CLANDESTINE TALKS
MAKE-UP

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□ Hello, my name is Silvia Bottiroli. I'm a curator, festival maker, researcher, writer. I work in the expanded field of the performing arts, am part of the artistic direction of Short Theatre Festival in Roma and of the inaugural cycle of Rose Choreographic School in London.

/ Hi, I'm Sara Giannini. I'm also a curator, a writer, and an educator working in the field of performance and performativity. I live in Amsterdam, though I'm Italian, and I work for an organization called *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution*.

* Hi, I'm Massimiliano Mollona. I'm an anthropologist and I'm based in Bologna. My field is the anthropology of art and political economy, with a focus on class and capitalism or post-capitalism and performativity. I'm also a filmmaker, and I often work in Brazil as part of my main fieldwork.

○ I'm Janina Wellmann. I'm very pleased to be here — it's very exciting. I'm a historian and philosopher of science, in particular the life sciences. I'm here from Berlin, and the only one not speaking Italian, I'm afraid.

In my research, I very interdisciplinarily try to bring together arts, performance, and science. I'm always interested in the epistemological longevity of modern ideas and concepts, in particular in the life sciences and biotechnology, and in tracing them back to often very old ideas that haven't changed that much despite changes in technologies.

I'm currently a visiting scholar at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, pursuing a project on skins and ecologies of skins. So I'm very much looking forward to the conversation.

□ When the conversation was approaching, I just realized something about my relation to the word *make-up*. Maybe I can start with this. It's not a very articulated thought, but I realized that the first connection to this term comes to me through theatre and the question of theatricality, which is maybe obvious, but also comes with mixed feelings...

I can somehow trace this back to childhood, and then to the moment when I started being interested in theatre, and then actually working in it — coming from a small town in Italy where there was no theatre at all. For many years I would be asked or told things like, "You like theatre? So you also like to dress up? You like being in Carnival? The idea of taking somebody else's identity?" — which is something I deeply hated in my childhood. I remember this strange feeling of being confronted with that. And then what is it that I'm looking for in theatre if it's not this kind of pleasure of becoming or transforming into someone else in costumes and make-up?

Going back to the question of make-up, I realized that something which interests me and which I'm sure resonates with Sara's interest in it — as far as I know from

your writing, Sara — is indeed the relationship between make-up and identity, not so much in the sense of creating new identities though, but rather in creating the possibility of operating outside of identity. I'm using the word "identity," but maybe we could discuss if that's the right term, or if "self" or "subjectivity" would be more accurate.

There are certain notions around this, or the possibility of blurring them, which maybe connect back to performativity, rather than theatricality — as a possibility of thinking beyond the subject somehow, or thinking in a perspective of undoing and becoming at the same time. And I'd be curious if some of this resonates with you, maybe also having some projections from what I know — or don't know — about your writings and the different perspectives you bring to this, or maybe something completely different.

***** When I was thinking about the term make-up, I was reminded of how anthropologist Marcel Mauss describes the Western, capitalist self as *persona* — from the Latin *per sonare*, "resounding through" — whereby the body is a mask, a container for the soul. Unlike the interior soul, which is stable and authentic, the body is an exteriority which is unstable, everchanging and inauthentic.

make-up also made me think of the ritual *Naven*, performed by the people of Papua New Guinea and described by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson. *Naven* is a ritual of initiation into male adulthood where all the men related to the initiated dress up like women and all the women dress up like men. The idea of this ritual of collective transvestitism is to neutralize patriarchy by showing the toxicity of male behavior — represented in an exaggerated and even grotesque way — but also, more generally, the vacuity of gender stereotypes and distinctions.

The ritual is highly elaborate and contains a series of negations of identities. Here, the make-up — the ritual — triggers paradoxical transformations that question the authenticity of gender identities. Performed in the public space, it becomes a mechanism of socialization of collective identities. During the ritual individual selves exit the bodies and enter a collective space where ideas of gender, sexuality, and economy are problematized.

So for me, make-up implies this ability to transform and transcend the limits of the body, as intended through the capitalist framework, by acting upon the surface of the body. And, of course, the other side of this make-up is the making up of value in the capitalist process of valorization. Here, it is capital that makes up, invents abstract quantities, measures, and imposes limits on the infinite possibilities of human bodies.

So, for me, make-up points to this ambiguous threshold — make-up as self-transformation and hence as potential for growth, and make-up as a fetish, an abstract quantity that blocks this transformation.

/ What you're saying resonates in many interesting ways with how I've been thinking about make-up — not just in recent years, but also in the past few days.

While preparing for this conversation, I realized that the term, the topic, and the practices connected to it have really been part of my artistic practice and thinking process for a long time. So, thank you, Silvia, for inviting me. I realized it's actually quite central to what I do.

I think my focus is on understanding make-up not just as something that's applied onto something else. For example, in the English word "make-up", there's a sense of invention — you "make up" something, or it's about parts that come together, or a kind of reconciliation after a conflict. It's also related to storytelling — to "make up" a story. So there's this idea of simulacrum, or even deception. In Italian, that's even stronger: *"trucco"* really means trick — or it can also mean a magic trick. So it's already in the realm of illusion, if you will.

But what's really been a kind of *fil rouge* in my research is the idea of make-up not as something external or exposed, but as something already part of the body — already part of the self. The self, the face, the surface of the skin — they already have make-up, in a way. I try to unpack binaries like purity and invention, masquerade and reality — to question those binaries, and also to look at what we call the "real" as something that's already fabricated, or a product of negotiations and meaning-making.

In this sense, I wanted to read something I wrote in 2018, for a book I co-authored with a dear friend of mine, Jacopo Miliani. It's a book about secret languages within queer communities in Japan. I wrote an essay called *Madame Bovary C'Est Moi.* I'm going to read just the beginning, because I think it brings together some of the topics I'd like to discuss with you.

So here it starts:
When I was sixteen I devoured Madame Bovary.1 Like Emma Bovary I wanted to escape my place, my name, my face, my grace, my fate. Unlike Emma Bovary, however, I have never had any intention of succumbing to my fantasies. Throughout the years I have trained to live in a state of contradiction. I have tried, I try still, to break the spell of reality

In this unrepentant Bovarian state, I went to study theatre and later semiotics in Bologna. If theatre is the realm of illusion par excellence, semiotics is, according to Umberto Eco, "the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth: it cannot in fact be used 'to tell' at all."2 Signs, words, names... they are all masks hiding and yet revealing that which we want to see but cannot see, let alone possess. Paraphrasing a famous writer who knew Emma very well: "We are least ourselves when we talk in our own person. Give us a mask, and we will tell you the truth."

As someone who only believes in the truth of lies, I recently decided to approach Lacanian psychoanalysis. The subject for Lacan is at the mercy of language.

It is nothing other than a "semiotic effect." Soon after I started my analytical sessions, I had the following dream:

"I am acting on a stage and, like in many of these frightening dreams, I cannot remember my part. I search for props to help my memory return but nothing happens. It is hopeless. My role and my words have permanently left me. I am an impostor. In suffocating embarrassment and desperation, I run backstage where a childhood friend was waiting for me. We place ourselves in front of a gold rococo mirror. I try to paint my lips but I am not able to. The red lipstick slips away; it goes off the borders of my mouth. My face is all messy and dirty in red. I panic. At this point, my friend takes the lipstick in her hands and very gently shows me the way. 'Look,' she utters in a very reassuring tone, 'it's very simple.' She performs the usual gesture of painting someone's lips, but in fact she was holding nothing. She keeps on running her finger tips over my lips and she leaves no red mark. My lips are bare skin color. They felt right and beautiful."

To my great disappointment, my Lacanian psychotherapist suggested that my dream was just a reflection of the unresolvable split nature of our subconscious. Even if structurally impossible, the "I" still aspires to get rid of all the masks and find its true self. I couldn't believe my ears. I am sure that what my dream was actually trying to show me was that nudity is a dress: There is no mask, we are the mask! There is no part to remember, we are already playing it! I –myself– can only exist as a sign in transformation: "Madame Bovary, c'est moi!"

O It's fascinating to listen to you, because I feel like the discourse — that human skin, the make-up, is part of it or not part of it, or is the skin itself or the personality itself – is what anthropologist Nina Yablonski once called "a canvas for human creativity". So the skin and what we do to the skin — usually human skin — is a locus of demarcation of the self against the outer world. It's the place where stigmatization takes place, or self-expression, and it's a kind of contact zone.

I have recently started a project that is trying to bring in new ideas of scientific research into skin and to combine this discourse in the humanities and in recent science that, actually, skin microbiome teaches us that we are an ecological entity. Our skin is not a demarcation at all, but it's a living environment for microbes that tightly embed us in our surroundings in all kinds of ways.

I'm interested not only in the discourse itself but in how the humanities' discourse about skin might change if we take in this ecological understanding, recently developed in the sciences. On the one hand, what does this do to our ideas about skin? On the other hand, if we think about skins — not only human skin, but all kinds of animal skins, and plant exteriors and interiors — all of them interwoven with us, with others, with the environment, with the universe... how does that change our ideas of the human in this new Anthropocene era?

What happens if we are not demarcated? If we don't use our skin — as you so nicely displayed — to express ourselves or hide ourselves? What happens to our ideas and discourse about skin if we think of ourselves as ecological niches for microbiomes and all kinds of organisms living on our skin and changing all the time?

So this is the question I'd like to bring in — where to develop this, where to bring in these perspectives. That's what I'm curious about.

/ Yes, it's very interesting, because in a way, it's another proposition for intervening in conceptions of identity — what human identity is, or what constitutes it. It really opens that up and challenges those ideas.

But it also makes me think of anatomical discourse. And maybe you know more about this than I do, but in medieval and modern times, public anatomies were sites of knowledge production and circulation — around the "secrets" of the body, in a way. The skin, for example, used to be seen as a kind of filter between inside and outside, as something that keeps knowledge hidden. It's quite Platonic — the idea that there's a deep, secret substance underneath, and then there's the surface — this layer that protects or conceals something sacred.

And I think, from a feminist perspective, it's not a coincidence that this superficiality — this emphasis on the surface — is often attributed to female subjectivity. make-up, for instance, and everything associated with appearance rather than essence, is linked to that surface layer. But that's a bit of a deviation.

What I really wanted to mention is something I find fascinating about the history of public anatomy in Bologna — specifically, at the Archiginnasio, which I know you visited recently. During the Renaissance, public anatomical dissections were only allowed during Carnival. That was after the medical students' lessons had ended, and the sessions could then be opened to the general public, who attended wearing carnival disguises. So their identities were masked — literally hidden.

There's something really compelling about that. You're attending this public "desecration" of the body, this opening-up of the inside, this exposure — while remaining fully protected behind your own second skin, your costume. There's a tension between looking inside, confronting what's hidden, while being wrapped in an additional, performative layer. I think it's an interesting historical fact — or maybe anecdote — that ties into the history of Bologna and connects with what you were saying earlier, too.

* What you say, Janina, resonates with Gregory Bateson's ecological approach to cultures. He argues that non-capitalist cultures are self-regulating systems based on rules and rituals that make them sustainable in relation to an ever-changing environment. Interestingly, the "people" of these cultures are imagined to be without skin and completely open — vulnerable in a way, but also protected by thick relational textures. They are made through the encounter with the other.

There is also the issue of the scalarity of bodies. Their bodies are fragments — or, let's say, fractals — of a greater whole. They are continuously in the making. This resonates with what you are saying: of the skin not actually as a surface, but as a space of coexistence of entities. I also like this idea of the carnival, which comes into Western society at a time when the skin can be open, mentioned by Sara, when boundaries and rigidities are questioned and undone.

□ Staying with the Carnival and the question of the surface, as it was brought up, we might think of surface not as something separating, but instead as something connecting, and something cohabited — already a place of becoming with one another. This is an ecological place though. You, Janina, mentioned, how skin is discussed and understood in the humanities, and that made me think of how much, in the performing arts field, we talk about porosity lately — being *porous* in many terms and in many ways.

This makes me think back of the temporality of the Carnival, something I've always been very fascinated by. The Carnival is a moment of exception, where different rules may apply, and common rules can be diverged from radically, but it is also as a moment that happens in a very designated time. And still, the Carnival itself has surfaces and thresholds — moments where it starts and moments where it ends.

A question that, in a way, I realize has accompanied me for a long time, and which I like to think with at times, is: what happens at the midnight of the last Carnival day, when for some people it is still Carnival and for others it is not anymore? What is this porosity between exceptions and norms? Or, what is this place where an exception can leak into a norm — or maybe where a form of fabrication or make-up can leak into reality, using other terms that have been used, earlier?

Maybe these singular terms are not even valid in themselves, but this idea of traversability — if that makes sense in English — of surfaces or porosity of thresholds, and also in individual and collective bodies. Since the beginning, Massimiliano brought up ritual. Now we've already talked about collective ritual, and some of this idea of multitude goes beyond collective bodies, in your understanding and the scientific understanding of skin... Within this idea of identity, the self, or the possibility of becoming another, maybe there is something different at stake...

○ I think the point is that science and art, in many different ways, have constantly, throughout history, mutually shaped each other — in those ideas of what is ritual, what is the social, the collective, and the individual. And it has been very entangled. Probably it is not possible to think about it differently, but often that is my experience. In the sciences, at least, the discourses still tend to be very separate.

So you either talk about the sciences and the scientific facts, and not so much about the parameters, and the cultural ideas and tropes that go into the way we examine, scientifically. I very much like your example of the coincidence of anatomy and the carnival.

In anatomy, you have to cut open the body, you have to hurt the body to go inside. With today's methods, you scrape the skin or do genetic research — you have different methods, and you don't have to hurt the body anymore.

The way we gain knowledge is tightly connected to the way we examine and the procedures we apply. I think that is something that is never a coincidence. When you can do anatomy in the winter months, and all the cultural rituals that are connected to winter — the dark light and the change in social roles — I think that is intimately part of the scientific practices: how they were established and how they changed over time.

✱ I think another interesting element that comes out from your work, Janina, is the relationship between science and technologies of visualization. In a ritual context, visualization is embodied in the social context – it is socialized and negotiated – whereas in science, visualization is a technology that comes out from a detached scientific setup — objective researchers, impartial technologies.

This impartiality is also implicit in Western technologies of photography and cinema, which, after all, emerged as scientific technologies (see Jules Marey). It's interesting that Western science is embedded in this kind of attempt to neutralize the tool or the instrument, even though the two — technology and social context — are very enmeshed. Unlike Western science, the visual evidence of ritual is totally relational. Rituals, even when very elaborate, only work if there is a witness. Art can also be thought of as a technology for capturing imagination.

O Yes, that's very true. Concerning art history, even how skin was depicted in art, the colors chosen, and the pigments used to represent it in the first place. And given that these representations were sent from places far away, what was the value attached to sort of practical choices and material choices that had to be made by the people at those places? How to even find something that represented their perception of a structure, color, or surface?

So that's definitely something you cannot separate at all. And it's very interesting and very true what you said, that in science you have the tendency to link it to technology, whereas it is actually always embodied and much more complex. It's not so easy.

✱ Yeah. And the way you describe experiment — the performativity of experiment — is a moment in which science also comes out. Of course, there is then a kind of colonial reading of this. For instance, I really like Sandra Perry's work on the color blue, which is always created in the representation of Black skin in cinema. So this kind of color correction always comes into the representation of a "normal" Black skin tone.

Going back to the skin, and also to ritual, I think these are probably differences in relation to how I'm thinking about non-capitalist or non-Western contexts, where knowledge production and rituals are associated, let's say.

And also based on talks about this, knowledge comes out of more collective interactions, which are recognized and often exaggerated — not as untruth, but as parody.

The interesting thing about these rituals is that the men are exaggerated women, and the women exaggerated men – very aggressive. All of this parody is recognized for what it is, not as reality. People are given the chance to gauge the intensity of their actions in public.

/ Yeah, I'm thinking about make-up in relation to normativity — like what you were talking about before, the threshold between exception and norm. What is in between? What is leaking between the norm and the exception? Because, in a way, the carnival — and also maybe this ritual, I'm not sure, so please correct me if I'm wrong — normally, these kinds of collective rituals are a confirmation of the norm. They're executed to reproduce and make sure that the norm can be passed over to new generations.

In a way, it's a form of make-up, using the term that is used to disguise the norm, but only within an accepted timeframe and accepted parameters, to then confirm normativity. But, of course, it's also interesting to look at moments in which make-up, or the mask, or different forms of representation, are used to undermine the norm — which is not the case in these rituals or the carnival.

Within drag and queer communities, it becomes clear how much this is a matter of conventions and parameters: what is considered acceptable or not. For example, it's actually not so commonly accepted to walk in the streets in drag during the day, and even more so nowadays, with the political turn toward conservatism in the West. This is due to another convention, which is that the night is the realm where you can cross-dress or put a lot of make-up on. But what happens if you go to work in drag, or use make-up in a way that is not useful for the reproduction of normativity?

□ This makes me wonder: what is the space of *performativity* in these practices? Performativity is a word we've all used, I think, in our conversation — in the sense of literally what something does to you. What does the Carnival do to those who experience it?

While listening again to you talk about the Carnival, I was thinking how these rituals are meant to confirm and strengthen an existing norm. But still, they probably do something to the body, when allowing it to experience other possibilities in terms of gender, power, and position. Where does this embodied experience go afterward?

This also reminded me of something which Elsa Dorlin writes in her book on delf defence, where she discusses, drawing from history and from literature, cases of violence inflicted on people, with different kinds of subjectivities, from slaves to Black people, to women. When violence is inflicted on some particular subjects, it is inflicted in ways which make any attempt of self-defence cause even more pain.

Dorlin discusses cases ranging from ancient and medieval torture to recent episodes of police brutality toward people of color, and then focuses on gender-based violence as a main subject.

In times of slavery, she mentions how slaves often had intense dreams of revolt — of being armed and fighting against their masters — and how such an intense dreaming activity was also a response to being deprived of the possibility of protecting themselves in any form. If I remember correctly, Dorlin raises the question of what these dreams did to the slaves' bodies and lived experiences, and this feels like a more extreme example of what we are discussing about the Carnival. Bringing it back to our subject, this may be seen as a question of how we can address — and perhaps even tackle — the performativity of make-up, even within frameworks where it is not meant, or allowed, to radically change reality. What does make up do?

* What you mentioned reminded me of Elaine Scarry and her book *The Body in Pain*. She writes about the experience of women and men who have been tortured during military dictatorships. Torture changed their perception of themselves in relation to their bodies, which were felt as expanding and retracting — there is a kind of plasticity of the body in the experience of pain.

She argues that people who are tortured, experience a retraction and severing of the body in relation to their outside. Experimental rituals in non-Western societies, however, try to expand the self beyond the boundaries of the body. The moment of ritual is a moment in which, especially younger people, feel this possibility.

True, in Western societies, rituals reproduce the existing order by normalizing its subversion. But in most societies, rituals aim to neutralize power. For instance, anthropologist Ernesto de Martino shows how societies based on magic have rituals that neutralize notions of individualism, autonomy, and abstract value, upon which power develops in Western societies. Magic is the neutralization of things we tend to take for granted.

/ I didn't read the book *Self-Defence*, but I was discussing it recently with a friend — a former student of mine, Simon(e) Van Saarlos— who also found it really crucial. And I understood, or at least these were the terms in which we discussed it, that it's also about how, within a power relation, the subjectivities involved are defined by their reciprocity. So, within a master–slave relationship, let's say — or within a sexual-romantic partnership — the two identities are of course also defined by their relationship and their positionality within it. So I think the question — or at least this is what we were discussing — is: how can you define yourself outside the terms of that relationship? Or is there even a way?

And I think this is where the question of performativity — or the otherwise — comes in. How can you perform otherwise? How can you *not* be this particular subject?

And actually, this is also something I unpacked a bit in my work on Carmelo Bene, an Italian theatre-maker and filmmaker from the 20th century. The book is called *Maquillage as Meditation*. In a play called *S.A.D.E.*, Bene intervenes in the slave–master relationship — of course, from his own perspective, which I describe as one of dis-identity. So, in a very, let's say, anti-Hegelian, anti-Marxist standpoint, Bene says the only way to implode the relationship is when the slave stops performing as a slave. It's not about revolting against the master — not even recognizing that this is a subjectivity you are performing — but rather to completely ignore it. To just step out of the binary. So it's really against, in a way, the idea of class struggle. You have to ignore the dialectic and exit it altogether.

It's something that deeply fascinates me. And, you know, in many moments of my life — especially as a teenager — I found extremely empowering the idea that you can just break out of these patterns. But over time, I've also become more critical — or, let's say, I've come to understand more deeply how overdetermined these patterns and structures really are. But yeah, I think a part of me still believes in the radicality of breaking from the pattern.

□ You make me think of how, in the final chapter of her book, Elsa Dorlin discusses a novel by Helen Zahavi where the main character, Bella, has experienced some forms of sexual harassment from a neighbor. Bella goes through a process of dealing with what she's experiencing, and ends up killing the neighbor and then other men. In describing the transformation that Bella experiences, Dorlin analysis how she in the beginning reacts to the experience of violence by closing into herself and becoming very fearful, to then appropriate that same violence and turn it against her perpetrators. Dorlin defines this process as an anamorphosis. By anamorphosis, Dorlin means a process of change where there is no transformation from the outside. Anamorphosis is rather a different way of looking at oneself, which bring us back to the image of the mirror that emerged in our conversation before, but also to what you, Massimiliano, said about the bodies which have experienced torture and the question of what is the experience of those bodies. Bella experiences a possibility of looking at herself differently, and this makes all the difference. This is where she stops performing the role of the victim, stops performing in relation to the perpetrator and within that kind of power relation, and opens up an alternative possibility for herself. This kind of experience is maybe one way of articulating what you were saying, Sara: not necessarily acting outside of a relationship, but somehow shifting focus to the relationship with oneself. And then creating another possibility of existence, and also of performing a role, which transforms the reciprocity in that original relationship. What Bella does, is overcome the assigned position, or the self-assigned position, of the victim. I am not saying that everyone should be able to do this – that this is a capability everybody should have – but that there's always the possibility for a tactic of shifting from a certain understanding of one's positionality in relationships. This maybe has to do with the question of the trick.

✱ There are different historical and cultural kinds of slavery. In small-scale societies, slaves at first are dehumanized and turned into aliens. Then they slowly

become part of the extended family or the lineage group. In this way, slavery is a process through which groups get to know themselves through the incorporation of the other — the violent process of dehumanization, and even killing at times, is combined with a process of care. Care and violence are connected. You take someone from the outside, first, you dehumanize them, and then slowly you accept them as part of your own humanity. This kind of slavery is diffused, in different forms, in many societies. Slavery became an economic system, a system of systematic violence and mass genocide, only with the Atlantic trade. Here, the slave is an object — Fred Moten says, "a talking commodity." Sara, your idea of slavery as a relationship fits more the institution of slavery in small-scale societies, where communities get to know themselves and transform themselves through owning, if temporarily, another person. Of course, here the notion of ownership is much more fluid than in the capitalist West. The Atlantic slavery was different. It was an economic system, in which the subject was not even human; it was just a "thing."

/ Can you give some examples of this other form?

✱ Yeah. For instance, Orlando Patterson's studies on social death, or the book *Ownership and Nurture*. Studies in Native Amazonian property relations show how indigenous communities develop a kind of slavery at the threshold between caring and owning, dehumanizing and socializing. There are also exchanges of women and young people between different communities, as compensation for marriages and warfare killings. At first, these aliens enter as non-human subjects — they experience "social death" by being ritualistically dehumanized. They are shaven, and marks are made on their skins. But then, slowly, they are welcomed into the community at the end of a long process of re-humanization and care. Here, the labor of nurturing, reproductive labor, is involved. But Atlantic slavery is different. Human beings are just commodities. Socialization or the making of family relations doesn't come into play at all. In fact, in slave communities in Brazil or across the Atlantic, there were no families. Children were killed because it was easier, and cheaper, to buy more commodities than to nurture new slaves. I was just trying to indicate that slavery and the ambivalence between care and ownership is a kind of human universal, whereas Atlantic slavery is the outcome of the monstrosities generated by Western modernity and the colonial encounter.

O I think maybe an interesting question, because you all raised it, is that instead of speaking of relationship, you used the word *relationality* in a more neutral way. If we can at all escape any kind of relationality that somehow gives a sense of self, of being *something* as opposed to *something else*, or being something in a particular environment and not in another — in an environment. Speaking of societies, societies of humans, societies of animals, humans and animals, in the broad sense, is it switching relationalities that changes? And, what I found particular is that you used the expression, when you talked about the last chapter in the book and the hero's journey, looking at yourself differently, and that this is maybe the moment of empowerment, or of being at the height of the relationality that you choose. Or if you are able to feel like this kind of relationality provides you with something that

different kinds don't. I don't know whether you can switch, whether you can exchange, whether you can even choose where you are. But to me, it seems that this is connected to some sense of being yourself, having these — or feeling at least — that you could make these choices. Maybe you can't historically, not always – some can, some can't. But the way you — as you said — it was put in the novel, it has the sense of making a big difference, if I understood correctly.

✱ So the disempowerment came from the awareness of relationality. In the case of the protagonist, that's what.

O If I understood you, this was part of the idea of treating herself differently because of choosing how to relate to herself differently.

□ Yes, or at least this is how I remember it, how I understood it. Yes, very much. Very much so.

O Maybe this is now a bit too abstract, but what fascinates me – and I'm not working on the complex level of societies, but rather on the scale of tiny animals and microorganisms – is what actually makes us think that they are alive? Why is something that is living on our skin alive? And when does it stop being alive? That was what I tried to explore in the book. Is it because they are moving on our skins, because they are changing our skins, because they can be exchanged between skins and environments? Somehow, in a broader sense, I just had this idea when you said that she felt alive the moment she could choose the relations. And in a way, if we consider ourselves as being ecologically defined by the relations we have — for example, if you live in a very toxic environment, you will find the traces of that environment on the body, in the body, and through the body; the porosity you talked about. And of course, thinking about modern cities and how we have to build our cities to reduce toxicity, because we are part of this environment, this gives us a sense of being able to choose. And these choices go deep under the skin in a very profound sense, because they are not just choices; they affect how we feel, how we are exposed to toxicities – or having the privilege of not being so. And this plays with the notion of being alive from a very basic sense – being toxic or healthy, or on the spectrum. By feeling this you can understand who you are in a complex social and self-reflective way.

□ I'm curious, Janina, about how you relate to the notion of the individual subject, from your studies on skin and the multiplicity of life forms that live on our skins, from understanding bodies as ecological environments. Because, in a way, some of the conversation went very much in that direction, and I keep feeling it's hyper-contradictory somehow. As you were very nicely rephrasing what I remember of Elsa Dorlin — this idea of this character deciding for herself, deciding who she wants to be, etcetera —broadening the perspective, feels also just very made up, right?

O I don't know — you're much more versed in literature and culture — but I do think that this notion and the concept of individuality is a cornerstone of literary

production, cultural production, even of how cities are built, how we conceptualise, how a museum is structured. And, in a way, much of it is very vague, frail maybe, and based on an understanding of having exact boundaries of being and of being the one who chooses to be close or far from something, to immerse yourself into some situation or to take yourself out of it. It all has this idea of a very defined surface, and your personality ending at this point. And I think much of our modern discourse is based on this very notion of "who I am." And even as a self-representation, I have this idea of being confined, precisely shaped. And all this — this deep concern we have with the change of our surface, all these "cosmoseuticals," this pharmacy — is about not changing your self, always staying the same, being the same, because this is who you are. Yeah, I think this is very much part of our culture. And there are ways to put it differently, I would say. I don't know exactly how, but slowly you get these ideas that it's much more complex. And how to find ways, I think, is the fascinating thing: how to try to think about these ways, these relations, or these notions a bit outside the box.

/ Yeah, to decentralize the individual. What you're saying makes me think of a lot of readings I've been doing recently in relation to disability, chronic illnesses, and the vulnerable body — so like, a body that is in itself not coherent, not completely closed, but injured, open, vulnerable, broken. And actually — yeah, now I can't remember the title of this book, but I read a chapter maybe two or three weeks ago — it's really beautiful the way the author, after losing his voice, starts to talk about the self as both a subject and an object. Or like, not knowing anymore what the difference is between subjectivity and objectivity — and reclaiming agency within that.

There's a moment that's very strong, also as a metaphor, where he says: normally, in science — especially in Western modern epistemology — as a scholar, or a scientist, you have things laid out on a table for you to study. You can manipulate them. You observe them from a distance — with your coherent body, observing coherent objects. You are the subject and you have the gaze. And he's like: actually, *I* am the object on the operating table. I am the subject who is also an object on that table. And what do we do with that position, with that perspective? Isn't it still a perspective? Isn't it still a kind of agency?

So I think the knowledge that comes from scholars and artists and writers within the field of disability justice is, for me... I find that it's there that we can nurture a different understanding of the self — and of the collective, also in the sense of interdependency. Interdependency is a relation — a relationality — which is different from dependency. Because, I mean, we are all interdependent on each other. And so it also decentralizes things like, for example, in art — the use of authorship, which is often very rooted in the individual. But here, it's about the distribution of authorship, the distribution of agency, and how we come together to make things — which, in a way, makes me think of the microbiome. To imagine oneself as a site of multiplicity.

Yeah. I don't know how to find the source of this author. I'm very sorry.
Sorry, author!!!

✱ I am intrigued by the work you're doing, on art and science. The idea that science is a form of art, especially in the way it has attempted to visualize — "capture" — bodily movements. But to me, it's not very clear if this attempt to capture movement is part of the problem, or part of the solution. It's nice the way you put it — as a peculiarity of the West. In my own work I describe art as a form of capture of movement. On the other hand, it's also interesting to note that, in a way, individualism, or this construction that we make to ground ourselves in the world, is innate. That all cultures need moments in which they emerge as individual, singular, and autonomous, and it is also thanks to these moments that relationality emerges. So my question to you is whether science actually makes things worse because it eliminates this possibility of plasticity, it eliminates the illogical possibility that you can be both an individual and also relational. For me, in the capitalist West, art and science, particularly economics, are totally entangled as technologies of movement capture. But in your book, it seems nicer. It seems that in the West this capture of movement happens in a dialectic between the aesthetic and the scientific.

O Yeah, I think, as you framed it, what is clear for science and art is that movement is endlessly mind-boggling. I mean, it's always there, it's easy to perceive, but it's so difficult to understand and to grasp as a concept. And in a way, I would say you're absolutely right. It has been part of what the human mind has tried to understand and work with in all the different facets for centuries. And so I found it endlessly fascinating to think about it. And in a way, what science does, I would say, is it makes things much more complicated.

In the 21st century it has started to be able to make things like artificial cells or bits and pieces of artificial cells — things that are intended to replace the natural existing structures. And the moment science produces these kinds of things, the question arises whether these things are made – what is the way that they come into existence? And then the question underlying the book: what does it mean then to be alive if things in nature move but artificial things don't – unless we make them move or have something that is initializing movement? But if we do make them now and make them move, what does it change for our understanding? When is something alive? How is it alive? And it all comes down to, as you put it, the way we perform movement and, in a way, embody movement and try to make it a cognitive concept while experiencing it. Science and art have done it differently, but often they have done it conjointly in a shared interest and then moved it in different directions. But I do think there is a common fascination and often common preliminary solutions. But it is unsolved, I would say. It's not clear where it is taking us and where it is going. And I think the switch is coming in the moment we do things in science and pretend this is now the thing and it is the same as the one that it copies – the simulacrum. We do something with our means and make it equivalent to the things we find in nature. What does that change? And I think that has a huge impact on everything, basically.

/ I wanted to just ask a question: what is the relationship between visuality — in terms of the visual paradigm — and everything we're talking about in relation to

make-up and representation? Because, yeah, how would make-up perform within a non-visual paradigm? I mean, would it even exist? I don't know what it would be. And somehow, I think it brings me back to the idea of anamorphosis, and to the question of consciousness.

O Again.

/ Big, big question. Like, yeah, this is your self-consciousness or self-awareness. Is it related to the visual, or is it something that transcends the visual? Does it have to do with embodiment? I think it's all very intertwined — it's all informing each other. But I think we're still speaking within a visual bias. I mean, the visual paradigm of representation is so dominant — it's the capture; of course, you wouldn't have it without visuality. It's so central within, let's say, Western epistemological frameworks, but maybe even beyond that. So yeah, it's a question for all of you.

O No, just to add, I think science is deeply visual. Maybe, in a way, the history of science has been the history of making the visual paramount, reducing the performative elements that are still there and have always been there, but which have been consciously eliminated to make clear-cut demarcations to other forms of practices and forms of knowledge generation. And so this is definitely something science does, especially with this modern data deluge, where you need visuals to make sense of data — you can't escape this kind of visuality, I would say. That doesn't mean that there are no performative developments, but it's a very good question whether there is a kind of make-up. And in a way, there is a kind of dexterity you need still to do experiments to this day. There is this element of manipulation — in a way of bringing about things where you cannot be entirely 150% sure whether you bring about something that really exists or that exists in the context of the machinery, the technology, and the conceptual framework in which you bring it about.

/ Yeah. Because, in a way, there's this assumption that what you can't see doesn't exist — or that seeing is knowing. And, I mean, also, of course, now we know about the microbiome, but we know it because of microscopes. It's always about making things visible, because otherwise they wouldn't exist.

O Yeah, but the paradox is that you don't actually see the things you have. The microscopes you use are no longer just optical tools. They involve very complex computational procedures that make something visible under the conditions of the technology — so that, in a way, nobody can directly see it. And often, you have registers of instruments and series of instruments that sort of read each other, yet nobody really examines what you consider – it's called an electron microscope, or whatever kind of technology, which is, in a way, an optical tool. But nowadays, what we get from it is technologically harvested and data-processed. People rarely look at these images and think of them as images in the usual sense. So, you need these technologies — but not to see, interestingly. And I think that is a very interesting twist, because you could look deep into something that didn't exist to the physiological eye, with a microscope.

But now, with nanoscopy, you are left just with computational data and images that are computed. You need mathematical models to create those images, and then you put color to them.

I just went to a conference about data visualization. The question was about the colorings you choose for what kind of data. Apparently, you can find color palettes to your liking. So, for example, you can choose the Vermeer palette if you like the colors of Vermeer paintings. Then you have a sort of differentiation of the graphs along those colors. So, if you like someone else's art, you can use those colors. I find this a fascinating entanglement of how we conceive pictures and colors we like, or feel good about, or feel appalled by — choices we make according to conventions entirely outside the scientific realm.

✱ But there is a self-awareness that these images are actually artificially and socially constructed.

○ They are constructed, but in a way, I'd say the social aspect is purely additional. The idea is that there is a scientific epistemology and technology that follows its own laws and rules. Then you have some add-ons that you can choose, but they don't change the scientific nature. That would be, I guess, the scientific nature of how you do things.

✱ This is an interesting reflection.

This is an interesting difference between scientific culture in the West and non-Western cultures, where images are normally not supposed to be "real." Even when images are embodied in mediums, there is an awareness that the medium hides more than it reveals. So, there is no question of truth associated with the image or the medium. There is an awareness that the world is fluid; it is made of images that are negotiated, and that embodied photos or films are just a small part of the universe of imagination.

For gender theorist Sara Ahmed, the issue of how we appear is deeply political. Visibility is the politics of how you fix someone or something into an image. Another interesting thing emerging in your work is the disembodiment of visual knowledge in relation to other forms of knowing. For instance, in terms of Aboriginal knowledge, you get to know by walking the land, listening to the land, smelling it, and exploring it through all the senses. I think artists and art theorists are slowly catching up with this new materialist approach. There is a critical distance toward the visual, with more emphasis on matter and materiality. I am thinking about Denise da Silva's reflections on Black politics in terms of "matter in excess," and how such Black materiality also transpires in her films.

□ I find your question, Sara, very deep, and I'm a bit stuck with that. How would make-up perform in a non-visual paradigm? It immediately makes me think of two examples — now three — of artworks..

In relation to performativity and the capture of visualization, I think of a performance by Markus Öhrn, a Swedish artist whom I invitetd to Santarcangelo in 2015, for the development of a new creation for the Santarcangelo Festival, which I was directing back then.

Markus is an artist with a very strong imagery, also connected to a particular music scene. His relation to the body is quite strong, also in terms of how his body looks — he is a bodybuilder and is fully tattooed. He comes from a visual culture that is pretty hardcore in that sense. At that time, he had just made a big trilogy in theatre, working on patriarchal structures in different layers and sizes, and had a desire to work in a different performative format.

After spending a few days in Santarcangelo for a research residency, he proposed to work with a group of elderly women—something which he felt drawn to, in relation to the recent death of his grandmother. He felt that women of that generation had never had the possibility of doing something for themselves, and recalled how in her last months, his grandmother Eva Britt was reflecting on how, if she could live her life again, she would make space for doing silly or destructive things.

Markus proposed then to launch an open call to see if elderly women from Santarcangelo would show up and work with him: his intention was in some way to create the possibility for women of that age to do what his grandmother could not do. This ended up becoming a huge and beautiful project called *Azdora*, the regional name for a housewife. The project ended just last year – it was meant to last for one year but ended up lasting almost ten years. It was a collective, emancipatory, and very empowering work that the women did with Markus and other artistic collaborators, including rituals, a metal concert, performances, and even a visit to the grandmother's grave in northern Sweden.

Many things happened during the artistic process of *Azdora*, across many media. But one thing that had been there since the very beginning was the choice of make-up for the women. They literally put on make-up every time, always in the same style — inspired by the black metal music scene that Markus proposed to them as a reference and a life-world: very pale skin with strong black markings around the eyes. At some point, it became very tangible how that make-up was highly performative. Not only did it create an image of the Azdora, but while they put on that make-up, Markus also began to dress as an Azdora, wearing apron dresses with floral prints. In this way, one was transforming into the other, and make-up became a sign of that transformation. At the same time, it was also very clearly a sign that allowed the participating women to do things in performance that they would not have allowed themselves to do in "real life" — whatever that means

This something that we've already discussed and that we know quite well, but I'll mention it once again because, for me, there's still an interesting tension between the images we have of the Azdoras from the performance and the sense of the performativity of that make-up.

I also remember hearing about a work by another artist — unfortunately I don't remember their name, and I haven't seen the work myself, only heard about it. It was exhibited in London recently, at Tate Modern, I think. The artist made a work exposing the make-up remover tissues — make-up dirt that was used for the performance. I find something fascinating in this transferability of make-up from one surface to another... In this artistic practice, there is a strong element of visualization and even exposition. These tissues become artworks, but at the same time they're just traces, the leftovers of the action of putting make-up on and then taking it off.

Listening to you, Massimiliano, I also started thinking about and beyond the visual paradigm. How would make-up operate in sound, for example? Maybe because you were talking about postcolonial theories and colonial approaches, I thought of the artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan, who often works with sound. I'm thinking of a recent performance he did, titled *Zifzafa*, which is the name of a wind. He's been researching the history of windmills that are now spread across Jordan and other neighboring countries. In the text of his lecture performance, he talks about the sound that these windmills produce and the conflicts surrounding them, highlighting how protests are being held by both, environmental activists and local communities, which are opposing the presence of the windmills, but for two opposite reasons.

The environmentalists want the windmills removed because of the noise pollution — they want a return to silence. Meanwhile, the local people, whose ancestors once lived there, want the windmills gone so they can "listen to the voices" of the ancestors again.

I somehow connect this to the reversibility or transferability of make-up, and to make-up as something that can be done and undone. The questions that Lawrence Abu Hamdan raises about sound are similar, in the sense that sound can also be taken away. But, taken away to return to what? With make-up, removing it means going back to the face, to identity — or maybe not. I find something is spiraling there, in a fascinating way.

/ It's interesting that you mentioned Lawrence Abu Hamdan. He's an artist but also a forensic researcher working primarily with sound as a forensic tool. And together with Forensic Architecture — and I think Amnesty International — they used the testimonies of people who were kept prisoners in Syria, in this now-famous prison that was dismantled just a few months ago.

Through the sonic testimonies of these people, they were able to reconstruct the architecture of the prison, which was completely off-limits. Like, nobody knew how the architecture was built, but through different technologies, the sound became an image. And now, with the fall of the regime, they were able to actually access the building — and it was very accurate.

Actually, the reconstruction also helped locate prisoners who were kept in very remote isolation cells that otherwise wouldn't have been able to be traced.

I don't know why I'm saying this, but somehow I guess it has to do with this idea of truth as well. Like, is the face the truth? Is the visual the truth? I don't know how we understand truth or existence or reality. I don't know.

✱ It's really interesting because in a way it's a very technological operation, the way the whole Forensic Architecture group operates. They mobilize science in support of justice. Lawrence used a similar technique with an hospital in Gaza which was bombed by the Israeli army. The Israeli government was claiming that it had been bombed by Hamas. Through the analysis of the sound waves of the explosions, Lawrence showed that in fact the explosion was caused by a rocket launched from the Israeli zone.

/ Yeah, indeed.

✱ I found this intriguing also in relationship to the work of Janina, in the sense that they are developing a kind of scientific epistemology within art, but for a different reason. I mean, for a progressive reason. On the other hand, I think that this kind of epistemology of truth — this idea of art as judicial evidence — is jarring with what's happening in Palestine. Does a genocide such as the one unfolding in Palestine, which we are all witnessing, televised and live, need evidence? I was also interested by what you said, Sara — that when you follow traces, there's no way to go back. In fact, how do you trace movement? Movement is just a relative category because it never ceases, like history.

This resonates with what you said about the make-up in relationship, Sara, whereby the make-up and the surface are the same thing. In a way, there is no way to remove the make-up. It's just a stratification of new make-up. And I was really taken by what you said: when you eliminate the wind, what do you find? Do you find silence or a different kind of noise?

/ Yeah, it also makes me think about toxicity from a different perspective — as an invisible force. Like toxic sites, radioactive sites that aren't visibly radioactive, or at least don't look that way. And how that invisibility makes it really hard for communities impacted by radioactivity to fight back, and to push for laws and regulations.

Yeah, I'm thinking about this especially when you mentioned the windmill, the silence, and the landscape.

O My first idea when thinking about other kinds of senses involved in our appropriation of the word. When I think, the skin is always the site of touch, and visual and sound are long-distance senses. They are ways by which we have more choices to position ourselves, and it makes a huge difference where we stand – from where we hear sounds – and the kind of geographical concepts we have or the spatial orientation we have. And touch, which is linked to the body, is a different kind of sense. I don't know the art world in that respect, but it's heavily understudied.

You have a lot of developmental biology, of course, that is interested in the sense of touch because it's vital for newborns to develop a sense of their own body, of the baby's own body, by sensing where it physically ends. So there is an interest, and it's vital also for the development of the brain and all these steps in human or animal development. But I think it's very important that it is a short-distance sense and that it is a different way of positioning yourself, of proprioception, but also of perception of your surroundings. Touch allows us to perceive whether something is close or far, whether a sensation comes from outside and approaches us, or whether it is bound up in the intimacy of our own body or the closeness of another body. And with that comes the idea of danger, of the invasion of personal space: where does touch remain acceptable, and at what point does it become uncomfortable?

/ Very interesting. Isn't it true that touch became a sense a bit later than the others? Or am I just making it up?

O What do you mean by, like...?

/ By science. I don't know the exact historical period, but up until a certain point, touch wasn't considered a sense like hearing. But I'm not sure about this... so I don't know exactly.

O Perhaps the interesting thing is that with everything visual, you have optical systems that emulate the physiological system. You have the lenses and the way you construct. Not only do you have technology that is copying the physiological system, but you also have, with perspective, the representation of form, to have perspective and to bring it into a presentation. And you don't have this kind of elaborate technology to measure any kind of sense impression. It's not equivalent to what you have. And that might play a role in understanding when to determine whether something is an impression of touch, and how to even categorize that.

And when — when is when? Yeah, is it just pressure? The first way of thinking scientifically about touch was as pressure exerted on some kind of surface. But there is, of course, much more to the impression of touch than feeling some kind of pressure on different parts of the body.

✱ Laura Marks, a very interesting scholar, in her book *The Skin of Films* (an expression of Antonin Artaud), talks about haptic images as being central to feminist filmmaking — think of Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* — but also of non-Western art. I think it's interesting the way touch has been sanctioned in our society, in relation to social hierarchies and bodily segregation. Not only in the West. In India, instead of class, touch is sanctioned along lines of caste. Those from the untouchable castes cannot touch those from superior castes because they can pollute them.

I think it's interesting how some feminist artists approach touch as a space for undoing distances and even recrafting power.

Performance art has been particularly interesting from this point of view — I am thinking of Carole Schneemann or the films of Barbara Hammer.

/ So, I have a small child — he's three and a half. And I'm discussing this also in relation to learning and knowing through touch for small children. Until very recently, discovering the world meant touching everything — and sometimes swallowing things, potentially — but mostly touching. So touch played a really important role. And, yeah, until very recently, it was quite a challenge to go to museums with my child because, obviously, you can't touch anything there.

So it's a form of knowledge that's still very, very visually dominated. Though, of course, artists have been busy undoing the visual for, I don't know, a century now. But still, museums are really very controlled spaces of enlightenment in a certain way, postulating a certain type of behavior — a certain type of citizen who is able to stand, look, and keep a certain distance. So there's this choreography of limitations. And touch is really the ultimate no-go. Of course, then you have the exceptions where you can touch, but anyway, it's an exception that confirms the rule again.

O Just an addition, because I enjoyed it so much — coming here to the MAMbo Museum, for the Easy Irony exhibition, you have this very nice ice bear that is made of feathers. And I think this is irony, this playing with the idea of what you know or want it to be because of some kind of experience and sense perception that you imagine, and how it is counteracted. I found this very nice. This playfulness can be used to counter your imagination according to your experience.

For children, having different experiences, or not that many experiences, might be completely normal — an ice bear made of feathers could possibly exist. So this is a way of playing with this sense of knowledge you have about, or think you have about, surfaces, because you have it from visual experience. But it could be different in different worlds, or at any time, depending on your mindset.

/ I wanted to share an image — maybe you've already seen it — but I was standing in front of a palazzo where there's a retrospective of Antonio Ligabue here in Bologna. So I went on Sunday. Antonio Ligabue is a so-called naïve artist from the 20th century, Italian-Swiss, who had some physical or cognitive disabilities and lived a very difficult life, even on the streets. He was a painter, famous for animals — leopards and jaguars, but also animals from the Po River, where he used to wander.

I was quite impressed. There was a small documentary about him, which also won the Berlin Bear award — the prize at the Berlin Film Festival a few years ago. It's a portrait of this artist who, late in life, became known. In the first part of the documentary, we see him wandering along the banks of the Po River, emulating the sounds of the animals he painted all his life. The interpretation given by the voiceover was that he was so marginalized by human beings that he sought kinship and companionship within other species — he really wanted to become them.

So he was walking around with a small mirror, making the sounds, but also wanting to really be like them. Both the voiceover, and of course, the gaze were really on him. There was a certain, I don't know, fetishization, I guess, of his character. But it was quite interesting, quite profound. And the image I'm showing here on the table is a photograph of Ligabue in front of a sculpture of some animal — maybe a jaguar — trying to imitate it. I thought it was relevant for the conversation, so I brought it today.

□ Do I remember correctly that Ligabue never travelled outside Europe, thus never managed to see those animals for real? Many paintings of his portray animals he never actually saw.

/ Indeed.

□ Probably.

/ Yeah, and in the exhibition there are also some kinds of stickers — like the Italian *figurine* — which he collected and found inspiration in. They were a sort of colorful encyclopedia of animals. So in the exhibition, there are also some of those. But yeah, he never traveled much — of course, the wild animals he never saw. But the turkeys and chickens, those he was very familiar with.

□ The image of the mirror also comes back even in this image that we are looking at now. It seems to be a boy mirroring, you know, imitating or maybe responding.

/ Yeah. And somehow through his expression, there is some kind of laughter, at least I sense it. And then I read "this" [the animal] in a different way, like his presence changes — for me at least — the presence of the animal, its features, its intention.

○ But then again, it's also only the relationality of that particular moment that is captured, because it's taken out of, I guess, his performance while wandering around — and they could have been influencing each other differently. Sort of now you see laughter, but it could also have been being frightened at that moment, and being in a fluent conversation with him and the animal, in a way. But he's the active part. He can change the perception of the animal, not the other way round, because he's still alive.

/ Seems so.

○ He looks very alive.

□ I find it beautiful, this image — and how we are opening it up in the relationship between these two entities, perceiving the imagine of the animal differently because of the living, fluid expression here, captured in the image of the painter-observer. I keep thinking of this image of the mirror somehow, and of looking at some *other* in the mirror. And maybe I have this image very much in my mind, in relation to the theatre –

many images we have seen of actors and actresses in front of a mirror in the dressing room, preparing to enter the stage. And very often this means putting make-up on, among other things. So, in a way, you know, this process — which can be very different in different theatrical cultures — is a process of transforming into another.

At least in the West, but not only, I guess, theatre is very much about this sort of transformation. I remember seeing some of these images — actors putting make up or masks on, in front of a mirror — in dressing rooms at Théâtre du Soleil, for example, where the audience can just have a glimpse of the actors preparing themselves before entering the stage. And that's a very long process for them. But also the images we have seen in movies so much — I think we all have some in mind.

And maybe, whereas the fact of being in front of the mirror and looking at one's image while putting make-up on is also a kind of everyday experience for people who use make-up, in the theatre dressing rooms there is something about the *otherness* of the image that also this image of Ligabue makes me think of very much.

Suddenly this image we are looking at makes the space between the two creatures much darker and denser — in the possibility of doing and undoing one another, of this reciprocity between the image I'm looking at and what it does to me, and how I am transforming it but am also being transformed by it.

Here we see it in two different creatures. And it makes me think that something similar happens in the mirror sometimes, when there is a sense of intention, desire, or awareness of the otherness of the image we are looking at. Which also makes me think of what you were saying earlier, about our current obsession in our culture and society about our surfaces and how they change.

I remember recently somebody told me — we were talking about aging — about the experience of casually looking at themselves reflected in a window, not recognizing this old man they were seeing, and only after a moment realizing: "That's me." It says something about the complex relation we sometimes have with our images, maybe especially in relation to age.

And going back to the other senses, it also makes me think: maybe we judge these experiences too easily. He did not recognize himself — is that because he couldn't accept becoming that old person? Or maybe it's also because the experience one has of oneself is more complex — via other senses and feelings — than just that image? So it's maybe not so much that it's an old man, but rather that "this thing" is an image, while I know I am not, somehow...

✱ Yes, it's interesting, the relationship between image and gestures. As you were talking, I was thinking about Milan Kundera's novel *Immortality*, which starts by describing in detail the gesture of a woman coming out of a swimming pool. As the story unfolds, we come to realize that that gesture is itself a connecting force between the imaginations of the different characters of the story.

I think performance and theatre have worked in very interesting ways around images and bodies, and on processes of identification and re-identification channelled via simple gestures. Again, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead led interesting research on Balinese culture in the 1930s, called *Dance and Trance in Bali*. Referring to the trance performances of Balinese dancers, they pointed out that the Balinese public believed in the gestures of the dancers who acted out their states of trance. They believed the gestures of the dancers were actually gestures made *in* a state of trance.

For their cosmovision, this was not just about images or exteriority — they believed that individuals could change through their gestures, as if they could become different kinds of subjects. For Bateson and Mead this was a "proof" that Balinese culture was schizophrenic. In the 1970s, while researching out-of-body consciousness and LSD, Bateson changed his mind. He considered the Balinese understanding of the entanglement of body and mind as sophisticated, and less alienated than the schizophrenic compartmentalization in Western society.

But I mean, I guess the interesting thing about performance is how it brings images into life. It's an illusory space but also much more. Images become the essence of subjectivity.

O I think it's really very deeply rooted in the paradox of movement — that something is identical while always changing. How do you keep the sense of being an identical "you" while constantly changing in appearance. Speaking again of skin. You feel like this is your skin, and it has the same kind of touch maybe, or softness to it, but it changes all the time. It's never the same as when you were born. Every four weeks it completely sheds off, and you have new skin. And the same is true for your features too.

And still you have a sense of identity while physiologically being entirely different all the time. The biological material you're made of has no identity with what you had as a child, or even four years ago. And still — this is the paradox: considering something as changing while being the same. And that's not only true for our own perception, but also for an animal, or a pet, or an animal you live with — still the same while not being the same.

/ Yeah, it's extremely fascinating and interesting what you're saying, because in a way, that also takes me back to childhood — or how we teach children. For as much as I want to avoid categories, I realize that learning has to do with understanding some kind of sameness. You have exposure, you have repetition of a pattern, you recognize the pattern, and therefore it becomes something — a category established by this sameness. And of course, that already creates regions of inclusion and exclusion, and diversity, but it's still not the same.

I mean, recognizing a shape — a triangle — you see many triangles, and you think, "Okay, this is a triangle, this is not a triangle," or "It's an amorphous shape,

or it's not," well, I don't know. And I feel that within Western epistemology, and really in logic — like Aristotelian logic — it's all about induction, deduction, about extrapolating or extracting a law or a rule of sameness out of the diversity of the world and of change and difference.

And, yeah, for myself at least, it's kind of a paradox: how do you get out of it? How do you manage to navigate the world without relying on these categories? I feel like my work and the discourse is all about undoing categories, but then, actually, that's how you simply function. But yeah, there's so much violence that categories of sameness produce.

So, maybe make-up helps us camouflage these categories — it helps us accept that we can transform.

✱ I was thinking also about children's play, which defies categories and brings different and contradictory logics together. Anthropologists are interested in children's games because they are spaces where you can believe two opposite things at the same time. They're completely opposite and yet compatible. We are all geared toward contradictions and to believing in non-logical thinking. That's allowed when you're a child. But then with formal education and socialization, logical thinking starts to take over.

□ Maybe in this sense, it is— or can be — not just a way of camouflaging, but also a form of being two things at the same time. Maybe contradicting what you were saying in the beginning, but if it is indeed adding another layer or another surface to an existing surface, then it's not simply there to reveal the truth of that original image, but also not just to hide it. It's, in a way, to let the two surfaces exist at the same time.

✱ I have a question for you, Janina. Do you think a movement is an ontological category? It's an objective category, or rather, that movement doesn't exist?

○ There are many different philosophers you can ask, with opposite answers.

✱ I mean, I know there is a long history of Western philosophy around movement — Heraclitus, Parmenides, Lucretius, Aristotle. But for you — is it relative? Is it an invention? Because when I think about interrelatedness, I think about the absence of movement. If everything was interrelated, there wouldn't be movement. For me, I mean, a lot of my political thinking revolves around movement.

○ I could probably answer on two levels. As a historian, I was very impressed doing the research for my book when I learned — you all know Marey and his chronophotographies — the way that he was the first to capture movement as movement, imagining and framing movement with a camera. A camera that is depicting or tracing movement while holding on to a body that is moving against a dark background. And he had these beautifully iconic images of the moving body, often with soldiers performing, having reflective straps on the joints and limbs.

And so you could treat — and sometimes you have this art historically — you could treat them in different frames, like with Muybridge, or you have them all on one plate, fusing into this graphic representation. Then I learned about a psychologist in the 1970s, Gunnar Johansson, who did exactly the same experiments using light bulbs instead of adhesive reflective strips, creating the same kind of representation, but with a completely different idea of how perception works.

He said the way Marey framed movement does not exist. We don't perceive movement against a static background, because in our perception of the world everything is moving at the same time. And the real conundrum is: how do we perceive that this or that is moving as an entity against a moving background? Why do we see a branch of a tree moving while, in the background, cars are also moving? Why do we have these different percepts in a world where everything is moving?

So he said: it doesn't work through the technology of the camera and traces. That is not how it works. Instead, the mind computes movement, depicting some things as percepts moving within an environment of movement as well. In that sense, I think the mind is very capable of having a representation, a kind of appropriation of the environment in its moving capacities. Otherwise, you wouldn't be able to move your body in space, or to have a spatial orientation, or to avoid bumping into things all the time.

That's what I found really fascinating, because often, since we have the technology, it feels self-evident that this is how it works. But it makes sense that it might be more complicated.

And when it comes to going a level deeper into the biology, coming back to this notion of relationality: if we don't understand living entities as shapes or structures or forms that are given, but as processes — constantly processing something within an environment that is itself processing — then it changes. Inside a cell, for example, there are hundreds of different processes going on in a tiny environment all at the same time, choreographed into different rhythms and speeds. It's a highly complex system.

If you try to think about these processes as movements, then the whole question is: you only have movement in relation, as you said, to some other kind of structure. And where do you end this scaling? Because logically you can just have a relation to a relation, and it never ends. But then you end up with the question: how do you order something to make some form, in a structure or a conceptual framework, where you can't speak of something that is given, but always changing — and changing in relation to something else, differently?

That is a question that modern process biology is trying to come to grips with. What do we do, and how do we think of living entities, if we don't think about structures performing things, but about processes, constantly interrelated?

And I guess in some ways these two levels go together. But, yeah, cognitively it's a great thing to think about without any conclusion maybe. But in some ways I think it's alien to philosophy — that's not how the history of it goes. It's difficult. It's easier to categorize, to long for structures, forms, and functions. And I think probably this is the first approach you have, and then thinking about it differently comes with work. And, you know, a lot of knowledge was produced that way. So it's not something superfluous, but it is more complex than that.

□ I would like to bring in a question about rhythm, knowing that you also work a lot on that, and I'm currently working on rhythm myself. Maybe from what you were just saying about movement and relationality, I'll start with a very simple example. Lately I find myself fascinated by my perception of moving things, of things that move in some contexts.

And I have two examples in particular. One is that I started becoming more sensitive to the fact that when I'm, for example, walking in a forest, or when I'm looking outside of my window and there is a garden, something very easily becomes strongly visible to me about movement — when, for example, an animal is moving. So I realized, in a forest I would very easily notice if there is something moving, not because the rest is static, but because I started to think it's maybe a different rhythm: the rhythm in which it moves, or a rhythm that operates as a kind of interruption, or intervention, within the rhythm of the forest, let's say.

And this became more vivid last summer. I went on an excursion with my partner and with my child in Liguria, in Italy. There is a place where, if you go into the sea with a boat, you might be able to see some whales or maybe, more easily, dolphins — which is the animal we did see. So we went on this whale-watching excursion, which means that for many hours you are sitting or standing in a boat looking at the seascape, which is constantly moving. And at some point it all became, for me, about, on the one hand, really enjoying this very meditative movement made of repetition — some repetition with differences, of course, but still repetition. And then realizing, OK, I'm only waiting to see some movement that looks different from this one and which would be a sign that there is an animal underneath — I mean, maybe a big mammal underneath the surface of the sea. It made me think of rhythm — perhaps because of the rhythmic nature of waves, or the interplay between repetition and interruption, or a sudden change in rhythm, which immediately captured my attention. Which is maybe a way of getting into this complexity of movement and the perception of movement that we have.

○ I mean, in a way, we are, as social animals, tuned to movements. And social perception, in sociology and psychology, is the sheer necessity — as social animals we need to read the clues of other animals to survive. And so there is an inventory of movements that we know instantly, or in a way know how to react to — perceive as dangerous for ourselves, or as friendly. Some of that is learned, but there is a variety. I think there are these social cues that we needed to learn, as

social animals, to survive: to distinguish different kinds of movement, whether it's an impending act of violence or something that is a friendly approach.

And then, when it comes to the interaction of movements, it involves the combination of changing bodily configurations as bodies interact within a certain rhythm or timeframe, and these interactions need to be choreographed. Depending on the size of the space, you have to find ways to either repeat movements or move around them. Like a choreographer arranges the movement of bodies inside a given space in a given time.

And this, I think, is a way to understand how nature is creatively arranging the complexity of things that are going on and that have to be done to keep processes going inside the body or between different bodies. It's just not doable, I think, otherwise. And there is this wonderful Goethe quote — or his reflection on it — where he says that nature is constantly operating on the border of chaos. So within his reflections on the metamorphosis of plants, you always have to bring movement into a certain order to get rhythm. But the moment it loses rhythm, you're operating on this border of turning into the chaotic — and then you either perish, or something new arises from it.

But it's the necessity of nature to work like this: to be creative, to work economically, using the same processes and repetitions, but at the same time never producing something identical — always something similar, and so introducing novelty.

***** There is an interesting way in which Tina Campt speaks about the rhythm of images, and about motion, not movement — how the rhythm of images reveals motion as a subjective and political category. Her analysis of the work of Arthur Jafa, especially *Love is the Message, The Message is Death* (2016), is wonderful. The piece uses different found footage to show the constant racial violence Black and Brown subjects experience in the US. The narrative follows, literally, the rhythm of images and songs.

Rhythm brings in a hidden, common understanding of movements — a different kind of consciousness of movement shared by the Black community: an "undercommons." It seems Jafa decided to escape the emphasis on the visual, the emphasis on sheer images. Such a shift from visuality to sound is also a way of recognizing movement on a different level, let's say.

/ There's also this other book by Tina Campt, *Listening to Images*, which is very interesting in that respect, because she's really inviting us to — I mean, she's talking about images, identificatory images of mostly African American people in the U.S. — and she's inviting us to look at these images not actually through a visual lexicon, but to listen to them and try to tune into the kind of vibrations or movements that are frozen in these images. So the fear, the intimidation, but maybe also some kind of secret acts of rebellion that are pulsing under the skin and are not visible, but you can kind of sense them through a different mode of approaching.

And yeah, for some reason I have to think of the work of a scholar called Amelia Groom. She's an Australian art historian, and she's currently — and has been for a few years already — looking at the work of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, who were two artists, writers, and resistance fighters living during the Second World War in France. From Paris, they went into exile on the island of Jersey, in the English Channel. And when Jersey was occupied by the Nazis, they started to perform acts of resistance.

I mean, they were completely forgotten for many years, and then in the '90s Claude Cahun became a big hit, especially through these images of cross-dressing and gender performativity. But it's also interesting that the art historical canon kind of erased the partner, even though Marcel Moore was the photographer of those pictures, and the whole work was a collaboration between the two of them, as lovers and friends — and actually they were step-sisters as well.

But Amelia is looking at the way in which these performances were not just enacted in relationality between the two of them, but also with the island. Jersey experiences extreme tides — it completely changes its land dimension and shape. So the fact that they were continuously changing their appearances and dressing up, cross-dressing — she says they were performing with the land, with the water, changing shape all the time. Also with cats — and cats are animals that are very malleable, in a way. Which I think is amazing. Their form of resistance was also inspired by this idea of camouflaging.

So they basically impersonated — or they spread around anti-Nazi propaganda, or collages, but also flyers. These were written in German, so they were posturing as if they were German traitors spreading propaganda against the Nazis, to drive them crazy, basically. And it's such an anti-identity form of resistance, in which you step outside the identity of the resistance fighter, or the victim, or the persecuted — and you complicate the power positions.

And Amelia, in her essay, also talks about an episode of a Nazi officer who refused to accept that the island would change through the tides. So he said, like, "I'm not going to move," and he died — he drowned in the water. I don't know if it's real or not, but it's this fixation of "No, this is the land, this is what it is," and refusing to believe that it could change.

It's a beautiful work...

* It's very interesting. I was thinking about Claude Cahun and her underground work during the Nazi occupation in France. As a form of political resistance, it was difficult to pin down into something concrete — it was about changing identities. It countered a violent regime performatively, in underground spaces. Yet it was so effective and scary for the Nazi regime, precisely because of this queer and submerged quality.

□ From what you just shared, I wonder if we can also use it as a possibility of opening up a question around disguise and identity. I was thinking of the anti-Nazi propaganda written in German as a way of acting or performing propaganda in disguise. And then I was thinking — is it a form of make-up? It also made me start thinking of other forms of, maybe in the first place, political intervention or activism, but maybe also other forms of *doing* that operate in a similar way.

/ I think the political conditions of the present are, in a way, encouraging these forms of disguise. I think they're important to revisit. I mean, I know — not that in Europe we are necessarily moving fully in this direction, but in the United States, since certain terms are now considered, I don't know... illegal? I'm not even sure what the exact term is, but within faculties like gender studies or critical race studies, people are using different language to disguise and to protect themselves — so, in a way, it's a form of survival, of resistance.

It's interesting also in relation to the performativity of social media, which we are very accustomed to, also for activism. It's always about projecting an identity or an image. So it will be interesting to see what remains underground, or what kind of activism in disguise might develop within certain media. Now, I don't have examples in mind that use contemporary technologies, but maybe we'll learn about them in a few years, in the future.

✱ It's interesting also, the historical aspect of make-up, as you were highlighting — the moments in which the term means different things, when there are different possibilities. And yeah, I think I agree with you that it's a historical moment in which we will have to disguise and operate underground.

□ I find it interesting that we are also kind of landing on language now, after discussing a lot about visualization – the visual, and images. What are the possibilities of language as make-up? In many dynamics today we see appropriation of language from different sides, actually with different intentions. But also sometimes, what I am seeing more in Europe, are strategies or tactics of not using the language we would normally use, in order not to reveal how we think about things in contexts where we feel they become more dangerous.

I remember having a conversation with some colleagues in recent months while we were all writing funding applications for artistic organizations. Normally, we would use inclusive language. In Italian there is — or was — a need to invent inclusive language in terms of gender. This is the language we would normally use in all our texts and communication materials. But most of us decided not to use inclusive language in the funding applications in the end, which we also perceived as wrong somehow, but also as a necessary gesture of protecting what we are actually doing by not making it so visible or turning it into a statement. In this current moment, I'm still very ambivalent about this decision. I don't think it's necessarily right.

And then it makes me think about invention — or whether there is another way that is not about appropriating existing language or dis-identifying with existing language. What possibilities do we have in terms of invention of language? Maybe in a sense make-up is not necessarily transforming into another that we know, or that we know what it is — but transforming into an otherness that we don't know or don't want to define, and that is not capturable. Or maybe, as in rituals, it is not about men dressing up as women and the other way around, but dressing up as some entity that has no name yet. I don't know. It's maybe a bit romantic, but...

/ No, I think it's very relevant, and maybe it also has to do with... to put it simply... questions of anonymity, for example. So, like, how to use language in a way in which identity is disguised? Maybe it's not about the language, but about the emitter, the sender. I think of pro-Palestine activism — it's quite evident that people are being clearly targeted for their activism. So there is really an urgency in protecting one's identity, while at the same time not disguising the language, because I think that's the point now, right? How can you still use the language you want to use — you know, talking about genocide, talking about ethnic cleansing? How do you continue to use that language without exposing yourself?

And I think there are different strategies, which can be collectivism, for example. If you collectivize the identity, then it's not one person who is persecuted.

✱ That is really similar to the notion of opacity or relationality in Édouard Glissant, which is about socializing, not disguising. So when you socialize it, a statement becomes untraceable in a way. And of course, the transparency of language has always been a privilege of the powerful, in the same way in which the transparency of the image has always been the privilege of white people, as bell hooks writes. But on the other hand, I believe that the censorship on freedom of speech, which is happening, for instance in the UK, is very worrying.

/ In Germany.

✱ In Germany, yes. So it's interesting to think about language as a term not necessarily linked to logical language or written language, or some kind of language in the media, but as a space of possible articulations of a narrative.

□ Big question, maybe... I was thinking in relation to scientific language, which also has the responsibility of describing and, in a way, of being close and faithful to reality — but at the same time, a language that by describing also makes up a reality, or discovers one. Because in the end it makes something known that was not known before.

So yeah. I also like the reference to opacity as defined by Glissant, which is widely used, I think, in our field at the moment. But maybe in relation to make-up and what we've been discussing — this idea that, for me, counterweights a certain desire for transparency, for knowing, maybe very much connected to visuality

indeed: knowing by seeing or knowing by being able to define something. Opacity makes a space for uncertainty, for holding onto not knowing, but also for a complexity of adding layers.

Sometimes — and here I'm thinking of a reference that Lara Favaretto shared in relation to this project — she talks about the misty nature of a conversation, its fogginess. This materiality of what makes something opaque is not created by taking a layer away, but more often by adding extra layers in between, let's say, a subject and an object, or a subject looking at something as an object.

✱ This makes me think again about the materiality of make-up you were describing — the adding of layers rather than taking them away. When you speak and communicate, you don't necessarily clear the field; you are adding complexity. We often think about communication as a kind of efficient activity that continuously creates an empty space which then needs to be filled again. But I really like this idea of adding layers of complexity to a conversation that doesn't really create an empty space or clarify. It's interesting to think about a conversation as a way of looking and searching through layers which are added in the process.

□ OK. Thank you for this conversation.

✱ Thank you.

/ Thank you so much. Thank you, and thank you for listening.