





ARCHITECTURE AS MASK, MASK AS ARCHITECTURE

IVAN CHENG

**a text around authorship
(structures are all we pass through)**

on the waterfront / under the boardwalk
under the boardwalk (acconci seedbed)

a component text for
BETTE DE BREST - BEUYS BEUYS BEUYS
(b d b - b b b)

(vitex agnus castus – fresh)

developed for RESTAGING RESTAGING at Alaska Projects

to be passed over in different orders

Loren Ringer – *Saint Genet Decanonized: The Ludic Body in Querelle* (2001) – Introduction

“Le jardinière est la plus belle rose de son jardin”

Sartre quoting from *Miracle de la Rose* (*Saint Genet* 563)

There exists a tradition of *récitation* in the French school system which consists of memorising famous quotations by famous authors. If the practice continues in the 21st century and if Jean Genet maintains his position in the canon of *belles lettres* then the sentence above from *Miracle de la Rose* stands out as a likely selection from the author's opus. Amply commented on by Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida, René Girard and others, the quotation emblematises the poetics and according to some, the problematic nature of Genetian prose fiction...

Genet captured the attention of many people not only due to his literary talent in prose and theatre but also due to his life as a convicted thief and later his involvement with subversive or left-winged political groups. While Sartre's book put Genet on the French literati map, it marked the end of Genet's career as a novelist. Whether it was just coincidence, or if we are to take Genet at his word when he said that he experienced *Saint Genet* as a “literary castration,” Genet definitively turned to writing theatre...

The “figure” of a philosophical treatise, Genet is posed as an object of study. In a sense, he is frozen in time with the methodologies of that period, Sartre captures Genet in a portrait as a social pariah. As Sontag so aptly remarks, “The name ‘Genet’ repeated thousands of times throughout the book never seems to be the name of a real person. It is the name given to an infinitely complex process of philosophical transfiguration”³.

Jean-Paul Sartre (tr. B Frechtman) - *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* (1952):

Genet is related to that family of people who are nowadays referred to by the barbaric name of *passésistes*.¹ An accident riveted him to a childhood memory, and this memory became sacred. In his early childhood, a liturgical drama was performed, a drama of which he was the officiant; he knew paradise and lost it, he was a child and was driven from his childhood. No doubt this "break" is not easy to localize. It shifts back and forth, the dictate of his moods and myths, between the ages of ten and fifteen. But that is unimportant. What matters is that it exists and he believes in it. His life is divided into two heterogeneous parts: before and after the sacred drama. Indeed, it is not unusual that the memory condenses into a single mythical moment the contingencies and perpetual re-beginnings of an individual history. What matters is that **Genet** lives and continues to re-live this period of his life as if it had lasted only an instant.

To say "instant" is to say fatal instant. The instant is the reciprocal and contradictory envelopment of the before by the after. One is still what one is going to cease to be and already what one is going to become. One lives one's death, one dies one's life. One feels oneself to be one's own self and another; the eternal is present in an atom of duration. In the midst of the fullest life, one has a foreboding that one will merely survive; one is afraid of the future. It is the time of anguish and of heroism, of pleasure and destruction. An instant is sufficient to destroy, to enjoy, to kill, to be killed, to make one's fortune at the turn of a card.

Genet carries in his heart a bygone instant which has lost none of its virulence, an infinitesimal and sacred void which concludes a death and begins a horrible metamorphosis. The argument of this liturgical drama is as follows: a child dies of shame; a hoodlum rises up in his place; the hoodlum will be haunted by the child. One would have to speak of resurrection, to evoke the old initiatic rites of shamanism and secret societies were it not that **Genet** refuses categorically to be a man who has been resuscitated.² There was death, that is all. And **Genet** is nothing other than a dead man. It he appears to be still alive, it is with the larval existence which certain peoples ascribe to their deceased in the grave. All his heroes have died at least once in their life.

"After his first murder, Querelle experienced the feeling of being dead... His human form—what is called the envelope of flesh—continued nevertheless to move about on the surface of the earth."

His works are filled with meditations on death. The peculiarity of these spiritual exercises is that they almost never concern his future death, his being-to-die, but rather his being-dead, his death as past event.

This original crisis also appears to him as a metamorphosis. The well-behaved child is suddenly transformed into a hoodlum, as Gregor Samsa was changed into a bug. **Genet's** attitude toward this metamorphosis is ambivalent: he both loathes it and yearns for it.

1 *Passésiste*: one who is not adapted to the present age, who is a man of his time, who "lives in the past" - Translator's note (Frechtman)

2 The candidate for shamaic functions is killed by the spirits. His body is cut to pieces. Then he comes to life again. Only then is he a shaman. Almost all "rites of passage" centre about death and rebirth. The theme of death and resurrection similarly governs all initiations.

Is extinction so dire?

Articulation is finding a line
forming
and discarding everything else
invoking

Articulating is the act of preservation
but preservation (in relation to time) is
reduction, preferencing.
preservation is the arranging of a mass
(that is, a 'body'),
the affixing of a death mask
(whether it is a corpse or not).

The material that constitutes this mask is obviously vulnerable.

Articulation can be laboured, but we hope for polemic, topical idiom.

(Is extinction so dire?)

There are stakes conjured by the incantation of these words.



SPREZZATURA



Chris Kraus is in my mind as a conflation of her writing. Avoiding the speculation on the relation of her reality to print structure, I note that she wrote an essay in 2012 titled *Pseudo-fiction, Myth, and Contingency*. The title is not telling, but this essay belongs in a monograph for Ryan McGinley, whose photography is discussed with relation to its subject – youth. Her argument is geographic, with the assertion that McGinley’s nudes float like small, figurative masks over these nature theatre backdrops. The youth acts as blank slate to register psychic/physical qualities. The constructs we establish to quantify youth and movement are various; Kraus uses a milieu of Barthes:

What are wrinkles and bulges of flesh if not marks of a past that can no longer be shed? Myth, let us remember, is free of all past.

Myth . . . abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them a simplicity of essences. . . . it organises a world without contradictions . . . a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.
— Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*

In *Mythologies*, a 1957 collection of essays, Roland Barthes found a kind of euphoria in the image of Einstein’s brain—“at once magician and machine”—and in Omo detergent’s artful disguise of abrasive chemicals within delicious folds of white foam. Devised from material drawn from the cultural surface, myths seem to evoke limitless depth.

Mythology is formed by posing questions and only allowing them to be answered particularly. Curation underpins life. Stylistic assault, or conventions of form are the core of representation. In an article promoting her novel ‘Summer of Hate’, Michael H. Miller asserts “These days, Ms. Kraus would rather not talk about her film career. “I was never a filmmaker,” she said. “I was a performance person fooling around with a movie camera.” Off-handed clarifications about what or whom we are or represent come under the tyranny of language. In this case, considering my history and her history, there’s an antipodean notion of the globes of culture that populate the Northern Hemisphere, and how we ape or appropriate ideas.

Negotiation of identity through a physical or psychological migration poses questions of borders. Is there a decisive point of departure, of recommitting one’s identity to another geography? An essay by Australian Centre for Contemporary Art director and curator Juliana Engberg accompanies *Gillian Wearing: Living Proof*. Let’s slide easily across bodies of water to neatly connect by profession. McGinley (US) and Wearing (UK) as photographers disseminated in a method that focuses on their ‘staging’, and Kraus (NZ) to Engberg (AUS) as writer/curators who echo theoretical substantiation. Engberg summons

Barthes' mask, but rather than *Mythologies* his older voice present in the more recent *Camera Lucida* (1980) (same man!? different time and thought!)

In front of the lens I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture... I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object.

The comparison of Barthes' act of writing to the act of photography is a cool reflective pool we can bathe in, but to ignore the alteration in these formats with the advancement of technology is like performing your daily ablutions out of habit, not purpose. The wild wave of archives threatens to break - documentation moving against a breaking rock so that we can no longer mildly disown/dismiss indiscretions (formations) of youth. Communication through selected forms are a soft leaning toward immortality, neatly threatened by the sheer mass of communication – what will be read - articulated - preserved - in the end? At the time of publication, Engberg's words are being carefully considered in relation to the equation of the 19th Biennale of Sydney and founding (birthing) sponsor Transfield. In the archiving of disparate sources, which voices will force their way into spheres of representational prominence in coming years? We do, of course, orientate around monoliths and gravitate to centres, but these movements are peripatetic (not cyclical). The lines drawn are relations, but also suspendable.

If you however, try to fix the position of the object of appropriation in time and draw the trajectory of its displacement in a coordinate system with multiple temporal axes, it obviously gets more complicated. How would you clarify the status of ownership of something that inhabits different times, that travels through time and repeats itself in unpredictable intervals, like for instance, a recurring style in fashion, a folkloristic symbol that is revived by a new political movement to articulate its revisionist version of a country's history or a complex of second rate modernist architecture occupied by residents who know nothing of its original designs but still have to find a way of living with the ghosts that haunt the building. Who owns a recurring style, a collective symbol or a haunted house? Even if you appropriate them, they can never be entirely your private property. Dead objects can circulate in space and change owners. Things that live throughout time cannot, in any unambiguous sense, pass into anyone's possession. For this reason they must be approached in a different way.

Jan Verwoert

We select a moment and method to release, perform; a period of time in which to promote an album. Even if the content is conceptual, there's a 'soft leaning' towards the virtuosic/muscular commercial framework that produces and markets. The rigour and care for truth and artistic integrity is for, and will always be assessed by the audience, the punter. Perhaps originality is for the same assessor.

The object the punter receives is a tightly bound spiral track that forces light to diffract into a full visible spectrum. Aural integrity is upheld by inserting a single finger into the centre hole, avoiding bodily contact with the untouchable, and from that hole is a clear frame before we see the darkened, burnt rim, evidence of use. A **mask** is printed on the other side, an identifier for otherwise inscrutable knowledge. Can psychoanalysis be enacted to clinically dissect the product? Summaries and critical fortunes will not be read objectively.

If music is a language (lines of sound/'text' that rely on context for meaning) it is apparent that like any communicable language, music commands duration. When text enters the world of music, an understanding spurts beyond the abstract signifiers of instruments – suddenly our focus or experience refines and is defined. Performance is of various accuracy, virtuosity, or fluency. When performed, music without voice is an abstracted language sequenced into structures, and with voice is in relation to the body and experience, but inevitably we read/interpret mainly gender and agenda. Whether performed live or with the composer-creator's identity obfuscated, the basic communication rides on the context it's presented in.

Feminism situates the observer or practitioner into a certain posture, and parallel to the accessibility of news and opinion, the gatekeepers of 'Feminism' seem to now be commentators on shifting figureheads. Recent discussion pivots on celebrity reportage, and with misunderstanding of language alongside the shifted interfacing of intent. Reliquaries are hewn. Good or Bad feminists, Black or White feminists. Gray/grey feminists.

I don't think I know what I'm talking about, I suspect that there might be something in a gender writing about a gender, or just someone on another - the task of representing. In writing around *Fresh Acconci*, a work by Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley, Milena Tomic writes that

'Bad' re-enactment – to apply the reductive binary of value judgements – reproduces ideological structures, seeing as value now increasingly refers not to material objects exchanged but to immaterial services rendered. 'Good' re-enactment, on the other hand, is more elusive as it can challenge these same ideological structures. Specifically, it allows artist and viewer alike to go through the motions of ritual in ways that do not necessarily inculcate belief.

Good re-enactment becomes a fantasy space where players can potentially step into more than one role; it becomes an experiment with identification whose outcome is endlessly deferred... the term fantasy no longer refers to static representations that prompt real-world behaviour but rather to 'the very scene which suspends action and which, in its suspension, provides for a critical investigation of what it is that constitutes action

So when rerecording songs, the identifiable text-lyric suggests reproduction. The language of the arrangement and the communicative properties of the interpreter might suggest restaging. A recording artist consists of an indefatigable ribbon of personal representation. The conceit of songwriting (or all writing) is that myth (broad romance/history) is being constructed into yet another totemic reliquary of Western tonal tradition. In (the era broadly titled) Ancient Egypt, figurative reliquaries accompanied the embalmed body to serve the deceased, executing tasks in lieu of the dead.

Declaring the death of a work (if a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it...) is uncertain. The act of slipping on or reconfiguring of another's formed persona/mask for a stroll in the industry is releasing and promoting new material. We just might be perpetuating our mild immortality, their mild immortality. The audience digests it under the emotional conditions of how it's sold and substantiated by the merit of recording artist's character – was this released to coincide with a holiday, is it timely for marketing or career purposes, is the method of handling indicating an artistic decision of personal significance or (and) self indulgence?

The work is mask. Like delineating a home, youth, or naming waters, the edges, faces, borders of a mask are slippery. If we frame this 'mask' theatrically, it's a given that the lighting design and virtuosity of mask bearer will transform the same object into emotional multiplicities.

The act of covering is mighty – by re-chanting words that exist in the correct sphere, an spellmaster can elevate and volley themselves to a pantheon of the admired. A mask can be wielded with breathtaking efficacy. The technical, physical or emotional virtuosity of interpreter is a living, breathing organism - how astounding that one time based rendering of it - a historical document - is chosen to operate in perpetuity, a spinning compact disc.

Clarifying, cleaning: we are dealing with the disc, a physical object that resists deletion if it is traditionally handled, but is also easily destroyed. It's a distance away from the digital download or vinyl record. What is the relation of this object to other physical proofs of photography or sculpture? Thinking along these lines, there's relation to time and space, and maybe ideas of activation with viewing. The forming-act of inscribing sound it into time, beyond the physical means of production, is precarious too – the circumstances of mastering, the equipment used in recording. The slippery mask is more than its material - it's how it's seen - it's the boardwalk and also what's under, around and over it. The materials are individually variable too - different planks of wood, different performers on the same instrument, and then the walking up and down the boardwalk, seeing the vista safe from the waves. We might smoke a cigarette beneath. We might return to it later in life and make our homes there.

The stipulation of virtuosity, of showcasing a level of skill, is usually an act of articulating, spotlighting, or singling out. As an audience in relation to the stage, there is an economy constantly coursing between the viewer and subject. This space is most easily viewed in retrospective gaze, or in a framework which involves once again being an audience. The endless individual variation in experience from circumstance is hard to grapple with. What is a virtuosic audience member? The articulating, spotlighting or singling out on the other side is even harder to gauge. Fantasy and myth enter as inscrutable balance tippers.

Looking at 'performance' archives with a deliberate direction, the influence of Joseph Beuys is evident. The genderless archive WIKIPAINTINGS records Beuy's performance *I like America and America likes me* (1974) as follows:

A master of compelling performance pieces, Beuys flew to New York, picked up by an ambulance, and swathed in felt, was transported to a room in the Rene Block Gallery. The room was also occupied by a wild coyote, and for a period of 8 hours a day for the next three days, Beuys spent his time with the coyote in the small room, with little more than a felt blanket and a pile of straw. While in the room, the artist engaged in symbolist gestures, such as striking a triangle and tossing his gloves to the coyote. At the end of the three days, the coyote, who had become quite tolerant of Beuys, allowed a hug from the artist, who was transported back to the airport via ambulance. He never set foot on outside American soil nor saw anything of America other than the coyote and the inside of the gallery.

His work deals in the properties, symbology and potency of object within physical realm. The presence and strength of his legacy as character, artist, educator, performer is aided by somewhat autobiography work *Arena (where would I have got if I had been intelligent!)* (1970-1972) consists of 100 panels with 264 images that represent his performance history, one of them a found image on a Roman amphitheater in Verona, indicating 'his overriding conception of the work as dealing with the arena of life'. Installed five times during his career, it was variously reworked and reconfigured in layout, from circular install, to a layout resembling the arena of the pantheon, and finally as three stacks, a configuration as a 'fond', his term for dense structures - batteries - which store, transmit, and receive energy. The panels are glass and heavy aluminium, with images formed from manipulated negatives of documentation, the manipulation a signifier of active reconstruction. The image becomes a charged object, and with the responsibility of being a battery, the lines of history travel directly through the panels, the panels in stacks, three coloured glass lenses against it - two blue, one yellow. Historically, this work is charged as an inaccessible but hyper-aware archive which represents his artistic persona.

The 'realness' of the historical images contained and the pseudo-intellecto-spiritual way they are treated makes this smoothly palatable as an emblem of Beuy's mythology arc in male master art history. I'll briefly nominate Jean **Genet**'s mythology as equivalent (*Born on the 19th of December, 1918, at 10 a.m. To Gabrielle Genet. Father unknown. Except for his books, he too remains unknown. As unknown as the day of his death, which he feels is near. Signed: Jean Genet.*) before sliding across the sea to America and stepping into a different circle, though still an arguably male-dominated one. We can look at the oeuvre of master performer (MISTRESS, DIVINE MISS M) Bette Midler, whose fundamental energy and accessible interfacing with her fans is as virtuosic as her vocal stylings are. As a triple-threat public persona whose personal life is bugled across her body of work, the roles and characters she crafts seem to lie in similar veins to the projected idea of her-self. In an extreme version of re-enactment, re-staging, much of her work seems to be enacting herself again and again, whether through songs, roles, images, or stage shows. The alteration over her decades long career is limited - what has altered is her physicality, her voice, the immediacy of sassy talent perhaps shifted with venerable regard and charm.

To acknowledge the performative dimension of language means to understand the responsibility that comes with speaking to engage in the procedures of speech and face the consequences of what is being said. To utter words for the sake of analysis already means to put these words to work. You cannot test a spell. To utter it is to put it into effect.

Jan Verwoert

The cult film *Hocus Pocus* features Bette Midler's performance of *I put a spell on you*, in which, playing one of three witch sisters, she enchants a room of adults to dance until they die.



The enactment of diva is a push towards performance as an aspirational but difficult trope. It lies across media and filmic construction, and one might see it alongside - rather than identical to - the construct of (often male) genius in culture and criticism. Regardless, diva or genius, there is a conscious push and latent marketing in these figures becoming present in our consciousness. They are borne by an audience with ongoing expectation - we can't help but lend them our ears, for the politic, economy, lighting, and architecture are direct vectors toward it.

Pop singer Beyoncé asserts that she was under-singing in the recording of the soundtrack for motion picture *Dreamgirls* to better portray the character Deena Jones, based on the character Diana Ross.

For the 1988 film *Beaches*, Bette Midler requests that the actress charged with playing her character's younger self have her singing voice overdubbed. The younger actress and the middle aged Midler both deliver renditions of *The Glory of Love*, in each instance staged in a proscenium arch. Midler fronts a string orchestra in sombre strapless velvet, and renders the song, eyes heavy lidded, her comedic face in demure and earnest submission. Playing a 'woman who has lived life', it is staged as such. Her body is fixed, and as she feeds us line after line about the story/glory, she waves two arms, the camera tracks out. A turn of the head, and the camera tracks around her in a muscular contrivance of a filmic ballad performance. Spotlight, back curtain rises, gradient lit, one arm hand held high in a testimonial declaration, dimmable spotlight, soft backlighting, en frizzante silhouette.

The preteen rendition is frantic razzmatazz, the young Mayim Bialik choreographed with deliberate lack of dancery grace by Bette Midler. 'Diagetic' lighting, a plinky plonk piano, and while the arms are about their business, Bialik's nubile body is wrapped in a flashy leotard, gamely performing postures choreographed for a different body. The actress playing her mother stands in the aisle, a golem mirroring the same choreography. The camera flicks between the mini-Midler and the audience, and this rhythm is present to the viewer. Does this method of reminding an audience that they're watching an audition for a show within a film alter our cognition of meaning? Certainly. Is this set of dualisms and dualities in the plot seductive to an audience? In forging an irretrievably -american- situation of this Atlantic City audition, how does a non-American, non-performer; exterior to the eisteddfod ambition or socio-economy understand this? Have we been conditioned to accept this already? In my thirst for knowledge behind the scenes, I turn to dvd extra features, seeing the stars talk about their experience.

Much is implicated about age and human currency, the roles of mentors, and authorities passing wisdom. Yes, it is unfair when loved ones are struck by illness, and we enact these pseudo-psychoanalysed roles. But to view characters in film, reliquary representations if you will, as only enacting these power and age related roles is to be bamboozled by the mask that is a filmic gaze - if this is the narrative line, it should be remembered that there are infinite alternatives. In addenda, one might consider Daniel Mudie Cunningham's 'Oh Industry' (2009), restaging and refilming of a scene from *Beaches*, in an historically industrial area which has been repurposed (restaged, if you will) as an Olympic site and subsequently, an 'exciting art precinct'.

Mudie Cunningham casts himself as Bette Midler, his masked back up dancers from a sympathetic performance vein of the Australian dance world (rather than commercial dancers), their training latent in their bodies. The art direction and design is camp and naïve, and neatly recanting the conveyor belt choreography. The editing is like that of a music-video – as the lyrics are hammed up and campily lip-synced, the text does not change - image does, and it is thrown into a gallery context too. The viewer's gaze is cast into the ambiguous definitions of structures – the (repurposed?) buildings that we're always at the threshold of, the choreographed roles (and the suspicion that women are sidelined at this age), and the position that this work assumes within the artist's career and his contribution to the industry. The song is purposed as a mask, but lit and seen in a different way.

In his 1982 film *Querelle*, 'enfant terrible' Rainer Werner Fassbinder interprets the Jean Genet's novel *Querelle de Brest* into a luridly coloured, highly staged film. The actors are theatrically lit, sections of bodies highlighted in an erotic, laconic evocation of Genet's language. The actors uttering the text are almost expressionless, stoic, charged with flexed sex - an opposition to the filmed staging of *Oh Industry*, but just as choreographed. Violence and sex transforming into external friction is through choreographed, stylised fight scenes. A confrontation between Querelle and 'murderer' Gil is filmed in a single long shot towards the end of the film. The two actors, Brad Davis and Hanno Pöschl mirror each other in movement, circling each other in long strides, switching raised arms and knives ritualistically, coming closer with over breathy, guttural dialogue.

*(chromatic orchestral strings broadly descend
in patterns, accumulative, continuous)*

I crossed the river of creeping vines
help me I'm coming to your shore

That will be hard brother, I can
feel your resistance

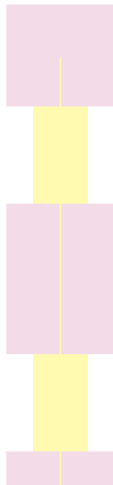
What did you say I can hardly hear it.
Jump on my leg hold tight to it
don't worry about my pain – jump.

Be yourself

I'm becoming myself

Talk more quietly.
Come closer now

I love you more than myself



MASK AS ARCHITECTURE

my hate was simply a camouflage, a
dangerous melancholy draws me
close to you but my battles separate us

My laughter is the sun
it drives away the shadows
you cast on me
I seek out the daggers of the night

I set up barricades,
my laughter locks me in.
It draws me away from you
- you're beautiful

You are beautiful too

Be quiet
We mustn't lose ourselves in
all too perfect unity, set your
hounds and wolves on me

To what avail?
Every fight crowns you
with a painful glow

Don't lose courage, work.

*(staccato oboe enters.
Querelle and Gil grasp each other
by the elbow, daggers drawn back.
A siren pierces and diffuses)*

Moving in unison (lovers, fighters, 'brothers', men), the two actors costumed as archetypal homoerotic fantasies are backdropped by the perpetually orange sunset of the film. Framing them on screen-left are a stone wall with staircase leading offscreen and lamp-posts lighting the boulevard they circle on, and on screen right, a mossy sea wall in the mid-ground, a large, stylised brick scrotum which oozes onto the road, with a wall behind it. The unison movement forces the eye to observe every gesture which does not match its mirror in size or timing, and their shadows are cast on the floor towards the camera. The artificiality of road patina is striking, as though on stage flooring, and the taut, filmic music underscores the action. Fassbinder's preferred cinematic cut is with German dialogue dubbed over the image, filmed in English. In discussing sound recording as a language, which, as in image, is a representation, not a reproduction, North American academic Alan Williams writes that sound recording in film "conveys a latent spatio-psychological subjectivity".

The idea of murder frequently evokes the idea of sea and seafarers. No precise image of sea and seafarers may at once spring to mind: it is rather that Murder surges over out thought in breakers of emotion. if we suppose seaports to be the theatre of recurrent crimes, then the explanation is simple and need not detain us; but the chronicles are numberless from which we learn that the murderer was a man of the sea – either in reality or in imagination – and if the latter, then the crime will have less affinity with the sea. - - - This novel is addressed to inverts. The idea of love or lust is a *natural* corollary to the idea of Sea and Murder – and even to a greater extent to that of so-called *unnatural love*.

Jean Genet (tr. G Streatham), *Querelle of Brest*

*"This is a song I've been singing for a long time.
It's like an old friend.
But, you know, I think it, it's only recently
that I discovered what it's really about."*

*You've got to give a little, take a little,
and let your poor heart break a little.
That's the story of, that's the glory of love.*

*You've got to laugh a little, cry a little,
until the clouds roll by a little.
That's the story of, that's the glory of love.*

*As long as there's the two of us,
we've got the world and all it's charms.
And when the world is through with us,
we've got each other's arms.*

*You've got to win a little, lose a little,
yes, and always have the blues a little.
That's the story of, that's the glory of love."*

Bette Midler, *Beaches* soundtrack

Wisdom can be a fickle friend, with the measure of it coming from the measuring increments that exist in our territories. When we are perceived to be wise (or perceive others to be so), is it just a very convincing type of acting? Method acting? Or is it being yourself - being present in the space as many performers now attempt through training, frameworks or devices. To the outrage of the characters, and hopefully our emotionally invested audience, the perky first rendition of *The Glory of Love* in *Beaches* is trumped by a girl who walks on her hands, which might be read as an indictment of Atlantic City, a semi-premium, somewhat trashy peon to high rollers, the dreamy american (object), nuit americane (filmic technique), american dream (art).

The American Dream is a well oiled trope in cultural representation, and in the present time, is one that 'resonates' across the First-World, but as yawns break out and we feel threatened by the problematic and skewed representation of 'plain delusion: misled life', it's important to quickly note that it is the compression of time cycle and choice of frame that constricts our throats (good? bad?) or triggers a gag reflex (good? bad?).

Away from Hollywood, across the Atlantic, we reach a scenic view of Fassbinder's phallic Brest. While *Beaches* coasts towards a significant character death, the tragedy of which casts the problematic female friendship into the throes of transformative-beautiful-life-shaping, our hero Querelle shapes his beauty through his itinerant life as a matelot, and then another kind of beauty through his redemption, theft, betrayal, and murder - *petit mort*, committing what seems to primarily be masculinity. Fassbinder's opening credits indicate that the film is about Genet's *Querelle de Brest*, and the auteur delivers a defined visual interpretation of the text. Though critical reception was (and continues to be) divided, the stylistic conceit has led to its reception as one of the most faithful filmic adaptations of [Genet](#).

Our attraction to narrative film is arguably linked to the possibility of simultaneous identification and separation from material, and just as one might choose to endure and enjoy a film for its emotional construct, character development, our reception is just as aligned with its marketing, reception, and stars. Just like [Barthes](#), [Genet](#) serves as a reference point to audiences, with indications that *Querelle* is a cult gay film, a staple of homosexual intellectual life. Does its milieu separate it so far from *Beaches*?

The sole female ornament of *Querelle* is Jeanne Moreau as Lysiane, who sings, dances and acts her way through her role as Nono's wife, the proprietor of the notorious bar and brothel FERIA. Her consumption of suitors is through her husband, who one must throw dice with for a

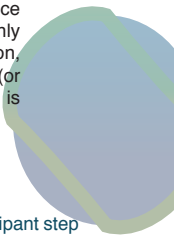
roll with Lysiane, the losers of this game getting anally penetrated by Nono. Cast as a remarkable Angel of Death, Querelle is protagonist, transcending this cycle of casual gambling, sexual tension and drug smuggling within our 'invert' cast of brothel owner, lieutenant, policeman, dock-worker etc (is Brest cast as the same place of origin of formative relationship, like Atlantic City in *Beaches?*). The soundtrack offers recurring motifs which are primarily orchestral/instrumental, with the notable exceptions of a rousing chorus of men singing vowel sounds in unison at the height of their voices, and Moreau's throaty, recurring warble of *Each man kills the thing he loves*, an Oscar Wilde poem set to a chanson melody by Fassbinder.

Moreau seems to occupy a similar space to Midler, perhaps by virtue of the demands on performer, but also in their characters' distanced methods of interaction and ultimate role as foil (rather than focus) to the tragic plotpoints. It is a cotillion – one of many social *contredanses* in France, but in the United States, our actors are debutantes attending a cotillion season – one will fit into similar gowns and perform the same fan dance for a while, and even if later debuting into a geographically and culturally altered society, the general purpose of 'presentation' remains. Everyone off screen is in or out of the ballroom. When our debutantes are married off, it is rare that they disavow their past too publicly.

It is important to note time passing as roles are opted into, executed, and a new skin assumed. It seems possible to imagine a liminal point of reality and fantasy. If the core of life is boredom and the avoidance of such, our attention spans for focal points are such that suddenly there are hierarchies of relevance, interest and disinterest: flirtation, sexualisation, can't be maintained/sustained. A compact disc (or record) spins round and round, read by the same prick/pin, until it is changed – we sustain fantasies despite (or because of) frictions.

Participation art is often dictatorial, requiring that a participant step into a particular, pre-determined role. It is useful to return here to the function of fantasy in this educational *mise-en-scène*. 'The reason why representations do not jump off the page to club us over the head, although sometimes we fantasize precisely that', Judith Butler has written perceptively, 'is that even pornographic representations as textualized fantasy do not supply a single point of identification for their viewers, whether presumed to be stabilized in subject-positions of male or female'

Milena Tomic



The fidelity of internet pornography differs, the notion of 'poor image' gushing around the loaded, the superstars, the studios. A fee, as in with less explicit theatre or film, may apply. Oh Industry! If one searches for a Bette Midler sex-tape, a Brad Davis sex-tape, a Jeanne Moreau sex-tape, it is often from rumour, hope, or presumption of personal character. We are aiming to see the suggested sexuality in direct friction, to witness an unleashing or loss of control in the moment of orgasm. The method of intercourse may vary, but particularly with the homogenised and taut bodies of the film industry, the choreography will rarely differ, though performed in unique contexts and with variable soundtracks.

The enactment of direct sexuality (to a 'hidden camera' or a contrived, perhaps private and intimate document is part of the allure – what are they - and their genitalia - really like?). The reality of sex is difficult to prove, the act of being present or connected, when sexual relations are arguably transactions of power. What does one gain from sleeping with a public figure, and how does repetition play into this? The choreography of sexuality is enacted for different audiences; participatory, immersive, or voyeuristically gazing into a 'proscenium'. The performance is physical.

Bette Midler sits in a motorised wheelchair, restricted by a shimmering fishtail around her legs and an iridescent bikini top. There may be a burst of bright feathers atop her head. Her hand is wrapped around a joystick that skids her across the stage, and she sassily and goofily belts into a microphone that hovers in front of her mouth. It is the second half of the performance which is the core of her *Kiss my Brass* tour, repeated 77 times over North America. Her colourful persona is named Dolores DeLago, a mermaid character developed in her formative days singing to gay men in a bathhouse. Is DeLago also Midler? The consummate (and veteran) performer will perform the same show with limited variation between December 10 2003 and December 12 2004. As an interpreter of songs – her own and those of others, how much will her sense of self alter her performance and delivery of the emotional and technical musical material. How much is she physically capable of?

A DVD box set of the *Kiss My Brass* tour was released, using footage from the Madison Square Garden performances. The set list is composed of major hits, as well as material recorded for *Bette Midler sings the Rosemary Clooney songbook*. The finest mimic, the finest actors, the finest interpreters, are known as that because of historic precedent that they mine, ape, or trump. Language, once learnt, is difficult to discard, and can be re-used, re-staged in different contexts.

Anna Greenberg was a 28 year old Bette Midler fan dying of rhabdomyosarcoma, a rare form of cancer. She is filmed with a handheld (phone) camera whilst receiving a call from Midler. In opening statements, we find that her pain is being staved away by morphine. The mise-en-scene seems to me a crowded and protracted version of the hospital scene in *Beaches* where Barbara Hershey's character asks to be switched off – the real life Greenberg has tubes up her nose and a hospital gown on. Her skin is puffy, and while Hershey's character (suffering from viral cardiomyopathy) has a full head of hair, Greenberg's is short, tufted, and unstyled. The dialogue between Greenberg and Midler is breathy, as in *Querelle* between Davis and Pöschl, but the volume is moderate, sometimes overwrought, hysterical, resigned – enactments of behaviour (medicated / caring).

As Greenberg tearfully asks for a dream to be fulfilled on what the viewer understands as her deathbed, the camera unflinchingly lingers on Greenberg's placid face, mask-like, and sometimes inscrutable. Who is this video for? It is harrowing. Why is it on the internet? Is it a character reference for Midler? Why has the family consented, and what relationship does this have with idols? Midler throatily warbles 'Wind beneath my wings', her voice seeming to fail on higher notes, a heart-stopping interruption to the musical line. Midler is a mature, wise singer, she has been singing this song for a long time. They declare their love for one another. The phone call ends, Greenberg's face is once again impassive, the video ends, related videos of Bette Midler performing are offered.

afterwards I may rest across your thighs
as a pieta, and you will watch over me
as Mary watches over the dead Jesus.

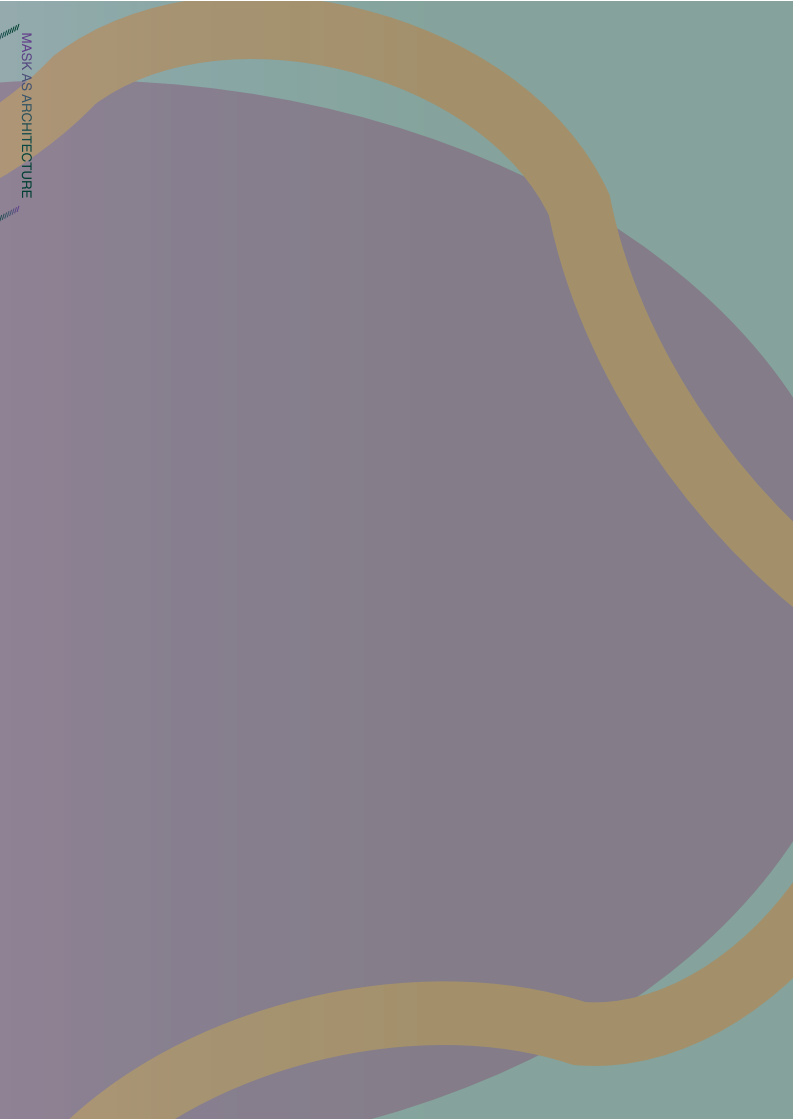
Querelle to Lieutenant Seblon, film dialogue

wedding - princess - geography, daddy - milieu, territory
officiant - ironic - iconic
atlantic city, las vegas, san francisco, sydney, mythical brest,
heirlooms, ornaments, as marker
jewellery

querelle secretes jewels that he's looted into locations
across oceans, carefully indexing the evidence of theft
and murder using the sensory and photographic memory
that *genet* has endowed him with.

Endowment informs our position on EVERYONE..

- Ali, Zahra A. Hussein – *Aesthetics of memorialization: The Sabra and Shatila genocide in the work of Sami Mohammad, Jean Genet, and June Jordan*
- Altman, Dorothy J. – *Jean Genet and George Querelle: A Quest for Identity*
- Barthes, Roland – *Camera Lucida*
- Barthes, Roland – *Mythologies*
- Bradby, D & Finburgh, C – *Jean Genet – Life, politics and play-texts*
- Derrida, Jacques – *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, The work of Mourning, & the New International*
- Dia Art Foundation – *Joseph Beuys*
- Elliott, Nicholas – *Alain Guiraudie (interview)*
- Engberg, Juliana – *Gillian Wearing: Living Proof*
- Farocki, Harun & Steyerl, Hito – *A Magical Imitation of Reality*
- Fassbinder, Rainer Werner – *Querelle, the film book*
- Gay, Roxane – *Bad Feminist*
- Genet, Jean – *Querelle of Brest*
- Hebdige, Dick – *Even unto Death: Improvisation, Edging, and Enframing*
- Hebdige, Dick – *Posing...Threats, Striking...Poses: Youth, Surveillance, and Display*
- Jameson, Frederic – *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*
- Kenelly, Brian Gordon – *A paraitre/Apparaitre: Genet and his Press*
- Korhonen, Kuisma – *Thanato-Genet: The poetry of Death (and) of God*
- Kraus, Chris – *Pseudo-fiction, Myth, and Contingency*
- Kraus, Chris & Lotringer, Sylvère – *Hatred of Capitalism*
- Lane, Christopher – *The Voided Role: On Genet*
- LaValley, Al – *The Gay Liberation of Rainer Werner Fassbinder: Male Subjectivity, Male Bodies, Male Lovers*
- Miller, Michael H – *The Novelist as Performance Artist: On Chris Kraus, the Art World's favourite fiction writer*
- Owens, Craig – *The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a theory of Postmodernism*
- Ringer, Lorin – *Saint Genet Decanonized – The Ludic Body in Querelle*
- Sartre, Jean-Paul – *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*
- Shepherd, Reginald – *What remained of a Genet: On the topic of Querelle*
- Stewart, Harry E – *Jean Genet's Favorite Murderers*
- Scott, Jay – *Malet and memories of Fassbinder, Genet*
- Sontag, Susan – *Against Interpretation and other essays*
- Steyerl, Hito – *The Wretched of the Screen*
- Taussig, Michael – *The Language of Flowers*
- Todd, Jane Marie – *Autobiography and the Case of the Signature: Reading Derrida's Glas*
- Tomic, Milena – *Fidelity to Failure: Re-enactment and Identification in the work of Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley*
- Verwoert, Jan – *Apropos Appropriation: Why stealing images today feels different*
- Wenzel, Helene V – *Interview with Simone de Beauvoir*
- Winterfox, Cecilia – *Feminists are not responsible for educating men*
- Yakir, Dan – *'Querelle' has its rewards (review, Boston Globe)*



disc

1. fanfare (kiss my brass)

2. wind beneath my wings

performed by Ivan Cheng, son of Po Cheng and Louisa Lau

3. wind beneath my wings

performed by Po Cheng and Louisa Lau, parents of Ivan Cheng

WIND BENEATH MY WINGS was written by Jeff Silbar and Larry Henley in 1982, and has been extensively recorded. Perhaps the most well known version was recorded by Bette Midler for the soundtrack to *Beaches*. It is this version that serves as a reference point for three of the Cheng family, who serve as vocalists on this release.

The disc begins with a midi instrumental, entirely of digital, synthesised brass sounds, burdened by aural association. The chordal structure is occasionally abrupt, but does not modulate radically or in particularly interesting ways. There is a sense that sections of time are deleted and hastily patched over, that it is a digital composite.

All vocal recordings are in a single take. The version performed by Ivan Cheng is sung in falsetto - a lower, chest voice is not heard. Ivan attempts an interpretation of the lyrics in earnest, and sings only a fragment of the original song. There are a few melismatic alterations, and the voice carefully cracks in moments. The pitch of the accompaniment slides down in the coda, and that is where the version performed by Ivan's parents begins.

The version performed by parents consists of the same text that Ivan sung and then transcribed as words. Soon after inviting his parents to participate in the project, Ivan enters the study of his family home with a field recorder, and singing the text through (in chest voice), he asks his parents to echo, asking for two attempts before retreating into the studio. Ivan's parents truncate phrases, and take melodic cues from their existing conception of the song as well as watching their son sing this song. Their two voices are unbalanced and sing in a rough unison, negotiating a line.

The film *Beaches* has only been seen once, but Bette Midler is a known entity in the Cheng household. The stricture with which this exercise is engineered is deliberate - as individuals, their egos are uncomfortable with the skill demonstrated in recorded performances.

Who apes who? Why these performances, and what for? All three have a degree of musical training in various and differing forms. Unpicking 'intuition', why the musical choices made?

DISC CARE: DO NOT INSERT DISC INTO SLOT DRIVE.
DO NOT TOUCH SURFACE OF THE DISC. DO NOT LEAVE IN
DIRECT SUNLIGHT. MAY BE CLEANED WITH SOFT CLOTH



