

HUMAN OR NON-HUMAN?

Tia Yoon



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Introduction	
	5	
Chapter 1	Biopolitics	
	7	
	Reflection upon Biopolitics	Approaches towards Biopolitics
	8	9
Chapter 2	Poems	
	12	
Chapter 3	Posthumanism approaches towards Biopolitics	Posthumanism vs. Performance art vs. Subculture
	16	17
Chapter 4	Fragments	
	30	
Chapter 5	Case Study	
	33	
Chapter 6	A Letter	
	46	
	Conclusion	
	49	
	Footnotes	Bibliography
	54	58



## INTRODUCTION

*Man is not the effect of some special purpose, of a will, an end; nor is he the object of an attempt to attain an “ideal of humanity” or an “ideal of happiness” or an “ideal of morality.” It is absurd to wish to devolve one’s essence on some end or other.*

—Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*

From growing up in China to being a transgender, non-binary, person of colour, artist living in Europe, I have experienced throughout my life a constant feeling of oppression hovering over me like a dark cloud. The drive to find out the constituents of that dark cloud has led me into a research journey about the concept of power, different forms of resistance against power, and how those approaches relate to performance art and underground culture.

In my own works I have gone through stages, from working with direct politically confronting approaches, to a more surreal approach now which uses interactive performances with marginalised performers that create situations which tackle power through bodies, movements, and materials. This change of approach is due to my struggle of not wanting to be an activist due to my disappointment in humanity and my desire to reclaim my sense of alienation in both performance and in life as a form of activism and rebellion in its own right. Despite using performance as my main medium, I believe I am an abstract painter who starts their paintings with figurative drawings. The drawings are rooted in my research interests and concerns regarding the condition of humanity, which then evolve into surreal and abstract live images as the outcome of my reactions towards them.

Since Friedrich Nietzsche announced his famous words ‘God is Dead’<sup>1</sup>, which he used as a starting point to reflect upon the essence of humanity as something that stands on its own without any restrictions, there has been a long road of dialogue reflecting upon the condition of humanity in the academic family tree. The research journey in this thesis starts from Michel Foucault’s ideology of the historical development from the top-down judicial power to the bottom-up biopolitical power. Then it moved towards

contemporary thinkers such as Judith Butler and Paul B. Preciado's ideas of the evolution of the biopolitical power, the different approaches of resistance towards it through both living and theoretical analysis with a focus on gender. My frustration towards the nature of humanity further lead me into posthuman academics such as Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti's approaches which speak of the de-construction of the very idea of humanity itself. The ultimate practice of these theories seems to me to exist in underground subculture of contemporary posthuman performance art and performance artists such as Aun Helden, Anthr0morph, Salvjia, and Parma Ham. They are not only living a form of radical resistance but also seem to be the only people that have the possibility to revert power.

A Critical Fiction consisting of poems, fragments and a letter, chosen and constructed, will be written in parallel chapters alongside the research in this thesis. I believe by using my post-humanist alienated subjectivity, I can provide another perspective and contribute to a more comprehensive angle which is the co-existence of realism and surrealism. This is crucial for me in both the process of my mind and the development of my works.

## CHAPTER 1

### Biopolitics

Foucault formulated the concept of biopolitics in his lectures at the College de France in 1978, as he said: “Bio-power... [is] the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power.”<sup>2</sup> The biological features such as gender, race, and class of human became a non-negligible element in the formation and distribution of political power. Foucault noted that the political power behind the construction of western society had shifted from a juridical power system in the 18th century towards a power system based on biopolitics in the age of neo-liberalism. Power, like energy, is a substance that cannot be accumulated nor lost. For example, in BDSM, only the dominant person has the power because the submissive forfeits their power to the dominator.

Therefore what changed through time is the dynamic and formulation of power. Foucault noted that in the juridical system, while there were absolute rulers such as a king or a queen, power worked through the will of the monarchs. They ruled the population through prohibitions and punishments by suppressing individuality. Their agents were official institutions such as laws, government, police, psychiatric hospitals and so on. Whereas in the era of neo-liberalism, the dynamic of biopower had evolved from ruling to also governing: It didn't simply command to do or to not do, punish according to a law only, it also aimed to read people's minds and actions, and direct thought and desire themselves. Biopolitical power's formation was based on the interest of the majority, it functions through the micromanagement of the norms of subjects such as body size, gender, sexuality, IQ, mental illness, etc. For example, one would feel shamed and perceived negatively if their biological features did not fit into the general standard — such as being overweight, gay, or identifying outside of binary gender norms.

This phenomenon indicates that the agents of biopolitical power are now not only found official positions, but also in the unofficial institutions such as peer pressure and opinions, meaning

it has spread into everywhere and in everything that involves a group of humans.

Preciado wrote on the evolution of the political power condition from the 20th century to the 21st century in his book *Testo Junkie*. Biopolitical power is now not only in the intangible and unofficial institutions, but is also entangled with a material, binary, and consumption level in the contemporary and capitalist techno-scientific industry. What was considered 'abnormal' now can be, and should be 'corrected' through the control of the body, which will then fit into a part of consumption within capitalism (eg. transforming depression into Prozac, masculinity into testosterone, erection into Viagra, fertility/sterility into the Pill, AIDS into tritherapy, etc.).<sup>3</sup>

### Reflection upon Biopolitics

The problem of living with a political power that functions through the normalisation of a population is that in order to optimise the ones with the most 'advanced' forms of biological features (in the eyes of western norm) — white, cisgender, straight, healthy male — it must neglect those who don't fit into these categories. In order to understand the effect of this we need to take a closer look at the concept of human capital.

In communism, as Marx explains, labor power and wages are equivalent to the time that has been put into the work. Whereas in capitalism, labour power and wage do not correlate with time. One's wage under capitalism comes from the excess of capital, it corresponds to the resources and power. Capital is made up of innate elements such as gender, race, sexuality, and acquired elements such as education and mobility (the individual's ability to move around). However, there are only limited resources, and since the biopower is formed by the interest of those who fit the norms, those who don't attain the 'right' biological features that fit the optimised norms thus have less human capital. Therefore, they unavoidably receive fewer resources and power and thus are degraded in a society under such power relations.



Evidence of this can be found in the pornography industry, as Preciado points out: only the bodies of cis-females, trans-females, and gays are considered to be potentially penetrable bodies, in the same way that only the bodies of cis-males present themselves and are represented as natural and universal penetrators. Despite how nowadays there seems to be an increase in pornography that features female or femme dominatrices taking power over male submissives, it is still ultimately a patriarchal outcome which serves the pleasures of a male audience in a capitalist industry. This phenomenon has also occurred and caused disastrous consequences throughout history. It is one of the most foundational reasons of how racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia are formed, and the logic behind of the actions of the Nazis and the witch hunts of the middle ages. As Silvia Federici has noted, “Witch hunting in Europe was an attack on women’s resistance to the ‘spread of capitalist relations and the power that women had gained by virtue of their sexuality, their control over reproduction, and their ability to heal.”<sup>4</sup> What was considered paganism was actually the belief of the spirit in nature that has long existed before Christianity. The actual history of witches has no relation to demons since the idea of the demon has appeared alongside with Christianity, which is an idea that only appeared after the existence of the witches. The ‘witches’ were independent women who made healing herbs to heal others and to support themselves both financially and spiritually. The witches were demonised because they had become a threat towards the church’s ruling power over citizens which was based off porto-capitalist and patriarchal ideologies.

### Approaches towards Biopolitics

The theoretical reasoning behind the resistance against juridical power is a direct one: since it is a power of law over people, it is excised by the threat of violence and banning of certain action. Since power is a substance, if power is lessened or subtracted, liberation stems from this ‘subtraction’; if power functions by prohibiting certain acts, then resistance must take the form of ‘disobedience’ (i.e. political revolutions).

Resistance against biopolitical power seems more complicated since it is already rooted and based upon the norms of the majority of a population. The capitals of the bodies (gender, race, sexuality, class, etc.) become elements or materials that can be judged and calculated. However, Butler gives a good suggestion of how repetitive subversion could form resistance against biopolitics in her book *Gender Trouble*. She says that people are not determined by norms, because norms are not what cause us to be. What causes our being is the perpetual performance of these norms. As such, norms only exist as norms because people enact them all the time.

*“The subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantialising effects. [...] In a sense, all signification takes place within that orbit of the compulsion to repeat, ‘agency’, then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation of that repetition.”<sup>5</sup>*

Since biopower is formulated by norms, subverting norms thus has the potential to subvert power. Butler uses the example of drag performance: if a non-cisgender female can perform more femininity than a cisgender female, then it must mean that the concept of gender does not exist as a fixed form, it is a social construct that has been formed through repetition of behaviour. In Preciado’s book *Testo Junkie*<sup>6</sup>, he claims that he does not use testosterone to change himself into a man or as a physical strategy of transsexualism, he calls himself a “gender hacker” or “gender fucker”. Preciado not only took a step beyond drag, by combining the subversion of gender both performatively and biologically, but also brought it from a temporary situation (the stage) to an unlimited scale of space and time (everywhere and every moment). As Butler has noted, “If rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e. new possibilities of gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binaries, then it is only

within the practice of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible.” Therefore Preciado is reclaiming the right to participate in the construction of biopolitical fictions and challenging new possibilities of the social construct through his own way of subverting norms of existing with a gender identity that is undefinable. If biopower exists in everywhere and at anytime, Preciado is resisting through subverting biopower by using the powerful medium of merely existing as a social being.

## CHAPTER 2

### Poems

[ *Untitled* ]

The sky turned purple again, trying to hide its illness  
of being colourblind  
And In the purple dust, old people singing lullabies  
Again and again and again and again  
and again and again and again

I just sit there and wait  
Waiting for the laughters, the mocking, the sarcasm  
and the racists

I saw tenderness waves making love  
I saw animals losing their bones  
I don't dare to tell you that I saw it all  
So silently I put the other end of the  
needle into my eyes

I also don't dare to tell you that I'm walking through  
a forest where every single tree is made of you.

But I could not see your face  
So I chopped down the whole forest to salute to your  
tears and vomit in the rotten roots.

It's the red that won't wake me up

Her voice trying to pull up the last thread of the  
destined shoelace forgotten in the mist wanting  
to say it all

I am again dancing in the balance that could never  
be found

Fulfil me, fulfil my desire to fall  
Fulfil me, fulfil my desire to fall

*“Try to speak, not scream, but speak,  
until it tears off every bit of your weak skin”*

Her sound echoing from the enteral womb rising as the  
black hole of a sinking piano  
Dancing with me  
Full of possibilities

“You can relax now, my doll, lay on  
my stomach with the frozen wind in  
slow motion”

“But... How about the blue?”

*Cut!*

The director whispered before the sound of thunder.

[ *Slowdance* ]

He has forgotten there is a bowl  
of chicken soup waiting for him

His grandmother spending another  
afternoon killing, cutting, boiling with her shivering  
hands. Too old to not be numb, her sensations fade.  
The old woman with a bowl of chicken soup waiting  
for him. Who will not hear that longing complain  
“Grandma! It’s too salty!” His mind fades, too young  
to not be numb.

Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

How weak he is of wanting to believe in it.

How stupid he is of not believing in it.

He wants to open it up for her.

The disgusting and sticky truth together with  
selfishness pushes their huge hand aiming right  
into her face like a bullet

shot her blind.

“Now she could come into the room.”

He will now remember,

In the repeating castle holding him like a curse,  
they will laugh, they will dance, they will weep,

Flying just beneath the roof and thinking they are up  
high in the sky.

[ You ]

You frowned in piles of hair  
You talked of those first times  
Each of them with an old song  
You sewed your mouth and wrote them  
down in oceans of fear with your eyes

Yes, yes I cannot read any of them at all.  
You are magnificent  
You are magnificent  
You are magnificent  
Of your small death.

## CHAPTER 3

### Posthumanism Approaches to Biopolitics

As Haraway notes, “Gender, race or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism.<sup>8</sup>” What can we do about this dark cloud of settler-colonial patriarchal violence under which we live? Is there a solution? I often wonder if my frustrations towards human nature will continue when the binary or dualism between gender (and all the *biological* qualities that lie within the cloud of power distribution) is destroyed. This thought has led me towards a discovery and interest in posthuman theory. I relate deeply with Braidotti’s motivation behind her exploration into posthumanism: “...My interest in the posthuman is directly proportional to the sense of frustration I feel about the human.<sup>9</sup>” With the acknowledgement of the word ‘posthumanism’ as a umbrella word with various branches, the posthuman theories that I am interested in discussing start from a point of frustration and a desire to reconsider the power relationship between class, race, gender, nature, technologies, and species in the current social construct.

Haraway proposed the concept of a cyborg society in her book *A Cyborg Manifesto*. *A cyborg society is a society of creatures where there is no man, woman, race, or religion. Unlike humans, who are prejudiced, divided, and whose heads are full of stereotypes that can't be gotten rid of, cyborgs are free. They don't know what religion is, there are no limits for them. Cyborgs are supposed to put an end to human domination. They are here to blur the last boundaries between human, animals, and technologies.*

As Braidotti observes in her book *The Posthuman*: “Power is not a static given, but a complex strategic flow of effects which call for pragmatic politics of intervention and the quest for sustainable alternatives.<sup>10</sup>” Braidotti opposes the idea of ‘oneness’ due to her scepticism towards the strategic commodity of capitalism, and due to her belief that the concept of ‘human’ has never been a neutral term. She suggests that it has always been related to power



(white cisgender men versus black trans women). Therefore, instead of looking into a posthuman future with a society where everyone is created 'equal', she advocates the post-anthropocentric concept of zoe. Zoe is a monolithic universe of matter that is the "dynamic, self-organising structure of life itself."<sup>11</sup> Zoe is also a life force that moves through us and connects us to the other creatures we share the world and our own bodies with. This concept is at "the core of the post-anthropocentric feminist turn: it is a materialist, secular, grounded and unsentimental response to the opportunistic trans-species commodification of Life that is the logic of advanced capitalism."<sup>12</sup> Braidotti urges that a post-anthropocentric model is needed to achieve Zoe. This can occur across three phases which she labels becoming-animal, becoming-earth, and becoming-machine.

*The surreal and almost impossible to achieve ideologies in post-humanism theory is realised through the magic of contemporary art.*

### Posthumanism VS. Performance Art VS. Subculture

In recent years, there seems to be an increase in contemporary artists of many disciplines whose work relates to theories of post-humanism. These include Marianna Simnett's sculpture *Hyena and Sean in the midst of sexual congress*, 2019 currently showing at the Frans Hals Museum (fig. 3.1); Video works *Uterus Man*, 2013 by LuYang (fig. 3.2), and Jon Rafman's *Dream Journal* (fig. 3.3), which is on view now at the Venice Biennale.

Alongside them, I am especially interested in the young generation of the performance artists which include Aun Helden, Anthr0morph, Matieres Fecales, Zah, Salvjia, and Parma. Ham (see fig. 3.4 — 3.9). They embody both the cyborg and Zoe from posthumanist theory as practice in their everyday lives. "I perform to feel a sense of autonomy with my body," says Zah, "Being treated like I'm not a person is familiar, I internalise it. I've become my art, it carries my spirit."<sup>13</sup> All of the artists mentioned above are marginalised people, their everyday visual presentation is represented in these pictures. How they look is not only a performance but

also an outcome of an urgency to react against the repression of biopolitical power. It is their way to not only break or challenge the social construct, but also to survive in a society which already views them as different because of their marginalised identities. They all work within a variety of mediums which begins with their identity, more closely, their race, class, gender, body, and how the intersection of those elements is perceived or placed upon them in our society.

Performance art is a live scenario that happens in a present time and space of both the performers and their audience. Posthumanism performances offer situations of existences out of the daily life scenario. It offers not only the possibilities of bringing posthumanism theories into live forms, but also can revert the position of the other and the majority (in this case, the audiences) within a safe space. The problem of Butler's example of drag to me is that, it is only a temporary situation of power micro-subversion that happens on a stage; Preciado's mere existence brings the subversion off the stage and into the everyday experience. It occurs in an environment that's ruled by the dominating power.

Although art galleries and museums seem to be able to offer a 'neutral' and 'safe' space for posthumanist performance artists, they are still institutions which happily exist alongside capitalism. My interest in the idea of 'reverting power-relationships in a safe space' and 'not existing under the dominating power' leads me into the thrill of looking at posthumanism performance art in underground culture. "Subcultures are [...] a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives,<sup>14</sup>" as it creates a space on its own is based upon a rebellion against capitalism.

As Dick Hebdige said in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, the subcultured people are viewed "animals" and "up to date."<sup>15</sup> There is a tendency of wanting to get away from humanism. "Ordinary life is so dull that I get out of it as much as possible<sup>16</sup>," and "anti-humanism is one of the historical and theoretical paths that can lead to the posthuman."<sup>17</sup> They are "alternately dismissed, denounced and canonised; treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons<sup>18</sup>" and embody the genes of "the grandchildren of the witches you didn't burn."<sup>19</sup>

Among the various categories of contemporary subcultures, the one which involves the kinds of the performance art that I am interested in and the one I feel most connected to is goth culture and its club scene. Not only is goth culture a subculture, but goth people who expresses themselves through radical appearances are also marginalised people who are seen as inhuman or subhuman among the society, and thus treated as such. Goth culture is made up of people who understand and appreciate the dark side of life. Its club scene is a safe space which builds a temporary world of their own that exists only in the night where they can connect with each other. It is also a space where they can freely express themselves through different mediums of art, and through blurring the boundaries between dark and light, femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality and homosexuality, etc.





FIG. 3.1  
Photo documentation of the sculpture  
*Hyena and Swan in the Midst of Sexual Congress*,  
by Frans Hals Museum (2019).  
Photo by Maarten Nauw.



FIG.3.2  
Film still from video *Uterus Man*  
by LuYang (2013)



FIG. 3.3  
Film still from video installation *Dream Journal*  
by Jon Rafman (2019)



FIG. 3.4  
Photo documentation from the performance  
*The Figure of Plague and Epidemic*  
by Aun Helden (2019)





FIG. 3.5  
Image *Butterfly Queen*  
by Anthr0morph (2018)



FIG. 3.6  
Image made by / portrait of  
Matières Fecales (2019)



FIG. 3.7  
Image made by / portrait of  
Zah (2018)



FIG. 3.8  
Image made by / portrait of  
Salvjiia (2019)



FIG. 3.9  
Portrait of  
Parma Ham (2019)

## CHAPTER 4

### Fragments

23 November 2019

11:32 PM

Third day after my split tongue surgery.

My whole tongue turns to a creamy, almost white colour, swollen, and I can barely feel it except for the pain. It is almost like having a dead organ in my mouth.

Can't stop thinking about this sentence: *"Always this old and aberrant confusion between two beings so fundamentally opposed as the vampire and the necrophiliac, between the dead that feed off the living and the living who love the dead."*

*The Necrophiliac*  
Gabrielle Wittkop

---

The split of sound

What kind of creature do I become if I have no gender,  
no race, scars all over my body and the genes of animals?  
What kind of daylight would allow me to exist?

I like the feeling of not understanding the meanings  
at all but getting stunned by the mere use of and  
composition of words in English writing, perhaps  
partly due to my un-native language skill, perhaps  
it's due to my boredom of the content that the only  
thing left that interests me is the context.

Don't say what you want to say too directly, try to find  
a way to hide it while expressing

try sound  
try poetry  
try sculpture  
try metaphor  
try performance  
try beautiful things

because even the bullies aren't  
cruel enough to hurt beautiful things — that way you  
won't get hurt again.  
And that's the only way I can protect you my darling.

Looks are so important.  
I like beautiful people; I wish the whole world is filled  
with only beautiful people.

Self-internalised degradation.

Why would you think that I'd want to be friends with you when all you've got is face and the look you've got is not even original it's just a pretty version of a social instruct that I am simply not interested in.

Reclaimed femininity doesn't need masculinity to validate itself.

Reclaimed masculinity doesn't need femininity to validate itself.

The only reason you can carelessly say the things you say is because of your lack of understanding in pain.

Working in escorting and presenting as myself as a cis female with cis straight white male clients for the sake of supporting my 'art works'.

I think my real job is as an actor making soap operas, performing a transgender role.

I always found it extremely funny that cis straight men lust all over my body; they will never know that I know (almost) exactly what their current sex drives feel

**THANKS TO THE 16.2 MG/G TESTOSTERONE  
ANDROGEL**



## Case Study

*Nullo* is a project by Parma Ham and Salvia that exists in multiple forms of presentation in both offline and online diameters: runway performance in a nightclub, photography on social media, video on website, and in their everyday lives. The performance of *Nullo* (sissy slut S/S 2020) took place on the 18th of October 2019, around 1:30AM in the goth club night Wraith (curated by Parma Ham) hosted at Electrowerkz, London.

The runway performance started with Parma Ham, wearing a black dress made from chains and silicon tentacles, dragging a body that was wrapped from head to toe in black plastic tape into the centre of the stage. Parma Ham tore off the tape covering the body using their mouth and a knife, revealing a figure in black PVC fetish wear consisting of a head mask and open-butt underwear. Parma Ham left the stage, leaving the figure behind. Eight performers entered the stage in sequence, wearing redesigned strap-on dildos named such as 'Pegging Goblin' and 'Alien Oil Spill Dress'. Their outfits were made from materials such as deer legs, horns, pig trotters, chains, and tentacles made from silicon. After the final entrant Salvjia entered the stage, the performers formed a circle around performer and professional dominatrix Luzia Lowe, who wore a strap-on made from a deer's leg, penetrating the anus of the figure in the mask. The work ended with the eight performers leaving the stage, followed by Parma Ham dragging the figure in the mask off stage.<sup>20</sup>

Both Parma Ham and Salvia are Instagram influencers (400,000+ followers in total) who rebel against social construct oppression by creating looks and art that they embody and live in.<sup>21</sup> The majority of the audience at this performance either went there for the alternative goth nightlife and/or are fans of Salvia/Parma from social media. Therefore, in the safe space that has been intentionally created at the venue, there is unavoidably a lack of concentration and critical analysis that might be given to a performance hosted in a gallery or a museum.

However, perhaps it is a work that requires a specific audience who

understands its implicit rebellion against power dynamics. The intersectionality of *Nulla* goes beyond its context, but also the content of this work. It is aware of its shifting position as a performance that doesn't strictly or clearly belong in any category of contemporary art, fashion, or fetish.<sup>22</sup> There is a sense of togetherness between both performers and the audience that could perhaps only happen in a underground safe space. This togetherness is different from the shallow opportunistic neo-humanism that claims there's "only one race, the human race<sup>23</sup>", a phrase echoed across western capitalist cities. This togetherness unites through the rebellion of humanity itself. The deer leg strap-on that anally penetrates a living human being has also penetrated surrealism into realism, shining light on the bodies unseen before, the species unseen before, the ways of intercourse unseen before.

Performance art has been dealing with concepts regarding alienation, identity politics, pain, duration, and sexuality for decades. Lee Bowery's seven day long performance at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery in London 1988 is an example of this, in which Bowery sat on a couch and appeared in different looks every day for two hours behind a two-way mirror which let the audience see Bowery, but Bowery could only see himself (fig. 5.4). In Ron Athey's *Resonate/Obliterate* he poured blood with HIV onto glasses in close distance of the audience (fig. 5.5). In Yann Marussich's *Bain brisé*, 2010, he walks out from being buried naked in a bathtub filled with sharp broken glasses and removes the glass with his bare hands (fig. 5.6). In Franko B's *I miss you* (1999 — 2005) (fig. 5.7), he bleeds while walking rounds on the runway until he faints due to the loss of blood. *Nulla* is a project that inherits performative elements from the 90s and 2000s but also integrates its own language, with ingredients that reference the carnivalesque and merges it with the aesthetics of the current internet era. I have chosen *Nulla* as a work to examine in-depth because it seems to represent a clear heritage from the performance art works from previous generations which deals with similar topics, yet it forges its own identity.

I am concerned that a lot of people might find themselves disconnected while seeing performance art in galleries or museums. I believe that this is due to the fact that in order to fully experience (the majority of) performance work, a sympathetic vibration

of energy between the audience and the performers is required. Yet, people cannot fully experience this empathy if their personal experience shares no similarity with the performer's. For example, it is often disconnected audiences who use the term 'shock value' when they describe performance works that contain taboo elements or blood, etc. However, most of the time the performers are merely using the most sincere language available to them in order to communicate their world to the audience (which is usually an alienated world stemming from concerns such as identity politics, pain, duration and sexuality). What a disconnected audience might consider 'shock value' is usually either a performer's everyday experience or a method for them to face their own fears. However, most people's first reaction towards abjectness is to run away from it. As such, I believe that because empathy is not a feeling that can be guaranteed to be elicited, misunderstanding and disconnection is often likely to happen. There have always been and will continue to be a number of limited audiences who are willing to open themselves up to the performer and go through an intense spiritual journey with them.

In the case of *Nullo*, it deals with this problem by presenting itself in an underground space (as mentioned above in Chapter 3)<sup>24</sup>. Similar to how Franko B uses the runway as stage (or vice versa), *Nullo* emphasise the audience's gaze. However the gaze is no longer a complete separate one anymore, the relationship between the audiences and the performers are no longer mainly based on the performer's attempt to trigger some kind of empathy, the empathy is already there in the specific setting of the underground goth club before the performance has even started. People in attendance already share a mutual understanding of pain.

Athey said about the reason behind his live works, "Why do I choose to make disturbing images? This is the question, more accusatory than curious, that never goes away... it wasn't the fault of the art movement I never belonged to, or the sick mentors that encouraged me, it's the fault of my rotten life."<sup>25</sup> The creators of *Nullo*, Parma Ham and Salvjiiia are also artists that create an "abstract interpretation<sup>26</sup>" of their queer, goth, alienated, trans, etc. lives. In fact, Parma Ham made a performance piece with Chadd Curry inspired by Athey's work<sup>27</sup>. Similar to Athey and

Franko B's position as artists who shift and co-exists between art institutions, theatres, and underground club scenes, it is quite difficult to identify both Ham and Salvjia's positions as artists. However, perhaps in order to keep the sincerity, authenticity and the mutual connection with their audience, it is essential for both artists to be in a position where the lines are blurred.

*Nulla* also inherits the concept of 'duration' both through the artists' urgency in everyday life (as mentioned in Chapter 3) and through social media in the internet era we live in. I believe *Nulla* inherits how Marussich and Franko B deal with duration through subtle changes across time in their live works. As a project it extends from live performance in a specific time setting to an everyday experience for both the artists and the audience that is both online and offline (or vice versa)<sup>28</sup>. *Nulla* is achieved by a group of performers who empower the audience through their shared alienation. "The process of becoming — minoritarian or becoming — nomad of Europe involves the rejection of the self-appointed missionary role of Europe as the alleged centre of the world."<sup>29</sup> The artists become the rule-creators of their own world they have created. It is a live form of biopolitical resistance which weaves a web of intersectionality of gender, sexuality, race, class and species. It is a pure experience of "becoming — minoritarian."<sup>30</sup> The work itself realises the post-human fantasy that Braidotti wishes to see, "*The stated criteria for this new ethics include: non-profit; emphasis on the collective, acceptance of relationally and of viral contaminations, concerted efforts at experimenting with and actualising potential or virtual options; and a new link between theory and practice, including a central role for creativity. They are not moral injunction, but dynamic frames for an ongoing experiment with intensities.*"<sup>31</sup>

Similar to the works mentioned above by Athey, Marussich and Franko B, *Nulla* also deals with pain, yet not through the direct use of blood but with a more subtle material. In the last scene of the performance, Salvia<sup>32</sup> wears a 30–40 cm heel that is so difficult to walk in that she needs to use medical walking sticks. The abnormal height (empowerment) is achieved through the endurance of unspoken suffering, similar to how Bowery achieves his iconic looks by pushing the fat from his belly all the way up to his chest with tape to create the look of authentic breasts, smiling and dancing while

silently suffering through an enormous amount of pain. Therefore, posthuman performances are not only parades of the reclamation of alienation, but they also reveal radical tenderness, urgency, and vulnerability. They are a form of communication which says, “look what you have made me” to the privileged population, and an attempt of asking for understanding. I wonder could we find a way for both sides to accept each other and live with each other. Does it always have to stand on the opposite side from the ‘normality’?

In Haraway’s book *The Companion Species Manifesto*, she talks about her view and approach on the relationship between human and other species. Instead of inflecting human centred ideologies upon them, learn their languages, culture and behaviours. Through empathy, listening, and deconstruction of the idea of what is human, the abject ‘others’ could have a space in this world as they always should have.



FIG. 5.1

Film still from video documentation  
of the performance *Nullo 1* (2019)

Performer and pro-dominatrix Luzia Lowe penetrates another  
performer anally with a strap made by deer leg.



FIG. 5.2  
Film still from video documentation  
of the performance *Nullo 2* (2019)  
Parma Ham with a performer wrapped in  
black plastic tape.



FIG. 5.3  
Film still from video documentation of  
the performance *Nullo 3* (2019)  
Salvjia walking the runway.





FIG. 5.4

Photo documentation of Lee Bowers's first public appearance in the context of Fine art, at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery in on New Bond Street, London, 1988. In this 7 day-long performance, Bowers sat on a couch and appeared in different looks everyday for 2 hours, behind a two-way mirror: the audience can see through, however for Bowers, he sees the reflection of himself. Photographer unknown.



FIG. 5.5

Photo documentation of the performance *Resonate/Obliterate* by Ron Athey and Julie Tolentino (2011) Allen Street Studios, New York City. First performed in the 90s.  
Photographer unknown.



FIG. 5.6  
Photo documentation of the performance  
*Bain brisé* by Yann Marussich (2013)  
Frist performed in 2010.  
Photo by Emilie Salquebre.

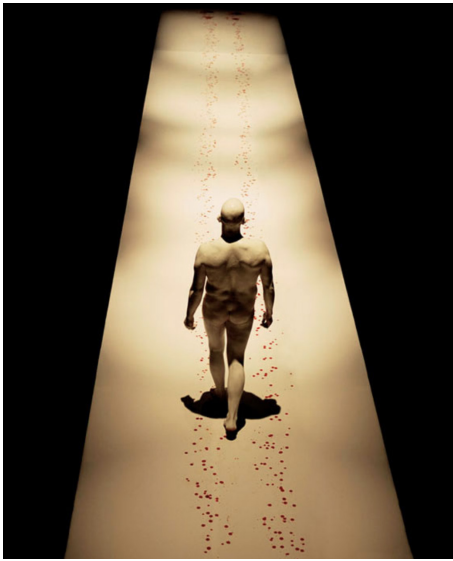


FIG. 5.7  
Photo documentation of the performance  
*I miss you* by Franko B (1999—2005)  
Photographer unknown.



FIG. 5.8  
Documentation of the performance made by  
Chadd Curry and Parma Ham.  
Inspired by Ron Athey 2018.

## A Letter

I waited till people fell asleep, waited till there's no light nor sunshine, I looked for a corner with dead street rats and little bugs waking up in the unnoticeable places. Knowing that here's a place you'd like, here's where you'd probably sit down and write me a letter. You've always been the one in the shadows, the one who cleans up my messes. It is much more complicated than that obviously but whatever I'm writing could always be my idealisation of you. However whatever the idealisation of you, throughout the years I am becoming less of the me you knew and more of the you when you were with me (or us). You are the one that introduced me the sincere sense of confidence yet I have the least confidence while thinking of you to a point I can't even admit the idea of 'me' have ever existed in you.

I can't think back and I don't want to look back. Everything that has you in it is not reality to me since it's too closely linked to my schizophrenic breakdown. I am at the point of accepting the needlessness of reality. Space has no sense in this circumstance. I have only just come to the realisation of it after a stubborn belief that it means everything. It's the same everywhere, same sadness, same emptiness, same secret hope that maybe someone would understand. My English stammers, my English always stammers when you are involved in this language, yet how could I ever hope

of the slightest possibility of whatever I am hoping for if I don't involve this language? I am so submissive with you. I am disgusted at myself for this, and that's probably one of the reasons I was driven insane.

I always wonder if I am truly a creative person. Other people have so many interests in exploring the possibilities of materials, in researching political issues and the different languages of making art, whereas basically all I truly have is some kind of urgency to make. I think there is a fundamental difference between me and most of them. Sometimes I still wonder whether I'm just a mental patient using so many layers of 'art' to hide and justify my illness. But all of that is okay. You are honestly not a really good artist, but I love you anyway.

Time stops so easily with historical buildings and artificial lights in the nighttime at the corner of a city. It's not like the countryside where there are so many sounds of animals reminding me that they are alive. In a quiet midnight city I can simply and easily imagine that I am the only person alive, or the only person that's dead.

I wish you were dead. I guess what hurts more than the impossibility of sending this letter is that you are not dead. But I have to be careful on thinking like this, I have too much mental problems, I cannot afford to have another invisible friend at this stage of my life. Ever since I can remember, I've always had a necrophilic desire where I found dead beings much more beautiful and gave me more of a sense of

safety than beings that were alive. So I hope you can understand when I say I wish you were dead. I mean it with a pure, sea of love.

Of course I won't mind if I'm the one dead and you the one alive, as long as you know and feel what I mean, as long as you will take care of my body the way I would take care of yours. The thing that stops me doing any of these is my belief in consent. Having that said I think I'd actually prefer to be the one that's being killed as long as you are the one doing the killing. Because the dead one will have to go through so much pain, they can't experience any feelings anymore, and the person who experiences the most pleasure will obviously be the one who is alive. And you have gone through so much pain already, all I want to give you is pleasure. I hope you will feel the safety that I would feel if I were on the other side of this, and that is how I love you.



Nietzsche went insane after he encountered a horse that had been flogged for disobeying its owner's orders. From my understanding, this is because at that moment he witnessed a fallacy of his core philosophy which said that humanity could be self-claimed and fought for through the will of each individual's existence (the superhuman). There have always been and always will be a bigger shadow hovering above and among each individual's own will (in the case of the horse, it is the horse owner and his whip). As soon as an individual wishes to reach somewhere outside of the pre-set ideal, the whip strikes the person, creating pain. Perhaps Nietzsche saw this as applicable to various situations, concerning a blackhole of the unescapable downfall of human condition. Whereas in my eyes, I feel most strongly of seeing the relationship between the horse owner with his whip and the horse as the reflection of the tension between biopolitical power and marginalised group of people. This group of people lives in limbo between needing to fight against a social construct that does not suit their individuality and living an oppressed life under a power that is unphased by their confrontation. Throughout this thesis I have been looking at the structure of this rivalry, how does it affect an individual through critical writing, and I have been trying to look for possible solutions to this dilemma in posthuman performance art in underground cultures, even if these possible solutions only occurs in the shadows during the nights, for a short while with limited audiences.

With the current corona virus situation not only causing tens of thousands of people getting sick but also becoming an open excuse for racism towards Chinese people happening worldwide (see fig. 1 — 5), I cannot help but wonder whether this xenophobic reaction is similar to how straight people reacted to gay and transgender people during the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. We are living in an era that needs to reflect upon the intersectionality of identity more than ever. Fear makes humans segregate themselves from 'the other', making excuses that have absolutely no ground upon which to stand or justify themselves, all for the sake of themselves being able to continue to stay in a safe bubble that's built up upon other beings' blood, and using resources that are limited and completely unequally distributed. As Braidotti said, posthumanism is "all



Coronavirus: Chinese student in Sheffield 'attacked for wearing face mask'



P. 52 — 53 (top to bottom):

FIG. 1  
*Daily Telegraph*, Sydney  
 Newspaper reporting on Corona virus,  
 writing “China Kids Stay Home”.  
 Accessed on 29th January 2020.

FIG. 2  
*Herald Sun*, Melbourne  
 Newspaper reporting on Corona virus,  
 writing “Chinese Virus”.  
 Accessed on 29th January, 2020.

FIG. 3  
 Charlotte Orme-Wilson News, UK  
 Accessed on 29th January 2020.

FIG. 4  
 Nail Salon in Vietnam.  
 Photo source: *Reuters*  
 Accessed on 29th January 2020.

FIG. 5  
 Restaurant in Seoul, Korea displaying  
 sign saying “No Chinese allowed”  
 Photo source: *@Kakapolka*  
 Accessed on 29th January 2020.

too human.” Humanity has not changed much throughout history, however by understanding the essence of biopolitics and different ways to resist it, either through micro-subversion, posthumanism, or performance art, it is a step for us to build a safer world.

Although I have been mainly looking at the conditions in western society in this thesis — more research upon different cultures will be done in future works — I do believe power as a concept applies universally. Therefore, this research journey is deeply linked with my concern for my own existential condition: my interest in posthumanism is also a study for my self-empowerment and a fight against my internal degradation that has been caused by the dominating norms of my everyday living environment.



## NOTES

- 1 Nietzsche. *The Gay Science*, Section 125, tr. Walter Kaufmann, 1882
- 2 Michel Foucault. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977—1978* P. 1 (2007)
- 3 Preciado, B. Testo. *Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 2013.
- 4 Federici, S. *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, 2004, P. 170.
- 5 Butler, J. *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, 2007, First published in 1990. P. 198.
- 6 The book is a combination of Paul B. Preciado's own personal journey of the changes in his body from a biologically born female due to testosterone (the male hormone used for female to male gender transitioning) through the lens of a romantic affair with his then lover, VD, as well as intertwining perspectives on medication industry and pornography.
- 7 ^ Butler, J. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 2007. First published in 1990, P. 198-199.
- 8 Haraway, D. *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Macat International Ltd, London, 2018.
- 9 Braidotti, R. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013.
- 10 ^ *The Posthuman*, P. 99.
- 11 ^ *The Posthuman*, P. 61.

- 12     ^ *The Posthuman*, P. 10.
- 13     Quote from Zah's Instagram post 2019.
- 14     Hebdige, D. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Methuen, 1979, P. 132.
- 15     ^ *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, P. 94.
- 16     ^ *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, quotes from Steve Jones, a Sex Pistol in *Melody Maker*, P. 18.
- 17     ^ *The Posthuman*, P. 26.
- 18     ^ *The Posthuman*, P. 2.
- 19     Talk by Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti on March 25, 2017, at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. [Online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXQTex0a3dc> (Accessed 22 February 2020)
- 20     Fig. 5.1 — 5.3
- 21     The influence of social media is a crucial factor of the resistance of bio political for contemporary performance artists, artists, and influencers, alongside that there's also many problems such as censorship and internet blocking in countries such as China. However, in this thesis I am intentionally leaving this important topic out to focus on the live aspect of project *Nulla*.
- 22     Parma Ham, Wraith. [Online] [parmaham.tv](http://parmaham.tv). 2019 (Accessed 22 February 2020)
- 23     Rosi Braidotti, Posthumanism and Society Conference. New York, 9 May, 2015. [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S3CulNbQ1M> (Accessed 22 February 2020)

24 We need to take into consideration that the default of performing in clubs is that the works risk of losing critical and conceptual interpretation from the audiences, since the audiences are usually either high in drugs or drunk in such environments.

25 Johnson, D. *Pleading in The Blood. The Art and Performances of Ron Athey*. Goner Press, UK. 2015, P. 12.

26 ^ *Pleading in The Blood*, P. 14.

27 Fig. 5.8

28 ... despite the ugly censorship on Instagram

29 ^ *The Posthuman*, P. 53.

30 ^ *The Posthuman*, P. 53.

31 ^ *The Posthuman*, P. 191

32 Fig. 5.3





# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## I

### BOOKS

Braidotti, R. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013.

Wolfe, C. *What is Posthumanism?* University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Haraway, D. *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Prickly

Paradigm Press, Chicago, 2003

Haraway, D. *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Macat International Ltd, London, 2018.

Hebrdige, D. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Methuen, 1979.

Federici, S. *Caliban and the Witch*. Autonomedia, 2004.

Kristeva, J. *Powers of Horror*. Columbia University Press, 1982.

Foucault, M. *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Picador, 2008, First published in 1978—1979.

Foucault, M. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1. Translated by Robert Hurley*, Random House 1978.

Butler, J. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 2007, First published in 1990.

Preciado, B. *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 2013.

Johnson, D. *Pleading in The Blood. The Art and Performances of Ron Athey*,

*Goner Press, UK. 2015.*

Sontag, S. *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Penguin Group, UK, 2003.

### ARTICLES

Dani & Daniel, *Radical Tenderness Manifesto, 2015*.

Sontag, S. *Notes on Camp, 1964*.

Debord, G. *The Society of the Spectacle, 1967*.

Linda, N. *Why have there been no great women artists, 1971*.

*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Michel Foucault, 2013.  
[online] <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/foucault/>

### ONLINE PRESENTATIONS

Talk by Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti March 25, 2017, The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam  
[online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXQTex0a3dc> (Accessed 22nd February 2020)

Rosi Braidotti, *Posthumanism and Society* Conference. New York, 9th May, 2015.  
[online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S3CulNbQ1M> (Accessed 22nd February 2020)

II  
BOOKS

- Lautreamont, C. *Les Chants de Maldoror*, First published in 1868.
- Lispector, C. *The Passion According to G.H.* Modern Classics, 2012, First published in 1964.
- Serano, J. *Excluded*, Seal Press, 2013.
- Baudrillard, J. *Cool Memories*, Translated by Chris Turner, Duke University Press, 1996.
- Emin, T. *Strangeland*, Sceptre, 2005.

PLAYS

- Kane, S. *4.48 Psychosis*, 1998

POETRY

- Rogers, B. *Cunny Poem Vol. 2 (selection)*, forthcoming 2019

LIST OF  
ILLUSTRATIONS

- 3.1 *Hyena and Swan in the Midst of Sexual Congress*
- 3.2 *Uterus Man*
- 3.3 *Dream Journal*
- 3.4 *Aun Helden*
- 3.5 *Anthromorph*
- 3.6 *Matieres Fecales*
- 3.7 *Zah*
- 3.8 *Salvjjia*
- 3.9 *Parma Ham*
- 5.1 *Null0 1*
- 5.2 *Null0 2*
- 5.3 *Null0 3*
- 5.4 *Lee Bowery*
- 5.5 *Resonate/Obliterate*
- 5.6 *Bain brisé*
- 5.7 *I miss you*
- 5.8 *Chadd Curry and Parma Ham*
- 01 *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney
- 02 *Herald Sun*, Melbourne
- 03 *Charlotte Orme-Wilson News*, UK
- 04 *Nail Salon in Vietnam*
- 05 *Restaurant in Seoul, Korea*





I want to thank my friends Wenzhelini and Matthew Maldoror for their mental support throughout the journey of writing this thesis.

I also want to thank Agathe Dupire & Hagen, Alba Boustanji, Barbara Morkane, Chenny Ye, Dorothy Kakos, Eduardo Torres Sansano, Emma van Herk, Dannos, Georgia Rose, Liliana Aise Manuputty, Luca Fynn, Luna Naumer Mateos, Matthew Wj, Pryo Muse, and Yi Tu. They are the friends, performers and artists I work and collaborate with in my own works, transforming what we believe in into our own reality and creating our worlds together. I would like to thank the mere existence of Anthr0morph, Parma Ham, Salvjiii, and their works.

Last but not least, I would like to thank to all the bodies and souls and takes autonomy of themselves in this cruel world.

*Human or Non-Human?*

BA Thesis 2020  
Gerrit Rietveld Academie  
Fine Arts department  
Amsterdam, NL

Thesis Supervisor:  
Alena Alexandrova

Teachers:  
Jay Tan, Alena Alexandrova,  
Frank Mandersloot

Proofreading: Aidan Wall  
Design: Cleo Tsw

Printed and bound  
in Amsterdam, NL



