

PART I

SEXUAL REPRODUCTION, LABOR

AND

REPRESENTATION POLITICS

Entanglement

Univ. Prof. Dr. Marina Gržinić,

The Institute of Philosophy, ZRC-SAZU, Ljubljana, Slovenia,

Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria

(margrz@zrc-sazu.si)

Abstract:

My intention is to expose the way in how gender, class and race and media were and are overdetermined, but without falling into a simplification that they are simply “contradictory.” I will make recourse to some contemporary performative practices and political spaces in Europe that dismantles the singular established contemporary history of art and performative practices in European context.

Key words: gender, class, race, media, performativity

I.

I will argue here that that which has and will have pertinent political weight in Europe today is the question of race. Europe has to critically review its colonial and racist history and present. Present EU hyperbolic regained whiteness and reiterated ideology of Occidentalism. In doing so it has brutally reproduced regimes of racial and class coding that governs economic, social and political inequality in Europe. My intention is to expose the way in which gender, class, race and media are overdetermined, without falling into a simplification that they are simply “contradictory.” I will make recourse to some contemporary performative practices and political spaces in Europe that dismantle the singular established contemporary history of art and performative practices in European context. Finally, I will conceptualize a possibility to think how to queer Europe which, after the fall of the Berlin wall (1989), has been divided in at least two parts – the European Union (that dreams to become in the future the “United States of Europe” or simply to vanish!) and other states waiting at EU’s threshold.

The point of departure for tackling this question is the project *Iron Mask, White Torture*, performance and installation, conceived by Marissa Lôbo in 2010.¹ It was presented at the group exhibition “Where do we go from here?” at Secession, in Vienna (also in 2010). Performers: Agnes Achola, Alessandra Klimpel, Belinda Kazeem, Flavia Inkiru, Grace Latigo, Steaze, Sheri Avraham, Njideka Stephanie Iroh and Marissa Lôbo. Why start with this project?

What is the most striking point that strikes us back but we refuse to go on strike is the absence of any word whatsoever in the mass media after the opening of this performance which was so strikingly black and white that was impossible to miss? An article was published in “Der Standard” the text that was published on the whole exhibition did not single out a word on this performance. At a later stage, an interview in “Der Standard,” with the author was published online. Therefore the role of “empowerment,” “agency” and “choice” had a double role in this performance. Shortly, I will state what the elements of the performance are, is based on the “Report by the Collective of Black Women Subjects in Art Space,” written by Marissa Lôbo and Sheri Avraham, and published in “Reartikulacija,”² a bilingual journal from Ljubljana.

They said that they entered the museum (or the “Secession” I mention above), “a space of production of an epistemological violence. Such a space presents an appropriation of the history of the ‘other,’ a constant reproduction of the white western desire of exposing and determining otherness – pure empire of voyeurisms.”³ The performance consisted of nine black women and women of colour, wearing black outfits and having bright blue eyes! The blue eye represented a reference to Anastácia, a slave in Quilombo region in Brazil. Her struggle for freedom became the symbol

¹ Cf. Marissa Lôbo, “Iron Mask, White Torture: What is Anastacia Keeping Silent? What Does Anastacia See?” in The Editorial Group for Writing Insurgent Genealogies (consisting of Carolina Agredo, Sheri Avraham, Annalisa Cannito, Miltiadis Gerothanasis, Marina Gržinić, Marissa Lôbo and Ivana Marjanović) eds., *Utopia of Alliances, Conditions of Impossibilities and the Vocabulary of Decoloniality* (Vienna: Löcker, 2013) 269-275.

² <http://grzanic-smid.si/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Rear2010tikulacija10111213.pdf> (Accessed: November 5, 2013).

³ Ibid.

of anti-colonial resistance.

The curator presented the title of the exhibition, “Where do we go from here?” “Where do we go from here, Vienna?” – isn’t this an ironic question to ask when your history is imprinted in every corner, and at the same time we revile openly and legally a deep-rooted racist structure. For example, in one recent Austrian election campaigns, one spoke of legislation that would enforce laws that are imposed on those who are defined as “aliens” that is the way of naming those coming from third states (states outside the European Union).⁴

The performance:⁵ One long, empty table is slowly occupied by nine black women and women of colour. They sit next to each other and stare directly at the audience.

The group articulates and gives voice to all objects exhibited in art museums that have been object of theft, violence, lies and silence. The reading starts with a repetition of the name Anastácia by each of the nine performers. Then each woman, one after the other, exposes firmly thoughts by black feminists. Thoughts that concern racism and sexism, African diasporas, black identities and colonization are juxtaposed with critical migration politics and “rethinking black feminism as a social justice project.” In the last minute of the performance, they take the blue eye lenses out, they leave the space and some applause comes from the audience. This is a violent moment of contemplation on the art work, and the strong voice by Grace Latigo asks: “Is there something to be applauded here?” Not to forget the question that doesn’t want to be a silent one: “Where do we go from here?” “Nowhere! – We are here to stay!”

II.

Now let us make a slight detour to contextualize the performance, the topic of racism and the silence. To get a wider perspective in which to situate the performance and to understand what is going on in moment of its showing, it is necessary to make recourse at least briefly to what are the most propulsive positions in the West white queer context regarding the triangle of feminism, gender and queer. I have two main positions in mind and they are: Marie-Hélène Bourcier⁶ and Beatriz Preciado.⁷ These two positions are developing an internal critique inside the western discourse in the following triadic format: feminism, gender and queer. Especially important is Bourcier’s statement when she predicated the death of feminism.⁸ She stated that it will not persist without taking into account the issues of “race,” class, sexuality and gender.



For decades, the entanglement of these three elements has been pushed forwards by the black, Chicana and Asian feminists and the queer activists and theorist combining post-colonial and decolonial movements and studies. Today, the same entanglement is apparent in European context too, especially in the diasporic communities in former Western Europe, communities of migrants, queer and transsexuals and sex workers.

Why entanglement? Global capitalism functions not through a division but due to an *entanglement* that can be precisely described as the/a Christian white capitalist world reiterated through a constant – humanization. “Becoming human” is a specific process of racialization that works hand in hand with class racialization. Through stigmatization and labeling based on the constructed category of race, racialization transforms societies into race determined societies. This process is today going so far that we have a process of racialization being imputed without any “race” prerogatives while nevertheless serving as a measure of discrimination, subjugation and finally global capitalism’s dispossession. It functions in Europe through the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The description is taken from the text published online. See

<http://grznic-smid.si/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Rear2010tikulacija10111213.pdf> (Accessed: November 5, 2013).

⁶ http://next.liberation.fr/sexe/2013/03/18/notre-feminisme-de-l-egalite-est-triste-et-peu-affirmatif_889497

⁷ Cf. Beatriz Preciado, “Pharmaco-Pornographic Capitalism Postporn Politics and the Decolonization of Sexual Representations” in The Editorial Group for Writing Insurgent Genealogies, eds., *Utopia of Alliances, Conditions of Impossibilities and the Vocabulary of Decoloniality* (Vienna: Löcker, 2013) 245-255.

⁸ http://www.nonfiction.fr/article-4344-politique_et_theorie_queer_la_seconde_vague.htm

The interview is a key reference for all the elaboration I made in relation to Bourcier.

manufacturing of the former Eastern European, the “non-subjects” into fully gendered European white middle class subjects. It is about *us* acquiring our capitalist conservative, chauvinistic, patriarchal, mostly petit-bourgeois lineage with which to safeguard the heterosexual family and the racialized nation’s “substance.” The European Union aims for the manufacturing of former the “barbarian communist” Eastern European into a “humanized” and “civilized” European.

The performance entitled “Iron Mask, White Torture” tackles precisely the entanglement formulated by Marissa Lôbo with regard to the context of her work. I quote: “all these processes affect us let’s say as human beings inside of all complexity of ideological effects of racialized bodies in this historical and geographical moment, and ask how the ideas of affect, sexuality, gender, class, modernity, and citizenship co-articulate and racialize our bodies; this is what is to be elaborate and made conscious to us.”⁹

Therefore it is possible to argue that at the core of the demand is the politics of queer, gender and feminism through race. This is a thesis I started to develop in 2000 when I made an analysis regarding the triadic model of feminism, gender and queer in the space of former Yugoslavia. I asked how we pass from Sanja Iveković, a Croatian artist of international recognition and a feminist, to the lesbian scene in Ljubljana in the 1980s and to the works of dramatization of masculinity in the post-feminist context in the works of Tanja Ostojić and Šejla Kamerić, in order to finally arrive to a discussion about a group in Ljubljana known as the “Uprising of the Lesbogs.” This trajectory unravels and explains the passage from sexually queer to politically queer, where we have projects in the queer context that have no simple connotation of the sex/gender divide. The demand I posed for repoliticizing comes around the time when Bourcier in the end of the 1990s started to think how re-politicize and re-sexualize French Theory (Foucault, Derrida). It coincides with the first wave queer from the US (today Bourcier talks of the second wave queer). Bourcier said that due to the simple fact that genders are constructed it was possible, as an outcome of the theoretical work produced by Judith Butler and others, to criticize the heteronormativity of the 1970s and 1980s feminism.

The situation of interpretation of the triadic passage from feminism through gender to queer in the former Yugoslavia’s context was similar (that means absent) as in the exhibition called “Gender check” (Vienna, Museum of Modern Art in 2009, produced by Erste Bank).¹⁰ In the exhibition missing were positions that come after the heterosexual feminist subject positions from the 1970s. These positions are surely historically extremely important. However, we cannot understand anything after the 1970s if we do not subject to precise analysis the positions of lesbians and gays in the 1980s in the socialism in ex-Yugoslavia.

Bourcier emphasizes not only that the queer feminism she started to develop in its first wave attacked heteronormativity, but that nowadays what is important is questioning homonormativity. Bourcier engages today with the critique of Butler and of the French materialist feminists and lesbians, notably Monique Wittig.

What is important with the translation of the queer US movement in Europe was that the questions posed by the Chicana, mestiza and African American feminists and lesbian positions have been brought in with the first queer wave in Europe. Bourcier argues that in the American context the queer of color were always suppressed and subjugated by the white majority and therefore this recent call for interseccionality when produced in the US white context in between gender, class, race and sex could be seen as a rather suspicious moment.

In the 1990s feminists, Chicana and Asian positions asked for intersectionality. They as well asked that their positions of empowerment are to be recognized. Nonetheless, as pointed out by Bourcier concerning European context, the political subject positions of identity politics were nullified by the structuralist and post-structuralist theories and their narratives of the death of the subject. Bourcier said very precisely that the translation of the queer movement from US to Europe that asked same questions by the queer of color did not get a satisfactory answer. Moreover, it was made ridiculous through mocking “strategic essentialism” and subsumed immediately under the republican universalistic (and I will say colonial, as France is a colonial republic) context. Knowing that Bourcier is talking about the French republic then we know that the ideals of the republic are the ideals of the colonial republic. The same can be applied to the Austrian republic, as we know this from the very precise work of migrants group, notably by the work of “The Research Group for Black Austrian History and Presence /Pamoja” from Vienna.¹¹

⁹ Cf. <http://grzanic-smid.si/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Rear2010tikulacija10111213.pdf>

¹⁰ Cf. Marina Gržinić, “Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe,” Museum of Modern Art, (MUMOK), Vienna, November 2009/February 2010, <http://eipcp.net/policies/grzanic/en>. (Accessed: November 5, 2013).

¹¹ Cf. The Research Group for Black Austrian History and Presence /Pamoja, “Welcome to Cafe Decolonial. ‘Sag zur Mehlspeis’ leise Servus...” in The Editorial Group for Writing Insurgent Genealogies, eds., *Utopia of Alliances, Conditions of Impossibilities and the Vocabulary of*

What was the result of the incompetence—let us ask following Bourcier—by the irresponsible and tainted white theoreticians in the West of Europe? Racism, migration and disregard for the positions of minorities resulted as the product of this process. Bourcier argued that the choice was to either get rid of identity politics or cease performing not being capable to recognize some important points in it. French intellectuals, followed by the official gay and lesbian movements have still not understood this argument and continue missing the political potentials of cultural identities; as Bourcier explained when discussing the republican universalist claims. With such a gesture they include racism and misogyny in the very ideals of the colonial republic. Therefore, the point is, as stated by Bourcier, that today it is logical to emancipate ourselves from the U.S. queer theory in the first wave: it is inappropriate to French and European context as its limitations are numerous and as well revealed by the transqueer of color and transstudies. Transstudies brought as a major contribution in the European context topics such as labor, job insecurity, sex work and I would say the very powerful questioning of the formation of the Western, occidental white epistemic matrix. This later is the matrix of pure (colonial) violence.

This is what we could see at the performance and even more what Bourcier calls as a new indecent materialism. When Grace Latigo argues “why to applaud if we do not go anywhere from there, and we are here to stay,” this new materialism is, frankly, indecent. So the questions that are opened are the possibility of a construction of a new materialist migrant queer indecent political agenda.

In a word, the possibility for a materialist queer political agenda is the question of race that is according to Bourcier the Achilles heel of white feminism since the first queer wave movement. Taking into consideration the reaction after the performance in the “Secession” this is the most neuralgic point of EU space as well. If in the past studies, homology has been made between female oppression and slavery, this cannot be attainable anymore without the implication of the postcolonial or decolonial studies on slavery. To understand that the second wave queer starts to bring forward this moment is very important. Moreover, queer theory of the first wave has constructed heterosexuality as the main enemy. Therefore these questions are at the core of the transfeminist epistemological matrix. This is one of the queer issues that was opened at the performance in the “Secession.”



Therefore this issue is at the core and will stay there for another long struggle. Here is as well present a new demand for the pseudo-naturality of the alignment of “the same sex/same gender” type. Indeed, this position has resulted in an enhancement of the gendered female subject who has been associated with a certain naturalization of women (against the male subject, and of course many others, including transsexuals). This presupposes, as pointed out by Bourcier, the existence of the woman and of domination that erases all differences among women. This then resulted into declaring that the sexist domination is equal to slavery, but without the questioning of the colonial presuppositions of such a shift. It resulted in a deletion of the issue of racism in feminism, as a total absence of color in positions of feminist theory. Therefore, this is why the outsiders as Audre Lorde or the mestiza consciousness of Chicana lesbians as Cherrie Morraga, that live at the borders, are important as they put into question this new purity. Haraway’s cyborg had initially the same aim. This aim was firmly pointed out by Bourcier to oppose any idea of female moral superiority, innocence, and greater closeness to nature.

Still it is possible to formulate a critique that what Bourcier and Preciado develop, and what they call sexpolitics, is almost fully about the current dominant configurations of the biopolitical. Pedro Paulo Gomes Pereira¹² in an

Decoloniality (Vienna: Löcker, 2013) 53-57.

¹² Pedro Paulo Gomes Pereira, “Body, sex and subversion: reflections on two queer theoretician,” *Interface* (Botucatu) vol.4 no.se 2008.

interesting analysis on these two queer theoreticians develops a set of relation on which I will rely upon. Sexpolitics focuses on forms of expression like pornographic cinema, sadomasochism, the construction of the figures of the transvestite, transgender and transsexual. The so-called queer zones constitute privileged intervention spaces. All this is part of a hot, punk capitalism as Beatriz Preciado stated in her text.¹³ Moreover, one arrives to sexpolitics after the persistent critique of the sex-gender distinction. Here is important to state that such critique of the sex-gender distinction destabilizes both the category of biological sex and the category of gender identity. Though exists as well a warning path, as emphasized by Pedro Paulo Gomes Pereira. He refers to Toril Moi,¹⁴ who argued in 2001 that though this destabilization enabled to think the plurality of identities and practices, it also increased their abstraction in relation to corporeity and, simultaneously, made the concept of gender become virtually useless in theorizing subjectivity and identity. According to Toril Moi this is something that cannot be so easily overlooked.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize, as Pedro Paulo Gomes Pereira does, that Bourcier and Preciado both draw on Butler's theoretical legacy and both search for something more than a performativity theory that is supported by a language model based on speech acts; they are authors who act within the queer politics that bets on the subversive possibilities of the abnormal bodies (abject, strange, queer), and who search for the body's materiality. This is why their approach to the techniques that construct the bodies (vibrators, pornography, cinema, surgeries), and the need to historicize the categories of sex, flesh, body, biology and nature, makes the concept of sexpolitics so important.

Again, still what stays open is whether the queer experience can be seen without a more precise re-elaboration of the relation in between queer – and the other two constructed categories of nationality and race? And if does not exist a danger that leaving out from the conceptualization of queer the relation to nation-state and its processes of racializations (social and institutional racism) we would end up not naturalizing what we wish to denaturalize?

Simply if I connect what was said until now with the art project that was presented in the start of this text, we have to state that we could not be able to talk about it, if we were not able to question the relation between queer and the dilemmas of identity, sex politics that are constructed through the nation-state or through "race." Therefore we have to reflect on technologies that construct racialized bodies and to ask how they act. In short, I am asking about the place of race, nation-state and migrants in queer theory.

III.

And the question that presses us is as well what we do with the necropolitical?

What is the relation in between biopolitics and necropolitics? In an abbreviated mode, I can state that the mode of life envisioned in the First Capitalist World by Michel Foucault and named biopolitics in the 1970s changed in the time of global capitalism into necropolitics, a term coined and elaborated by Achille Mbembe¹⁵ in 2003. Mbembe talks about necropolitics in order to capture a mode of life in Africa after the 2001 when capitalism literally changed into neoliberal global capitalism. Now before giving a certain explanation what brings such a change I have to emphasize that in global capitalism neoliberal times, biopolitics and necropolitics lives one near the other. They reside as well one in the other. That this is the case we see just when making an analysis of the LGBTQI reality within Europe today.

But before proceeding into this, I can state that Foucault's **biopolitics** (a coinage in-between bio (life) and politics) can be described in an axiomatic way as **"make live and let die."** With necropolitics we can on the other side precisely define the transformation of regulation of life within extreme conditions produced by capital. Necropolitics is a coinage in-between necro (DEATH) and politics. Necropolitics regulates life through the perspective of death, therefore transforming life in a mere existence bellow every life minimum. I defined **necropolitics as "let live and make die."** These two modes of life present a brutal difference in managing life and death; in biopolitics life was controlled and it was about providing a good life but only and solely for the citizens of the sovereign first world capitalist nation-states; today what is at the hand is a pure abandonment of these structures of life (as what reigns is "let live") and at the same time death is capitalized (necropolitics) by the war machine. The surplus value is made by managing death in many different ways and by different machines, regimes and aparati. Today in global neoliberal capitalism the biopolitical and necropolitical mode of life reproduces one near the other transforming many of the former biopolitical sovereign states into necropolitical ones.

¹³ Cf. Beatriz Preciado, "Pharmaco-Pornographic Capitalism Postporn Politics," op. cit.

¹⁴ Cf. Toril Moi, *What Is A Woman? And Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁵ Cf. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," in *Public Culture*, 15.1 (2003) 11-40.

And the difference between biopolitics and necropolitics is very visible if we are to conceptualize a homophobic history in the post-Yugoslav space. This space is not on the other continent, somewhere there, but here and now, in the middle of the Fortress EU or just Europe. The processes that are to be captured from drawing this homophobic history are not possible to be named just biopolitical measures by respective nations-states for the protection of the nation-state heterosexual rights. We see all over bodies in blood, LGBTQI members beaten and their lives threaten to the point that they are living under the constant threat of death and with basic human rights being negated to them.

Therefore we can talk about a homophobic history that is a necropolitical measure by the respective nation-states and moreover this necropolitics lives side by side the biopolitics of as they like to call themselves former West European states.

In 2001, Serbia's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community (LGBTQ) attempted to hold the country's first Gay Pride in Belgrade. When the participants started to gather in one of Belgrade's principal squares, a huge crowd of opponents (right wing, fascist-orthodox organizations and individuals) attacked the event, injuring several participants and stopping the march. The police were not prepared to suppress riots or protect the Pride marchers. Non-governmental organizations and a number of public personalities criticized the assailants, the government and security officials. In 2009 a group of human rights activists announced their plans to organize a second Belgrade Pride. However, due to the heavy public threats of violence made by extreme right organizations, the Serbian Ministry of the Interior moved the location of the march out of the city center, thereby effectively banning the Pride. In October 2010 petrol bombs and rocks flew at the parade, after the authorities allowed it to go forward, announcing that they would protect the participants. A presence of some thousands of policemen guided the way for 1,000 marchers; several policemen were injured; a few dozen people were arrested in the wake of their anti-gay violence. In 2011 the interior ministry banned the Belgrade Pride Parade, allegedly because they saw the parade as an "obstruction of public transport, endangering health, public moral or safety of individuals and properties." Not a word from the Serbian Ministry of the Interior being preoccupied in this case with the obstruction of basic human rights. In 2013 it was the same.

Although the first LGBTQ event in Slovenia dates back almost 30 years, deep in the times of socialism, when in 1984 in Ljubljana the first coming-out public project called "Magnus" was organized (which was, in fact, the first coming out in all of the former Eastern European states). The first pride parade in Slovenia was not organized until 2001, and it was the result of an immediate provocation by an incident in a Ljubljana cafe where a gay couple was asked to leave for being homosexual. Though vandalism and beatings targeting the LGBTQ population held sway in the new millennium and repeated during the 2010s, the sign of a Slovenian society becoming more and more openly homophobic and transphobic happened in 2012, when Slovenians voted against the new Family Code. The new Family Code expanded provisions protecting the rights of children, such as outlawing corporal punishment, and expanded existing same-sex registered partnerships to have all the rights of married couples, except adoption (excluding step-child adoption).

A conservative group called Civil Initiative for the Family and the Rights of Children, which proposed the referendum to ban the new Family Code, "opposed same-sex unions and demanded the referendum out of respect for motherhood and fatherhood," which allegedly was a statement that would function as a "counter" statement to the proposed definition of family in the new Family Code, described as a "union of a child or children with one or two parents or guardians." It was clearly presented in the debates (not exempted from an invigorated racist and homophobic rhetoric) that if accepted, the new Family Code would be a first comprehensive overhaul of family legislation in 35 years (the last one was approved in the 1970s). The Family Code was rejected in the referendum held on 25 March 2012.

In 2011 the Pride Parade in Split, Croatia, was met with a face of primitivism and violence that shocked many. The parade was surrounded by hundreds of very hostile citizens of Split who were shouting "Kill the fag," making the fascist salute with their right hands and continuing to throw stones and various objects. The situation was shameful for Croatia, who in 2011 signed the treaty of accession to become the twenty-eighth member of the European Union.

To conclude, another task stays in the vision of the queering and that is to put clearly the place of necropolitics into queer and to expose the "queer death" as a process that develops hand in hand with global capitalism. It is not going on somewhere else but rather, it is here and now, occupying and amplifying the turbo fascist capitalist features in former Yugoslavia or the postmodern fascist disintegration of the social in the west European or US context.

US context? Eric Stanley in his text “Near Life, Queer Death: Overkill and Ontological Capture?”¹⁶ reported that thousands of mutilation of transgender people happened in the last decade. He calls this overkill as the transgender individuals are so mutilated that it transcends homicide; actually it is a fury of transphobic situation. The point is that this is not just a single situation somewhere in some rural spaces but a reality here and now in the developed urban spaces. Achille Mbembe has provocatively asked, “But what does it mean to do violence to what is nothing?” in order to explain how the queer approximates physical violence that marks the edges of subjectivity itself.

In short, it is clear that what global capitalism brings in front of us is a necessity to revisit globally the racist, homophobic and discriminatory processes, not as simple identity differences but as processes that are entangled with capital, new media technology and the change of the mode of life under capital’s brutal modes of racialization and exploitation.

Reproductions part of this text are images from the performance and installation, Iron Mask, White Torture, conceived by Marissa Lôbo in 2010. The project was presented in Secession, Vienna, 2010.

Dr. Marina Gržinić, philosopher, artist and theoretician. She is professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Institute of Fine Arts, Post-Conceptual Art, Vienna, Austria. Her last book is *Re-Politicizing art, Theory, Representation and New Media Technology*, Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna and Schlebrügge. Editor, Vienna 2008. Marina Gržinić in collaboration with Aina Šmid, produced more numerous video-films and media projects. They have exhibited at numerous exhibition projects and festivals (World Wide Video Festival, Den Haag; European Media Art Festival, Osnabruck; After de wall, Moderna Museet, Stockholm; 100 years of Lacan, at The Freud Museum; Net_art Condition project at theSteirische Herbst; Video Viewpoints Program MOMA New York; Gender check, MuMok, Vienna).

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¹⁶ Cf. Eric Stanley’s text at http://www.academia.edu/863819/Near_Life_Queer_Death_Overkill_and_Ontological_Capture (Accessed: November 5, 2013).