



Fig. 4 Bookshelf with gravestone from Allyson Mitchell's *Killjoy's Kastle*, 2014; spread from Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, *Toxic: a play in two acts*, artist zine, 2013 (photo: Lisa Castagner). Reproduced *Oxford Art Journal*, 2016 with permission from the artist.

Salomania

In Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz's film *Salomania*, a collective is again pictured across time as well as through the audience, bringing together iterations of Salome's dance of the seven veils as a form of infectious image (Fig. 5). Circulating around this dance as pictured in Alla Nazimova's 1923 experimental film *Salomé*, the artists excavate the queer potential in various embodiments of Salome and her dance as it was performed through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The artists say how 'we liked the idea of a dance as "infectious" in terms of denormalising practices'.²⁸ In one of the statements published to accompany the film, they tell us how:

At the beginning of the twentieth century in England, women met privately to perform the dance of the seven veils, a movement which, like a kind of viral infection, was called "Salomania". Shortly after the appearance of the Strauss opera "Salome", an article in the *New York Times* urged President Roosevelt to act to prevent the fad from spilling over into the USA.²⁹

In the film, this *Salomania* is continued through a montage of fragmented scenes, which include Wu Ingrid Tsang and Yvonne Rainer re-enacting Salome's dance as it is performed in Nazimova's film, as well as interacting as Rainer teaches Tsang her own Salome-inspired dance, 'Valda's Solo', from her film *Lives of the Performers* (1972) (Fig. 6).³⁰ In between these dances, the process of rehearsal and discussion are foregrounded, with Tsang questioning Rainer on her 'NO Manifesto' and the campy eroticism found in Rainer's interpretation of Salome's dance.³¹

Like other films by the two filmmakers, there are many elements both within and alongside the film that indicate the process of its making and research. Clapperboards are shown at the beginning (marked 'Scene 1, Take 3' – although this scene is actually scene 2); a scene between Rainer and Tsang

28. Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, email to the author, 13 May 2013.

29. Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, 'Salomania', <<http://www.boudry-lorenz.de/texts/>> [accessed 20 May 2013]

30. Wu Ingrid Tsang is now known as Wu Tsang, but at the time of *Salomania* is credited with the former name.

31. Rainer's 'NO Manifesto' is in 'Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called *Parts of Some Sextets*, Performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York, in March, 1965', *Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 10, no. 2, Winter 1965, repr. Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961-73* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), p. 51.



Fig. 5 Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, *Salomania*, 2009, HD/super 8 film installation, 17 min. (film still), Performance: Yvonne Rainer, Wu Tsang. Reproduced *Oxford Art Journal*, 2016 with permission from the artists. Courtesy of Marcelle Alix and Ellen de Bruijne.



Fig. 6 Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, *Salomania*, 2009, HD/super 8 film installation, 17 min. (film still), Performance: Yvonne Rainer, Wu Tsang. Reproduced *Oxford Art Journal*, 2016 with permission from the artists. Courtesy of Marcelle Alix and Ellen de Bruijne.

appears to be a rehearsal for one of the others, and they are shown getting ready for the performance of Nazimova's dance (Figs 7 and 8). The artists explicitly reference Brechtian strategies of showing in commentaries on their work, although they emphasize that this act of showing is done without a sense



Fig. 7 Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, *Salomania*, 2009, HD/super 8 film installation, 17 min. (film still), Performance: Yvonne Rainer, Wu Tsang. Reproduced *Oxford Art Journal*, 2016 with permission from the artists. Courtesy of Marcelle Alix and Ellen de Bruijne.



Fig. 8 Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, *Salomania*, 2009, HD/super 8 film installation, 17 min. (film still), Performance: Yvonne Rainer, Wu Tsang. Reproduced *Oxford Art Journal*, 2016 with permission from the artists. Courtesy of Marcelle Alix and Ellen de Bruijne.

of explaining what is being shown.³² In Boudry and Lorenz's work, the *bodies* of performers transform the scripts as well as the re-enactment of speech. Here the concept of 'embodied inquiry' is thought through the dancing figure of Salome, the communities that have historically formed around the dance, and the differently gendered, raced and aged bodies that Salome has been taken up by. By working with the young trans performer Tsang, who plays Salome, Nazimova, and the student of Rainer, the history of Salome as an exoticised, perversely sexualised character is animated. Boudry and Lorenz have discussed how the figure of Salome was taken up by Nazimova as a way of performing her Jewish identity, as well as taking charge of her type-casting as 'exotic'. By the late nineteenth century Salome was a figure used to embody racial and sexual degeneracy, a circular logic in which a fictional character become justification for pseudo-scientific debates which located excessive female sexuality within a non-white, non-Christian body.³³

32. Renate Lorenz, 'Stages: A Conversation between Andrea Thal, Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, Berlin, September 2010', in Pauline Boudry et al, *Temporal Drag* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011), p. 1999.

33. Johannes Hendrikus Burgers, 'The Spectral Salome: Salomania and Fin-de-Siècle Sexology and Racial Theory', in Marja Härmänmaa and Christopher Nissen (eds), *Decadence, Degeneration and the End: Studies in the European Fin de Siècle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) pp. 165-182.

34. Boudry and Lorenz, email to the author.

35. Boudry, 'Stages', p. 2001.

36. Boudry and Lorenz, email to the author.

When the film was shown at the South London Gallery, a zine was published alongside the exhibition, including material on historical embodiments and performances of Salome, focusing on their queer feminist potential. When asked about the relationship of the research and associated materials with the film they stated: 'The films should also work without any further information. But since our works are based on research on the one hand and they also might produce "theory" or "thinking" on the other hand, other dimensions might open up if you are able to look at documents or read a text that is related to the different elements of the film'.³⁴ In interviews, the artists have explained why they are not interested in historically accurate re-enactment, with Boudry saying 'the way that performers engage with the archive is not a mere re-enactment; it very often involves anachronistic elements.'³⁵ They discuss how the idea of temporal drag underpins their use of re-enactment, describing it as 'a connection of current performers (which include their embodiment of contemporary performance work) with materials from the past and the audience – connection understood as instigated by desire.'³⁶ Here re-enactment is a form of understanding, learning, of getting inside a collection of historical moments and gestures to make them active for the present.

When we see Tsang dancing alongside film footage of Nazimova in the famous dance of the seven veils, Rainer performs the viewer, Herod; Salome's stepfather, and the man for whom the exchange of a dance for a promise leads to the execution of John the Baptist (Fig. 9). There is already a strange temporality to Nazimova's dance, as he performs in a white wig and close-fitting dress that seems closer to punk than the actual moment of its performance in the 1920s. Rainer mimes the leering face of Herod watching Salome dance, a feminist mother transformed into a queer predatory stepfather, a parody of a familial relationship.

In a later scene we witness a conversation between Tsang and Rainer as Rainer teaches part of 'Valda's Solo', her response to Nazimova's dance that is filmed for *Lives of the Performers*, in which a ball is used to represent the head of John the Baptist. They talk about the relationship of 'Valda's Solo' to Rainer's famous 'NO Manifesto', with Rainer being slightly exasperated. In contrast, when she is teaching Tsang gestures from the dance she is much more precise.



Fig. 9 Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, *Salomania*, 2009, HD/super 8 film installation, 17 min. (film still). Performance: Yvonne Rainer, Wu Tsang. Reproduced *Oxford Art Journal*, 2016 with permission from the artists. Courtesy of Marcelle Alix and Ellen de Bruijne.

The act of learning and teaching is dramatised here, with Tsang's serious student contrasting with Rainer's casual, but nonetheless exacting, teacher (Rainer was Tsang's teacher at CalArts).³⁷ After Tsang asks Rainer about the relationship of eroticism and camp in Valda's Solo to the dictates of the 'NO Manifesto', Rainer simply says 'That manifesto was never meant to be a Bible!' Her comment warns the good student not to be too studious, and also points to the impossibility of recreating a historical moment or intention in the present, as in the moment of its making it was not completely fixed. Instead, we are encouraged to join Rainer and Tsang in the seemingly formal act of learning a dance, which Tsang performs for Rainer in the subsequent, penultimate scene of the film.

In the opening speech (which could also be the closing speech)³⁸, Tsang refers to Rainer as his 'father-in-law'. If the two are performing the relationship between Salome and Herod, then this is a mistake, maybe of translation, as Rainer would be Tsang's stepfather. But if this is about a conceptualisation of their relationship, then father-in-law might be apt. A father-in-law implies a relationship that is both familial and generational, but bound by convention, not blood. The potential for this relationship to be an erotic one is therefore more possible, and the dynamic with an older generation is not straightforwardly between sons and fathers, just as these two characters are not men, but are figured in a variety of masculine poses and positions. Tsang usually employs the male pronoun when referring to himself, although his screen persona is ambiguously gendered.³⁹ He has described himself as 'a butch queen in heels', refusing to locate his trans identity as male or female, but instead remains resolutely queer.⁴⁰ When watching the film I'd assumed that Tsang was a butch woman, and what was being presented was a relationship between two queer women enacting different models of feminine seduction and female masculinity. Instead, like the artists' conception of Salome as an image that is not fixed, but a combination of interpretations, gestures, and figures, the two performers are set up as a series of relationships to each other and to us, the audience. Rainer is the historical figure who has made canonical works such as *Lives of the Performers*, but also the wry teacher who watches her student critically but affectionately, as well as camping up for the figure of Herod, a fantasy of power that ultimately rests in the ring on his finger rather than anything about his own person. (In Nazimova's film, the ring on Herod's finger is taken by his wife and given to the executioner, who understands it as a command to execute John the Baptist).

In this film we are seeing the process of research, and the process of performing. The montage of scenes is disruptive, stuttering, with different moments of performance, thinking, discussion, reflection. Like a Brechtian learning-play, the act of showing is foregrounded – showing us how the dance is performed, showing us how our viewing is positioned, and showing us how the film is made. Returning to Brecht's quote '[r]evisiting a play is like rereading a page of a book'⁴¹ I would like to propose that we are watching such an act of rereading, one that is passionately and creatively engaged with its potential for the present, utilising its historical sources as methods of teaching us, of showing us how we perform the act of viewing and asking us to continue the act of researching. As we oscillate between the leering face of Rainer as Herod and the lithe body of Tsang as Nazimova as Salome, we are encouraged to take part in a Salomania that continues beyond the frame of the film; a fantasy in which the past is imagined in the present, a past that is as difficult and exciting to engage with as a person, a script which commands us to examine, perform, and discuss.

37. Boudry and Lorenz, email to the author.

38. Boudry, 'In the film *Salomania*, we have two or even three different beginnings.' 'Stages', p. 2000.

39. Whilst writing this article, Tsang was referred to as 'he' in the press and on Tsang's website. As I was finalising this text, Tsang's biography had been amended so it now referred to the artist as 'she': <<http://wutsang.com/about/>>. Text changed on October 2nd 2015, according to captures on Internet Archive Wayback Machine: <https://web.archive.org/web/20151005084347/http://wutsang.com/about/> (last accessed 10 January 2016).

40. 'Wu Tsang rejects the straightforward FTM identity tagline in favour of being called "trans feminine but also sometimes... a 'trans guy' because I am also that. Or a MUCH more straightforward ID would be: butch queen in heels.'" B. Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), footnote 23 p. 284. Quote from Chris Vargas, 'Interview: Wu Tsang' at <<http://www.originalplumbing.com/2011/02/20/chrisblog-interview-wu-tsang/>> (last accessed 1 May 2015).

41. Brecht, 'The German Drama: pre-Hitler', p. 80.