

033 SURVEY
Lili Reynaud-Dewar:
Interpretations
Diedrich Diederichsen



I. State of Affairs

The scene is set in a desert. A group of attractive, well-dressed twenty-somethings chat light-heartedly in perfect English with a French accent. The little group has come in search of art. But despite the gorgeous landscape, reminiscent of that in *Breaking Bad*, or Roberto Bolaño's posthumous novel *2666*, something truly terrible is about to happen.

We are near Marfa, Texas, the focal point of Lili Reynaud-Dewar's film *Beyond the Land of Minimal Possession*, made in 2018 and featuring students from Geneva, and the artist Michael Smith, amongst others. From 1979 until his death in 1994, Donald Judd bought every building of interest in this town in order to create an art museum-cum-mausoleum within his lifetime. What has emerged after his death is an opulent centre, the miniature art enclave of Marfa, which is somewhat at odds with its surroundings. The small Texan town is only one example of the often bemoaned wave of gentrification brought about by the adventures and expeditions of certain artists. It is an attempt to make a white cube out of a whole town. Reynaud-Dewar's interpretation of this concept in her film can be seen as an allegorical reminder of a well-financed art world spread over a series of small islands, where utopian politics are discussed and security zones are set up in order to protect against insult and injury in a world that is heading towards some kind of para-fascism.

In *Beyond the Land of Minimal Possession*, Reynaud-Dewar is an artist, teacher and fictional character (a professor); her students are both her real and fictional students. It is a typical component of her methodology to consider every character and actor, herself and all the other participants in her work, not only for their individual drive but also for that which is determined by society. The fictitious plane of narrative and the real practice of those who act in her works are often mixed and subverted, as is the whole principle of representation by acting. It is only logical that real students act as fictitious students and the professor plays a professor, and the artist as teacher in general is an important theme. Teaching is the material base of much art these days. Many contemporary artists can only survive or avoid compromising their work by adopting a teaching position on the side, but they are normally less radical, more meditative and more diplomatic in doing so. This is an aspect addressed by Reynaud-Dewar in some of her works. It is a

typical component of her methodology to take seriously both the individual drive and the social specificity of every character and actor, herself and all the other participants and collaborators in her work – and there are many of them – friends, teachers, students, muses, role models, hired pros. She is interested in who is what and why.

In the desert, the plot comes to a head. Conversations reminiscent of *Beware of a Holy Whore*, also a desert-based film, this time directed by Rainer Maria Fassbinder, collide with a Russ Meyer vibe: *Faster Pussycat, Kill, Kill!*. Where and how will it all end?

Well, to find out, we must start from the beginning. Lili Reynaud-Dewar belongs to the first generation of influential, highly acclaimed artists whose oeuvres have already achieved global prominence, despite emerging only at the beginning of this millennium. It therefore seems reasonable to explore her work through the lens of the social and artistic themes that were of particular relevance or influence during this period. Reynaud-Dewar's work repeatedly references the discourses of unconventional sexuality and queerness; the human-made character of the natural; the dialectical nature of the body and its symbolic, sexual and ethnic identity; the precariousness of the skin and other boundaries of the human body as places for trauma and transition, representation and concealment, a surface for projection and perceived essence; the boundless availability and generative quality of easily remembered signs, logos and memes; architecture as the environment for texts and bodies, and the attempt to celebrate and criticize, abandon and inhabit these conceptual worlds and physical spaces; and, finally, the concept and reality, history and present of subcultures and countercultures. She plays with these themes insistently. She pulls the ground from under their feet, yet she does so in such a stubborn and sustained manner that it cannot be considered an undirected act of provocation or subversion, but rather a complex of well-planned strategies, of works of art.

Before I can address these themes and motifs and describe their successive unfolding and mutual overlaying in a temporal continuum that might be called a career, a development or even a play, performance or novel (or less linearly, an unfolding spiral or a self-multiplying network – or the classic French rhizome), I would like to explore the historical background of her works.

[BEYOND THE LAND OF MINIMAL POSSESSIONS](#), 2018
HD FILM, COLOUR, STEREO,
81 MIN. 58 SEC.

With Bianca Benetti, Sandro Canovas, Joana Castilhos, Yannis Christ, Chad Dawkins, Dorothée Dupuis, Heyd Fontenot, Peter Friel, Thomas Le Lann, Trystan Matthey, Arttu Palmio, Mireille Rias, Laurent Schmid, Michael Smith, Ida Souillard, Ramaya Tegegne, Claire Van Lubeek, Martha Wilson and the artist.
Cinematography by Victor Zébo.
Sound by Laurent Schmid.
Special effects by Hugo Scibetta.
Make-up by Trystan Matthey.
Editing by Nicolas Bacou.

previous pages,
[INTERPRETATION RECALLING \(MIREILLE RIAS' STORY OF SUN RA'S CONCERT AT FONDATION MAEGHT, AUGUST 3, 1970\)](#), 2013
PERFORMANCE

Music by Sun Ra. Text by Mireille Rias. Costume by Mathieu Bernard.

KUNSTHALLE BASEL,
SWITZERLAND, 2013



As an adherent of Theodor W. Adorno's concept of *Materialstand*,¹ the 'state of the material', I will make a few comments on the subject in relation to developments in visual arts around the year 2000. If we want to understand an artist's choice of particular media and formats from amongst those that are available at a given point in time, we must not only describe that choice as not a free one but determined in a double sense. On the one hand, forms and materials are selected in proportion to the requirements of the markets and their developments (or progress), with which they are not identical, but which they can never completely escape, because contemporary art cannot avoid the contemporaneity of certain aesthetic and technical developments (and achievements) without becoming quaint and regressive.² On the other hand, it is only by stepping 'inside' these levels of mediation between the market, technology and artistic developments that their relationship can be highlighted and criticized.

By 2000, this meant, above all, the slow transformation and reconfiguration of the presence of artists and their bodies into a primary material that transcended its prior use for the subgenus of performance art. This development was also based on a double cause. First of all, despite the way in which it is most often portrayed, the booming art world was not simply triggered by a new upsurge in art speculation; the art market did not only become a substitute for investing in securities, precious metals and other objects of speculation. Art also went beyond this to offer a world of

splendour and glamour, a higher quality of life and a social, even sexual weight and attractiveness, for which the collection of artworks became a critical entry point for the group of individuals who had been growing increasingly wealthy in the preceding decades. Nobody gave much thought to the fact that human work, make-up, fashion knowledge, beauty skills, social energy, intelligence in conversation and vitality was producing this attractiveness through living labour. The boom in art fairs, parties, festivals and biennials created an unprecedented assortment of attractive events, not only requiring the presence of young and sexy audiences at opening events, but above all, of the artists themselves. They generated, to a greater extent than acknowledged, surplus value through the living labour of personal appearances. Whereas this appearance was declared to be a natural and alluring by-product of the work, it was in fact an important and lucrative part of the work: 'The artist is present.'

This relationship between the presence of the artist (at opening events, through paratextual appearances, and in semi-performance formats) and the artist's work (in the conventional sense of Western 'fine art') has always been a crucial aspect of Reynaud-Dewar's projects. She has sought to underline the economically precarious, physically risky production of the sought-after commodity of attractiveness in an age of standardized immediacy in art. In doing so, she has effectively spearheaded the criticism of this development, accepting and rejecting its implementation in the

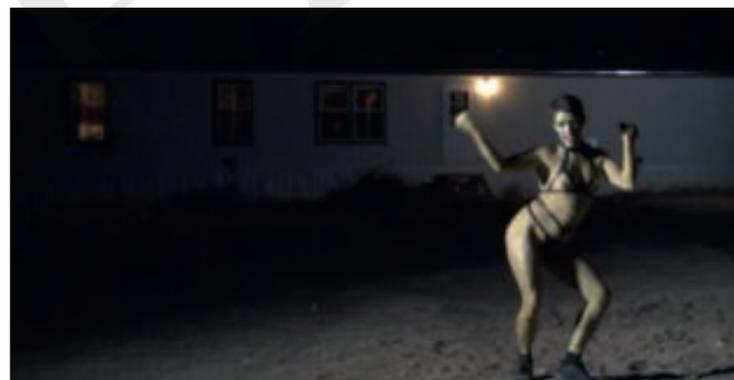
BEYOND THE LAND OF MINIMAL POSSESSIONS, 2018
HD FILM, COLOUR, STEREO,
81 MIN. 58 SEC.



exploitation of living labour. This development started with personal signatures in early twentieth-century art history and art theory discourse, shifting away from their role as a resource for authentication and evolving into a sui generis discourse on legitimation. Perhaps the first artist to win over the public, keeping his style so brilliantly focused on a theme by always remaining contemporary and constantly changing (in so-called periods), was Pablo Picasso. However, compared to Picasso's then relatively conventional restriction of his image to his own physical-technical abilities, his Spanish compatriot Salvador Dalí highlighted the mythologization of his own person above his artistic practice, which was reduced almost to the point of a secondary activity by this genius of self-promotion. After the war, Andy Warhol's glamorization of the traditionally non-performative production of fine art would be extended through another twist of sophistication: the reason behind the importance of the artist's presence was not his extraordinary genius, but his machine-like ability to attract other talents and record and exploit their performances. In Warhol's antagonist, Joseph Beuys, and his many successors in the typical German over-estimation of the charismatic, instead of a distancing sophistication, there is a surpassing of the function of presence in the overridingly religious and shamanistic. Martin Kippenberger was able to lastingly establish himself as a disruptive and/or intensifying, ever-present artist in such a way that even object-focused art, and especially its audience, no longer wanted to be rid of the irritating/intensifying artist. Jeff Koons, despite failing with his tabloid simulation (public marriage to a porn star), successfully established his Michael Jackson-esque persona (sterile presence: presence as absence). In the

present-day, artists from Marina Abramović to Vanessa Beecroft or Thomas Hirschhorn engage in a physical relationship with their work, encompassing a vast range of metonymic methods – whether they merely represent, defend and present these in a striking manner or declare parts of their (naturally always visible) physicality, or that of their employees and students, as an oeuvre in itself.

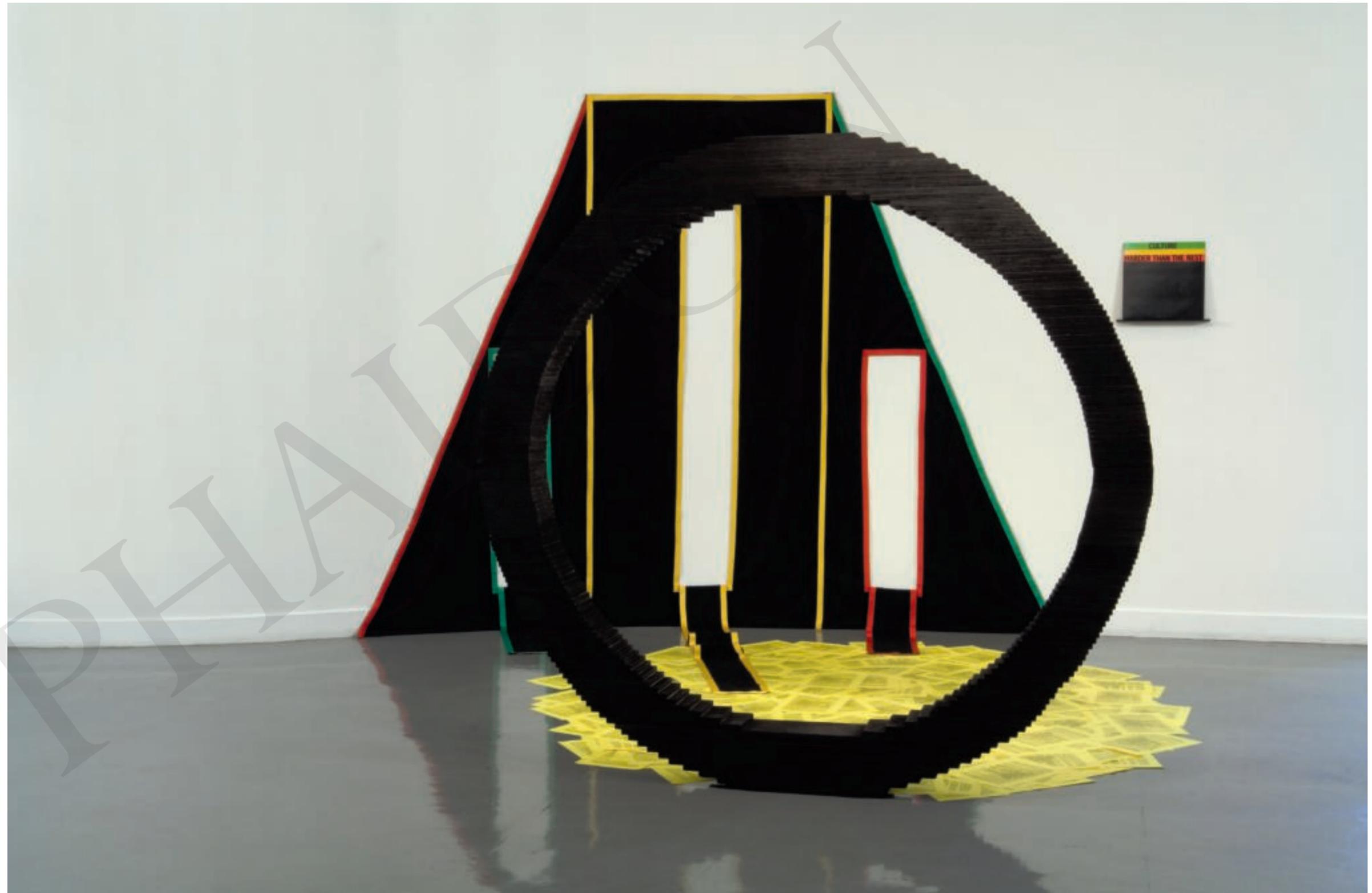
A large portion of Reynaud-Dewar's work constitutes a critical attempt to reflect on and reassess the compulsory presence in contemporary art and its neoliberal politics of attraction. She uses its resources, but to outperform, undermine and overcome them with virtuosity – with the artistic, technical, and reflective means available today, in this 'state of the material'. She offers a plethora of performances that take place in galleries and museums, but which are only accessible through intense mediation: performances are held before the opening and then presented through a video, or are visible at the opening, but a video of the dress rehearsal is then shown, or the performance involves doing something with objects that are then exhibited in the gallery as sculptures. Sculptures are often pieces of furniture (chairs, beds, make-up mirrors, curtains, bean bags, carpets, etc.) that have been used either in the performance or while creating the work. Their status as autonomous works of sculptural art is thus just as much at risk from the many performance mediations, interruptions or obstacles as the ideological authenticity of contemporary art infatuated with the idea of the artist's presence. The problem of the authentic is already a theme in Reynaud-Dewar's early work.



II. Collectives and Anti-Collectives

In Reynaud-Dewar's exhibition, 'The Center and the Eyes' (2006) at the Zoo Galerie in Nantes, the city, once a hub of the slave trade, becomes the starting point for a reflection on runaway slaves and related cultures, from the Maroons to the Rastafarians, who refer in their belief to Marcus Garvey and worship Haile Selassie as a god (Jah). It was an intense installation work with staged elements, and a performance using the exhibition as a set took place during the opening. This set consists of simple geometric shapes placed front-on in three consecutive series so that the circular parts (which look like masks) can be interpreted as eyes in a face comprised of displaced sculptural components – a face in turn designed to be reminiscent of a pseudo-primitive or pseudo-African mask. There are two constructs side by side – a 'white mask' and a 'black mask'. The faces, composed of stylized benches in the shape of a mouth, geometric barriers in the form of a nose, and suspended mobile eyes, are only noticeable as such from a frontal view. Mary Knox, one of Reynaud-Dewar's friends from the Glasgow clubbing scene and a frequent collaborator, reads texts from works such as John Cage's *Silence*. Jean-Marie Racon also performs, reciting a very abstract text on Maroon cities and Maroon identities written by the artist, while experimental rock and noise avant-gardist Lionel Fernandez (from the group Sister Iodine, among others) plays very loud guitar. All are performers and musicians who would continue to perform with Reynaud-Dewar for some years. They became a core group of friends from different disciplines, milieus and scenes that functions in a similar way to a troupe – but is different from collectives like Fassbinder's or Warhol's, since they are all also active in other constellations.

Texts are an important element in all of Reynaud-Dewar's work. She has written theoretical and literary texts since the very early days. In her writing for this particular piece, she quotes – among other things – an anti-Garvey speech by Haile Selasse, in which he argues against the 'Back-to-Africa' movement and its belief that African Americans should or could return to their 'roots'. This builds the foundation for a more general argument against cultural authenticity and for the artificial nature of social relations. Printed on a poster used to announce the show, these texts were also accessible as part of the installation, spread on the floor, as well as cut up to comprise the eyelashes of the mobile eyes.





LOVE = U.F.O., 2008
PERFORMANCE

FONDS RÉGIONAL D'ART
CONTEMPORAIN AQUITAINE,
BORDEAUX, 2008

With Lionel Fernandez, Mary
Knox, and Jean-Marie Racon,
and The Dressing Table Plaza
designed by Michael Greaves for
the Memphis Group, 1981.



The installation's double aspect plays with the idea of difference in comparable elements (normal wood, burnt wood), as opposed to the brutal dichotomy between black-and-white. On the one hand, the installation appears as an independent work of art that, through sameness and difference, as well as through the concept of the whole and the composite, showcases its principles of form in the masks and furniture. On the other, however, it is more than just the background for a performance. It instead suggests that the series of homogeneous entities – such as the chairs – and the cognitive focus on differences and repetitions, and on the difference between difference and repetition in the specific objects, does not simply accompany the performance; it structures it like a musical composition.

But it is equally clear that certain objects – like a piece of furniture or a mask – hover between genres in Reynaud-Dewar's work (and not just between ontologies like any prop on stage, where a table is always a table, but also a sign for a table), i.e. between the piece of furniture as a sculpture and the piece of furniture as a design object and the piece of furniture as a prop. The overlaps and accumulations of features and attributes accruing to a random object based on its potential membership of various worlds, disciplines and ontologies, in turn result in an additional and new ontology from which artists and audiences can keep moving in any direction, towards the origin of the attributions or to possible new meanings: a table, a mask – as shown in this and subsequent works – can never again merely sit on the stage or in the white cube; they constantly speak of their potential ability

to move location. Phrased negatively, they can never be totally native anywhere. Once this has been spelled out by creating, working through and enabling these transitions, there is no way back into Pandora's box. Classifying the place of exhibition, Nantes, at a post-colonial and de-colonial level by identifying visual media in design and avant-garde history, the synchrony of scripted performance, free elements, installations whose components oscillate between autonomous art and staging, electronic music and queer performance techniques thus provides a vast spectrum of interpretations and links, while stopping short of tipping over into the completely open and abstract; everything is concrete, physical, fixed and spelled out.

The tool of choice for handling this surplus meaning and precision is the synchrony between overflowing performance physicality and the accuracy of texts and references. *Love = U.F.O* (the title referring to an expression by Robert Filio) was a three-part theatre show performed at the opening of an exhibition at the FRAC Aquitaine in early 2008. Once again, it was Mary Knox who, as the lead actor, refreshed this tension and suspense. Starting with the performer's make-up routine and preparation, it explored the idea of otherness, based on popular and subcultural myths, its precarious relationship with ostracism, and othering as its antidote. If we have to 'other' a love interest in order to desire it, to want it for ourselves, we 'other' ourselves in order to be loved. A second level is constructed when a different 'othering' is addressed, the one practised by the state, institutionalizing it in the form of segregation, border regimes, ghettoization.

In a burlesque performance conducted on a carpet of posters, Knox mirrors the actions and gestures made by Jean Marie Racon (who is present only via a video projection) accompanied by the noisy soundtrack of Lionel Fernandez's guitar. Sitting in front of a Memphis dressing table (*Plaza*, 1981), she applies various coats of make-up – after Bruce Nauman's video *Art Make Up* (1967), which the artist cites as a key reference for this work and others in which she used make-up, but this time in the colours of different Afrodiasporic movements. The second phase sees her dance, perform and pose in front of a pane of glass on which symbols and numbers are drawn during the third phase. The figures used are those designed by Peter Saville – the famous graphic artist and designer who worked for the Factory label in Manchester and *The Face* magazine in the 1980s – for 'The Festival of the Tenth Summer' in Manchester, 1987, which paid tribute to the Sex Pistol's concert held ten years earlier in the city. In Reynaud-Dewar's version, they are symbols of the other, on the tipping point of being sculptures; if a digit can no longer be identified as a number, it is – as an illegible symbol – a sculpture. Conversely, abstract sculptures only need a small modification in order to suddenly and unexpectedly make literal sense – that of the alien, the other. Both letters and numbers are symbols that, as a central subgenus of all (abstract and referential) sculptures, resemble the upright human body, capable of expressively short-circuiting all its acts of alienation and otherness (whether voluntarily or by force) through nuance, which sees performances jump back and forth between person and object, as between sculpture and drawing, and this notion adds another dimension to the performance. In this fluid relationship between objects and performers, letters, symbols and outsiders amount to one physical entity, which demonstrates its queer potential in its ability to change its physicality into a piece of furniture, etc. – all motifs that we will encounter frequently in Reynaud-Dewar's work. But something else is additionally taking shape here: the insistence that all the connections between art and life beyond the old avant-garde and neo-avant-garde strategies of the 1950s to the 1970s, and which have been re-addressed

by artists, particularly Reynaud-Dewar, in the last two decades, share one key common feature: a connection and transgression of this kind is not created by fleeing from form, but rather by concentrating on form, on the form's ever political, sexual and drastic life.

While the dressing table was the work of Memphis designer Michael Greaves, another Memphis artist Ettore Sottsass became even more important for Reynaud-Dewar. The Schinkel Pavillon at the 2008 Berlin Biennale featured a series of collaborations between Biennale artists and a prominent older designer. These artists effectively curated an exhibition incorporating works by their role models. Reynaud-Dewar's installation *In Every Room There is a Ghost of Sex* sees six of Sottsass's giant *Ultra Fragola* mirrors placed in a semi-circle, a large group of identical office chairs on wheels that Sottsass had designed for Olivetti, and the vase *Diagrama Phallica*. Texts by Sottsass covered the whole space, including windows and floor, in a somewhat claustrophobic manner, printed on large posters in various shades of grey (referring to his idea of 'I Mobili Grigi': the colour grey loses its neutrality, if used in exaggerated proportions). Once again, there was a performance by Fernandez and Knox in a room filled with text, posters and objects, wildly shifting between ontologies: information, celebration, personal, objective, paratext, expression.

Simultaneously, Kunst-Werke Berlin showed Reynaud-Dewar's work *Les garçons sauvages* (a reference to William Burroughs' *The Wild Boys*): three large pillar-like structures to which photos, clothing and other objects such as props were affixed. To a certain extent, this work shows how the stylized form thrusts forward the notion of the body. The structures were in general dedicated to the wild boys of Berlin's underground gay scene, and especially to three very specific and partly overlooked and forgotten heroes – porn star Peter Berlin, singer Klaus Nomi and funk musician Betty Davis. By specifically combining voice usage and sculptural outfits, Klaus Nomi unhinged the notion of the classic rock-music performer body,





LES GARÇONS SAUVAGES, 2008
WOOD, GLASS, CERAMICS,
LEATHER, PHOTOGRAPHS,
DIGITAL PRINT ON PAPER.
180 X 45 X 170 CM

INSTALLATION VIEW AT THE
BERLIN BIENNALE, 2008

with its fetishistic insistence on the full package of gravelly voice and heterosexual masculinity. His doll-like performance image, vaguely reminiscent of Oskar Schlemmer, which cross-faded virtuoso mastery with machine-like elements – a technique in vogue during the new wave days – contrasted with his trained opera voice, which occupied a completely different emotional spectrum. More willing than anyone else to face up to the risk of significantly breaching the ‘coolness’ requirement with this exalted performance in a pop-music context, he eerily merged the two into one single entity. Nomi is considered to be the first AIDS victim in show business, and another major constant in Reynaud-Dewar’s work revolves around tackling the issue of AIDS and HIV, from more than just an ethical/political perspective.

Peter Berlin is often reduced to the image of a gay porn star, an iconic hero of the 1970s gay subculture, who interested the likes of Tom Of Finland, Andy Warhol and Robert Mapplethorpe as a model. But he is also a director, graphic artist and photographer who boasted a wide range of work – though this was barely visible for some time, with Berlin having retreated from the public eye for many years. Betty Davis, for her part, is one of the very few women to have been part of the 1970s funk music scene. At one point, when funk started to break away from the integrationist soul approaches of the 1960s, particularly at an aesthetic and stylistic level, and surrendered song structure for flared, anti-dramatic groove-based music, Davis was the only woman to combine this musical style with a personal front-woman performance. During the former model’s brief marriage to Miles Davis in the late 1960s, she acquainted the cool-jazz trumpeter with the emerging funk culture and musicians like Sly & the Family Stone and James Brown, playing a key part in Davis’s shift towards electric instruments and the birth of fusion sound; the consequently historic album *Bitches Brew* (1970) can be attributed to her suggestions. But she left the role of model and muse, and all its objectives behind, without totally rejecting them, when she went on to combine a dominatrix look with tremendous musical control and density in her own records and performances.

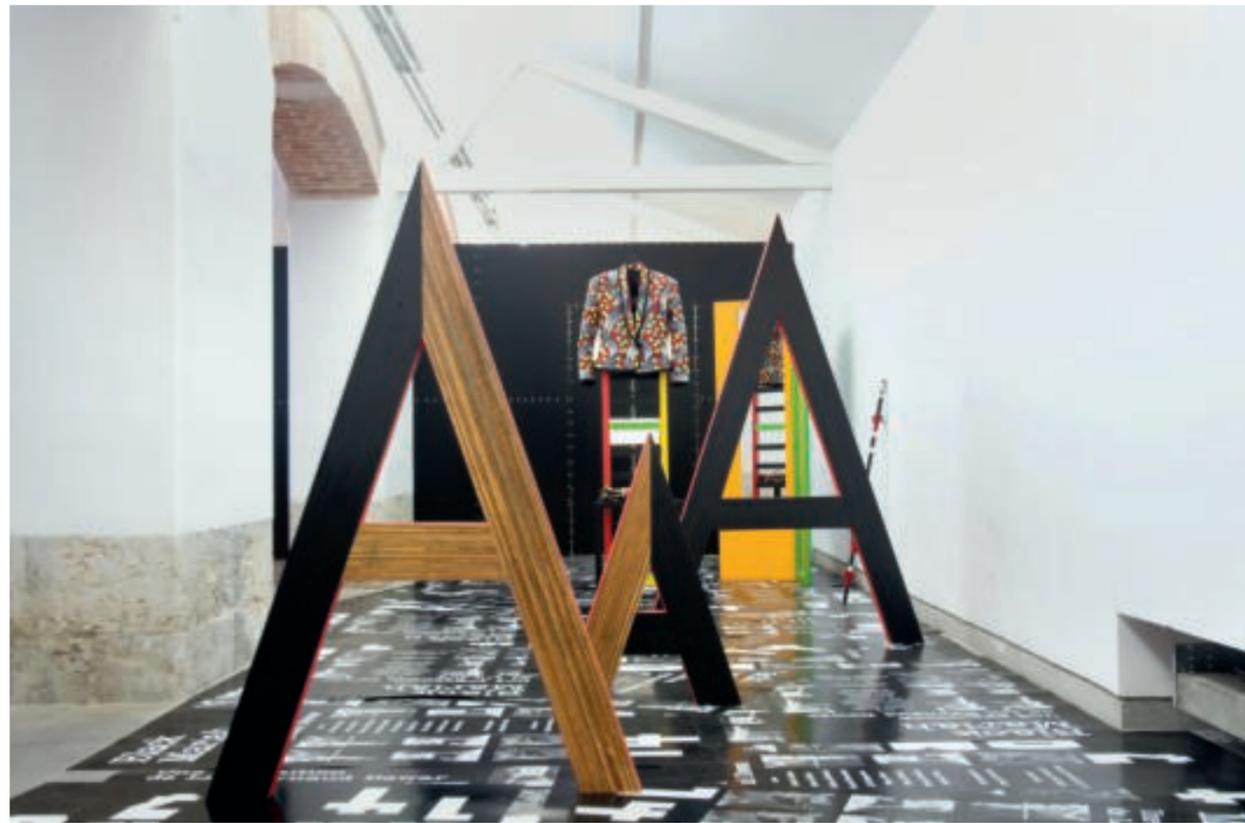
All three performers thus come from marginalized and varyingly sexualized cultures, but nonetheless subvert the integration of their performance styles

into the mainstream culture and its concept of art. This is where Reynaud-Dewar’s sculptures come in: she creates the pillars from documents, objects, clothes and photographs of her friends wearing them while imitating the attitudes of Davis, Nomi and Berlin. These sculptures also function as ‘notes’ on poses, attitudes and gestures that she would use in her later performances. In this way, they can be seen as a mood board of sorts, or a score.

In 2009, some finishing touches were applied to the collective character of the troupe of performers and musicians who worked with Reynaud-Dewar. For her second institutional monographic exhibition in France at the Parc Saint Léger Contemporary Art Centre in Pougues-les-Eaux, Reynaud-Dewar reconstructed what was said to be the first production studio in film history, the ‘Black Maria’, built by William K. L. Dickson on the site of Thomas Alva Edison’s laboratories in New Jersey in 1892. It was here that, as a means of trialling a technology that was still in the process of being invented, very short film scenes were created, mostly based on sideshow and fun-fair attractions. The genre of astonishing mini attractions that swept through Europe and North America in the second half of the nineteenth century thus became more than just the subject matter for the very first cinema. Edison and Dickson also anticipated that the cinema itself would become part of these types of attractions, generations before it was linked to art and science.

This early cinema and its characters also have a link of sorts to the subcultures that naturally produced the performers of the ‘attraction culture’. For these exhibitions, members of Reynaud-Dewar’s entourage, including her mother, Fernandez and Knox, shot short films full of archaic vaudeville and sideshow traditions mixed with contemporary subcultural references, and scripts with punch lines aimed at entertainment. All the films were shot before the opening inside a loose recreation of the Black Maria which would go on to form the ‘shell’ or the decor of the subsequent exhibition – the Black Maria, with an additional ‘h’; there were posters on the floor, while film props (keys, umbrellas, costumes, sceptres covered in letters and numbers) were put on display as relics.

The notion of reflecting on the artist’s self and her production methods as director or scriptwriter for



BLACK MATAH (THE WOMAN'S PERFORMANCE OBJECTS), 2019
WOOD, PAINT, LEATHER,
BLACK AND WHITE POSTERS,
COSTUMES BY MATHIEU
BERNARD

INSTALLATION VIEW AT
CENTRE D'ART DU PARC SAINT
LEGER, POUQUES-LES-EAUX,
FRANCE, 2009

BLACK MATAH (THE WOMAN'S PERFORMANCE OBJECTS)
(DETAIL), 2019
WOOD, PAINT, LEATHER,
BLACK AND WHITE POSTERS,
COSTUMES BY MATHIEU
BERNARD

next pages,
BLACK MATAH (THE TWINS),
2009
COLOUR PHOTOGRAPH
13 X 20 CM



a group, in this case the agents of early fun-fair and vaudeville entertainment, has close ties with Tod Browning's 1932 film *Freaks*, which experienced a massive revival in the 1960s as a template for new subcultural production and life forms. These included, on the one hand Frank Zappa and his early crowd, people like Pamela Des Barres, Vito Paulekas and Carl Franzoni, and on the other, it informed queer theatre by the likes of John Vaccaro, Jack Smith and even Warhol and Fassbinder. Reynaud-Dewar refers to Fassbinder in a second attempt to address and reflect subcultural and queer performative production styles. The title of her 'Antiteater' exhibition, which opened in early 2010 and featured the eccentric spelling used by Fassbinder's first theatre troupe (comprising the core group of his actors, as well as musicians, outfitters, make-up artists, etc.), extended beyond the actual exhibition at the FRAC Champagne-Ardenne Reims, whose elements Reynaud-Dewar summarizes as 'a kind of mini-retrospective'. The starting point was a performance at the theatre la Comédie Reims, in which Reynaud-Dewar gave a

long talk about her work, while she re-staged several of her existing performances all at once on the same platform, swapping the original roles of the performers, with recordings of the originals being projected. Thus she was sitting behind a desk on the huge stage of the theatre giving a lecture while her performers and friends were moving about silently next to her. The later exhibition at FRAC Champagne-Ardenne was an extension of what had happened on the stage of La Comédie a month earlier. It featured in one room a poor video of the performance and in another room the props and objects used during the performance. The artist's deliberately annoying voice while giving her talk was audible throughout the whole venue. The 'Antiteater' title functions as a general work plan that not only encompassed a range of possible interpretations at the start of Fassbinder's career, but indeed only truly enabled this some forty years later – certifying how the time span between Reynaud-Dewar's 'Antiteater' and Fassbinder's *antiteater* is the same as the one between *Freaks* and the freaks of the late 1960s.

III. My Alien, My Self

From 2003 to 2010, Reynaud-Dewar's work often focused on historic themes and artists. She would quote, re-arrange, collate and compile historic references in installation-performance formats, making not only authors, views and historic movements part of the material, but also styles (e.g. Memphis and burlesque). The artist presented her work within the lines of tradition as an alternative to either designing herself as a new and unencumbered figure or becoming completely absorbed in the fact that the lines of tradition and precursors are already a thing of the past. Although this material exists objectively and historically, it is only pooled together in this way by Reynaud-Dewar. It then ceases to be simply about the 1960s or the counterculture, but rather creates very specific openings onto Reynaud-Dewar's own present concerns. Also of note is the fact that her sources often involve male figures like Jean Genet, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Guillaume Dustan, Bjarne Melgaard, Sun Ra and Ettore Sottsass, creating further distance.

This strategy changes around 2010. The exhibition 'Interpretation' centres on Mireille Rias, the artist's mother, both as an agent and – in a certain sense – as an object. While Reynaud-Dewar's performers and collaborators have always been friends and people close to her rather than professional actors, dancers, musicians or singers, the relationship between the presentation and the presented, between symbols and reference, was still somewhat classic. These two relationships do not collapse even when the artist's mother (and later also her grandmother) joins the show; rather, a further complication, as well as intensification, occurs at the level of the interaction between the performers. The repeated co-operation with a very specific group of friends suggests, even with reference to figures such as Fassbinder and his *antiteater*, the formation of an artistic family, echoing the small, productive yet socially tight-knit and potentially crisis-laden setup of bands and artist collectives; the mother's involvement turns the quasi-familiar into actual family – exposing it to a mutual deconstruction of sorts.

The subject of this piece, the African American musician, mystic, poet and illustrator Sun Ra and a specific performance by him and his Arkestra, has retrospectively been labelled as afro-futuristic and in recent decades been intensively discussed and interpreted. The Sun Ra Arkestra first toured Europe in the second half of 1970 and performed twice at the Nuits de la Fondation Maeght in St Paul de Vence, alongside appearances at the Berliner Jazztage and Donaueschinger Tage der Neuen Musik festivals. It shares with the *antiteater* the fact that it oscillates between collectivity as an artistic form and a dictatorial hierarchy, and that it built itself around queer relationships.



INTERPRETATION RECALLING
(MIREILLE RIAS' STORY
OF SUN RA'S CONCERT AT
FOUNDATION MAEGHT, AUGUST
3, 1970), 2013
PERFORMANCE

Music by Sun Ra. Text by Mireille
Rias. Costume by Mathieu
Bernard.

KUNSTHALLE BASEL,
SWITZERLAND, 2013



INTERPRETATION, 2010
WOOD, MIRRORS,
SOUNDSYSTEM BY SAM SUPA-
SONIC, MIRRORS, VIDEO
VIDEO: 60 MIN. 9 SEC.
MIRRORS: EACH 340 X 191 X
150 CM
OVERALL DIMENSIONS:
760 X 760 X 340 CM

INSTALLATION VIEW AT
KUNSTHALLE BASEL, 2010

from top,
 INTERPRETATION DRAWING
 (I HAVE SET BEFORE YOU LIFE
 AND DEATH, CHOOSE LIFE),
 2010
 RED PENCIL ON CARDBOARD,
 TEXT BY SUN RA
 315 X 240 CM

INTERPRETATION DRAWING
 (LITTLE I'S I LOVE YOU), 2010
 PURPLE PENCIL ON
 CARDBOARD, TEXT BY SUN RA,
 305 X 240 CM

INSTALLATION VIEW AT 1M3,
 LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND,
 2010

On the one hand, Sun Ra has a direct relationship with Reynaud-Dewar's mother, while also, due to his famous claim of being from Saturn (sometimes also Sirius) rather than Earth, he represents a completely different, somewhat contrary relationship with origin and descent – alien, preconceived and self-controlled. At the centre of the 2010 'Interpretation' exhibition is a huge geometric sculptural installation containing sound and video. The video shows Mireille Rias in a costume reminiscent of the Arkestra's glittering futuristic stage outfits. She sits in an armchair decorated with African fabrics as she talks about the concert held on 3 August 1970, Sun Ra's first ever in Europe, which she attended with her husband, who was a poet and a jazz record shop owner. She also listens to the well-known recordings of the concert and dances to the music.

For the exhibition, Reynaud-Dewar created huge pencil drawings on the grey card of Sun Ra's pamphlets, which had been distributed across Chicago, particularly in the 1950s. At the time, Sun Ra was part of a scene of African American artists and intellectuals who examined Afro-centric and separatist ideas and ideologies in different ways. The best-known group was the Nation of Islam, from which Sun Ra kept his distance. While the altercations between traditionally left-wing and separatist-nationalist groups shaped a number of debates among African Americans in the time before the civil rights movement, hardly anyone went as far as Sun Ra, who, through numerous artworks (music pieces, as well as drawings, poems, record covers, costume designs, etc.), effectively reverted the African diaspora's history of displacement and scattering to a form of futuristic rescue by an outer-space colony, and repeatedly acted this out in new variations on the theme. In Reynaud-Dewar's eyes, his work also brought together the interest in subcultural structures and models, and in the African diaspora's specific history of resistance. But the piece really builds suspense by directly short-circuiting its content (obtained from various events, artworks, documents and historic material dating back to before Reynaud-Dewar's birth) with existential issues of production, e.g. the person

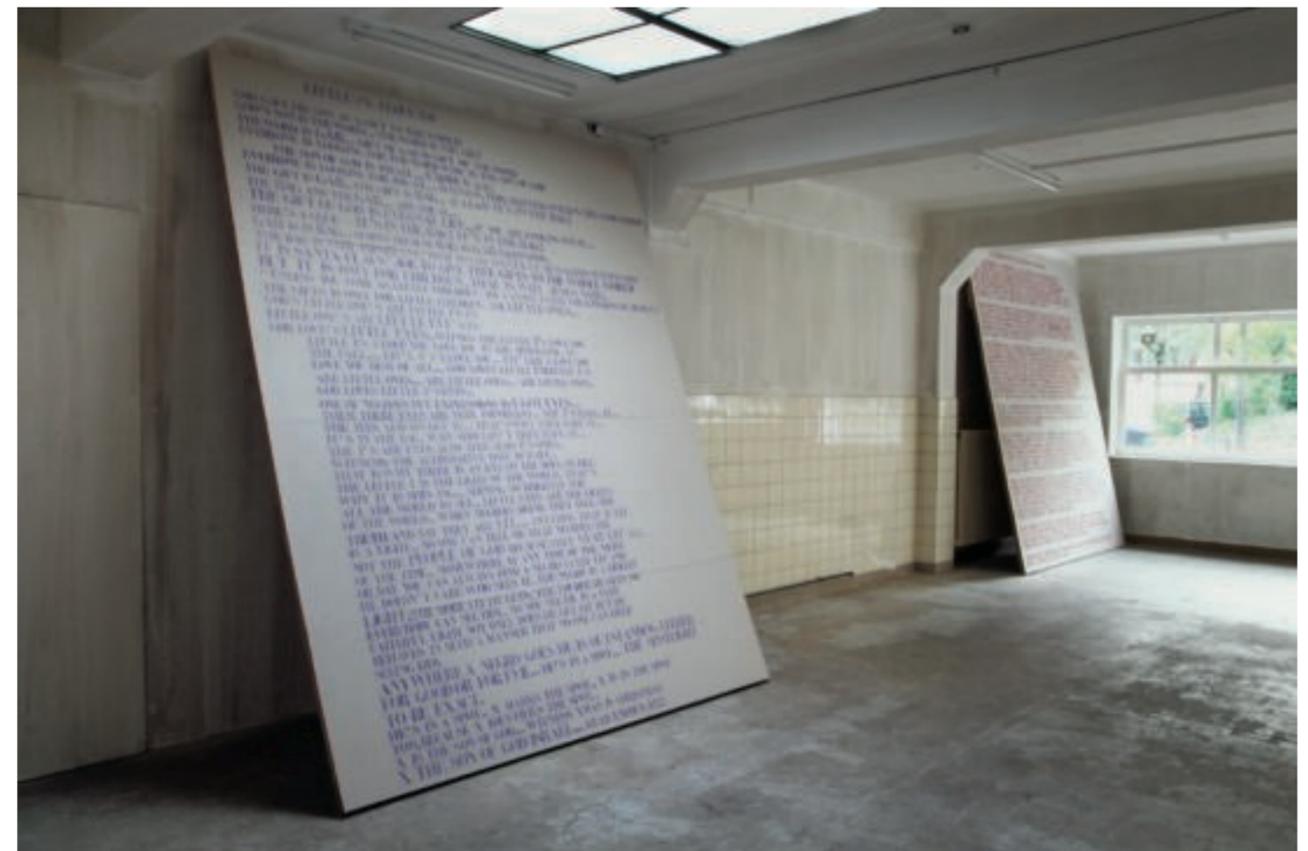
who, to a certain extent, 'produced' the artist – her mother.

Clédas Chairs (Bielefelder Kunstverein, Bielefeld) continued this idea of conflating autobiographical material with contemporary political issues (in this case, gentrification) and historic artistic projects. The project referred to Pier Paolo Pasolini's highly subjective and experimental documentary *Notes Towards an African Orestes*, which endeavoured to transpose Aeschylus' tragedy to Africa, and once again dates back to the countercultural period, the year 1969. Here, too, it is family history that ensures that the artist's subjectivity does not remain in the shadow of objective omnipotence or aesthetically superior detachment: Cléda is Reynaud-Dewar's grandmother. A video filmed before the exhibition shows Louis XIII chairs being dragged out of her home by the performers and through a forest. These chairs had been left behind in her house, following Cléda's move from the place in the countryside where she had lived all her life. They are a literal representation of the leftovers in the transition from the mythical world to that of the state and city in the *Oresteia* – the unconquered or displaced, if not ostracized, part that ends up in the forest. The African perspective is ruptured by Pasolini, who is both an ambassador and antagonist of the 1968 revolts – not least as a fierce enemy of the urban middle-class subcultures. He is thus not only an inspiration for the performance film, but also a subject for criticism. In the excerpts of Pasolini's film that Reynaud-Dewar chose to include in hers, he is seen presenting his project of adapting the tragedy of *Oresteia* to a group of Ethiopian students who accuse him of both generalizing and idealizing Africa. It makes sense that this caught Reynaud-Dewar's attention. The gap between white 'progressive' projections and the objections of those projected upon is the kind of conflict to which she would return, as we shall see later.

In *The Power Structures, Rituals & Sexuality of the European Shorthand Typists*, which was created around the same time, and has featured in various exhibitions,³



PIER PAOLO PASOLINI
 NOTES TOWARDS AN AFRICAN ORESTES, 1970
 FILM
 65 MIN.





opposite, from left,
[FOUR TYPISTS PRACTICING A RITUAL \(BLACK MASK RITUAL\)](#), 2009
 FOUR DIGITAL PRINTS
 EACH 84 X 56 CM

[THE POWER STRUCTURES, RITUALS & SEXUALITY OF THE EUROPEAN SHORTHAND-TYPISTS \(DETAIL\)](#), 2009
 CLOTHES, WOOD, MIRRORS, PAINT, TYPEWRITER, VIDEO PROJECTION
 220 X 201 X 160 CM
 VIDEO: 9 MIN.

INSTALLATION VIEW AT
 MARY MARY, GLASGOW, 2009

below, foreground
[THE POWER STRUCTURES, RITUALS & SEXUALITY OF THE EUROPEAN SHORTHAND-TYPISTS](#), 2009
 WOOD, MIRRORS, PAINT, THREE SCREEN PRINTED POSTERS, TYPEWRITER, VIDEO PROJECTION
 220 X 201 X 160 CM
 VIDEO: 21 MIN. 50 SEC.

background,
[FOUR TYPISTS PRACTICING A RITUAL \(BLACK MASK RITUAL\)](#), 2009
 FOUR DIGITAL PRINTS
 EACH 84 X 56 CM

sculpture, body, drawing – and its constantly insinuated and actual jumps between the different ontological or quasi-ontological states of the bodies and things involved. There is also a fourth level. The interest in furniture as an ‘applied’ version of sculpture, but which is also charged with other meanings (etymologically, at least in French and German, the word for ‘furniture’ denotes something ‘moveable’), further intensifies the slipperiness and porosity of disciplinary boundaries. As a member of a collective that once curated a project called *Cross Gender/Cross Genre* in 1999, I find that Reynaud-Dewar’s work from these years strongly reminds me of the relationship between unlocking a concept relating to genre and discipline in art and unlocking the concept of gender in queer and feminist discussions.

In 2011, Nottingham Arts Centre held an exhibition entitled ‘Four Walls: Speaking of Revolt, Media, and Beauty’. Crafted out of superposed stripes of moving blankets, four walls split the heart of the Arts Centre into small alcoves containing books, plaster casts of fists covered in black and pink make-up, and plastic

replicas of AK-47 rifles. Beside their function of containers of some sort, these walls were also speakers playing the readings by musician Sabisha Friedberg of political texts by Jean Genet from the essay collection known as *The Declared Enemy* in the English-speaking world, and from *Prisoner of Love*. This installation was also a stage design for a performance held at Tramway theatre in Glasgow, with Knox, dressed in her usual burlesque attire, translating live a filmed conversation about Genet between Reynaud-Dewar and poet Pierre Giquel. Pierre Giquel was a very influential teacher of Reynaud-Dewar (especially his way of communicating and teaching in an informal way, in convivial settings) and for this piece on Genet, she asked him to function as an advisor, interpreting his enigmatic reflections and transforming them into visual and formal matter. The colours of the sculptures, pink, white and black, were chosen at his suggestion.

In a conversation with German author Hubert Fichte, Genet pits the revolts to which he lays claim against the revolution for which he seems to have worked devotedly, stating that he never really wanted



it is again the artist’s mother (having spent a few years working as a shorthand typist), who provides the inspiration and is also the performer. But this time it is a different type of production that links to the artist’s mother: a rather unartistic, Taylorist and dreary one. The profession of the shorthand typist was identified by Klaus Theweleit and his media-theorist friend Friedrich Kittler – alongside ‘female’ jobs like telephonists, film editors, script girls and other film-making activities which, from the perspective of this kind of media materialism, were not clouded by the masculine illusion of spirit, content, or by the artistic ideology of form – as belonging to their category of the ‘mediatic woman’, a central factor, Kittler claims, of technological modernism.⁴ Aside from the feminist themes associated with this perspective, a performance not defined by spirit, content or form is of course also enthralling. This dream of many directors and theatre theorists (which also happens to be the job of shamans and spiritual teachers) of purging the protagonists and making them perform very specific movements

in a pure, undefined manner is a specific performance aesthetic derived also from ideas such as the Surrealist conception of automatic writing. This kind of purging constitutes an increase in absorption – the antithesis of theatricality for Michael Fried – taking the step towards a style resembling purging’s logical opposite: obsession.

The logical polarity between purging (through absorption) and obsession takes to its limits the metaphor that imagines the performing spirit as a vessel. It also touches on another issue repeatedly raised in Reynaud-Dewar’s performances during the 2000s: the transition from sculpture to body to drawing (the use of letters as sculptures, the combination of this mix of symbols and sculptures with the bodies of dancers and performers who in turn appear to bring the dead symbols and objects to life as animated versions of sculptures and drawings, and the recurring flirtation with the idea of a ‘tableau vivant’, where performers form groups and become sculptures, inanimate objects). In the end, however, it is not just about this triad –





LADY TO FOX, 2018
 MANNEQUINS, BODY PAINT,
 STYROFOAM, FIREPLACE:
 MANNEQUINS:
 200 X 80 X 85 CM
 110 X 80 X 85 CM
 INSTALLATION VIEW AT
 CLEARING, BRUSSELS, 2018

ANTITEATER, 2010
 COSTUME DESIGNED
 BY MATHIEU BERNARD
 INSTALLATION VIEW
 AT FONDS RÉGIONAL D'ART
 CONTEMPORAIN CHAMPAGNE-
 ARDENNE, REIMS, 2010



a revolution. In case of a revolution he would be forced to become its supporter, but he was not someone who supported anything – he was a ‘revolter’.⁵ This paradox of queer (and other) transgressive philosophy, whereby transgression is still ultimately significant even when it is no longer the main focus or when people are opposed to a more ‘civil rights’ interpretation of queer politics, flickers and simmers throughout the entire discussion, but is constantly brought to a head in Reynaud-Dewar’s installations and presentations. When a policy of ‘subversion’ or ‘transgression’ tends to increasingly err on the side of desire, it forgets that the boundaries and laws it is transgressing are not just any old boundaries and laws; they are very specific, and their blueprints are based on political motives. If such a policy concentrates on objectively and pragmatically changing these laws, on breaking them down, it not only loses a key component of its highly mobilizing dynamics of desire (the boundary, the prohibition), but also runs the risk of losing to market dynamics the political dimension of its liberation.

In Reynaud-Dewar’s work, the concrete nature of boundaries is often established by continually invoking architecture, spatiality and sculpture – confronting the transgression with actual physical barriers, moving from the concept to the physical act, which in no way remains merely an allegory, but instead plays a central role and becomes an actual object in the show. In her later work, this is achieved through the performers’ dancing and acting in the installation, where the walls are so dramatic and solid (and at the same time strange) that they cannot be danced around or confronted by bodies. Their similarly oscillating use value as shelves is reminiscent of the fact that bookshelves are sometimes referred to

as partitions in German, and books generally not only ‘furnish a room’, as Lawrence Weiner would put it,⁶ but can also be used to create walls and thus boundaries. In this case, it is the texts themselves, words representing concreteness, that need to be installed. This of course also resonates with the reoccurring motif of letters becoming sculptures or text blown up to sculpture-size (the Sun Ra-pamphlets in ‘Interpretation’) or used as costume (as in *Small Modest Bad-Blood Opera*, 2015, which will be discussed later).

IV. Becoming Avatar

At a certain moment, Reynaud-Dewar seems to have decided that the problem of the presence of the artist could no longer be solved piece by piece, but through the introduction of a certain form of presence that acknowledged its necessity as much as it rejected it. Ever since that key shift in her work, she has been dancing naked in art institutions with her body painted. Indeed these performances follow her artist’s biography, and she is dancing solely in spaces with which she has a working relation and where her work is displayed. These performances are made visible in the form of videos in all of her shows, a strategy that allows her to extremely present, vulnerable and unavoidable but at the same time distanced and mediated.

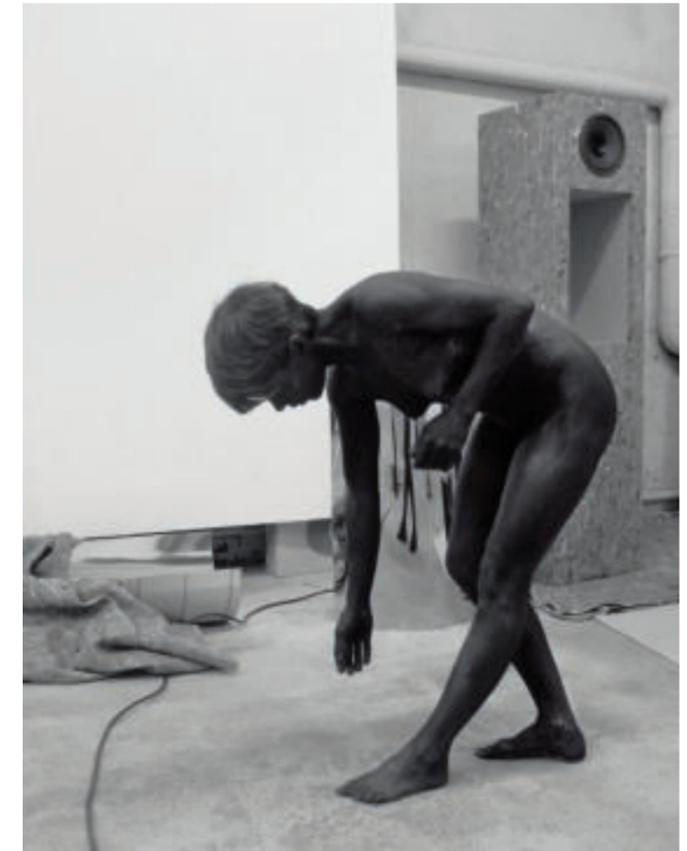
This approach began with her reflection on the work of Cosey Fanni Tutti, who had been known since the early 1980s as a member of experimental music collective Throbbing Gristle, and later as half of the Carter/Tutti duo. Before Throbbing Gristle, she and Genesis P-Orridge previously had formed the radical

performance duo COUM or Coum Transmissions, which was itself shaped by a radical body-politics-based performance art, but aimed to go even further. COUM's last exhibition, which effectively marked the start of Throbbing Gristle, was held at London's ICA in 1976 under the title *Prostitution*. It centred on Cosey Fanni Tutti's experience of sex work (including as a model for various British 'gentlemen's magazines') during the temporary cessation of her work in the radical performance art culture of the 1970s. Thereafter, she spent several decades more or less exclusively in the world of experimental pop music and out of the visual art context, regaining minor exposure in the 1990s before only truly being rediscovered in the new millennium, during which she continued to work on aesthetically radical projects, albeit solely on the music scene.

Cosey Fanni Tutti ties in closely with many of Reynaud-Dewar's reference figures. On the one hand, she is a risk-taking artist who opposed the way in which men laid claim to risky and dangerous acts in the radical (performance and action) arts of the 1960s and 1970s.

But she did so without totally reducing the risky aspect of feminist performance art to the notion of being the victim of male violence in the traditional sense – as could be the interpretation of certain famous actions undertaken by Yoko Ono or Marina Abramović. To some extent, she is the crossover point between Nomi's performances, which were enabled purely by the new wave genre, and Berlin's 1970s porn – but she adds a whole range of other nuances to the spectrum. As an homage to Cosey Fanni Tutti organized by Maria Fusco in 2010 at the ICA in London,⁷ Reynaud-Dewar re-enacted a series of poses that the performer had struck in the magazines featured in the exhibition. A naked Reynaud-Dewar, whose body is painted black, adopts these poses in a series of black-and-white photos, but is often far away in the background, her dark silhouette slotting in as just another symbol among the letter and number sculptures she has used so many times before, also painted black or white. Lying on the floor are plastic sheets at whose edges she kneels, as if looking at her reflection in a body of water. When they are not primarily reminiscent of symbols, which is made clear through contextualization by the letter sculptures, the

WHO CYBORGS WILL BE IS
A RADICAL QUESTION, THE
ANSWERS ARE A MATTER
OF SURVIVAL (AFTER COSEY
FANNI TUTTI), 2011
TEN BLACK AND WHITE
PHOTOGRAPHS
EACH 14 X 21 CM



COSEY FANNI TUTTI
THREE DAY PERFORMANCE, 1979
PERFORMANCE
HAYWARD GALLERY, LONDON



poses look very dance-like: the dark body appears to be an abstraction of the glaring sexualization in the Cosey photos.

All these impressions are of course no accident: light, body colour, symbolic nature (as opposed to the mercilessly illuminated character of flesh and blood) are certainly all components of the ideological machine explored by Cosey Fanni Tutti, and to which, decades later, Reynaud-Dewar responded with an update that now enables specific parameters of the ideology to be directly controlled through aesthetic operations such as separation and juxtaposition. The title of the work, *Who cyborgs will be is a radical question. The answers are a matter of survival*, combines the homage to sex work in Cosey Fanni Tutti with the artificiality and contingency, the meaning, indeed the content, of bodies in the future, referencing the hope for a deliberate, artificial definition of such bodies as described by Félix Guattari, but particularly by Donna Haraway and her many followers.

Along with Cosey Fanni Tutti and her use of the body in a radical 1970s tradition, Josephine Baker was a defining source of inspiration for Reynaud-Dewar in inventing this role for herself – not just as the pioneer of a new, confident, black female role, but also as an artist who acted in direct confrontation and conflict with the forces of an existing institutional regime, while also acting symbolically. One anecdote that particularly inspired Reynaud-Dewar hones this idea: Le Corbusier is said to have fallen in love with and wooed Josephine Baker on a ship. Then, to really impress her, he transformed himself into her at a party, appearing in drag in a feather skirt and black-painted body. Reynaud-Dewar has presented this story as a larger allegory through constant confrontations between (individual) women working in varyingly precarious and risky roles and the (masculine and institutional) logic and rationality of architecture and its neutralizing and ‘unmarking’ effects.

When Luke Skrebowski, Ilse Lafer and Diana Baldon curated the ‘Counter Production’ exhibition at Vienna’s Generali Foundation in 2012 (with Josef Strau, Henrik Olesen, Marion von Osten, Ricardo Bassbaum and Seth Price, among others), Reynaud-Dewar’s contribution was called *I Don’t Know What A Conceptual Artist Looks Like*. While her installation – number sculptures, black-and-white stripes on the wall, and elegantly glittering minimalist sculptures on pedestals – was being set up, she danced through it, her naked body painted, and this would then be shown on screens as a black-and-white projection after the opening. Classic subjects of conceptual and institution-critiquing projects are thus cited, but associated with a comical figure by recreating Baker’s dance routine – a historic counter-model to the all-knowing, immaterial position of institutional critique, yet certainly also (distantly) related to the recurring dance, the physical performance, of a newer institutional critic like Andrea Fraser.

LADY TO FOX, 2018
PRINTED SILK, LACQUERED
METAL, LIGHT BULB,
ELECTRIC CABLES, HD VIDEO
PROJECTION, COLOUR
215 X Ø 40 CM
VIDEO: 6 MIN. 29 SEC.

INSTALLATION VIEW AT
CLEARING, BRUSSELS, 2018

next pages,
*MY EPIDEMIC (SMALL MODEST
BAD BLOOD OPERA)*, 2015
PRINTED FABRIC, INK,
METAL, LED SCROLLING
TEXT DISPLAYS, 5 COLOUR
SPEAKERS, AMPLIFIERS, FIVE
HD VIDEOS, COLOUR
VIDEOS:
3 MIN. 12 SEC.
2 MIN. 34 SEC.
4 MIN.
3 MIN. 18 SEC.
4 MIN. 24 SEC.

INSTALLATION VIEW AT THE
VENICE BIENNALE, 2015

Music by Nicolas Murer.
Texts by the artist. Sung by Diego
De Atucha, Naim Bytyqi, Maud
Constantin, Etienne Chossou,
Romain Juan, Sarah Margnotti,
Lea Meier, Coline Mir, Nicolas
Murer, Sara Sandler and the
artist.



This marked the first appearance of a new central element in Reynaud-Dewar’s vocabulary – one that she is still using to this day in various modified forms. This step brought about the shift from referencing other historic characters to autobiographical material, including at a performance level. A very minimalist and radical decision is made to replace directing many other bodies and performers with one single thing: her own naked, dancing body, and to paint it in one single colour. Ultimately, however, it was also about devising an approach that combined the literal and architectural side of institutional critique (walls, boundaries, architecture) with an expanded theatrical and conceptual dimension (the offices, the backstage areas, as well as the closed galleries, libraries, etc.).

Reynaud-Dewar continues this idea of painting her body and dancing naked around galleries in different, usually location-specific variants, despite the fact that it is controversial since the painting of the naked body, particularly in black paint, has been associated with racist minstrel shows and similar traditions. The various reactions rightly notice the confrontational aspect of this form, which is unfurled in varying ways and developed semantically through different setups. The diverse but always single-coloured body paint with which Reynaud-Dewar would now start working would of course serve the purpose, for the time being, of driving the body (essentially the opposite of the abstract and abstraction in art terms) towards abstraction. This is certainly apparent in some of her work after 2010, made in the knowledge that it is precisely this abstraction from the body that plays a role in phenomena from administration, biopolitics, planning and surveillance to war and mass murder. But the abstraction of the body is only ever an insinuation, a direction, in Reynaud-Dewar’s work. The ideological figures of authenticity and sexualization associated with the naked body are hinted at only in order to contradict and highlight them – this is not, however, done from a safe, unmarked, absolute narrator’s position, but rather from that of a distinctly present, tangible artist who exposes herself to possible risks.

Another key starting point for this vocabulary’s development is the opponent of the dancing body: architecture. Reynaud-Dewar has often used her body to analyze the existing architecture of museums and galleries, from the Generali Foundation in Vienna to the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and many other places – she has danced practically in every exhibition she has staged or participated in ever since (and occasionally in other places which she has a specific personal connection or professional link with). Architecture and its way of framing a whole array of practices, enclosing them and making them comparable within symbolic genres of spatiality such as the ‘White Cube’, ‘Black Box’, as well as stairs, offices, kitchens or the libraries of museums, etc., corresponds in some respects to the role of money – an exchange-oriented

format that is constantly incommensurable with art. Unlike in both classic institutional critique as a genre of Conceptual art in the 1960s/70s, and the revived versions since the late 1990s, Reynaud-Dewar presents neither architecture itself (like Michael Asher) nor the institution as an abstract category (like Hans Haacke and many artists of the 1990s); she instead establishes a relationship between architecture (which is often extremely chaotic and does not limit itself to one single function) and the abstracted body.

The naked painted dancing artist thus became something of an avatar of the artist herself, which was able to act within set institutional and architectural frameworks without adopting a violently external stance, and thus combined some of the roles played by the texts of authors, from Genet to Pasolini, referenced in earlier works, with the role of the many performers, actors and extras. There also continued to be a plethora of external references, though these were now pooled, annotated and slipped in by the naked, single-coloured artist (black in the black-and-white films/videos, and red, silver and other colours in the colour films/videos).

But recently there has been a noteworthy break in this avatar’s function. In the exhibition ‘Lady to Fox’ (2018), Reynaud-Dewar, her body painted in bright orange, does not dance in institutional surroundings, but rather in nature among a flock of sheep. The installation presented along with the video references General Idea’s 1990 piece *Fin de Siecle*, which used Styrofoam sheets to represent the ice floes that crush and sink a ship in Caspar David Friedrich’s *The Wreck of Hope*, and to deliver a poignant commentary on those struck by the AIDS pandemic, a very personal subject on which Reynaud-Dewar chose to focus for a long series of works, as we shall see later in this text. This deeply charged work is one of the last self-portraits the trio created in their twenty-five-year-collaboration. Amid Reynaud-Dewar’s ice floes sit mannequins, some with male, others with female attributes, covered in the same make-up that Reynaud-Dewar uses to paint her body: they refer to her dancing persona. These overlays develop into a veritable ‘reference baroque’ that, despite its complexity, coexists with the hardness and grip of clearly defined targets and content.

A cold, wintery vibe dominates ‘Lady to Fox’, and not just in the film that was shot during a freezing morning on January in the countryside. With this temperature effect, Reynaud-Dewar seeks to address the increasingly tough, intense discussions currently taking place in the art world. The title of the exhibition referred to a novel by David Garnett (who, having spent many years living with an openly gay man, had married Virginia Woolf’s niece). He attacks civil marriage by telling the story of a well-educated British wife who gradually transforms into a fox. Excerpts from the novel were printed on the door of the gallery and spread on various objects such as lamps that constituted, together with a

SMALL TRAGIC OPERA OF IMAGES AND BODIES IN THE MUSEUM, 2017
PERFORMANCE

WIELS AND KUNSTENFESTIVAL DES ARTS, BRUSSELS, 2017

With Diana Dobrescu, Clara-Louise Di Girolamo, Thibaut Vanhacter, Felix Bahret, Lynn Bruyere, Thevani Ramasawmy, Tiphane Blanc, Stéphane Doneux, Walid Aïssaoui and Thomas Dupal. Libretto by the artist. Music by Nicolas Muren.



fireplace with an actual fire, the only sources of heat in the gallery. ‘Lady to Fox’ was not designed to break the endless mirror logic of the art system’s self-criticism of its self-glorifying self-reflective aesthetic, but rather referred to the accusation of illegitimate appropriation levelled at Reynaud-Dewar for alluding to Baker, and ‘transforming’ into her, despite being a white woman. Would it be easier to turn into a fox instead? Short excerpts from a track by Theo Parrish, *Love is War for Miles*, possibly referring to Miles Davis’ unhappy love affair with a white woman, played at regular intervals in the gallery, may provide further indications, albeit enigmatic, of the complex, if not irresolvable, nature of these questions seen from Reynaud-Dewar’s perspective.

IV. Controversies and Operas

My Epidemic (started in 2015, in parallel with *Small Modest Bad Blood Opera*) covers a wide spectrum of forms: first there is a long text on the epidemic and the various strategies of prophylaxis, up to today’s PreP, that was written to be featured in an issue of Reynaud-Dewar’s feminist magazine *Petunia*.⁸ There is a book, a collection of Reynaud-Dewar’s writings, with a cover by

Marina Faust and a foreword by Verena Dengler, as well as texts by and about Reynaud-Dewar’s own work. There is a performance in the Giardini library of the Venice Biennale, where Reynaud-Dewar and her students read out loud texts on the epidemic and its prophylaxis by the likes of Douglas Crimp, Samuel Delany, queer activist Scott O’Hara and Guillaume Dustan. There is a large colourful installation, with loud vocals, at the Arsenale in Venice. And so on.

The title of the series, and the fact that performances and books, installations and seminars, reading groups and film presentations are all held together by the concept, adds further depth to the continuous relativization of frame, installation, stage setting, institutional architecture and that which normally happens *within* such a frame. All this leads to the intensification of an issue still handled very delicately by classic institutional critique – the question of whether roles can be reversed in terms of what is the foreground and what is the invisible background of artistic production, obscured by the concept of normality in the conventional art system (Michael Asher making the gallery office the centre of the exhibition, for example).

TEETH GUMS MACHINES
FUTURE SOCIETY 2017
 TRASH, CARDBOARD PANELS
 PRINTED WITH EXCERPTS
 OF THE CYBORG MANIFESTO
 BY DONNA HARAWAY
 EACH 588 X 131 CM
 ENLARGED GRILLS IN
 ALUMINIUM MOUNTED ON
 POLES AND FILLED WITH
 TRASH: 54 X 20 X 20 CM;
 72 X 16 X 31 CM; 72 X 20 X 31
 CM; 66 X 16 X 29 CM; 81 X 23 X
 34 CM; 72 X 18 X 32 CM

PAINTED STEEL CONSOLE:
 120 X 200 X 30 CM
 PAINTED STEEL HIGH STOOLS:
 200 X 30 X 30 CM
 HD VIDEO, COLOUR:
 6 MIN. 26 SEC.

INSTALLATION VIEW AT
 VLEESHAL, MIDDLEBURG,
 NETHERLANDS, 2017

The explosion of this model of critique goes hand in hand with the explosion of references, and ultimately of another of Reynaud-Dewar's key methods: that of closely aligning and sticking together very different, heterogeneous themes and issues, such as teeth-cleaning and racism, heteronormativity and architecture, which often end up proving to be highly congruous. The principle of forming series out of elements, but always assigning them a different role or functional location at the level of detail – the performance from one location is shown at another, the colour used to paint the body in the last edition is used as the letterpress colour for a text by the likes of Donna Haraway in the next – enables the extreme density typical of systematically connected artworks. In Reynaud-Dewar's works, highly heterogeneous practices, artistic functions, participation by people (from dead heroes and references to her own family, to students), multiple concepts of causation and authorship are all held together by an assertion such as the concept of the series, a title or certain semantics with an environment of association.

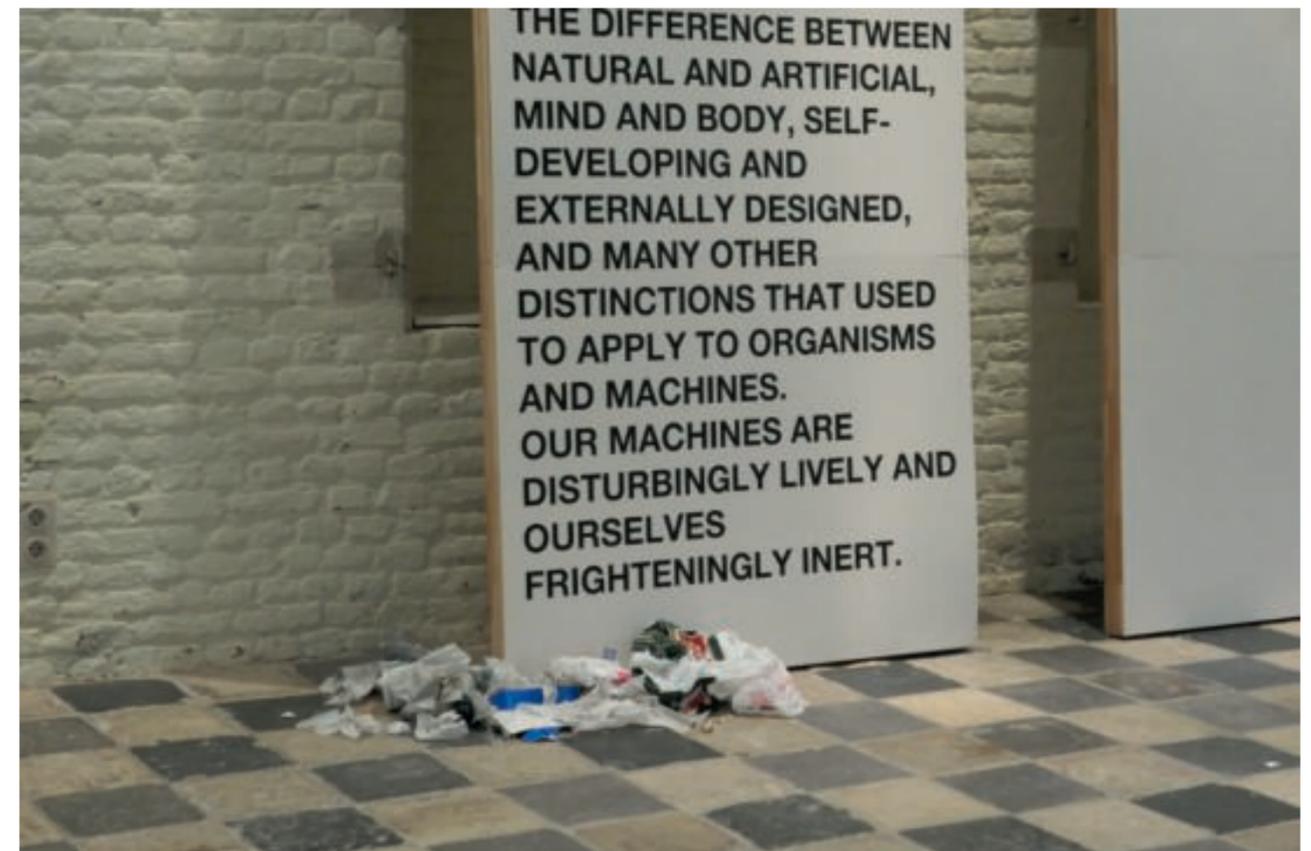
At the start of a mission statement of sorts for her series *My Epidemic*, Reynaud-Dewar declared: 'My first two loves were HIV-positive'.⁹ Many of her works have referred to the concept of infection, virus and the anti-hedonistic, homophobic cataclysms sparked by the official AIDS policy. A key figure influencing this series is the versatile, and in France very well known, author and activist Guillaume Dustan (1965–2005), who originally worked as a judge, but also wrote radical novels from his hedonistic queer perspective, shot short films, and created the first ever collection of books by queer and gay writers in France: *Le Rayon*. As a multi-dimensional cultural producer, he was responsible for a number of discussions relating to queer politics in France in the 1990s and 2000s, and remained at odds with ACT UP due to his advocacy of unprotected sex. In his refusal to let people's lives be defined by political reason alone, he shares traits with Jean Genet. His novel *In My Room* provides material for Reynaud-Dewar's *I Am Intact and I Don't Care* (a phase from Arthur Rimbaud's *Bad Blood*) performance at Frieze Projects. Lying on a bed at whose centre was a fountain filled with black ink, she read over and over again the full autobiographical novel.

Later, for her show at New Museum of Contemporary Art, she painted large excerpts from the novel on curtains covering the entirety of the space in which her installation *Live Through That?!* was presented. It also featured beds, this time with speakers in the middle, playing the voice of Reynaud-Dewar reading the novel once again.

The notion of architectural criticism is developed here, with the establishment of domesticity ('my room'), a domesticity not constituting one's own home, or the notion of private isolation, but rather the criticism thereof – an attack on the idea of establishing oneself as the private flipside to the neutralized public aspect of the art institution. In Dustan's novel, his own room becomes the decidedly public location for sexual encounters, friendship and fierce conflict, as well as care and nurturing.

The story of the conflict between Dustan and ACT UP also serves as the basis for the *Small and Modest Bad Blood Opera* (2015), an installation that was presented during Okwui Enwezor's international exhibition for the Venice Biennale. Here, an exchange of views, sung by, on the one side (representing ACT UP) Lili Reynaud-Dewar's students, and on the other side (representing Dustan), herself and her partner Nicolas Murer a.k.a. Macon (often responsible for the music in her projects), who also composed the subtle, continuous electronic keyboard music that is reminiscent of the artistically naive synth-pop vignettes of the early 1980s. The texts, painted onto colourful curtains as a stage design of sorts, juxtapose not only the *protective reason* advocated by ACT UP with the *overt risk* of promiscuous lifestyles, but also the notion of the group and the individual. Both sides' arguments are pitted against one another, and the conflict remains unresolved. But it is clear that, while the installation allows itself to open into a succession of narration and discussion (whenever an opera is being performed), the framework of conflict-laden materials lingers.

The connective semantics do not standardize, however. The principle underlying the *Small Modest Bad Blood Opera*, among others, is that of controversy, of conflict.



But it is about conflicts that are no longer being argumentatively waged in contemporary public formats, and which instead freeze when retreating into identities and principles. Yet Reynaud-Dewar does not have a biased penchant for ideologically rationalist retreats into the seemingly simple, incorruptible reasoning of the argument either. Just as the notion of argumentation is entrapped in asymmetrical power relationships and their naturalized privileges, so the notion of retreating into identity is a dead-end street. In opera format it is possible to equally pit the affective side of humiliation, of identity and identification, and of power, against the argumentative and political side of rationality. But while she does appear to sympathize with the renegade Dustan in his conflict with then-ACT UP president Didier Lestrade (sympathies that certainly align with her interest in Genet and other individual ‘revolvers’), contemporary conflicts are even more difficult to portray when one side invokes its experience with a specific identity and the other cites general categories of universality.

And this approach of a coexistence, a parallelism between spirality and clarity on the aesthetic level, works very well with the narrated antagonism between universalist illusions and ideologies declared as political reason on one side and identitarian claims based on first-hand experience declared as un-negotiable and fundamental on the other, either performed as institutional power or as affective opposition. It facilitates works that establish a connection within series based on dance, the reference structure (the response to other artists or continuation of work by another artist, writer or theorist), but also continue this connection. Another example is the *Small Tragic Opera of Images and Bodies in the Museum* (with music written by Murer and lyrics by Reynaud-Dewar), which premiered at Wiels in Brussels in 2017, and could be read as a reference to a public debate in connection with an exhibition by Kelley Walker in St Louis. Large sections of its audience found the portrayal of violence against predominantly African American people in Walker’s collages inappropriate in a city that had repeatedly been the scene of police violence against the African American community. A discussion at the museum with the artist, who stated that his work had been created long before the cases in question and subsequent public and political reactions, left audiences dissatisfied, and calls for the exhibition’s suspension grew. Reynaud-Dewar’s opera features abstracted representatives of museum workers, the audience, critics, curators and artists, plus a choir. Together, they discuss the issue of whether the portrayal of a community belongs to the community by virtue of the right to representation. The participants each sing in styles selected (sometimes counter-intuitively) for the role and move around in costumes made from texts.

During this phase of examining the opera format and combining a plethora of performance techniques and

degrees of mediation, which were primarily structured as a complex coexistence, denying holism to a certain extent, the concepts of series and opera began to create other plausible frameworks for projects that benefited from the spirit of opera. This was the case with a series of works made by Reynaud-Dewar in 2017–18: performances (in Nanterre, Bozen and Hamburg) and a film project (shot in Memphis, Tennessee) with the shared title of *Teeth Gums Machines Future Society* (2017–18).

Teeth are a special body part, located in one of the body’s orifices, while also being part of its inner workings, its care process and representative function. The dialogues and presentations involving musicians and stand-up comedians whom Reynaud-Dewar met in Memphis focus on the specific fashion of dental grills – a look that has been appearing in hip-hop culture since the late 1980s, originally as a sign of a hard, gangsta rapper, but one that has now spread and diversified. This is the constant theme throughout the project. It is not possible to address the general idea of physical rows of human teeth, and the decoration thereof, without picking up on the specific background in African American culture. At the same time, however, dental grills have also reached a completely different level in universal humanity: the machine-like extensions and enhancements of the human body in an age of cyborgs. This interior adornment cannot perform, be seen or climb on stage. It can only manifest itself through shimmering, reflective elements conveying the impression of being valuable, of having the exchange value of gold, silver or jewels – as an architectural human front of sorts; an architecture that may perhaps be more solid than that of a building’s walls. The comedians were debating on the theme of the cultural appropriation of an object such as the grill. The film culminates in a vivid and sometimes absurd conversation between them, sometimes rendered inaudible by Hendrik Hegray’s loud noise music.

Reynaud-Dewar, who had often focused on African American themes and very explicitly cited and discussed sexual themes, is faced with two debates relating to her work: the need to protect, as expressed through the concept of the safe space and its now inflationary meaning, and the view emerging from various sides that a marked, named social group should be, to a certain extent, in charge of its existing representations, while others tend to be illegitimate. Although both themes need specific contexts and analyses of real power asymmetries to be properly discussed, general rules are almost impossible to give: the literal diversity of singing voices in operas serve as a highly adequate model for the dignity of the specific, even arriving at some general level, namely the general human principle of the individuality of the voice (that everyone has). In each case, the experiences associated with this project went on to shape a number of the operas mentioned above, as well as other controversy-related works.

TEETH GUMS MACHINES
FUTURE SOCIETY 2016
CARDBOARD PANELS PRINTED
WITH EXCERPTS OF THE
CYBORG MANIFESTO BY DONNA
HARAWAY, BLACK CARPET,
CUSTOM MADE SOUNDSYSTEM
COVERED IN FOIL, BEANBAGS
PANELS: EACH 588 X 131 CM

TEETH GUMS MACHINES
FUTURE SOCIETY 2016
HD FILM, COLOUR
36 MIN.

With Jada Brisentine, Darius Clayton, Henry Coleman, Ashley Cook, Hendrik Hegray and Brandon Sams. Cinematography by Victor Zébo. Sound by Nicolas Mazet. Editing by Nicolas Bacou.

INSTALLATION VIEW AT
HAMBURGER KUNSTVEREIN,
HAMBURG, 2016



V. The Teacher’s Promise

Teaching has played an increasingly important role in the creation of Reynaud-Dewar’s work. And there are a number of pieces in which students collaborate, or where seminars become artworks. These include the various versions of the series *Teaching like a Teenager* (2012–ongoing) in which she moves classes that she normally teaches at a university in Geneva to her hotel room, i.e. her actual place of residence as a commuting professor at the time of teaching, but which – as a hotel – in turn represents a Genet-esque antithesis of domesticity. At the same time, however, the teachings that are intended to be kept neutral and objective at the institution – even though we know that the admiration of the ‘pedagogical Eros’ too often glosses over asymmetrical power and of course also abuse – are now transferred to a more intimate, personal space. The centre of this space is generally a bed, on which the students sit, collaborating on reading tasks. This project, according to the artist, has been inspired by Michael Krebber, who wrote about his teaching style indirectly in ‘Puberty in Teaching’ and is known to have met his students in pubs instead of in the studio or university, and would talk to them about art, give them texts to read, and share news from the art world with them, by all accounts largely rejecting the notion of direct,

institutionalized discussion of work located in the same room.

Reynaud-Dewar has repeatedly modified her work with different students and reading lists according to location, for example at the Marrakech Biennial (with texts by Moroccan writers, Choukri, Taïa, Rachid O.) and French and American writers who lived in Morocco (Genet, Bowles). All were chosen in relation to one another – culturally, personally, sexually, etc. The objective of *Teaching like a Teenager* was to underscore the troubled and somehow imbalanced relations between them. ‘It is about the various ways in which transmission and pedagogy are twisted via emotions, sexuality, etc.’, says Reynaud-Dewar.¹⁰ Two central ideas of her work are re-examined here – on the one hand, testing a new performer-audience situation that goes beyond the neoliberal understanding of participation, and on the other, the notion of how (literary) texts are made accessible in installations and performative formats of visual art, and must be disclosed as sources.

Reynaud-Dewar is to my knowledge the only artist, apart from Mike Kelley and his *Educational Complex*, to even address the concept of art teaching as artwork. While teaching is, for many artists unable to survive on the market a way of earning a living without



ENSEIGNER COMME DES ADOLESCENTS, 2013
PERFORMANCE AND INSTALLATION

LE CONSORTIUM, DIJON, FRANCE, 2013

With Dorine Aguerre, Anastasia Bruelle, Johanna Di Dio, Camille Dumond, Marguerite Duras, Guillaume Dustan, Adrien Guillet, Simon Haenni, Lauren Huret, Macon, Steven Parrino, David Robbins, Louis Scoufaras, SSB, Camille Tsvetoukhine, Johanna Viprey, Andy Warhol and the artist.

MY EPIDEMIC (TEACHING BJARNE MELGAARD'S CLASS), 2015
HD VIDEO, COLOUR
6 MIN. 59 SEC.



making too many compromises, it is for others – often performance-oriented artists – also an attractive work option, because it enables them to gain influence, generate successors and create genealogies and dynasties in the patriarchal game of mastery. Many predominantly male artists also view teaching as a means of living out their eccentricity – a place of both freedom and encroachment, omnipotence.

Krebber always made strong reference to his art teachers (Markus Lüpertz, Georg Baselitz) and influential elders (Sigmar Polke, Friedrich W. Heubach, Oswald Wiener) as an artist, while also transforming the patriarchal teaching style of people like Lüpertz into an informal mobile youth camp. Reynaud-Dewar responds to this sequence of teaching styles, and to the paradoxical notion of anti-conformity that is taught, by positioning the teaching within the artwork. It is work performed on and with a skill that invisibly frames the artist's actions, particularly her social side, the molecules of artistic impulsiveness, affectivity and subjectivity – i.e. in everything that, based on the logic of a certain naive institutional critique, opposes the institution, everything that is on the other side.

But it is not just about unmasking or exposing the institutionalized nature of art teaching and the behaviour it co-produces as a form of organized eccentricity; it is also about actually teaching and learning – in a way that is better facilitated in the 'domesticity' of a room, but is also indeed eccentric. For

an exhibition held in the Audain Gallery of Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Reynaud-Dewar took this as a basis to develop a 'teaching' piece that she incorporated as part of her *My Epidemic* series, centring on reviving the AIDS discussion in many different formats using texts by Dustan, Douglas Crimp, David Wojnarowicz and others. At the same time, however, she allowed it to be seen as a continuation of *Teaching like a Teenager*. The Vancouver exhibition included the reading and discussion of texts, some of which also formed part of the exhibition and were printed on strips of fabric that had been dyed blood red. Reynaud-Dewar dressed up as Bjarne Melgaard, who had represented Norway four years prior at the Venice Biennale, where he had run a seminar on AIDS ('Beyond Death: Viral Discontents and Contemporary Notions about AIDS', 2013) and how it was affecting the world today, especially in relation to identity formation, the use of violence and the possibility of collective action. This was done through the close study of the work and ideas of a series of thinkers, writers and artists – including Leo Bersani, the Black Panthers, Douglas Crimp, Guillaume Dustan, Hervé Guibert, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Guy Hocquenghem, Chris Kraus, Tiqqun and David Wojnarowicz. The course also included the participation of Leo Bersani as Guest Lecturer.¹¹

But Reynaud-Dewar did not just seize this opportunity to dress in drag and slip into the role of a male artist who had tackled this issue in a different way; she also used the sense of alienation to turn the texts back into

opposite,
BEYOND THE LAND OF MINIMAL
POSSESSION, 2018
GLASS, SILK, LACQUERED
METAL
193 X 100 CM

INSTALLATION VIEW AT ATELIER
HERMES, SEOUL, 2018

next pages, from left,
SAFE SPACE, 2017
METAL, PRINTED FABRIC,
DUVET
180 X 106 X 50 CM
180 X 70 X 50 CM

SAFE SPACE, 2017
METAL, PRINTED FABRIC,
DUVET
EACH 180 X 130 X 50 CM

MY EPIDEMIC (A BODY AS
PUBLIC AS A BOOK CAN BE),
2016
WHITE CURTAIN DIPPED IN INK,
350 X 164 CM

INSTALLATION VIEW AT
MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY,
PARIS, 2017

teaching material. Once again, she insisted that the mere discussion of texts, authority, complicity, expertise and personal concern – such as her own close relationships with HIV-positive people – should be based on convoluted, historically and personally complex connections and previous ties. Every conversation is a continuation of one that has been started elsewhere. And Reynaud-Dewar is not only constantly completing the work of others by highlighting teaching as a central site of contemporary art production (and the production of producers), but is also expanding, if not completing, the corpus of institutional critique and its strategies.

And so we return to a dusty road in the Southern U.S. Reynaud-Dewar has set up a pedagogical situation similar to her reading groups in her hotel room: she organized a seminar, with guests who were at the time working closely with her and in the Texas region. The pedagogical situation is also a fictional one this time: it is incorporated in the film she made in collaboration with her students. So how does it all end? From Memphis to San Antonio to Marfa, once again with students, once again transitioning from seminar to fiction, to an artwork, in search of Donald Judd's art, lying buried under real estate in the desert, near walls, mass murders and crystal-meth factories; in what increasingly threatens to happen to cheeky artists and intellectuals; in college horror films and equally in reality: bloody confrontations and confusion. The only weapons left appear to be the irony of referentiality – we're already familiar with it all, even the ultimate threat – and the politically relevant knowledge that artists and their friends are at risk not only from the outside (i.e. from reactionary politics), but also from themselves. It seems it's us, the members of a separate privileged class, who are the zombies in the desert.

TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN BY CILLERO & DE MOTTA

