

HUMANITIES GRADUATE SCHOOL CONFERENCE 2025



The Human Body in Culture, History, and Expression

UU Humanities Graduate School Conference 2025: Programme

Conference – Thursday 22 May 2025

Location: Academiegebouw, Domplein 29, 3512 JE Utrecht

All speakers are (R)MA students, recent alumni or PhD candidates from the Humanities Graduate School at Utrecht University

Time	Programme	Room
9.00-9.30	<i>Conference registration opens</i> <i>Coffee & Tea</i>	Zaal 1636
9.30-10.30	Keynote Dr. Willemijn Ruberg - Historicizing the right to bodily autonomy Chair: Folkert de Vries	Aula
10.30-10.40	<i>Room change</i>	
10.40-11.25	Parallel Sessions 1 <i>Becoming Posthuman Bodies</i> Chair: Sorchá Ní Bhraonáin <ul style="list-style-type: none">Jonathan Kirn - Performing More-than-Human Bodies. Blurring Boundaries in BVDS' <i>Song of Songs</i>.Nienke Draaisma - Don't Be Silent About the Goosebumps: A New Literary Materialist Reading of <i>The Song of the Stork</i> (2022) and <i>Dromedary</i> (2026)	Belle van Zuylenzaal

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biancamaria Gotti - Becoming Immortal by Becoming Posthuman: Transhumanism, Mindcloning, and the Misconception of the Self <p><i>Bodies in Protest</i></p> <p>Chair: Yowali Kabamba</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negar Asgharifard - The female biopolitical body: gendered state violence during the Woman, Life, Freedom protests in Iran Kimberly Lee - Embodied Resistance: The Human Body and Protest Art in Hong Kong's Street Movements Yasaman Bathaee - Hair, Materiality, and Resistance in the Work of Nasim Moghadam 	Kanunnikenzaal
11.25-11.45	<i>Coffee break</i>	Zaal 1636
11.45-12.30	<p>Parallel Sessions 2</p> <p><i>Disability and sense-making</i></p> <p>Chair: August Christensen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yvonne Marinus - Exploring the plural 'frame of body': how Anne Boyer's <i>The Undying</i> (2019) employs sensory diction to connect bodily discomfort to sense making Lara Morello - The relevance of being visible. Exploring the representation of the body through the audio description of the Italian Tv series <i>Prisma</i> (2022) Larisa van Rijn - Supercybercrip: cyborgism and disability in <i>Cyberpunk 2077</i> <p><i>Imperial and Colonial Bodies</i></p> <p>Chair: Dorian Hagedoorn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ruth Bryant - Spoils of Whales: Commodifying Nature in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Arctic Genre Scenes Bryony Harris - Disease control and bodily autonomy in Mehmed Ali's Egypt (1831-1843) Hilary Spiteri - Between Empire and Tradition: The Body as a Site of Artistic Practice in Malta's Colonial Era 	<p>Belle van Zuylenzaal</p> <p>Kanunnikenzaal</p>
12.30-13.30	Lunch	Zaal 1636

	<p><i>Constructing Bodies across Media</i></p> <p>Chair: Dorian Hagedoorn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amber Helmes - It's (Not) Just You; The Lonely Female Body in Contemporary Literary Fiction • Ariel Rabkin-Meyer - Klingon Terror, Human Trauma: Embodied Islamophobia in <i>Star Trek: Discovery</i> • Rudy Henke Brands - How Can I Glow Up? The Feminine Body as a Project on TikTok and the Politics of Individualized Preoccupation • Bo Davids - Blood, Milk and Tears: The Construction of the Female Body in the hagiographical writing of James of Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré 	Kanunnikenzaal
15.25-15.40	<i>Coffee break</i>	Zaal 1636
15.40-16.25	<p>Parallel Sessions 5</p> <p><i>Sites of Expression and Communication</i></p> <p>Chair: Iris Krips</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roos Ledeboer - Do Multimodal Cues Compensate for Manual Gesture Restrictions in Infant-Directed Communication? • Mireille E. Cornelis - The Spontaneous Stance: Karel Appel and the Act of Painting • Harriet Boateng Aduako - Empowered Identities: The Role of Priestess Okomfo Akosua Atuobua in Kwahu Spirituality <p><i>Sex and Sexuality</i></p> <p>Chair: Camila Malig</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christl de Kloe - 'Unlock Your Orgasm' Sexual pleasure and orgasm in femtech • Priyanka Jha - Shame On You, But Who's Under You? or On How to Have An Erotic Encounter With Shame • Elle Zwinkels - Poor, Unfortunate Females! Interrogating through Androphonia 	<p>Belle van Zuylenzaal</p> <p>Kanunnikenzaal</p>
16.25-16.35	<i>Room change</i>	
16.35-18:00	<i>Closing remarks & Borrel</i>	Zaal 1636

KEYNOTE [Aula, 9.30-10.30]

Historicizing the right to bodily autonomy

- Dr. Willemijn Ruberg, Utrecht University
- Moderated by Folkert de Vries

In the humanities the idea that the body is culturally and historically constructed has by now become accepted. Philosophers such as Judith Butler and historians like Thomas Laqueur have demonstrated particularly how not only gender but also bodily sex are not biological, natural, fixed entities. But what about the right to bodily autonomy? In human rights discourse the right to bodily autonomy is often assumed to be either respected or to be denied, thus assuming bodily autonomy to be a stable entity. In histories of human rights the right to bodily autonomy is thought to be ‘discovered’, whether this happened in the seventeenth century by political theorists such as John Locke, during the French Revolution with its human rights declaration, or after the Second World War when human rights treaties were ratified, such as the Code of Nuremberg (1947) (revolving around informed consent), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the European Convention on Human Rights (1950). In this historical perspective, as well, the right to bodily autonomy is either accepted and anchored in law, or not respected in practice. In this talk, I would like to present a different, historical, and praxiographic perspective. By analyzing different case studies, such as the early struggle for the right to abortion in the 1920s and 1930s and its slogan ‘Your body belongs to you’, I will argue that we need to contextualize the right to bodily autonomy: which bodies are actually meant here? Against what or whom is bodily autonomy claimed? How does the right to bodily autonomy fit into different political ideologies, varying from feminism and anarchism to religious conservatism? In line with Annemarie Mol’s praxiographic analysis of the ‘body multiple’, I would like to emphasize the multiplicity of (the right to) bodily autonomy.

PARALLEL SESSIONS 1 [10.40-11.25]

Becoming Posthuman Bodies [Belle van Zuylenzaal, 10.40-11.25]

- Moderated by Sorcha Ní Bhraonáin

Performing More-than-Human Bodies. Blurring Boundaries in BVDS *Song of Songs*

- Jonathan Kirn

How does the human body performatively become? How is it differentiated from the nonhuman through actions by itself and others? Posthumanist and new materialist theories of performative relationality emphasise the importance of such questions regarding the emergence of human, non-human and more-than-human bodies, rather than assuming that it would be evident what a human body is. Moreover, as in the term more-than-human, these theories show that the boundaries of bodies can be blurred. Where one body starts and another ends, how it connects human and non-human parts, and how it differentiates itself through boundaries turns into an area of study, rather than being an unproblematic anchor point for research. In my PhD project, I study how such boundaries are performed and how it is possible to account for their blurring both theoretically and affectively. I do so through a diffractive reading connecting Karen Barad’s agential realism and Theodor W. Adorno’s aesthetic theory. Particularly, I am interested what can be learned from aesthetic theories and practices for discourses on relationality. Can we learn to think and feel this more-than-human being through aesthetic practices? For the Humanities

Graduate School Conference 2025 I will offer an insight into this project through the discussion of a performance theatre piece: *Song of Songs* by BVDS. In this "ecological orgy", BVDS explores how bodies emerge which blur the lines between human and non-human, organic and technological. They develop an "ecological storytelling" which stages more-than-human bodies, blurring boundaries and imaginatively suggesting what such bodies could look like. This, in turn, allows to identify lines along which these bodies are differentiated, such as form, behaviour, and movement, which can equally be applied off stage. *Song of Songs*, thus, enables a better understanding of the performative becoming of more-thanhuman bodies.

Keywords: performativity, new materialism, aesthetics, more-than-humanness

Don't Be Silent About the Goosebumps: A New Literary Materialist Reading of *The Song of the Stork* (2022) and *Dromedary* (2026)

– Nienke Draaisma

Affect takes place when bodies (humans, but also animals, or texts, for example) move to a so-called becoming in a non-hierarchical encounter (Deleuze, 1997). This paper theoretically explores the concept of the affective encounter between bodies and makes it methodologically applicable for a literary approach. In recent decades there has been much attention in the humanities to conceptualising and theorising affect and to interpretations of affective text and images. This is referred to as the affective turn (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, Ahern, 2019, Houen, 2020 & Colm Hogan et al., 2022). In this paper, affect is considered from the massumian, deleuzian perspective. This perspective is often associated with a focus on the body and/or physicality. Within the field of New Literary Materialism (Vallely, 2019 & Pultz Moslund et al., 2020), research starts from the deleuzian definition of a body. A body is not strictly human but must be viewed post-humanistically (Van der Tuin & Verhoeff, 2022). The widely discussed and lauded novel *Het lied van ooievaar en dromedaris* (2022) (The song of the stork and dromedary) by Dutch author Anjet Daanje is used as a case study. A New Materialist reading of this novel shows what a symbolic reading of the novel leaves out: that it is precisely the physical exchanges between the characters that allow them to move to each other in a becoming. These becomings take place not only between the human characters in the novel, but also between non-human bodies and potentially also between reader and text.

Keywords: affect, New (Literary) Materialism, Literary Studies, becoming

Becoming Immortal by Becoming Posthuman: Transhumanism, Mindcloning, and the Misconception of the Self

– Biancamaria Gotti

In this paper I explore how the transhumanist's quest for immortality through the process of mindcloning reveals an ontological shift in the conception of the self: from an embodied being to a disembodied digitizable entity. By focusing on the ambivalence towards the body and the senses that emerges from the exploration, I argue that this conception is not only reductive but contradictory and deceptive, ultimately a misconception of the self. Indeed, the path toward immortality offered by mindcloning allows one to overcome mortality, the greatest human limitation, only to the extent that it works by hiding all the other limitations that define and give meaning to our existence. My argumentation is based on two premises: first, that different paths to achieve symbolic immortality help to understand how the Self is conceived and understood in society; second, that digital immortality is made conceivable by technological developments and our growing entanglement with technology, which both blur the boundaries between the human and the machine—not only in practice but especially in our conceptualization of the human as

machine and of the machine as human. I will explore the specific transhumanist path of mind cloning and its ambivalence towards the body and the senses by focusing on the work of Martine Rothblatt: her book *Virtually Human*—where she describes in detail the concept of mindcloning—and her first mindclone prototype, Bina48. Ultimately, I will argue that the ambivalence is resolved by a conception of the self that is no longer human but has transcended its boundaries and has become posthuman.

Keywords: Transhumanism, mindcloning, digital immortality, posthuman.

Bodies in Protest [Kanunnikenzaal, 10.40-11.25]

- Moderated by Yowali Kabamba

The female biopolitical body: gendered state violence during the Woman, Life, Freedom protests in Iran

- Negar Asgharifard

The Islamic Republic of Iran has systematically used bodily harm as a means of suppressing female protesters during the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, with the targeted blinding of one eye emerging as a key tactic of repression. Drawing on theories of state violence and bodily harm, this study engages with Angela Davis's work on police-inflicted disability, Jasbir Puar's concept of debilitation as state control, and Judith Butler's theory of precarious bodies in protest. These scholars argue that state violence is not only about death but also about strategically rendering bodies permanently vulnerable to suppress dissent. This study asks: How does the targeted blinding of female protesters in Iran function as a biopolitical mechanism of control? Using feminist political theory and biopolitics, this research examines state violence as a gendered biopolitical tool aimed at incapacitating, intimidating, and erasing women's political agency. The findings reveal that these injuries are not incidental but part of a systematic strategy to disable resistance while reinforcing state dominance over public space and bodily autonomy. Additionally, the paper demonstrates the function of bodily harm as both a spectacle of power and a mechanism of long-term social control. By applying Butler's theory of precarity, this study highlights how Iranian women are disproportionately subjected to state-sanctioned harm, their suffering primarily erased from official narratives. Ultimately, this research situates the blinding of female protesters within a global pattern of using bodily harm to suppress resistance, connecting the Iranian government tactics to broader discussions on state repression, feminist resistance, and biopolitical violence.

Keywords: state violence, biopolitics, precarity, debility, gendered violence, protest culture

Embodied Resistance: The Human Body and Protest Art in Hong Kong's Street Movements

- Kimberly Lee

This paper explores the role of the human body in public spaces during protests in Hong Kong, focusing on the body as medium in participatory art. The first case study is the Umbrella Movement, a 79-day pro-democracy protest in 2014 triggered by China's proposed electoral reforms. This movement marked Hong Kong's first large-scale social protest. The second case study is the Anti-Extradition Movement of 2019, which arose in response to a controversial extradition bill that would allow China to extradite individuals from Hong Kong for trial. These Hong Kong protests gained international attention for their scale and the variety of protest art produced, some of which is housed in the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam collection. However, little

has been discussed or conceptually grounded regarding protest art and the human body in protests within contemporary art theories. This paper draws particular attention to socially engaged participatory art in Hong Kong, considering art and the human body as forms of advocacy and activism, mapping art onto street protests. The human body in Hong Kong protests is registered in various forms. First as physical bodies in public spaces; and second through representations of bodies in protest art. Lady Liberty Hong Kong is a human body statue modelled after a female protestor, and the widespread Lennon Walls are post-it walls that covered the streets across the city. These written messages create a form of haptic encounter, where the body is indexed through words while being not physically present. This paper further explores concepts of anonymity, repression, and the idea of human body at risk and in danger in public space, aiming to bring together the intersection of art, activism, and social engagement.

Keywords: protest activism, public, participatory art, social engagement

Hair, Materiality, and Resistance in the Work of Nasim Moghadam

– Yasaman Bathaee

As a deeply personal and culturally charged element, hair—particularly female head hair—serves as a threshold between individuality and societal norms in art, carrying profound symbolic and political significance. In Iran, the hijab and the practice of covering hair have long been subjects of socio-political contention. This paper examines *The Rug* (2018) by Iranian diasporic artist Nasim Moghadam (b. 1988, Tehran), who uses Iranian women's hair as a medium of resistance against oppression. In *The Rug*, the artist replaces traditional textile threads with strands of her own hair. By incorporating her unveiled hair into the sacred object of a prayer rug, she challenges the Islamic Republic's politicized weaponization of religion to control women's bodies. This paper explores how hair, as a medium, can challenge and redefine the boundaries imposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran on the female body; thus becoming a tool of resistance against patriarchal structures. Building on Nawal El Saadawi's seminal work *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1977) and employing the concepts of visibility, materiality, and agency, this paper argues that Iranian women's hair is a contested site of agency—where women's bodies are both asserted and regulated.

Keywords: Hair, Materiality, Resistance, Feminism, Contemporary Iranian Art

PARALLEL SESSIONS 2 [11.45-12.30]

Disability and sense-making [Belle van Zuylenzaal, 11.45-12.30]

- Moderated by August Christensen

Exploring the plural 'frame of body': how Anne Boyer's *The Undying* (2019) employs sensory diction to connect bodily discomfort to sense making

– Yvonne Marinus

An able body is temporary, its arrangement can be unexpectedly change due to external and internal factors. Able bodies make sense of the world around them in a certain way, which unexpected change may inhibit. An individual must then learn to make sense of the world within the new state of their body. In this paper, I would like to refer to these dynamic processes of meaning making based on the way one's material body functions in the world as a 'frame of body' (James 2002, Fletcher 2020). In using this term, I refer to the ways material bodies are implicated

in meaning making as well as the ways their fluidity and precarity create constantly changing ‘frames of bodies’ based on bodily experiences. I will be drawing on Anne Boyer’s *The Undying*. Boyer’s work is an autobiographical meditation on illness, in which she testifies to her own journey with breast cancer as well as the ways illness and disability function more widely within contemporary understandings. How does the corporeal and sense driven language used in Anne Boyer’s *The Undying* (2019) illustrate how her perception of her body and the world around her adapt to her breast cancer diagnosis and subsequent chemotherapy treatment? By drawing upon Lennard J. Davis’s ‘normalcy’ and Maaïke Bleeker’s ‘corporeal literacy,’ I will conceptualise the idea of a “frame of body.” This will build upon S.P. James’s interpretation and discussion of the phenomenological role of the body in the rapidly technologizing state of the world (2002). Through this concept, I will close read a section of Anne Boyer’s *The Undying*.

Keywords: Disability, Illness, Perception, Sense Making, Diction

The relevance of being visible. Exploring the representation of the body through the audio description of the Italian Tv series *Prisma* (2022)’

– Lara Morello

The sight sense is often associated with objectivity and bodily detachment and prioritized over other senses in Western discourses. This phenomenon has been described by Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí and Donna Haraway and is rooted in white, racist and gendered discriminatory axes generating an oppressive control over representation. This gaze values bodilessness and neutrality more than partiality or embodiment, opposing a "view from nowhere" to what it constructs as "embodied Others". In this paper, I will theorize about seeing and being seen through the analysis of the language of the audio description (AD) of the Italian TV series *Prisma* (2022). AD is a progressive tool that enhances accessibility for the visually impaired to audiovisual productions. The main rule of AD writing process is objectivity, and its core element is relevance, defined as the details translated from a scene to allow the audience access. Both objectivity and relevance are situated within specific discourses and, despite aspiring to neutrality, they are not neutral. *Prisma* tells the story of the twins Andrea and Marco through their identity discovery journey. The TV series introduces innovative narratives on gender identity and disability representation, establishing itself as a fundamental work in Italian TV industry. Despite its aim, the AD of *Prisma* still reinforces stereotypes that the series tries to overcome. Within this framework, my research questions are: How does the AD of the Italian TV series *Prisma* reproduce problems of cis-normativity and racism that it tries to challenge within its representation? And what can AD highlight about the role of vision in Western discourses? By addressing these questions, through textual analysis and a critical combination of representation theories, queer, decolonial, and critical disabilities studies, the paper will show how AD can highlight the limits of representation and underscore how identity is a bodily experience only for some individuals.

Keywords: audio description, gender identity, embodiment, vision, representation

Supercybercrip: cyborgism and disability in *Cyberpunk 2077*

– Larisa van Rijn

In the dystopian science-fiction action role-playing game *Cyberpunk 2077* (CD Projekt RED, 2020), implants and prostheses, called ‘cyberware,’ play significant roles, both mechanically and narratively. The game’s story is centred around a debilitating implant erasing the personality of the player character, cyberware can be used to modify the player’s capabilities and many in-game characters use cyberware. Within a critically disabled, crip framework using prostheses and implants to navigate daily life is a common disabled experience, which has led to the usage of

“cyborg” as an emancipatory term by crip writers (Kafer 2013, Weise 2020). This invites a crip reading of cyborgs as depicted in *Cyberpunk 2077*. In this paper, I analyse the depiction of cyborgism and disability in this game, and the futurity it constructs. I answer the question: “What kind of disabled imaginary of the future is produced by the conceptualizations and representations of cyborgism within *Cyberpunk 2077*?” I use an explorative methodology of crip playing of this game. I examine fragments of disability and cyborg representation within specific moments and see how they connect to the mechanics and larger narrative of the game (Carr 2019, Carr 2020), informed by earlier playthroughs. Herein it is understood that the mechanics of the game can model societal issues (Bogost 2008), which can be applied to depictions of disability and cyborgism (Jerreat-Poole 2020, Ledder 2023). I do so from a critical crip position, informed by disability (Johnson & McRuer 2014). I argue that the game’s depiction of the cyborg player character as hyper-able to fight bad, not fully human enemy characters can be understood as a supercrip depiction. You play the ‘good’ crip, who triumphs over the ‘bad’ crips. As such, the player character can be seen as a ‘supercrip,’ a narrative that reinforces ableist rhetorics of bodily hierarchy (Schalk 2016).

Keywords: Disability, Cyborg, Game, Future, Science-Fiction

***Imperial and Colonial Bodies* [Kanunnikenzaal, 11.45-12.30]**

- Moderated by Dorian Hagedoorn

Spoils of Whales: Commodifying Nature in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Arctic Genre Scenes

- Ruth Bryant

In the historiography of the Dutch ‘Golden Age,’ the actions of the Noordsche Compagnie and independent merchants in the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions have received considerably less attention than their respective counterparts in the New World and other colonies. Unlike colonial acts of destruction in the New World, the affected non-human bodies are much less visible; therefore, the systemic acts of theriocide are pushed even further to the peripheries of history. Rather, this paper examines an understudied group of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings depicting whale fisheries in Arctic environment— defining them as Arctic Genre Scenes. As demonstrated in this paper, artists and their paintings bound whales to their potential commercial value; thus, encapsulating the cultural attitudes towards whale fisheries and memorializing the great economic benefits. Through glorifying the profitable whaling industry, the paintings considered in this paper arguably played a central role in the commodification of non-human bodies, and in large-scale systems of environmental colonization. As cultural, societal, and technological benefactors of whaling, it is our duty to contend with this history, the impacts of human economy, and recognize ways in which colonial/eurocentric perspectives have dominated the normative narrative. Given the current place of these paintings in the permanent collection of the Rijksmuseum and Het Scheepvaartmuseum, Arctic genre scenes still exemplify environmental colonization and monetization of the Arctic region as glorified through the human perspective. By revealing the dichotomy between historical interpretations of the whaling industry, I intend to illustrate how art has worked to affirm the actions of human industry by distorting the whalers’ gruesome realities. Using ecocritical theory, the essay proposes new ways of interpreting Arctic genre scenes and the role of visual culture in upholding an extractive dynamic between humanity and nature by intentionally refocusing the subject of the paintings, from the prowess of the Dutch Republic to the whales. In doing so, we might challenge the institutions of authority that aggrandize Arctic genre scenes, that place human bodies above non-human, and the tendency of commodity markets to objectify nature. Through acknowledging the sentience of whales and a contemporary understanding of the whaling fisheries as exemplifying

unsustainable and extractive industry, this new method of viewership counteracts the seventeenth-century interpretation of whale fisheries as trophies of the Dutch imperial ambitions and recognizes the tandem role of art and industry.

Keywords: Whaling Industry, Bodily Autonomy, Colonial Bodies, Human Economy, Posthumanism

Disease control and bodily autonomy in Mehmed Ali's Egypt (1831-1843)

– Bryony Harris

In 1831 Mehmed Ali Pasha, governor of Egypt, readied his army to invade Syria; but cholera invaded Cairo first. The pasha swiftly rallied a new force to defend Egypt from the disease; at his behest, seventeen consuls named a five-man committee as the Quarantine Board in Alexandria. This board would become the first iteration of the Sanitary Council in Egypt (1831-1938), a mixed body of natives and foreigners, doctors and diplomats who controlled (to varying degrees), the bodies of Egyptians for over a century. Despite being the precursor to the WHO's regional office in the eastern Mediterranean, the institutional history of this diplomatic body is missing. My thesis will therefore chart the survival of the Sanitary Council throughout the vicissitudes of Egypt's ever-transforming political status, from semi- autonomous Ottoman state to veiled protectorate and British colony. Notably, Mehmed Ali secured 'bodily autonomy' for his tributary state within the Ottoman Empire at a time when new approaches to disease control dramatically transformed notions of bodily autonomy for ordinary Egyptians. Between 1831 and 1843, the Egyptian body became a canvas for an emerging international sanitary regime, upon which vaccination campaigns, quarantines, medical experiments, and new building and burial regulations (to name but a few) were enacted. *How did Egyptians respond to these challenges to their bodily autonomy? And how was the contested autonomy of both the Council and Egypt (at the diplomatic and state levels respectively) connected to these challenges?* My paper will introduce my broader research before spotlighting this question of (bodily) autonomy in the first decade of the Council's lifespan. Looking at cases of the denial or defence of bodily autonomy with regards to merchants, religious elites, and incarcerated people in Egypt, my paper will introduce stories of bodily agency, power and dignity from the Egyptian, Ottoman and Dutch national archives.

Keywords: Egypt, sanitary regulations, quarantine, bodily autonomy

Between Empire and Tradition: The Body as a Site of Artistic Practice in Malta's Colonial Era

– Hilary Spiteri

Malta's national art collection (MUŻA) houses a significant yet largely overlooked body of nineteenth-century anatomical drawings within its reserved collection. These works, which have seldom been publicly displayed or studied, offer a fascinating lens through which to explore the human body as a site of artistic practice, pedagogy, and cultural exchange during a pivotal era in Maltese history. This compilation of academic drawings includes artists' portfolios and loose works produced either at the newly established Malta Drawing School (1800) or the prestigious Accademia di San Luca in Rome. Marked by meticulous studies of the human form, this collection encompasses a variety of practices, including studies derived from printed instructional manuals, plaster casts (gessi), life drawing sessions, anatomical dissections recorded in painstaking detail and even caricatures. The duality of influences present in nineteenth century Malta — British colonial governance and Italian artistic heritage — shaped the pedagogical frameworks and artistic outputs of the Islands' institutions during this period. This

research situates these drawings not merely as isolated artistic exercises but as products of a complex interplay between colonial governance, local identity, and trans-Mediterranean cultural currents. The rigorous academic training reflected in these works underscores the centrality of the human body in shaping artistic expression and cultural narratives in colonial Malta. It also highlights how artistic pedagogy served as a tool for negotiating cultural identity within the frameworks of British imperialism and Italian artistic influence. For the conference *The Human Body in Culture, History, and Expression*, this presentation will delve into the significance of these drawings as a case study for understanding how the human body was rendered, idealised, and politicised in colonial and academic contexts. By bringing these long-hidden works to light, this research contributes to broader discussions on the intersections of art, identity, and cultural expression in colonial and Mediterranean histories.

PARALLEL SESSIONS 3 [13.30-14.15]

Gender Performativity [Belle van Zuylenzaal, 13.30-14.15]

- Moderated by Yowali Kabamba

Trans performance art and the politics of bodily non-normativity

- Ayantika Majumdar

Trans performance art has emerged as a critical space for disrupting dominant narratives of gender, embodiment, and visibility. By centering bodily non-normativity and fluidity, trans artists challenge the constraints of cis-heteronormative aesthetics and expand the possibilities of self-representation. The work of artists such as Cassils, Del LaGrace Volcano, and Genesis Breyer P-Orridge illustrates how performance art subverts binary understandings of gender by embracing ever-evolving forms of embodiment. Bodily non-normativity in trans performance art refuses medicalized, pathologized, or victimized representations of trans existence. Instead, artists reclaim agency through hyper-visibility—whether through Cassils’ intense physical transformations, Volcano’s photographic portraits of queer embodiment, or Breyer P-Orridge’s lifelong project of merging identities with Lady Jaye. This act of performing gender disrupts the fixity of identity, echoing Butler’s (1990, 2004) theory of performativity, wherein gender is not an inherent truth but a series of stylized acts that gain meaning through repetition and social recognition. Furthermore, the politics of visibility in trans performance art complicates the relationship between recognition and erasure. While visibility can be a powerful tool for resistance, it is also accompanied by precarity, fetishization, and the risk of co-optation. As Foucault (1977) argues, power functions through both surveillance and normalization, meaning that increased visibility of trans bodies may invite new forms of regulation and control. Similarly, Straube (2024) suggests that bodily fluidity and non-normativity are often framed through an aesthetic of contamination, where gender variance is perceived as unstable or unnatural. This mirrors Foucault’s (1980) critique of biopolitics, wherein the state’s management of bodies enforces disciplinary power through the policing of gender norms. Additionally, Mepschen et al. (2010) argue that Western liberal discourses of sexual freedom often reinforce Orientalist narratives, positioning non-Western queerness as regressive while celebrating trans identities within a Eurocentric framework of progress. This paper seeks to examine to what extent trans performance art challenges the commodification of non-normative bodies within neoliberal frameworks of diversity and inclusion and how the visibility of trans bodies in artistic spaces negotiates the risks of hyper-surveillance and exploitation. Also, it tries to further analyse through these performances how art truly exists outside institutionalized power structures that seek to

contain and regulate nonconforming identities. This paper seeks to represent that through fluidity, resistance, and aesthetic transgression, trans performance art not only disrupts dominant cultural narratives but also expands the realm of political possibility, offering new ways to imagine embodiment beyond the constraints of normativity.

Keywords: normativity, trans performance art, fluidity, visibility

Something Off My Chest: Queer Sensibilities of Clothing, Gender, and the Body

– Maaïke Weitering

This paper explores how people who live outside, between, or beyond the gender binary navigate the embodied and material experience of gender through clothes or the way they dress. The following research question was asked: *how do genderqueer people navigate the embodied and material experience of gender through clothing and the way they dress?* Navigating, in this context, refers to finding non-normative ways of being in normative spaces and systems. To answer the above question, the project uses a queer adaptation of the wardrobe interview, understood as a material-semiotic approach to methods in which researchers are invited into informants' wardrobes, and conduct their research based on and with the items of clothing present in the wardrobe. The interviews revolve around the embodied experience of clothes as a notion of the past embodied experience of clothes as a notion of the past and a passage through the memories, narratives, and emotions that are associated with them. As such, clothing and the way informants dress are used as an entry into larger material totalities and conceptualizations of gender. In total, ten wardrobe interviews are conducted. Theoretically, the project is situated within queer studies, primarily indebted to the works of Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and José Esteban Muñoz. The combination of the materiality of the wardrobe, personal narratives, and theoretical concepts such as performativity, disidentification, and queerness, yields an understanding of gender that is closely tied to the materiality of clothing and the body. In the discussion, the writings of Andrea Long Chu are used to critically consider gender as a category of inquiry as well as the wardrobe as a political space.

Keywords: clothing, gender, queer, wardrobe interview

The body in art and performance, Renaissance Art, Visual AI, Gender

– Brianah Lee, Giulia Specia, and Celis Tittse

This study investigates gendered representations of activity and passivity in Renaissance art through computational pose analysis. Using the "Poses of People in Art" dataset, which includes 491 figures from 237 artworks created between 1450 and 1600, we explore three pose configurations hypothesized to reflect active versus passive traits: leg spread (indicating motion), pose dynamism (inclination angle), and head tilt. Figures were processed with OpenPose, a CNN-based AI algorithm that identifies key skeletal points, and manually annotated for gender and secondary tags such as "baby," "portrait," "seated figure," and recurring figures like Jesus and Mary. Regression models were applied to test gendered distributions of pose dynamics, accounting for general effects on pose such as portrait type, figure posture, and production period. Preliminary results revealed no statistically significant differences in leg spread ($p = .231$) or head tilt ($p = .833$) between male and female figures. However, men were depicted more often in static, vertical poses compared to women ($p = .001$). Notably, babies demonstrated an upward neck tilt ($p = .001$), and seated figures exhibited a significant increase in leg spread ($p = .007$). The production period did not significantly influence these metrics. These findings challenge established theories of gendered depictions, revealing minimal differences in activity or passivity

between male and female figures in Renaissance art. Instead, the results suggest that historical conventions and subjective interpretations may influence traditional analyses. This study highlights the potential of computational tools like OpenPose to refine art historical theories, paving the way for more nuanced investigations into gender representation. Future research will expand the dataset to include Baroque artworks and refine pose analysis metrics to capture more nuanced definitions of activity and passivity.

Loss, Illness and The Body [Kanunnikenzaal, 13.30-14.15]

- Moderated by Sorcha Ní Bhraonáin

Walking Through a Landscape of Loss: The Body and Grief in Maria Ardizzi's Work

- Giada Quaranta

This paper investigates how Italo-Canadian writer Maria Ardizzi explores the interconnections between the body, loss, and grief in her novel *Made in Italy* (1982) and poetry collection *Conversation with My Son* (1985). Rooted in her biographical experiences of migration from Abruzzo (Italy) to Toronto and the death of her son Paolo from leukaemia, in Ardizzi's works a multifaceted sense of identity emerges, shaped by the dual losses of loved ones and one's former self through migration and the transformation of places. In *Conversation with My Son*, grief is portrayed as an embodied, nonlinear process that reconfigures the boundaries between life and death. The son's body, marked by illness and medical interventions, becomes intertwined with the environment of the hospital—a "foreign womb". In *Made in Italy*, the protagonist Nora's aging, paralyzed body reflects the disconnection and alienation of life in a consumer-driven metropolis. At the same time, her body serves as a site of resistance, where memory transforms into a space for dialogue with lost loved ones. Through an analysis of these works, the paper examines how Ardizzi's narratives articulate a spectrum of embodied experiences that are deeply rooted in specific contexts yet resonate with broader historical processes. Drawing on Ida Hansen's (2023) analysis of Bracha Ettinger's concept of "matrixial carriage" and Joan Didion's idea of a "world without end", these frameworks are employed to interpret an embodied understanding of the afterlife, as well as the interconnectedness of multiple places, times, and processes of change and deterioration. Ardizzi's focus on inhabited places—and on the consequences of urbanization, pollution, and systems of consumption—further reveals the relational narrative as a dialogue with the dead, allowing a connection with grief that transcends the individual to narrate global conditions of interconnected vulnerabilities.

A Living Community: Theorizing Immunity from the Autoimmune

- Ohad Ben Shimon

This article proposes a theorization of immunity from an embodied autoimmune perspective. Arguing through what it identifies as the limitations in current clinical immunology explanations and politico-philosophical theories of immunity, the article seeks to embody, rather than metaphorize, the theoretical stakes of current immune theory. As a counterargument to dominant theorizations of immunity that pathologize or metaphorize the autoimmune bodily experience, the article forwards a more spacious, material, and affirmative theorization of the body. As the author supplements existing immune theory with their own emergent and embodied theory, they develop an *autoimmune methodology* based on their experience of living with an autoimmune disease. Part personal narrative, part speculative autoimmune theory, the article ultimately calls for a practice of self-care aimed at coming to tolerate the *disagreeing*

community of the autoimmune body as it challenges normalized notions of what self and other, immunity and community, ease and disease mean.

Keywords: immunity, autoimmune, community, disability, care

White Wedding: Marrying the conventional symbolisms of lace to the 2000s beauty standards for the female body

– Julia Gommeren

The 2000s were a period of transition from one beauty ideal to the other: the 1990s heroin chic-dominated era, characterised by hyper-skinny models with pale skin and the 2000s polished, highly sexualised era, when bodies were desired to be more curvy and toned in a fitness-way. This paper aims to analyse how Agent Provocateur's 2008 White Wedding campaign, specifically its use and visualisation of lace on their lingerie, reflects the 'ecologies of making' of 2000s ideals and possible 'ecologies of loss' related to 1990s ideals and symbolisms of lace. The six 'scenes' (featuring previous heroin-chic model Kate Moss) function as case studies to analyse how Agent Provocateur positioned their brand in the transition from the 1990s to the 2000s. A visual analysis is used to identify how lace interacts with Moss's body, her movements, and the setting in which she is depicted. Moreover, lace is historically associated with wealth, purity and femininity. However, this campaign repositions lace as a provocative, modern material that aligns with the shifting cultural narratives surrounding the female body. This paper argues that White Wedding characterises an 'ecology of loss', representing a fading of the androgynous heroin chic while contributing to an 'ecology of making' by presenting a more sculpted, sexually assertive body. Also representing a twofold of making and losing for symbolisms of lace. In doing so, this analysis highlights lace as a symbolic material with a vital role in shaping the narratives of ideals for the female body. This research is particularly relevant as Y2K fashion and its diet culture are returning to our contemporary streetscapes and media, similarly to how they were applicable in 1990s/2000s culture. The cyclical nature of fashion accounts for body ideals, too, and this research helps us understand how we position the female body in modern society.

Keywords: lace, lingerie, visual analysis, body ideals, ecology of loss/making

PARALLEL SESSIONS 4 [14.25-15.25]

Bodily Autonomy and Labour [Belle van Zuylenzaal, 14.25-15.25]

– Moderated by Camila Malig

Embodied Knowledge and Affect in Childbirth: Birth Justice to Reclaim Bodily Autonomy

– Viola Ruggieri

This paper examines the marginalisation of affect and embodied knowledge in childbirth, with the aim of exploring how recentring these two dimensions in obstetric care through the framework of birth justice can create emotional, embodied and relational experiences of childbirth, thereby restoring the bodily autonomy of the birthing individual.

Mainstream Western obstetric care, rooted in patriarchal and technocratic systems, has historically devalued and marginalised affect and embodied knowledge in childbirth. Dualistic thinking in Western philosophy which devalues nature, femininity, emotion and the body in favour of mind, masculinity, reason and technology underpins this marginalisation. Shaped by hierarchical, extractivist, biopolitical frameworks that seek to regulate and control the reproductive process, obstetric care often disempowers, alienates and disembodies birthing individuals, contributing to violent and traumatic experiences. In

response, birth justice frameworks, centring on alternative midwifery practices have emerged to reclaim bodily autonomy in childbirth. These frameworks advocate for relational, affective model of care that centres the embodied and emotional experiences of the birthing individual, as well as the relationship between caregiver and birthing person. In doing so, they offer a powerful alternative and tool for resistance to disembodied and traumatic childbirth. This paper draws on feminist theories, in particular critiques of medical epistemologies and epistemic injustice, to analyse how Western dualistic thinking and power structures in obstetric care lead to the dismissal of embodied knowledge and have the effect of compromising bodily autonomy. Through a review of the birth justice literature and case studies of alternative midwifery and relational care, the paper argues that the birth justice framework, by revaluing emotional and embodied experience, can help to restore bodily autonomy in childbirth. The question guiding this paper is: how does mainstream obstetric care marginalise embodied knowledge and bodily autonomy, and how can the approaches promoted by the birth justice movement offer an alternative framework for affective and embodied care?

Workers or Victims? AntiTrafficking Campaigns as the Moral gatekeepers of Feminised Labour

– Christina Chiotaki

This paper examines how labour is conceptualized within the politics of anti-trafficking campaigns and its correlation with policies on sex work. Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of NGO campaigns against human trafficking, it explores how anti-trafficking discourse is used to police female and feminised bodies, imposing moral limits on their labour. When migrant workers exceed these systemically enforced boundaries, their labour is no longer recognised as work; instead, they are recast as victims, their agency erased under the premise of their “non-labour.” In this context, terms such as *agency*, *bodily autonomy*, and *choice* are instrumentalised against working bodies. Drawing on Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, this analysis examines linguistic and visual elements in campaign materials, discursive strategies that frame sex work as non-labour, and the broader socio-political implications of these narratives. A frame analysis is also employed to identify key recurring themes, such as the moralisation of labour, the erasure of migrant agency, and the strategic use of “false consciousness” rhetoric. This study argues that the discourse of labour functions as a mechanism of control over bodies and their expression, reinforcing cultural and moral boundaries through the narrative of rescuing migrants engaged in sexual labour. Within this self-proclaimed “rescue industry,” migrant bodies are silenced and forced into new precarious conditions that are both gendered and classed. Reintegration programs promoted by NGOs often frame “integration” as participation in low-wage, feminised labor - such as knitting or cleaning - revealing an implicit hierarchy of acceptable work. These anti-trafficking campaigns do not address the structural conditions that push migrants into precarious labour, but instead reproduce exploitative labour hierarchies under the guise of protection. By moralising work and selectively denying agency, they serve as disciplinary tools that reinforce state and economic control over marginalised bodies. This paper situates anti-trafficking discourse within broader systems of migration control, gendered labour discipline, and neoliberal governance, highlighting the urgent need to rethink labour rights and autonomy beyond carceral and moralistic frameworks.

Keywords: Sex work, Human Trafficking, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Morality politics, Feminised Labour

The Body in Documentaries of Displacement: *For Sama* and *The Cave*

– Suzie Toumeh

The Syrian conflict has caused one of the most significant displacement crises of the 21st century, with over 14 million individuals forced to flee since 2011. Amidst this turmoil, western

media outlets often portrayed displaced bodies including women as simplistic narratives of “refugees,” overshadowing the complexity of their lived experiences and agency. This study examines how Syrian women reclaim bodily agency in the documentaries *For Sama* (2019) and *The Cave* (2019), which foreground the exiled female body as both a site of suffering and resistance. The central research question guiding this analysis is: How do the documentaries *For Sama* and *The Cave* depict the embodied experiences of Syrian women during the journey to displacement? Employing Richard Dyer's approach to textual analysis, this research conducts an oscillation between close textual analysis and contextualization, considering both the formal aspects of media texts and their broader cultural contexts. This study also draws on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), to examine how displaced women assert their own narratives rather than being spoken for. Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* (2004) informs the discussion on how these documentaries enable these women's bodies -that are often marginalized in geopolitical discourse- to be rendered visible. *For Sama* centers on Waad Al-Kateab, a journalist documenting her life during the siege of Aleppo, providing an intimate portrayal of a woman falling in love and getting married during war. *The Cave* follows Dr. Amani Ballour, who leads a hospital in an area under siege in Syria. Both documentaries focus on the resistance of these women to state-sanctioned violence not only on other Syrian bodies, but most importantly on their own.

Keywords: Feminist media studies, postcolonialism, refugee narratives, bodily agency, resistance

Framing social reproduction under the neoliberal platform economy: outsourced content moderation in the discursive context of Daniel Motaung's case

– Stepan Lastuvka

This project examines how discourses concerning the work of outsourced content moderation complicate reproductive labor as culturally and historically devalued in response to the technological and ideological context of the neoliberal platform economy. By content moderation, I refer to the work of filtering the circulation of content on social media platforms, which has been documented as organized into exploitative and harmful conditions. In order to address how content moderation as a specifically devalued form of socially reproductive labor is discursively construed and contested, I analyze the frames under which this work is communicated in a material stemming from the case of an activist, public figure, and a former content moderator, Daniel Motaung. This case evolved from 2022 until the present, addressing the exploitative and harmful conditions of work at a Nairobi office of the outsourcing firm Sama, which used to provide content moderation services for the U.S.-based platform corporation Meta. In order to engage with the case, I use the approach of qualitative frame analysis to examine how content moderation outsourcing is discursively construed and contested in a way that reflects reproductive labor as devalued upon distinct intersections of social difference. To this point, drawing on the case of Motaung, I collected material in the form of newspaper reports, together with promotions of digital platforms and outsourcing firms. On the basis of this material, I unpack the frames in terms of which content moderation is communicated within two distinct discursive contexts of investigative journalism and digital platform corporations. As a result, I address how outsourced content moderation, as discursively construed and contested within the neoliberal platform economy, complicates the way reproductive labor is culturally and historically enshrined as devalued.

Keywords: Content Moderation, Reproductive Labor, Neoliberalism, Platform Economy, Frame analysis

Constructing Bodies across Media [Kanunnikenzaal, 14.25-15.25]

- Moderated by Dorian Hagedoorn

It's (Not) Just You; The Lonely Female Body in Contemporary Literary Fiction

- Amber Helmes

In my research, I examine representations of female loneliness in contemporary literary fiction. I analyse how solitude, alienation, and disconnection are narrated and ask what structural conditions and socio-political forces become available when reading feminine loneliness as an affective structure. Drawing on affect theory (Ngai, Flatley, Berlant, Ahmed), urban theory, feminist theory, and sociological research on loneliness, I explore how novels by Ottessa Moshfegh (*My Year of Rest and Relaxation*), Cathy Sweeney (*Breakdown*), Sally Rooney (*Beautiful World, Where Are You*), and Jhumpa Lahiri (*Whereabouts*) depict women who retreat from sociality, resist normative attachments, or experience isolation within seemingly connected lives. For the Humanities Graduate Conference, I turn to this same corpus to focus more specifically on the corporeal dimensions of feminine loneliness. I approach the body not only literally but also phenomenologically and affectively—through posture, gesture, sensation, fatigue, and spatial movement. Across these novels, I identify four recurring modes through which loneliness becomes embodied: sleep, illness, or shutdown; sensory estrangement; the collapse or intensification of domestic life; and altered movement through urban space. These registers of loneliness reflect how structural conditions—late capitalist alienation, gendered affective labour, and cultural scripts of intimacy—shape not only psychic life but the way the body moves through the world. Through close readings, I show how the female body in these texts becomes both a site and a symptom of loneliness, making visible the quiet, persistent ways in which disconnection is felt and endured.

Key terms: loneliness, contemporary fiction, affect theory, exhaustion, intimacy, gender

Klingon Terror, Human Trauma: Embodied Islamophobia in *Star Trek: Discovery*

- Ariel Rabkin-Meyer

This essay examines how the contemporary *Star Trek* franchise engages with discourses of Islamophobia in the first season of the 2017 series *Star Trek: Discovery*. This series continues the franchise's long history of engaging with contemporary political and social issues in a futuristic, sci-fi setting. Utilizing Richard Dyer's method of textual analysis with an intersectional approach, I expose the historical discourses that influence the first season of *Discovery*, focusing on the portrayal of alien-human hybrid Voq/Ash Tyler (played by Shazad Latif). I examine how race, religion, masculinity, and sexuality interact with the narratives of trauma, bodily (dis)possession, and violence that Latif's characters undergo. In turn, I analyze how each of these elements and narratives, as well as Latif's racialized visibility as a brown, Pakistani-British, Muslim man, relate to Islamophobic discourses resulting from the "War on Terror." Overall, I seek to answer the research question: How does Shazad Latif's visibility in his portrayal of Voq/Tyler impact the relationship between his characters, *Star Trek: Discovery*'s narrative, and discourses of Islamophobia?

I argue that the racialized visibility of Latif in his portrayal of hybrid character Voq/Tyler creates an explicit association between his characters' storylines and Islamophobic discourses relating to violence, terrorism, and non-normative masculinity and sexuality. Voq/Tyler's narrative arc portrays themes of trauma, torture, sexual assault, and bodily sovereignty. I argue that Voq's brutal psychological and physical transformation into human sleeper agent Ash Tyler evokes literalized fears of brainwashing, loss of bodily possession, and the enemy within, and reflects

real world narratives of the physical and sexual exploitation and dehumanization of Muslim men. However, I find that the portrayal of each character also challenges cultural myths relating to male rape victims as well as Islamophobic discourses which establish the deviance of Muslim masculinity and sexuality.

Keywords: Islamophobia, War on Terror, sexual trauma, masculinity, sleeper agent

How Can I Glow Up? The Feminine Body as a Project on TikTok and the Politics of Individualized Preoccupation

– Rudy Henke Brands

In this research, I critically and carefully analyze a relatively recent trend on TikTok consisting of young women asking the internet how they can ‘glow up’, a request readily and uncritically picked up by accounts dedicated to the digital editing of these young women’s physique to conform to hyperfeminine Euro-American beauty ideals. Doing so, the environment and architecture of TikTok operates in line with a society of control, encourages a relentless pursuit of aesthetic bodily perfection on the premise that women are lacking and constantly need to improve their appearance. This study is guided by the following research question: how does the ‘glow up’ trend on TikTok enable a reinstatement of the feminine body as a disciplinary project, and how does this contribute to a politics of preoccupation? Using a combination of feminist media analysis and critical discourse analysis, my project on the (digital) female body as a continuous disciplinary project showcases how the ‘glow up’ videos on TikTok emphasize and strengthen how women are ensnared and entrapped in the pursuit of beauty as a result of their bodies prescribed inferiority. Following the logics of media analysis and discourse analysis, my project does not only closely consider the content of the videos, but the underlying power structures giving meaning to those videos. Consequently, this research contributes to feminist critiques of digital beauty culture, revealing how TikTok reproduces and reinstates gendered disciplinary mechanisms, resulting in individualized preoccupied with self-regulation and improvement, which ultimately defers and distracts from structural inequalities and practices of collective liberation.

Keywords: glow up trend, TikTok aesthetics, feminine bodily discipline, politics of preoccupation

Blood, Milk and Tears: The Construction of the Female Body in the hagiographical writing of James of Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré

– Bo Davids

‘O holy mother, with sufficient praises, you who knew the secrets of God’ thus Jacques of Vitry addresses Marie of Oignies in a thirteenth-century Flemish hagiography. In this period, the church became increasingly centralized and clericalized. Women had no official religious authority. Despite this, Marie – and Lutgard of Aywières – continue a tradition of extra-clerical female authority dating back to late antiquity. (King & Feiss, 1998; Newman & King, 2008)

Spiritual motherhood in the Middle Ages has received limited attention, and although the hagiographies of Marie and Lutgard have been thoroughly researched as seminal texts of the lay piety movement, a thorough analysis of their treatment of motherhood is lacking. Earlier and later modes have received more scholarship. (Atkinson, 1991; King, 1985; Smoller, 2005).

Through comparative study and a close reading of specific passages, this paper seeks to define the particular form of spiritual motherhood present in these related hagiographies. This motherhood draws on earlier modes but emerges as a unique phenomenon as it intersects with concurrent developments in mysticism and lay piety. The feminine body – as constructed by the authors – plays a much more important role. The women exceed earlier ‘mothers’ and

appropriate male-gendered roles by acting as religious advisers. Their asceticism and direct contact with God accord them a unique authority. (Newman, 1995)

I draw upon the theory of Caroline Bynum and Rachel Smith, arguing that Marie and Lutgard embody theology and that their bodily practices are essential to their construction as mothers in the hagiographies. I conclude that the extra-clerical role of the spiritual mother exceeded clerical authority and is a critique of its power. By creating a working definition of thirteenth-century spiritual motherhood, this paper seeks to open up a path to further examination of its rhetorical use in hagiography. (Bynum 1982, 1987; Smith, 2018).

Keywords: Hagiography, Mysticism, Motherhood, Gender, Authority

PARALLEL SESSIONS 5 [15.40-16.25]

***Sites of Communication and Expression* [Belle van Zuylenzaal, 15.40-16.25]**

- Moderated by Iris Krips

Do Multimodal Cues Compensate for Manual Gesture Restrictions in Infant-Directed Communication?

- Roos Ledebøer

Communication is inherently multimodal [1, 2]. When communication in the auditory modality is perturbed, speakers tend to compensate crossmodally by exaggerating lip or head movements [3, 4]. Gesture restriction can negatively impact speech fluency and content, indicating co-speech gestures aid speech production [5, 6, 7, 8]. However, research on its effects on multimodal communication is limited: no compensation has been found in speech [9, 10] and conflicting results are found for gestures [8, 11]. This study therefore examines the effects of manual gesture restriction on both prosody and visual articulators (i.e., the head, eyebrows, and torso) in infant-directed speech (IDS). In IDS, amplified gestures are found [12] accompanying exaggerated pitch measures [13]. Based on previous research on adult-directed speech [9, 10], we hypothesize that manual gesture restriction will not affect prosody. But no directional hypothesis can be formulated regarding the visual articulators, given conflicting findings [8, 11]. Using video recordings of a German native speaker telling stories to four 9- to-11- month-old Dutch-learning infants in a foreign language learning task [14], we analyzed the speaker's verbal and visual behavior in two conditions: hands-free and hands-restricted. The auditory recordings were annotated for intonational phrases in Praat [15]; pitch and intensity measures were extracted from each IP with ProsodyPro [16] and subsequently corrected manually. The videos were annotated for presence of head, eyebrows and torso movements per IP in ELAN [17]. Linear mixed-effect modeling [18] revealed no significant effect of condition on any outcome variable, confirming the hypothesized unaffected prosody. It indicates that pitch characteristics of IDS such as a high mean pitch and a wide pitch range were present in both conditions (mean: 264 Hz and 260 Hz, range: 163 Hz and 159 Hz). No evidence for visual compensation was found. However, further analysis using automated detection software may provide more insight.

Mireille E. Cornelis - The Spontaneous Stance: Karel Appel and the Act of Painting

The paintings of the Dutch artist Karel Appel (1921–2006) are frequently characterised as the output of a fierce expressionist who created his work during spontaneous outbursts of creativity. However, his frequently overlooked drawings present a contrasting perspective, revealing a more deliberate and contemplative working process in which drawing plays a pivotal role. This points to an apparent duality between spontaneity and deliberation in his oeuvre; and calls into

question the generally accepted interpretation of Appel's creations as epitomes of unbridled artistic impulse. The focal point of my PhD research pertains to the inquiry into Appel's multifaceted artistic identity, with a pivotal emphasis on the analysis of his drawings.

For the Humanities Graduate School Conference 2025, themed "The Human Body in Culture, History, and Expression," I intend to focus on Jan Vrijman's influential 1961 film, *The Reality of Karel Appel*, which reinforced the archetype of the expressive artist engaging their entire body in the act of creation. Notably, prior to the film's release, in 1958, Appel himself had already positioned the human body as a significant 'tool' for painting, exemplified by his act of hanging beneath a mini-helicopter while wielding a broom-like brush above a canvas. Such visual narratives have inadvertently led to misconceptions regarding his methodology, thereby oversimplifying the richness of his artistic practice. By framing Appel solely as a visceral painterly body, the revaluation of his artistic identity has proven challenging. Through my study, I critically interrogate the concept of spontaneity—where the artist's body plays a vital role in modern art—exploring both how Appel constructed his artistic persona and how he has been perceived and contextualized within the broader discourse of art and cultural history.

Keywords: Karel Appel, spontaneity, artistic identity, body in art, Abstract Expressionism

Empowered Identities: The Role of Priestess Okomfo Akosua Atuobua in Kwahu Spirituality

– Harriet Boateng Aduako

The paper examines the evolving role of a priestess within the Kwahu ethnic group in Ghana, focusing on her body as a medium of expression during possession rituals for healing. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's body was not given, but 'acquired,' through training and years of experience with a network of deities in Kwakore, located in Ohene Akura village in the Eastern region of Ghana. The paper contextualizes the unique contributions of women in traditional roles, using Bruno Latour's Actor–Network Theory, to show how the body can be studied not only in dualism but also in the network of material and somatic factors influencing it. Through interviews and participant observations with Atuobua, the research highlights how the priestess' body is manipulated through customs, drums, and rituals to achieve a specific religious experience that has sustained the Kwahu communities. The study emphasizes the transformative process that the priestess' body undergoes in a multifaceted way (actions, gestures, words, and knowledge communication), revealing a traditional understanding of the healing process. Among the Kwahu, healing is not a simple physical state; relationships and networks mediate it. The survey of Okomfo Akosua Atuobua and her role as a priestess provides valuable insights into the complexities of the body, which experiences continuity with its physical environment rather than isolation, shaping identity and having far-reaching implications for her leadership roles.

Sex and Sexuality [Kanunnikenzaal, 15.40-16.25]

– Moderated by Camila Malig

'Unlock Your Orgasm' Sexual pleasure and orgasm in femtech

– Christl de Kloe

The paper examines the evolving role of a priestess within the Kwahu ethnic group in Ghana, focusing on her body as a medium of expression during possession rituals for healing. Okomfo Akosua Atuobua's body was not given, but 'acquired,' through training and years of experience with a network of deities in Kwakore, located in Ohene Akura village in the Eastern region of Ghana. The paper contextualizes the unique contributions of women in traditional roles, using

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Keywords: femtech, sexual pleasure, orgasm, embodiment

Shame On You, But Who's Under You? or On How to Have An Erotic Encounter With Shame

– Priyanka Jha

This paper expands on Eve Sedgwick's notion of "queer performative"¹, which she understands as "a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame."² Bollywood "item songs" represents the desiring practices of non-normatively gendered bodies whose legibility is inseparable from markers of caste and class. By close reading the lyrics of Bollywood item songs and the affective gestures of Bollywood dance, I argue that the marginal "item body" highlights a history of colonial Law in India that constructs sexuality as a product of public shame. Within dominant strands of Queer Theory, Judith Butler's definition of "queer performativity"³ has taken precedence over Eve Sedgwick's understanding of the same. Reading the socially illegitimate body represented in Bollywood "item songs" as exemplary of Sedgwick's queer performative provides grounds to mobilize shame in new ways. Butler understands shame as a stigma that attaches itself to queerness, and its performance as public resistance to the interpellation of shame. Bollywood "item songs" reinfuse this flaccidly political performance of shame with the pleasures of theatricality by arguing that sexuality is definitionally public. Arguing for a sexuality that understands pleasure in relation to the public mobilizes shame as a transformational life force that delineates identity without determining identity or fixing its social position.

Keywords: Queer Performativity, Bollywood, Public Sexuality, Shame, Colonial Law

Poor, Unfortunate Females! Interrogating through Androphonia

– Elle Zwinkels

In contemporary Western societies, many take voice as indicative of sex and, consequently, gender (Azul 2013, 79-80). As the prevalence of (mezzo-)soprano protagonists in musical theatre and opera suggests, Western aesthetics deem higher notes/voices a sign of femininity/Womanhood (Clement 2001; Boyd 2010). When non-trans* Women with low voices suffer from repeated vocal misidentification, medical physiologists may diagnose them with *androphonia* (Koçak and Övünç 2023, 177). This clinical diagnosis points to bodily *femaleness* as foundational to Western, gendered hierarchies of voices. And yet, might *androphonia* help us productively question sexuating systems of presumptions on voicing? In this paper, I perform a concept-driven discourse analysis to contemplate the re/production of femaleness in "Poor Unfortunate Souls" from Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1989). Noted for its low notes, Ursula the Sea Witch's song affords a study of voice and sex with both interdisciplinary and societal merits.

Its relational approach helps academic debates transcend disciplinary conventions – including voice science’s fixation on sex (Azul 2013, 78). Its critical expansion of femaleness denounces femininity as a constitutive indexicality while, unlike trans-exclusive radical feminists, disposing of essentialism (see Raymond 1979). In this paper, a musicological and voice scientific description of Ursula’s vocals first maps the gendered, sensory contradictions in “Poor Unfortunate Souls”. Through introducing androphonia, I proceed with questioning implied ontologies of voice-of-sex and voice-as-sex. Finally, I think with androphonia, embracing contradiction, to proffer an alternative, expansive conceptualization of female voicing. Overall, I seek to respond to the following question: how might thinking “Poor Unfortunate Souls” through androphonia elucidate and denaturalize realities of vocal femaleness? This paper is ultimately an effort to hold space for the *complexity* of female voices – of *female*, of voice, and what their syntactic pairing discloses about Western social and aesthetic grammars.

Keywords: androphonia, femaleness, voice, sex, Poor Unfortunate Souls
