



Pauline Boudry/
Renate Lorenz,
Normal Work, 2007,
16mm transferred
to DVD, colour, sound,
13min, film stills.
Performance:
Werner Hirsch,
camera: Bernadette
Paassen

Previous spread:
*Charming for the
Revolution*, 2009,
16mm transferred
to DVD film
installation,
colour, sound,
12min, still.
Still photography:
Andrea Thal,
performance:
Werner Hirsch,
camera: Bernadette
Paassen. Presented
with 6 framed
photographs.
Images courtesy the
artists and Ellen
de Bruijne Projects,
Amsterdam

Repetition and Change: The Film Installations of Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz

– Gregg Bordowitz

*It was the days of ghosts. Still is. Not
the death, but the actual forgetting, even
the death of sexuality and wonderment,
of all but those who control and those
and that which can be controlled. Since
an emotion's an announcement of values,
in this society of the death (of values)
emotions moved like zombies through
humans.*

– Kathy Acker¹

The composition of the image is carefully staged. The subject stands in front of a wall-size landscape painting. A tall handsome woman, dressed in a work shirt and apron, rolls up her sleeve to reveal the bicep of her tensed muscular arm. She looks directly into the camera, proud of her physique. Visible in the lower part of the frame, some bananas and other fruit are arranged on a tabletop. A potted palm occupies the corner of the foreground. This is one of a number of tableaux vivants that comprise the film loop *Normal Work* (2007), part of an installation by the collaborative artists Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, and featuring the performer Werner Hirsch.

light of a projected slide show. Who are the members of her imagined audience? Are they hostile or sympathetic? Looking out into the vacant rows of seats, she laughs. And laughs. She titters, giggles, chortles and howls. Her sustained laughing suggests a spectrum of emotions – humorous one moment, filled with pathos the next, mixing pleasure with pain.

In *Charming for the Revolution* (2009), Hirsch plays a character dressed in a leather jacket, tight white shirt and plaid bell-bottoms. The costume connotes masculine working-class style. The German film director Rainer Werner Fassbinder comes to mind. We learn that the character is a housewife, as Hirsch declaims a revolutionary speech:

*I know how work functions
I have done that before.
We housewives. They make us work
for free!
But in return we don't get anything
for free!
The only thing that we get is anxiety
and the fear of losing a lousy job!
So just leave me alone.*

Gregg Bordowitz examines the performance strategies of Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz to illuminate their approach to the representation of history.

Hirsch reappears in a number of film loops by Boudry and Lorenz. In *N.O. Body* (2008) Hirsch plays a bearded lady who addresses the empty seats of a medical theatre. It's not clear if she is the subject of an examination. No one is present to examine her. Alone in the hall, she makes a private presentation, playing with a small spotlight, tuning in to the stations of a small portable radio, moving in and out of the

*In the factories, in the offices, in the
hospitals, in old people's
homes, online, in the kitchens, in the
museums, in the movie
theatres, we are married!
Married to a straight white guy called
'the economy'.
The only thing to do is to ask for a
divorce,
and a huge settlement.²*

Lest we be convinced of this revolutionary message – haltingly delivered, read off index cards – another character, also played by Hirsch, appears in *Charming for the Revolution* as a counterpoint to the 'housewife'. An extravagantly dressed

1 Kathy Acker, *My Mother: Demonology*, New York: Grove Press, 1994, p.14.

2 *Temporal Drag: Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011, p.1943.

dandy enters the scene, walking a turtle, slowly biding time, indulging in observation and reverie. Housewife or flâneur, which of the two is the real star of the film?

There's no choice to be made. Each is a star existing in a larger constellation. The characters in *Charming for the Revolution* allude to numerous references in a long history of queers struggling for survival against a hostile world of repressive norms. The housewife is a gender queer feminist, and possibly Fassbinder. The dandy is Oscar Wilde and Jack Smith. Composite and jumbled, the characters appearing in Boudry/Lorenz productions represent modes of existence rather than particular persons (even when the characters bear the names of actual historical figures, as is the case in later films). The artists portray the actions of individuals and groups living – indeed thriving – in defiance of convention, law and economy.

From 2007 to 2012 the collaborative duo produced seven film installations, each featuring a film loop from thirteen to seventeen minutes in length: *Normal Work, N.O. Body, Salomania* (2009), *Charming for the Revolution, Contagious!* (2010), *No Future/No Past* (2011) and *Toxic* (2012). The subjects of each film differ significantly, from historical personages to fantasy figures, but they are all tied together by an abiding interest Boudry described in an interview with Andrea Thal:

*We often work with materials from the past that show bodies that have been marked as 'other', freaky, perverse, racialised or socially outcast. But when we do this, we ask a lot of questions about how we can work with these documents without repeating processes or acts of devaluation of these bodies.*³

Boudry/Lorenz are fascinated by the histories of the queer marginalised subjects who serve as the basis for characters appearing in their films. It is significant that their films feature performances executed by stars from the artists' own milieu in Berlin and beyond – performers, film-makers, cultural figures and friends. Projected large scale, on walls or screens, the looped films serve as the central focal points of exhibitions, but they are not the only works on display. Boudry/

Lorenz draw together troves of historical documents to show on the walls of the gallery or museum – photographs, letters and explanatory texts that give a pedagogical aspect to the work. The artists emphasise this scholarly approach to their subjects, often producing books or zines to accompany an exhibition. All of the film installations are supported by an archive that extends to a body of writing, leading from the gallery to conferences, catalogues and the internet. Accessibility is a central principle behind their working methods. Much of the descriptive material for this essay was taken from the growing discursive corpus that surrounds the artists' oeuvre.

In their work, research materials, artists' intentions and critical examinations thus coexist in numerous forms and permutations. Still, their film practice is their central organising activity. The film loops are not conventional documentaries. They are theatrically driven spectacles. The performers are given a certain amount of autonomy. The artists shoot long sequences of performances without cuts or interruptions, but Lorenz is adamant that 'these films are neither meant to be a unique performance nor a documentation of one'. Boudry insists that 'the performance doesn't exist outside the film – it's not staged for the audience that was there the day it was shot, but for the audience that watches the film when it is projected'.⁴

The film-makers use well-established critical strategies to foreground the constructed nature of each film: self-reflexive gestures such as revealing the apparatus, having performers directly address the camera and breaking narrative continuity. No 'character' is shaped by individual psychological motivations. The performances in the films are copies, imitations or enactments of previously documented poses, actions and behaviours. The performers are self-conscious and complicit with their representation by the camera. Boudry/Lorenz are alert to the function of the lens as both a means of disciplinary observation and a point of resistance. The artists have an ethical mandate not to perpetrate violence against their subjects, who have often been demeaned by photographic representations.

3 'Stages: A Conversation Between Andrea Thal, Pauline Boudry, and Renate Lorenz', Berlin, September 2010, available at <http://www.boudry-lorenz.de/texts/> (last accessed on 9 May 2012).

4 *Ibid.*



Pauline Boudry/
Renate Lorenz,
Salomania, 2009,
HD film installation
and performance,
colour, sound,
17min. Still
photography: Kaliisa
Conlon, performance:
Yvonne Rainer,
Wu Ingrid Tsang,
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Courtesy the artists
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Projects, Amsterdam

Boudry/Lorenz's freaks are prepared to face the glance, the snapshot, the filming by hostile witnesses. Posing for the camera in advance of anticipated capture by the lens is a form of self-defence in the age of surveillance. It's an act of self-authorship. This was the case in the outrageous styles of early punk, where fashion was a means of resistance to the investigative eyes of law enforcement and sociology. Showing up publicly as a fabulous self-creation was a strategy to confound hostile spectators — shutterbugs and scientists eager to police the field of visibility by imposing norms of decency upon the depicted.⁵ Boudry/Lorenz's installations are similarly founded on the premise that subjectivity is lived in public, shaped by history. As they have written, 'The freak is a figure that acts and meddles in the practices of staring, knowledge production and constellations of power and desire.'⁶

In *Normal Work*, Werner Hirsch imitates poses borrowed from the late nineteenth-century photographs of the domestic servant and cleaning woman Hannah Cullwick, who produced a remarkable series of staged photographs that flaunted her strength, her muscles and her big dirty hands. She made these portraits in collusion with a bourgeois male partner named Arthur Munby, with whom she shared a sadomasochistic relationship. The photographs produced from this relationship feature Cullwick in a number of guises: servant, slave, bourgeois man and Victorian lady.⁷ Hirsch posing as Cullwick dressed as a Victorian lady delivers what sounds like an autobiographical account of the performer's own experiences:

I worked as an assistant in a library and I also worked as a teaching assistant at some point. And I gave flyers out to people in car ... parking lots. Things

5 The tactic of 'hiding in the light' was developed out of a history in which the 'lower classes' were particularly vulnerable to the conjunction of law enforcement and modern photography in the early and middle parts of the twentieth century. Scholars such as Dick Hebdige and John Tagg made significant contributions to the theorisation of the emergence of subcultures as a response to the vigilant eye of the spectacle and the history of the camera as a sociological tool in the hands of the law. See D. Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*, New York and London: Routledge, 1989; and J. Tagg, *Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

6 Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, 'Laughing about N.O. Body', available at <http://www.boudry-lorenz.de/texts/> (last accessed on 9 May 2012).

7 See P. Boudry and R. Lorenz, 'Normal Work', <http://www.boudry-lorenz.de/normal-work/> (last accessed on 9 May 2012).



*like that. I cleaned the floors in a dance studio every day. I worked as a bouncer, I worked as a kind of a professor. And I am strong: I think I could do heavy things like carrying luggage in train stations or in airports. And I also maybe want to work in a moving company, to move furniture around. But I still would like to work as a professor in academia and teach. I also have like a master's degree in art and whatever. I just thought, I would do what comes first, carrying or teaching.*⁸

Consumer culture has incorporated a version of continual self-alteration as the promise of success in the market. Wealth and status are tied to mobility across variable possibilities of body modification and fashion eclecticism. Perpetual adjustment of identity – personality, character and look – is perhaps the precondition for success. Adaptability to variable labour conditions, job descriptions and social roles within fluid hierarchies is necessary for survival in today's labour markets. Further, one is not in control of the conditions that shape the requirements of personal modification. The range of adaptability is overdetermined by market

demands. Boudry/Lorenz are acutely aware of the 'modern' conditions that circumscribe terms like 'identity' and 'self':

*We think that the negotiations of social boundaries and the crossings of different social positions that Hannah Cullwick performed in her photographs as well as in her everyday life are a kind of prototype for current neoliberal conditions.*⁹

In *Normal Work*, both Cullwick and Hirsch share a set of limited conditions determined within capitalism's corrupt bargain. The confusion of performer with character is an effective strategy that the artists have employed in each of their films. All figures within the frame are chimeras simultaneously occupying numerous periods, decades or epochs.

In *Salomania*, the performer Wu Ingrid Tsang delivers the following opening statement:

My name is Oscar Wilde, the whole country knows me. I choose my friends for their beauty and my enemies for their

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Salomania, 2009,
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Still photography:
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Wu Ingrid Tsang,
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Courtesy the artists
and Ellen de Bruijne
Projects, Amsterdam

⁸ *Temporal Drag: Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, op. cit.*, p.1960.

⁹ R. Lorenz, 'Interview with Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz by Antke Engel on *Normal Work*', available at <http://www.boudry-lorenz.de/texts/> (last accessed on 9 May 2012).

intelligence. On my grave in Paris it is written, famous for his play *Salome* and other literary work. I don't hide my male lovers. When the situation in town is getting tense, I go to the colonies, spend the winter in Morocco, where I can do as I please.

I am Alla Nazimova. I am shooting the film *Salome*. I am 45, and, as you notice through my accent, I am a Russian immigrant. I am the richest actress in Hollywood. I love women, I don't hide it. I am directing this film, I produced it and I act in the main role.

I am *Salome*, I just became fourteen, I am the Jewish Princess of Galilee, today north of Israel. I will dance for my father-in-law, Yvonne, in exchange I can get all I want. I want blood.¹⁰

In *Salomania*, Tsang is simultaneously Wilde, Nazimova and *Salome*. The 'father-in-law, Yvonne' is the film-maker and choreographer Yvonne Rainer, the second performer in *Salomania*. Her appearance

Posing for the camera in advance of anticipated capture by photography is a tactic of self-authorship in the age of surveillance.

in *Salomania* serves a number of ends. She teaches Tsang how to perform Valda Setterfield's solo, inspired by Nazimova's *Salome*, who danced in Rainer's film *Lives of Performers* (1972). In *Salomania*, Rainer also performs as King Herod, for whom Tsang/*Salome*/Nazimova/*Valda* dances. Boudry/Lorenz structure their performers as palimpsestic surfaces revealing layers of history — a dense overlay of texts, images and stories drawn from many generations, resembling strategies that Rainer developed in her own films.

The final section of *Lives of Performers* is titled 'Lulu in 35 shots'. Quoting G.W. Pabst's film *Pandora's Box* (1929), the dancers enact the film stills as tableaux. The viewer can see them straining to hold the poses for long durations — eyelids flicker, nostrils quiver — until the poses briefly are disassembled before the following shot.¹¹ For Rainer, speech is

movement and movement is language. In *Lives of Performers*, sequences showing her cast rehearsing a dance are juxtaposed with the casually staged set-ups of a scripted melodrama. A large portion of the film is about a relationship between two people played by four performers — two female, two male. The relationships in the script are performed by the combination of players so that it is not clear who is in love with whom, and if the relationship is straight or gay. In this and other ways, Rainer's films set precedents for Boudry/Lorenz.

As with Rainer's films, gender is key. However, our understanding of gender has changed dramatically since the early 1970s, when Rainer shifted from choreography to film-making. Boudry/Lorenz's works are based on the now current theorisations that separate biological sex, gender identity and sexuality into three distinct categories.¹² It is possible for a person to be born female, to be gendered male and to have sex with many differently gendered people; there are more than two genders. Boudry/Lorenz productions feature people who occupy various positions along a very wide spectrum of gender identity. Binary gender construction is both invoked and dismantled in their work by deploying the operative modes of gender construction: performance and imitation. Performers mimic modes of dress and style to signal time period, gender, race, class or social position. In some instances performers instruct each other on how to move and act according to already existing choreographies. Contagion is the third mode of operation — either through infectious laughter, as in *N.O. Body*, or by coughing, like in *Contagious!*

Contagious! is set in a nightclub. Performers dance for an audience of spectators who are susceptible to suggestion, and are moved to copy what they observe. The performer Vaginal Davis restages movements from the 'Cakewalk' — a dance developed in the US by enslaved Africans who mocked their white masters' European dance styles, such as the minuet. Davis's attitude and performance on stage resemble the movements of Arantxa Martinez, who restages poses and dances from 'epileptic dances', made popular in

10 *Temporal Drag: Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, op. cit.*, p.1908.

11 Yvonne Rainer et al., *The Films of Yvonne Rainer*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989, p.76.

12 See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York and London: Routledge, 2006; and J. Butler, *Undoing Gender*, New York and London: Routledge, 2004.

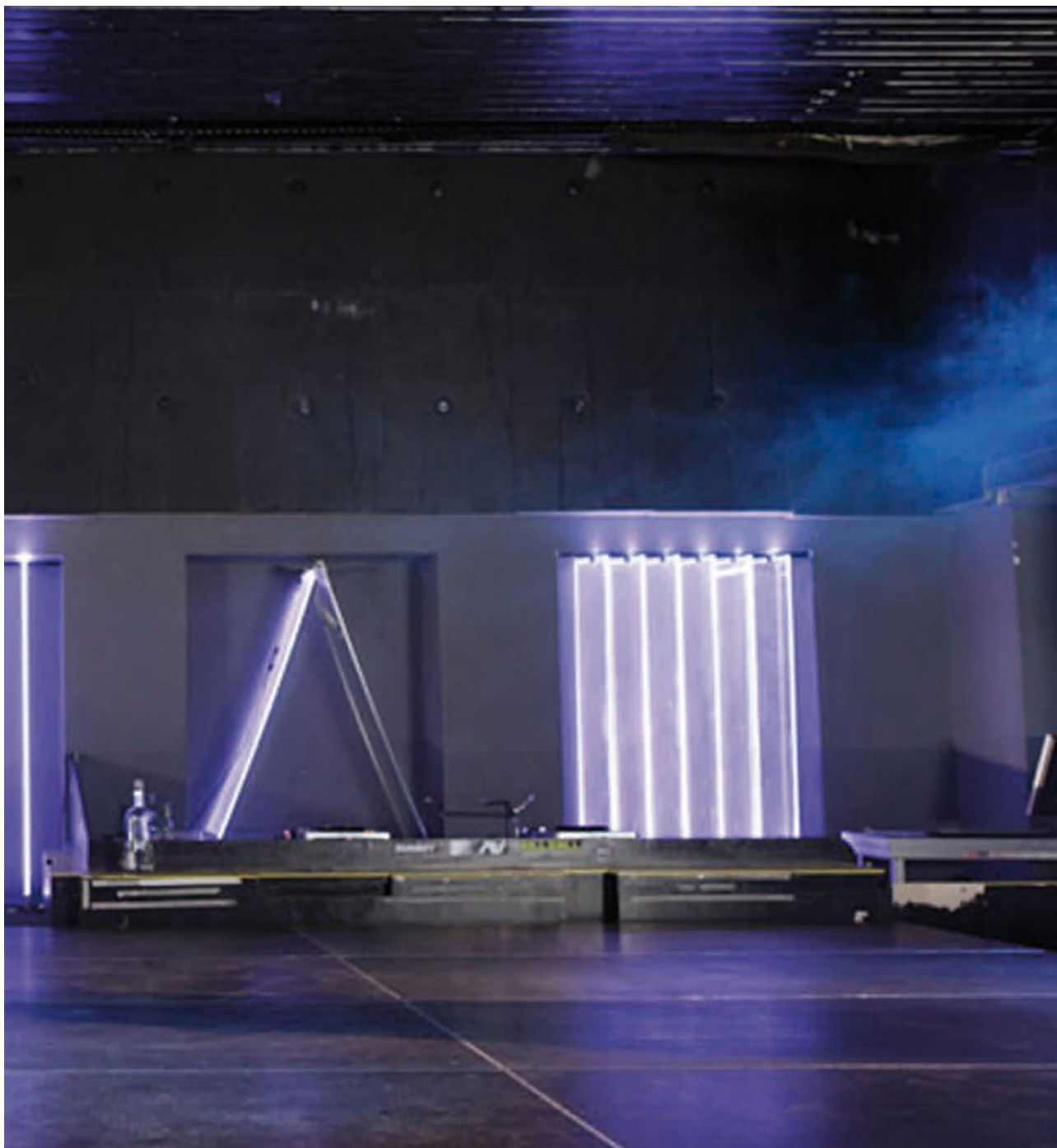


Paris at the same time that Dr Jean-Martin Charcot was researching epilepsy and hysteria in his Hôpital de la Salpêtrière.¹³

In one scene a performer coughs, setting off a coughing fit among the members of the audience. Viewing *Contagious!*, one cannot help but think of the panic surrounding the early days of the AIDS crisis, when disease and homosexuality were publicly linked by

government policy in the US. A long history of associations has bound stigmatised behaviours to diseases, connecting outcast minorities to epidemics. If the AIDS epidemic is a subtext of *Contagious!*, it is not overt. Perhaps AIDS is not a concern at all. Instead, the film installation connects the notion of contagion to two conflicting sets of impulses: (a) the wish to exercise the threat of contagion as an empowering

¹³ See P. Boudry and R. Lorenz, 'Contagious!', <http://www.boudry-lorenz.de/contagious/> (last accessed on 9 May 2012).



Pauline Boudry/
Renate Lorenz,
Contagious!, 2010,
HD film installation,
colour, sound,
12min, still. Still
photography: Andrea
Thal, performance:
Arantxa Martinez,
Vaginal Davis,
camera: Bernadette
Paassen. Presented
with 11 framed
photographs.
Courtesy the artists
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Projects, Amsterdam

gesture, claimed for the enfranchisement of freaks against normative social conventions, and (b) the contradictory urge to challenge the viral repetition of behaviour that underpins social conformity.

Whether or not AIDS figures in the background of *Contagious!*, Boudry/Lorenz's methods and concerns regarding queer enfranchisement and resistance to conformity are preceded by theoretical tendencies that were developed during the 1980s, when postmodernism and

post-structuralism promised liberation from identity as an open-ended series of metamorphoses. Kathy Acker is a significant precedent to consider here. Acker mixed a punk ethos with critical theory. Her writing was inspired by a deep immersion in literary history: she followed, copied and exploited models including Georges Bataille, Jean Genet, Pier Paolo Pasolini and the Marquis de Sade. In her essay 'Critical Languages' (1990), she generated 'The Languages of the Body':

1. *The language of flux. Of uncertainty in which the 'I' (eye) constantly changes. For the self is 'an indefinite series of identities and transformations'.*
2. *The languages of wonder, not of judgement. The eye (I) is continuously seeing new phenomena, for, like sailors, we travel through the world, through our selves, through worlds.*
3. *Languages which contradict themselves.*
4. *The languages of this material body: laughter, silence, screaming.*
5. *Scatology. That laughter.*
6. *The languages of play: poetry. Pier Paolo Pasolini decided to write in the Friulian dialect as 'a mystic act of love ... the central idea ... was ... (that) of the language of poetry as an absolute language'.*
7. *Language that announces itself as insufficient.*
8. *Above all: the languages of intensity. Since the body's, our, end isn't transcendence but excrement, the life of the body exists as pure intensity. The sexual and emotive languages.*
9. *The only religions are scatology and intensity.*
10. *Language that forgets itself. For if we knew that chance governs us and this world, that would be absolute knowledge.*¹⁴

Many of the principles in this list remain relevant to Boudry/Lorenz's practice, even though many theoretical terms and tendencies have changed significantly in the past twenty years. Boudry/Lorenz do not see the possibilities of identity transformation as limitless. They understand the determining features of neoliberalism and they are not so optimistic about the possibilities of liberation. Still, their work does contain a strong belief in the chance probabilities of novelty emerging from the irrepressible differences that exist among people. Their work invokes the 'languages of wonder, not of judgement' that Acker calls for as a necessary precondition of 'travel', or mobility, through selves and worlds.



Boudry/Lorenz celebrate difference. They construct their installations to include 'languages which contradict themselves'.¹⁵ They appreciate the power of 'laughter, silence and screaming'.¹⁶ They focus on 'scatology', on buried and discarded archives and genealogies. A kind of poetry is composed through the juxtapositions of texts with gestures. There is an attention, reminiscent of Pasolini, to the local dialects and specific characteristics of the performers — accents, gestures, fashion. And there's a shared set of stakes among all the participants in Boudry/Lorenz's inclusive public project. All the people involved inhabit a milieu where perseverance and survival are common concerns. 'Language announces itself as insufficient' to describe the desires of performers and film-makers.¹⁷ Utopian yearnings exist at the edges of the frames, among the loops and ellipses of a magnificent evolving collage unified by the principle that 'the life of the body exists as pure intensity'.¹⁸

¹⁴ K. Acker, *Bodies of Work*, London: Serpent's Tail, 1997, pp.91—92.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*



Pauline Boudry/
Renate Lorenz,
No Future/No Past,
2011, dual 16mm
transferred to HD
film installation,
colour, sound,
15min each, still.
Still photography:
Andrea Thal,
performance: Ginger
Brooks Takahashi,
Fruity Franky,
Werner Hirsch,
Olivia Anna Livki,
G. Rizo, camera:
Bernadette Paassen.
Courtesy the artists
and Ellen de Bruijne
Projects, Amsterdam

Optimism is shared among the living and the dead. They, we, together hope for the fulfilment of our desires in the present tense.

Boudry/Lorenz's projects mine the past to interrogate current conditions of existence. The project *No Future/No Past* uses the past to address its audience in the present tense more deliberately than the previous films. This installation is constituted by a pairing of two films, one set in 1976, the other in 2031. Both exploit the look and feel of Andy Warhol's films – shot in real time, and with white exposed leader separating takes. *No Future/No Past* features a group of five performers – three sitting, two standing – their faces looking off-screen. Each takes the name of a famous (or infamous) punk musician; the film draws on archives from 1970s punk 'to interrogate the radical negativity, the self-destructiveness and the dystopia of this past moment'.¹⁹

In *No Future*, for example, Fruity Franky, playing Poly Styrene, delivers the following 'political speech':

Basically I have one feeling, the desire to get out of here and any other feelings I have come from trying to analyse why I want to go away. I always feel uncomfortable and I just want to walk out of the room. It's not going to any other place or any other sensation or anything like that. It's just to get out of here.

Such deep dissatisfaction with the present and the imperative for another way of being – the desire for something else, a world radically reorganised – are qualities Boudry/Lorenz's work shares with the punk movement. As with previous films, mimicry and imitation drive the actions of the performers. Werner Hirsch plays the on-screen director feeding the cast members their lines. At one point everybody is ordered to look bored. They all oblige, with vacant stares and glum faces. 'Emotions move through humans like zombies.' 'It's the time of ghosts.' The Acker quote I chose as the epigraph to this essay rings most true with *No Future/No Past*. Are we still coping with the death of values described by Acker? Has capitalism robbed us of an authentic emotional life?

In Acker's novels, dystopian patriarchal societies are methodically described as impervious to change. The only hope for overthrowing male domination is achieved through the exploits of her protagonists who undermine the social order by following all the corrupt rules of male supremacy to their logical dead-end conclusions. Acker's protagonists rise up from slavery by embracing and exploiting their status as slaves. Boudry/Lorenz's queer feminist practice operates along similar lines. The characters of their film loops are doomed to repetition, trapped in history, replaying old gestures, occupying well-established roles. In *No Future/No Past*, the cast passively takes direction.

Still, beyond the disdain expressed by Hirsch's on-screen directions, there is something energetic in *No Future/No Past*, something that escapes the gloomy affectless performances of the punk characters. Three musical acts, which happen at the edge of the frame or just outside it, generate moments of enthusiasm and expectation. If there is a promise of finding a way out of the staged torpor, it lies beyond the camera's range. The action

¹⁹ P. Boudry and R. Lorenz, 'No Future/No Past', <http://www.boudry-lorenz.de/no-future-no-past/> (last accessed on 9 May 2012).

contained within the frame simply shows a theatrical play on film with contemporary people claiming the identities of past figures. By repeating in the present what others have stated in the past, the performers' behaviours elaborate (reiterate) an ongoing process of historical change. Reaching into the past and drawing connections to present-day existence, Boudry/Lorenz create a counter-hegemonic genealogy of ways of being-in-the-world. In spite of all the constraints that capitalism, patriarchy, racism and colonialism continue to exert upon social relations, we have ample evidence of people and subcultures that persevere in bold defiance of instituted norms. Boudry/Lorenz recognise and embrace the deviations that are structurally necessary to the development of modernity. Customs are altered by iterations, variations and constant modifications.

The film installations are apparently based on an historical model of evolutionary change. Thus far in the film installations, the panacea of revolutionary change is rejected. Ideals such as freedom, love and beauty are abandoned by the queer feminist left positions Boudry/Lorenz clearly endorse. The film installations and all the supporting theoretical material surrounding their production — including catalogues, essays and interviews — demonstrate that the artists have avowed commitments to radical social change, although not to the treacly promises of flawed utopian programmes. Their work is genealogically related to the history of counter-hegemonic cultural production, but they avoid the future-oriented expectations of traditional 'social change' artwork. Their film installations are designed to frustrate the very attempt to prescribe revolutionary conditions. There's no programme to follow, no list of tenets to adopt. The primary concerns are perseverance and pleasure in the moment.

Toxic, their latest film project, faces the problem of revolution directly. The film features Werner Hirsch and Ginger Brooks Takahashi. Like many of the above-mentioned productions, their performances draw upon the spirit of Jack Smith, who performed with his own sense of time, indifferent to an audience or camera. This film shows Hirsch and Takahashi staggering around the aftermath of some kind of party. The floor is covered with glitter, streamers



and cigarette butts. Hirsch, wearing a sequin dress, leopard-print bra, false breasts with a hairy chest and a messy bouffant wig, picks a cigarette butt off the floor, lights it, draws on it and coughs up glitter from her nose and mouth.

Takahashi wears a shredded white denim jacket with the sleeves cut off. Colourful and thick dark make-up is applied around her eyes. She holds a microphone to her mouth as she laconically delivers a litany of intoxicants, medicines, hormones and environmental disasters:

...alcohol, cocaine, acid, heroin, AndroGel, oestrogen, chemotherapy, ecstasy, silicone injections, mushrooms, Atripla, Celexa, Wellbutrin, the Great Pacific Plastic Patch, radioactivity crossing national borders, hydrolic fracking, opium, Tylenol, aspirin, Aleve, caffeine...

The elements on the list affect the body by soothing pain, producing pleasure, changing gender or treating depression. Or, they infect the body with poisons. *Toxic* is about feeling overwhelmed by stimuli and sensations. The performers seem hung-over, sick, tired and dejected.



Pauline Boudry/
Renate Lorenz,
Toxic, 2012,
installation with
Super 16mm film
transferred to HD,
archival material,
13min, still.
Performers:
Ginger Brooks
Takahashi, Werner
Hirsch, director
of photography:
Bernadette Paassen.
Courtesy the artists
and Ellen de Bruijne
Projects, Amsterdam

Toxic ends with Hirsch reprising a television interview with Jean Genet, given to the British television arts programme *Arena* in 1985. Hirsch, like Genet in the interview, exhorts the crew of the film to revolt against the hierarchy of film-making. The technicians, the argument holds, should occupy the position of privilege, sit in front of the camera and speak as the subjects of the interview. The camera duly turns around to reveal the director and crew – we see a boom operator, crew members, Takahashi and, most importantly, Boudry and Lorenz. Hirsch angrily explains how it feels to be marginalised, accusing the directors and crew of representing ‘the norm’. The interview set-up is another version of cops interrogating a thief. Dispirited, Hirsch ultimately takes responsibility for upholding the positions of power instituted by the interview format. Genet/Hirsch is a marginalised subject who willingly participates in the process of subjugation. As a result, the subject feels anger, disappointment and sadness. Self-disgust.

These feelings are the affects (poses and postures) that Boudry/Lorenz attempt to marshal as rallying points for the

audience. Rather than engage the audience through enthusiasm, optimism and joy – historically the kinds of emotions revolutionary media aims to produce – Boudry/Lorenz appeal to queer feelings, such as awkwardness and alienation. In *Toxic*, the film-makers indict themselves. Revealing themselves behind the camera is an act of self-abnegation. It places the artists within the range of the norm. More than that, it makes them seem pathetic. It’s no longer a revolutionary gesture to reverse roles and turn the camera on the film-maker(s). That gesture is now a worn cliché. There is no doubt that Boudry/Lorenz are aware of this. They’re not trying to overturn the social order with one powerful gesture. For Boudry/Lorenz change comes through constant reiteration.

It is still the ‘day of ghosts’. Forced to mime our emotions, now cheap commodities, we continue to fight ‘the death of wonderment and sexuality’ by repeating the words of the dead. Through such exhortations change does arrive, constantly. One can never return the same. All of the historical citations and repetitions enacted in Boudry/Lorenz’s works return us differently to the problem of liberation. ‘Differently’ because the words and actions enacted in the artists’ film loops are not identical copies of the originals to which they refer. The citations are merely the apparatuses for a new seat of authority. In Boudry/Lorenz’s work, transgender people, lesbians, women and queers become self-determining subjects constantly evolving through performance as a mode of being. Performance in this case means the act of taking control of history by becoming its subject through repetition. Rather than producing a revolutionary break with history, the artists repeat moments of queer liberation over and over to the point where the past becomes an ever-present tense. The subject of history becomes a self-negating position constantly altering the terms of its identities to suit its own desires. Freaks rule! In the film installations of Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz there is no static oppressive presence that enforces a regime of supremacy. That’s over.