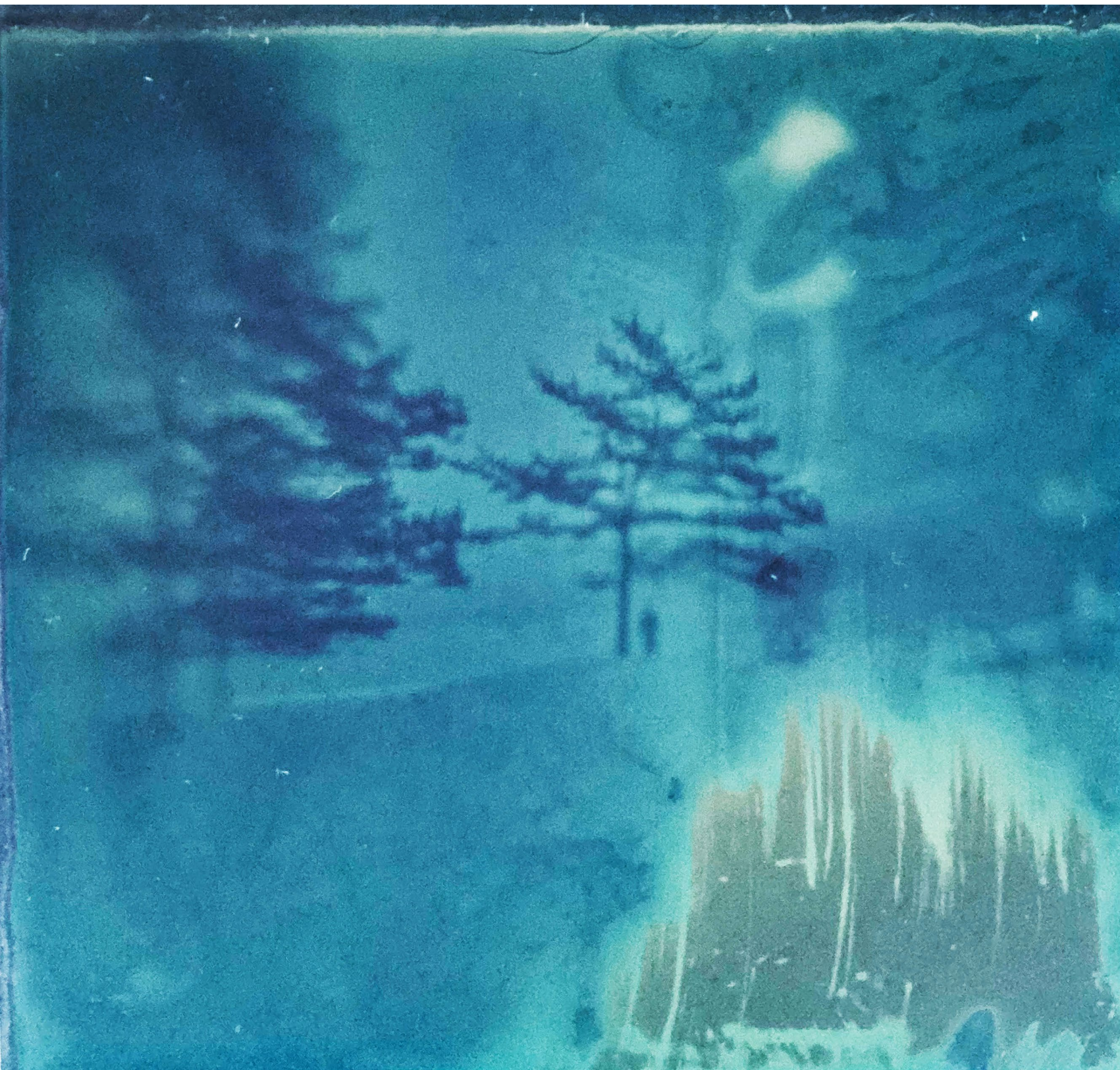


N. 17 March 2024

И | INSTITUTO DE HISTÓRIA DA ARTE

FACULDADE DE CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS E HUMANAS, UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA





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ABSTRACT

The re-turn, like the repair, is a disruptive act. It pauses Azoulay's forward thrusting, carving out space in the present. In this, the return and the repair become co-agents for temporal relationships between past, present, and future. If we always configure that temporality with a forward motion, then we fail to consider ways in which the future influences that which is ahead of itself and we set it always in the service of its past. Positing an altered temporal framework based upon the repair allows us to consider a future that is a co-producer of knowledge, understanding, and community.

Here I want to use the practice of textile repair – the mend – to consider ways in which we might return to future art histories and thus reframe what we can understand by reparation. Rupture and mend are borne out of violence and hold the parts in tension.

Colonial notions of reparation are driven by an urge to hide this damage and thus fail to consider mending as productive, plural, vulnerable, and affective ways of being.

Here I want to propose the rough repair as an artistic practice, what Jack Halberstam terms 'murky resistance' (Halberstam 2020: 2), a space of alternatives, sometimes counterintuitive and refusing. The rough repair gives us scope to think of reparation through material entanglements that are wrought through violent acts and actions. Repair becomes an ethical space in which questions of differential edges, power structures, and the formation of art histories can become a point of re-turn. The wound and reparation are inherently violent and physical actions, and they are destructive. Within an ethics of care, this violence becomes necessary and important for future art histories. In this essay, I want to use this artistic practice to propose ways in which art histories can be regarded and observed, and thus entreat that repairs and reparations should not be rendered invisible.

keywords

REPAIR
REPARATION
MEND
TEXTILE
DARN
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Return to Repair

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Introduction

Mending infers damage, which establishes a temporal fracture in which the past is presupposed from the present. Unlike many narrative forms, the mend involves looping forward and back across the temporal plane.

In this essay I want to take this idea of the fractured temporal narrative, the rupture and its repair, as a materially-driven, textile-focused metaphor for thinking and reframing notions of reparation, particularly in terms of damaged or absent art historical narratives, dominant power structures that enable hierarchies of practice and genealogies, and thus frame how we read and encounter artworks. In this, the repair is both a space of re-formation and one of rebellion; this is an ambivalent, uncertain action upon the rupture.

I further propose that this materially-led metaphor of the textile mend offers scope for considering ways in which we might challenge a forward-driven narrative in favour of one that has the capacity to look both back and forward simultaneously. Reparation itself is a multifarious term, most commonly used to refer to acts of payment by way of recompense for wrongs previously wrought. Reparation formed a key part of the Slavery Abolition Act in the UK, but also following the First and Second World Wars, in 2003 following the South African Truth and Reconciliation process, and in 2013 when the UK government agreed to reparation payments for the torture of Kenyans following the Mau Mau uprising in the 1950s. These examples demonstrate the ways in which reparation comes to be usually thought of in

reference to the brutality of colonialisation. I want here to consider the rupture and the mend in terms of the violence of their formation and their capacity to hold the past, present and future in a tensional relationship, and I draw upon the South African artist Mary Sibande's sculptural, textile-rich installations so as to open out the personal, political and metaphorical interplay. This serves to address narrative spaces where the repair is often driven by an urge to hide the damage of the rupture, and thus spaces which fail to consider mending as a productive, plural, vulnerable, and affective space.

The repair is thus allied to the return in the form of co-agents for temporal relationships. Jack Halberstam speaks of this in terms of not becoming repaired, being repaired, or doing reparation, but focuses upon the 'shady, murky modes of undoing, unbecoming and violating' (2011: 4). This serves to emphasise a surrender to 'a form of unbeing for which beginnings and ends have no meaning' (2011: 131). If repair infers damage, but damage does not imply repair, the temporal relationships between repair and damage are set in an imbalanced relational interplay. This potentially establishes the repair as an act of refusal, a refusal of temporal hierarchies that seek to subjugate the past in favour of the future.

By setting the repair as such a co-agent, we can set the past and future not as antitheses of each other, but in active dialogue. In the repair, linear narratives become disrupted and fragmented, potentially chaotic and dis-ordered. This speaks to the event of the rupture for which the repair has been deemed necessary. If we can understand the trauma that renders an event unrepresentable in terms of a linear narrative, in the impossibility of experiencing and remembering in discursive terms, the repair offers links and connections based upon radical fragmentation. Halberstam suggests a dismantling of the 'logics of success and failure' to make a case for 'losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing' as spaces for surprise and 'wondrous anarchy' (2011: 2). The ripped or frayed cloth is such a space of failure, a space where the threads disrupt what knowing might mean, offering a tangle moving in the wrong direction.

The tangled and frayed edge of woven cloth allows the temporal plane to become a place of meandering without direction, a place to lose oneself, a place to become unreliable. This space of muddled narrative and fragmentation is important because it offers a means to slip out of the usual linear narrative refusing individuality and singularity to embrace plurality and a form of discourse that transcends temporal relationality. The rupture approached from this angle can be construed as failure-in-resistance, offering textual unevenness, bias, and challenging fixed logics.

¹ Apartheid is a term derived from the Afrikaans word for separation and is used predominantly in relation to the South African system of institutionalised racial segregation from 1948 to the 1990s. Black and coloured South Africans were forced to live in separate townships, no voting rights, and were denied access to most forms of political and financial agency, including the same kinds of educational opportunities afforded to white South Africans. Following F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandelas' new South African constitution, finalised in 1993, a framework for the reversal of apartheid law was established, restoring equality, racial integration, and the rights to human dignity. However, the reality of post-apartheid South Africa has demonstrated the complex and long lasting legacies of such regimes. We can see continuation from the past, ongoing inequalities based on racial profiling, and a messiness in relation to the promised new world order. This messiness is well articulated in Eve Fairbanks' *Inheritors* (2023) and Evan Lieberman's *Until We Have Won our Liberty* (2020), which offer up different perspectives on this period, highlighting the ways in which transition to democracy has taken place from social and moral and institutional perspectives.

² This is taken up more fully by Andrew Abbott (1991), Doreen Massey (in Massey & Denton 1993) and TJ MacDonald (1996).

Methodology

In this essay, I want to take a materially led approach in which figuration and personification are drivers for understanding and which takes an embodied reading of concepts, themes, and examples. This is to say, I do not intend to explain the works selected but to stand alongside them, to try to come into dialogue with them as materially and conceptually conceived works and with their maker(s). I have selected a few works in particular for the ways in which they demonstrate aspects of rupture and repair, either physically or metaphorically. Sibande's collection of 'Sophies' are drawn on particularly for the ways in which they speak to an escape from the apartheid and post-apartheid¹ restrictions on black women's bodies and the fettering that remains. Through this, I aim to establish a non-linear narrative that functions in partnership with the installations, entangling the viewer, the works, concepts, histories, and meanings. In taking the idea of the narrative as non-linear, I want to give it cyclical and plural forms. I want to take on the storyteller's mode in which multiple starting points are available and the form of the story changes from telling to telling; sometimes some elements become focal points, and sometimes they recede, depending on the context and audience. The storytellers themselves become embedded in the context of the storytelling, framing the narrative accordingly. This is to take a different stance to a singular authoritative narrative, something that has been critiqued in postcolonial thought² particularly for the way it disregards other perspectives and often presumes a hierarchical pathway. Since the 1980s, narrative has emerged as a major form within academic writing, but often seen in direct opposition to analysis (Abbott 2007). I want to suggest that this is rather reductive and does not bring into play ways in which the form, choice of language, materiality, and the stance of the author towards their audience can add meaning and understanding to the analysis of artworks.

To approach an analysis of artworks in this way is to actively and emotionally engage with them, placing the writer, here me, within their framing. This also sets up a framework in which the emphasis does not stop at describing the work and exploring the artist's intentions, but also includes this viewer's reaction to it/them. This is to draw upon Andrew Abbott's concept of 'lyrical sociology' (Abbott 2007), through which he argues that there is a legitimate place within critical analysis and rigorous academic thinking and writing for the author's emotional apprehension. A lyrical sociological approach allows for a space within analysis for positing and exploring human differences and the tensions that exist between them. Abbott (2007: 96) writes that 'it confronts us with our temporal and social spatial particularities in the very process of showing us those of others.'

In this sense, I am proposing a form of non-linear lyrical narrative for thinking through the activity of repair as a materially led metaphor within Sibande's artwork. This is to say, in this essay I want to draw attention to the ways Sibande's works are complicated and useful for thinking about repair and reparation beyond formal artistic frameworks. The concept of repair is thus not taken as singular universally positive action. I will approach repair and reparation from a number of standpoints: the mend, in which the repair is considered in terms of its capacity to disrupt temporal linearities; the rough repair, in which the damage is loosely bound, leaving it open to re-rupture; care-full mending, in which the edges are brought together within a tensional field of new possibilities; and, finally, reparation in which a plural and productive mode that disrupts processes of normalisation of violence and harm. These four, taken together, often contradict and cross over one another, forming a matrixial surface across and through which to move in the endeavour of understanding what repair and reparation can contribute to understanding art works and artmaking.

In focusing on the artwork of Mary Sibande throughout this essay [Fig. 1], I recognise that there are artists whose work deals more directly with notions of repair and reparation and others whose work is more fabric-based than hers. Her practice takes multiple forms: photography, film, installation, and sculpture, and it is in this plurality and from this ambivalence that I want to take my departure. I am interested in the way in which, like textile, her work takes on a life attached to capitalist and geopolitical machinations. It is work that emanates from her preoccupations with failure, struggle and a vision for equitable freedoms. Her installations become self-portraits and thus vehicles to articulate these preoccupations. Whilst not exclusively textile works, textile features as a dominant voice across all of Sibande's works; there are excesses of clothing, tendrils wrought from stuffed fabric, head-dresses, skirts, aprons, hair, and other rampant forms that flow and ooze out from her figures, taking up space unapologetically. It is these characteristics that I will be drawing upon as a textile-based framework, and through which I will offer a way of thinking about repair and reparation as material actions for addressing equity.

The Mend – return to form

As previously discussed, ripped, torn, or frayed cloth offers a space of failure, a temporal plane of past, present, and future which plays host to undoing, unbecoming, and unknowing. In the meandering of tangled threads, the notion of repairing the trauma of rupture becomes reframed as a form of re-turn. The ques-

Fig. 1 Mary Sibande *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2008-13), installation. Photo: Somerset House, ©Anne Tetzlaff

Fig. 2 Mary Sibande *The Purple Shall Govern* (2013-17), Detail. Photo: Somerset House, ©Anne Tetzlaff



tion here is a re-turn to what? The repair as an ambivalent, uncertain activity is both desirable and to be resisted.

Here I want to think through the lens of tangled temporalities to scope out a more nomadic model for making meaning. I want to suggest a fragmented form of thinking that refuses the logic of resolution. Following Halberstam, this could be framed in terms of queer failure, where meaning and understanding are encouraged to inhabit the shadowy, murky spaces.

Mary Sibande is a South African post-apartheid artist working in a variety of forms: installation, photography, textiles, sculpture, and fashion. She creates the quasi-fictional character, Sophie, to embody a dream of liberation [Fig. 2]. Her clothes and their extensions and excesses become a site for such reinvention, tracking and tracing a passage from domestic worker to mistress. The Sophies, necessarily plural, act out yearnings and inner desires. Sophie was named after Sibande's grandmother and the series includes mannequins that have been modelled on herself. The series was initially developed for a solo exhibition in 2009,³ *The Purple Shall Govern*, in reference to Sophie's namesake but has evolved into a lexicon of expression of a South African collective consciousness, operating as conduits for other selves and expression of the psyche.

When I see the work of Mary Sibande, I am reminded of what she calls 'the gesture of naming',⁴ an action that functions like the mend to direct the gaze toward the damage or rupture that moves ahead and yet remains afterwards. Sibande, through this naming of her forms, calls attention to the failure of divisive systems, drawing the viewers into their chaos. Sibande's work is majestic and ceremonial; the installations and photographs are part fantastical, part advertorial, part yearning. In the sculptural installation *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2009) she presents four Sophies: Elsie, Marica, Valucia, and Ntombikayise; the first three genealogically linked to her along the matrilinear line, and all connected through a history of bondage [Fig. 3]. In this she reaches into the fissure of ways in which so many women remain bound up within cruel and violent systems of control. What Sibande achieves in these portraits is a demand to attend to the ways in which the world fails to be deterred from actions that maintain such systems of abuse. In so doing, she offers a vision of something different, an honouring through a storytelling that emanates from a powerfully calm surface. Ashraf Jamal notes that Sibande chooses to take the audience 'through the artist's body as memory-trace, ideal, familiar ... re-rout[ing] the past, transmit[ing] it, and thereby mak[ing] it a stranger to itself' (2017: 53). In this sense, these figures and their stories perform an act of repair, pointing to the ruptures, demanding attention, and prefiguring reparation.

The notion of re-routing the past in this way creates an extended system of connectivity in the majestic presence of the installations, its bodies and the ghosts

³ Mary Sibande at Iziko South African National Gallery (9 July to 3 August 2009).

⁴ Artist statement, 'Mary Sibande: I Came Apart at the Seams', Somerset House, October 2019-January 2020.

Fig. 3 Mary Sibande *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2008-13), Detail. Photo: Somerset House, ©Anne Tetzlaff



or spirits it evokes. We can see this in the configuration of Victorian costumes interpenetrated with activities and signifiers of a domestic worker. In her artist statement, we read: 'My interest is not in looking at the negative of being a domestic worker, specifically in post-apartheid South Africa, but rather in the humanity and commonplace of people despite the boxes we find ourselves in.'⁵ This provides a useful pivot point in the temporal sphere in which Sibande rethinks the black body, her black body, shifting its aesthetics to establish different rules of engagement. 'Sophie' becomes her projected and imaginary other and yet there are

⁵ Artist statement, 'Mary Sibande: I Came Apart at the Seams', Somerset House October 2019-January 2020.



multiple (four) Sophies, an unsettled plurality that privileges uncertainty. Their energy is both latent and released upon the viewer, and it is within this uncontrolled force-field that the clothing, the exaggerated forms, and wildly flailing cloth/body parts revel in their excessiveness. She was influenced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1980) concept of the bifurcating rhizome and their explication of the generative and creative power of schizoid thinking. These concepts don't pivot around a principle core, but invoke an openendedness, a refusal of finite meanings. This leads Jamal to speak of Sibande's work in terms of a Baroque practice that 'lives in a wondrous sense of hope and play' (2017: 59). He continues to reflect upon how she constructs a self only to shatter it, rejecting prescriptive narratives, and it is here that we again see Sibande shifting the temporal field, reordering repeatedly past, present, and future. She ruptures the temporal frame, allowing its edges to tangle. If repair was demanded, it would be one that can be held in Sibande's hands – it breaks away, re-rupturing. Sibande's Sophies are dangerously and endlessly prone to rupture and re-rupture [Fig. 4].

Sibande's works present the rupture as an open wound, a space of and for troubling, and with the potential for refusing the originating structures. She plays between the tangled edges, refusing an essentialism that the urge to repair configures. In the rupture of the temporal order, the unravelling threads and stitches create a space of excess, outside of organising structures and principles. Homi Bhabha considers excess to be a form of differentiation that gives rise to a doubling, a mimicry of colonial practices and slippage of meaning (1984: 127). However, Mary Corrigan, writing on Sibande's work, sees her excessiveness as a tool through

Fig. 4 *Mary Sibande The Purple Shall Govern* (2013-17), Detail. Photo: Somerset House, ©Anne Tetzlaff

which to enable dislocation from reality and uniformity (1994: 148). Taking both together, we have in the excess of the rupture a space set aside. Sibande deploys this rupture through her interpenetration of domestic worker with Victorian bourgeoisie, exaggerating the excessiveness and drawing attention to the absence of social mobility within the supposed democratic context of post-Apartheid South Africa, for both parties. In this sense, she plays with the rupture, pressures for repair, and the burgeoning out from the tangled edges.

Socio-culturally, the rupture invites repair in the same way that repair presupposes rupture and damage. In the rupture, excess abounds and the temporal sphere is distorted. Societal forces come into play to try to re-order and return the whole to its former self, to maintain the status quo. As Sibande's Sophies remind us, the status quo is wrought with inequalities, and it denies social mobility – the domestic worker cannot become lady of the house. However, she further reminds us that both are social institutions, and in combining them in her work, she is collapsing the syntax. In this space of rupture, between mimicry and differentiation there is excess and slippage, and a fragmentation of power structures; in the case of Sibande, a fragmentation brought about by an imaginative pleasure-seeking, a space for hopeful imagination.

Returning to the metaphors of mending, frayed cloth, we can consider that when cloth is torn or frayed, an invisible repair requires painstaking retrieval of the loosened fibres and threads back into their woven structures alongside the introduction of new threads to seal up the tear or fray. This repair returns and re-forms the cloth and behaves as if the rupture never took place, preventing fantasies of liberation, returning and re-locking each to their socially allotted space and associated dichotomies.

In Sibande's works we repeatedly see Sophie resist this form of mending [Fig. 5]. Her hybrid garments retain her at the borderlines, at that frayed, torn edge where there is doubling over and back of the syntax of status, where imaginations can flow and entangle. In this excessive space, Sophie appears lost in her imaginings and suspended between the temporal sphere, and Sibande's clothes become increasingly fantastical with extreme proportions that appear to be trying to escape her bodily form as well as entrap her further.

I want to suggest here that these expanded garments, with their fantastical forms and increasing excessiveness, drive the fragmentation of the temporal plane yet further, denying the stasis of simply arriving at a new social status, leaving the balancing act between need and desire in a precarious state. To do this, I want to move away from notions of rupture and repair as actions of making good, returning to wholeness and sense-making within existing structures, and move further into a non-sense-making realm exemplified through the rough mend or the bind.



Fig. 5 Mary Sibande *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2008-13), Detail. Photo: Somerset House, ©Anne Tetzlaff

This is to follow writers such as Kader Attia (2018) to adapt and survive in new environments. From an ethical point of view, there is reappropriation because there has been dispossession. African objects that have been repaired using Western leftovers, or overexpressive repairs are kept aside in the collections of Western museums as inadequate. Since the Age of Reason, the Occident has always categorised and ordered the world, following its own cultural criteria and beliefs, which led to a misunderstanding. Western human sciences, like ethnology, were developed to analyse the non-Occidental world, in order to control it. The unexpected aesthetic of ‘antemodern’ repaired objects from non-Western cultures, which have been colonised, embodies a sign of resistance. It happens from an act of a cultural otherness, which reappropriates the cultural space that it was taken from (and taken over by a foreigner occupant and ideology, Julia Bryan Wilson (2017), and Patricia Stuelke (2021), who collectively unpack notions of what it means to repair from non-Western standpoints, the forward thrust to put ruptured objects back in their initial state. Stuelke ends her book *The Ruse of Repair* with a ‘Conclusion: Against Repair’ (2021: 215-218) in which she refuses a vision of repair, suggesting that to do so is a ‘category error.’ Her approach is to trace reparative logics and point to the ways in which the will to repair without trace has helped to bring about something worse. Meanwhile, Bryan Wilson reflects upon the persistence of textiles and the way in which their significance becomes enhanced as they unravel and reveal their structure. Attia looks at the in-between space that broken non-Occidental objects occupy within Occidental aesthetics and ethics of repair. This is to say that in the process of rupture and fray, the conditions for

⁶ As previously noted, the process of dismantling South African apartheid systems and cultures is a continuous process and many of the freedoms afforded have not been realised as imagined. For example, with the freedom to participate in retail and social activities come the capitalist and cultural structures that exclude on the basis of unwritten knowledge systems and affordability.

repair are formed as an expanded and ambiguous space. In the excess of the fray, the repair becomes an agential and temporally ambiguous space.

The Rough Repair – Binding

One of the most dominant features of Sibande's artworks is the ways in which she embodies critique and possibility of the promise of new freedoms within post-Apartheid South Africa.⁶ In this she focuses viewers' minds on an argument of a form of world-making that is an agential, performative enactment of imaginative possibilities, set outside of temporal and colonial constraints. She takes on a sense of futurity or a process of becoming that moves to and fro between pasts, presents, and futures. Her artwork encompasses and speaks to the past at the same time as opening out new possibilities and thus new histories.

In the Sophies' progression, Sibande speaks of generational trauma, something anthropologist Henrietta Moore considers in terms of inverting psychoanalytical approaches and the capacity of embodied experience. Sophie refuses a life lived through such generational trauma, refuses to repeat, and shifts the emphasis onto how to imagine (and realise) differently. Moore suggests there is a capacity to destabilise making of the self, social relations, and imaginaries. She frames this as 'being oneself and being beside oneself' (2011: 13). In taking on her alter-ego-self, Sophie, Sibande foregrounds her matrilineage, rupturing the naming practices white employers used on the South African people they employed. In an interview, Sibande makes it clear that she is aiming for a form of world-making that is not 'a simple reaction to social and political conditions' (Eyene 2013). She argues for a doubling back and folding forward, a way of being other than the past presumes. In this she makes of the rupture a rough mend, a mend that holds the parts in tension whilst repeatedly calling attention to the ruptured surface. The new surface formed is definitively not taken back to its previous state, but rather allowed to take on its own future trajectory, its frayed and entangled threads allowed to break away from the woven structure.

The rough mend could, in many ways, be said to not be a mend at all in that it draws together the broken or frayed edges with stitches that bind over and around. It has no intention of returning the surface to its original state or wholeness. It is, at best, pragmatic and functional; it is often made for reasons of urgency or because that which is being mended does not warrant more time or care to be spent on it. It could also be carelessly formed by someone unskilled.

bell hooks, writing with frustration about how little has been committed to print about the ways in which living within racial apartheid affects the psyches of black

people, a fear rooted in unresolved trauma that is intended to keep black fearful of white (2009: 56), speaks eloquently of transgenerational trauma. I am interested here in the effect of this trauma in terms of the rupture and the rough repair. hooks discusses the role of images in world-making and the perpetuation of racial segregation. Mass media could be said to be the source of most people's understanding of other groups and communities, and mass media proliferates stereotypes and biases, requiring the enquiring mind to break out of the closed loop of thinking, to become curious about the formation of ideologies. This is a space where the rough mend, as a hiatus in the social fabric, offers scope for such curiosity, to become awakened. If the rupture is made visible, its entangled threads laid bare, without the intention to return the surface to its original state, then there lies greater scope for exploration and understanding the causes of the rupture and the nature of the tensions surrounding it.

The invisible mend aims to render the surface as new; it requires skill and dexterity to manipulate the broken and new threads back into an orderly formation [Fig. 6]. It is formed consciously to draw attention away from the rupture, to arouse no further interest. Should any interest be placed upon this mend, it is to admire the skill of the repairer. The rough mend, on the other hand, borne out of pragmatics, leaves edges and threads free and tangled; it holds the parts together, but repeatedly calls attention to the rupture. The edges double over each other, press together, reveal their intimacy on the outside, with loose threads escaping. Returning to the idea of the second chance, however, is useful here in contemplating mending, but particularly the rough mend, its brutal and raw formation, and its utilitarianism, but also a certain defiance in the stitcher and surface. In this defiance, the concept of repair and reparation emerges, cutting across timelines, calling into question how we should or can read the material forms in front of us. With this in mind, we need to think carefully about Sibande's Sophies, her use fabrics and forms. Are these being repaired or undone? Are the fabrics new, repurposed, or pre-used? This cuts against concerns of authenticity. We know she uses her familial narrative, the matrilineal struggle, alongside metaphors and storytelling techniques within her artworks as a means by which to explore the marking of time, a fear of dying and her own fragility; these all become part of the Sophies' narratives. The Sophies become simultaneously the articulation of the rupture and their own rough repair.

Thus, the rough repair, its volatility and provisionality, offers a space of order within disorder, balance within imbalance, a doubling back and over the temporal zones. In this entanglement, the bound edges of the rough mend remain visible. In this sense, through the forms, marks, and traces, we can understand a story that sets not just a staging of her response to contemporary concerns regarding



Fig. 6 Catherine Dormor *Rough Mend* (2023)
Photo: the artist

⁷ The Black Lives Matter movement coalesced in 2013 around a number of murders of black teenagers in the US where the perpetrators, in some cases state sanctioned police officers, were acquitted or not investigated fully. The movement has expanded internationally and seeks to highlight ways in which black people are treated unfairly both in society, but also through institutionalised racism by agencies such as the police.

⁸ For further reading on the ways in which post-apartheid South Africa has both changed and remains segregated along racial lines, I recommend Eve Fairbanks' *Inheritors* (2023) and Evan Lieberman's *Until We Have Won our Liberty* (2020), which take different methodologies and case studies to frame an analysis.

post-apartheid South Africa and post-Black Lives Matter contexts,⁷ but a capacity to reach forward and back simultaneously, a capacity to form a robust and yet delicate web that is rich in ambiguity, a threshold between the visual and the sensual.

Within this web there is a play across the temporal structures, something that bell hooks refers to in her book *Belonging: a culture of place* (2009) as a 'psychic archaeological dig' (p. 67), as she searched for a sense of belonging within her home state of Kentucky some thirty years after leaving it. She speaks of revelling in a piecing together of her world in such a way that she can be whole and holy (p. 68), which tacitly references a form of mending that refuses to remain invisible and, in that refusal, denies the invisible mend, with its imperatives to move forward. For hooks, whole and holy are aligned but do not mean seamless or unruptured, but reference the fragmented self within the world. What we see in hooks' homecoming is how she grapples with her past lived experience of that state and its segregations alongside her genealogy: a long line of farmers and the stewardship of the land that that implies and evokes. The reparative work of hooks aligns with Sibande's fantastical structures. hooks draws upon Scott Russell Sanders' phrase in relation to how we belong within a landscape as 'a knitting of self and the world' (1994: 49) and, in terms of rough mending, it is this same kind of materially led binding of edges and pieces, without the finesse and attempt to disguise the rupture, that the invisible mend offers. Like hooks, Sibande's Sophies are searching for a sense of belonging, grappling with what belonging might mean for a newly liberated population.⁸ She draws out the fantasies and ambitions, recognising the constraints that a house servant, even liberated, still faces. Sophie performs hooks' 'psychic archaeological dig' (2009: 48) through her tendrils, her falling form, her unbalanced lurching forward [Fig. 7]. We are not presented at any point with a static, resolved Sophie. She is constantly in flux and change, the visible, rough mend holding things together. For now.

Thus in Sophie the rough mend allows for her genealogies to remain at risk of failing. I want to consider what this might mean and consider an organisational principle for the mend in the next section, focusing my thoughts around the mend as an ethics of care within which being lost is a vital aspect and being found is finding oneself.

Care-full Mending

bell hooks, speaking of her return, addresses the ways in which black farmers were 'gifted' parcels of land by the white occupants, observing that 'healing begins with

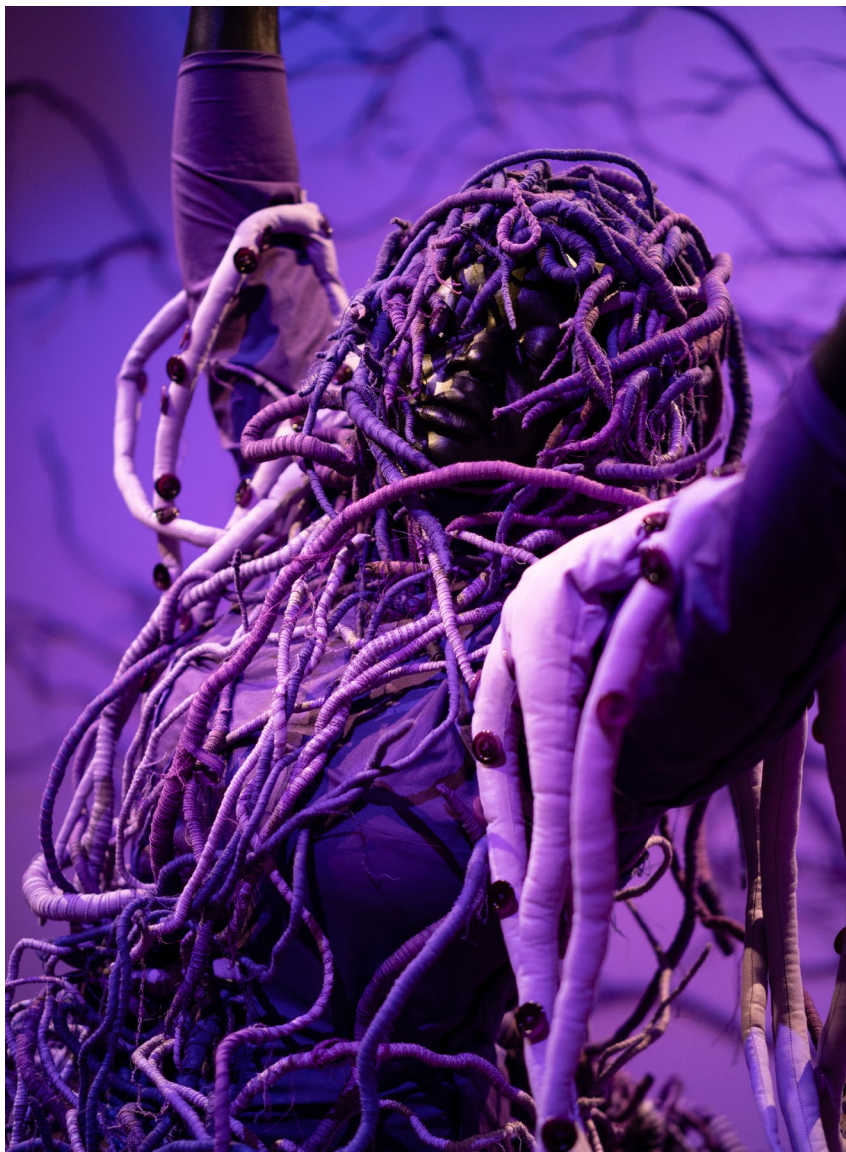


Fig. 7 *Mary Sibande The Purple Shall Govern* (2013-17), Detail. Photo: Somerset House, ©Anne Tetzlaff

self-determination' (2009: 47). In this she establishes a space that draws together past actions, present circumstances, and future histories that are being made in the present. She further observes that one cannot be mended; one must make one's own mends. As she discusses what she found and what she had forgotten of her childhood landscapes, she quotes Wendell Berry, 'the body cannot be whole alone' (2002: 99).

These two observations might at first appear contradictory, but I want to argue here that it is both perspectives, the self-determination within and as part of a



Fig. 8 *Mary Sibande Long Live the Dead Queen* (2008-13), installation. Photo: Somerset House, ©Anne Tetzlaff

community that allows mending and healing to take place. This draws us back to Halberstam and sets healing and mending as a care-full set of practices enacted through a process of losing and re-making across the temporal planes. Thus, the past becomes activated within the present, and the thrusting forward of the future loops back into this present.

Let us start by revisiting Sibande's artworks, this time to consider the excess, the overflowing and outpouring that are performed within them [Fig. 8]. Looking at the full collection of Sophies, it is immediately clear that her garments become more and more elaborate over time, as do their titles, reflecting her dreams and aspirations expanding. The progression appears to speak of a form of self-determination being constructed as the boundaries between the possible and the imagined break down and blur. Sophie begins to play with notions of excess stuff and being excess, and the associated waste, and in this she creates a rift between herself as imagined aristocrat and herself as servant. This excess, Sibande tells us, mirrors the conspicuous display of wealth seen in post-apartheid South Africa and notes that such behaviour became a form of hedonistic practice in which people

seemed to want to push the greater and greater extremes (Sibande quoted in Corrigall 2010: 6).

The collapse of boundaries, the rupturing of apartheid systems and the performance of excess and waste establish a frame that is all about the rupture, loss, and what might come next. In the dreamlike, fantastical installations, Sibande plays between the real and the imagined, drenching the viewer in intensified colour pallets syncopated by white servant aprons and their ties. As the series progresses the garments and forms become tentacular, breaking free from Sophie, challenging the audience before turning back on her, gradually subsuming her, monstrously expanding, and running ahead of her imagination from within the excess.

What we see in this series is an expression of unhealed rupturing, where agency appears to be in the process of being returned, only to be redirected towards an alternative system of suppression – capitalist excess and ostentatious consumption. Where Sophie seeks liberation, she finds material wealth and capacity, but it is not a psychic liberation. Sophie has become entangled and colonised by this system. Sibande's oeuvre starts messaging subtly and then with great volume that her garments are expressions of imagination, not reality, questioning whether the entangled interplay between self and clothing can ever really be taken as proof of social and/or political transformation.

If we take hooks' aphorism that 'healing begins with self-determination' (2009: 47), we need to take a step back from this apparent conundrum or unrealisable dream of freedom and look at Sibande's tentacular installations and sculptures through a slightly different lens, that of care-full mending. This involves not travelling down a consumerist fashion fantasy line of thought, but to focus upon the way in which Sibande, through the Sophies, establishes a site for reinvention of the self. Through this reinvention she can map her own transition from domestic worker to mistress through a process of care-full mending.

To speak of care-full mending here is to focus upon the body and its clothing not as a series of objects but, to follow Simone de Beauvoir, as a 'situation' (1966: 301). In saying this, de Beauvoir offers an alternative to the post-structuralist distinction between sex and gender of the late 1960s. In its place she proposes a more materialistically focused model of feminism, placing women and their lived experiences within social and historical framings. Thus to think of the body as 'a situation' is to consider it as a networked, bridging, socio-cultural phenomenon. Interestingly, she draws upon phenomenology in taking this approach, which highlights the point here about how social and political structures become produced and reproduced at the level of the body.

If controlling structures are produced at the level of the body, then this is most concentrated within the processes of incarceration which, according to Lisa Guenther,

‘conflates accountability with punishment’ (2021: 16). Care-full mending requires this same tracing of structures, to make the elements visible and yet bound up with one another. Remaining with phenomenology follows Merleau Ponty’s idea that humans are *in the world and at the same time the world is in us, something he illustrated through the rhetorical figure of the chiasm* (1964: 130-155). The chiasm allows for a shared space occupied by distinct entities without them becoming combined or elided; it is a space that prioritises relationality. Touching, as an example, cannot take place without being touched – there exists a reciprocity within the chiasm.

In this sense care-full mending performs such a chiasm: it has both distinct and overlapping elements, or what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls ‘difference without separability’ (2016). Where the rupture is formed, the care-full mend requires persistence and pervasive action, creating a tensional field between the concrete and the speculative. The stitch draws pieces together, re-joining broken edges. As the pieces are brought together by the stitching, a new sense of the whole is formed: edges, threads, stitches functioning within a chiasmatic relationship. As the needle and thread rupture the fabric to pass through before turning back and re-rupturing, they form holes within the structural integrity of warp and weft. The stitch causes a form of bleeding out and sticking to – sometimes a gradual seepage along the length of the stitching as the sewing thread becomes increasingly worn, or it can be more sudden, like haemorrhage or menstrual flooding. The care-full mend hovers and functions at the edge or borders, between clean and dirty, life and death, whole and fragmented. It is both the rough mend and the refusal of the reparative act. The matterly activity of the stitch or stitching can be understood through Judith Butler as ‘a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter’ (1993: 9). To consider mending as a process of materialisation gives scope for thinking through the needle, thread, fabric, and the action of stitching collectively. This is a collective becoming: both seepage and haemorrhage.

Hand stitching is a care-full act of pushing the needle and thread through the fabric in a repeated set of movements along the line of stitching: push needle into fabric, draw shaft, eye and thread through the hole formed, draw thread against thread. The body and fabric remember each stitch, each rupture of surface, gestures that leach out of the porous limits of body and cloth. Returning to de Beauvoir’s body-as-situation, the stitch thought of in this way offers a refusal of subject/object divisions in favour of a framework in which consciousness is body-specific and gendered. That is to say, there exists a frictional relationship between body and subjectivity. As that body-fabric seeps and bleeds, it speaks into an intergenerational shadow, speaking into Sibande’s unwanted histories,

genealogies, and legacies that epitomise female subjugation and an invisible workforce of enslaved and semi-enslaved domestic workers and clothing producers. In Sibande's work we see cloth and stitch let loose in a fantastical space for imagining. The works question what so-called self-determination might look and feel like. She breaks away from the lap-based, portable structures into vast swathes of cloth and cloth-based forms. She creates an excessive space that leaches out of the prim and tidy stitching, doubling over and over. Here the care-full mending is not so much about containing the broken edges, but about allowing the inner excesses to be relocated and set free. The stitching and mending here recognise that the clothing given no longer fits, the internal body is growing, expanding, and traversing its boundaries. This mend, then, allows for that growth and spilling out – further ruptures. It allows new forms to be stitched, in the form of tendrils and tentacles that can reach up, out, and around the body and its given forms. Where previously the white apron symbolised Sophie as a domestic worker, now her position within society has become ambiguous: she is oversized and overflowing, taking up more and more space and disrupting the excess dress of the aristocracy. Sophie's excess is not rows and layers of perfectly formed ruffles and pin-tucks, nor does she reference the dandy whose dress played with a wealth of styles and silhouettes derived from different eras. Sibande plays between stabilised forms and their destabilised imaginaries, dragging her needle and thread between the two to form a rhetorical chiasm – touched and touching, excess and exceeding, mended and ruptured. Here, in the care-full mending, worked from within the system of dominating powers and the syntax of dress, Sophie rebels and positions herself in a conflicted and duplicitous situation, to coin de Beauvoir. She points to a place of reparation, a way in which a new order might be imagined and in which more fluid identities might be given agency. The care-full mend creates a dialogic space within which the imagined can be realised through its capacity to function outside of the usual temporal and societal planes.

Reparation

Spending time with Sibande's Sophies presents a powerful, emotive, and psychologically difficult range of works, comprising different personas suspended between temporal planes and societal positions. Their interior imagination becomes channelled through these fantastical exteriors that challenge the notion of dress as somehow a superficial façade. The sculptures are beautifully rendered, meticulously crafted from elaborate fabrics. Through this we can read the language of oppression and subjugation, difficult lives and violent acts perpetrated against

them. Sibande's Sophies reach out towards the viewer and one another. They do not cower as victims, instead offering an empathetic space in which they hold fast to their own imagination for freedom; they speak to the viewer's own vulnerability – not as victim or one in need, but as co-constituent.

Sophie's bodies are chiasmatic; they are held as much as they hold, they make space as they take up space. This capacity to occupy the chiasm between bodily known self, imagined self and historical self, becomes an important motif across the body of works. The installation becomes an act of mending, binding between Sophies, Sibande, and viewers. This binding acts out a reparation that is as unlike fine embroidery or invisible mending as it is possible to get, using the same raw materials and tools.

Sibande, even within the beautifully crafted forms, privileges pierced surfaces, rough edges and fraying in the works, through their excess, their tendrils, and tentacles. The viewer is directed away from the pristine and notions of wholeness, pointed towards the chaotic, imbalanced, precarious, and broken. The bleeding from the ruptures is staunches, but only just, and the scary repairs are paraded. These repairs destabilise the bodies' boundaries, speaking directly to the violence, enabling a discourse of reparation. Sophie is provocative and enlivening. In a time of historical reckoning, particularly in terms of colonial pasts, Sophie offers a form of future history-making based upon a repair that seems more urgent and vital than ever. I want to suggest here that repair and reparation are necessary because of violent acts, are borne out of violent actions of needle and thread, act through violence, and hold in tension a dynamic of anxiety. This is, I propose, a necessary condition of reparation. It is the only way to hold the temporality of violence and oppression to account.

What this means is that reparation and repair, operating within a dynamic of anxiety, are not established as phases to pass through to fixed wholeness, but as productive, plural, vulnerable, and affective ways of living. This involves meeting the past in the future and looking at the future through the past. It involves becoming lost within the repair and its excesses to find an expanded subjectivity.

Anxious living offers a way by which to understand corporal-affective materialisations of power structures that continue to enable racism, sexism, and coloniality, to occupy Sophie's tendrils and tentacular spaces. To approach repair from within anxiety is to refuse an invisible model of mending, because this tries to pretend nothing happened. The rough repair and care-full mending do not let colonial pasts and presents escape reckoning. There is no set of actions of payments that can make the rupture go away.

If the repair is made visible and care-fully rendered, if the edges can potentially re-open and re-bleed, then the mend or repair becomes a material and affective

enactment of, and challenge to, contemporary power structures. These are both individual and structural, sometimes painful and sometimes undesirable. This sets up a framework not as an alternative or desired way of being, but as a challenge to disrupt norms and processes of normalisation.

Sophie's manifestation of anxious living offers a terrifying space for contemplation. To live with the terrifying is an agentic dynamic that establishes temporary alliances, separations, and disruptions that deny solidified allegiance, identity, and belonging. The act of catching up the edges of fabric parts in the repair is important when the focus is upon anxious living as reparative because it cuts to the lived experience. It has the capacity to speak to politics embedded in the quotidian but experienced systemically and structurally. In this, anxious living holds the capacity to act beyond the reactive; it can enact a break and effect change. In the precarious act of pulling needle to and fro across the rupture, the needle and thread perform an acrobatics of change. The raw edges, held roughly and carefully, offer a model of murky resistance, 'counterintuitively, often impossible dark and negative realm[s] of critique and refusal' (Halberstam: p. 2).

The bedfellow of anxious living could be said to be imaginative living, enacted through affective materialisation of counter-power actions; that is, acts and actions that are ambivalently agential. Sophie performs non-normativity and refuses to conform. She is an open wound, roughly repaired. She is a space of pain and hope, disability and capacity, stasis and action. She is the act of catching fabric edges and performing the acrobatics of the turn before drawing the thread around and over, binding the edge, but leaving sufficient capacity for the excess within to emerge and spill over. She breaks the temporal plane, pointing to new kinds of futures in her histories.

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a retrospective post-humanist and fematerial reading of the work of Charlotte Posenenske. This paper re-reads Posenenske's work in relation to how a decentring of the human subject and artistic author in her Minimalist, fabricated, sculptural practice could be considered to extend an empathy to materials and allow for intimacy with objects; defined here as an amity, a kinship, a close reading, and consideration for objects and materials.

The sculptural processes implicated by Posenenske, and her removal of the hand of the artist from her work not just in the production but also the installation and placement of the work, is radical. Posenenske's work steps beyond the outsourcing of the labour of art to an anonymous factory worker in the case of the found object, or to a fabricator. Instead her work insists on a collaborative process not just in production but in the arrangement, configuration, and distribution of the artworks, that breaks down the hierarchies embedded in the production, reception, and circulation of art.

Posenenske's work is currently enjoying a revival and being correctly acknowledged for its radicality and importance to the history of Late-Modernist sculpture. This paper asks, what might Posenenske's sculptural practice offer to the discourse of sculpture now in terms of notions of sculptural intimacy, and to a post-humanist, feminist ecological revision of female practitioners of minimalist sculpture?

keywords

CHARLOTTE POSENENSKE
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Minimalist intimacy and feminist materialism in the work of Charlotte Posenenske

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Introduction

Charlotte Posenenske was a sculptor born in pre-WWII Germany who died relatively young in 1985 at the age of 54 after famously leaving the art world and art-making behind in 1968 to study sociology with a particular focus on industrial labour. As an artist, Posenenske is known primarily for her factory-produced, serial sculptures made from common, industrial, quotidian materials such as corrugated cardboard and galvanised steel. This essay focuses primarily on Posenenske's series *Vierkantrohre Serie D* (Square Tubes Series D, 1967), which takes the form of common architectural galvanised steel ventilation ducting. These sculptures are distinctive in terms of their focus and explication of the conditions of their production, dissemination, and circulation, intended by the artist to be arranged by the gallery technicians and members of the public and to be reconfigurable in the exhibition environment.

Posenenske's work has recently enjoyed a revival and has achieved significant recognition after being largely omitted from the art historical narrative since the artist stopped practicing in 1968. The revival of Posenenske's work in major museum and gallery exhibitions, particularly in the United States, has often focused on the later series *Vierkantrohre Serie D*. The dialogue and discourse surrounding these exhibitions have regularly focused on reframing Posenenske's work – because of her insistence on the 'participation' of the audience and others in their gallery arrange-

ments – as an early precursor to more contemporary modes of artistic practice such as Relational Aesthetics and socially engaged and participatory practices.

This paper provides a re-framing of Posenenske's work alongside contemporary post-humanist discourse, re-situating *Vierkantrohre Serie D* in terms of how it may operate to dismantle anthropocentric models of human and non-human relations in the context of sculptural artmaking. Posenenske's work is examined in terms of how it demonstrates ways that non-human objects, materials, and humans can collaborate, co-produce, and co-labour in models for production that take in the economic model of labour and production in Marxist thought and go beyond this anthropocentric model of production and labour to include non-human entities as co-labourers that comprise the artwork. Posenenske's work is placed alongside a post-humanist reading of objects and a de-anthropocentric framework of production, collaboration, and empathy between humans, objects, materials, and social and political realities through which to resituate her significant and radical sculptural practice.

This paper explores the possibilities of more-than-human collaborative labour offered by Posenenske's sculptural work, exploring the politics of the hand and artistic authorship as presented in her sculptural practice. Posenenske radically questioned the unique authorial status and privilege of the artist by including and explicating 'many hands' as authors in the work. This approach is placed in contrast with the work and ideology of other minimalist artists Donald Judd and Richard Serra, illustrating how Posenenske deviated from the norms of her canonical American Minimalist contemporaries. Posenenske insisted on the removal and redistribution of her authorial status in terms of how her work was produced, disseminated, exhibited, and ultimately how it was traded on the art market.

The empathic potential of the industrial object is explored as regards Posenenske's work *Vierkantrohre Serie D*. Posenenske's work is located between divergent histories of the found and readymade object, that of the Duchampian lineage, and the Constructivist lineage. This analysis seeks to discover what the industrially produced object offers in terms of potential for post-human empathy in Posenenske's work. Following this, a semiotic reading of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* is positioned and problematised as both anthropomorphic and as offering a pathway towards material empathy, a way of feeling into empathy and care with materials and more-than-human material and objects through post-human discourse.

Finally, this paper examines more-than-human Marxist politics of labour in Posenenske's work, considering the potential for a posthumanist view of multiple human and non-human labouring entities in Posenenske's work. This section examines how the collaboration between the artist, the factory worker, the museum worker, and the viewer in Posenenske's work act to collapse the hierarchies of value in

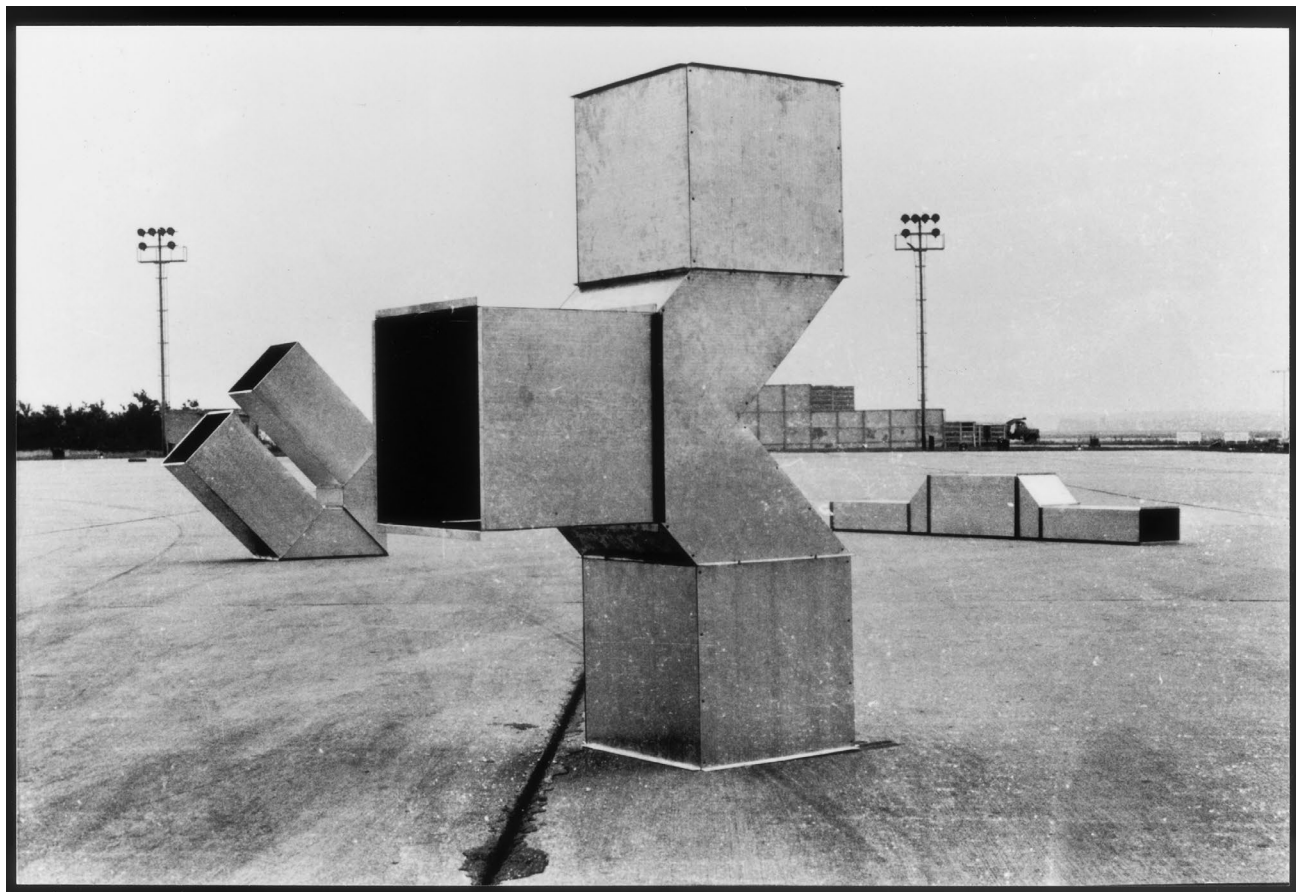
human social and labour relations and rehabilitate the alienation of the worker. Further to this, the non-human agents – objects and materials and the machines or apparatus that make Posenenske's work – are considered as labouring alongside the human 'authors.' This expanded model of collaborative labour is proposed as posthuman artistic labour.

While Charlotte Posenenske is notable for her radical form of artmaking, this is often eclipsed by the fascination and attention she has gained for her early exit from the art world and her abandonment of the making of art. This paper seeks to locate and re-examine Posenenske's sculptural works, particularly *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, within a posthumanist discourse, pursuing the possibility for her works to be reconsidered as radical artistic, social, and de-anthropocentric objects that consider and refigure a more-than-human labour politics in the production of artworks.

Many hands; artistic authorship and democratic artmaking in Posenenske's work

Charlotte Posenenske's work *Vierkantrohre Serie D* consists of a series of six shapes manufactured industrially in galvanised sheet metal and fabricated into large square tube forms that closely resemble ventilation ducts, carefully designed by Posenenske. This work and other series by Posenenske such as *Drehflügel Serie E* (Revolving Vanes Series E, 1967-68) were founded and contingent on the removal of the authorial hand of the artist, and the replacement of the singular artistic hand of authorship with many hands of process, fabrication, handling, and installation by various other actors, such as fabricators, gallery technicians, and members of the public.

The works in Posenenske's *Vierkantrohre Serie D* were and still are, following her consent before her death, manufactured by a factory in Frankfurt to Posenenske's specifications (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 13). The specified individual forms are relatively modest in scale, but once assembled into configurations can become industrial, even architectural in scale. Once fabricated, the installation configuration for these sculptures was, at Posenenske's instruction, to be decided on-site by the installation crew in the gallery or museum. When the works were exhibited, Posenenske intended for these forms to be infinitely reconfigurable by viewers whom Posenenske referred to as 'consumers' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 7), a term that explicitly underlined her focus on the entire economic cycle of production of her objects in terms of circulation, dissemination and reception, and the politics of labour and authorship.

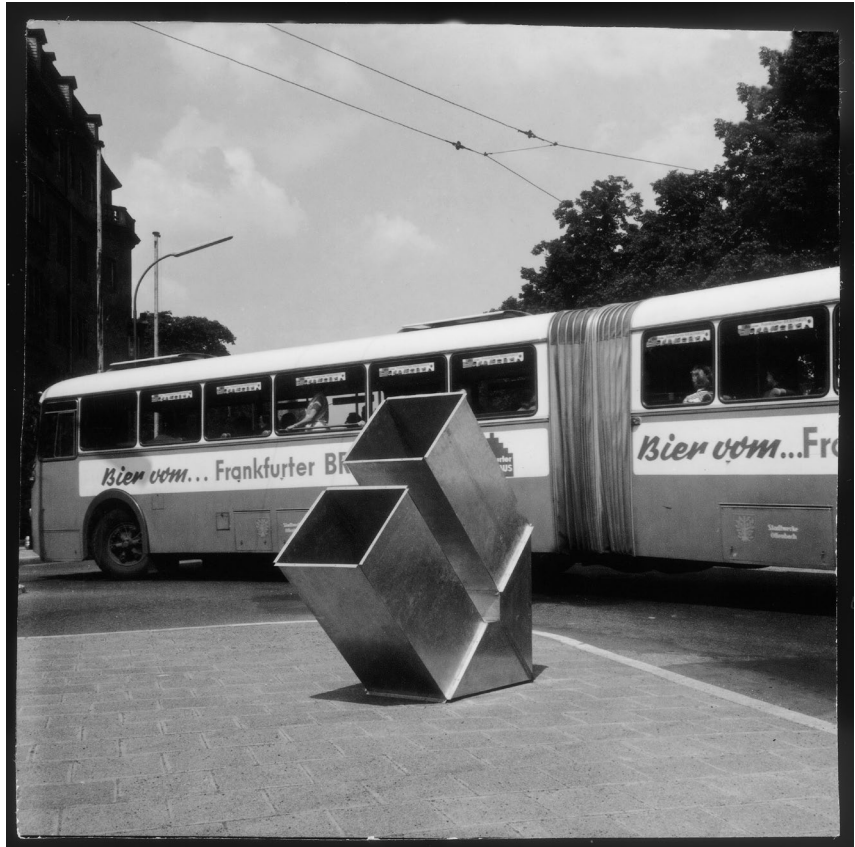


These objects were offered to the 'consumer' at cost price, made financially possible by the fact that Posenenske was the recipient of an inheritance (Kleinman 2010). Posenenske encouraged the 'consumer' to consider these objects as being infinite in terms of their potential for configuration and arrangement, writing in the catalogue for her Kleine Gallery exhibition: 'Don't worry if you're never "done," because the re-combination could proceed in perpetuity without ever becoming boring' (Vogel 2019). As a result, the series *Vierkantrohre Serie D* has a sense of contingency and performativity, despite their industrial appearance and large, monumental scale when assembled into combinations. The sense of performativity is derived from the artist's directive and invitation that this and other works in her serial configurations be re-made, re-arranged, and re-figured during and in subsequent iterations of their exhibition.

The performativity of her sculptures was demonstrated at the debut of a related series of serial duct-like sculptures, *Series DW*, at the Galerie Dorothea Loehr in 1967. Posenenske had a crew in Lufthansa overalls arrange and re-arrange the

Fig. 1 Installation view of Charlotte Posenenske, *Vierkantrohre Serie D* at Frankfurt airport in 1967. Courtesy of the Estate of Charlotte Posenenske and Mehdi Chouakri, Berlin.

Fig. 2 Installation view of Charlotte Posenenske, *Vierkantrohre Serie D* in Offenbach, 1967. Courtesy of the Estate of Charlotte Posenenske and Mehdi Chouakri, Berlin.



units at the opening event. Posenenske wrote in a text accompanying the exhibition: 'You'll see this evening that in the rooms and courtyard of the gallery large shapes in cardboard will be assembled in always new combinations... There is a wide range of combinations... The choice depends on the size of the space, the time at disposal, the number of spectators, and the weather tonight' (Posenenske 1967). This passage demonstrates the mutability and contingency with which Posenenske regarded these serial objects at the time of their exhibition in 1967. To Posenenske, their appearance is subject to multiple external factors and conditions, human and more-than-human (the weather), rather than being fixed, monumental, and solely dictated by the artist.

To add to their performativity, Posenenske often photographed the forms in liminal, transitory civic, or industrial environments, such as this example of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* [Fig. 1] pictured at a siding in Frankfurt Airport, or in another example where this sculpture is photographed installed temporarily on a busy traffic island in Offenbach. [Fig. 2] The photographs of the sculptures are staged by Posenenske, and her placement and installation of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* in every-

day or transitory environments serves to demonstrate how the artist regarded her work as deeply part of the everyday, of the ordinary and useful components of the world, mutable and subject to change, rather than as rarefied art objects with elevated fixed status in the world. Further, she regarded her role as an artist as forming one part of the production process, rather than as the unique, singular originator of the work. As Martin Pesch writes: 'She viewed her function as that of a supplier who made material available, but who did not have to be present at the moment of artistic realisation' (Pesch 2000).

Contemporary versions and exhibitions of the work have not fully allowed for the process of 'consumer' re-configuration specified by Posenenske, presumably due to museological concerns about the archival safety of the artworks (ie, to protect them from the hands of the public). In the 2010 exhibition of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* at Artist's Space New York, the ducts were configured every week by curatorial staff and then by the artists Ei Arakawa and Rikrit Tiravanija. This iteration of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* presents a version of Posenenske's 'many hands' that operates to exclude the public, and to re-establish a hierarchy of authorship with these works, handing authorial power to a selected and elite few: curators and artists. This is an iteration of her work that would seem to stray from Posenenske's ideology, considering her commitment to examining the politics of labour and democratisation of the art object, demonstrated both in the time of her artistic practice and subsequently in her study of sociology with particular focus on the labour conditions of factory workers and exploitation of labour (Vogel 2019). The decision by Artist's Space to invite Rikrit Tiravanija and Ei Arakawa to arrange the works would appear to be motivated by contemporary revisions of Posenenske's work being viewed through the lens of socially engaged practice and participatory practices of the 2000s and early 2010s.

Posenenske's work, when operating with her original intentions, removes the elitist authorial touch of the artist; in the place of the hand of the artist, the work rather includes and acknowledges the touch of many other hands. The fabricator, the installation team, and the touch of the 'consumer' are explicitly included and acknowledged by Posenenske as integral to the production of the artwork. The system of production forms a discursive part of the work. Amelia Winata writes about the democratisation of the labour cycle in Posenenske's work in terms of its democratic aims, and describes how the artist enthusiastically engaged with 'mass production as a vehicle for democratisation. She chose to sell the square tubes unsigned and un-editioned and at the cost of production. In addition, the tubes were intended to be handled, assembled and reassembled by random groups of people' (Winata 2019: 74).

Posenenske explicates and makes visible the industrial labour system through her redistribution of the singular hand of authorship and through her refusal to appropriate an industrial process into make bespoke or rarefied art objects like other Minimalist contemporaries such as Judd. Instead, the hand of the fabricator and the industrial labour of the machine are made visible in *Vierkantrohre Serie D* precisely because this work looks identical to the ventilation ducts commonly produced and installed in buildings. They remain fundamentally ventilation ducts. This fidelity to the functional object makes visible the labour of the machine and the fabricator. Their co-produced product remains untransformed and is presented on the same hierarchical footing as works of art. Posenenske credited the fabricators in the production of her work and embraced the patina of damage, scratches, and marks that arose from their transport and handling. As Leah Pires writes in *Art in America*, 'she credited fabricators and viewers as equal collaborators in the production of the artwork, drawing attention-long before 'social reproduction' and 'affective labour' became buzz phrases-to the invisible work that makes all other work possible' (Pires 2019: 109-110).

Posenenske substitutes her single authorship with the acknowledgement and inclusion of many hands of the producer, labourer, technician, and public or consumer. The democratisation of both production and decision-making around the placement of the work was radical, even in the context of its time when Minimalist practitioners in the United States had begun to openly outsource the production of their works to fabricators and had been producing their work from plans and diagrams. In her 1968 Manifesto-like statement in *Art International* that is considered to herald her retirement from the art world, Posenenske writes: 'They are components of a space; since they are like building elements, they can always be rearranged into new combinations or positions. Thus, they alter the space. I leave this alteration to the consumer who thereby again and anew participates in the creation' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 14). Thus she openly acknowledges the agency of the viewer, the space, and the participation of agents other than herself, as not only incidental but central to the production of her work.

Posenenske's work steps beyond the outsourcing of the labour of art to an anonymous factory worker in the case of the readymade, or to a manufacturer in the case of American Minimalists such as Donald Judd and Richard Serra. Posenenske's work insists on a collaborative democratic process not just in production but in the arrangement and configuration of the artworks. This disassembles the hierarchies embedded in the production, reception, and circulation of these artworks. Even in the American Minimalist practices contemporaneous to Posenenske, where artists such as Judd frequently outsourced the making of the artworks to manufacturers, the artist always remained the genius, the creator, the author and

financial beneficiary of the artworks that they regularly produced with others. Burkhard Brunn writes in *Manifesto* that as administrator of Posenenske's estate, in 2012 he continued to reproduce her works at cost price, on demand. He notes that the object's 'unlimited reproducibility represents a subversive strategy against the commercialization of art, since not only is no profit made, but any increase in value – something most collectors desire – is ruled out' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 14).

Posenenske did not seek to remain the sole author, creator or beneficiary of her work. She explicitly situated her role as an artist within a greater ecology and system of production, labour, and dissemination. Posenenske writes further in her *Manifesto* re-published in a 2012 monography edited by her partner and estate administrator Burkhard Brunn, 'I make series because I do not want to make single pieces for individuals' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 23). Brunn annotates Posenenske's original text, remarking that in the case of *Vierkanthrohre Serie D* 'unlike an edition, the series are not limited' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 23). She constructed a situation where the serial, non-editioned object of artistic production explicated and engaged in an ethical and ideological concern for the politics of artistic labour and the market. This concern propelled the formal and fabrication decisions of *Vierkanthrohre Serie D*, ultimately arriving at a 'mass produced Minimalism that pointedly addressed the pressing socioeconomic concerns of the decade by circumventing the art market and rejecting established formal and cultural hierarchies' (Dia:Beacon 2019).

Industrial objects, embodied sculptural empathy and posthumanism in Posenenske's work

In her *Statement* originally published in *Art International 12* in May 1968, Posenenske writes: 'They (the objects) should present nothing aside from what they are' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 39). Despite Posenenske's intention that *Vierkanthrohre Serie D* and her other serial sculptures would remain outside a symbolic or semiotic interpretation, it is difficult to separate them from interpretations and representations of power, social and cultural references, and the trap of anthropomorphism especially given the socio-political directives and references that Posenenske herself implicated in her sculptures. Burkhard Brunn in his commentary on this line from Posenenske's *Manifesto* concedes the impossibility of pure self-referentiality in Posenenske's work, writing that: 'The similarity between the

Square Tubes and ventilation equipment alone contradicts the claim of self-reference' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 39-40).

This section will discuss the art historical and contemporary notion of the 'found object' and 'readymade', and situate Posenenske's industrially produced sculptures in this art-historical lineage. From there, semiotic and symbolic readings of Posenenske's industrially manufactured objects are implicated. Semiotic and anthropomorphic readings of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* paradoxically are posed as having the potential to create a more-than-human empathy with the mass-produced and quotidian objects that surround and facilitate human life. Engaging semiotics and anthropomorphism in interpreting Posenenske's work provides a pathway to describing embodied and empathic encounters and enables a posthumanist reading of this work.

While the found object is now a common constituent of contemporary artworks, at its origins in the early 20th century this strategy in sculpture presented a radical shift in the way artworks were composed and produced. Marcel Duchamp is credited with creating the term 'readymade' and the device of reframing mass-produced commercially available objects as artworks by signing them and situating them in a gallery context. As Okwui Enwezor notes: 'Duchamp opened the aperture of deconstructing that not only removed sculpture from its base as a monument, and thus the evisceration of its symbolic content in the form of the celebration of power' (Enwezor 2011: 9). Enwezor refers to the 'celebration of power' that the Duchampian act of authorship represents, with the placement and signing of objects by an artist enough to confer artwork status onto even the most banal objects. Duchamp pointed to this authorial power particularly with those objects he chose to elevate to artwork status, most famously the urinal, a shovel, and a bottle rack. These items are not just quotidian but also connote human waste (piss, junk, and detritus), serving to highlight further the power the artist could exert by elevating even these most culturally disregarded or devalued of objects.

Posenenske's industrially produced works sit awkwardly in between a found object and the Duchampian readymade. She does not lean on her authorial power to expose the hierarchies of artistic authorship like Duchamp; rather, she seeks to redistribute this power among many contributors. Nor are her works pre-existing or 'found' – they are intentionally designed and manufactured as art. In this sense, her works find more commonality with the lineage of Russian Constructivism and Productivism and the Bauhaus (Pires 2019: 109-110). seeking instead the integration of art-making and democratic production into the broader context of social change and an intention for the radical reordering of human labour. Posenenske's works are not comprised of 'found' or purchased readymade commercially available objects, but rather they were produced to Posenenske's specifications via a

mass industrial process that meant that the objects look identical to mass-produced objects.

John Roberts distinguishes between the Constructivist approach to the readymade as an elevation and equalisation of the labour of the worker and the labour of the artist. Roberts describes this as a situation where ‘the non-artistic collaborator “completes” the circuit of authorship as the artist enters production by removing the distinction between artist and worker’ (Roberts 2007: 160). Roberts puts the Constructivist model of artistic production at odds with the Duchampian approach to the readymade, where the original maker of the object remains distant from the artist. This demonstrates the ideological and artistic lineage that informed Posenenske’s practice. Despite her early exit from the art world, she held at least briefly some believe in the ability of art to critically engage with the circuits of production and labour outside the context of art (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 10), like the precursors to her work found in Constructivism and the Bauhaus.

Posenenske’s *Vierkantrohre Serie D* remains very much in touch with other humans that co-produce and collaborate to stage the work. Posenenske invited or sought to provoke viewers and non-artists to touch and move the work, thus placing these non-human objects into direct and embodied contact with the ‘consumer.’ Thinking in terms of embodiment and empathy, it is useful to engage in a semiotic reading of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* to further explore an embodied reading of the work. Jessica Morgan has anthropomorphised Posenenske’s industrial, utilitarian *Vierkantrohre Serie D* ductwork, observing that they resemble lungs (Morgan 2019: 154) – the organs that deliver the purifying mechanism and life-giving oxygen to the body.

Vierkantrohre Serie D is at the very least unavoidably engaged in semiotic references to industrial and architectural respiration, given that their original function is to provide the transmission of air in and out of large buildings. As Morgan (2019: 154) writes: ‘Their forms suggest that Series D might bring fresh air to carry away a building’s stale exhaust.’ The reference to architectural respiration is inescapable. In the post-WWII German context, these artworks can be interpreted poetically in this anthropomorphic way as allowing a sense of new life to be breathed into a system, referencing the renewal and rebuilding of a society after the destruction of war. The introduction of a semiotic reading to this work, a sculpture that, according to Posenenske’s *Statement*, was intended to work outside of language and semiotic structures and insisted on matter and objects as meaning on their terms, provides the possibility for drawing closer to the relations between the human and non-human elements that comprise this work. Engaging in anthropomorphism and semiotic readings of *Vierkantrohre Serie D* introduces the notion of an embodied proximity to and with the work, to allow for what might be thought of as an empathic materialism.

Empathic materialism could be characterised as a process of *feeling into* materials via a sculptural work. The notion of Aesthetic empathy was explored by Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) in the early 20th century, which she characterised as:

a complex mental process, by which we (all unsuspectingly) invest that inert mountain, that bodiless shape, with the stored up and averaged and essential modes of our activity... of the German word *Einfühlung*, I have called Empathy. [*]

From *έν* and *πάσχω, έπαθον*. The German word *Einfühlung* 'feeling into'-derived from a verb to *feel oneself into something*. (Lee 1913: 61).

Lee's description of empathy with the non-human matter of the mountain as a 'feeling into' can be placed in the context of the experience of encountering and entering into a relationship with material in the case of Posenenske's *Vierkantrohre Serie D*. A semiotic, anthropomorphic interpretation of Posenenske's mechanical object allows space for the body and human subject to become engaged empathically in this work. This potentially leads to a human consideration of the relationship between the material of the 'consumer's' body, the manufacturer's body, and the material of the sculpture.

In this consideration, as Lee would have it, a 'feeling into' a radical and deeply material empathy is caused by the shared embodied materiality of the viewer and object.

The relationships between the human and non-human in *Vierkantrohre Serie D* produce a condition that invokes material, embodied empathic relations alongside discursive, social, and political relations that connect and amplify one another materially and formally in the sculpture. This artwork gathers and explicates forces via its materiality; the politics of labour, the materiality of galvanised aluminium, the labour of the worker in the factory or production line, the intention of the artist, the arrangement created by the installation technician in the museum, and the agency of the viewer of the artwork when experiencing these out-of-place objects.

This gathering together, resulting in material empathy, suggests that there is a potential posthuman reading possible in and for Posenenske's work where the ethical (labour politics), ontological (the material existence of the sculptures, the artist and the viewer), and epistemological (the knowledge systems of artmaking and reception) combine and appear in high relief through the non-human material of the sculpture. Through the lens of recent feminist posthumanist thought, Posenenske's work could be regarded as participating in a refiguring of human and non-human relations and the attendant hierarchies of social politics and gender.

Donna Haraway's notion of natureculture is an originating example of post-human thinking that critiques and points to the fallacy of binary oppositions such as nature and culture, mind and body, and the attendant power structures these binaries uphold. Haraway's natureculture works in favour of acknowledging interdependent and blended taxonomies and hierarchies of species, both human and non-human. As Haraway writes in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 'Flesh and signifier, bodies and words, stories and worlds: these are joined in naturecultures' (Haraway 2003: 20). Haraway and other post-human scholars such as Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, and Iris Van DeTuin argue that the world is in a constant state of co-creation through the entanglements of matter, non-human agents, discourse, and semiotics.

Rosi Braidotti outlines the position of posthuman theory on social hierarchies as such: 'posthuman theory contests the arrogance of anthropocentrism and the "exceptionalism" of the Human as a transcendental category. It strikes instead an alliance with the productive and immanent force of zoe, or life in its nonhuman aspects' (Braidotti 2013: 66). In this sense, *Vierkantrohre Serie D* not only contests dominant hierarchies of human labour and social structures but also the more-than-human hierarchies and taxonomies of materials and, in so doing, further interrogates the human social order. Posenenske, by inviting materially empathic situations with familiar objects and materials, scrambles the material and taxonomic codes. In a contemporary context and through the lens of posthumanism, this scrambling of taxonomies indicates that empathy can become networked through our bodily human intra-actions with sculptures and that matter can be thoughtful and full of 'zoe,' and invested with the labouring politics of the human and non-human.

In Posenenske's work, the sculptural decentring of the singular human agent or subject is not just the decentring of a generic human but acts particularly to decentre the patriarchal modernist subject, who in Western art discourse, has been mythologised as a male genius who enacts singular authorship with materials, resulting in a work of art. Posenenske's explication of the multi-authored production of the work of art in *Vierkantrohre Serie D* and in her other serial works breaks down the mythology of the patriarchal, singular artist author genius. As Braidotti observes 'Universal "Man", in fact, is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity' (Braidotti 2013: 65). Braidotti contends that challenging the dominant masculine, white urbanised subject leads to other hegemonic binary structures being critically dismantled in what she describes as a 'cascade effect that opens up unexpected perspectives' (Braidotti 2013: 66).

Considered through the lens of the posthumanist work of Braidotti and Haraway, Posenenske's sculptures challenge this dominant white male author myth, and implicate and entangle material, discursive, and semiotic modes. *Vierkantrohre Serie D* materialises and enacts the decentring and destabilising of the dominant, patriarchal modernist ideal of the human subject and destabilises hegemonic anthropocentric human relationships to non-human objects. The sculpture does this by implicating materials in space, explicating the semiotic order and acknowledging social and labour structures that compose the work. The value structures inherent in binary structures work to privilege white, phallogocentric positions. Braidotti contends that this human 'man' subject has sustained its privilege by subjugating others, human and non-human alike.

In this series of interconnected onto-ethico-epistemological relations (which Barad characterises as a coming together in an entangled fashion the spheres of being, ethics and knowledge, where none of these positions can be separated (Barad 2012: 185), the artwork is co-produced and comes into existence. These entangled relations can produce a deep, more-than-human empathy between the collaborators of the artwork (material, objects, found objects, artist, and viewer), where all components are of equal agency and value in the constitution of the coming into being of the artwork. Barad (Ibid.) writes in favour of a 'knowing in being' of 'onto-ethico-epistemology', where the world comes into being in every moment and engagement, and which requires a different framework and understanding of knowledge practices that implicate all the human and non-human experiences of the world. As Barad writes in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*: 'the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter' (Barad 2007: 185). So too with Posenenske, who engaged deeply in the ethics and politics of the becoming of her artworks by engaging in empathic material processes and multi-authorship. It is in the moment all these strands come together, the ontological, the ethical and the epistemological, that Posenenske's sculptures come into being.

The empathic material potential present in Posenenske's industrial sculptures could be thought of as a 'knowing in being', as a collapse and entanglement of the nature/culture, subject/object, and male/female divide. In *Vierkantrohre Serie D* this could open space where the artist as executor of an artwork, the materials and objects (even if found or industrially produced), and the viewer become part of a broadened system of apprehension where the co-producers and co-makers of the work are positioned on an equal footing, a co-constitution or co-production that arguably could produce a condition of close attention and thereby care and empathy.

Marxism, Materials and More-than-human labour

Posenenske's work, particularly the industrially produced series *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, is regularly discussed through the discourse of Marxism and Post-Fordism. In the publication *Charlotte Posenenske, Work in Progress* that accompanied her major solo presentation at Dia Beacon, New York, Jessica Morgan opens her essay on Posenenske's work by describing the history and economics of factory line operations at Ford Motors, starting with their Model T assembly line that began operating in 1913. Morgan describes the worker alienation that took place on these mass-production factory lines, resulting in attempts by Ford to retain workers by raising wages and increasing worker numbers (Morgan 2019: 154).

Posenenske's work emerged from the context and cultural sensibility of post-war Germany, which was both physically rebuilding from the rubble after the war and grappling with the responsibility and guilt of National Socialism and Fascism while experiencing 'Wirtschaftswunder, a vast "Americanization" of the new German industrial, urban, and economic landscape' (Kleinman 2010). Posenenske and her friends and associates were engaged in various counter-cultural and political movements of the time. She painted the façade and interior of Paul Maenz and Peter Roehr's headshop Pudding Explosion in Frankfurt, which was stocked with counter-cultural merchandise and reputedly under police surveillance because of suspected illicit political activity. Broadly speaking, there was a general anxiety about the increasing mechanisation of labour in the 1960s that was accompanied by other social justice movements concerning gender, race, and equality. The advent of German *Wirtschaftswunder* influenced Posenenske's methodologies, politics, and work, along with the discourse of Marxist thought and the notion of the estrangement of the worker from the objects they produce.

These factors and the general upheaval, student protests, women's rights and cultural revolutions of 1968 across Europe and the United States all provide a backdrop to Posenenske's work. As Burkhard Brunn writes: 'Charlotte's concept becomes clear against the backdrop of the late 1960s when it was not only rebellious students who wanted to change the rigid social conditions...Charlotte was interested in change through human action' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 10). *Vierkantrohre Serie D* is set against the backdrop of this milieu and the events and relations of labour in the specific German context. Her practice was politicised and charged with the currents of change.

Posenenske's industrially produced *Vierkantrohre Serie D* potentially rehabilitates both what Karl Marx describes as the worker's alienation from the product, or object, and the viewer's alienation from the utilitarian factory-produced object.

While the worker is certainly an instrument in Posenenske's model of artistic labour, the factory worker is no more or less instrumentalised than the artist or the viewer in her labour model. In the 'many hands' model described earlier in this paper, Posenenske implicated a situation where the authorship of the artwork is acknowledged and shared among many workers. In the context of a Marxist or Fordist reading of Posenenske's work, this could be considered as a re-distribution of worker instrumentalisation and alienation in the production of *Vierkantrohre Serie D*. In the context of contemporary post-humanist thought, this re-distribution could be considered again to include a de-anthropocentric point of view, one where the labour of the human is no more or less than the labour of the machine.

The labour of the materials and objects themselves are part of the collaboration required of all forces and entities in the production of the *Vierkantrohre Serie D*. The post-human model of a co-created world that entangles 'flesh and signifier, bodies and words, stories and worlds' (Haraway 2003) may be considered alongside Marxist *Entfremdung* in the context of Posenenske's work. Morgan writes that *Vierkantrohre Serie D* undoes Marx's *Entfremdung* or the worker alienation that occurs in the production line by remaking these forms identically but personalising them and bringing them into humanness. Morgan writes:

by inviting labourers to become consumers with creative agency, (they) bring an essential humanness into the interchangeability, specialization, and repetition of progressive assembly. Posenenske's Series D acts as a sort of antidote to the alienation of the worker and to the product itself. (Morgan 2019: 154)

Morgan refers to a 'personalisation' that occurs with *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, derived from Posenenske's engagement with the manufacturers to design and commission these otherwise utilitarian objects. The artworks stay in close touch with their makers and the worker's labour is credited in the work. This personalisation is further expanded with respect to the object's exhibition in the context of an art gallery or museum. These ordinary, utilitarian objects become viewed in the same way as other more bespoke, rarefied objects of art, although they share none of the notions of the unique or original object that have historically existed as markers of value and skill in works of art. Morgan remarks on the human-ness of the assembly line, revealed by *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, as systems that are designed by, for, and to fulfil human needs and desires. Posenenske's work amplifies and reveals the intrinsic humanness of the assembly line by presenting these objects for concerted close contemplation in the context of a gallery or museum.

Another way of interrogating this sense of close attention and material and the potential for object empathy via the mass-fabricated or found object may be

located in the consideration of labour in the context of artmaking in a Marxist sense. John Roberts speaks to this in his publication *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade*, where he examines the found object and the art historical Avant-Garde through the lens of Marxism and an analysis of the economies of labour related to the authorship of the artist and the production of the artwork. Roberts argues that: 'By transforming a reproducible non-art object into an unreproducible art object in the form of a reproducible art object, the logical relations of artistic labour and productive labour are exposed and inverted' (Roberts 2007: 33).

Roberts argues that the industrially, readily reproducible object, when reframed as an art object, reveals the power of the institutions and authoring hand of the artist. It serves to perform a disrobing of the commodity status and operations of the found object (even in the case of 'low' objects) and reveals the artistic and productive labour behind the object. The commodity, taken from its original context and intended use, is described by Roberts as extending its capability for metamorphosis into another sphere of production, into the commodity circuit of the art market. This action is presented as a performance of the agility of the commodity and of the markets, art, and otherwise that can adopt it and transmute it into another form of commodity where it transcends or transforms its original use value. Roberts' analysis extends only as far as human authors, be it the factory worker, the artist, or the participant/audience, as participants in conscious or unconscious collaboration in the artwork.

Posthuman artistic labour could be argued to be present in Posenenske's work. The object and materials of an artwork could be regarded in Posenenske's work as labouring alongside the 'many hands' of human authors to produce the artwork. Posenenske's *Vierkantröhre Serie D* engages in and acknowledges a collaborative system of authorship and labour. In the contemporary context, this collaborative authorship may extend to non-human entities. As Roberts writes, Socialism attempted to: 'eradicate the distinction between the factory worker and the artist... The non-artist as collaborator becomes the figure who brings authorship out of subjectivism into collective intellect' (Roberts 2007: 160-161).

In this model of collective intellect, authorship steps out of subjectivism or subjecthood. In the case of Posenenske's *Vierkantröhre Serie D*, collective intellect and collaboration could be expanded beyond the ambits of Robert's anthropocentric intellect or that of human consciousness towards a collectivisation of intellect that includes artist humans, non-artist humans, and non-humans, machines, and other entities. This model considers the labour of the artist and the labour of the materials alongside and with the human agent. In this situation, the co-labouring of humans and non-humans in a sculpture can begin to accomplish

what is being proposed as material empathy, where artworks are co-constituted, and authorship and work are distributed across several human and non-human entities in an empathic exchange. Work happens with all the components and participants, both human and non-human.

In this posthuman model of artistic production lies the potential for a radical empathy among humans, materials, and non-human forms that may be acted out in the making and reception of *Vierkantrohre Serie D*. Materials and objects are considered and understood as active and agential conspirators that inform the form, shape, size, and meaning of the work and their attendant politics. This is both an interrogation of systems of capital and labour through a Marxist lens and a consideration of collaboration and co-production – regarding materials and other objects effectively as co-workers – that can influence and implicate a sense of empathy and intimacy with all things in the production and reception of sculpture. Could this engage a renewal of empathy for the non-human both inside and outside the art context?

The machine in the instance of Posenenske's *Vierkantrohre Serie D* functions similarly to Barad's analysis of the apparatus described in their theory of intra-action and in *Agential Realism in Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Barad contends that apparatuses are not neutral scientific instruments, but rather active agents in the production of the world, collaborators along with the human agent, matter, and discursive, ethical, and semiotic forces. Barad writes: 'apparatuses are specific material reconfigurings of the world that do not merely emerge in time but iteratively reconfigure spacetime as part of the ongoing dynamism of becoming' (2007: 142). Apparatuses equally examine and reconfigure what they examine in an ongoing, unfixed, and temporal ontology.

Some parallels can be drawn between Barad's analysis of the apparatus and the factory machine that produces Posenenske's work. The machine that produces Posenenske's artwork is not neutral, nor are these machines operating entirely independently from the human operator. The machine that produces Posenenske's *Vierkantrohre der Serie D* and the series of tools and processes of industrial fabrication act in concert with the human operator, the instructions of the artist, the materials, and the prevailing social and labour conditions. As in Barad's version of the apparatus, the machine that produced Posenenske's work refigures what it makes, the artwork itself is always, as Barad would say, in the ontological state of becoming in its infinite potential for reconfiguration, but also in terms of the relations that the artwork activates between the human, non-human, social and political discourse, language, and semiotics.

Posenenske famously left the art world and stopped making sculptures in 1968, citing the following in *Art International*: 'Though art's formal development has

progressed at an increasing tempo, its social function has regressed... It is painful for me to face the fact that art cannot contribute to the solution of urgent social problems' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 7). Perhaps the posthuman notion of labour and vibrant collaborations across the human and non-human sphere presents a new opportunity to rehabilitate these works in the context of Posenenske's concern about what art might contribute to what she describes as 'urgent social problems' (Posenenske and Brunn 2012: 7). In the current context of ecological crisis, what *Vierkantrohre Serie D* implies about the democratisation of human engagements with art and about honouring and discovering fealty with objects and materials alongside human politics and systems may contribute to de-anthropocentric thinking.

The nearly un-transformed or mass-produced industrial objects that Posenenske manufactured as sculptures expand the authorship of the artist's hand to 'many hands', including the touch of the machine and the apparatus. This reveals a more-than-human collaborative process that is further played out in a gallery that produces the effect of focusing care and attention on the overlooked or quotidian mass-produced object. The transfer of the authorship of a singular human hand to many hands, including the machine or apparatus, could produce a form of intimacy with the object that may otherwise be obscured by more obvious human interventions or impositions of self-expression or gestural touches where the intentions of the human author are foregrounded. Posenenske's work points to the potential of a sculptural artwork to examine objects closely and with empathy, to examine the terms of how we relate to the world socially, economically, materially, and politically, and to be instructive with regards to how we live and might want to live more justly with the people and things around us.

Conclusion

Charlotte Posenenske's work, and particularly *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, has been examined in this paper through a post-humanist lens and more-than-human empathic perspectives on the politics of labour. Considered in contrast with the work of her Minimalist contemporaries, Posenenske's work delineates a clear difference in terms of ethics and ideologies of labour between her approach and American Minimalists in particular. Posenenske's work and her position on the authorship of the artist correspond with the Post-WWII German milieu from which Posenenske's work emerged. The Western art-historical lineages of the 'found object' and 'readymade' concerning Constructivism and Duchamp have been explored concerning Posenenske's practice, and the differences in the ideologies

of worker, value, and product in these two related but divergent models of practice have been noted. Posenenske's practice, and particularly *Vierkantrohre Serie D*, has been identified as sharing more of the impulses of the Constructivist version of production, where the labour of the factory worker is elevated to the same status as the labour of the artist.

While acknowledging the influence and backdrop of Marxism and the discussion of labour in Posenenske's work, *Vierkantrohre Serie D* has been posed as offering the potential for a consideration of sculptural artistic labour as a more-than-human collaboration. This is a politics of labour that includes post-humanist thought, explicating a collaboration between the artist, the factory worker, the museum worker, and the viewer, while collapsing the hierarchies of value in human social and labour relations. *Vierkantrohre Serie D* in this sense is the product of more-than-human labour where the materials and objects equally labour in the system of production, display, and dissemination of this artwork.

Empathy with materials and non-human entities can be created with Posenenske's sculptures. In Posenenske's work, it is possible to consider the extension of the agency of labour to the non-human and to consider the object and materials of an artwork as labouring alongside the human 'author' to produce a form, or series of forms, in relation in a sculptural artwork. This paper re-considers the work of Charlotte Posenenske, re-framing the discussions of labour in her work through a post-humanist reading of objects and a de-anthropocentric framework of production, collaboration, and empathy between humans, objects, materials, and social and political realities. In this sense, Posenenske's work points to the potential of sculptural artwork to examine objects closely and with empathy, to examine their relations socially, economically, materially, and politically. Perhaps sculptural artworks can be instructive about living and labouring with the non-humans, and about how it might be to live more empathically with other humans and non-humans.

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Resumo

Como se sabe, a arte ao serviço de Luís XIV (1643-1715), particularmente a pública, foi marcada pela exploração intensa da temática de matriz clássica e mitológica, a qual foi instrumentalizada, sobretudo, (mas não exclusivamente) como um mecanismo de legitimação dos feitos “heroicos” e militares do rei. No sentido oposto, a segunda metade do governo luís-quatorziano foi impactada por uma viragem de paradigma, apontada como a causa que subjaz à falência da arte produzida nestes moldes. Contudo, os formulários clássicos não deixam verdadeiramente de ser instrumentalizados, mas antes astutamente adaptados a certos contextos de mudança. Centrado na descodificação iconográfica e narrativa de um conjunto de objetos artísticos associados a Luís XIV – respetiva e recorrentemente enquadrados como *espelhos* da “primeira” ou “segunda” metade do seu reinado –, o presente ensaio tem como principal objetivo a compreensão e o enquadramento das dinâmicas de interpretação, de (re)adaptação e de continuidade/descontinuidade da cultura artística de matriz clássica aplicada neste contexto.

Abstract

As is widely acknowledged, classical and mythological culture played a crucial role in constructing the “heroic” and military image of Louis XIV. Conversely, the second half of the Louis-Quatorzian government witnessed a paradigm shift, identified as the cause of the failure of art produced along these same formularies. Yet classical iconography never truly ceased to be instrumentalised but was rather astutely adapted to a new context of change.

Focused on the iconographic and narrative decoding of a set of artistic objects associated with Louis XIV — respectively and recurrently linked with either the “first” or the “second” half of his reign — the main objective of this essay is to understand and contextualise the dynamics of interpretation, (re)adaptation, and continuity/discontinuity within classical artistic culture applied in this context.

palavras-chave

LUÍS XIV
ANTIGUIDADE CLÁSSICA
CONTINUIDADE/DESCONTINUIDADE,
ICONOGRAFIA
RETRATO

keywords

LOUIS XIV
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‘La plus éclatante victoire coûte trop cher’: (des)continuidades de matriz clássica na arte produzida durante o reinado de Luís XIV

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Contextualização: da Antiguidade Clássica à Monarquia Cristianíssima

Ainda que o contexto fundacional da igreja católica romana expresse uma notória assimilação da cultura pré-cristã – com a apropriação de fábulas da mitologia pagã, posteriormente resinificadas –, é comumente aceite que a aculturação greco-romana atingiu especial notoriedade a partir do renascimento e da disseminação de literatura que relacionava, positivamente, certos imperadores da Antiguidade Clássica e alguns dos seus seres sobrenaturais com os reis católicos.

Alicerçada ainda noutros fatores que fomentaram este contexto, entre os quais a descoberta e valorização de ruínas da Antiguidade, a exploração intensa da arte de temática alegórica e mitológica adequou a representação, reinterpretada, de várias das divindades do panteão greco-latino aos circuitos profanos e sagrados da Cúria Romana e dos reis católicos (Gombrich 1999: 448; Eusébio 2005). Nesta nova era de intensa sede pelo conhecimento da cultura clássica, os artistas representaram, como nunca antes, um vasto universo figurativo com recurso a figuras de estilo, como a hipérbole e a sinédoque, que faziam transparecer as qualidades e virtudes dos seus encomendadores: convenientemente equiparados a personagens cuja moral se considerava irrepreensível e ideal.

Comungando, de resto, das estratégias utilizadas por alguns dos seus antecessores, Luís XIV empreendeu um ambicioso projeto de apropriação de um conjunto de

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divindades, virtudes e, em suma, símbolos e signos visuais da Antiguidade Clássica. Apropriação que se consagrou particularmente através da equiparação entre soberanos franceses e imperadores e deuses romanos, revelava-se um mecanismo adequado aos emergentes valores culturais da Época Moderna², mas também – e sobretudo – um projeto de instrumentalização da arte ao serviço da política de estado belicista do rei, que, como sabemos, marcou praticamente todo o seu reinado.

Contudo, as consequências advindas de várias ofensivas bélicas, como a Grande Aliança contra França, a Guerra da Liga de Augsburg (1688-97) e a Guerra da Sucessão Espanhola (1702-13), abririam caminho para que a cultura figurativa de matriz clássica começasse a falir. Tentemos agora compreender estas dinâmicas de continuidade/descontinuidade.

O Rei Sol: um projeto de propaganda de matriz clássica

É amplamente sabido que o reinado de Luís XIV foi marcado por sucessivos esforços para disseminar a ideia de que as suas ambições territoriais eram legitimadas por desígnio da Divina Providência. Contudo, como também sabemos, a dominação do plano terreno – sempre legitimada pelo “triumfo da verdadeira fé”³ – necessitou da guerra para cumprir o seu propósito⁴. Concebida de forma a “validar” vários dos confrontos bélicos patrocinados pelo rei, a arte instrumentalizada pelo Estado francês desempenhou um papel da maior importância nesta matéria.

A Guerra Civil das Frondas (1648-53) revelou-se, justamente, um dos primeiros momentos do reinado Luís-quatorziano em que se associou a imagem do rei ao triunfo do guerreiro sobre os “infiéis”. Neste caso, a produção de objetos artísticos cujo tema central era a vitória das Frondas tinha como propósito lembrar que se devia a ele, o recém-entronado Luís XIV, o dismantelamento do feudalismo e dos efeitos nocivos que infligia ao povo e, enfim, ao próprio Estado, numa espécie de relação umbilical. O rei devia ser, portanto, implacável e brutal para com a rebelião⁵, a qual devia dominar, reformar e submeter à autoridade estatal, livrando, desta forma, a sociedade do desequilíbrio de poderes, das “injustiças” de que padecia. Era nele que deviam ser depositados todos os poderes, o legislativo, o executivo e o judicial. Era essa a vontade de Deus, segundo as teorias absolutistas⁶ que intentaram escudar o seu governo.

Assim, o sucesso do exercício do poder e da autoridade, em geral, e da disposição na esfera pública e privada de imagens alusivas ao confronto das Frondas (e outros), em particular, alicerçava-se num conjunto de doutrinas que impeliam a sociedade

² Refira-se que o interesse pela história política dos imperadores romanos se revelou um tema vastamente explorado ao longo do final da Idade Média, disseminado nos circuitos régios, ainda que a tônica destes textos não acentuasse a associação do plano de governo hegemónico romano à figura do rei, tal como a viríamos a conhecer no início da Idade Moderna. Veja-se Provini 2006: 92-5.

³ Narrativa que a sociedade era conduzida a assimilar e a defender e na qual era levada a acreditar.

⁴ Embora também pudesse ser exercida através de ofensivas diplomáticas passivas.

⁵ Neste caso, o poder parlamentar e feudal, insubmisso à coroa.

⁶ Como as de Jean Bodin (1530-1596), Charles Loysau (1564-1627), Cardin le Bret (1558-1655) e Cardeal Richelieu (1585-1642) e, claro, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), contemporâneo de Luís XIV.

a crer que Luís XIV só era absoluto (mas não despótico ou tirânico) porque assim serviria melhor a esmagadora maioria da população: o Terceiro Estado (Bouveresse 2016: 79-81). Portanto, o plano passava por legitimar o uso da força e da repressão sobre aqueles que eram (estrategicamente) considerados os inimigos do Estado, e da sociedade por extensão – uma tentativa de legitimação das ambições de conquista e domínio territorial, executadas a custo de violentos e brutais confrontos, cuja lastimável perda humana se intentou por várias vezes dissimular, sobretudo a partir da década de 1670.

Em suma, as condutas bélicas do rei, mesmo aquelas que implicavam conflitos sangrentos, eram impostas como virtudes: (desejavelmente) compreendidas, aceites e defendidas não só através do favorecimento da propaganda do absolutismo, intrinsecamente cristão, como também (e não raras vezes em concomitância) através da instrumentalização dos épicos da Antiguidade Clássica – temática que nos interessa explorar. De forma a tornar facilmente inteligível esta realidade, as “virtudes” associadas à guerra, como a Força, passavam por um processo de personificação e, através das artes (plásticas, cénicas, literárias etc.), assumiam a forma de um conjunto específico de figuras: de heróis bíblicos e, sobretudo, de heróis clássicos, como os imperadores, deuses e paladinos greco-romanos, que, à época, se reconheciam como modelares⁷. Tal como eles, Luís XIV deveria tornar-se um “homem de culto” (Campbell 2009: 29) – homem este que impulsiona a sociedade a crer⁸ que França é herdeira de Roma; a “patrie du droit, de la théorie de l’État, de la puissance publique”, como bem sublinha Jacques Bouveresse (2016: 77-78). Luís XIV era, enfim, a continuidade desta realidade, não um simulacro. No limite, era esta a ideia que se tentava imprimir.

Assumindo-se como um protótipo fruto deste panorama sociopolítico e artístico, destaque-se a célebre estátua de mármore de *Luís XIV esmagando a Fronde*, encomendada a Gilles Guérain (1611-78) em 1653, conservada atualmente no *Château de Chantilly*.

Apresentando um programa iconográfico “à l’antique” e “à romaine”, assim descrito nas cláusulas contratuais a que o artista foi submetido, esta escultura expressa o plano de hibridização cultural, (con)fundindo, justamente, a simbólica da monarquia francesa – cristã, se quisermos – (flor-de-lis, mão da justiça, etc.) com a simbólica de matriz clássica (manto e sandálias à *romana*, armadura, etc.):

le roi serait habillé à l’antique en Caesar victorieux avec un manteau à la romaine semé de fleurs de lys, sa teste couronnée de laurier, tenant en sa main droite un spectre de mesme marbre avec lequel il montre avoir reduict la Mutinerie, foulant aux pieds une figure représentant la Rébellion de grandeur convenable et au naturel d’un fort jeune homme renfrogné de visage, armé d’un javelot et

⁷ Incrementando a construção da imagem do herói (rei) clássico, “as publicações periódicas, em particular a Gazette de France, publicava duas vezes por semana, e o Mercure Galant publicava mensalmente um espaço considerável dedicado às ações do rei” (Burke 2007: 27). Os textos inclusos nestes periódicos – evidentemente de carácter laudatório – contribuíam ativa e simultaneamente para a execução do plano de instrumentalização das artes (neste caso, da escrita), já que os seus compositores eram frequentemente congratulados com prémios e avultadas quantias que incentivavam a criação do melhor panegírico dedicado ao rei. Neste domínio, a censura desempenhou um papel fundamental na proteção e disseminação da imagem de matriz clássica e “gloriosa” de Luís XIV, particularmente a partir da nomeação de Gabriel Nicolas de la Reynie (1625-1709), em 1667, a primeiro-tenente da Polícia de Paris (Burke 2007: 61).

⁸ Sendo educada e coagida a tal, mas sempre cumprindo com a ortodoxia cristã, que, afinal, é a sua matriz.

un cimier en teste auquel il y a une figure de chat, foulant un joug rompu (Bresc-Bautier 2012: 69).

A estátua foi colocada na Praça da Câmara Municipal de Paris, no centro nevrálgico da cidade, a 23 de junho de 1654 – precisamente 16 dias após a sagração de Luís XIV. Ora, a data da sua inauguração desempenhou um papel da maior importância: não nos podemos esquecer de que o edifício da Câmara Municipal estava ainda a ser alvo de uma campanha de reabilitação, fruto das devastadoras e sangrentas invasões perpetradas por uma fação da nobreza insubmissa⁹, sobretudo a ocorrida no ano de 1652¹⁰. A Fronda quis arruinar – e esmagar –, literal e simbolicamente, o poder régio. Contudo, o Estado – afinal vitorioso – viabilizou a reviravolta: agora, era a Fronda que estava a ser esmagada, mesmo em frente ao edifício que outrora desrespeitara e destruiria¹¹. O poder régio restaurava-se; erguia-se das cinzas e eternizava-se (tal como a cultura romana). Já a *rebelião feudal* era, inversamente, condenada a ser esmagada *ad aeternum* sob a forma de uma estátua de pedra cuja durabilidade é, enfim, (quase) eterna. A disposição desta imagem, bem como de muitas outras, na esfera pública reforça a instrumentalização da arte ao serviço das ambições de Luís XIV.

Naturalmente, a apropriação da cultura clássica torna-se evidente não apenas nas esculturas dispostas em locais de convivência da sociedade urbana, como também a partir dos vários exemplos de outras pinturas e retratos da primeira metade do governo luís-quatorziano, dispostos nos circuitos régios, nos quais o monarca se apresenta como um verdadeiro general das milícias romanas ou como um glorioso deus do panteão clássico¹². Nos casos da arte produzida para os circuitos de carácter mais privado – sobretudo aqueles que se afastavam, literal e simbolicamente, dos palácios de aparato, da encenação mais direta do poder e autoridade (como o palácio de Fontainebleau, do Luxemburgo, entre outros) –, o plano de propaganda era, naturalmente, menor, ou, até, inócuo. Nestes circuitos, o rei tinha um maior sentido de “liberdade”. E era essa mesma liberdade, esse poder de decisão, que sintetizava os desejos e anseios mais profundos – ou meramente estéticos – do rei. Para analisar a imagem de Luís XIV como instrumento de propaganda temos, portanto, sempre de destringer, de entre outras questões, o domínio público do privado¹³. Em Versalhes, estas dinâmicas conviviam paredes-meias. As antecâmaras privadas dos apartamentos régios, onde as encenações diárias da pessoa pública do rei não tinham tanta preponderância, não desempenhavam a mesma função – simbólica e propagandística – que, a título de exemplo, os grandes jardins de aparato do palácio. Relembre-se, aliás, que:

⁹ Incluindo os príncipes do sang.

¹⁰ Veja-se Maral (2009), Bresc-Bautier (2009) e Bresc-Bautier (2012).

¹¹ Tirando partido de um verdadeiro projeto doutrinário que polarizava a sociedade, não raras foram as vezes em que os “inimigos do rei” foram retratados (alegóricamente ou diretamente) com atributos identificativos de características idiossincráticas de determinados grupos sociais, entendidos como a encarnação do Mal.

¹² Situação que adquire grande notoriedade a partir de 1664, altura em que se delega a Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683) a supervisão do patronato real das artes e das academias ao serviço de Luís XIV.

¹³ Para o conhecimento abrangente dos estudos centrados no retrato veja-se Pinelli et al. 2012.

Les jardins de Versailles devenaient le musée à ciel ouvert de la culture antique, et c'est bien ainsi que l'appréciaient les courtisans trompant leur ennui dans la promenade, comme le public issu des classes urbaines cultivées, désormais visiteurs assidus, et déjà les « touristes », ces aristocrates adeptes du « grand tour » dans les capitales européennes (Sabatier 2016: 12).

A classicização do Estado é, como quer que seja, inequívoca: o rei era repetidamente retratado, nos mais diversos suportes, como um “novo Alexandre (a sua comparação favorita, pelo menos durante a década de 1660), um novo Augusto (encontrou Paris em tijolo e deixou-a em mármore), um novo Carlos Magno, um novo Clóvis, um novo Constantino, um novo Justiniano” (Burke 2007: 45).

Contudo, deve deixar-se bem claro que o plano do rei não passava apenas por fazer-se confundir com estes imperadores. Luís XIV quer superá-los. É este o motivo que justifica, aliás, a hibridização – afinal anacrônica – da simbólica clássica com a simbólica da monarquia francesa em inúmeras obras, da pintura à escultura, que incluem o retrato do rei. “Cette pratique volontaire de l'anachronisme obéit à deux motivations: ne pas conférer une temporalité fallacieuse (ce roi n'est pas Trajan), identifier le prince (ce roi est Louis XIV). D'où la perruque” (Sabatier 2016: 190-9).

Para além dos deuses e imperadores da antiguidade, existem outras figuras sobrenaturais de matriz clássica que foram instrumentalizadas, mas às quais menor atenção se presta. Retratadas em diversos cenários alegóricos que exortavam à glorificação dos triunfos do rei no plano militar, também as Virtudes Cardeais (a Justiça, a Fortaleza/Força, a Prudência e a Temperança) desempenham um papel importante.

Efetivamente, as reflexões que versam sobre as Virtudes Cardeais constam na obra de Platão e Aristóteles, pelas quais Ovídeo se deixa contaminar (Castañeda 2014: 97-116). Séculos mais tarde, o Cristianismo emergente apropria-se da carga semântica original destes “seres celestes”, mediadores da conduta humana, para assim formular os seus princípios de ortodoxia. Refira-se, aliás, que as Virtudes acabam por ser retratadas nas sagradas escrituras, mais concretamente, no *Livro da sabedoria de Salomão* (8:7): “Se alguém ama a justiça, as virtudes são os seus frutos, pois é ela quem ensina a temperança e a prudência, a justiça e a fortaleza, que são na vida os bens mais úteis aos homens.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Disponível em: <<https://biblia.paulus.com.br/biblia-pastoral/antigo-testamento/livros-sapienciais/sabedoria/8>>, consultado em: 10-03-2022.

Com a consagração das Virtudes, inclusas nas sagradas escrituras, e posteriormente louvadas por autoridades da Igreja Católica Romana como Santo Ambrósio, Santo Agostinho e São Tomás de Aquino, iniciou-se um novo paradigma iconográfico,



Fig. 1 Jean Dolivar (gravador) e Jean Berain l'Ancien (desenhador), *Trono do Rei da Grande Galeria de Versalhes, montado para a audiência dos embaixadores siameses, 1686.* Fonte: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

patente nos mais diversos retratos pictóricos e escultóricos de sumos pontífices e governantes, que, ao longo de toda a Idade Média e Idade Moderna, se fizeram retratar acompanhados das Virtudes Cardeais e Virtudes Teológicas (Castañeda 2014: 100-7).

Ainda a este propósito, e no que à arte produzida ao serviço de Luís XIV na primeira metade do seu reinado diz respeito, tome-se como exemplo a cadeira real do monarca, encomendada em 1669 a Philippe Caffieri, *sculpteur ordinaire des meubles de la Couronne*.

A cadeira incorporava sete imagens de prata, adossadas à sua estrutura, que assumiam a forma de quatro querubins (integrados nas pernas e braços da cadeira); de duas Virtudes Cardeais (a Força/Fortaleza, empunhando o seu bastão, e a Justiça,

sustendo a balança e a espada, ambas rematando os cantos das espaldas); e de uma divindade: Apolo (rematando o cachaço da cadeira, ostentava a coroa de louros e a lira)¹⁵.

Como já foi referido num estudo anterior (Lemos 2023a: 52), este programa iconográfico invocava, justamente, os seres celestes da Antiguidade Clássica de que Luís XIV se apropriou para o reforço da imagem da monarquia que conquista e reina por direito divino. Apolo desempenhava um papel essencial na dupla configuração da imagem do rei apresentado como mecenas – que, através da lira, se anunciava patrono da música, da dança e das artes – e do rei que encarna o próprio *Sol*, encenando a extensão do seu jugo sobre todo o plano terreno: “(...) suffisant seul à tant de choses, [comme] à gouverner d’autres empires, comme le soleil à éclairer d’autres mondes, s’ils étaient également exposés à ses rayons” (Luís XIV apud Goubert (ed.) 1992: 136-7).

A apropriação da Justiça e da Força/Fortaleza aludia aos feitos homéricos do monarca que domina e conquista – por direito –, através da guerra (Maes 2013: 114). Recorde-se que, no momento da encomenda da nova cadeira real, além de outras conquistas no campo de batalha, Luís XIV acabava de sair vitorioso do conflito pela dominação de territórios da Flandres e do Franco-Condado; situação que poderia anunciar-se como fruto de ações guiadas pela Justiça e, sobretudo, pela Força. É este o motivo que parece justificar a eleição desta combinação de virtudes e não outras, como a Justiça e a Prudência ou a Justiça e a Temperança. Para compreendermos a apropriação do binómio Força e Justiça como entidades que legitimam a conquista – ou resgate – dos domínios terrenos em posse de outras nações, é forçoso que tenhamos em conta que Luís XIV concentrava esforços para disseminar a ideia de que territórios como o Franco Condado pertenciam, por direito, à coroa francesa – aos franceses, se quisermos.

Assim, algumas possessões alheias configuravam verdadeiros casos de “usurpação” perante a lei dos homens e, nalguns casos, perante a lei de Deus. Eram territórios considerados “refêns” de um jugo criminoso, situação que “justificava”, enfim, o uso da Força, para assim serem reclamados por França – o que restituía, pois então, a Justiça. Como adiante veremos, Luís XIV escudou-se nas reflexões de um conjunto de teólogos, juristas e funcionários do Estado ao seu serviço, advogando, taxativamente, que a Força devia ser administrada como uma espécie de corretivo, punindo *justamente os injustos*.

Tendo em conta que a cadeira real configurava um dos símbolos, por excelência, da majestade real, a aplicação escultórica da Justiça e da Força indiciava uma clara exaltação destas virtudes em detrimento das restantes¹⁶.

No Salão de Hércules, em Versalhes, ambas as entidades voltaram a ser aplicadas, integrando parte de um programa iconográfico cuja narrativa enfatiza a apoteose

¹⁵ Veja-se sobre o assunto Castelluccio 2006, Arminjon 2007 e Maes 2013.

¹⁶ De facto, a Prudência e a Temperança parecem figurar em menor número noutras representações, textuais e iconográficas, do rei.

do semideus – o mesmo será dizer de Luís XIV. A mensagem é inequívoca: o herói bélico merece um *lugar no céu* pelo sucesso das suas demandas.

Outros casos existem em que as Virtudes – em particular a Força, intrinsecamente “Justa” – são evocadas através de outras figuras mitológicas. Na pintura alegórica executada por Charles le Brun, *Luís XIV e a conquista do Franco-Condado* (c. 1678-85) este fenómeno consubstancia-se através da representação das figuras de *Hércules e Marte*, que, neste caso, aludem não só à virtude da Força, como também à beligerância exercida pelo rei¹⁷. As cidades e províncias do Franco-Condado são personificadas sob a forma de um conjunto de mulheres prostradas no chão que, expressando tristeza, medo e sofrimento, se veem resgatadas do jugo inimigo por Marte (Rainssant 1687: 35-6). Por sua vez, o *Deus da Guerra é, ainda, acompanhado na luta por Minerva*. Divindade que, segundo os épicos clássicos, se insurge contra a ira de Marte, alia-se, neste caso, ao seu antagonista, para assim derrubarem o inimigo. O conflito é “justo”¹⁸.

E se dúvidas restam de que Luís XIV ambicionava ser (con)fundido com as figuras de Marte e Hércules, pelo menos durante a primeira metade do seu reinado, veja-se o Arco Triunfal da Porte Saint-Martin, colocado no centro nevrálgico de Paris em 1674, também a propósito das vitórias no Franco-Condado. Aqui, o rei associa-se, sem qualquer margem para dúvida, a ambas as entidades, encarnando, até, uma delas: na fachada norte, o Deus romano da Guerra é retratado com o escudo e a espada, armas que servem de proteção à águia imperial – alegoria à força alemã, afinal derrotada. Já na fachada oposta, na cena da *Rutura da Tríplice Aliança*, Luís XIV apresenta-se apoiado na tosca massa de Hércules¹⁹, ostentando ainda a pele do Leão de Nemeia, que cobre parcialmente o seu corpo possantemente musculado, qual Hércules Farnésio.

Todas estas representações, da escultura e pintura às artes decorativas, associam, inequívoca e intrinsecamente, a Força à Justiça. Para as escudar contribuem ainda as reflexões de Jean Domat (1625-96)²⁰, jurista protegido por Luís XIV. Em *Le Droit Public* (1696), Domat advoga que o reino deve ser sustentado por dois pilares fundamentais para a manutenção da sua soberania: a proteção contra as investidas externas e a repressão da violência e da injustiça dentro dos seus domínios (McCullough 2007: 6). Para cumprir tais premissas e, em suma, o bom governo do reino, Domat realça, justamente, a importância que a Força e a Justiça – legitimadas por Deus – desempenham:

Ainsi, la puissance des souverains étant une participation de celle de Dieu, elle est comme le bras et la force de la justice qui doit être l’ame du gouvernement, et qui seule a l’usage naturel de toute autorité sur les esprits et les cours des hommes; car c’est sur ces deux puissances de l’homme que la justice doit avoir son règne.

¹⁷ Tal como consta na famosa *Explication des tableaux de la gallerie de Versailles* (Rainssant 1687: 35-6): *Cependant un Hercule, symbole de la Force & de la Vertu heroique, monte sur un Rocher effroyable, où Minerve, qui est à costé de luy, semble le conduire; & sur lequel on voit un Lion furieux. Le Lion represente l’Espagne, & la Rocher la Citadelle de Besançon.*

¹⁸ Não tendo sido o único dos monarcas católicos que apropriou para si a união destas duas divindades, tenha-se também como exemplo o trono encomendado por D. João V (Lemos 2023b: 351-3).

¹⁹ A disposição do atributo poderá indiciar o sucesso do conflito.

²⁰ Autor de importantes obras jurídicas, financiadas por Luís XIV, que refletem, entre outros assuntos, sobre o papel da monarquia francesa.

Fig. 2 Etienne Le Hongre, *Luís XIV em Hércules*, 1674-5, Escultura, Paris, Porte Saint-Martin.
Fonte: ©Chabe01 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Porte_St_Martin_Paris_8.jpg



L'autorité de la justice sur l'esprit de l'homme n'est autre chose que la force de la vérité sur la raison et sur le bon sens; et l'autorité de la justice sur le coeur de l'homme, n'est autre chose que la force de son attrait qui en fait naître l'amour dans le coeur. Mais parce que tous les esprits et tous les coeurs ne se laissent pas conduire par la lumière et les attraits de la vérité et de la justice, et que plusieurs les rejettent et se portent à des injustices; il est de l'ordre divin que la justice ait d'autres armes que la lumière pour éclairer l'esprit, et les attraits pour toucher le coeur, et qu'elle règne d'une autre manière sur ceux qui résistent à son empire naturel, qui devrait régler la conduite de chaque personne. C'est ainsi que Dieu, qui est lui-même la justice et la vérité, règne sur les hommes, et c'est ainsi qu'il veut qu'usent de sa puissance pour le gouvernement ceux à qui il la confie, qu'ils rendent leur domination aimable à ceux qui aiment la justice, et terrible à ceux qui, ne l'aimant point, entreprennent de lui résister (Remy 1835: 20).

Dissipando quaisquer dúvidas, Luís XIV chega mesmo a afirmar, no auge do período em que patrocinou várias ofensivas bélicas com consequências desastrosas no plano humanitário, que o uso da força – da força corretiva, autoritária e modeladora – era necessário para fazer observar a “correta” administração da “justiça”: “Il faut de la force assurément pour tenir toujours la balance de la justice droite entre tant de gens qui font leurs efforts pour la faire pencher de leur côté” (Dreyss 1860: 135).

As conquistas no campo de batalha tornavam, enfim, perfeitamente evidente que a arte ao serviço do *Rei Sol* deveria formular os seus programas narrativos e iconográficos com base na apropriação da cultura figurativa de matriz clássica alusiva ao plano bélico. De facto, à medida que o reinado de Luís XIV vai avançando, vários são os momentos em que o Estado participa ativamente na propagação desta faceta do rei no domínio público²¹.

Contudo, a proliferação – ou imposição, se quisermos – destas imagens, deste projeto de propaganda, só foi possível porque existe uma escalada no exercício do poder absoluto que se (con)funde com o poder despótico²²; conduta esta que trará vários problemas a Luís XIV, sobretudo a partir da década de 1680, como veremos. Com particular expressão após os conflitos da Fronda, o rei encabeçou uma série de provisões que inibiam não só a autonomia do exercício do poder parlamentar e local, como também a liberdade de expressão e de protesto. Por outras palavras, o poder das províncias e cidades francesas foi paulatinamente reduzido e condicionado, chegando, a certa altura, a ser orquestrado indiretamente pelo rei, que arrogou a si o direito de nomeação dos seus governadores – anteriormente eleitos pela elite local. “À la veille de la Révolution, les libertés locales, provinciales et urbaines, ont cédé presque partout sous le poids de la centralisation” (Bouveresse 2016: 83).

Tal como aconteceu noutros setores da sociedade²³, a monarquia francesa sujeitou o trabalho oficial, artesanal e artístico à supervisão de entidades que eram, por sua vez, sujeitas à autoridade régia (Bouveresse 2016: 77-8). Na prática, e centrando-nos no domínio do artístico, quem decidia os programas iconográficos e de celebração do poder régio era o próprio rei.

Este contexto estaria, no entanto, prestes a mudar.

Das (des)continuidades de tradição clássica

Sensivelmente a partir da segunda metade da década de 1680, a associação da imagem do rei a cenários alegóricos de matriz mitológica começou a falir.

França entrava num período de declínio em várias frentes. No plano bélico, a Guerra da Liga de Augsburgo (1688-97) e a Guerra da Sucessão Espanhola (1702-13) lesaram

²¹ Relembre-se, a título de exemplo, o findar da sangrenta Guerra de Hollande (1672-1678) e a intensa propaganda promovida pelo Estado Francês, persuadindo as grandes cidades a encomendarem estátuas equestres do rei (Burke 2007: 113-22).

²² “Il ne faut pas confondre absolutisme et despotisme. L’absolutisme, même s’il y a contradiction dans les termes, comporte des limites, des règles d’organisation et de fonctionnement, des institutions que le monarque doit respecter. Quant au despotisme, il désigne le gouvernement arbitraire, sans frein ni limites. L’absolutisme est la résultante d’une longue gestation historique” (Bouveresse 2016: 77).

²³ Não nos esqueçamos de que o rei era absoluto e, portanto, era a máquina propulsora do Estado: controlava a nobreza, outrora insubmissa; nomeava os representantes dos mais altos cargos eclesiásticos; controlava a burguesia.

profundamente o Estado, abrindo um grave buraco financeiro ao qual se juntava um calamitoso desastre humanitário (Burke 2007: 118). Em crescendo, o rei começou a ser alvo de duras críticas que denunciavam, de entre outros crimes, a violação constante da Lei Fundamental, fruto dos massacres por si cometidos nos domínios das potências cristãs vizinhas, particularmente a sangrenta invasão francesa ao Palatinado (1688). A sua conduta bélica – construída, afinal, à imagem de um Marte implacável – foi também duramente exposta em panfletos que se insurgiam contra a tirania luís-quatorziana (sobretudo no famoso panfleto de 1689). Por outro lado, a fabricação da sua faceta “gloriosa” via-se severamente contestada e ridicularizada pelos seus detratores, que sublinhavam, ainda, as “referências aos «louvores extravagantes» (...) que «explodiram a sua Ambição, comparando-o ao Sol” (Burke 2007: 147-53)²⁴. Naturalmente, as autoridades que atuavam em nome do rei tentaram controlar os (felizes) efeitos nocivos da imprensa que expunha a cru a personalidade despótica do monarca, mas a erradicação não teve sucesso²⁵.

O Terceiro Estado, impelido pelas suas próprias franjas intelectuais, mas também por membros do clero e da nobreza, como se sabe, estava a dar claros sinais de rutura com o exercício do poder (Bouveresse 2016: 87-8). Estas reviravoltas obrigaram a que o Estado repensasse as suas políticas de atuação, nomeadamente, as que diziam respeito à propaganda.

Não obstante, e uma vez mais, as academias enfrentavam uma nova problemática: a fabricação da imagem “gloriosa” do rei, consubstanciada, outrora, através dos épicos clássicos, falia. A par desta situação, o pensamento erudito deixava-se contaminar, abrindo novas discussões que, além de realçarem “as particularidades nefastas dos antigos imperadores romanos” (Burke 2007: 137) – quais avisos e denúncias –, questionavam

se a cultura moderna (inclusive a ciência) era superior àquela da antiguidade clássica. Outras questões incluíram a adequação na escolha de heróis pós-clássicos (como Clóvis ou Carlos Magno) como protagonistas de poemas e peças, no uso de uma linguagem moderna para as inscrições em monumentos (...), e no retrato de figuras contemporâneas, tal como o rei em trajes modernos.

Esta mudança de paradigma foi, aliás, há quase um século sublinhada por Paul Hazard (1935: VII), que descrevia precisamente a década de 1680 como um período de verdadeira revolução – de tentativa de cortar amarras, se quisermos. As artes e a cultura acompanharam, naturalmente, todas estas mudanças, geradoras de uma “nova mentalidade (...) a alteração no estado da analogia: uma mudança de correspondência objectiva para metáfora subjectiva. O simbolismo tornou-se mais auto-consciente”²⁶ (Burke 2009: 138).

²⁴ Sátiras impressas nos Países Baixos e distribuídas com facilidade por França. Veja-se, a título de exemplo, a *Les Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* (Bouveresse 2016: 86).

²⁵ Veja-se, sobre este assunto em particular, Boneet 2019.

²⁶ “(...) Por que razão, por exemplo, as velas são colocadas no altar durante a missa? Segundo a teoria tradicional, formulada por Durandus no século XIII, as velas significam que Cristo é a luz do mundo. Claude de Vert, por outro lado, rejeita o que ele chama de explicações “místicas” para históricos. Segundo ele, as velas foram necessárias durante os dias em que a missa foi celebrada nas catacumbas, e o costume sobreviveu. (...) Os soberanos perderam uma parte importante do que Pierre Bourdieu chamaria o seu património simbólico” (Burke 2009: 138-9).



Fig. 3 Antoine Coysevox, Luís XIV, o Bom Cristão, c. 1684, Escultura, Musée Carnavalet. Fonte: ©Mbzt https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Louis_XIV_en_empereur_romain_statue_d%27Antoine_Coysevox_1689.jpg

Portanto, tal como refere Paul Hazard, no final do reinado de Luís XIV, vários setores da sociedade conseguiram fazer prevalecer (com efeitos práticos) as suas opiniões: a declaração pública da repulsa ao autoritarismo, à restrição, aos dogmas, etc. (Hazard 1953: I). A sociedade estava consciente do que significavam a tirania e a brutalidade. E o Estado estava consciente de que a sociedade estava (demasiado) consciente²⁷.

²⁷ Para compreendermos este contexto de forma global, não podemos também deixar de referir as acesas intrigas cortesãs, sobretudo as que surgiram após a morte de Colbert (1683) e a tomada de posse do seu cargo de Surintendant des Bâtiments du Roi (cargo que, como se sabe, definia em grande medida a produção artística vinculada a Luís XIV) pelo seu “antagonista”, François-Michel le Tellier, Marquês de Louvois (1641-1691). Marco gerador de dissidências de várias ordens, cujas consequências reverberaram na preferência pela representação do rei de forma mais direta e menos alegórica – situação que espelhava também a praxis de uma nova geração de artistas, aliás defendida por Louvois –, relegava para segundo plano a produção de arte de temática marcadamente alegórica e mitológica, outrora fomentada por Colbert (Coll 2014: 7-10).

No domínio estrito da arte, esta reviravolta expressou-se, desde logo, através de substituições e até destruições de determinadas obras associadas a Luís XIV. Concentremo-nos, agora, nos seguintes exemplos.

Comece-se referindo a substituição da antiga estátua de *Luís XIV esmagando a Fronde* por uma outra, executada por Antoine Coysevox (1640-1740) a mando do próprio rei, que a 30 de janeiro de 1687 afirmou que a antiga “n’était plus de saison” (Maral 2009: 42-9). A inauguração celebrou-se a 14 de julho de 1689.

A escultura de vulto em bronze retrata Luís XIV e repousa sobre um pedestal, no qual se inscrevem dois baixos-relevos, também em bronze, essenciais à descodificação narrativa da obra. De um lado, a *Piedade alimentando os Pobres*. Do outro, a *Religião derrotando a Heresia*.

Ora, neste caso, Luís XIV é acompanhado por duas entidades que, não aludindo diretamente à virtude da Justiça, “descendem” dela, tal como refere Castañeda (2019: 306-11). Esta alusão – indireta – à faceta “Justa” do rei é bastante significativa. Luís XIV tem a necessidade de fazer crer que os seus atos são “Justos” e, portanto, plenos de piedade e religião, condutas, aliás, canonicamente indissociáveis da Justiça, sem as quais esta não se executa, tal como referem várias autoridades da Igreja ao longo dos séculos (*Idem, Ibidem*). Por outro lado, o programa iconográfico aplicado nos baixos-relevos exclui as divindades do panteão greco-latino mais inequivocamente associadas à guerra, rejeitando ainda a virtude da Força. As figuras tutelares que acompanham o rei são de uma outra espécie: não é a força bruta e pagã que viabiliza a glória do rei, mas antes a Religião e a Piedade – um programa iconográfico, enfim, cristão.

No baixo-relevo da *Religião derrotando a Heresia*, a “guerra” retratada não se concretiza através do confronto físico. O que aqui se consagra é a vitória, alegórica, da Religião Católica Romana sobre o Protestantismo: a revogação do Édito de Nantes (1685). Sendo esta uma narrativa que justifica, naturalmente, a inclusão da figura da Religião, não deixa de ilustrar um certo cuidado na conceção do programa iconográfico desta imagem, uma vez que existem exemplos vários, verdadeiros “modelos de tradição”, em que os reis franceses se insurgem contra a Heresia (seja ela o protestantismo ou qualquer outra força adversa ao poder régio vigente), guiados por figuras como Minerva, Marte ou Hércules²⁸.

O outro baixo-relevo, concebido, entre outros motivos, como uma tentativa de desvio das atenções dos sangrentos conflitos que patrocinava incessantemente²⁹, relembra a crise agrícola de 1661³⁰ (Woolley 2012), mais particularmente as providências tomadas pelo rei de forma a combater a fome que grassava e a inflação do preço dos cereais (Clément 1846: 112-3). Medidas, todavia, insuficientes, originaram um descontentamento generalizado que levou à publicação de um decreto que punia a liberdade de protesto referente a esta situação (*Idem*: 284-303)³¹.

²⁸ Relembrem-se, de entre outros, o célebre retrato de Henrique IV (1553-1610), (círculo de Toussaint Dubreuil, c. 1600) esmagando a Hydra, encarnando Hércules, ou ainda os retratos de Luís XIII (1601-1643) onde o mesmo cenário se repete. Note-se que, durante o reinado de Luís XIV, o retrato de Henrique IV estava exposto num circuito privado (Cabinet Doré, Palácio de Fontainebleau), alheio ao escrutínio público (Sabatier 2006: 215). Ora, a localização das obras é, naturalmente, um fator essencial para compreendermos as suas funcionalidades. Neste caso – como em muitos outros mais restritos – o rei pode baixar a guarda e decidir, com maior liberdade, a temática que lhe agrada. Este é, aliás, um dos motivos que justificam a existência de obras cujos programas iconográficos e narrativos se distinguem de outros, aplicados nos circuitos mais públicos. A este propósito, relembrem-se as considerações da célebre cronista Jean-Baptiste Primi Visconti Fassola de Rasa (1648-1713): “En public, il est plein de gravité et très différent de ce qu’il est son particulier. Me trouvant dans sa chambre avec d’autres courtisans, j’ai remarqué plusieurs fois que, si la porte vient par hasard à être ouverte, ou s’il sort, il compose aussitôt son attitude et prend une autre expression de figure, comme s’il devait paraître sur un théâtre” (Primi Viconti 1988: 28).

²⁹ Não nos esqueçamos de que Luís XIV acabava de infligir terríveis massacres no Palatinado (1688).

³⁰ Fatalidade que dizimou inúmeras vidas.

³¹ Provisão que, pelo menos aos olhos de hoje, não nos parecerá pautada por grande justiça...

Distribuindo pão pela população desfavorecida, a figura da Piedade, trajada aliás com um manto flordelisado, assume-se, portanto, como uma espécie de falsa propaganda, cujo intuito radicava no apaziguamento e glorificação dos feitos (enfim insuficientes) do monarca. Por outro lado, como bem refere Alexandra Woolley (2012), a evocação deste episódio – aparentemente desconexo quando relacionado com a cena da *Religião derrotando a Heresia* retratada no outro baixo-relevo – e em particular a representação do pão, tinham como propósito reafirmar as teorias absolutistas que comparavam Luís XIV a Deus. O rei não combatia apenas a fome com o pão que distribuía. Ele era, também, o responsável pela proteção da religião católica romana nos seus domínios, sendo o pão o símbolo do corpo de Cristo: a hóstia que alimenta a alma da sociedade. E o *verdadeiro alimento da alma* é aquele que o crente toma através da comunhão eucarística que acontece nos templos da “Verdadeira Fé”: condição apenas garantida pela Revogação do Édito de Nantes.

Embora a iconografia de matriz clássica se plasme no traje que a figura ostenta – e que, uma vez mais, consagra Luís XIV como um imperador da antiguidade –, a obra afasta-se do esquema de representação que privilegiou a associação positivista das divindades pagãs ao rei, sobretudo as alusivas à guerra. O rei apresenta-se, sim, como um imperador romano, mas o programa iconográfico utilizado, tanto na escultura de vulto, como nos baixos-relevos que ladeiam o pedestal sobre o qual a imagem repousa, remetem-nos para os últimos imperadores – bastiões da defesa e disseminação do Cristianismo – e não tanto para aqueles anteriores ao nascimento de Cristo. Mais: se bem notarmos, na parte traseira da escultura, o manto do rei cobre parcialmente uma armadura e elmo depostos, completamente caídos no chão. Sobre estes, também ocultada parcialmente pelo manto, uma pele de Leão: atributo iconográfico que ganha, sem dúvida, conotações com a pele do Leão de Nemeia de Hércules. Ora, estes atributos marciais – os quais assumiram lugar de destaque noutras obras associadas ao rei, em particular as da primeira metade do seu governo – são reprogramados e, portanto, a sua significância altera-se. Ao serem *deixados para trás*, relegados para o plano traseiro da imagem; pleno de esquecimento, estes objetos dissociavam, uma vez mais, Luís XIV de condutas bélicas e irascíveis. O rei não opta pela Força bruta.

Esta reconfiguração justifica, enfim, que a figura de vulto do rei – qual Teodósio, o Grande (346 a.c.-395 a.c.), ou Carlos Magno³² – repouse o seu braço direito sobre um elmo deposto nos fasces, os quais são domados por ramos de palmeira; motivos fitomórficos que denunciam, com efeito, a inutilização destes instrumentos bélicos, evocando, portanto, a Paz (Sabatier 1998: 561) e a (desejável) união dos povos sob o signo da Igreja *Una, Santa, Católica e Apostólica*. As *armas da guerra* constam na obra, é um facto, mas, ao estarem depostas e domadas pela *vitória da paz*, evocam, justamente, uma carga significativa oposta à consagrada noutras obras associadas a Luís XIV – tal como em *Luís XIV esmagando a Fronda*³³.

³² Teodósio, o Grande, instituiu o Cristianismo como religião oficial do Império Romano com o Édito de Tessalónica (380).

³³ Note-se, ainda, que aos pés do rei brotam uvas de uma cornucópia. Dialogando com o pão que a Piedade distribui, não será ambicioso interpretar as uvas não apenas como um símbolo de abundância, mas, também, em simultâneo, como um símbolo eucarístico.

Este contexto sociopolítico – de particular “aliança” com a derradeira missão da Igreja Católica Romana, que, afinal, beneficiava do apoio de Luís XIV no que concernia à defesa da “Verdadeira Fé”, não obstante os consecutivos episódios de verdadeira afronta ao poder papal (Sabatier 2016: 171-80) – é, justamente, um dos motivos que justificam um certo afastamento (todavia, nunca absoluto) da mitologia clássica durante este período. Um episódio de sublimação da simbólica eminentemente cristã, se quisermos antes. Como bem clarifica Alexandra Woolley, ao longo de toda a década de 1680/90, várias das manifestações públicas de exaltação luís-quatorziana construía-se com base na invocação de figuras caras ao universo cristão: a Igreja, a Fé, a Caridade, a Esperança, a Religião, a Verdade, os Anjos ou a Heresia (esta última algumas vezes representada sob a forma de Hidra, o que também deixa claro que não existia a recusa completa da mitologia clássica (Woolley 2012).

A substituição de arte vinculada à faceta mitológica – e sobretudo bélica – do rei não se verificou apenas na estátua encomendada em 1687. Em Versalhes, e já num circuito menos público (mas nem por isso menos eficaz), Luís XIV ordenou, no mesmo ano da encomenda da estátua de Coysevox, a substituição de uma antiga escultura de vulto do rei que estava colocada num nicho do Salão de Vénus, executada entre 1665 e 1672 por Jean Warin (1604-72), por uma outra: de *Hermes atando a sandália*³⁴ (Sabatier 2006: 218).

Na primeira obra, é desde logo notório que a efígie régia expressa uma vibração violenta, eximamente plasmada nos contorcionismos quase ameaçadores – quase gorgóneos – da cabeleira. Acentuando a agressividade da figura, Luís XIV apresenta traje e elmo à romana, aos quais acresce ainda o escudo, onde se inscreve a cabeça decepada de Medusa. Ora, a substituição desta obra pela célebre escultura de Hermes – imagem que, à época, se julgava representar o imperador Cincinnatus (519 a.C.-439 a.C.) – é altamente significativa. Cincinnatus foi um general romano que se celebrou pelo apoio incondicional à sua pátria. A história conta-nos que o general foi nomeado pelo Senado Romano, quando estava já retirado na sua *villa*, para desempenhar o cargo de comandante da República. Sem hesitar, Cincinnatus aceitou a missão e cumpriu valerosamente a defesa do império, derrotando a ofensiva. Não obstante a vitória e a exaltação popular, renunciou a todas as glórias e regressou ao seu retiro.

Neste caso, o Deus – afinal confundido com um mortal! – é retratado numa posição plena de vulnerabilidade, humanismo e, até, erotismo. A dissociação do confronto bélico é inequívoca.

Variando entre a total omissão das entidades celestes clássicas e a seleção cuidada destas, notemos outros casos de considerável destaque.

Refira-se o retrato de *Luís XIV corado pela Glória*, de Antoine Coytel (1661-1722). Na obra, são aplicadas virtudes e divindades celestes de matriz clássica, mas estas

³⁴ Veja-se: https://collections.chateauversailles.fr/?permid=permobj_e54049bc-5208-4446-af34-0096d7fd08b6#14100c6d-529b-4890-97b8-f0a553238950.



distanciam-se, numa primeira análise, das entidades mitológicas às quais se reconheciam condutas bélicas e irascíveis. Note-se que o monarca é representado com a Justiça – agora acompanhada pela Paz –, que, outrora, num binómio tipificado aquando das mais notáveis conquistas de Luís XIV, se via acompanhada da Força, circundada por Hércules e Marte, prontos a desbaratar as figuras alusivas aos territórios subjugados por França.

Noutros domínios, como no da medalhística, os programas iconográficos utilizados a partir de 1680 passavam também a representar o rei de forma direta e não alegórica (Burke 2007: 41). O mesmo cenário replica-se também nos interiores dos edifícios públicos do Estado (de Paris às províncias), onde se verifica um maior número de encomendas de retratos pintados de Luís XIV ostentando o traje da

Figs. 4 Jean Warin, *Luís XIV em traje marcial*, c. 1645–72, Escultura, Palácio de Versalhes. Fonte: © Zairon https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Versailles_Ch%C3%A2teau_de_Versailles_Innen_Venus-Salon_5.jpg — Autor desconhecido, *Hermes atando a sandália*, c. 100 a.C–200 a.C, Escultura, Museu do Louvre. Fonte: © Jastrow https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Montalto_Sandalbinder_Louvre_Ma83.jpg



Figs. 5 Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Luís XIV, o Grande*, 1701, Pintura, 277x194, Museu do Louvre. Fonte: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Louis_XIV_of_France_in_Coronation_Robes_\(by_Hyacinthe_Rigaud\)_-_Louvre_Museum.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Louis_XIV_of_France_in_Coronation_Robes_(by_Hyacinthe_Rigaud)_-_Louvre_Museum.jpg) (Pormenor) Pierre Drevet, *Luís, o Grande*, 1714-15, Gravura. Fonte: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Louis_XIV_in_Coronation_Robes_by_Hyacinthe_Rigaud_\(1701\)#/media/File:Louis_XIV_by_Pierre_Drevet_after_Hyacinthe_Francois_Rigaud,_1712,_engraving_on_paper,_from_the_National_Portrait_Gallery_-_NPG-S-NPG_69_6.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Louis_XIV_in_Coronation_Robes_by_Hyacinthe_Rigaud_(1701)#/media/File:Louis_XIV_by_Pierre_Drevet_after_Hyacinthe_Francois_Rigaud,_1712,_engraving_on_paper,_from_the_National_Portrait_Gallery_-_NPG-S-NPG_69_6.jpg)

sagração ou outros atributos que representavam a monarquia francesa de uma forma mais objetiva (*regalia*, manto flordelisado, etc.) (Sabatier 2006: 221). Na segunda metade do seu reinado, o Estado havia já posto em marcha o plano de centralização do país, de maneira que a questão da onnipresença do rei cumpria todo o seu propósito. A percepção da sua efigie tem de ser o mais verosímil possível – não deixando, contudo, de corporizar a *majestas*.

O caso mais paradigmático desta realidade é, no nosso entender, o retrato de Luís XIV, pintado por Hyacinthe Rigaud em 1701. Rigaud foi, como se sabe, uma das novas apostas deste período de renovação. Integrando parte de uma nova geração de artistas ao serviço de Luís XIV, as suas qualidades plásticas, composicionais e programáticas opunham-se às consagradas por Le Brun e outros pintores da sua geração, da primeira metade do governo luís-quatorziano (Coll 2014: 13). Este retrato foi encomendado por Luís XIV em 1700 e destinava-se a ser oferecido

ao seu neto, Filipe de Anjou, futuro Filipe V de Espanha (1683-746), que acabava de ser reconhecido como um dos herdeiros legítimos do trono espanhol, conforme o testamento de Carlos II de Espanha (1661-1700), então falecido.

O retrato – a partir do qual foram posteriormente produzidas várias cópias, com o aval régio – foi, enfim, apresentado à corte e disposto na sala do trono (Salão de Apolo) em 1702, mas nunca deixou o Palácio de Versalhes³⁵.

O rei apresenta-se com os atributos identificativos da sua autoridade – o manto, o cetro, a mão da justiça, a coroa e a espada de Carlos Magno – e sem qualquer veste, armadura ou objeto alusivo aos antigos imperadores pagãos³⁶. Portanto, numa leitura superficial, a obra obsta à integração de entidades de matriz da Antiguidade Clássica, que tanto marcaram a arte produzida na primeira metade do seu reinado. O retrato régio demonstra claramente a decadência da narrativa do *tableau d’histoire* em prol da (re)afirmação da autoridade real, *per se*, sem recurso à construção de cenários onde monarca e figuras celestes do panteão greco-latino dialogam com verossimilhança (Coll 2014: 20-1).

The portrait of Louis XIV does not share this allegorical spatiality. Victory is not suspended in mid-air to crown the king and Fame does not play its trumpet above the king’s head. Nothing compromises the verisimilitude of the scene (Coll 2014: 34).

Ora, ainda que várias matrizes historiográficas corroborem, claramente, a falência da figuração clássica na obra, há que sublinhar que os seus formulários não foram completamente suprimidos. Note-se, desde logo, que, neste caso, ainda são retratadas não só a Justiça, como também a Força, segurando a coluna – pormenor, aparentemente, ignorado pela historiografia, pese embora a sua representação inequívoca (mas obscura, literal e metaforicamente) tanto no retrato a óleo como na célebre gravura aberta por Pierre Drevet, em 1712. Observe-se que Rigaud inclui a Força num plano de tal modo oblíquo, que dificulta em muito a perceção visual desta figura. O mesmo não acontece com a virtude da Justiça, retratada num plano frontal, aliás, iluminado. Como se não bastasse, Rigaud parece ainda “castigar” a Força, aplicando sobre esta uma densa penumbra que obscurece o respetivo lado do pedestal onde assenta a coluna. Sobre estes pormenores, deter-nos-emos um pouco mais à frente.

Tal como Ramon Coll sugere, a representação da Justiça (à qual adicionamos a da Força) convoca uma dimensão distinta de muitos outros retratos de aparato de Luís XIV: a corporização carnal destas figuras que, antes, dialogavam com verossimilhança com o rei é anulada. Agora, as figuras são transformadas em metal, enquadradas num baixo-relevo. O realismo da obra não é comprometido.

³⁵ Veja-se Blunt (1953), Coquery (1997) e Cornette (1999).

³⁶ A espada que o rei ostenta não é um mero instrumento de combate, constituindo-se, antes, como um símbolo da legitimação do governo luís-quatorziano. Utilizada pelos reis franceses como um objeto-reliquia, a narrativa corrente delega a sua posse originária a Carlos Magno – primeiro imperador da Europa após a queda do Império Romano –, cuja descendência daria origem ao reino de França (Coll 2014: 26).

Além da representação das Virtudes, a cadeira real que acompanha o monarca denota, de igual modo, a apropriação de um pormenor decorativo cuja simbologia convoca, de forma mais subtil, é certo, a aculturação de matriz clássica. Observe-se o cachaço do espaldar, rematado com um elemento ornamental não raras vezes entendido como uma derivação da concha. Como já tivemos oportunidade de defender (Lemos 2023a: 54-6), este motivo representa uma palmeta – representação estilizada da palmeira. Aludindo à vital importância que esta árvore tinha na subsistência das culturas orientais síria, fenícia, egípcia, etc., a palmeira era, primordialmente, associada aos oásis:

verdadeiros templos de água das terras áridas e secas. Só os mais dignos eram agraciados com tal dádiva da natureza. Com a descoberta dos motivos grotescos e com a apropriação da linguagem clássica para a fabricação da imagem de Luís XIV, a palmeta ganha grande sentido de adequação e associação ao rei, inclusive nos mais diversos suportes existentes nos circuitos régios (Lemos 2023a: 56).

Compreende-se: a palmeira era, convenientemente, associada a

nôtre Apollon aussi bien que la Palmier: parce qu'il est né entre ce deux arbres [palmeira e oliveira], soit parce qu'il aime la chaleur et ne profice pas aux climas septentrionux, foit encore parce qu'il retient ses feuilles en Hyver, qui sont preservées du froid, par l'unctuosité et le chaleur qui leur sont naturelles (Bauderon 1684: 230-1).

Não obstante o espectro alargado de significâncias para o qual a iconologia e os seus estudiosos sempre nos remetem³⁷, e sobretudo no caso da palmeira, atente-se no *O Apolo francês, ou O paralelo das virtudes heróicas do rei Luís, o Grande, XIV*. Na obra, impressa em 1684, Bauderon (1684: 203) identifica a palmeira como um “(...) Symbole de la Guerre et de la Vittoire”. Esta associação corporiza-se, aliás, no Arco da *Porte de Saint-Denis* (fachada sul), onde se observa Luís XIV retratado com uma coroa de louros (qual Apolo Vitorioso), acompanhado por um grande ramo de palmeira, estilizado quase como se de uma palmeta se tratasse. Atributo que, para além de “recompensar” o fardo do governo das nações – direito divino que assiste aos reis católicos e, naturalmente, a Luís XIV –, este elemento ganha, ainda, conotações com o plano bélico – distanciando-se, todavia, de figuras como Marte ou Hércules, pese embora a evocação do mesmo espectro significativo.

Tal como acontece com as Virtudes Cardeais, a palmeira é referida nas sagradas escrituras, dando-se ainda conta das suas qualidades significantes: “Dans la Bible,

³⁷ E para isso basta que consultemos as obras magistrais de Louis Réau (1955-1959) e Jean Chevalier e Alan Gheerbrant (1982).

il est un symbole du juste, riche des bénédictions divines: *que le Juste, ainsi qu’un palmier, soit florissant*” (Chevalier e Gheerbrant 1982: 338).

Assim, a utilização da palmeira que pontua a cadeira real não deverá ser interpretada como um mero ornamento decorativo, desprovido de significância, assumindo-se, antes, como um símbolo clássico a partir do qual se reconhecem e recompensam – justificam e dignificam – os feitos do rei, agora sem recurso a entidades celestes às quais a nova mentalidade e cultura atribuíam defeitos e vícios. Refira-se, aliás, que a exclusão das divindades pagãs se atesta no domínio estrito das artes decorativas mais vinculadas à autoridade régia, situação esta plasmada, com efeito, não apenas no retrato da cadeira inclusa na pintura, mas também na nova cadeira real que Luís XIV encomendou em 1690, a propósito da destruição da anterior, esculpida por Caffieri em 1669, como já se teve oportunidade de defender (Lemos 2023a: 51-3).

Terminando a análise do retrato de Luís XIV pintado por Rigaud, note-se que tanto a coluna e os baixos-relevos da Justiça e Fortaleza, como a cadeira real são remetidos para o segundo plano composicional da obra. Desta forma, o rei é – mais uma vez – retratado em primeiro plano e sem qualquer auxílio, condecoração ou assistência das divindades e virtudes clássicas que, tipologicamente, acompanharam inúmeros dos seus retratos ao longo de praticamente toda a primeira metade do seu reinado.

Na obra, o Estado é, de facto, o próprio rei. Mas por que motivo se representa a virtude da Força envolta numa tal penumbra que quase a torna impercetível? Esta parece ser uma questão bastante complexa.

Se por um lado parecia ser evidente que o carácter marcial de Luís XIV (guiado pela Força) viabilizou os seus feitos geopolíticos, permitindo, ainda, a proteção e repressão da violência dentro dos domínios franceses – como aliás, defendiam os juristas régios –, por outro, Luís XIV dava sinais de uma aparente consciencialização – e talvez arrependimento – do sofrimento que infligiu ao seu povo. Estas contrições, referidas pelo próprio rei em várias das cartas enviadas aos seus confidentes mais próximos³⁸, notabilizaram-se, como se sabe, nos conselhos que deixou ao seu sucessor:

Mon enfant, vous allez être un grand roi. Ne m’imitez pas dans le goût que j’ai eu pour les bâtiments ni dans celui que j’ai eu pour la guerre. Tâchez de soulager vos peuples, ce que je suis malheureux pour n’avoir pu faire (Luís XIV apud Andre 1950: 26).

Este é, sem dúvida, um assunto ambíguo. No seu leito de morte, o rei está consciente de que “la plus éclatante victoire coûte trop cher quand il faut la payer du sang de ses sujets” (Luís XIV apud Wittmann 1942: 114), como bem afirma.

³⁸ Veja-se, sobre o assunto, Luís XIV apud Andre 1950.

O que pretendeu Rigaud – certamente com o aval régio – ao condenar a virtude da Força a um aparente esquecimento, à penumbra? Será este pormenor a expressão efetiva de uma espécie de remorso latente que se instalara na consciência de Luís XIV? Se sim, talvez não o suficiente: não nos podemos esquecer das consequências humanitárias desencadeadas com os longos anos da Guerra da Sucessão de Espanha.

Ora, o facto de este retrato assumir um lugar de máximo destaque no palácio de Versalhes, ao qual acresce a distribuição de cópias, admitidas pelo rei (Cornette 1999; Coll 2014: 18) – as quais, com a gravura de Drevet, aberta em 1712, ganham ainda uma projeção maior –, atesta a tentativa, sem dúvida alcançada, de renovação e atualização da sua imagem, que, afinal, se afastou (não completamente, como vimos) da figuração de matriz clássica, sobretudo mitológica. Não podendo garantir que a *obscuração* da virtude da Força consubstancia uma espécie de “remorso” ou consciencialização dos temores da Guerra – mas que, contudo, não a exalta –, há algo que fica claro: o protagonismo desta entidade é total e propositadamente roubado pela figura da Justiça, figura essa que se encontra, literalmente, no *lugar da luz*, ao contrário da anterior, que se encontra *tomada pelas trevas*...³⁹

Estes pormenores – durante séculos relegados à margem pela historiografia – devem, cremos, recuperar um lugar de destaque. Os lugares periféricos, as margens, podem também ser ricos e nem sempre são prescindíveis, acessórios, decorativos etc., como, aliás, a mais recente historiografia de arte tem comprovado.

Como quer que seja, é seguro afirmar que as virtudes representadas na coluna não desempenham a mesma importância que outros atributos representados em primeiro plano, como o cetro, a espada, a coroa, o bastão e o manto – objetos-reíquias que são testemunhos, efetivos e verossímeis, da dignidade régia e não metáforas (Coll 204: 34-5).

Conclusão

Concluindo o ensaio que aqui se apresenta, e sublinhando, mais uma vez, que a arte de matriz clássica não deixa verdadeiramente de ser contemplada – antes cuidadosamente manobrada –, refira-se a estátua equestre de Luís XV, encomendada pela câmara de Paris, esculpida por Edmé Bouchardon (1698-1762) em 1748.

Alinhando com o contexto político e social, no qual se verificava uma tentativa de desvinculação da imagem tirânica e bélica do seu antecessor, Luís XV recomendou a Bouchardon, com efeito, que o retratasse numa postura diferente da consagrada em inúmeras estátuas de Luís XIV, reiterando que seria mais vantajoso ser representado como “um pacifista do que como um conquistador” (Swann 2020). É este

³⁹ Relembre-se que esta não seria a primeira vez em que a Força foi relegada, propositadamente, para segundo plano. Na estátua de Antoine Coysevox que anteriormente analisámos, a Força – para nós evocada através da armadura e pele do Leão de Nemeia – é também, astutamente, obscurificada.

o motivo que justifica que o bastão de comando das milícias armadas que o rei segura se encontre “firmado com doçura sobre a coxa”, tal como explica o *nosso* Joaquim Machado de Castro (1731-1822), e não firmemente empunhado, como em outras estátuas de Luís XIV:

Girardon mostrou Luiz XIV. na sua Estatua, como dando ordens aos seus Exércitos. Bouchardon lembrou-se do titulo, com que os seus Naturaes caracterizarão Luiz XV. o *Bem-amado*: e por isso o figurou apoiando a mão no bastão de Commando por huma extremidade, e firmando a outra sobre a coxa direita; mostrando usar da Authoridade Regia com doçura. [...] Neste apoiar a mão, em lugar de pegar-lhe, consiste o fino desta expressão: he certo que apoiando, nao se pode usar do bastão com a mesma violência, com que se pode mover pegando-lhe: e isto he que quizerão mostrar aquelles judiciosos, e instruídos Escultores, para indicar, do modo que lhes era possível, a benignidade dos seus Heroes (Castro 1810: 12-3).

Neste caso – como também nos outros tratados ao longo do texto – não está em causa o anulamento da responsabilidade marcial que subjaz aos reis católicos, mas antes a promoção “prudente e justa” do rei guerreiro, do rei que defenderá os interesses do seu povo – e, neste caso em particular, do rei aparentemente comprometido com o decréscimo dos danos colaterais da guerra sobre a vida Humana. Sabemos bem, aliás, que a participação dos príncipes de Bourbon (do ramo legítimo e ilegítimo) em conflitos bélicos, mesmo aqueles que acontecem após a década de 1690 e se estendem para o reinado de Luís XV, é ininterrupta (Swann 2020: 163-5; Duc de Saint-Simon 1879-1928: 333-5). Ora, esta estátua revela uma das “regras” mais valiosas para conjeturas iconológicas: a significância de um qualquer atributo iconográfico – ou pose, gesto, cor, etc. – pode mutar consoante a “atitude” do retratado. Machado de Castro explica bem esta questão, ainda a propósito da estátua equestre de D. José I, que compara com a de Bouchardon:

[...] assim Acção, e Actitude são dous accidentes absolutamente distinctos. Exemplos: quer-se representar hum homem lendo em hum livro: o ler, he a Acção, ou Feito, neste caso; porém pegar no livro com huma, ou ambas as mãos, estar em pé, sentado, ou encostado, mais, ou menos torcido, etc., esta he a Actitude (Castro 1810: 14-5).

A imagem de *Hermes atando a Sandália* consagra, justamente, a lição de Machado de Castro. A “Actitude” de Hermes dessacraliza-o: torna tangível a sua dimensão mundana, menos divina e, até, menos pagã, se quisermos. É este o motivo que o

fez, aliás, ser confundido no reinado de Luís XIV com Cincinnatus: afinal um mortal. E este é, enfim, um dos motivos – basilares, no nosso entendimento – que justificam que a arte de temática mitológica e clássica do reinado de Luís XIV não se esgote verdadeiramente.

Por outras palavras, o retrato de um rei com atributos de imperador romano, aos quais podemos adicionar os de Hércules ou Marte, não fazem, necessariamente, deste um adepto da tirania ou da guerra incondicional. Uma clava de Hércules domada por flores primaveris – tal como os fascos domados pelos ramos de palmeira de Coysevox – não evoca a mesma significância de uma outra, empunhada para desbaratar o inimigo. A figura de uma “Força” encoberta e distorcida não pode ser entendida da mesma forma que uma outra, retratada como um possante Hércules.

Não nos podemos esquecer, pois, de que a descodificação iconográfica de um qualquer atributo depende – sempre – dos entornos políticos, sociais, antropológicos, etc. da produção do objeto artístico.

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, theatre actors wore masks to embody individuals with no clear identity. Masks did not feature specific anthropomorphic qualities, leaving audiences free to imagine the malleable and anonymous characters between fiction and actual plausibility. In contrast, in the photographic series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* by artist, writer, and activist David Wojnarowicz, the use of a Rimbaud mask seems to have an opposite intention, overlapping meanings and allowing spatiotemporal compression. Portraying the French poet in different contexts and activities, Wojnarowicz is able to interpret the notion of identity and belonging following a narrative that is fictional, biographical and collective, addressing queer histories and temporalities. This paper discusses the multiple possibilities that the mask represents in this work.

keywords

MASK(S)
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Role-taking, role-making: the mask as a tool in David Wojnarowicz's *Arthur Rimbaud in New York*

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Introduction

Artist, writer, activist, and central figure of the American counterculture, David Wojnarowicz often dealt in his work with the theme of alienation and estrangement. From his childhood to his early death due to AIDS-related issues, a strong sense of isolation accompanied Wojnarowicz throughout his life. Central for the artist was the possibility of connecting with people around him, friends, lovers, and fellow artists, to fight loneliness and feel understood. As Olivia Laing recalls, '[v]iolence ran through his childhood like a fire, gutting and hollowing, leaving its mark. The story of Wojnarowicz's life is emphatically a story about masks: why you might need them, why you might mistrust them, why they might be necessary for survival; also toxic, also unbearable' (2016: 123). Likewise, by using a mask, Wojnarowicz made French Symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud travel through time, inviting him to share his personal experience and creating a manifesto for an entire marginalised community.

This paper analyses the 35 mm photographic series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* by David Wojnarowicz (1978-1979), focusing in particular on the function of the mask as a tool of portrayal, disguise, and mythmaking. After a brief introduction to the genealogy of the work and the relationship between Wojnarowicz and Rimbaud as both a source of inspiration and proxy of the artist, the research focuses in particular on the mask as an instrument for role-making and a mechanism of spatiotemporal compression. The study is conducted by approaching the series as

a whole, addressing themes and concepts that recur throughout the photos, while briefly presenting some of the scenarios portrayed to provide a better frame for the visual dimension of the object of analysis. At a later time, a consistent body of critical literature on the subject and personal writings by both Rimbaud and Wojnarowicz will support the analysis of the work, its context, and imagery evoked. Wojnarowicz's ability to depict and narrate the struggles and hopes of a community made the Rimbaud series, and his body of work more generally, a landmark and true cult in contemporary art and activism. As Crawford recalls from her experience visiting a retrospective on Wojnarowicz, '[a]t the Whitney Museum's shop I buy two pin badges. One the Rimbaud mask, one the house in flames. I can't spin this as a counter-cultural move. The symbols have been co-opted. The task is to turn the signal against itself, from within the bought-up world. Word of mouth. Cruising. Where I might lose myself in you. Because we haven't all found each other yet. Not yet' (Crawford 2018). In particular, this paper stresses how the tool of the mask had a central function in shaping the work of Wojnarowicz, its temporality, and related myth.

Wojnarowicz goes Rimbaud: life and art

A prolific artist and writer despite his short life, solitude and isolation are recurrent themes in the work of David Wojnarowicz. Spanning different media over approximately 15 years of artistic production, Wojnarowicz approached and experimented with multiple techniques in his career. While the first years of his work were mainly dedicated to two-dimensional visual production, from spray paint and stencilling on walls to photography and posters, music, collages, sculptures, performances, and films were also explored. Especially in his later years, his art was deeply tied to his activism, addressing social and cultural injustices and in particular the mismanagement and prejudice that characterised institutional and social reactions to the AIDS crisis that spread in the US and the world from the early 80s. The production of extensive writing, both private diaries and aimed towards publication, also accompanied Wojnarowicz throughout his entire life.

As Olivia Laing writes in her essay 'In Loving Him', part of the collection *The Lonely City* (2016), the work of Wojnarowicz, 'which includes paintings, installations, photography, music, films, books and performances, turns on issues of connection and aloneness, focusing in particular on how an individual can survive within an antagonistic society, a society that might plausibly want them dead rather than

tolerate their existence' (Laing 2016: 122). His need and desire for diversity were central in both his body of work and personal life, since he believed that a stringent and homogeneous society was the first cause of isolation and hatred for those who were perceived as 'different'. The feeling of being misunderstood and marginalised was a primary drive in Wojnarowicz's artistic production, and this sense of alienation can be found in many of his writings. For instance, in his raw memoir *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*, he wrote of the sensation of living in a

world of the stoplight, the no-smoking signs, the rental world, the split-rail fencing shielding hundreds of miles of barren wilderness from the human step. A place where by virtue of having been born centuries too late one is denied access to earth or space, choice or movement, the bought-up world; the owned world. The world of coded sounds: the world of language, the world of lies. The packaged world; the world of speed in metallic motion. (Wojnarowicz 1991: 103-104)

In this world, which Wojnarowicz called the Other World, he constantly experienced a sense of detachment from his surroundings. Wojnarowicz defines himself as an 'alien' in this world and the people who run it as 'a different species of humans' (Ibid., 104). It is as if Wojnarowicz experienced his milieu from the outside, incapable (or unwilling) to mingle with his contemporary. The detachment from nature, ongoing industrialisation, and the AIDS crisis progressively caused a diffused estrangement from the world and one another.

The condition of feeling like an outcast pushed towards the margin of society unites both personal the life and artistic production of David Wojnarowicz and Arthur Rimbaud. The distant-in-time relationship between the American artist and the Symbolist poet is extensively documented in Wojnarowicz's bibliography, written by Cynthia Carr, *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* (2012). His first acknowledged direct artistic reference to Arthur Rimbaud can be found in a crude portrait of the French poet on a windowpane at the Hudson River piers. However, it was only later, in 1975, that Wojnarowicz started to work on his famous Rimbaud photographic series. That same year Wojnarowicz was hired by an agency for a minimum-wage summer job in which he was trained to both run a photostat machine and print photographs. It was in that studio that he managed to photostat the cover of an edition of Rimbaud's *Illuminations* that he owned and create a life-size mask made of rubber band and cardstock of the poet at the age of seventeen (Donegan 2018), before being quickly fired after having repeatedly asked for days of sick leave.

The photographic series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* was started the same year, starring his friend and lover Brian Butterick and shot with a borrowed 35 mm camera. Butterick posed in front of hanging cow carcasses in the butchers' district, at the Hudson River piers, in Chinatown. He rode a metro covered in graffiti, stood in front of porn movie theatres, masturbated and shot heroin in front of the camera, always wearing the mask of Rimbaud on his face. Produced when Wojnarowicz was just over twenty years old, the series is one of the few photographic experiments of the artist. All photographs of *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* present a lone individual portrayed in the urban context and the surroundings of New York City, mapping places that were central in the geography of Wojnarowicz and the life of his community (Times Square, the Meat Market, the West Side piers, Coney Island, and many more). The masked figure wistfully looks at the camera in both public and private situations from the urban sphere. The moment in time in which the series was shot, the decade after the Stonewall riots and right before the AIDS crisis, was a short-lived period of experiential freedom and innocence, but also danger and material poverty that was followed by a time of physical and cultural erasure. The series not only testifies to the cultural and personal moment of a time of creativity, love, art, sex, and drugs, but also a cross-generational narrative of Wojnarowicz himself, his fellows and influences, against homogenisation and cultural obliteration.

This broader, multitemporal dimension results from the association of Wojnarowicz's contemporary New York City and the presence of Arthur Rimbaud in the photographs. Many shared elements of their bibliographical experiences led Wojnarowicz to identify with Rimbaud and start referencing the poet in his work. Born exactly a hundred years apart one from the other, Rimbaud in October 1854 and Wojnarowicz in September 1954, they

were deserted by their fathers and unhappy with their mothers. Both ran away as teenagers. Both were impoverished and unwilling to live by the rules. Both were queer. Both tried to wring visionary work out of suffering. David just didn't yet know the rest – that he would soon meet an older man and mentor who would change his life (as Paul Verlaine had changed Rimbaud's), and that he too would die at the age of thirty-seven (Carr 2012: 224).

By placing Rimbaud in his environment, Wojnarowicz highlights through the series the numerous parallels in the lives of the two artists. In a liminal positionality between photographic portray and autobiography, Wojnarowicz fuses elements from the sphere of the self and historical fiction, while liberating Rimbaud from the constrictions of his time and allowing him to explore activities that were

accused of deviance, immorality, or at least illicitness. As Emily Roysdon argues, Rimbaud (as much as Jean Genet, among others) is not a passive object of interest, but one to which Wojnarowicz experiences deep attachment and fascination, leading its manipulation, negotiation, and transformation to suit the needs of his art and time (Roysdon in Anderson 2019: 99).

In the introduction of *David Wojnarowicz: Brush Fires in the Social Landscape* (1994), Lucy R. Lippard examines with great detail many photographs in the series. She observes: 'Wojnarowicz's Rimbaud is always shown facing the camera, usually dressed conservatively in a dark turtleneck, white sweater, and suit jacket, or sleeveless with a vest. The mask photographs as almost real, its abnormal whiteness making the face the initial focus of each image, before the surroundings are taken in' (Lippard 1994: 9-10). The masked figure is captured in dozens of activities and situations, including smoking, in bed with a beer, standing on the Jersey Shore or by street artworks, and eating at a diner's table. Moreover, '[e]ight images were taken in the Hudson River warehouse that Wojnarowicz used as his studio/sketchbook/journal in those years [...]; Rimbaud is seen holding a gun; standing before a passageway of door frames; next to some of Wojnarowicz's works, including Japanese ideographs and quotes from a book of American slang ('Junk, Nothing but Junk'), and with other texts, such as Joseph Beuys's phrase "The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated"' (Ibid.: 10). The photographs were the first consistent and solid series completed and later made public by Wojnarowicz.

About 30 photographs were taken, also involving his friends Jean Pierre Delage and John Hall as models, while dozens of ideas were found in Wojnarowicz's diaries, the majority of them never realised. The project was supposed to follow a fictional story with Rimbaud as the main character, arriving by boat to New York City and adventuring in a maze of perdition. The work was made public for the first time in June 1980, when the magazine *SoHo News* reached out to Wojnarowicz asking for four pictures of the series to be featured in the centrefold: 'Rimbaud at Coney Island in front of the parachute drop. Rimbaud holding a small pistol in front of a "Jesus Is Coming" mural. Rimbaud at the pier with the torso-hypo graffiti. Rimbaud with a wounded hand' (Carr 2012: 261). The strong connection between the adventures that Wojnarowicz made Rimbaud go through is evident, and the experiment embodies a powerful exchange between the two artists. In this work, the poet is evoked by Wojnarowicz as an ancestor, a father of the culture of the margins who inspired generations of artists and writers.

Escapism plays a key role in both artists' lives. As Fiona Anderson reports, in a letter to Paul Demeny from 1871, Rimbaud writes about his craving for a 'derangement of all the senses' (2019: 102), a both physical and psychical way to escape

a violent and repressive reality. Despite their contexts differing culturally and geographically, Rimbaud and Wojnarowicz shared the experiential dimension of the margins, characterised in both cases by loitering, substance use, and sexual libertinage. In the photographic series, Wojnarowicz shapes a contemporary version of the *poète maudit*, imagining what he would have experienced living in contemporary New York City. As a result, the two lives overlap: Wojnarowicz claimed that if Rimbaud was one of his contemporaries, they would have had the same life.

Some parallels can be found in the two artists' writings as well. In his works, Wojnarowicz often referred to feeling out of place and a desire for a non-existent somewhere else to live with friends and fellow artists able to understand his condition. In his journal, he wrote

[i]t is the appearance of a portrait, not the immediate vision I love so much: that of the drag queen in the dive waterfront coffee shop turning toward a stranger and giving a coy seductive smile that reveals a mouth of rotted teeth, but the childlike rogue slipped out from the white-sheeted bed of Pasolini; the image of Jean Genet cut loose from the fine lines of fiction, uprooted from age and time and continent, and hung up slowly behind my back against a tin wall. (Wojnarowicz 1991: 14)

In this regard, as Cameron suggests, Wojnarowicz's creative urge manifested itself in 'the process of turning his personal feelings of cultural estrangement into the core of his creative strength, making it especially striking that his earliest developed artistic statement took the form of a masquerade' (Cameron 1999: 7). Likewise, in a letter Arthur Rimbaud wrote to Paul Demeny in August 1871, he describes his life and work in the Ardennes region as abominable and obstinate, hoping for a way to escape his life and find the much-desired freedom, while scared he will be sent by his mother to correctional facilities.¹

In fact, in *Arthur Rimbaud in New York*, the figure disguised as the French poet is protected by the mask while in the fragile condition of being an outcast in a ferocious world. At the same time, his presence cannot help but scream for attention, demanding to be watched and claiming a place to exist in a society that pushed him to the peripheries, just as it did to Wojnarowicz.

New York City at the end of the 70s was experiencing a phase of decline. High crime rates, poverty, and unemployment following the financial crisis pushed hundreds of thousands of people to leave their apartments and the city. Despite the millions of people living and working in New York, a strong sense of isolation and precariousness was experienced, especially by more vulnerable minorities on the

¹ 'Je refusais cette vie ; sans donner mes raisons : c'eût été pitoyable. Jusqu'aujourd'hui, j'ai pu tourner ces échéances. Elle, en est venue à ceci : souhaiter sans cesse mon départ inconsidéré, ma fuite ! Indigent, inexpérimenté, je finirais par entrer aux établissements de correction. Et, dès ce moment, silence sur moi !' (Rimbaud 2015: 125)

streets. In the pictures, Rimbaud is always on his own, alone despite sometimes being part of a crowd, different from any other subject who surrounds him. The mask creates a feeling of impalpability and elusiveness, it 'marks him out as separate: a wanderer or voyeur, unable or unwilling to display his real face' (Laing 2016: 122). This sense of estrangement and isolation is a recurrent theme in Wojnarowicz's body of work, and the impassive face of Rimbaud functions as a proxy of the artist himself in revisiting the places Wojnarowicz lived but also struggled to survive. Both home-like and haunting memories follow one another in Rimbaud's trip around a chaotic New York City. Looking at the pictures, a bidirectional power relation between Rimbaud and the locations portrayed emerges: while he juggles from place to place, enduring abuse and degradation, an overwhelming sense of tentacular attraction to danger creates a vicious circle between survival and a self-destructive drive.

In *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* there is both an effort towards the reappraisal of biographical knowledge and locations and the desire to imagine a series of movements that can bring together the experience of all the people at the margins, and particularly of the artistic figures that had inspired and preceded Wojnarowicz. As Rizk suggests, 'Wojnarowicz constructed histories that would otherwise go unrecorded. In the Rimbaud series, such sites as the desolate Hudson River piers or Times Square's red-light district allude to the lived experiences [...] of countless other outsiders to history-queers, juvenile runaways, sex workers, intravenous drug users, the homeless' (Rizk 1999: 48). In this regard, the following section focuses on the tool of the mask and its role in the photographic work analysed.

Rimbaud's mask and identity-making between biographical and collective

Not the presence of the French poet per se but the choice of including the figure of a young Arthur Rimbaud through the object of the mask (and not, for example, adding it posthumously as a collage, a technique widely used by Wojnarowicz) is doubtless one of the central elements of the *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* photographic series.

The presence of the mask in artistic practices is as long as human cultural history. In Western traditions, these face-covering objects were associated with personality traits and specific qualities of the fictional and mythic characters they stood for.

In this respect, in his pathetic theory on tragedy, Hegel (1975) argues that masks did not stand as faithful representations of specific physical traits of the characters performed, but rather recalled the dominant emotional condition or *pathos* that actors were impersonating, aiming to better typify the different characters. In the frame of Western theatre and performance in particular, when actors were wearing masks on stage, they assumed undefined traits and no clear identity (Vervain 2012: 164). While Greek actors often played multiple roles and needed to be seen from afar by the audience present, masks were of great support in recollecting stylised (and often idealised) characteristics (Halliwell 1993).

Malleable and exaggerated, masks stood in the connection between actors and members of the audience, between the fictional, fantastic world and the physical one. Masks transmitted emotions, complementing the vocal element and corporeal gestures of the staged performance. Given the mimetic nature of tragic theatre, masks participated in the action of mirroring: through anonymous impersonation, the public freely interpreted characters and identified fictional elements with real-life experience. While on the one hand masks could limit facial expressiveness and consequentially performative possibilities, they created a great sense of theatricality and immediately recalled the fulcrum and aesthetic dimension of the dramatic act.

As classics scholar Peter Meineck suggests, the 'mask provides a visual focus for emotional communication, and is able to stimulate a deeply personal response from the spectators. The mask demands to be watched' (2011: 121). In this sense, masks play a crucial role in cognitive terms. They attract attention and allow observers to recollect particular spheres of emotional and psychophysical states, together with relevant domains of individual and collective experience. This outcome is related 'to our cognitive prowess at recognising faces, in that we store thousands of physiognomies in our memories and match them to the holistic configuration of the face before us' (Ibid.: 132). Thus, it is historically evident that from the outset masks were predominantly designed and employed in staged forms of artistic expression, functioning as a bridge between spectators and performers in the aesthetic live experience, as a medium between the physical and the fictional (Kimmel 2000: 11).

As Wojnarowicz testified, in contemporary artistic production, the mask ceases to be strictly linked with the sphere of staged performance, experiencing a return to its primordial function: we are identified by our faces, and masks cause an impossibility of recognition and subsequently anonymity. As Laing claims, '[m]asks amplify the way in which skin is a barrier or wall, acting as a marker of separation, singularity, distance' and stand in the opposition between being 'protective, yes,

but a masked face is also frightening [...] they reveal our intentions and betray our emotional weather' (Laing 2016: 118-119). Masks not only play a central role in the artistic field, but are also crucial in the public sphere. Masks recur in the continuity between fictional representation and actual life, as long discussed by many authors, including Italian dramatist, writer, and poet Luigi Pirandello. And this aspect was of vital importance also for Wojnarowicz. In fact, Laing continues, '[m]asks also beg the question of the public self: the set, frozen features of politeness and conformity, behind which real desires writhe and twist' (Ibid.: 119). Masks play on the emerging surface, inviting strangers to imagine you as 'someone you are not, living in the closet: these imperatives breed a gangrenous sense of being unknown, of going unregarded. And then of course there are masks as a cover for illegal or deviant activity' (Ibid.).

In the *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* series, the specificity of the subject portrayed implicates consistent differences in the reasons behind the choice of including the mask, as opposed to its traditional aforementioned function. Even if potentially not identifiable by some, the title of the series itself explicitly recalls the centrality of the figure of Rimbaud in this work, both in his biographical story and corpus of work. While the mask for the most part is impersonation and alterity, here it stands for a specific otherness. The French poet is invited into Wojnarowicz's world with a staring and blank portrait, as an observer capturing the experience of his surroundings. Nonetheless, he always appears alone.

In a letter Arthur Rimbaud wrote in 1871 from Charleville to his professor Georges Izambard, he declared: 'C'est faux, de dire je pense. On devrait dire ON me pense. Pardon du jeu de mot : « je est un autre »'² (Rimbaud 2015: 86-87). The intended disagreement between the first person *je* (I) associated with the verb declined into the third person *est* (is) emphasises the facets and nuances, but also partition and partibility of the individual into multiple. Rimbaud played, and eventually was, multiple. Young poet and rebel, later coffee and arms dealer in Africa, alterity is central in Rimbaud's life and the way he understood the relationship with the other and oneself, as well as the multiple roles he had to play to meet the expectations of his family and contemporaries. The I and the other coexist, differ, and are one and the same in Rimbaud, while they contrast what is outside and, at times, the idea he had of himself and that he was forced to confine.

The same expression can also be found in another letter he wrote in the same year to poet and friend Paul Demeny: 'Car Je est un autre. [...] Cela m'est évident : j'assiste à l'éclosion de ma pensée : je la regarde, je l'écoute [...] : la symphonie fait son remuement dans les profondeurs, ou vient d'un bond sur la scène'³ (Ibid.: 91). The metamorphic theme is dominant in Rimbaud's writing, both claiming the

² 'It is wrong to say I think. One should say ONE thinks of me. Excuse me the pun: "I is another"' (translation by the author).

³ 'Because I is another. [...] This is obvious to me: I witness the blossoming of my thought: I look at it, I listen to it [...]: the symphony stirs in the depths, or jumps onto the scene' (translation by the author).

importance of malleability and plasticity and the need to escape in multiple dimensions other than reality. In the narrative captured by Wojnarowicz, the mask of the poet in his teenage years plays on this dichotomy in two different directions. On the one hand, the mask hides the person behind, whether a friend, the spectator, or Wojnarowicz himself, guaranteeing them safe protection to appear in public. This condition is opposed to the absence of privacy that the city causes, a context in which a permanent status of exposure is demanded despite the irrelevance of each individual being just like everybody else in the crowd. On the other hand, the renowned face of Rimbaud clashes with the anonymous and sordid environment in which the photographs are shot. The portrait, shot by the French photographer Étienne Carjat in ca. 1872, is not only the most famous and reproduced image of the poet for its iconic, young, and romantic look but also one of the only eight photos remaining today of Arthur Rimbaud, and one of the two from the Parisian years in which he was actively writing poetry (Desse 2014). In between these opposites stands the mask in its attempt to create the affirmative aesthetic dimension of a valid reality: it is both an artificial construction and the honest expression of the artist's creative vision (Pérez 2015-2016).

A sense of indefinite identity brings together *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* with the traditional function of masks in theatre. Is Wojnarowicz identifying with the Symbolist poet or is he standing behind the mask portraying Rimbaud? Neither of the possible answers can be stated with certainty, probably both are correct to some extent. What is nevertheless more striking in this work is the attempt pursued by Wojnarowicz to erase the relevance of individual identity and capture in the figure of Rimbaud a much broader sense of cross-generational community. It is indeed possible to see the many elements that directly unite the two subjective experiences of Wojnarowicz and Rimbaud. As Donegan writes in her review of the Whitney Museum's retrospective *David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night* (July-September 2018), 'Wojnarowicz identified with Rimbaud when he took those photos, and in the twenty-six years since his death, he has become [sic] a Rimbaud-like figure: young, iconoclastic, gay, and gone too soon' (Donegan 2018). However, for a politically and socially engaged Wojnarowicz, the attempt to bring together a united collectivity was much more important than just talking about his own story. To do so, Wojnarowicz recurred to the construction of a space-time frame out of standard historical order, in which Rimbaud, himself, and a broader community can meet.

Mask as plasticity: travelling space, travelling time

The decision to include the figure of Arthur Rimbaud in the photographic series through the tool of the mask allows Wojnarowicz to compress diachronic discrepancies into an environment able to bring together elements from different moments in history. The compression of time is a concept that recurs in Wojnarowicz's body of work, often constructed through collage and videomaking narratives that overcome the limits of traditional chronological ordering. In this case, the French poet can travel through time, be part of Wojnarowicz's New York, collaborate and even overlap in the same figure with the American artist.

In an interview with Jonathan Olsoff, David Wojnarowicz recounts his first encounter with Rimbaud's poetry:

[w]hen I lived in Paris in 1979, I read the work of Arthur Rimbaud and there were similarities in our backgrounds [...]. When I returned to New York City I wondered – given that he was living around the turn of the century, and had started writing at age nineteen, and written some of the most beautiful poetry that we have in the world today – I wanted to consider what his life would be like if he lived in New York City in the present. And so I did a series of photographs using a mask of his face, ostensibly of Rimbaud in various daily activities. (Ambrosino 2006: 219)

Wojnarowicz makes Rimbaud travel into the landscapes of his teenage years, in a connection between a younger self and the French poet's experience.

This combination of back-and-forth movements through time is a very powerful operation, recalling elements from both historical and personal past. Making Rimbaud visit his own time, Wojnarowicz creates an atemporal figure in a suspended dimension. 'Another self?', Laing wonders, '[a] sexy, nerveless simulacrum, toughened by experience. Was it a figure he could enter (as later, in his diary: "I want to create a myth that I can one day become"), or a way of retroactively protecting the goofy, vulnerable little boy that he'd once been?' (Laing 2016: 133). The mask functions as a tool for time travelling, not to the nineteenth century Paris in which Rimbaud lived, but rather to an infant mirror stage in which Wojnarowicz tries to recognise his true self for the first time, and erase at the same time the distinctive elements of his personal experience through repetition without difference: the never-changing captured portrayal of Rimbaud makes the definition and recognition of individual personhood impossible.

As Fiona Anderson argues, in the waterfront ruins Wojnarowicz opens the possibility of temporal overlap, shaping a place as physical as imaginary, where present and pasts, and their inhabitants, meet. This dimension is similarly reproduced in the photographic series, in which Wojnarowicz creates a relationship with Rimbaud that is not passive but is adapted and altered in a process of negotiation and transformation (Roysdon in Anderson 2019: 99). Present and past, Rimbaud's and Wojnarowicz's lives are not simply mixed or put into dialogue, but are reworked to shape a third element in which they both participate. Both inhabited by spectral, queer, intergenerational icons and flesh, Anderson calls the world of *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* as one of 'cross-temporal collaboration' (Ibid., 100) of both reality, mythology, and art making. In this way, Wojnarowicz does not displace Rimbaud to his present, but encounters him as he is already in the present, one that is hybrid and multigenerational (Freeman 2010: 95). The spatial and temporal frame created by Wojnarowicz within the series allows the compression of times and activities (Blinderman 1989: 54), what Barney Warf defines as the phenomenal and procedural complexity capable of 'caus[ing] the relative distances between places [...] to contract, effectively making such places grow "closer"' (Warf 2017). The idea of exploring life and art beyond the boundaries imposed by temporal constraints often recurs in Wojnarowicz's writings. In his diary *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* he wrote:

I'm the robotic kid looking through digital eyes past the windshield into the preinvented world. I'm the robotic kid gone haywire in the sudden mounds and coils of crazy-kat landscapes. I'm the robotic kid lost for a fraction of evolutionary time in the outskirts of tribal boundaries; I've slipped through the keyhole of an enormous psychic erector set of a child civilization. I'm the robotic kid lost from the blind eye of government and wandering the edges of a computerized landscape; all civilization is turning like one huge gear in my forehead. I'm seeing my hands and feet grow thousands of miles long and millions of years old and I'm experiencing the exertion it takes to move these programmed limbs. I'm the robotic kid, the human motor-works, and surveying the scene before me I wonder: What can these feet level? What can these feet pound and flatten? What can these hands raise? (Wojnarowicz 1991: 76)

Here, Wojnarowicz defines himself through elements that cross the diachronic depth of human and personal experience, bringing together his political present with the computerised future, a million-year-old bodily practice that merges in the robotic flesh of a kid and digital gaze. It's in evolution and contamination that the artist can perceive himself and decipher his present.

The reality described by Wojnarowicz appears like a limbo from which the artist was not able to escape, a place in which he experienced the impossibility of living fully. In this context, Rimbaud functions as a stand-in for the artist, participating in Wojnarowicz's experience but free from the judgment the artist suffered from his contemporaries. This should be the role of the poet in society, as Rimbaud wrote in the same letter to Paul Demeny in 1871, '[L]e Poète se fait *voyant* par un long, immense et raisonné *dérèglement de tous les sens*. Toutes les formes d'amour, de souffrance, de folie ; il cherche lui-même, il épuise en lui tous les poisons, pour n'en garder que les quintessences'⁴ (Rimbaud 2015 : 93-94). Rimbaud freely moves in time, able to distance the outside world protected by the mask and experience the rawness of Wojnarowicz becoming a youthful mythic figure. Again, the idea of compressed spatiotemporality returns, bringing together under the category of the illicit and socially unaccepted the two rebel artists, together with Rimbaud's Paris during the Belle Époque and Wojnarowicz's twentieth-century New York. In this regard, writer, activist and art critic Lucy R. Lippard claims that Wojnarowicz's

photography is not "documentary" in any ordinary sense. The Rimbaud pictures reflect extremely personal emotions [...]. Functioning as a compression of historical time and activity, they also constitute a kind of objective autobiography, permitting Wojnarowicz simultaneously to be himself and to step outside himself. The masked man records and perhaps exorcises a life his creator was gradually abandoning. Photographs, like writing, he said, could *strip the power from a memory or an event...cut the ropes of an experience*. At the same time, for viewers, those connections are not cut, but forged. (Lippard 1994, 10)

The past holds a powerful imaginative potential that becomes, through Rimbaud and other cross-generational artistic figures, a space to express present states and emotions. Memory is for Wojnarowicz a place to inhabit, at times safer and freer than reality, amplifying interpretative possibilities and practices of resistance. The series portrays specific moments in historical and geographical terms, but also a retrospective of Wojnarowicz's personal life. By making Rimbaud live that moment, Wojnarowicz captures his private history while detaching himself from it, shaping a new version of his experience that can then belong to anyone else, as an object of contemplation, a new whole contemporary myth. As years go by, the alluring and dangerous world Wojnarowicz lived in 'was followed by an era almost opposite in every regard, years when Manhattan became dominated by money and death, a sleek wealthy city rising, while an entire generation of gay men, drug users, and others were being buried' (Vitale 2018).

⁴ 'The Poet becomes a seer for a long, immense and reasoned disorder of all senses. All forms of love, suffering, madness; he seeks himself, he depletes all poisons in himself, to keep only the quintessence' (translation by the author).

Conclusion

While the use of the mask in *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* contributes to the representation of the alienation Wojnarowicz suffered all his life, the artist portrayed in his work the narrative of a much broader collective experience, able to bring together individuals in a cross-generational community through space and time. The mask of the French poet, as a tool for identity shifting and making, 'emerged as a central strategy of Wojnarowicz's collage aesthetic as well as the conceptual operation at the heart of the artist's formulation of a spiritual genealogy and vision of history' in support of 'the necessity for, but also the complications of, actively constructing a personal history as a defence against the many ways that silence may be imposed' (Rizk 1999: 47-48).

More than the depiction of his estrangement per se, Wojnarowicz's choice of the mask of Rimbaud seems an attempt to make people feel less alienated, to make them feel like someone else. The experience of Olivia Laing in front of the photographic series perfectly evokes this effect:

[t]his sums up exactly how I felt about his work. It was the rawness and vulnerability of his expression that proved so healing to my own feelings of isolation: the willingness to admit to failure or grief, to let himself be touched, to acknowledge desire, anger, pain, to be emotionally alive. His self-exposure was in itself a cure for loneliness, dissolving the sense of difference that comes when one believes one's feelings or desires to be uniquely shameful. (Laing 2016: 160)

Wojnarowicz repeatedly wrote in his diaries how he felt understood and seen reading Rimbaud's poetry. Likewise, he hoped to achieve the same effect with his community witnessing his work portraying the adventures of the French poet around New York. Wojnarowicz thus contributes with his practice to the redefinition of dominant ideological and socio-economic temporalities, in favour of plural ones. The Rimbaud series encapsulates the possibility to play with time and multigenerational chronology, within what will be later defined as queer temporalities, a malleable frame that opposes heteronormativity and its reductions reclaiming a queer dimension of rethinking history, as well as relationships and cultural concepts (Dinshaw, Edelman, Ferguson et al. 2007).

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the issues of borders and migrants by closely analysing the artwork *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea* (Centre for Temporary Permanence) [2007] by Albanian-born artist Adrian Paci. *CPT* is a short video filmed in San José, California, not far from the US – Mexico border, which is fraught with issues of migrant influx. The work makes a pointed reference to institutions in Italy whose function is to detain illegal migrants and determine whether they remain in Italian territory or face expulsion. Paci's video subtly yet powerfully denounces the ongoing treatment of specific groups of migrants at troubled borders and skilfully films near the US – Mexico border in California. This paper aims to explore how *CPT* illustrates, in parallel scenarios, the ongoing discriminatory process against migrants with 'undesirable' provenances.

keywords

MIGRANTS
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Adrian Paci and Immigration to Italy

Centro di Permanenza Temporanea

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Introduction

On the 28th of April 2017, the Triennale Museum in Milan inaugurated the exhibition *The Restless Earth* (Fondazione Nicola Trussardi 2017). Organised conjointly with the Trussardi Foundation, it showed works by over sixty artists on the theme of migration and the present refugee crisis. The title of the show, borrowed from a collection of poems written by the Caribbean writer, Édouard Glissant, reflected on different perspectives regarding transnational migration, voyage, refugees, multiculturalism, host countries, integration, human rights, and acceptance. The artists, who came from a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives, offered their insights concerning these delicate themes. Among them, one artwork by Albanian-born but naturalised Italian artist, Adrian Paci, born on the 28th of January 1969, was featured (Morandi 2020). His video entitled *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea* (Centre for Temporary Permanence) drew attention to the condition of undocumented migrants detained in these prison-like structures in Italy while awaiting their fate.

Scope of the Article

This article analyses an artwork by Adrian Paci, who currently resides in Milan, Italy, following his departure from his home country in 1997 (Marie and Marta 2013: 56).

Son of an artist and a trained artist himself, Paci arrived in Italy after fleeing with his young family from the political instability and violence in Albania. He is part of a mass migration of Albanians to Italy that occurred throughout the 1990s when the Italian peninsula first experienced a strong influx of people in search of a better life (Antonela 2011: 20-27). Paci, arriving in Milan, became a building restorer,¹ whereas in his hometown, Shkodër, he worked as a professor at the Shkodër University, teaching art history and aesthetics (Bonazzoli 2020: 57-58). His personal story of being a migrant permeates his artistic practice, expressing themes of loss, abandonment, nostalgia, discrimination, hostility, hope, family bonds, and the excitement of settling in an unknown territory. Working with a wide range of media, including video, photography, and installations, but also sculpture, performance, collage, and paintings, Paci focuses on deeply personal interpretations of pivotal issues such as migration, xenophobia, and instability. Through private details concerning his personal and family life, the artist expresses powerful political statements taking the viewer 'beyond' statistics, numbers, surveys, polls, and policies (Bonazzoli 2020: 57-58). Paci adds a human dimension to complex themes that are often difficult to understand by simply absorbing information from media outlets.

This article discusses how contemporary art responds to issues concerning migration, specifically in Italy. My objective is not only to understand Paci's perspective on current migration patterns in Italy and the world but also to understand how other contemporary artists such as Ursula Biemann and Francis Alÿs respond to a deeply political yet personal phenomenon. I focus on Paci's work because of the consistency of his artistic practice in highlighting themes of migration from a personal perspective. Paci not only reflects his personal experience as a migrant in a country that is at times hostile but also confronts viewers with the humane side of newcomers and what this experience entails in the private sphere.

According to the Statistics Immigration Dossier of 2019 produced by the Centre for Research and Study IDOS, there are 5,255,503 foreign citizens in Italy, which corresponds to 8.7% of the entire Italian population (Raffaella 2019). This is a relevant increase compared to the 6.5% of foreign citizens in 2008. The same dossier recorded an increase of 6.8% in foreign residents in Italy between 2013 and 2018. Italy has only recently become an immigration target country, having historically been a nation of emigration. According to Eurispes, the Research Institute of the Italians, the past twenty-five years in Italy have seen a shift in demographics. From being a country where its citizens emigrated for a better life, during the past few decades, it has experienced a significant influx of migrants. Italy, along with countries such as France, the UK, and Germany, is one of the European nations with the highest foreign resident population. Due to the relative novelty

¹ In a moving interview with Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, Paci on the occasion of his personal exhibition at Sant Eustorgio cloisters in spring 2017, admits that throughout his experience as a building restorer he previously worked at those same cloisters. During those days he would fantasise about exhibiting his art there, a dream that decades later became true thanks to his former colleague and restorer Luciano Formica. (Bonazzoli 2020)

of this phenomenon, Italian-born citizens often manifest hostility against foreigners, particularly those with 'undesirable' provenances or specific phenotypes.² According to data gathered by the European Social Survey in 2016, Italians were asked if foreign immigrants rendered Italy a better place and the responses were overwhelmingly negative. Only Hungary and Russia gave bleaker assessments than Italy.

Albania experienced a ruthless Communist dictatorship under the ferocious rule of Enver Hoxha starting in November 1944 and ending with his death in 1985 (King and Mai 2008). Hoxha was a strict follower of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine and led Albania with an iron fist. He first isolated the country so that it would not be 'contaminated' by Western civilisation. Then, in 1945, land reform was passed that sought to prevent anyone from owning land, consequently almost entirely banning private property. The core of Hoxha's regime was the denial of the individual in favour of the collective, thus rendering individual profit an impossibility and plunging the country into extreme poverty. With Hoxha's passing in 1985, Albania was left in a precarious state of economic instability and violence, which forced numerous Albanians to flee the country (Vattese 2006: 107-108). Coincidentally, an era of political turmoil also reigned north of Albania as Yugoslavia's breakup unfolded during the Yugoslav Wars,³ which ravaged the region throughout the 1990s, causing incalculable human loss and destruction.⁴ It was then that numerous Eastern Europeans escaped to Western Europe, especially to Italy and Greece, which lie nearby (Destanisha 2011: 14). During this mass exodus, Italians, who had never experienced hefty influxes of people, started manifesting prejudice and xenophobia against Albanian migrants, also fuelled by the fear of Albanian organised crime groups (Perlmutter 1998: 211). According to authors Nicola Mai and Russell King in their book *Out of Albania*, Albanians in the 1990s were intensely stereotyped in Italian media as criminals, morally depraved people, and sex traffickers. This narrative contributed to Albanian migrants in Italy being denied access to skilled jobs, even when they had the qualifications, as well as suffering poor housing conditions and interpersonal discrimination from Italian colleagues and bosses.

Economic discrimination often kept Albanian migrants in a spiral of poverty, which was hard to break and further contributed to their social exclusion.

In this article, I focus on Paci's work entitled *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, which shows a group of people, seemingly South and Central American migrants, walking up a passenger stairway that is not docked at the side of an aeroplane, and instead leads nowhere [Fig. 1].⁵ The aeroplane never appears at the stairs, thus leaving them in a state of limbo. This work is a powerful denunciation of Italian detention centres, which, as I will examine, were created in 1998 to hold undocumented migrants while their fate is decided by Italian law and bureaucracy (Fraser

² *Cosa pensano gli Italiani degli immigrati? E gli Europei?*, <https://www.infodata.ilsole24ore.com/>, European Social Survey, Published on March 30th 2019, Last accessed 12 January 2024, <https://www.infodata.ilsole24ore.com/2019/03/30/cosa-pensano-gli-italiani-degli-immigrati-gli-europei/>

³ The Yugoslav Wars were a series of devastating conflicts in the Balkans between the years 1991 and 2001. Yugoslavia was a country formed following the Second World War constituted by six different states: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Republic of Macedonia. Tensions rose amid strong religious and ethnic hostilities as well as increasing nationalism on behalf of the six nations fuelling the desire to separate from Yugoslavia. After the death of Yugoslavian dictator Josip Broz Tito, havoc in the region arose thus causing massacres of ethnic minorities such as in Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995 where Muslim men and boys were killed at the hands of Bosnian Serbs. At the end of the twentieth century, following international negotiations where the United States took place six independent states were formed. John Zametica and International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Yugoslav Conflict: An Analysis of the Causes of the Yugoslav War, the Policies of the Republics and the Regional and International Implications of the Conflict*, (Adelphi Paper, 270. London: Brassey's, 1992), pp. 3-4

⁴ BBC, *Balkans War: a Brief Guide*, Last Accessed 27 February 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17632399>

⁵ Erika Cammerata, *Adrian Paci e Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, Ritrovare l'Arte WorldPress (Blog), Posted on April 3rd 2017, Last Accessed 27 February 2020, <https://ritrovareartewordpress.wordpress.com/2017/04/03/adrian-paci-e-centro-di-permanenza/>



and Gili 2013: 64). Paci, by filming in San José, draws a direct correlation between the mistreatment of migrants at Italian borders and those detained at the high-profile USA-Mexican border.

Centro di Permanenza Temporanea

The video is five minutes and thirty seconds long, and was filmed in San José, California, in 2007, not far from the USA-Mexican border.⁶ Translated in English as *Centre for Temporary Permanence* [Fig. 2], the work makes a pointed reference to existing institutions in Italy, later called Centres of Identification and Expulsion, and as of June 2019, Permanent Centres for Repatriation.⁷

The function of these centres is to detain illegal migrants to determine whether they are allowed to stay in Italian territory or to expel them.⁸ Once detained, migrants are held and reside in a temporary limbo⁹ without any idea of what their future might hold, powerless to decide their own fate. The video commences on a sunny day showing an empty boarding stairway on a functioning airstrip. The solitary staircase stands immobile, though the viewer later hears aeroplanes landing and taking off in the surroundings. As the video focuses on the upper part

Fig. 1 Adrian Paci, *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, 2007, 16:9, 4'32", video, colour, sound (video still), edition of 6 + 2 AP, Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan / New York, and Galerie Peter Kilchman, Zürich

⁶ Vimeo Video, *Adrian Paci / Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*,

⁷ Osservatorio, *Detenzione, Accoglienza, Migranti Puglia, Centri detenzione: I Centri per il rimpatrio*, Last Accessed 27 February 2020, <http://www.osservatoriomigranti.org/?cie>

⁸ Progetto Melting Pot Europa, *Cosa sono i C.I.E.*, Last Accessed 27 February 2020, <https://www.meltingpot.org/Cosa-sono-i-C-I-E-Centri-di-Identificazione-ed-Espulsione.html#XlgJgxNKhPN>

⁹ The time frame established for migrants residing in these spaces changed over time as the Turco – Napolitano law changed. Initially, in 1998 when the law was promulgated, the time

Fig. 2 Adrian Paci, *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, 2007, 16:9, 4'32", video, colour, sound (video still), edition of 6 + 2 AP, Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan / New York, and Galerie Peter Kilchman, Zürich



Fig. 3 Adrian Paci, *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, 2007, 16:9, 4'32", video, colour, sound (video still), edition of 6 + 2 AP, Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan / New York, and Galerie Peter Kilchman, Zürich

of the stairs, a line of people slowly walks towards it and climbs to the top until all of its tiers are full. The camera first frames their legs and feet while walking, then, from a distance, films them from the top of the staircase as they ascend [Fig. 3].

When all are 'ready to board', Paci shoots close-ups of their facial expressions with a chiaroscuro effect, which vary between expectation, weariness, fear, resignation, sadness, anger, and curiosity. The viewer does not see what occurs around them, only the people are filmed. At that point, the camera slowly moves away to frame the entire staircase from different angles. It emerges that all the individuals on the stairs stand there in silence with aeroplanes, by now visible to the spectator, moving in the background. The striking aspect of the video is the absence of an aeroplane for them to board. Customarily, passengers walk up some type of ramp or staircase to enter an aircraft that will take them to their destination. Yet in this short film, these men and women ascend only to wait futilely. Since no aeroplane is present for their transportation, there is no possibility of flight or destination, only uncertainty as to what to do next.

In contrast, everything around them is in motion. It is only towards the end of the video that the artist reveals to the viewers what is occurring: most of the time the camera is focused on the people and not the surroundings. The human dimension is the primary focus of this artwork, which contrasts with numerous mainstream media accounts concerning migrants, which are often dehumanising.

Paci uses the airport as a metaphor for a place of transit through which most people pass with a precise destination in mind. He furthermore employs Central and Southern American migrants in the video, thus underlining the similarities between ordeals faced by non-white migrants in Italy and at the border between Mexico and the USA. During a conversation I had with Paci back in March 2020, he affirmed that what truly interested him about these structures was the name itself: 'temporary permanence'.¹⁰ In Paci's view, this wording created a universal dissonance that spoke to a global condition of being a migrant with a 'wrong' provenance waiting at the border of a richer (whiter) country. The irony, in these cases, of imposing a 'permanence' that is uniquely temporary is another example of the unfair treatment these individuals are subjected to.

Paci is not the only artist to reflect on issues of migration between borders, particularly the often controversial US-Mexico border. Belgian artist Francis Alÿs, in his 1997 work *The Loop*, reflects on the boundary between Mexico and the US, more specifically between San Diego and Tijuana (Riou 2019). This performance was an attempt to go from Tijuana to San Diego without crossing the border, a highly volatile place. To accomplish this ambitious task, the artist travelled for thirty-five days around the globe; from Tijuana, he went to Mexico City, then to Panama, then

span was of a thirty-day maximum. Following the Bossi – Fini law in 2002 it was increased to sixty days and in 2008, with new modifications, one hundred and eighty days became the time limit in which migrants could stay. In 2011 the law morphed again and the maximum went up to eighteen months only to be reduced to ninety days in 2014. As of 2017 the average stay in these spaces is 25,5 days. Senato della Repubblica – XVII Legislatura, *Rapporto sui Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione in Italia*, Published December 2017, Last Accessed 24 August 2020, https://www.senato.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg17/file/repository/commissioni/dirittiumaniXVII/Rapporto_Cie-Cpr.pdf According to the prefecture's official website, detainees have the right to legal assistance either by a lawyer of their choice and at their expense or by one provided by the Italian government. Moreover, it is their legal right to access an interpreter, have pocket money (€2,50 per day), partake in Italian classes, have external visits, eat regularly, access a telephone and postal service, recreational activities and medical treatment including psychological assistance. (Prefettura 1998)

¹⁰ Adrian Paci, *Conversation with Adrian Paci*, Deborah Galante, Skype interview via Mac with recording, March 2020

to Santiago de Chile, Auckland, and continued his loop around the Pacific until he arrived in San Diego. This symbolic performance aimed to show how difficult and absurd barriers can be, depending especially on which side the individual is departing from. This piece can be considered a political act, indicating the arduous task of traversing from one country to another, documenting that most people do not have the means to travel in the same manner he did.

Independent curator Emma Mahony, in discussing *The Loop*, describes the artist's choice to transform this performance into a series of postcards that viewers are free to keep (Mahony 2010). This action is taken so spectators might have a grasp of the significant difficulty this journey entails even for a privileged person such as Alÿs. Furthermore, it might inspire them to undertake similar journeys and to reflect on the theme of borders. Mahony suggests that the artist was inspired by the desperation numerous people face in traversing this passage fraught with tension. Paci, in a similar way, chooses to locate his video near the border between the US and Mexico because of its intrinsic meaning. Capturing on camera a symbolic performance in such a location conveys a powerful message to viewers, showing how a short strip of land can represent a distressful situation and even define an individual's human dignity.

According to artist Ursula Biemann, 'There is nothing natural about the border: it's a highly constructed place that gets reproduced through the crossing of people; because without the crossing, there is no border' (Biemann 2002: 30). In 1999 Biemann produced the 43-minute video *Performing the Border* in which poor Mexican women are interviewed in the town of Juarez. This place is located at the border between the US and Mexico and is a crossroads of the migrant flow of South and Central Americans attempting to reach North America. Juarez is also sadly known due to its high poverty and crime rates, particularly the murder of vulnerable and impoverished women. Biemann suggests it is not casual that this situation stems from this city being at the frontier between a richer country and a poorer one. The artist suggests that the border is a 'gigantic metaphor for the artificial division' between white, privileged bodies and racialised ones, between urban settings and deserted ones, between prosperity and misery, thus marking a deliberately systemic exclusion of the 'undesirables'. Paci's video denounces a similar process of mistreatment, poverty, and marginalisation of racial undesirables at a border that is nothing other than a constructed concept of exclusion. Author Shahram Khosravi suggests that one manner of excluding unwelcome migrants is through waiting and delaying, thereby implying that their time is less important than that of white Westerners (Khosravi 2019: 417-418). Keeping the so-called 'other' in perpetual waiting status, whether that means being deported or requiring an entry visa, is a manner of exerting control and power. Khosravi

asserts that ‘borders do not stop people but delay them’. Waiting is an act that is performed by a less powerful group, thereby giving more authority and domination to the ‘gatekeepers’. Borders, according to the author, exacerbate this process and are vehicles of exclusion of the less privileged. Khosravi further suggests that ‘borders signal that the people on the other side are different, undesired, dangerous, polluting and even non-human’ (Khosravi 2019: 414). It is not by chance that Paci’s video ends with the South and Central American migrants waiting helplessly on the staircase with no aeroplane to board. The message is clearly conveyed; their future, at this time, is out of their control. It is interesting to note that although they never actually appear in Paci’s video, the Italian detention centres are iconically represented through the artwork’s title.

Centres for Temporary Permanence are institutions that currently exist in Italy.¹¹ They were first established in 1998 by the Turco-Napolitano Law, which sought to regulate immigration to Italy. Their name evolved to *Centri d’Identificazione e Espulsione* (Identification and Expulsion Centres) following a legislative decree in 2002.¹² In 2017, following the Legislative Decree 13/2017, the name was further modified to *Centri di Permanenza per i Rimpatri* (Repatriation Detention Centres), which is the current nomenclature. The morphing of these institutions’ names coincided with governmental changes in Italy: the first terminology, Centres for Temporary Permanence, was coined during Romano Prodi’s government, a left-wing coalition¹³; while the second shift in nomenclature, in 2002, to Identification and Expulsion Centres, was introduced by Silvio Berlusconi’s right-wing government, communicating an increasingly protectionist stance in Italian policies concerning migrants. Unsurprisingly, one of the signatories of the Bossi-Fini law was Umberto Bossi, a notorious anti-immigration politician and one of the founders of the strongly nationalistic and formerly separatist party La Lega (Romano and Bonasera 2010: 17). On 17 February 2017, a final change to the terminology was introduced by the left-wing government led by Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, which specifically included the terms ‘repatriation’ and ‘detention’. This further modification might suggest Italians’ increasing hostility to newcomers, thus reflecting the rise in the ‘need’ for laws severely limiting it.

Paci poetically underlines the sense of individual frustration and sadness at being kept in a state of immobility when everything around is moving. The staircase is overflowing with people, thereby directly referencing the overcrowded conditions of these spaces and the forced idleness people are obliged to endure. Of crucial importance is the fact that the individuals in the artist’s video never communicate with one another, even though they are ‘cramped’ together. They do not even make eye contact, thus suggesting their isolation and alienation not only from their surroundings but even from others in the same situation. No person comes to their

¹¹ Medici per I Diritti Umani, *Arcipelago CIE: Indagine sui Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione Italiani*, (Modena, Infinito Edizioni, 2013), pp. 17-18

¹² Open Migration, *La sospensione dei diritti nei CPR*, Last Accessed 27 February 2020, <https://openmigration.org/analisi/la-sospensione-dei-diritti-nei-cpr/>

¹³ *Cosa sono i C.I.E. (Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione), Rinominati dal Decreto Legge 13/2017 C.P.R. (Centri di Permanenza per i Rimpatri)*, Meltingpot, Last Accessed 12 August 2020, <https://www.meltingpot.org/Cosa-sono-i-C-I-E-Centri-di-Identificazione-ed-Espulsione.html#.XzKMgxMza3I>

rescue, total indifference reigns around them. Despite the difficult circumstances, their facial expressions and body language do not express agitation, but patience, as if hopeful that something may change for the better and move them from limbo. At the end of the movie, the migrants look directly at the camera, as if questioning viewers' indifference or ignorance concerning their plight.

It is uncommon for viewers to have a direct account of the migrant experience from those who are living through this process. When reading or watching the news, most of us view a second-hand narration, generally made by journalists and reporters whose job is to report content – with strict wordcount or time limits – and to attract readers and viewers, often with graphs and statistics or sensational headlines and reportage. In contrast, Paci forces viewers to confront their indifference and to see the actual faces of the 'migrant crisis'. In 2023, filmmaker Matteo Garrone, directed the impactful movie *Io Capitano*, about two Senegalese teenagers who attempt to reach Europe in perilous ways to escape poverty, ending in the ruthless hands of traffickers and brutal Libyan detention camps.¹⁴ Garrone, in a crude manner, shows through his movie a terrible reality that numerous people face still today. Film and video productions revolving around migration offer viewers a more relatable and often immersive experience compared to that of experiencing an installation or painting.

According to a report by the website Osservatorio Migranti (Migrants Monitoring Unit) the 'inmates' in the CPTs are prohibited from having contact with the outside world, meaning they spend most of the time in their rooms without engaging in any activity.¹⁵ Despite the Turco-Napolitano law stipulating respect for migrants' human dignity, according to numerous reports and denunciations by activists, politicians, journalists, and academics, the living conditions in these centres are disastrous.¹⁶ In June 2005, Amnesty International published a fifty-five-page report expressing concerns over the treatment of migrants detained in these centres. The report is based on critical comments made by people held there as well as the assessments of external inspectors. In the introduction, Amnesty states that it understands the necessity for countries to ensure all people entering have appropriate legal documentation. However, it affirms the inviolability of human dignity and the necessity to implement strong guidelines so that migrants, regardless of their legal status, receive proper, fair, and humane treatment. Amnesty notes this seldom happens, substantiating the report with numerous accounts of physical harm, verbal abuse, xenophobic behaviour, lack of hygiene, inadequate food, denial of legal counselling or representation, isolation, and the withholding of information regarding individual cases (Amnesty International 2005).

While viewing some of these locations, the non-profit organisation Medici Senza Frontiere (Doctors without Borders) reported instances in which 'inmates' self-

¹⁴ Pathe. "Io Capitano – Official Trailer in HD," 28 November 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6fLvLN2EqM>

¹⁵ Contacts via telephone are allowed; however, they must not exit the structure, which is surrounded by fences and guarded by armed personnel. Osservatorio, Detenzione, Accoglienza, Migranti Puglia, *Centri detenzione: I Centri per il rimpatrio*,

¹⁶ Open Migration, *La sospensione dei diritti nei CPR*

harm due to frustration, depression, and anxiety, mainly driven by the uncertainty of their future and feelings of alienation from the outside world (Dardanelli 2008: 231). The report further denounces that, in January 2004, some migrants held in the CPT in Bologna accused security personnel of illicitly adulterating meals and drinks that made them drowsy and severely ill. Due to restrictions in accessing these structures, confirming these denunciations presents significant challenges. However, the sheer volume of negative reports and the centres' secretive way of functioning suggest these are not just rumours (Amnesty International 2008: 18-19).

The artist films the scene from different angles; at the beginning of the short movie, aeroplanes are rarely seen, but by the end, the continuous landing and taking off of aircraft stands in contrast to the immigrants' immobility. The camera backs away slowly, focusing on different angles of the staircase to highlight the silent crowd of people who are kept in limbo. As the movie comes to an end the focus is placed towards the front side of the stairs, but at a distance, while the group continues to gaze directly towards the camera. As the focus continues to grow more distant, the screen blackens to the end of the video.

Scholars Francesca Esposito, Jose Ornelas, Erica Briozzo, and Caterina Arcidiacono, who conducted fieldwork at the centre Ponte Galeria in Rome between March 2014 and January 2017 (2019), express serious concerns regarding the treatment of the people 'hosted' in CPTs. During their research, they interviewed the 'inmates', asking them about their feelings regarding their incarceration. The data collected portrays a gloomy, distressing environment, where people are stripped of their human rights and dignity, subjected to verbal and physical abuse, isolated from family and friends, and have no alternative to spending their days waiting for a sign of their fate – generally a piece of paper.¹⁷ The academics further point out that legal services are scarce and inadequate, often lacking necessary interpreting services. Researcher Anna Simone argues that these establishments are set in place to purposely exclude 'non-citizens' from being an active part of society and to deprive them of their humanity (Simone 2006: 132-134). Simone suggests that this process is part of the government's so-called rational power or, simply put, a power to exclude. In other words, the hospitality of people without proper documents becomes a pretext to exclude specific subjects who are deemed 'illegal'.

Philosophy professor Donatella Di Cesare, in 2014, published a short pamphlet called *Crimes Against Hospitality* in which she talks about her visit to one of these centres and unapologetically denounces them as systems not meant to regulate the migration flow but to dehumanise specific people on the basis of race and provenance. She describes witnessing a severe lack of hygiene, migrants stripped

¹⁷ An investigation done by Doctors Without Borders in 2013 carefully analysed the internal arrangement of these detention structures. It concluded there were indeed rooms (four beds in each one) and bathrooms for migrants held there however they were often overcrowded and, in some cases, there was no door for the washroom meaning a lack of privacy. The common areas were set up so that detainees could eat, watch TV, go to class and when available practice sport. These centers are also provided with gardens so that individuals residing there can go out for fresh air. Overall, however, they reported that migrants spent most of their time in their rooms without activities to keep them busy. These spaces' over crowdedness is represented in Paci's video because of the density of people waiting on the staircase in the middle of the airport. There appears to be no free space hence reminding viewers of the absolute lack of personal comfort detainees are forced to endure. *Medici per I Diritti Umani, Arcipelago CIE: Indagine sui Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione Italiani*, (Modena, Infinito Edizioni, 2013), pp. 41-42

of their clothes for disinfestation from diseases such as scabies, the heavy usage of psychiatric drugs, and people left alone without any comfort, legal counselling or occasions to connect with others speaking their same language. Di Cesare argues these 'protocols' are not a way to protect Italy from illegal migrants, but to strip migrants of human rights and eventually expel them. She further states that self-harm and suicide attempts are common. (Di Cesare 2014) A humane system of hospitality is thus critically necessary along with, in case of expulsion, a plan to provide a safe way of providing this. She also denounces the fact that some of the expelled migrants were simply repatriated to a country that was not theirs and left without any resources to provide for themselves. The existence of these structures is well known by the Italian government and the public; however, with few exceptions, they turn a blind eye.¹⁸

Author Awad Ibrahim in his essay 'The Question is the Foreigner: The Spectre of Blackness and the Economy of Hospitality in Canada' expounds on the idea of being the 'other'. He reflects on his personal experience as a Sudanese black man with a 'different' name living in Canada. He recalls arriving in North America as a refugee and working as a university professor in a space that did not welcome him due to racial factors and his 'unusual' name. Ibrahim ponders Derrida's idea of 'unconditional hospitality'; that is, welcoming people regardless of race, religion, and provenance. The author argues he has seldom felt accepted in North America, mainly because of his black body, hence being regarded as an outcast in the 'Great White North'. Ibrahim, contrary to the people represented by Paci, lives in Western countries and has a prestigious job as a university professor, and has proper documentation, therefore his residence should not be questioned. However, this did not protect him from being stopped and searched by the police, being mistaken for a Muslim because of his name's phonetics, and asked the seemingly harmless question 'but where are you *really* from?', which evinces a perception of non-belonging in North America despite residing there legally (Ibrahim 2010). Migrants represented by Paci, even if granted entrance by border patrol, are more likely to experience difficulties because of a restricted idea of hospitality often based on provenance. Scholar Cristina Lombardi-Diop argues that 'Italianness' is perceived as inherently white, and that blackness is regarded as a foreign entity, something to be feared and kept at a distance. Diop suggests that the concept of whiteness as an intrinsic component of being Italian partially stems from racist eugenic theories that were popular in the 19th and 20th centuries, which often justified the colonial subjugation of African countries and the ethnic cleansing of Jews during the Fascist regime under racial laws promulgated in 1938. Although Italians, historically, are not a racially homogenous group, the lie of a homogenous white Italian population has been promoted for the purposes of social cohesion since Italian unification

¹⁸ Journalist Emilie Kassie, in her accusation against detention centres at the border between the USA and Mexico, affirms the usage of these sites has grown exponentially in the past decades as well as their cost. Just as Italy's Centres for Temporary Permanence withhold asylum seekers and people devoid of legal documentation, USA's detention centres operate in a similar manner. Kassie affirms these spaces were not born under the Trump administration; however, it has increasingly relied on them due to augmenting (even though since 2007 there has been a slight decrease) numbers of refugees and asylum seekers coming to the USA border. The journalist contends these sites have become spaces where basic human rights are disregarded; children sleeping on concrete floor, denial of soap and toothpaste, people crammed into small rooms, families separated at the border are just few human rights violations denounced in regards to border detention centres. Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have both come under scrutiny over mistreatment of people held in these structures. According to Kassie these cruel conditions pertain to a "zero tolerance" stance taken by the Trump administration in order to deter illegal migration (Kassie 2020).

in 1861. This would distinguish the ‘superior us’ versus ‘inferior them’, and instil a patriotic feeling in the newly formed nation. The author contends that the idea of being white in Italy is inextricably linked to hygiene and health, thus relegating blackness to the realm of disease and dirtiness. Diop suggests it is unsurprising that Italy shows hostility towards non-white migrants and attempts to exclude them since they are ‘inherently’ soiled, contaminated, dangerous, thus inevitably ‘un-italian’ (Lombardi-Diop 2012).

Author Sandro Mezzadra furthers his contention that ‘new nationalism’ of today, which aims at excluding non-whites and therefore non-Italians, stems from Italy’s shifting demographics due to recent migratory patterns. The fact that more non-whites are becoming Italian threatens the concept of a homogenous white Italian population, which translates into virulent discrimination against incoming non-white migrants (Mezzadra 2012). Author Fabien Georgi, whilst discussing the role of racism in the so-called migrant crisis in Europe, suggests that most European natives, due to constant frustration caused by ‘capitalist life’, will take out their negative emotions on minority groups. Scapegoating, the scholar suggests, is a convenient and narcissistic manner of exerting a perceived superiority over those thought to have less power. Georgi furthers his contention by asserting that racist policies undermining migrants’ livelihoods can be explained by a set of privileges enjoyed by white Europeans, who want these privileges to be kept intact: access to better employment, proper housing, preferential treatment by authorities such as the police, and so on (Georgi 2019).

Paci not only focuses on migrants without proper legal documentation but specifically chooses non-whites to show viewers how the experience of immigrating can be ambiguous depending on race. Unsurprisingly, the artist focuses on the Mexican-U.S. border to illustrate the difficulties for non-whites to enter a predominantly white space.

Israeli curator Edna Moshenson, in her essay concerning Paci’s work, argues that *Centre for Temporary Permanence* embodies the concept of liquid ‘modernity’ as elaborated by Polish intellectual Zygmunt Bauman. His theory elaborates on contemporary society’s ‘dual nature’: on one hand, we strive for order, domestication, and peace so that reality is deemed more ‘controllable’ and less scary; but on the other, humanity is in constant motion with travelling, globalisation, precariousness, and the gradual crumbling of traditional norms and values. Thus, according to Moshenson, Paci’s video illustrates the mutability of modern existence (Fraser and Gili 2013: 65-66). The people represented are in a state of uncertainty due to economic instability and volatile circumstances in their home countries, which are also countries subjected to destabilisation and impoverishment by Western nations.¹⁹ The author further points out that although globalisation helps connect different parts

¹⁹ Journalist Annalisa Camilli, during the beginning of March 2020 when Italy’s lockdown due to coronavirus had begun, points out the stark deterioration of the conditions at the Centres for Temporary Permanence: The reason being inadequate preparation in the face of a global pandemic and Italian government not promulgating specific provisions for these places hence suggesting carelessness towards people kept there. Migrants stranded in these spaces, Camilli argues, are cramped in small cells, do not have access to proper protection gear such as masks, gloves and sanitization alcohol and cannot even be repatriated because of the impossibility for most airplanes to fly. Furthermore, associations helping detainees can no longer visit the CTD due to the lockdown. An already difficult situation was aggravated by the Covid 19 (Camilli 2020).

of the world at an impressive speed,²⁰ at the same time it can destabilise social order and create, as Paci's artwork poignantly expresses, significant hardship for some.

The second theory Moshenson quotes is the idea of *non-place* put forth by the French anthropologist Marc Augé, in which he suggests that 'If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a 'non-place'. Augé contends that airports are a pivotal symbol of a world in motion where nothing is stable and all is in constant transition (Augé 2008). More so than trains or buses, aeroplanes signal the crossing of international, not merely domestic, borders. They therefore imply the need for permission – signalled by passports or visas – to enter countries where the traveller is not a citizen. For those whose rights have not been denied, airports are comfortable places of mindlessness or even fantasy which function purely to transport us from one destination to the other without fears or problems linked to our status. However, as Paci shows us in his long close-ups and slow camera movements, for others they are infernal locations where, as postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak posits, they are deemed 'subaltern', unable to speak due to their 'Third World' provenance as well as their race and, in some cases, gender. In Spivak's words, 'subaltern' denotes people who do not belong to a Western country and who are the 'wrong' race or gender (Spivak 1988: 95-99). Their humanity, I suggest, is reduced to documentation and the simple 'misfortune' of 'not being born on the right side of the world'.

Paci subtly yet powerfully denounces the ongoing stratification of the population and skilfully films near the US-Mexican border in California to illustrate a shared condition. By choosing Southern and Central American migrants, he underlines specific contexts in which the ugly truth of racial discrimination perpetrated by Western countries against poorer ones occurs. This impoverishment forces people from these nations to flee to richer, Western states to have access to basic living standards.

Conclusion

Paci's work goes beyond the piece I analysed in this article. However, for my argument, I have discussed this work in particular because I believe it best speaks to issues of migration and transnational connections. Earlier works, however, also touch on these themes: *Home to Go* [Fig. 4], for example, is a project the artist performed in 2001 in which he presents himself to the public scantily clothed and bearing on his bent back a tiled roof tied with ropes (Fiammetta 2020). This per-

²⁰ The coronavirus pandemic has furthermore aggravated access to basic education for people without an internet connection. Lockdowns and social distancing have significantly altered the way educators perform hence largely conducting classes online. This results in poorer strata of the population or people living in rural areas having difficulties with internet connection and therefore not being able to join online courses. This problem further exacerbates inequalities (Romm 2020).

formance evokes the heavy burden of migrating, moving to a new and likely unfamiliar location yet perpetually carrying the weight of a life left behind and all the associated memories. In October 2021, in Victoria Square in Athens, Greece, Paci along with curators Niovi Zampouka-Chatzimanou and Almir Koldzic, created the installation *We Apologize*. The artwork states the following: ‘We apologize for the discontent and stress that this may have caused you.’ The selection of this square was no coincidence: it is the meeting spot for numerous communities that are considered to be on the margins of society, such as prostitutes, refugees, and drug addicts. Paci, in a deeply poetic manner, obliges passers-by to confront their prejudices about ‘undesirable people’ present in the square disrupting their comfort. Greece, furthermore, has been at the forefront of the ‘migrant crisis’ due to its geographic location, hence it is regarded as a hotspot for undocumented migrants arriving to Europe in difficult conditions (Ståhl 2021). The artist provides a deeply humane perspective on issues often perceived in numeric and policy terms. He illustrates in a quiet yet potent manner the human toll of a world obsessed with working efficiency, social status, the economy, and money.²¹ Paci’s artworks focus on the private dimension of a collective experience, not in productive terms, but in a subtly familiar way, drawing our attention to each person’s unique sensitivity, individuality, and vulnerability. Despite showing a group of people, the artist underlines each person’s individuality, suffering, and desolation, which are shared by all the people he represents. An individual experience is illustrated as a collective, shared destiny, seemingly impossible to change. In many of Paci’s works, migrants and transnational workers occupy a pivotal point because of the type of representation they are subjected to in Western mainstream media, specifically in terms of their perceived utility, making them tokens rather than human beings. In a conversation with art curator Cristina Cannelli, Paci revealed that he attempts to give dignity to those who have been stripped of it so as to offer a personal perspective of a phenomenon mainly seen through news outlets or political propaganda. His work seeks the subject’s raw emotions without journalistic or didactic filters. Unsurprisingly, most of his artistic production not only focuses on migrants but also specifically on asylum seekers and refugees (Steininger and Hopper 2020). He admits his own experience of escaping from an economically ravaged country that went through a devastating dictatorship and arriving in a different place and starting from scratch deeply influenced him (Budak 2019). Paci offers an intimate and personal view. Seldom do nuanced accounts of the complex immigration process have any visibility in mainstream Italian media, which offers statistical accounts and alarmist reportage. Despite a flourishing migrant cultural network as evidenced in such publications as the literary magazine *El Ghibli*, and exhibitions dedicated to this topic, these types of news outlets

²¹ Throughout the current coronavirus crisis numerous countries such as Italy, France and Spain have imposed on its citizens complete lockdowns meaning anyone can exit their residences only for strict necessities such as buying food or medication. This was barely the case in the United States where former President Donald Trump often bolstered about re-opening the country in the midst of the pandemic regardless of the high risk this entailed. During this time US economy is imploding and over forty million Americans have lost their jobs thus the urgency of ‘getting back to work’ even though health professionals advise against it. This novel virus has shown to what extent today’s society is work obsessed regardless if it is a hazard to public health. (Pilkington 2020). Texas Republican governor lieutenant Dan Patrick has gone to the extent of stating publicly he would rather see the elderly perish instead of a country’s shutdown. In May 2020 Patrick appeared on Fox News to speak to host Tucker Carlson about the economic crisis unfolding because of the coronavirus and he argued it is better to be productive and earn profits instead of a total lockdown, which has demonstrated to be an effective way to protect from the pandemic. He contended he was comfortable with the idea of grandparents dying to save the economy (Beckett 2020).

Fig. 4 Adrian Paci, *Home to Go*, 2001, Plaster, Marble, Dust, Tiles, Rope, 165 x 90 x 120 cm / 65 x 35.4 x 47.2 in, edition of 5 + 2 AP, Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan / New York, and Galerie Peter Kilchman, Zürich



remain on the edges of mainstream information production in Italy (El Gibli 2020). The artist depicts the raw, 'unglamorous' side of occurrences happening daily in the contemporary world, such as migrants being held in inhumane conditions in designated structures at borders. In *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, by unapologetically focusing the camera on the facial expressions of the migrants stranded on the staircase in North America, Paci symbolically denounces a harrowing experience that is happening even now on another continent. This emphasis on the human aspect of global migration is a driving force of Paci's artistic practice.

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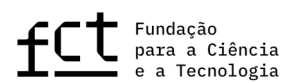
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