on what you are learning.

M: Only afterwards we started ping-ponging our ideas back and forth. At a certain moment, we were both invited by Circuscentrum to do a research project. We were able to either do it individually or together, so we started experimenting.

And you have become inseparable now?

M: We do see each other a lot, that's true (laughs).

R: There has never been more than one month, or one month and a half, between the different projects that we have done. But besides our joint projects we also still have our own artistic practices.

How do you actually end up becoming a circus artist, especially in 'new' circus?

R: Purely because we derive pleasure from it. Both of us started doing it as a hobby. You can spend time together with other young people, without there being a competetive atmosphere around. You learn how to build trust and work towards accomplishing the same goals in a group. But then when you start training officially, everything gets a little more serious. Twice a year, you have to create a conventional act of around ten minutes long. You present it in front of a panel, so you become more focussed on yourself than on the actual format you are presenting.

It's very difficult to let go of the conventions whilst you are still in a school. Only afterwards do you really start your very own practice. You look for something that others can also recognize. That is how we started working with Virtual Reality. We can attempt to modify someone's vision or perception yet they do not have to do anything technical for that to happen. When we reverse sight with VR, it almost feels like doing acrobatics. You constantly have to navigate and re-orientate your limbs.

An anecdotal approach

On your website, I found the following definition of your artistic practice: "anecdotal circus, installation art, post-internet art, prose and new elements supplied with things"… I think I need some explanation here.

M: Anecdotal is quite a negative term that is often used for things that are considered very superficial.

R: It is funny how that definition does bring together quite a lot of negative connotations. Both circus and the anecdote are not the most appealing terms to work with these days. A lot of contemporary artists also hate the label of post-internet. We do also write poetry and prose, but we are not too sure whether we can legitimately call ourselves writers or poets. And this new elements thing… That is something that came out of one of our phone calls. We just liked it.

And what do you actually mean by 'anecdotal'?

M: We're very superficial.

R: An anecdote does not remain an anecdote when it is constantly being repeated.

M: But when you weave several anecdotes around one theme, you generate a sort of continuity once again, which can become very powerful.

At this point, Michiel and Ruben start showing us around the place, demonstrating what they have been working on: the 'doom thinking' cart Doemdenken (feeling low).

R: You see, the most miniscule, blue detail suddenly becomes way more interesting because you are so close to it. This tiny pink spot too, or this five-cent coin, it can be totally fascinating. You start seeing connections between everything, everything is a little bit extra. The banality of the everyday becomes spectacular in its own way.

Primary colours

Colour plays a prominent role in your work. Besides performative works, Ruben has also shown work in a group exhibition in the Ostend gallery Den Ouden Zeebaersch. You opt for a flashy fuchsia lay-out for your website. Has colour been a central focus point from the beginning, or did it come later on in the process?

R: Colourwise, we only use red, yellow and blue - primary colours. First of all, because we like them, but also because it limits our possibilities. With those colours we are always able to generate other colours. I think it is a good decision, because it forces us to find alternative ways to deal with them. We never paint with a painting brush to be honest. There's a certain power to it which is very different from the skill of creating fantastic colours. Like, what does that actually mean, a beautiful colour? We don't have a clue about the way a painter does this, it's not our field of expertise. So we need to rely on a different approach.

And the magenta on our website, it goes way back. Although it is not a primary colour, it's one of the four colours in a printer. So maybe it is a primary colour that came out of technology. We were attracted to it. It might be because you wouldn't immediately associate it with two men.

M: Our school was also a pink circus tent. So that might also have influenced us.

R: (Laughs.) We were probably brainwashed by all that pink. But like, look at the balloons over there. You could opt for simple white, because that is sterile. That is not interesting for us, or at least the decision is a little forced. We want to stay as much as possible with a certain logic, we don't want to dig too deep. Because you have to justify all those choices as well. If you ask someone, "Which colour do balloons have?", no one is ever going to answer just one colour. These just exist in different colours.

Which colour would you ascribe to one another?

R: Michiel is definitely a blue guy. But it fluctuates. Baby blue, dark blue, several shades of blue.

M: I think of Ruben as somewhere in between sun yellow and mustard.

The clown and the acrobat

Do you have any inspirational artistic duos that you admire?

R: Fishli and Weiss. They make incredibly absurd films and installations. The movies *Rat and Bear* were made during the 80s. Amazing stuff! Dressed up in third-rate carnival costumes, they ridicule and question the world while dressed as a rat and a panda. They mock everything and everyone. And these Swiss artists were also the first ones to construct sculptures with cheese and meat.

Do you use a similar kind of humour with Mardulier en Deprez? I have the impression that you straddle a border between the absurd and serious.

M: Sometimes yes. It is important to be consistent in the execution. It is like the dynamic of a joke: even though it is only a joke, you still have to execute it well.

R: Otherwise you kill the joke. If we weren't to take our work seriously anymore… Who would? Imagine a stand-up comedian finding his own jokes so hilarious that he barely manages to tell them anymore.

Which brings us to two archetypes within circus: the figure of the clown and the acrobat.

R: It is not only the acrobat who needs to be technically strong, the clown too. I think the clown even needs more skill in terms of timing. It is not something we consciously refer to though. We do not really identify with these figures.

M: Those are archetypes from a kind of circus we are not really connected to. We do use the same techniques, I suppose, we experiment with similar effects.

How do you think about your own practice in relation to spectacle?

M: I guess we create a sort of a counter-reaction. The tradition of the circus almost coincides with spectacle. We believe it can be something else. That's why we often go for the most boring option. Something can become spectacular again in a different way, through a specific kind of curation for example.

R: There are two ways to build up a classic circus act: either you start with an impressive trick in order to catch the attention of the spectator immediately, or you build up slowly towards a spectacular apotheosis. It is a very tight rhythm.

There is no traditional circus act that actually involves even a minute of doing something unspectacular. So when we introduce greater time intervals between tiny spectacular effects, it might even create a better spectacle in the end, because you have been waiting for it for so long.

Situationist Guy Debord's artistic strategies of *détournement* and *dérive* are very present in performances where interaction with the urban environment plays a central role, as well as in the many experiments with popular media. As this notably highlights the everyday spectacle, do you in fact rely on historical references such as *La Société du Spectacle*?

M: We happen to be familiar with situationism, but we don't necessarily really work with theoretical material.

R: There could potentially be so much you could link to what we do. That is part of the reason why we enjoy talking to people who have an external perspective about our work. Our concepts are always born out of an emotional, rather than rational, trigger. The rational might slip in when we start observing mechanisms of human behaviour and what it is that fascinates us about that but at the same time it's also a very emotional trigger. Both of us must be totally obsessed with something before we are able to actually start working with it.

Would you call that the common denominator in your oeuvre up until now, the emotional reaction which in a way also links back to circus?

M: I do think so. Enthusiasm is the key.

Do you ever have the feeling that you are being taken over by the spectacle itself, whilst performing?

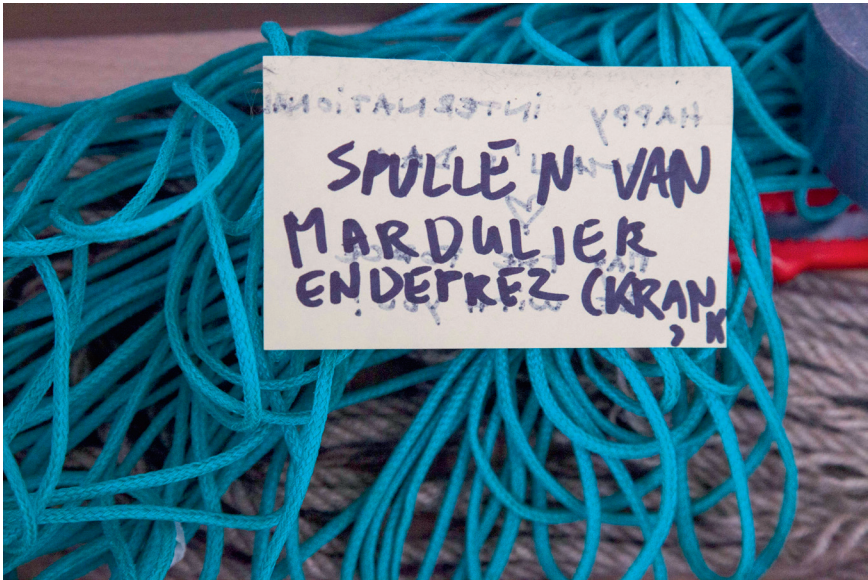M: Sometimes I have the feeling, in fact, that I am not absorbed by it enough.

R: We are still trying to find our role within the entire set-up.

How to position yourself?

R: Rather, how to add ourselves to it all.

M: We still need to find the right flow sometimes, the right attitude. Those moments where I completely blend in are the best.

234

Sometimes you create performances for audiences, but another aspect of your work is showing recordings of interventions you perform in public. What is the role you attribute to an audience?

R: When we decide to make something for an audience, we take a one-to-one approach. We made this cabin for example, *Oord kijken (seeing)*, where spectators can take a seat and watch the tourists in the city. We play music inside to act as a soundtrack to the passers-by they observe from there. An audience is crucial in this instance. They are no longer a passive element, whilst that is often a given in circus peformances. Although there is, of course, also the clown who picks out one person from the audience and then forces them to participate.

M: We carry a similar responsibility in relation to the audience. I try to trust the fact that, when I like something, chances are that others might think the same thing. We are normal people, we are not that exceptional. Liking bizarre things is not so weird.

To be honest, I actually think the concept needs to appeal to them in order for them to be able to enjoy the result. Without having any notion of the motivation behind it, or the enthusiasm, it's very difficult to understand our work I suppose.

R: Sometimes the recording of a piece works extremely well, so much so that the initial idea or concept even benefits from it. This was the case during *inbreken* (breaking in), where we tried to undermine the motion sensors of a security camera. The video recording is very accessible material. I think it is just something beautiful to look at.

But I agree with Michiel in most cases, when you don't have any feelings about the initial concept, it will be hard to make the recording powerful enough to overcome that. You need to be triggered by the initial idea. So you could say that we work in quite a conceptual way.

236

The playground of a post-internet world

Why do you mention the post-internet theme?

R: The notion of post-internet slipped in about three years ago when we were working on a piece called *Zeno.* We made hand-written copies of our Facebook wall, which we tore up and handed out at the central station in Ghent. At the time, we were working quite a lot with this idea of rendering digital platforms analogue again, which is something that still pops up every now and then in our practice. During a discussion with the artist Noortje Sanders, she said that the notion of post-internet is often a real pet hate of visual artists, they do not like it. So we thought we could give that concept a place within our sub-text and artistic practice.

You've already briefly touched upon the temporal nature of circus, of building up and creating tension. Is this also an underlying layer of reflection that you introduce in your ASMR[4]-inspired video project *PLANTEN ASMR PLANTS*? I find ASMR a fascinating post-internet phenomenon, precisely because it seems to indicate a free space, a practice where time is being de-capitalized in a sense, but at the same time its goal remains rendering the viewer more relaxed in order to be more productive afterwards. Is there a certain political aspect to Mardulier en Deprez's approach in this video work, one experimenting with a temporal experience?

M: It was not political in our case. Or at least it was not our intention. We never start out from a place where the end product is anticipated, neither do we work in a very goal-orientated way. How it turns out is something we only consider later on in the process. Once again, I think we work in a very anecdotal way. We are very superficial in that sense: we are not very considerate towards our audience, we do not really think about what we 'offer' them at the end. Precisely because of this approach really beautiful things come about, which would not happen if we were to think too much about how we could make something explictly beautiful or good.

R: Take the example of *slaapstudie 03* (The artists allow themselves to fall asleep on a train, having not slept for 24 hours and film each other during the process, holding a handcam.) We could have made it shorter and acted 'as if' we were falling asleep. But what good is it to us?

M: For the text of *Technoproza* (Technoprose*)*, we collaborated with a writer on one occasion. We were attempting to create a story with sentences received by us from the audience's smartphones. He suggested that we should add text as otherwise it wouldn't be readable. We found that a little sad. If we were to add our own text, then why would we even start out at all with the idea of whatever a smartphone would generate? The result is indeed not very readable, but at least it is what it was supposed to be. Sometimes it turns out in a pleasing way, sometimes it is more difficult. That's just how it is.

You introduced the theme of technoself in order to group these technology-related performances together. This notion, coined by Italian philosopher Rocci Luppicini, nuances the negative aspects of research about the impact of technology these days. Coincidence?

R: Oh, we didn't realize that, cool! We really have a minimal amount of knowledge about what we are actually doing when we carry out technological experiments. That's how we can shed a different light onto it. The technopoetry we made shows how bad technology actually is at doing what it is supposed to do. It's incredible to see what technology can already produce, but it is still completely different from what a human would do in the same situation.

Your upcoming show (cf. May 2019) is called Retrospectief, which means retrospective. The concept of a retrospective is quite weighty for two young artists, isn't it?

M: For us it is just an oppurtunity to show our creations. We always have relatively little residue, even when we perform continuously during an entire year. This is just our way of presenting work. We did not really consider the tradition behind the concept.

R: We'll make it even worse: on the second day we'll also do a retrospective of the first day (laughs).

¹ Lievens, Bauke. "Between being and imagining: towards a methodology for artistic research." Last accessed September 4, 2019.
https://www.circusdialogue.com/between-being-and-imagining.

² Lievens, Bauke. "The Circus Dialogues". Last accessed September 4, 2019. https://www.circusdialogue.com/circus-dialogues.

³ Kann, Sebastien. "Open Letters to the Circus, #3: Who gets to build the future?" Last accessed August 30, 2019. https://e-tcetera.be/open-letters-to-the-circus/.

⁴ ASMR is a YouTube phenomenon where people make videos of themselves whispering to the camera or creating other calming and repetitive noises in order to attain a relaxing effect, or even deal with anxiety.

Richtlijnen voor de auteur

De onderstaande richtlijnen zijn specifiek gericht aan auteurs die een artikel wensen in te dienen bij *Documenta: tijdschrift voor theater*.

Documenta is een *blind peer review*-tijdschrift dat beschikt over de A1.2-status. Het kent een B-rating op de European Reference Index en staat vermeld in de VABB-lijst. Een ingezonden artikel wordt door minstens twee leden van de redactieraad blind beoordeeld. Binnen de zes weken krijgt de auteur feed-back op zijn artikel. Het artikel wordt als publiceerbaar, publiceerbaar mits aanpassingen of niet publiceerbaar in *Documenta* bevonden. De reviewers maken gebruik van een sjabloon om het artikel te beoordelen. Criteria zijn originaliteit, wetenschappelijke relevantie, duidelijkheid van de vraagstelling, wetenschappelijk onderbouwde onderzoeksmethode en argumentatie, opbouw, structuur en coherentie van het artikel, toereikende bibliografie.

Inzending abstract. Het artikel wordt voorafgegaan door een abstract variërend tussen 100 en 200 woorden en een opsomming van maximum 5 kernwoorden. Stuur je abstract ter goedkeuring naar documenta@ugent.be vóór je een manuscript inzendt via de website.

Inzending manuscript. Een artikel telt maximum 8000 woorden. Gelieve de website www.documenta.ugent.be te raadplegen om online manuscripten in te zenden.

Referentiesysteem. *Documenta: tijdschrift voor theater* volgt de MLA-stijl met een volledige referentielijst op het einde van het artikel.

Beeldmateriaal. Een beperkt aantal zwart-wit foto's wordt toegelaten. De auteur is zelf verantwoordelijk voor het copyright.

CONTENTS

PORTFOLIO