

# L I M I N A J

*This exhibition proposal examines how contemporary artists explore the liminality of identity - pertaining to, but not exclusive of, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality - through technology, film, and visual new media.*

---

by Rebecca Elisabeta Marya Ribeiro

*Contemporary Art, Theory, and Criticism  
with a focus in Museology and Curatorial Studies*

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts*

*Purchase College  
State University of New York*

*May 2021*

Sponsor: Dr. Chelsea Haines

Second Reader: Dr. Jane Kromm

A CURATORIAL PREFACE AND REFLECTION

I  
THE LIMINAL SPACE

II  
ART HISTORY IS LIMINAL

III  
THE CYBORG IS LIMINAL

IV  
GENDER IDENTITY IS LIMINAL

V  
RACIAL IDENTITY IS LIMINAL

VI  
THE CORPOREAL IS LIMINAL

VII  
THE LIMINAL IS NOW

VIII  
THE LIMINAL CHECKLIST AND EXPANDED BIBLIOGRAPHY

## A CURATORIAL PREFACE AND REFLECTION

The exhibition, *Concentrated Power*, was a nine-month project conducted by a small curatorial cohort of graduating art history masters students. Reflecting on the exhibition process, timelines, and the ever-present challenges of working during the time of COVID-19, there are many ways in which the curatorial lens can be reinserted following the successful launch of the exhibition. Due to the various desires within the curatorial cohort, many individual lenses were applied to the final product - technicality, branding, media, and gender; the exhibition's lenses work in tandem with one another, and are quite interconnected, proving an art object such as *Dash* to be liminal and rich in both meaning and forms of value.

The curatorial cohort - recognizing the arrival of digital exhibitions, especially pressing during a global pandemic - originally desired an interactive app format, as opposed to the simplified, website platform that many museums are utilizing. Within the interactive app, the cohort hoped to find a means of recognizing the spectator, and encouraging one to insert one's own identity and personal narrative into the lenses surrounding the work, as well as to have a space to speak with - and listen to - others in order to further emphasize necessary discourse surrounding how one experiences constant engendering through media and mass-culture.

Looking at the gendered aspects of the show - those which deal with mass media advertising in the form of television, radio, marketing, and literature - the exhibition relied heavily on female, and feminized, connotations. The exhibition's supplemental zine, *Drrrty Laundry*, was meant to help create discourse beyond the specific biography and identity of Barbara Ségal, and simultaneously highlight women during the third wave of feminism who did not align directly with Ségal's identity - such as women of color, queer women, women of lower economic class, non-American women, immigrant women, and women who sought to take up

direct forms of activism. However, this supplement focused on direct engagement with, and the discussion of, femininity and feminization, too. In order to truly speak of the gendered and engendering pressures placed upon people and objects alike, the exhibition failed to create an agendered, or rather non-feminized, space for discourse. When considering the ways in which Dash laundry detergent was advertised - both on television and in print - there was little to be said about how individuals who do not identify with women interact with engendered domestic acts of labor, and in turn, engendered objects - such as a bottle of laundry detergent. Through feminist discourse, it is paramount to move through and beyond what is feminized, and in turn, recognize that it does not exist wholly separate from what is masculinized, or what is considered gender neutral; all are interconnected and dependent on one another. All identities have some form of a relationship to engendered notions - whether it be positive, negative, or existing within a liminal space.

The exhibition proposal, *LIMINAL*, seeks to open up discussion around the complexities of relationships with aspects of identity, historically and culturally, while simultaneously appealing to the cohort's original desire to give spectators the space to explore and consider one's relationship to identity, and how identities have been portrayed over time. While *Concentrated Power* sought to remain grounded in elements of Ségal's biography, as well as in Dash's historic marketing emphases, there was not ample space to consider the non-feminine, non-white, non-American, disabled, "glitched" and "cyborg" spectator within the context of the show, merely because that was not the show's focal point. Rather, the exhibition, through its emphasis on the artist and Dash's branding, created a harsh binary of value for the spectator to be placed in relation to - that which the spectator does - or does not - identify with. *LIMINAL* serves as a place in which *Concentrated Power* can jump to and expand upon in order to create a more

whole, intersectional, multiplicitous discussion of gender roles as they come into contact with technology, in the form of marketing, media, and the newfound, controlled creation of the self through digital platforms. It is paramount to remind oneself that the gendering and engendering of the lived experience, for example through the act of laundry, is not one-sided. Whether an individual's identity is part of a targeted audience or not, the individual has some semblance of a relationship to said engendering.

As we move closer to recognizing this complicated relationship with gender - made more mainstream through technology's wide spreading of - and accessibility to - personal narratives, truths of lived experiences, and how they continually and perpetually change and evolve, it becomes more clear that many - if not, all - aspects of identity cannot and never will be stagnant, concrete, perfect, and binary in nature. These qualities have always been constructed, and by using the technical and formal means by which they have been originally constructed, we gain freedom in the autonomous construction of the self, consciously choosing - or denying - notions historically associated with gender, sexuality, race, and biology. By looking to the past and present art historical canon, we have the potential to gain foresight, and therefore move one step closer to the idea that contemporary art - and the contemporary identity - are nonbinary and glitched, and deserve to be treated with respect to their intersectionality.

# I THE LIMINAL SPACE

The liminal has been considered a transition or threshold, implying that there are two or more spaces that can be accessed by traversing a liminal space - a space in which one has exited, and a space in which one may enter. The liminal space has a heavy connotation of transformation, serving as a momentary pause for contemplation and change, before moving on elsewhere. While lessons, meditations, or even losses are experienced in such a space, there is the expectation that one must leave the liminal space behind; the liminal space has been thought of as something ephemeral - an intermission. Thinking outside of the traditional and historic notion of a linear personal narrative - that which has a beginning, middle, and end - the liminal space can be explored, and thus encouraged, as a space of perpetual existence. One does not have to leave liminality, rather, one can exist within it. Considering the image of the beach, liminality occurs both physically and temporally, perpetually changing and avoiding singular permanency. It is in a liminal space such as this that binaries begin to collapse. Identity - while once having been controlled by various structures - becomes something which is fluid; the individual has control over where they wish to land on an infinite spectrum, sometimes choosing to occupy multiple points at once. By examining recent twenty-first century works of art through media of technology, video and photography, and social media, the individual embodies liminality. There is freedom in multivocality.

The fourth and current waves of ideological feminism promote liminality of the self as post-colonialism and intersectionality become stronger. While the non-cisgendered identity has geographical, cultural, and religious roots, the non-binary identity through a Western lens is relatively new and at the forefront of identity discourse. For many individuals in the twenty-first century, existence, referenced by Anne Wagner in relation to performance art, “is therefore as it

were centered between two machines that are the opening and closing of a parenthesis.’ The analogy means, of course, that the body ought to be considered to be held in qualified suspension: it is bracketed just as is a linguistic phrase or sign”.<sup>1</sup> Linguistics, via pronouns and the engendering of objects, qualities, and beings, present binary thinking on a massive and historic scale; through language alone, individuals are finding the way a structure explains and categorizes life to be ridiculously constrictive. This once-desired space of “qualified suspension” does not and cannot properly preserve the individual’s identity; simultaneously, by being in suspension - a temporary pause - and not grounded in finality, exploration and fluidity can easily occur. As new media art continues to achieve recognition in the art historical canon, its very liminality and inability to be neatly categorized are what have prevented it from having true permanency in the museum. It is paramount to note that an exhibition such as this cannot and should not have concrete categories; rather, each work - and each broad grouping - flow within one another, further proving their liminal nature.

## II ART HISTORY IS LIMINAL

Within the history of Western art, the traditional practice of copying the great masters has been believed to be one of many ways to achieve technical success and audience approval. It is important to understand that the individual feels compelled to copy not only in the realm of art, but through the structure of a social narrative; following - for example, cultural or religious - social narratives enables an individual to feel comfortable within one’s social setting, and provide one another with a collective sense of belonging and familiarity. However, it is paramount to discern that this specific social narrative has been constructed and shaped in such a way that it appears singular, constrictive, and unforgiving. Art institutions have preserved both

---

<sup>1</sup>Anne M. Wagner, “Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence,” *October* 91 (Winter 2000): 59-80, 68

subject matter and medium through a social narrative of sorts; there is an entrenched history of female nudity, for example, being reserved solely for figures that reference mythology and allusion. The building of discourse around engendered and engendering qualities allows for a deeper discussion towards the naturalization of gender norms. Opposing the immensely, and historically, charged aspects of gender, naturalization would both free and open up possibilities for gender identity that have not previously been allowed. Simultaneously, said naturalization would help counteract the ways certain gender identities - or engendered qualities - have had hierarchy over others - highlighted via the patriarchy. Despite examples as such, the entirety of art history is simultaneously founded upon the idea of movements, and the birth of an art movement in conversation with its predecessors. Each art movement either contradicts or expands upon not only its immediate predecessor, but those that came far before.

Art history can serve as a liminal space for identity exploration, with artists finding themselves not only emulating and mimicking aesthetics and subject matters of movements before them - often those that have served as academia and training - but finding a way to insert themselves directly into the aesthetic narratives of the past, both seriously and as parody. Two female-identifying artists that have discussed the representation of women - or, lack thereof - in art historical works are Cindy Sherman and Jillian Mayer. While still speaking in relation to race within the museum institution, Sherman and Mayer emphasize and highlight whiteness in such a way that points to its problematic role within the art historical canon. In Mayer's video, *H.I.L.M.D.A* (2011), Mayer reimagines and recreates a visceral and grotesque narrative around Alexandros of Antioch's *Venus de Milo*, circa 100 BCE; the iconic statue of the goddess is known for its arms having been broken off over time. Mayer carefully plays with the liminal space between sculpture and human, having painted herself stark white, while also allowing for



herself - as the Venus - to have a fleshy, bloody interior, that which is exposed as the artist chews off her own arms. It is through this photographed performance piece that the artist calls attention to the “end” product of an ancient Greco-Roman sculpture as it is perceived in a museum. Gavin Rae, in the context of Heidegger, authenticity, and what it means to “be” in the world, calls to the notion of *paideia*, and the Greek determination to educate individuals to become ideal members of society. “Humanism in the Roman context embodied the Greek spirit of *paideia*, meaning learned, philosophical scholarship and training in good conduct and manners. This ensured that the affirmation of a *culture* of reason and education became synonymous with the essence of humanity”.<sup>2</sup> Mayer utilizes the perverse and the surreal in order to draw attention to the sterile, white cube of the museum, and the ways in which women have been perceived in art history, by appropriating the icon, shaped by this sense of singular classicism, and blurring the boundaries between “good conduct” and true “humanity.”

Sherman, despite her art historical roots in her reproduction of feminine media stereotypes, produces works such as *Untitled, #603* (2019) and explores the way masculinity has been portrayed in art history. In her work, the artist mimics and sets up a traditional renaissance portrait backdrop, while donning clothes of that era. As opposed to presenting herself as a woman, Sherman takes on the persona of a man - more intentionally, that of a high-classed individual who would be financially and socially prominent enough to commission an artist for a self-portrait. Through this, the position of the artist becomes complicated as it coexists with that of the patron; as opposed to Mayer’s reappropriation of the female form in art history, Sherman transcends gender and becomes hypermasculine - achieving not only the heightened position of the royal court artist, that which was predominately male, but also the heightened position of the well-off subject who is not seen sexually, but rather worthy of having his accomplishments as a

---

<sup>2</sup>Gavin Rae, "Re-Thinking the Human: Heidegger, Fundamental Ontology, and Humanism," *Human Studies* 33, no. 1 (May, 2010): 23-39, 28

citizen emboldened in portraiture. Returning to Wagner, these works which speak directly to the art historical promote the notion that visitors of museums “need some restructuring; they must be made to see anew. To see actively, to see critically, to see suspiciously,” how the boundaries of art history are not opaque, and seek to be further broken open.<sup>3</sup>

Yasumasa Morimura’s *Une Moderne Olympia* (2018), utilizes the art historical canon on multiple levels. Morimura’s photography series appropriates and reassigns meaning to the tiered relevances within emblematic works from the Westernized canon, such as Edouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863). Morimura is simultaneously playing with notions of gender, sexuality, and race, merely by calling to a recognizable, established iconography. The artist, through self-insertion alone, has complicated the eponymous figure of the work. While Manet did intend to have the central figure as a recognizable, well-known art model and prostitute at the time, Morimura has inserted himself, clarifying not only the “artist as commodity” trope, but also that of the fetishized, stereotyped, non-Westerner. It is evident through Morimura’s oeuvre that, “queer people, people of color, and female-identifying people have an enduring and historical relationship to the notion of ‘remix’ ... materials that can be reclaimed, rearranged, repurposed, and rebirthed,” as explained by Legacy Russell.<sup>4</sup> Due to the heteromale Westernization of the art institution, marginalized individuals continue to find themselves existing both within and without the canon; even as one utilizes and appropriates the canon, the artist exists within liminal categorization. Both Legacy Russell and her predecessor Donna J. Haraway emphasize the importance of the cyborg, glitched, semi-human entity, and the ways in which this identity proactively complicates and places pressure on what it means to be a living being in the technological age. Through works such as Morimura’s, “the cyborg is resolutely committed to

---

<sup>3</sup>Anne M. Wagner, “Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence,” 80

<sup>4</sup>Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, (Brooklyn: Verso, 2020), 133

partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence”.<sup>5</sup> Morimura is cognizant of the conflated and entrenched histories behind the work in which he is referencing, and is - through the liminal, non-binarily, un-whole, piecing together of the “cyborg” persona - speaking directly to irony and perversity. He becomes a glitch: a malfunction in the once “stable” system.

Kent Monkman also uses photography as a means of critiquing and reappropriating art historical perceptions of marginalized peoples. In his series, *Fate is a Cruel Mistress* (2017), Monkman - through the two-spirit third gender, or gender variant, of Miss Chief Eagle Testickle - mimics the identities of mistresses in history that have become infamous in Judeo-Christian biblical narratives. As opposed to reinforcing misogyny and denouncing the “femme fatale,” Miss Chief highlights seduction as motive towards good and necessary success. By placing each heroine in the context of colonized Canada in the 19th century, as opposed to their original biblical backgrounds, Monkman as an indigenous artist is able to create dialogue not only around the perceptions of women in art history, but also those of indigenous peoples - more specifically, through the colonized lens. Photography, here, becomes the paramount medium for these artists; they are hyper aware that, as Douglas Crimp points to at the turn of the century, “when photography is allowed entrance to the museum as an art among others, the museum’s epistemological coherences collapse. The ‘world outside’ is allowed in, and art’s autonomy is revealed as a fiction, a construction of the museum”.<sup>6</sup>

### III THE CYBORG IS LIMINAL

---

<sup>5</sup>Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century,” *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016): 5-68, 9

<sup>6</sup>Douglas Crimp and Louise Lawler, “Photographs at the End of Modernism,” *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993): 2-31, 14

This means of seeing the liminal as a space of transition and experimentation is what makes various forms of technology so alluring. When the confines of social and cultural reality can present potential dangers to many marginalized individuals, the technological realm - beyond film and photography, and moving into a kinetic, alternative reality online - allows for further means of experimentation. In micha cárdenas' *Becoming Dragon* (2008), "bodily figures who do not fit into either gender fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject," centralized in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*.<sup>7</sup> cárdenas used the program Second Life for 365 hours - with each hour representing a day - in order to question the legislation stating that a trans individual must spend one whole year as their gender identity before being able to achieve gender confirmation surgery; through a Head Mounted Display, the artist is able to physically and virtually move throughout the space. It is interesting that - as opposed to choosing a human gender option on Second Life - cárdenas consciously chooses an entirely different being. Following Heidegger's ontology, "our condition to think in terms of fixed oppositions means that the new non-conceptual form of thinking he brings to our attention is both difficult to think and/or may seem nonsensical".<sup>8</sup> cárdenas' calling to, and embodiment of, the dragon speaks to two histories: one being the mythology of the dragon, and its ability to easily shapeshift and time travel; and two being the option of the dragon on Second Life as one without a binary gendered categorization. The artist as dragon navigates both the liminal spaces of identity, and the liminal spaces where reality and technology coexist.

Despite technology assisting many individuals with exploring and coming into their identities with more confidence, knowledge, and a sense of community, the technological realm can also take those freedoms away, and in doing so, erase what has been constructed. Both Hito

---

<sup>7</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 111

<sup>8</sup>Gavin Rae, "Re-Thinking the Human: Heidegger, Fundamental Ontology, and Humanism," 31

Stereyl's *How Not to be Seen. A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013), and John Freyer's *All My Life for Sale* (2001), discuss the physical and psychological ways that identity can be erased through technology. In Stereyl's video, the artist - speaking from her personal experience of having a friend disappear, most likely due to the friend's participation in a Kurdish rebel organization - takes a satirical approach to the instructional film. While the first few instructions are very vague, the instructions become more macabre and intense as the video steps progress. The central aesthetic symbol that appears consistently is a patch of concrete that is used by the United States government to recalibrate their surveillance cameras. Stereyl's work highlights "the issue of who's in charge: which voice, person, image, or moment might register some decisive claim to be calling the imaginary shots," that which Wagner finds fluctuating between those who are seeing, and those who are being seen.<sup>9</sup> A similar means of questioning authority and control as it has infiltrated the technological realm is Freyer's work. Freyer utilized eBay as his artistic medium for performance, selling each and every item that he owned, and eventually selling the domain for the website - where all of the receipts and sales are cataloged. While the artist originally planned this project as a means of moving out of Iowa City, the project also served as a critique on consumer culture, and the questioning of how items do - or do not - contribute to our identities. Personal histories were written and attached to each work that was sold; through this, Freyer was selling pieces of himself - physical items and emotional memories - and in turn, becoming glitched through "the splicing of a single entity into discrete parts".<sup>10</sup> The question arises: is it here that "single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters"?<sup>11</sup> When one is determined by a technological authority figure, where can the line be drawn between real and digital identity, and identity itself?

---

<sup>9</sup>Anne M. Wagner, "Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence," 77

<sup>10</sup>Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, 77

<sup>11</sup>Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century," 15

The concept of the cyborg - that which is human in some aspects, and non-human in others - explores the liminality of identity when it comes into contact with technological authority. In Poppy's (Moriah Rose Pereira) film, *I'm Poppy* (2018), the musician and performance artist further displays the pop star's relationship with technology and "Them" - Poppy's creators and ultimate controllers. As Poppy navigates the real world and encounters other pop sensations, cult members, and the viscerality of being human, Poppy finds "there is no return to the concept of 'the real' as digital practice and the visual culture that has sprung from it has forever reshaped how we read, perceive, process all that takes place AFK (away from keyboard)".<sup>12</sup> Because Poppy's existence thrives in the digital realm - identifying as a cyborg - there is an inability to separate the realms and treat them as separate and unique entities. While Pereira is human, Poppy functions similarly to pop artists like Hatsune Miku - the technological robotic musician, controlled and shaped by fans and producers. What makes Poppy so significant is Poppy's coexistence in both realms, and by doing such, displays that - as Haraway stresses - "the machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; *they* do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are *they*".<sup>13</sup> Like Steyerl and Freyer, Poppy works with, and therefore counteracts, the authority imposed by individuals in technologically high positions. This hyper-awareness of how technology controls identity and persona gives the audience ways in which they, too, can find control between the two realms; as aforementioned, internet as medium and the categorization of new media themselves are liminal.

#### IV GENDER IDENTITY IS LIMINAL

---

<sup>12</sup>Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, 45-46

<sup>13</sup>Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century," 65

The performativity of gender and the social expectations surrounding one's gender is ephemeral and inconsistent on a small scale; it is the small aspects that emphasize the performativity and arbitrary nature of gender on a daily basis. From clothing, to movies, to consumer products, the individual is reminded of the ways they are gendered through and by the things in which they are surrounded, as well as the ways in which they, in turn, are engendering objects of the everyday. Regardless as to what the pink and blue binary associates itself with at a given moment in cultural history, values such as color are continually engendered and engendering. When aspects of gender are found within a transitional period of meaning and value, it becomes clear that "gender is also a norm that can never be fully internalized; 'the internal' is a surface signification, and gender norms are finally phantasmatic, impossible to embody," when they are always in flux - the center of Judith Butler's "trouble" argument.<sup>14</sup>

In works such as Amalia Ulman's *Excellences & Perfections, Instagram Project* (2014), the artist utilizes technology as a means of amplifying the ways one promotes and performs certain aspects of gender identity. As Ulman changes her online persona after brief moments of identity stability, she is "revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal one that no one can embody".<sup>15</sup> It is through apps such as Instagram that an individual has the freedom to share and express various aspects of their persona and daily life, while simultaneously being confined by the notion that one's social media account is equivalent to all aspects of their "real" persona. Ulman uses photography via Instagram as medium, carefully crafting various feminine tropes for herself - such as a millennial social media influencer, a mature business woman, and a health fanatic. With each post feeding into specific tropes and trends on Instagram at the time, Ulman grows closer to "Beauvoir's claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* woman. It

---

<sup>14</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 141

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 139

follows that *woman* itself is a term in progress, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end”.<sup>16</sup> Ulman is aware that “female sensibility was in part socially constructed, but [many] felt that [they] had also constructed it...reclaiming the positive and disclaiming the negative,” through their own self-construction and interaction on social media.<sup>17</sup>

In works by Andrea Mary Marshall and Darryl DeAngelo Terrell, the artists follow that, “in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the intimate structure of gender itself, as well as its contingency”.<sup>18</sup> However, it is important to distinguish that while Marshall imitates gendered performance as a means of creating satire of gendered and sexual expectations, Terrell - through his persona, Dion - finds genuine significance in gender and sexual performance. Andrea Mary Marshall’s *Elvis (series)* (2013), takes on drag as a means of creating dialogue around sex symbols in Western culture; while men are given examples as to what they should strive to be, women are given examples as to what they should desire - for example, Elvis Presley. Through video and photography, Marshall creates a drag performance that combines both rockabilly Presley and fetishized qualities of the “Madame Butterfly” persona through an elaborate wig and large hand fan. Marshall also calls to masculine art icons - such as Jackson Pollock - by chain smoking and aggressively abstract painting. Terrell, however, “by means of costumes, disguises, and fantasies, detailed the self-transition,” that he desires and feels best represents himself.<sup>19</sup> In many of the photographs within *Dion (series)* (2019), Terrell is accompanied by other figures in many of the works, creating dialogue between what he claims to be his own blackness, queerness, fat-ness, and femme-ness, in relation to other black figures. While Marshall is critiquing and poking fun at binary expectations for gender and identity, Terrell refuses the

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 33

<sup>17</sup>Lucy R. Lippard, “Both Sides Now: a Reprise,” *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: New Press, 1995):258-265, 273

<sup>18</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 137

<sup>19</sup>Lucy R. Lippard, “Making Up: Role-Playing and Transformation,” *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays of Feminist Art*:89-98, 91



binary completely and creates within the liminal space. *Dion* serves “as the means of representation *and* production...to deconstruct and reconstruct bodies outside the oppressive categories of sex”.<sup>20</sup> As opposed to finding ways to insert oneself into already preconceived social norms, the autonomy within the constructed self allows for an infinite set of tools for expression; contrasting the confines and binary qualities of social norms, works such as *Dion* transcend them, giving the individual the safety and space to juxtapose, remove, layer, and reconstruct over and over again.

Zachary Drucker and Rhys Ernst’s *Relationship*, (2008-13) is a work that exists within - and tracks - the physical progression of the individual as they navigate the liminal spaces of gender. Both Drucker and Ernst capture and briefly immortalize moments of the liminal as they both transition from their assigned sexes at birth. The photograph series is not only honest and raw, but tender and sweet, displaying how “Foucault imagines Herculine’s experience as ‘a world of pleasures in which the grins hang out without the cat’,” a reference to the disembodied, fluid apparition of Cheshire from *Alice in Wonderland*, and the cat’s possession of a deep knowledge that is not privy to others.<sup>21</sup> While both partners navigate their own personal relationships with their bodies, they are also privy to and witness of one another’s, simultaneously dealing with the transition of their communal romantic and sexual relationship. The artists carefully organize and display moments ranging in emotion and timing, and by doing so, are able “to move away or through and not be so over-determined by a desire for smoothness or fullness or completeness”.<sup>22</sup> What makes this series so significant is its ability to neither dramatize nor reduce the significance within each photograph and memory; by making the liminality of their shared - and personal - space the main focus of the series, there is a

---

<sup>20</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 125

<sup>21</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 24

<sup>22</sup>Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *A Poetics of the Undercommons* (New York: Sputnik & Fizzle, 2016), 23

preservation of the raw. “A space is opened up within which the human can be discussed unencumbered by previous thought”.<sup>23</sup> Returning to Foucault’s sentiment towards Herculine, an intersex individual assigned female at birth, Drucker and Ernst find happiness in the process. *Relationship* is one of many works that contribute to the necessity “to affirm the complexity of gendered lives as they are currently being lived,” - the messiness, the mundane, and the many often silenced complexities of human experience, revisited and revamped by Butler in 2020.<sup>24</sup>

## V

### RACIAL IDENTITY IS LIMINAL

Much like the boundaries created within art history and its institutions towards people of color, it is important to consider the problem of the socially-constructed notion of racial identity as a singular, all-encompassing, shared experience. While it is important to note that within specific marginalized racial identities, as well as in all marginalized peoples, there is absolutely a shared identity in general marginality - that which combats Anglo-Saxon whiteness - but there is also multiplicity that exists within the marginal. Contrasting external solidarity, fragmentation is what lies within. Following Heidegger, “disclosing the truth of each particular entity requires that the being of that particular entity be inquired into,” in order to fully grasp the individual experience.<sup>25</sup> Through the works of artists such as Narcissister, Juliana Huxtable, Vaginal Davis, and Rafa Esparza, liminality is “about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints,” within their racial or ethnic community.<sup>26</sup> As opposed to working towards finding a means of tying down the BIPOC experience, these artists find their experiences most accessible and more rich in the liminal.

---

<sup>23</sup>Gavin Rae, “Re-Thinking the Human: Heidegger, Fundamental Ontology, and Humanism,” 30

<sup>24</sup>Alona Ferber, “Judith Butler on the Culture Wars, JK Rowling and Living in ‘Anti-Intellectual Times,’” *New Statesman*, date published: Sept. 22, 2020.

<sup>25</sup>Gavin Rae, “Re-Thinking the Human: Heidegger, Fundamental Ontology, and Humanism,” 24

<sup>26</sup>Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century,” 15

Narcissister's *Man/Woman* (2009), is one of many of the artist's works that thrive in the liminal, multiplicitous space - especially in the realm of racial identity. In this performance film, Narcissister discusses the complicated power dynamics when race is confronted with the additional layers of gender, sexuality, and class. In the performance film, Narcissister - as a black female porn star - shows the power and control she has when having sex with a white man - or rather, a mannequin of one. Despite the recognizable and assumed social power dynamics created between the two due to the binary differences of race, gender, and biological sex, Narcissister denies expectations and flips power structures. Through this power within the black, sexual, woman, the motif of Audre Lorde's "Sister Outsider" is called to mind: "the offshore woman, whom U.S. workers, female and feminized, are supposed to regard as the enemy preventing their solidarity, threatening their security".<sup>27</sup> In the performance film, it becomes more and more evident that through the porn industry, the fetishization of black women is acceptable and encouraged. The fetishizing of black women speaks not only to mere misogyny, but the history of colonization, slavery, and desired domination over the Other. Narcissister uses these tropes as a means of luring the white masculine clientele into a false sense of power, and then - through this lulling - takes complete control. The film ends with the protagonist - after exhausting the white man's penis until it is no longer of use - looking into a porn magazine, and taking the final steps towards self-empowerment and love: masturbation.

Vaginal Davis' *¡Cholita! The Female Menudo* (1989-99), thrives on the liminality of racial and ethnic identity by speaking to stereotypes, and finding empowerment in the stereotyped self. Composed of Davis, Alice Bag, and Fertile LaToyah Jackson, each band member took on the persona of a tween Latina, ranging from ages twelve and a half to sixteen. The boy band, Menudo, consisted of five Puerto Rican tween boys, and the group gained

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid, 54

mainstream popularity both in Latin communities and overseas. Being not only Latin, but also Black and intersex, Davis emphasizes aspects of her identity by working through both racial and gendered cultural specificity. As opposed to thinking broadly and in an all-encompassing manner, the specificity of the highly advertised and crafted tween girl band speaks to some of the power dynamics discussed in Narcissister's work. Lucy R. Lippard - speaking on taboos and anathemas - and in turn Davis, as the thirteen year old Graciela, "appears to pull the viewer into the interstices between cultural understanding and misunderstanding that are left when representational cliché is emptied of its accepted content".<sup>28</sup> Davis, thus, "is also a significant factor in the replacement of colonization and condescension with exchange and empathy".<sup>29</sup>

Speaking to the theme of colonization, Juliana Huxtable's *Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm)* (2015), participates "in retelling origin stories... We have all been colonized by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfillment in the apocalypse".<sup>30</sup> It is in the apocalypse - this supernova from binary existence - where Huxtable is able to find enlightenment and peace in identity. The figure present in the photograph, nude and vibrant in skin tone, accompanied by the title itself, calls to a visual language of the alien: the extraterrestrial non-human. Predicted for 2017, the Nibiru Cataclysm was speculated to be a detrimental collision between Earth and the object Nibiru, or "Planet X," with its date of action stemming from biblical codes connected to the Christian figure, "The Woman of the Apocalypse". Huxtable - intersex, and having been raised male - calls to a traditional femininity through body pose, long hair, and exposed breasts. Behind the figure, a white, omnipresent sphere floats in a sky-like background. The artist uses her body in such a way to call attention to the notion of a post-existence: post-racial, post-gendered, post-human. In Fred Moten's *A Poetics of the Undercommons*, he states that,

---

<sup>28</sup>Lucy R. Lippard, "Issue and Taboo," *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art*, New York: New Press, 1995):150-170, 160

<sup>29</sup>Ibid, 170

<sup>30</sup>Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century," 55

“with a cool Lacanian maneuver, Wilkerson says that to be black is to have no such space time”.<sup>31</sup> Huxtable here exists outside of space time, perpetually and hypothetically born from an event that never occurred, with an unclarity as to whether it ever will occur. The artist becomes liminally physical and liminally temporal - having existed, existing, and having yet to exist.

This anxiety can also be found through Rafa Esparza’s *Self Portrait: Catching Feelings (Ecstatic)*, from *New American Landscapes* (2017), in which he emphasizes the reconnection between earth and body for marginalized peoples. Along a similar line as Huxtable, Esparza inserts a partial self-portrait into a large work composed of adobe, equating the brownness of his skin to the brownness of the earth. While Huxtable looks beyond space time to find identity, Esparza - another queer artist of color - proposes that, through the specifically queer ethnic lens of Michael Hames-García, “looking ‘outward’...might not be the remedy for our confused racial feeling”.<sup>32</sup> By placing the earth and the body into the same space, and artistically confusing the boundary between Esparza’s portrait and the adobe mud, the artist finds ecstatic sexuality and empowerment within the material - whereas Huxtable has found that empowerment in the non-planar universe.

## VI THE CORPOREAL IS LIMINAL

While several of the aforementioned artists and works discuss the potential means of leaving behind the corporeal body in favor of the psychological, emotional, and digital, artists such as Jes Fan, Gillian Wearing, and Heather Cassils question, alongside Russell, “what purpose can a body with no body serve”?<sup>33</sup> These artists, in correlation to notions of race, gender, and sexuality, look directly to the body, and how it has been scientifically and biologically

---

<sup>31</sup>Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *A Poetics of the Undercommons*, 19

<sup>32</sup>Michael Hames-García, “What’s After Queer Theory? Queer Ethnic and Indigenous Studies,” *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013): 384-404, 402

<sup>33</sup>Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, 93

categorized and given value, in order to move through and beyond it. Jes Fan's *Mother is a Woman* (2018), speaks to the gestation of those who have been categorized as women. In Fan's film, the artist includes both a video showing the process in which the artist's mother's estrogen - extracted from her urine - is transformed into a hand lotion, as well as a bottle of the lotion itself which is available to those in the space. Both the video and the partaking in the use of the body lotion call attention to kinship and the ways in which humans are connected on a molecular level. This notion of genetics, and bodily connections to one another, is explored in the works of Gillian Wearing - such as in her work, *Self Portrait as My Mother Jean Gregory* (2003). In much of Wearing's oeuvre, the artist creates and wears hyper-realistic masks, more specifically, of family members. Wearing creates self portraits in which it is not quite her that is portrayed, but rather a liminal coexistence of her and a blood relative. By physically stepping into and donning the physicality of a family member, the artist through the glitched identity is "gesturing towards the edges of stories both hidden and untold, the intergenerational trauma that was seeded," in and throughout Wearing's upbringing.<sup>34</sup> While Wearing physically appears as her mother, father, sister, or brother, there is no way to completely and fully remove her sense of self; in the same breath, just as the artist exists as herself, there is the inability to remove herself from her genetic ties to others.

It is in Heather Cassils' works *Becoming an Image* (2012-), and *Ghost* (2013), that the corporeal body is truly put into question and tested on various levels. In the work *Becoming an Image*, Cassils - in the darkness, only illuminated by sporadic flashbulbs as photographs are being taken - physically beats, punches, and throws their body at a massive slab of clay. The work proves Cassil's intense physique and muscular build, and the sheer strength the body is able to emit and expel onto that which lies outside of the body. Moving beyond Cassil's gender

---

<sup>34</sup>Ibid, 87

identity, the body at work in the performance piece is at face value a body at work. Falling outside of various binary categories, as Julia Kristeva has said, “I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish myself”.<sup>35</sup> For the artist, “skin is as much about what is kept in as what it keeps out... skin suggests the protection of a subject and the creation of an ‘other’ that is forever standing on the outside”.<sup>36</sup> As Cassils tackles the massive matter before them, their body is also protecting them and separating them from the slab of clay. It isn’t until Cassil’s post-performance work, *Ghost*, that the clay truly becomes separate from - and devoid of - the physical presence of body; that is not to say that it is devoid of previous bodily presence, with the altered, beaten clay proving the remnants of Cassils’ bodily force, accompanied by audio recordings from the performance: the grunts, the flashes, and the sounds of each and every hit that the clay has absorbed. While the photography from *Becoming an Image* does show Cassil’s non-binary, ambiguous body navigating a space in order to make itself known, *Ghost* brings this question to the forefront: “if a body is not legible as a body, and therefore cannot be read, will it be ‘seen’? ... Failing recognition, can it successfully cease to exist?”.<sup>37</sup> *Ghost* works both in tandem with and in opposition to its predecessor, simultaneously proving Cassils’ existence while denying clarity of their identity; the later work reduces Cassils to the Everyman. The artist is simultaneously themselves and not; man and woman, and neither; human and lack thereof; in existence and not, transcending space time and history.

## VII THE LIMINAL IS NOW

---

<sup>35</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 133

<sup>36</sup>Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, 101

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid*, 139

From the art historical practices of copying, mimicking, altering, and self-insertion, to the current twenty-first century revamping of the self through artistic means, film and photography specifically have served as ample media for exploring the liminality of the identity. The technological realm - whether it be through a camera lens or through the internet - proves that “there is always the specter of the ghost in the machine”.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of how near or far the individual places themselves to the digital, and their presence - or lack thereof - within it, liminality is inherent and expected. It is through the multiculturalist and postcolonial lens that non-Westerners and people of color specifically are able to reconnect with previously silenced gender and sexual identities, as well as with individualism in a communal group - whether that be ethnic, religious, geographic, etc.

This exhibition encourages exploration and itself explores categorization and the liminal space where a being - whatever that may be - and technology coexist. It is paramount to recognize that the beauty of this exhibition is its inability to have concrete and neatly sectioned portions; to have strict boundaries between these artists and their works would go against the exhibition itself. Rather, these large groupings prove that, while a work or artist may be focusing closely on one or two aspects of identity, it is inherent that through exploration, one is bound to have their fluidity move within and without many aspects simultaneously. As specificity and interconnectivity move to the forefront, we - through this - become universal. Universalism in relation to the human experience does not necessarily correlate to our corporeal, cellular, luminal composition and enclosed form; rather, universalism comes from universal difference, intersectionality, and multiplicity. In order to truly become universal, we as individuals - corporeal and technological - need to eliminate harsh boundaries altogether, and allow for the liminal being to merely exist, encompassing something, everything, and nothing. We should not

---

<sup>38</sup>Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century,” 11



seek to completely transcend all meaning, but rather encourage and highlight individualism, and the infinite ways an individual can choose or define aspects of their sexuality, gender, race and ethnicity. Art, art history, and the human experience have never been, nor ever will be, stable, in their fullest - and that is what makes them so beautiful, so alluring, so inspiring.

## VIII THE LIMINAL CHECKLIST AND EXPANDED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### **ART HISTORY IS LIMINAL**

Jillian Mayer's *H.I.L.M.D.A* (from the triptych *Everyone's Been Lost at Sea*), (2011)  
Cindy Sherman's *Untitled #603*, (2019)  
Yasumasa Morimura's *Une Moderne Olympia*, (2018)  
Kent Monkman's *Fate is a Cruel Mistress (series of 5)*, (2017)

### **THE CYBORG IS LIMINAL**

micha cárdenas' *Becoming Dragon*, (2008)  
Hito Stereoy's *How Not to be Seen. A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, (2013)  
John Freyer's *All My Life for Sale*, (2001)  
Poppy's (Moriah Rose Pereira) *I'm Poppy*, (2018)

### **GENDER IDENTITY IS LIMINAL**

Amalia Ulman's *Excellences & Perfections Instagram project*, (2014)  
Darryl DeAngelo Terrell's *Dion* (series), (2019)  
Andrea Mary Marshall's *Elvis* (series), (2013)  
Zachary Drucker and Rhys Ernst's *Relationship*, (2008-13)

### **RACIAL IDENTITY IS LIMINAL**

Narcissister's *Man/Woman*, (2009)  
Vaginal Davis' *¡Cholita! The Female Menudo*, (1989-99)  
Juliana Huxtable's *Untitled in the Rage (Nibiru Cataclysm)*, (2015)  
Rafa Esparza's *Self Portrait: Catching Feelings (Ecstatic)*, from *New American Landscapes*, (2017)

### **THE CORPOREAL IS LIMINAL**

Jes Fan's *Mother is a Woman*, (2018)  
Gillian Wearing's *Self Portrait as My Mother Jean Gregory*, (2003)  
Heather Cassils' *Becoming an Image*, (2012- )  
Heather Cassils' *Ghost*, (2013)

---

Simone de Beauvoir. *The Independent Woman: Extracts from The Second Sex*. (New York: Vintage Books, a Division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2018).

Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Anna Chave. "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power." *Arts Magazine*, 64, no. 5 (January 1990): 44-63.

Douglas Crimp, and Louise Lawler. "Photographs at the End of Modernism," in *On the Museum's Ruin*. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993): 2-31.

Alona Ferber. "Judith Butler on the Culture Wars, JK Rowling and Living in 'Anti-Intellectual Times'." *New Statesman*. Date published: Sept. 22, 2020.  
[www.newstatesman.com/international/2020/09/judith-butler-culture-wars-jk-rowling-and-living-anti-intellectual-times](http://www.newstatesman.com/international/2020/09/judith-butler-culture-wars-jk-rowling-and-living-anti-intellectual-times).

Dominika Gasiórowski. "The Muxes of Juchitán: Representations of Non-Binary Gender Identities in Contemporary Photography from Mexico." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 95, no. 8 (2018): 895-914.

Tag Gronberg. "The Gendered Object; As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste." *Journal of Design History* 11, no. 3 (September 1998): 264.

Michael Hames-García. "What's After Queer Theory? Queer Ethnic and Indigenous Studies." *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013): 384-404.

Donna J. Haraway. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth-Century." *Manifestly Haraway*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016): 5-68.

Amelia Jones. *Sexuality*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014).

Jonathan Katz and Anne Söll. "Queer Curating." *ONCURATING* no. 37, (May 2018): 2-5.

Lucy R. Lippard. *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art*. (New York: New Press, 1995).

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. *A Poetics of the Undercommons*. (New York: Sputnik & Fizzle, 2016).

Gavin Rae. "Re-Thinking the Human: Heidegger, Fundamental Ontology, and Humanism." *Human Studies* 33, no. 1 (May, 2010): 23-39.

Maura Reilly and Lucy R. Lippard. *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*. (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2018).

Maura Reilly and Lara Perry. "Living the Revolution." *ONCURATING*, no. 29 (May 2016).

Dorothee Richter. "Feminist Perspectives on Curating." *ONCURATING*, no. 29 (May 2016).

Legacy Russell. *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*. (Brooklyn: Verso, 2020).

Anne M. Wagner. "Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence." *October* 91 (Winter 2000): 59-80.

Cécile Whiting. *A Taste for Pop: Pop Art, Gender, and Consumer Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Reprinted 2013.