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SuperNova: Performing Race, Hybridity and Expanding the Geographical Imagination

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to explore the many socio-political, temporal and spatial factors that contribute to the formation of cultural identity. Through my video work, *SuperNova*, I examine how race is performed and the discursive structures that contribute to the process of racialization. The core question that is central to this thesis is how race is performed and the potential benefits and drawbacks of this performance. In chapter one, I explore how whiteness is performed and how racial hierarchies are maintained through performance. I critique the Aryan race discourse that is a part pf Iranian nationalist discourse of identity. In chapter two, I examine ethnic performances in the western art market and cultural institutions. I review several art stars and memoir writers from the near east that employ neo-orientalist aesthetics to appeal to the western voyeur. In chapter three, I introduce the possibility of new spatial dimensions and perspectives that become available to the hybrid subject. I introduce my concept my limbo logic and the emancipatory potential of this strategy. Additionally, I explore the possibilities of a futuristic narrative through alien subjectivity and I aim to contribute to ethno-futuristic discourses, scholarship and cultural production.

Keywords

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the original peoples and land in which this paper was produced; the Anishinaabe Peoples the Haudenosaunee Peoples and the Leni-Lunaape Peoples.

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<u>Preface</u>

"You identify as a person of colour?!!!" the gallerist glared at me, offended and appalled. I was taken aback, "Well yes, you see, I grew up in French Canada and as a person of... wait..." I looked at her with a perplexed expression. "How do you identify?" "I identify as Persian, I am white!" She said assertively and with self-adulation.

It was Vienna Art Week and I had come across the only booth that represented Iranian artists. Eagerly, I approached the woman and extended my hand: *salum, haleh shomah khoobeh? Ismeh man Rah hast. Man yeh honarmand hastam as Canada.*[1] She offered a limp handshake and said, "Are you Persian? My god you have a funny accent!"

She had a dark complexion, jet black hair, dark eyes and thick brown eyebrows. I had seen many fair skinned Iranians before but she was not one of them. "You live in New York?" I asked. "Yes, I live in New York!" "And you identify as White?" I asked. "Yes!!" She looked at me scrutinizingly and *chap chap.*[2]

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[1] "Hello, how are you? My name is Rah, I am an artist from Canada."

[2] *Chap Chap i*s a term in farsi that literally means left left. However it does have three implied meanings: They are looking at me in a suspicious way. They are unhappy with me. They want me stop what I am doing.

I became aware of my appearance; my hair was wet and damp and my shoes were dirty from the walk. It was pouring rain and I had walked over from Studio Das Weisse Haus.[3] Her hair was styled, shoes polished, she smelt of Mademoiselle; she smirked. "Do you represent diasporic artists?" I approached the topic coyly. "Many of my artists live and work in New York." She looked bewildered, as if I was talking to her nonsensically. As I was thinking of a polite way to relieve myself from the conversation, she became agitated, "I'm going out for a smoke!" She huffed and threw her cashmere scarf over her head like a *rousari**[4] and hastily stormed off with a cigarette pressed between her lips.

I glanced over to the painting on the wall. It was Farshid Larimian's, *The Son of Man and Eve.* The figure started breathing, a breathe that mimicked the pace of my own, I slowly walked away. I became aware of my body, my fingers tingled, my legs felt numb and her words echoed in my head. "You identify as a person of colour! I am White." My palms were sweaty, I felt nauseous and disoriented walking through the labyrinth of art booths, each wall covered with kitsch paintings. I became overwhelmed. The air felt humid and damp and the crowd began to amalgamate. I could no longer identify individual faces. I shifted my eyes back into focus on a woman who was laughing while drops of chardonnay spilled by her feet. Distressed, I started looking for my friends from the studio, I saw Katharina standing across the hall with another artist. I slowly walked over, she looked at me and gasped, "Rah, what has happened are you ill? You look so White!"

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[3] In German *Studio Das Weisse Haus* means the *White House* and this is where I was doing my residency in Vienna.

[4] *Rousari* is a Persian term for headscarf.

I: WhiteFace and the Aryan Race Myth

Who can claim whiteness? Does race shift culturally? How is race performed across cultures? I have dedicated the next few chapters to answering these question. This thesis critically analyses racial performance; how it is performed and the possible outcomes and drawbacks of these performances. In my work, I explore these questions as I assertively perform race and gender. My work focuses on trauma and recovery and approaches the body as a primary tool for intervention, revaluation, and redefinition of the post-colonial condition. This thesis will also analyze the leading characters in my video *SuperNova*. SuperNova is a television talent show parody that I wrote and in which I perform all seven characters. The contestants in the show are Oreo, Fatimeh and Coco. Each character examines issues of race and ethnic performance; Oreo performs a magic trick in whiteface, Fatimeh sings and performs a neo-orientalist ethnic identity and Coco performs a dance as a diasporic and hybrid subject. The characters perform in the galaxy *Messier 82* and present their talent in front of a panel of judges; Sirius, Mira and Bellatrix. The judges are named after existing stars from various constellations. The host of the show is Starlight. The three leading characters: Oreo, Fatimeh, and Coco address contemporary issues of spatialized, racialized and gendered identity and performance. Through these characters, I explore how race is performed and conceptually engage with Judith Butler's theorization of *performativity*, Butler states that gender is a construct and a performance maintained through the process of reiteration.[5] However, Butler is reluctant to claim that the theory of performativity can be transposed to race:

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[5] According to Butler a performative is a discursive practice that enacts and produces names. A performance of gender is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms; it involves a power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration. Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter* (New York, 1993), 13-20.

Racial presumptions invariably underwrite the discourse on gender in ways that need to be made explicit, but that race and gender ought not to be treated as simple analogies. I would therefore suggest that the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race. Many of these debates have centered on the status of construction, whether race is constructed in the same way as gender. [6]

It is important to consider Butler's reservation in regards to the relationship of race and gender. Race and gender are both socially framed and constructed, perhaps differently but by understanding that race is a social construct that is relational and intersectional, highlights the active role of humans in the process of racialization.[7] Rather than merely treat these categories as comparable, it is more productive to examine how these categories intersect to contribute to one's experiences. Kimberlee Crenshaw's theory of *intersectionality* considers how race and gender, along with many other contributing factors such as class and age intersect and shape our experiences. Crenshaw argues:

In mapping the intersections of race and gender, the concept does engage dominant assumptions that race and gender are separate categories. By tracing the categories

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[6] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), Preface, xvi- xvii.

[7] Coates, Rodney D. and Abby L. Ferber, David L. Brunsma,*The Matrix of Race: Social Construction, Intersectionality, and Inequality* (Canada: Sage Publications, 2018), Introduction.

to their intersections, I hope to suggest a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable.[8]

Crenshaw and Butler both understand that race and gender are naturally seen as distinct categories but by understanding their intersection, one can better perceive the layers and complexities of gendered and racialized experiences. If a binaristic relationship and discursive practice of gender and racial performances constitutes our experiences and even forms the very practice of gender then analogously, race can similarly be a construct that is shaped through discourse and reiteration. For example a woman is a woman in relation to a man, people of colour are of colour in relation to whites, and the other is an other in relation to the self and so on.[9]

Butler and Crenshaw's theories are the base for understanding my particular performance of gender and race. My performance of whiteness considers the discursive structures and social forces that construct race and the power of reiteration and mimicry. Unlike the performance of blackface in nineteenth and twentieth century minstrel shows[10] which is steeped in a history of degradation and dehumanization; the conscious performance of whiteface functions as a critique. However, many people of colour mimic whiteness unconsciously and with no intention to critique white supremacy. Often people of colour mimic whiteness because they want to obtain

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[8] Kimberlee Crenshaw, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement,* (New York: New Press, 1995), 377-378.

[9] Fanon, Franz, *Black Skin, White Masks* (UK, Edition de Seuil: 1952), 14, 29, 83.

[10] *S*ince 1843 blackface and minstrel shows were a part of American popular culture and influenced music, dance, stage and film performance for over a 100 years.
Stark, Seymour, *Men in BlackFace: True Stories of the Minstrel Show* (USA: Xilbris Corporation, 2000).

access to the dominant group. According to Homi Bhabba, people of colour can only ever mimic whiteness; they can never actually be white:

> Every attempt to repeat the stereotypes will be a deadening mismatch and the mismatch will alienate the subject from the image rather than tie them securely to it. If we think about authenticity as performative, we can see that it opens up the idea of the reiterative as not only referring back to but also always misfitting, not matching, a prior or imagined original.[11]

People of colour can never attain whiteness, however, the performance is rewarded and praised by the dominant group. As one gets closer in appearance, attitude and accurate in their imitation, they are given access and begin to receive some of the perks that belong to the dominant group. Consequently, the performance of whiteness involves internalizing white supremacy and also entails disassociating oneself and impugning other minorities to be accepted as white.

 For many members of the Iranian diaspora, the performance of whiteness and struggles with self categorization are a complex social phenomena. In Iran, it is a part of the national discourse of identity that Iranians are Aryans, insofar that the name Iran even means the "land of Aryans:"

> Max Muller, who in 1861 claimed that the term *ariya* found in the Zand-Avesta indicated both a people and a land, and that *airyanem vaejah* in fact meant the 'Aryan Seed' *[sic]* as it were, denoting the origin of Aryans. Since

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[11] Amelia Jones, *Performing the Body/ Performing the Text* (NY: Routledge,1999), 71.

then, and to this day, Iran has been abundantly and erroneously referred to

as the 'land of Aryans' in popular and scientific writings alike, creating an

implicit ambiguity about whom those Aryans actually are. [12]

Reza Ebrahimi provides the reader with a thorough analysis of the Aryan race myth permeated in present day visual cultural and political discourses of identity. According to Ebrahimi, Aryanism is a self-designation made by Iranian nationalists and traditionalists that link Iranians to a European brethren rather than their Middle Eastern neighbours. Ebrahimi argues that the Aryan assumption plays a vital role in Iranian self-categorization through two interrelated processes: self-orientalization and dislocation.[13] He argues that the nationalist tendency is to romanticize pre-Islamic Iran and elevate Iranians because of their historical affluence and power. Many nationalists maintain that Iran is superior to the rest of the Middle East because of its history. Ebrahimi draws on this notion of self-romanticization to offer his definition of self-orientalization. Moreover, nationalists claim that due to an accident of geography, Iranians are middle eastern rather than European and Ebrahimi argues this as a symptom of *dislocation*.[14] Lastly, he contends that the term aryan was a philological device used to explain the similarities between Indo-European languages and only incorporated into a romantic idea of racial purity later in the twentieth century.[15] In contemporary lexicon, the term Aryan is notoriously associated with Nazi Germany. Interestingly, during the Holocaust, many Iranian Jews were exempt from

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[12] Reza Zia Ebrahimi, "Self- Orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of the Aryan Discourse in Iran." UK: I*ranian Studies*, Vol 44, 2011, 462.

[13] Ibid, 468.

[14] Ibid, 470.

[15] Ibid, 448.

the Nuremberg Racial Laws. The Iranian Jewish community were protected by Iranian diplomats because of strong cultural alliances with Germany, along with shared sentiments of Iranians as "pure aryans."[16]

Therefore, as descendants from the "land of Aryans," Iranians are indoctrinated with ideologies of white supremacy and inculcated with racial superiority. The struggle with racial superiority becomes further complicated for Iranians in the diaspora. The struggle with self-categorization is unique amongst the Iranian diaspora because many identify as white but have racialized experiences. Within the multi-generational Iranian family there is a struggle with self-designation as the first generation of the Iranian diaspora still maintains an ideology centered around belonging to the white race and the second generation are more likely to align themselves with people of colour.[17] This example demonstrates that race is relational and that the context has shifted. The first generation may still consider themselves white, but even if they occupy the lowest rung of the racial ladder, this does not exempt them from racial based violence and injustices.

Neda Maghbouleh addresses the complexity of these experiences in her book *The Limits of Whiteness*. She examines issues of self-categorization amongst multi-generational Iranian families living in the diaspora in America. Maghbouleh investigates the racial contradictions that shape the lives of Iranian-Americans. She asserts that in a sociological context, becoming white

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[16] Ibid, 459.

[17] Neda Maghbouleh, "The Limits of Whiteness in Iranian Americans and the the Everyday Politics of Race," Interview with *Ajam Media Collective,* (Montreal, August 19, 2014).

entails impugning other minorities and becoming affluent.[18] In this case, race is tied to class. Perhaps, one can argue that performing whiteness involves dissociating oneself from other racialized groups and also becoming wealthy. Maghbouleh states that the first generation are more likely to identify as white and are imbued with a sense of Iranian exceptionalism and this is also rooted in philology and the longevity of the language and the culture.[19] According to Ebrahimi, as early as grade school, textbooks perpetuate ideas about Iranian superiority and literally state that the people of Iran are of the aryan race and their language is Persian.[20] The second generation, however, identify as people of colour and feel a generational divide and difference, from their parents. Many of them having experienced post 9/11 Islamaphobia and prejudices targeting Iranians, Iranian exceptionalism is not a part of their lexicon nor lived experience.[21]

Whiteness shifts across cultures and nations and is therefore an unstable category and the performance of whiteness is not a phenomenon that is unique to Iranians. Globally people are encouraged through visual and dominant cultures to approximate European beauty ideals. Individuals are bleaching their skin, straightening their hair, getting rhinoplasty, purchasing items beyond their means and even changing their eye colour at the risk of going blind to adhere to these beauty standards. This global attempt at mimicking and performing whiteness creates difficulties in narrowing down a specific white group, so this raises the question, who can claim whiteness?

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[18] Maghbouleh, " The Limits of Whiteness."

[19] Maghbouleh, " The Limits of Whiteness."

[20] Reza Ebrahimi, "Uses and Abuses," 463.

[21] Maghbouleh, " The Limits of Whiteness."

It is difficult to define whiteness. It is not clear who is White as this shifts culturally and even throughout the western world. Are the Irish, Israeli, Italian, Scandinavian communities residing in North America considered white? Or are these groups that have racialized experiences? Historically, the Irish and Israelis were subjected to the atrocities of hate crimes and genocide but currently would be considered as belonging to the dominant groups. Do ethnic accents and immigrant statuses allow these groups to be treated fairly in society? Or do they still experience racial based injustices? According to Anne Louis Keating in her essay *Interrogating Whiteness, (De)Constructing Race*, Keating asserts that the the Puritans did not consider themselves white, they identified as Christians, English or free. During this time the term white did not represent a racial category and was not until 1680 and with the racialization of slavery, that the term was used to describe a specific group of people and the term emerged to distinguish one group from the other.[22] Keating states that white has been used since the late seventeenth century to designate an elite group of people and many people today consider white Europeans, light skinned Jews the Irish and Catholics of European descent as white, whereas in the eighteenth and nineteenth century they were not considered white.[23] Based on Keatings findings, the question of who is white is unclear and shifts throughout history. Keating references Kobena Mercer in expanding her definition of whiteness:

One of the signs of the times is that we really don't know what white is.

The real challenge in the new cultural politics of difference is to make

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[22] Keating, AnnLouise, *"Interrogating Whiteness. (De) Constructing Race"* in *College English*, Vol, 57, Nov.8 (Dec.,1995), 912.

[23] Ibid, 912.

> 'whiteness' visible for the first time, as a culturally constructed ethnic identity historically contingent upon the disavowal and violent denial of difference. Whiteness has functioned as a pseudo-universal category that hides its specific values, epistemology, and other attributes under the guise of a nonracialized, supposedly colorless, human nature.[24]

Moreover, the concept of whiteness is associated with wealth, purity, beauty and affluence. For people of colour living in the western world, we are aware of our position as an other, we perform the other, create pan-ethnic coalitions with other others and understand that we are positioned as diametrically opposed to the white race. We learn that we are "of colour" only in relation to white people. To survive in the dominant culture, one is coerced to assimilate, to adopt the language, culture, customs and values of the dominant group. Any deviation from these ideals is met with consequences and results in hostile environments and alienation. To avoid these ramifications, one attempts to dissociate oneself from the stereotypes assigned to one's ethnicity. In front of white counterparts, one performs their ideals, their whiteness since mere association, provides privileges. One attempts to pass and sometimes believe that one has passed as white. One then becomes alienated both from the white world and from other members of the homeland. The process of assimilation means that individuals are no longer relatable to the community in their land of origin. Unfortunately, there is a desire for integration into the dominant racial group which often requires the rejection of one's heritage.

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[24] Ibid, 904.

Following this path, the character Oreo embarks on a journey of self-annihilation and integration while dismissing her heritage. Oreo performs whiteness and struggles with 'passing' as white. To perform race means to mimic the available codes, stereotypes and signifiers that are attributed to that race. Performing race also involves sharing in the politics, language and cultural rituals of that race. Oreo performs in a position of whiteness by performing the reiterative quality of racial performance to mimic whiteness. Oreo reenacts the characteristics assigned to whiteness, and in doing so, she repeats the available stereotypes. Her performance consists of constructing her image referencing available stereotypes of whiteness depicted in visual culture while distancing herself from her racialized identity. She performs the characteristics of the term white; speaks the dominant language with a clear Anglicized accent, she dresses in playful pastels, has blond hair and blue eyes. In the first Oreo video, she unveils her hijab and calls for liberation, and materializes white feminist universalizing rhetoric.[25] Oreo's performance of whiteness involves using a vocabulary and existing in a digital medium that is utilized by a western reader such as Instagram, Tinder, Bitmoji and Youtube. It is noteworthy to mention that in the globalized world, many countries have access to these technologies but Oreo mimics and performs whiteness on these applications. She affiliates with the white voyeur through an implied sameness of shared ideas, religion, and thus creates a distance from her othered self. According to Jose Esteban Munoz, "subjects who attempt to identify with and assimilate to dominant ideologies pay every day of their lives. The price of the ticket: to find self within the dominant public sphere, we need

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[25] "The central issue in feminist theory in the 1980s became the universalizing and homogenizing of women. In effect this was 'the problem of essentialism'—another form of the problem of sameness in understanding gender difference, no longer, as in the first stage of feminism, sameness as the prerequisite for equality with men but now sameness among women."
Won Lee, Jae, *Paul and the Politics of Difference: A Contextual Case Study of the Jewish- Gentile Difference in Galatians and Romans* (UK, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2014), 42.

to deny self.[26]" Oreo aligns herself with the Western viewer through social media platforms where her performance of whiteness reflects her position and performance in the Western diaspora. She has a Tinder profile, shares images of her Persian cat named Aryan, takes endless selfies, communicates through hashtags and her performance is an exaggeration of young privileged adolescents that one is confronted with on these social platforms.

Her performance of whiteness is one that mimics the western cliche of a "valley girl" rather than the self-orientalizing Aryan proclamation of the nationalist Iranians. Oreo rejects and even denies her Persian background because it is not beneficial for her to identify as Persian in the West. The character uses whiteness as an aesthetic and this aesthetic is racialized, gendered, and classed. Oreo is a rich, trust fund baby, that is adorned in baby pink. Further, her high pitched baby voice contributes to her infantilization, and this digital alteration is both a critique of the infantilization of adult woman in western media culture and also emphasizes the absurdity of the character's performance of whiteness. Oreo speaks the dominant language in its clearest form but as Franz Fanon notes, she can only ever imitate the oppressor's language. She can master the language and earn their respect but she can never actually be white. Through the mastery of the language she loses her sense of identity and connection to the homeland, even though she will never be fully accepted as belonging to the dominant group or her native community.[27] Additionally, Oreo struggles with passing as white as her traditional Persian features and long hair and dark eyebrows give her away. José Esteban Muñoz argues:

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[26] Munoz, Jose Estaban, *Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 95.

[27] Franz Fanon, "Black Skin," XV, 47, 55, 64.

Passing is often not about a bold faced opposition to a dominant paradigm or a wholesale selling out to that form. Like disidentification itself, passing can be a third modality where a a dominant structure is co-opted, worked on and against. The subject who passes can be simultaneously identifying with and reject a dominant form. Both modalities of performing the self, disidentification and passing are often strategies of survival.[28]

Oreo similarly attempts to pass as a strategy to survive and to continue to be celebrated on these platforms. Oreo engages with individuals on Instagram and Tinder, many who, when confronted with the character, believe that she is a real person. Oreo blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality when she passes. "Passing" is a term commonly used in drag culture and refers to an individual who acts as a member of the opposite sex. Moreover, drag can be used to pass in society as a member of the opposite gender. For example, many lesbians use drag to reap some benefits of male privilege.[29] Based on the same premise, Oreo's performance of whiteness becomes an act of racial drag. Therefore, when she passes, she can enter the system and disrupt it from within. For example, in many Tinder conversations, Oreo addresses issues of race while performing as a white supremacist. Oreo asks men on this dating app if they will dress up like neo-nazis and she repeatedly impugns other minorities to evoke a reaction. Unaware that they are participating in a performance, these men either challenge her or encourage her. Thus, Oreo's performance is meta and self-reflexive; reflecting on itself to make a critique. Oreo's whiteface can be read as a critique of historical and contemporary misrepresentations of people of colour.

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[28] Jose Esteban Munoz, "Disidentification," 108.

[29] Myers, Joanne, *The A to Z of the Lesbian Liberation Movement: Still the Rage* (UK: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 107.

Therefore, Oreo's performance of racial drag can be understood as a subversive act. Unlike drag that merely imitates gender, with little intention of abolishing gender constructs, essentialist naturalism or patriarchal systems, Oreo's racial drag challenges racial hierarchy.[30] She satirizes white supremacist rhetoric and confronts both Iranian nationalists and Western and European imperialists.

Oreo's performance confronts the viewer in several ways; it blatantly demonstrates the violent nature of white supremacy, which the viewer may be actively maintaining. In regards to the Iranian diaspora, Oreo illustrates that claiming an Aryan heritage does not exempt Iranians from racial based violence. The self-referential nature of Oreo's performance engages with Claire Bishop's concept of *relational antagonism.*[31] Oreo ruffles the system and creates a friction and discomfort with the viewer while stimulating a self-reflexive tension.[32]

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[30] "In a racial order, a dominant group which thinks of itself as distinct and superior, raises its social position by exploiting, controlling, and keeping down others who are categorized in racial and ethnic terms." Blauner, Robert, *Racial Oppression in America*, (New York: Harper & Row 1972).

[31] " This relational antagonism would be predicated not on social harmony, but on exposing that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of this harmony. It would thereby provide a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to one other."
Bishop, Claire, *"*Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" in *October Magazine*, Vol 110, (Fall 2004), 79.

[32] Ibid, 78. Claire Bishop describes Santiago Sierra's work as relational antagonism.

II: Oriental Drag

In the previous chapter, I discussed how performing race involves performing the available stereotypes, characteristics, language and codes that are attributed to a particular race. In the same vein, performing one's ethnicity involves reproducing and reinforcing tropes associated with that ethnic group. Aforementioned in chapter one, based on a binaristic view of race, the racialized *self* understands itself as *other* only in relation to the dominant group and racialized individuals experience otherness only when they are confronted with the dominant group. For example, migrant communities that shift from belonging to a dominant group in their native land, only to be confronted with their otherness in their host nation.

The next few paragraphs of this chapter are dedicated to a critique of institutional multicultural policy because it is important to highlight the many dimensions and spaces in which race is performed in the art world. This study will also examine a few artists and writers to demonstrate the legacy of historical and contemporary artists that perform their ethnicity. Shirin Neshat, Lalla Essaydi, Bouchra Almutawakel, are a few names amongst many artists who are commonly critiqued for reproducing self-exoticizing imagery as they perform their ethnicity for the western voyeur:

> Whereas Orientalism is based on how the West constructs the East, this Neo-Orientalism is grounded on how the cultural East comes to terms with an orientalized East. The term "self-exoticisation" *[sic]* is used to explain this situation. In a radical sense, it could direct the work's internal rationale and what even governs the aesthetic choices of an artist toward an unrealistic and derivative

product, which has been purely shaped by global hegemonic powers for the so-called best interests of the "Other."[33]

Similarly, institutions contribute to the ghettoization of culture by incorporating institutional multiculturalist policies and practice. Major cultural institutions and museums appear to provide the public with authentic cultural experiences and diverse epistemologies. However, these institutions claim little responsibility for reproducing culturally homogenous and orientalist discourse. In Anne Ring Petersen essay "Identity Politics, Institutional Multiculturalism, and the Global Artworld," Peterson argues:

> Institutional multiculturalism is a regulatory instrument appropriated and deployed by the West to continue its cultural hegemony. It segregates artists of color by categorizing the work as "ethnic art." Institutional multiculturalism is an obstacle to true artistic recognition as white artists works are valued on artistic merit whereas non western artists are recognized as representatives of an ethnic community and local culture to which their ancestors belong. Cultural identity is often projected onto the works of art.[34]

Many exhibitions such as *She Who Tells A Story, Fertile Crescent*, and *Iran Inside Out,* have been critiqued for showcasing works by prominent female makers of the Middle East and Arab art

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[33] Keshmirshekan, Hamid, "Reclaiming Cultural Space: The Artist's Performativity versus the State's Expectations in Contemporary Iran" in *Performing the Iranian State,* edited by Staci Gem Scheiwiller. (UK and USA: Anthem Press, 2013),152.

[34] Petersen, Anne Ring, "Identity Politics, Institutional Multiculturalism, and the Global Artworld" in T*hird Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Criticism,* Vol.26, Issue 2, (March 2012),197.

world. Many of the artists featured in these exhibitions recreate self-exoticizing imagery which is marketed, commodified, and consumed by Western audiences.[35] Furthermore, cultural centers designate segregated spaces in the institution for diverse programming and in doing so, they create a facade of cultural and racial inclusion. These tokenist exhibitions present the audience with a constructed image that appeals to Western taste and demand ethnic artists to recreate and perform their otherness for western consumption. Both artists and curators continue to go unquestioned and unchallenged whilst promoting and circulating exoticizing imagery. Moreover, exhibitions that showcase works by artists solely from the Middle East and Arab world serve to fill a mandate of diverse programming through multicultural institutional policy. These showcases homogenize the many diverse cultures in the Middle East, Arab world and North Africa, without highlighting the idiosyncratic characteristics of these regions or countries.[36] These cultures share similarities but the nuances of culture practice and ethnic identity are ignored. These showcases are temporary exhibitions that are in segregated areas or "wings" within the museum. Museums develop cultural programming to provide access to marginal cultures and to represent marginalized and unrepresented groups.[37] These programs situate the minority culture in relation to the dominant cultural community and continue to grant the power of representation to the dominant culture.[38] The artists and marginal communities rarely exhibit outside of these designated spaces and alongside contemporary or historical works by European

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[35] Few Shirin Neshat, Lalla Essaydi, Shadi Ghadirian and Newsha Tavakolian.

[36] Iran; Turkey; Morocco; Egypt; Lebanon; Palestine.

[37] Quinn, Margaret, "Intercultural Museum Practice: An Analysis of the Belonging Project in Northern Ireland" in *Museums and Innovation*, edited by Zvjezdana Antos, Annette B. Fromm, Viv Golding (UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 22.

[38] Ibid, 23.

or Western artists.[39] The institution then commends itself for its diverse programming while still excluding these artists from the dominant space. These exclusionary practices are continuously exercised by cultural institutions and go unchallenged. Homi Bhabba refers to this practice as a *musee imaginaire*.[40] The *musee imaginaire* is synonymous with the imaginary Orient; both are illusive and cater to western voyeurism and consumption. Ethnicity is performed in the *musee imaginaire* and otherness is sought after for its exoticism and exchange value.[41] Similarly, the art market encourages artists to perform their ethnicity for monetary gain. In her review of the exhibition *Inside Out*, curator and writer Yulia Tikhonova critiques the western art market and artists that cater to the market's orientalising agenda:

In context of booming interest towards Iranian art in the West, more than ever the artists from the Middle East are conscious of the expectation that the art market invested in them. They are eager to wear veil or beard and make their pattering even more esoteric to show that the West expected to see, *[sic]* and achieve some economic, political, or other benefits. By focusing on distinctions of dress, and body type, the artists take up the references that are rooted in the past, ancestry and place

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[39] Reid, Natasha S.*Stimulating Change Through Story-Telling. Art Museums Educators of Color Share Their Lived Experiences with Multicultural Issues* in Multiculturalism in Art Museums Today, edited by Joni Boyd Acuff, Laura Evans, (UK: Rowman & Littlefield: 2014), 26.

[40] "Western connoisseurship locates cultures 'in a kind of *musee imaginaire*,' in a grid of its own choosing, wherein the urge to universalize and historicize readily acknowledges the social and historical diversity of cultures but at the same time transcends them and renders them transparent, illusive."
Bhabha, Homi K, *The Location of Culture*, (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 208.

[41] Haymes, Stephen Nathan, *Race, Culture, and the City: A Pedagogy for Black Urban Studies,* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 40.

of belonging. They self-Orientalise by offering a voyeuristic glimpse into their life,

acting as a camera obscura for the polluting Western gaze. [42]

The market capitalizes on leading art stars from the Middle East who consciously reproduce orientalist imagery and fantasy. They perform fetishizing and dehumanizing imagery derived from orientalist paintings, literature and discourse.[43] Rather than engaging the western audience by sharing cultural practices, craft, or bringing them into contact with humanizing representations, they reproduce cultural tropes such as the veil, calligraphy, Islamic patterning, the gun and bullets. These art stars, perhaps undesirably, have become the face of Islam and Middle Eastern women. They strategically perform stereotypes of the veiled woman in an uncritical manner and capitalize on the plight of women from Islamic countries. The aesthetic decisions and performance of "Islam" reinforced by these artists create an Islamic aesthetic.[44] This aesthetic uses available stereotypes and cultural motifs that are understood by the western audience as markers of Islam.

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[42] Tikhonova, Yulia, "Self Orientalise: Iran Inside Out" in *Contemporary Practices in Visual Art From the Middle East,* Vol. VI, (2009), 108.

[43] Examine Lalla Essaydi, *Les Femmes Du Maroc Series.* In these works the figures are often reclining and luring the viewer with their seductive gaze. Essaydi utilizes several stereotypical tropes such as veiling, calligraphy, bullets and even referencing jean Auguste Dominique Ingres painting *La Grande Odalisque.* The titles of the works are also problematic such as Harem Beauty 1, Reclining Odalisque and Bullets which reduces the subjects in the images to problematic and stereotypical tropes.

[44] I am not using the concept of Islamic aesthetic in its intended meaning. Rather, I am argue that this a performed and a problematic aesthetic application. Traditionally, philosophical aesthetics focuses on artistic beauty expressed in human creativity. By contrast, Islamic aesthetics understands that beauty is not limited to human creation but can also be experienced in nature, behavior and images.
Hanash, Idham Mohammad, *The Theory of Islamic Art: Asesthetic Concepts and Epistemic Structure,* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2017),79.

These artists, perhaps unwillingly, act as native informants[45] and perform an identity that is recognizable to the West. In her critical text, Reina Lewis investigates how eastern female writers act as native informants and use descriptions of female appearance and beauty to present an oriental and ethnic identity to their occidental audience.[46] She engages with Butler's performativity theory and focuses on reiteration to investigate how female memoir writers perform race and ethnicity. Lewis critiques the writings of two early twentieth century Turkish authors who wrote between 1900-1940; Haliede Edib Adivan and Demetra Vaka Brown. These authors wrote in the occident about their homelands and contributed to orientalist misrepresentation. Referencing Butler, Lewis argues that these writers perform and reiterate the dominant modes of orientalist spectacle for the occidental reader. Traditionally, orientalist art and literature prioritized occidental male representations to that of representation made by "oriental" women.[47]

According to Lewis, Western women similarly produced orientalist imagery but were often overlooked as many critics read the feminine perspective as essential to their meaning. However, Adivan and Brown had a direct relation with the harem and the harem was a space forbidden to men. Westerners were obsessed and fantasized about lesbianism and the overt sexualization of women in the harem. These female writers where aware of male orientalist fantasies and they

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[45] Spivak defines the native informant as a "name for that mark of expulsion from the name of Man - a mark crossing out the impossibility of the ethical relation." The role of the native informant is to provide indigenous knowledge and act as a moderator between their country of origin and the host nation. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *Critique of Post-Colonial Reason*, (USA: Harvard College, 1999), 6.

[46] Reina Lewis, "Cross-Cultural Reiterations: Demetra Vaka Brown and the Performance of Racialized Female Beauty" in *Performing the Body/ Performing the Text,* edited by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, (London ; New York : Routledge, 1999), 55.

[47] Ibid, 53-55.

performed these stereotypes and illustrated erotic harem scenes in their writings.[48] Additionally, these authors dissociate themselves from their orientalist subjects by aligning themselves with the occidental reader. They write in English, use a visual language and motifs that are familiar to the West. They sexualize the female subjects, create an image of the inferior other, and play with the classificatory system recognizable to the West.[49] By reiterating racialized and ethnic performative identification markers created by the West, the authors cater to the western gaze. Lewis quotes Butler's argument about reiteration and states that these authors rely on historical reiterations of performativity to be recognizable to the western reader, knowing if they do not perform the oriental fantasy, they cease being readable to their audience.[50] If these authors want their memoirs to be legitimized accounts made by authentic "oriental" women, their performance has to be recognizable to the western reader and they must perform the available codes and stereotypes within the existing western discourse, imagery and system of representation.

In her article "Performing Race," Rena Fraden states: "In attempting to escape being an artist completely predetermined by existing categories, one risks becoming an artist with no audience.[51]" This is a real concern for many artists because whether they are applying for cultural funding or participating in the western art market, racialized artists works are read through their racialized identities and they are expected to adhere to predetermined codifications. The art market thrives on works that reproduce orientalist images by Middle Eastern artists whether

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[48] Ibid, 53-63.

[49] Ibid, 66.

[50] Ibid, 65.

[51] Fraden, Rena. "Performing Race" in *American Literary History*, Vol. 15, No.1 (UK: Oxford University Press, 2003,) pp. 205.

working as native informants in the diaspora, or artists working directly in the Middle East and Arab world. The work of these artists does not serve the interests of their native communities. Instead, reinforce orientalist ideologies by performing an oriental aesthetic and the oriental aesthetic allows their work to be readable to international buyers, collectors and scholars giving them both validation and the stamp of authenticity.

How can one subversively perform an oriental aesthetic for the Western audience? In chapter three of my analysis of the character Coco, I argue that *their[52]* particular performance of the *other* and reclaiming oneself as alien can be a form of resistance and empowerment. Unlike Coco who is in a resistive position and demonstrates the transformative potential of reclaiming otherness, the character *Fatimeh* performs a caricature of her otherness to critically highlight self-exoticization and challenge both the western fantasy of the "oriental" and Iranian nationalists self-romanticizing tendencies. Fatimeh performs and reiterates orientalist fantasies. Similar to Oreo, Fatimeh satirically performs in racial drag. Thus, she dresses in traditional garments that are no longer worn in contemporary Iranian society. She sings in an archaic language, she offers tea to passerbys on the street, she ululates, dances on Persian rugs, sings about kings, mythological birds, and battles in the night skies. She is frozen in time and stagnant and presented as a historical and romantic figure that has seemingly been untouched by modernity. She is presented as a historical artifact and in *SuperNova* she is said to be a "lost artifact dug out from the sands of Andromeda." Fatimeh brings attention to the troubling classification system of ethnic art by strategically objectifying herself and presenting the body as an art object. Arguably,

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[52] Singular they is a gender neutral pronoun. Coco is a post-human, non binary character, therefore traditional pronouns are not relevant. Please note that Coco is not plural or multiple entities.
Wales, Kate, *Personal Pronouns in Present Day English* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996),125.

she also performs the fantasy of the romanticized self constructed by Iranian nationalists, for example, when she changes her name to *Gholdokt*. Name changing is a common practice in Iran as many Iranians want to disassociate themselves from Arabic people, which historically they have blamed for Iran's shortcomings. Thus, they often change their names to ancient Zoroastrian names. Further, many nationalists want to return to an archaic Middle Persian language such as Pahlavi, in favor of stripping the language of all Arabic and French loan words. In *SuperNova*, Fatimeh changes her name to an ancient Zoroastrian name that means *flower head*. This appeal to Zoroastrianism invokes a romantic notion of the pre-Islamic self and is in response to what Ebrahimi calls *self-orientalization*:

> Self-orientalization partly takes root in Iranian intellectuals' lack of adverse feeling towards European thought. In contrast to formally colonized lands, nationalism in Iran was not about to emancipate Iranians from colonial rule, but to catch up with Europe in terms of military, economic and political advancement. There was therefore less of a desire for emancipation or detachment from Europe's grasp than a willingness to either prove through the relentless reiteration of pre-Islamic achievements that Iranians are not a lesser people…Lack of a desire for detachment from Europe coupled with the inferiority complex already mentioned caused an internalization of Orientalism's prejudices towards Islam and the east. [53]

Nationalists recognized the prejudices against the Orient as true but argued that it should not be applied to Iranians because of their pre-Islamic achievements. Therefore, self-orientalization

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[53] Ebrahami, "Uses and Abuses," 468.

became a strategy to protect Iranians from European preconceptions with the Orient.[54]

To further perform the romanticized self, Fatimeh also sings in Pahlavi, that is, Middle Persian without any Arabic and French loan words. Many Iranian purists believe that contemporary Farsi has been spoiled and tainted with borrowed terms. Ebrahami argues that Iranians elevated the puritan fashion of *parsi negari,* that is, Persian void of all Arabic.[55] Fatimeh's dialect is not understood by the contemporary Farsi speaker. PhD. Miguel Angel Andres-Toledo, an Avesta and Pahlavi linguist and professor at the University of Toronto, who translated the song in *SuperNova* from English to Pahlavi, stated that only ten scholars in the world may comprehend Middle Persian and even these scholars require a Pahlavi dictionary.[56] Therefore, Fatimeh's Pahlavi song is incomprehensible to both Western and Eastern audiences. Fatimeh embodies the characteristics of a mythical and romantic illusion and the use of this obscure language contributes to the nonsensical nature of her performance.

In chapter one, I examined Butler's notion of reiteration in her performative theory. Butler argues that the process of reiteration is fundamental in maintaining gender and racial constructs.[57] Similarly, Fatimeh uses language and its reiterative quality to repeat and act racial and ethnic constructs. However, Fatimeh's *raison d'etre* is not merely to perform an oriental aesthetic and challenge Iranian nationalists and western orientalists. Fatimeh's satirical performance highlights the complexity of self-exoticization. In *SuperNova*, Fatimeh performs an exaggerated and

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[54] Ibid, 469.

[55] Ibid, 467.

[56] Toleda, personal communication, December 2, 2017.

[57] Butler, "Bodies that Matter," 13-20.

farcical display of wailing women. After her performance, Fatimeh receives a "golden ringer," and dramatically falls to her knees and weeps as if in mourning. Her arms are positioned to resemble a crucified martyr and she pounds her chest while wailing and rocking back and forth. She aestheticizes grief by using her body to perform the visual gestures of this cultural ritual. This practice is performed at funerals and in times of mourning; it is not a celebratory gesture. Fatimeh is performing a caricature of her ethnic identity and brings attention to the construct of orientalist imagery by occidental artist and writers, contemporary native informants and Iranian nationalists that continue to perform ethnicity in their works. Moreover, she highlights the aestheticization, performative nature and racialization of grief. In *SuperNova,* the performance of grief is racialized and becomes a performance of race.

Through the strategies Fatimeh's character utilizes to critique and subvert, her performance becomes racial drag. In his essay "The White to be Angry," José Esteban Muñoz discusses the American performance artist Vaginal Davis and her whiteface drag performances. Muñoz describes Davis's performance as "terrorist drag" and asserts that by challenging the viewer in this performative style, Davis is: "creating an uneasiness, an uneasiness in desire, which works to confound and subvert the social fabric.[58]" In addition, Muñoz argues that Davis exploits her otherness and by doing so, enacts cultural critique. Fatimeh similarly exploits her otherness and performs an unsettling desire; one that belongs to both an occidental and nationalist Iranian fantasy. Fatimeh seduces the viewer with her luring gaze, mystical garments and mesmerizing song. In *SuperNova,* she coyly approaches the stage. She is wearing traditional garments, and rather than greeting the panel with the contemporary and Islamic *salam*, she says the traditional

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[58] Munoz, Jose Esteban, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (USA, London: University of Minnesota Press,1999), 100.

greeting *dooroot*. This linguistic differentiation alludes to a romantic and pre-Islamic notion of the self and the Iranian nationalist desire to return to tradition. To further highlight this exoticism, Fatimeh sings a song that is in Middle Persian, as she sings her face blooms into a flower. The spectacle is intriguing but also terrifying as the metamorphosis is rather more grotesque than beautiful. The flower head scene is parodic and it becomes an extreme act of self-exoticization. Throughout *SuperNova*, Fatimeh performs the occidental and Iranian fantasies of the exotic self/other and satirizes it, thereby disrupting the viewer's fantasy.

Supernova strategically uses satire, parody and comedy as tools for communication and subversion. Comedy as a tool is utilized critically and allows comics to engage in socially charged discourses that are cloaked in entertainment.[59] In her book *Performing Marginality: Humour, Gender and Cultural Critique*, Joanne R Gilbert presents her term *marginal humor* and its potential to be subversive:

> Another strategy of marginal humor is subversion. Like self-deprecation, strategic subversion through humor has been studied primarily as it is used by women. Indeed both strategies are features of marginal humor…. It is clear, however, that these two strategies may dovetail within a single joke. My stupid bitch joke is a good example of this. By insulting myself, I achieve several goals: (1) I showed the audience the ludicrousness of the situation (2) I illustrated the abuse women face on the street daily; (3) I bested the fictive abuse through humor, thereby winning the "last laugh" and maintaining the ultimate power position; and (4) I exploded the

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[59] Gilbert, Joanne, R, *Performing Marginality: Humour, Gender and Cultural Critique* (USA: Wayne University Press, 2004), 3.

myth that women are weak, defenseless, or inferior in any way by having assuaged

the male ego while simultaneously showing that anyone capable of such a retort is

clearly anything but stupid.[60]

As Gilbert so shrewdly outlines, humor can be a powerful tool. Similarly, through humor

Fatimeh attempts to illustrate the ludicrousness of racial stereotypes by performing them. She

illustrates the violent and dehumanizing treatment of Middle Eastern people. She also reclaims

power by being the one who performs the caricature and challenges orientalist fantasies and

related myths of the near east.

Gilbert is speaking from a perspective of a comic who depends on immediate audience

engagement. In contrast, Fatimeh's performance is for the camera and her performance and

humor is performed metaphorically. Fatimeh performs as a shy and passive caricature of the

ethnic other and alludes to nineteenth century orientalist paintings and literature that depict

women as passive subjects. Many historical paintings represent women averting their gaze while

presenting their naked bodies for the viewer's pleasure. In some instances, they return the gaze of

the voyeur in a titillating manner and invite the occidental viewer to visually colonize their

bodies.[61] Further, the exotic western representation serves as part of a colonialist agenda, aimed

to dehumanize the subject. And once a subject is dehumanized, objectification, misrepresentation

and violence become inevitable. Orientalist paintings of women and harem scenes function as a

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[60] Ibid, 20-21.

[61] Several French painters painted harem scene and concubines. Look at Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *La Grande Odalisque*, 1849 or Theodore Chasseriau, *Nude in a Harem*, 1950-52.

visual form of sexual assault as the perpetrators penetrate and degrade these women by participating in and maintaining the fantasy of the other. In *SuperNova*, Fatimeh similarly uses seduction as a strategy to beguile the viewer and challenge their penetrating gaze. For example, she winks at the judges and appears nervous but when she sings she is composed and confident. To further reference the East/West dichotomy, Fatimeh claims that she is from Andromeda. Andromeda is a galaxy that is expected to collide with the Milky Way. This collision imposes a threat to our galaxy as the collision is fatal.[62] By claiming that she is from Andromeda, Fatimeh is presented as a threat and performs the Western perception of the East as a threat to national security and cultural and racial purity.

Throughout *SuperNova*, Fatimeh is performing stereotypes, and much like *Oreo,* Fatimeh's performance is meta and self-referential. Fatimeh presents herself as alien to this galaxy; she speaks an unfamiliar language and dresses and behaves differently. Charles R. Groin and Yvonne M. Gaudelius highlight the works of Hannah Sim and Mark Steeger and their collaborative performances such as *SWARM*, 2006. The performers distort, wiggle and convulse to expose the body as alien:

> It makes viewers aware of the ways in which people use cultural markers such as
> body shape and hair to create identifying objectifications. By problematizing and
> questioning such markers of culture and gender, Sim and Steeger critically analyze

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[62] Croswell, Ken, *Magnificent Universe,* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1999), 161.

the usual markers of identity…They force viewers to reconsider the body without

relying upon stereotypical signifiers that we have had years to learn how to read. [63]

Unlike Sim and Steeger, Fatimeh's performance relies on stereotypical signifiers to perform the viewers' fantasy. Fatimeh's parodic and exaggerated performance critically highlights and examines stereotypes and exoticizating practices. Fatimeh confronts the viewer with the othered body and invites them to self-reflect on their relationship with the racialized subject.

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[63] Garoian, *C*harles R. and Yvonne M. Gaudelius, *"Performing Resistance"* in *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 46, No.1, Technology Issue (Autumn, 2004), pp. 54.

III: Coco and Liminal Performance

Liminal Phase and New Geographies:

In a manner similar to Fatimeh's performance, Coco confronts the viewer with the othered body but embraces the alien subject and diasporic position. This chapter explores alienation and identity in spatialized terms and aims to answer the following questions; How can diasporic subjects explore the liminal phase? What can the liminal phase offer the diasporic subject in the formation of a new spatiality? Liminality is commonly used by members of the diasporas to articulate feelings of a betwixt[64] position, a disorientation and an in-betweenness relative to both their ancestral land and host nation. A diasporic individual is a person who has voluntarily or involuntarily left their ancestral land. The liminal phase exists in the diasporic subject's imagination, therefore, it is difficult task to describe its physical characteristics. It is not concrete and has no material properties. Rather, it is an invisible and imaginary stage, where one may internalize feelings of displacement from a larger community or whole.

Historically, the liminal was regarded as part of a ritualistic period during rites of passage and it has a negative tinge and connotation. In Viktor Turner's *Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure,* Turner builds on Arnold Van Gennep's 1969 concept of "the liminal phase" and tripartite model of rites of passages to develop a thorough analysis on how communities manage transition. Van Gennep highlights three distinct phases in rites of passage: separation, margin or limen, and aggregation. Gennep argues that the first phase involves a symbolic behavior that signifies a detachment of the individual from the group. In the second phase, the ritual person is ambiguous and exists in an unresolved state. In the third stage, the *limen*, meaning threshold, the

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[64] *betwixt; archaic term for between.*

passage is consummated. Turner highlights the characteristics of the neophyte by focusing on the passage rituals of the Ndembu of Zambia. The Ndembu treat the liminal phase as a transitional period. During this phase the neophytes are not yet a part of the larger network of classifications and are in-between ranks and status-less. The Ndembu tribe attributes many negative traits to the neophyte during the liminal phase; death, and being in the womb, invisibility, darkness, asexuality, sexlessness, wilderness, monstrosity, nakedness and possessionless.[65] Moreover, the neophyte is painted black and expected to perform their death as they lay motionless in soil. Additionally, the liminal subject must behave passively and follow instructions and are positioned in what Turner calls the "interstices of social structures," meaning they exist in the gaps and margins and occupy the lowest rung of the social ladder. During the liminal phase, the neophyte is dehumanized and stripped of their power and agency. It is important to note that the Ndembu have their customs and rituals that are culturally specific and I am hesitant to impose any meaning and judgement on their practices. However, Turner's observations of the liminal phase provides a framework which is useful in the comparison with the betwixt position and diasporic individuals, who are similarly plagued by feelings of angst, displacement, alienation and invisibility.

Inspired by the neophytes performance in the liminal period, my character Coco performs and transfigures the negative qualities assigned to the betwixt individual during the liminal phase. Coco resists unjust power relations and spatial hierarchy, and redefines the diasporic subject position in the liminal period. In *SuperNova,* Coco explores the liminal and introduces a subversive new language that both embodies the negative characteristics assigned to the

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[65] Turner, Viktor, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (USA: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 95.

neophyte but also repossesses agency. Coco does not perform the passive and docile qualities expected of the neophyte in the Ndembu tribe, for example, Coco does not lay motionless or perform their subordination. Coco is an explorer, an artist, an innovator, and through *their* artistry they create a highly idiosyncratic visual language. Coco has multiple identities, they are from the East, the West and the inbetween, thus making them a hybrid character. Further, Coco's hybrid status allows them access to the liminal phase where a restructuring of existing spatial hierarchies becomes possible. Unlike the neophyte, Coco does not abide by the hierarchal order, *they* dismantle the structure through movement. Coco's movements, reactions and interactions are assertive and confrontational, thoughtful and frivolous, controlled and loose, vigilant and careless, precarious and unpredictable; they explore the plethora of expressions and experiences that are available to the diasporic individual during the liminal period. Unlike the neophyte who awaits to transcend the undesirable attributes assigned to them during the liminal phase: monstrosity, sexlessness, displacement, loss, and grief, Coco embraces these qualities. Thus, to reclaims ones position becomes central to a self-guided transformation and evokes a celebration of the hybrid being. Moreover, Coco introduces a new spatial dimension and prompts us to reflect on the spatio-temporal and external forces that contribute to the formation of identity. The character performs in a dark, galactic and open space. The space provides a clean slate as it has no borders, no physical properties, material, land or topography. It is not locatable on a map and does not possess any distinct characteristics. Through experimentation and introducing a new dimension, Coco illustrates and performs the possibilities that become available to the diasporic subject in that space.

To further elaborate on the concept of space, I turn to Edward W. Soja and his analysis of spatiality. Soja asserts that space is often defined in dualistic terms and this perpetuates a polarized spatiality. He argues that we must deconstruct these dualisms to widen our geographical perspectives.[66] Soja credits Henri Lefebvre as the first scholar to theorize otherness in spatial terms. Referencing Lefebvre, Soja argues that Firstspace-Secondspace is a dualistic structure. The former is a perceived space and the latter is a conceived space:

> Firstspace includes all forms of direct spatial experiences, which can be empirically measured and presented in cartographies. Unlike Firstspace, Secondspace, refers to the spatial representations, cognitive processes as well as modes of construction, which give rise to the birth of imagined geographies. Whereas Firstspace epistemologies are used to describe spatial dimensions, which can be perceived, Secondspace epistemologies rather deal with symbolic worlds, which are conceived. [67]

Additionally, Soja acknowledges Lefebvre's study *The Production of Space*, as the first to introduce the term and concept of Thirdspace. Soja asserts that the "Thirdspace can function metaphorically and can keep the consciousness and theory of spatiality radically open."[68] Similarly, bell hooks defines the *marginal* as a space of radical openness. hooks argues that marginality is not merely a site of deprivation, rather a site of radical possibility and a space of

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[66] Soja, Edward W, "Thirdspace: Toward a New Consciousness of Space and Spatiality." in *Communicating in the Third Space*, ed. Karin Ikas, Gerhard Wagner. (New York: Routledge,2009), 49.

[67] Ibid,51.

[68] Ibid, 50.

resistance.[69] Moreover, Homi Bhabba locates the Thirdspace in the margins, and roots the Thirdspace as an experience of the post-colonial condition.[70] Admittedly, there are different and nuanced descriptions, meanings, conditions and qualities of these concepts, but a thorough examination of these concepts is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I argue that the margin, the limen and the Thirdspace, share similar qualities and provide available sites for intervention, resistance, self-exploration and redefinition to the diasporic subject. Through Thirdspace epistemology, we can widen our geographical scope and introduce the formation of a third perspective, a third way of thinking, and develop new narratives. Soja highlights how the Thirdspace has the potential to foster multiple definitions of spatiality. He argues that Thirdspace is not an alternative to existing binaristic concepts, rather it can simultaneously exist alongside and creatively combine diametrical perspectives:

> Thirdspace is instead an invitation to enter a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange, where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered epistemological referees to be incompatible and uncombinable.[71]

The emergence and possibility of introducing a third is contingent on existing binaristic structures of spatiality and identity categories. Arguably, Coco relies on spatialized notions of First and Secondspace, female and male binary, and white and colour dichotomy, for the

[69] hooks, bell, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," in *Yearnings, Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 206.

[70] Bhabba, "The Location of Culture," 38-39.

[71] Soja, "Thirdspace," 50.

possibility of a thirding to materialize. Coco is race-less, classless and genderless, and embodies the limbo status, thereby introducing a third way of being. This limbo state allows them access to a third space that is an ideal site to confront and intervene in dualistic binary structures. In this new site, Coco is performing the process of hybridity, and combines First and Second place epistemologies while introducing a Thirdspace and new epistemic culture. It is important to mention that Coco is not the creator of this new space, rather, the site becomes available to the diasporic subject through the expansion of spatial perspectives. This new site provides individuals with a space to negotiate and examine the spatio-temporal and external factors that formulate fixed identity categories and dualistic structures. The space is metaphorical and engages with the concept of perceived and conceived space whilst introducing a third radical possibility. This space also becomes a site where incompleteness, alienation, alterity and otherness is celebrated. Interestingly, Coco's reclamation of the alien, monstrous, and foreign subject becomes a powerful force against external structures and discourses that aim to disempower marginal subjects.

Dance and Language

Coco explores multiple liminalities between the material and virtual worlds, between the real and illusionary, between deception and truth, between female and male, between colour and white, between the human and post-human, visibility and invisibility and perceived and conceived space. In *SuperNova,* these liminalities are visually presented as a three channel installation. Coco moves through these channels as their body disperses into particles and reappears. In the immersive installation, the body becomes omnipresent, fragmented and it

multiplies, which signifies Coco's ability to transcend spatial boundaries. In doing so, Coco introduces movement as language. This new language consists of diverse dance styles including waacking, traditional Iranian dancing combined with abstract gestures. Waacking's rich history is pertinent to the discussion of race and space. Waacking emerged in Los Angeles amongst the LGBTQ community in the 1970s. The dance was predominantly performed by Black and Latin men and women in the club scene.[72] Thus, waacking emerged in the diaspora by diasporic communities and as a result, waacking consists of appropriated movements from salsa, muslin martial arts, funk and is combined with rapid hand motions, poses and theatrics. The freestyle dance form takes from many cultures and Coco further hybridizes the dance by incorporating Iranian dancing. Through accentuated wrist rolls and long strides with the arms, Coco movements are emblematic of traditional Iranian dancing. Further, Coco's fragmented and abstract gestures are repurposed from my own performance art works. Coco's fusion of these culturally specific dance gestures allows them to develop a unique and individualized vocabulary. Therefore, the piece involves using the body as a communication tool. In this performance, the Thirdspace is explored through lines. Coco moves in the space following an invisible line and creates asymmetrical lines with the body. These gestures nod to post-colonial concepts of centre-periphery knowledge production.[73] Coco walks along the line and tilts their body. Subsequently, they reach to the periphery and roll their arm to the center, which suggests an exchange between the center and periphery. In this gesture, the character is acting as a mediator between the centre and periphery.

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[72] Guzman Sanchez, Thomas, *Underground Dance Masters: Final History of a Forgotten Era,* (USA: Library of Congress, 2012),*99.*

[73] "There is a disparity of material and symbolic resources, which transform certain areas into centre of knowledge production and relegate others to a peripheral condition. "
Medina, Leandro Rodriguez, *Centres and Peripheries in Knowledge Production*, (NY: Routledge, 2014), 4.

Moreover, Coco refuses to partake in oral communication and colonial language. Thereby, suggesting an unwillingness to further perpetuate communicative inequality and hegemonic discourses that are established through language. Coco takes a resistive position and introduces the margin as an ideal site to create a counter-language.[74] Coco engages with post-structuralist arguments relating to the discursive formation of identity.[75] By developing a gestural language, one that exists outside of established norms of communication, Coco demonstrates a resilience to perform the inequalities that post-structuralist's argue are constructed, repeated and reinforced through language.

Coco's dance and gestural language is explored in a dark space which has no definable content, background, history and language. Thus, this space creates room for a counter-language to emerge. Through movement, Coco introduces content, narrative, language and brings their history to this site. The space functions as an open slate for the process of negotiation and self-discovery. In *SuperNova,* Coco's dance begins at the bottom and gestures upwards; the process of negotiation and self-reflection and has the potential to create a positive uplifting transformation. Coco takes up space, and moves like a bird, soaring and breaking through the weight of the air with each strike. In his review of *Spider* and Jeanne Robinsons book *Stardance*, the writer Adam Guzkowski, observes how the artist transcends limitations of the human body, and in doing so, demonstrates the emancipatory nature of dance. He notes Judith Lynn Hanna's statement that "dance may also go beyond the known or acceptable and permit futuristic

[74] hooks, 208.

[75] Preece, Sian*, The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 34.

explorations," and that dance is a "terrain to shatter canons of the past with audacious danced transformation of feeling and thought."[76] Similarly, Coco illustrates the transformative and emancipatory possibilities of dance and *their* non-normative body encourages the viewer to consider the social restrictions placed upon the body. Guzkowski states that presenting the non-normative body evokes reflection on "how empowered bodies in motion might create new possibilities for understanding human corporeality."[77] Coco's gestures are unpredictable, fragmented and stylistically inconsistent which highlights the transformative potential of the Thirdspace. I contend that there is great transformative potential during Coco's process of negotiation. The space between the resolved and the unresolved highlights a process of incompleteness, experimentation and negotiation. In this in-between space, new ideas can emerge and disappear, perhaps even result in nothing at all. Rather than a resolution, the emphasis and significance is on process. In the mere act of self-reflection, a realization may occur, or one may also regress. However, through regression one can encounter a transformation. If one can embrace the liminal phase, one can thus be relieved from the pressure to materialize and produce a resolution and there is great emancipatory potential in this strategy.

Perhaps here it would benefit my argument and my artistic practice to introduce the concept of *limbo logic*. This is a working term, but limbo logic does not provide an alternative to traditional ways of thinking. Rather, it can work alongside and even resist these traditions. Limbo logic engages with the margins and peripheries to decenter knowledge production and challenges eurocentrism and western exceptionalism. Further limbo logic embraces the process of

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[76] Guzkowski, Adam, "Movements in Space: Science Fiction, Dance, and the Politics of Performance" in *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 24, No. 2, (2013), 233.

[77] Ibid, 234.

negotiation and the unresolved position and the possibilities that become available to an individual during this process. The dictionary defines *limbo* "in or on the edge or border.[78]" Typically to position oneself on an edge or border is undesirable as it is precarious and uncertain, but for the diasporic subject, being "in limbo" as the old saying goes, is already a familiar position. For limbo logic to be truly emancipatory, individuals must shift their perspective and lift the negative tinge associated with the term.

Coco utilizes limbo logic to reject colonial epistemology and western cultural imperialism and locates the edge and border as an ideal site for resistance. Coco does not identify with any nation and does not perpetuate the romanticization of imagined communities.[79] By introducing this third site, Coco takes a stance against nationhood and belonging, by developing a new language. Coco embraces the third site as "home" and exhibits an indifference to belonging. In *SuperNova*, Coco presents the viewer with an unfamiliar and unprecedented performance. During Coco's critique, Coco's gestures suggest an indifference, *they* shrug their shoulders, refuse to speak and gleefully disappear. In the three channel installation, Coco brings the audience, the judges, the performer and viewer, into a third space that is saturated with abstraction, poetics and possibility. Coco visits *Messier 82* to introduce and activate a new spatial dimension and language.

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[78] Capps Donald and Nathan Carlin, *Living in Limbo: Life in the Midst of Uncertainty* (USA: Cascade Books, 2010), 3.

[79] Benedict, Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London:Verso,1983).

Post- Human, Alien and Futurism

Coco has several strategies to resist the molds of patriarchal humanist and colonial structures. Coco responds to dualistic and polarizing binaries by offering the viewer a new language, epistemic culture, ontological perspective, gender and race. Coco's has no fixed identity or body. Their body oscillates between transparency and visibility and is not limited by corporeality. Coco's body disappears, reappears splits, soars, multiplies and moves through channels and space. In the installation, Coco moves through all three channels and the digital medium allows for the creation of a new imaginary and geographical landscape. The multiple screens allow for multiple identities to be simultaneously explored and for new hybrid identities to manifest. The concept of third, perceived and conceived space are also available as an installation. The three channels are synonymous with the hybrid subject's relationship with the first, second and third space and the installation is literally offering three spaces to explore identity. Moreover, Coco breaks through the borders of the projection and occupies the center and periphery of our field of vision. Unlike the other characters, that are limited to their single frame, Coco activates all three walls to expand our spatial perspective. Coco's diaphanous body enables them to easily traverse through the center and peripheries of the projected image. Coco's body not only occupies all three channels but after its detonation, the pieces of this body take us to another spatial realm. The digital artist and art theoretician, Joseph Nechvatal argues that by presenting an image of the body in pieces rejects the transcendental and universal concept of the self in modern european philosophy. Thereby, evoking a postmodern subject. [80]

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[80] Gonzalez, Jennifer, "The Appendix Subject" in *Race in Cyberspace* ed. Beth E. Kolko, Lise Nakamura and Gilbert B.Rodman, (New York: Rutledge, 2000), 46.

Inasmuch as Coco is able to identify with post-modern and post-colonial subjectivity, however, these concepts are rooted in academic and western perspectives of identity. Coco aims to offer a new language, space and a body that is beyond the scope of Western ontology of subjectivity. Consequently, Coco is represented as a post-human, extraterrestrial and alien figure, and their costume and makeup highlight their transfiguration. By embodying and approximating alien qualities, the character is placed in a resistive position, whereby their extreme performance of otherness, threatens, critiques and intervenes western imposed hegemonic culture, its established colonial, humanist order and its fixed identity categories. Controversially, to present the racialized self as a alien may not be productive and is perhaps dehumanizing, unless the maker is self-alienating to reclaim the alien subject. In this regard, I explore the possibilities of a futuristic narrative through alien subjectivity. Additionally, I aim to contribute to ethno-futuristic discourses, scholarship and cultural production.[81] Futurism appeals to diasporic communities because it presents the future as a site to deconstruct and reconstruct history and infiltrate territorial and mental borders.[82]

Arguably, many futurist artists present a utopian future and *SuperNova* does not dismiss the possible problematics of the future. The viewer is confronted with how race and gender can function in the future. *SuperNova* is in dialogue with futurism but the discourse of racism,

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[81] Afrofuturism began during the 1950s by the Jazz musician Sun Ra. Ra combined ancient and alien technologies and presented the Afro subject as extra-terrestrial being.
Suleiman, Lama, "Afrofuturism and Arab Futurism: Reflections of a Present-day" in *Diasporic Reader* (June 12, 2016), 2.

[82] Suleiman, "Afrofuturism," 6.

misogyny and cultural imperialism are contemporary issues. In *SuperNova*, racial and class hierarchy are visible and the game show setting provides a space to explore the constituents of hierarchal order. In *SuperNova*, Gholdokht and Oreo attempt to gain access to the elite group by presenting themselves as a spectacle. The judges perform their power and demonstrate their complicity to the power structure by strictly adhering to the preferences of the "crowned." Hence, the work does not share in futuristic ideals of racial or gender abolitionism, as abrogating identity categories is an inadequate solution and response to the binary system. Rather, Coco introduces a future where the prioritization of one gender, race, culture over the other is put into question and welcomes and celebrates other ways of being, thinking and knowing. Thus, it may not be appropriate to label *SuperNova* as a futuristic artwork, although it shares similar aesthetic and methodological approaches. However, after the explosion, Coco invites the the viewer on a journey into a poetic and visual landscape where abstraction and ambiguity are at the forefront of the visual field. Perhaps it is during this explosive period, where Coco presents a vision of a galactic and a possible utopian future.

Further to the foregoing, an appeal to futurist aesthetic is echoed in the music. The music for Coco's dance performance is a blend of traditional Persian music accompanied by digitalized and synthesized sounds. *Native Melody* was created in collaboration with Kamyar Jarahzadeh. Jarahzadeh explores the possibilities of deconstructing, appropriating and recontextualizing traditional Iranian music to create a hybrid electro-acoustic performance. As a result, Jarahzadeh combined sounds and musical elements of the past and fused them with contemporary technology to create a digitalized ethno-futuristic aesthetic. Jarahzadeh sampled an early 20th

century recording of an Iranian court musician performing in the Iranian mode known as *dastgah shur*. The conceptual underpinnings of the piece are underlined in this passage by Jarahzadeh:

> I put my general musical approach under the approach *[sic]* of electroacoustics, wherein I try to bring together acoustic and electronic elements together for my compositions. I think aside from practicality--it allows me to create music with a whole ensemble even though I am one person--it strikes at a lot of the ruptures that are currently affecting society. Of course from the lens of the Iranian world this is particularly apt: the striking junctures between different modes of thinking, producing knowledge, and producing capital of the current age actually require us to look at how both very modern and somewhat antiquated phenomenona come into conversation. So in a sense, making music that way is like an auditory metaphor.[83]

The harmonious blend of musical genres and traditions prompts the listener to reflect on the intersection of technology, electronics, music and culture. *Native Melody* is a cross-cultural investigation of sound and is in dialogue with Coco's culturally hybrid dance piece.

In *SuperNova*, Coco presents a hopeful and transformative future. The character introduces new poetics, language and narratives that intervene in current dualistic and polarizing binary systems. Further, Coco brings the viewer into a third realm and encourages us to expand our geographical imagination and shift our perspectives, so that new modes of being and thinking can emerge.

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[83] Kamyar Jarahzadeh, personal communication, March 9, 2018.

Fatimeh similarly performs an otherness and her ethnicity to critically highlight neo-orientalist practices of the West in perpetuating the ideology of an exotic other, located in the East and consumable by the Western market. Fatimeh's character is a caricature of a historical figure who satirizes Iranian nationalists agendas to return to a pure archaic language and name changing practices. Fatimeh and Oreo's self-reflexive strategies, encourage the viewer to think critically about these characters and their role as active participants in maintaining white supremacy and perpetuating exoticism of the near east. These characters examine the struggles of self-identification and belonging in the diaspora. Regardless of the tools and technologies they utilize: Instagram, Tinder, comedy, language, dance or the methodologies they employ; relational antagonism, futurism, or post-colonialism, these characters apply highly individualistic and unique strategies to confront the viewer. *SuperNova* provides an accessible and critical stage, while utilizing these tools to examine the conditions that shape the post-colonial and diasporic subject position. The future provides the characters a site to examine the historical factors that have formed divisive racial identities and this new site offers a space for new narratives and hybrid entities to emerge.

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Solo Exhibitions/ Screenings/ Performances

Neues Kino, Curated by Claire Hoffmann, "Video Summe." Basel, Switzerland, 2017

Museum London, Curated by Cassandra Getty, "Oreo's Guided Tour." London, Canada, 2017

Topkino Cinema, Private Sponsors and Green Party Representatives, "Dear Sister." Vienna, Austria, 2016

SomoS, Curated by Paulus Fugers, "Cinema Conversación." Berlin, Germany, 2016

AX Gallery, Curated by Sousan Sohi and Saied Sharifi, "Dear Sister." Berlin, Germany, 2016

Kaapelitehdas-Cable Factory, Curated By Hanna Uusi-Seppa,"Art Fair Suomi." Helsinki, Finland, 2015

Carleton University Art Gallery, Curated by Jaclyn Meloche, "Coalesce." Ottawa, ON, 2015

Women's Studio Workshop, Curated by Heige Kim, "August Art Festival." Rosendale,NY, 2015

Xpace Cultural Centre, Curated by FADO and Kate Barry, "11:45." Toronto, ON, 2014

Williams College Museum of Art, Curated by Ph.D. Maurita N. Poole, "Oriental Barbie." MA, USA, 2013

Group Exhibitions/ Screenings

Images Festival, Curated by Sahar Te, Colin Rosati, and Sara Wyli, "Liminal States." Toronto, ON, 2018

Trinity Square Video, Curated by Emily Fitzpatrick. "Death to/ Long live the Archive." Toronto, ON, 2018

Miami Art Basel, Curated by Quinn Dukes, "Performance is Alive." Miami, USA, 2017

Art Gallery of Mississauga, Curated by Laura Carusi, "On the Queer Screen." Mississauga, Canada, 2017

Gallery 44, Curated by Leila Fatemi and Leila Timmins, "In Pursuit of the Perfect Pose." Toronto, Canada, 2017

ArtLab, Curated by Susanne Edelstein, "Sleight of Hand." London, Canada, 2017

Cinema Politica and Vtape, Unsettling 150, "Sound of Strings." National Screening, Canada, 2017

SAW Gallery, Curated by Jason St. Laurent, "The Last Picture Show." Ottawa, ON, 2017

Good Sport, Curated by Taylor Doyle, "Video Sport: Alone Together." London, ON, 2017

APA Galeria, Curated by Katherina Swoboda and Mare Van Koningsveld. "The Frame that Blinds Us."
Budapest, Hungary, 2017

Onnasis Cultural Centre, Curated by Medea Electronique, "Diasporas in Dialogue: Multiculturalism, Migration and the Improvisatory Imagination."
Athens, Greece, 2016

Nieuwe Vide, Curated by Mare Van Koningsveld and Lennard Dost, "Migration World Cinema." Haarlem, Netherlands, 2016

The Open Gallery, Curated by Barbora Raceviciute, "Ways of Being Here." Toronto, Canada, 2016

Place Bonaventure, Curated by Anais Castro and Marie Josee Rousseau, "Art Souterrain." Montreal, Canada, 2016

Le Centre D'Art, Curated by Sasha Huber, "Performance Voyage 5." Ville De Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, 2016

Pao Festival, Curated by MUU Galleria, "Performance Voyage 5." Oslo, Norway, 2015

Trinity Square Video, Curated by Timo Soppela, "Performance Voyage 5." Toronto, ON, 2015

SAW Gallery, Curated by Timo Soppela, "Performance Voyage 5." Ottawa, ON, 2015

Finnish Institute in Stockholm, Curated by Timo Soppela,"Performance Voyage 5." Stockholm, Sweden, 2015

MaxArtFest, A Contemporary Art Festival, Curated by Timo Soppela, "Performance Voyage 5." Zagreb, Croatia, 2015

New Performance: Turku Festival, Curated by Timo Soppela. "Performance Voyage 5." Turku, Finland, 2015

MUU Galleria, Curated by Timo Soppela, "Performance Voyage 5." Helsinki, Finland, 2015

Kunst Am Spreeknie – Schöneweide Art Festival, Curated by Timo Soppela,"LANDSCAPE – METROPOLIS & Performance Voyage 5."
Berlin, Germany, 2015

Snehta Residency, Curated by MUU Galleria, "Performance Voyage 5." Athens, Greece, 2015

Totaldobže Art Centre, Curated by MUU Galleria "Urban Poetry Festival." Riga, Latvia, 2015

Miami International Performance Festival'15, Curated by MUU Galleria, "PV5." Miami, USA, 2015

Kunst Am Spreeknie, Curated by MUU Galleria, "Schöneweide Art Festival 2015." Berlin, Germany, 2015

Studio 103, Artscape Youngplace, Curated By Lo Bil,"Process 9." Toronto, ON, 2015

[.BOX] Videoart Project Space, Curated by MUU Galleria, "Performance Voyage 5." Milan, Italy, 2015

Stichting Ruimtevaart, Curated by MUU Galleria,"Performance Voyage 5." Den Haag, The Netherlands, 2015

Petersburger Salon, Curated By Pitt Sauerwein, "Something Magic." Hamburg, Germany, 2014

Studio Das Weisse Haus, Guided Tour by Lucas Cuturi "Vienna Art Week: Studio Visit." Vienna, Austria, 2014

Fluc, Curated By Ursula Maria Probst, "Pocket of Resistance." Vienna, Austria, 2014

Kunsthaus Graz Museum, Curated by Gregor Krammer, "B the Beat Festival." Graz, Austria, 2014

Arts Court, Curated by Julie Tucker & Azarin Sohrabkhani,"Ottawa International Animation Festival: Disney Made Me Do It."
Ottawa, ON, 2014

PDA Projects, Curated by Brendan A. DeMontigny and Meredith Snider, "PDA Launch."
Ottawa, ON, 2014

Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Centre, Curated by Joel Kuennen and Artslant, "Cutlog NY." New York, USA, 2014

Xpace Cultural Centre, Curated by FADO and Kate Barry, "11:45." Toronto, ON, 2014

Rosenthal Gallery, Curated by Aziz Sohail, "Islam Contemporary." North Carolina, USA, 2014

Performance Space, Curated by Maria Unpronounceable, "Toothache Duets." London, UK, 2013

SAW Gallery, Curated by Jason St. Laurent, "Transformer. The Body Remixed." Ottawa, ON, 2013

Lichtenstein Center for the Arts, Curated by Abdul Aziz Sohail, "Islam Contemporary." MA, US, 2013

Oriental Charm, Curated by Beth Greenhorn and Andrea Stokes, "Chinatown Remixed." Ottawa, ON, 2013

University of Ottawa, Curated by the Graduating Students, "Momentum."

Ottawa, ON, 2013

La Petite Mort Gallery, Curated by Guy Berube, "National Geographic Goes Ghetto." Ottawa, ON, 2012

Nuit Blanche, Curated by Meredith Snider, "Life is Beautiful." Ottawa, ON, 2012

Villa Kuriosom, Curated by Amirali Ghasemi and Friederike Berat, "It's Normal." Berlin, Germany, 2012

Orange Art Gallery, Curated by Ashley White, "Art and Afghan Women: From Kabul to the Capital."
Ottawa, ON, 2012

SAW Gallery, Curated by PhD. Andrea Fitzpatrick, "Ciphers: Tension with Tradition in Contemporary Iranian Photography."
Ottawa, ON, 2012

Paradigm Gallery, Dean of Visual Arts Gallery, University of Ottawa. Ottawa, ON, 2012

St Brigids Center for the Arts, Curated by Wanda Fletcher, "Wicked Wanda's Spring Show."
Ottawa, ON, 2011

Shanghai, Curated by Agitate: Queer Women of Colour Collective. Ottawa, ON, 2011

Gallery 115, University of Ottawa Gallery, Curated by Professor Lorraine Gilbert, "Large Format Photography"
Ottawa, ON, 2011

La Petite Mort Gallery, Curated by Andrew Gayed and Taylor Norris, "Vasa Joins Mort." Ottawa, ON, 2011

SAW Gallery, Curated by Agitate: Queer Women of Colour Collective. Ottawa, ON, 2010

Ambassador's Gala, Received highest bid on photograph titled, *Justice*, "Art Auction." Ottawa, ON, 2010

Collaborative Performances

The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Directed by Franz Erhard Walther, "Call to Action."
Toronto, 2016

The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Directed by Ryan McNamara, "Several Interventions in the Course of Two Hours."
Toronto, 2016

Nuit Blanche Toronto, Directed by Christof Mignon, "Hit Parade." 2015

Awards & Commissions

Graduate Thesis Award, 2018
Chairs Discretionary Fund, Academic, 2017

Alumni Graduate Award, Academic, 2017

Jeux De La Francophonie, Team Canada, Finalist, Federal, 2016

Council For the Arts Travel Grant, Federal, 2016

Ontario Graduate Scholarship, 2016

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Joseph- Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship, Federal, 2016

Western Graduate Research Scholarship, Academic, 2016

Dean's Entrance Scholarship, Academic, 2016

Chair's Entrance Scholarship, Academic, 2016

Canada Council for the Arts Travel Grant, Federal, 2015

Conseil Des Arts et Des Lettres Du Quebec Grant for Research/Production in Film Video, Provincial, 2015

LOOP Discovery Award, Shortlist, Barcelona, International, 2015

Conseil Des Arts et Des Lettres Du Quebec Grant for Research/Production in Digital Arts, Provincial, 2014

Canada Council for the Arts Travel Grant, Federal, 2014

Sponsored Membership, Art Engine, Municipal, 2014

Ottawa International Animation Festival, Commission, Ottawa, 2014

SAW Gallery, Commission, Light Box for Transformer: The Body Remixed, Ottawa, 2014 City of Ottawa Direct Art Purchase,Shortlist, Municipal, 2013

BMO Financial Group 1st Art! Invitational Student Art Competition, Shortlist, Federal, 2013

Ottawa Art Gallery Graduating Student Award of Excellence, Academic, 2013

Dean's List Merit Scholarship, Academic, 2012

SAW Video Award, Municipal, 2012

New Perspective Conference, Dean of Research, University of Ottawa, Topic: Perspectives of Aging, Academic, 2011

Residencies

Koumaria Residency, Medea Electronique, Sellasia, Sparta, Greece, 2016 AX Gallery, Berlin Germany, 2016

MUU Galleria, Helsinki, Finland, 2015

Studio Das Weisse Haus, Vienna, Austria, 2014

Artslant Georgia Fee Artist/ Writer Residency, Paris, 2014

Work Related Experience

Researcher, Wafaa Bilal Studio, New York, 2018
Teacher's Assistant, ArtNow: History, Beauty and Politics, London, ON, 2017 Studio Assistant,
Wafaa Bilal Studio, Visual Artist, New York, 2017
Studio Mentor, Ottawa School of Art, Ottawa, 2017-2018
Teacher's Assistant, Advanced Media, London, ON, 2016-2017
Gallery Assistant, PowerPlant Contemporary Art Centre, Toronto, 2016
Gallery Assistant, Mercer Union Artist- Run Centre, Toronto, 2016
Photographer and Blogger, Michelle Illuminato, Visual Artist, Pittsburg, 2015 Studio Assistant,
Daniel Joliffe, Electronic Media Artist, Montreal, 2014
Studio Assistant, Jonathan Hobin, Photographer and Artistic Director, Ottawa, 2013
Photographer, LGBTQ International Film Festival Ottawa, 2012

Juries

Assistant Juror, Arab Documentary Photography Program, Magnum Foundation, NYC, NY, 2017

Presentations/ Guest Lecturer

Nipissing University, "Photography and Appropriation."Northbay, ON, 2018
Nipissing University, "Exploration in Digital Media." Northbay, ON, 2018
Thorneloe University, "Race as Performance."Sudbury, ON, 2018
Koffler Digital, Death To/ Long Live the Archive, Race and Gender in Video Art, Toronto, 2017
Western University, Translating Voices in Art, ArtNow, London, ON, 2017
Art Gallery of Mississauga, On the Queer Screen Panel, Mississauga, ON, 2017
Gallery 44, In Pursuit of the Perfect Pose Panel, Toronto, ON, 2017
University of Ottawa, Art and Gender, Ottawa, ON, 2017
APA Galeria, Artist Panel, Budapest, Hungary, 2017
University of Ottawa, Women and Media, Ottawa, ON, 2017
Onassis Cultural Center, Diasporas in Dialogue: Multiculturalism, Migration and the
Improvisatory Imagination, Athens, 2016
TopKino, Artist Talk, Vienna, Austria, 2016
SomoS, Artist Talk, Berlin, Germany, 2016
Studio XX, Rah, Montreal, Canada, 2016
Isabel Bader Centre For Performance Art, Performance and Media, Kingston, Canada, 2016
University of Ottawa, Contemporary Art of the Middle East, Ottawa, Canada, 2016
University of Ottawa, Women and Media, Ottawa, Canada, 2016
CultureLink, No Barriers, Artist Talk with Rah, Toronto, Canada, 2015
Alfred University, Rah Eleh: Studio Visits, Alfred NY, USA, 2015
Grünes Haus, Mahsa Abdolzadeh: Homosexuelle Frauen im Iran, Graz, Austria, 2015

Hart House, Peggy Gale: Rose-Coloured Glasses for Toronto Video, Toronto, Canada, 2015
University of Ottawa, Sculpture and Transformation,Ottawa, Canada, 2015
University of Ottawa, Art, Globalization, and Cultural Hybridities, Ottawa, Canada, 2015
SPAO,The Shrinking World of Photography Symposium, Ottawa, Canada, 2015
Secession, In conversation with Sherko Jahani, Vienna, Austria, 2014
Fluc, Artist Talk, Vienna Austria, 2014
Studio Das Weisse Haus, KulturKontakt Artist Talk, Vienna Austria, 2014
Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Centre, Artist Talk, NYC, USA, 2014
LPM Gallery, Light Painting with Raheleh Saneie, Ottawa, Canada, 2013
Pecha Kucha Global Event, "Hidden Heroes" Ottawa, Canada, 2013
Jer's Vision, Artist Talk, Perth, Canada, 2012

Publications/ Press

Death to/ Long Live the Archive, Koffler Digital, Toronto, ON, 2018
Women, Video and Avant Garde Filmmakers: Rah Eleh, Vol.15, Cinewomen Cahier, Paris, 2015
Rah, Point Magazine, Toronto, 2015
Artist Talk on Persian Radio, Orange Radio, Vienna, 2014
Vienna: The Street Art Waltz, Veronica Pozzi, European Magazine, Berlin, 2014
Georgia Fee Artist Writer Residency, Joel Kuennen, Artslant, New York, 2014
Raheleh Saneie's WhiteFace Parody, Six Pillars To Persia, 2014
Shading the Orient, Lital Khaikin, Guerilla Art Magazine, Ottawa, 2014 *Art Journal*, Volume 8, Ph.D Francine Dagenais, Tehran, Iran 2012
Rarely Seen Side of Iran on Display at Saw Gallery, Metro, Ottawa, 2012
Freedom with Restraint, Samantha Everts, Capital Xtra, Ottawa, 2011
Simorgh Success Stories: Raheleh Saneie, Pouya Keshtgani, Ottawa, 2010

Collections

York University, Library Acquisition, 2017
University of Ottawa, Library Acquisition, 2017
University of Ottawa, Library Acquisition, 2016
University of Ottawa, Library Acquisition, 2015

Mentors

Cindy Sherman, NYC, NY
Wafaa Bilal, NYC, NY
Andrea D. Fitzpatrick, Ottawa, ON
Daniela Sneppova, Toronto, ON