

competitive camaraderie in performance to the tensions of the world around the dance arena, specifically national political violence, hinges on the experience, expressivity, and agency of the singing dancing body as a warrior figure" (127). The margins of politics and performance blur. Dancers explore and imagine violence through performance without this practice devolving into violent conflict; violence is the spur for performance, not its actualization.

Chapter 5 engages in a different kind of politics by focusing on the South African music icon, Johnny Clegg, and his contributions to *ngoma* at esiPongweni and its performance on the world stage. "Sikeyi," as he is popularly known, is recognized as a musician, activist, businessman, anthropologist, teacher, friend, linguist, and culture hero to the community. This is the most comprehensive and culturally sensitive appreciation of Johnny Clegg's contributions to *ngoma* and his post-Juluka work. "To understand the course *ngoma* has taken around Keates Drift, the values it has come to encapsulate for its participants, and the promise it holds for them, one must understand the development of Clegg's career and creative work" (153). Clegg and his collaborators made *ngoma* "a form of global Afropop" that "ngoma singer-dancers hope" will benefit them (171). Clegg also wrote pioneering scholarly texts on *ngoma*, and so it is fascinating to read its trace in Meintjes's work.

Clegg's apparent public silence on HIV and AIDS opens the debate in chapter 6. Disease afflicts dancers and their families in ways that complicate *ngoma* aesthetics. "Well-being is noticed and monitored, always, and with heightened trepidation and verbal evasion in the presence of HIV and AIDS" (183 f.). In this chapter, Meintjes charts a shift in dancers' attitudes that are complexly related to the catastrophic denialism of the Mbeki-era government, and then to the subsequent treatment campaigns of the Zuma presidency. "I wish to understand how silence comes to feel necessary and how community members, especially soldiers, friends, fathers, and brothers, organize around it or through it in order to cope with the reduced physical capacity of men, especially of men who perform *ngoma*" (184). Factors of masculinity and *hloniphala* (norms of respect) play an important role in explaining this silence. Meintjes records how men learn to care for themselves and their friends and families even as "the heavy stigma of HIV pushes their relationships to the limit" (185). Dancers seem to manage by employing a "poetics of ambiguity" that she repeats like a mantra in the words of a dancer: "We know, but we can't say for sure" (187).

In "The Digital Homestead" (chap. 7), Meintjes reports on the making of two studio recordings by Umzansi Zulu Dancers, the group lead by Siyazi Zulu. She describes how these artists are negotiating a precarious existence on the fringe of impoverished regional markets, and equates their position to "the many wage laborers who have become expendable to the South African state" (213). The creation of a "homestead" aesthetic is a dynamic musical response to the constraints of working in semiprofessional city studios with inexperienced producers. This strategy works by densely layering sounds and emphasizing the timbres characteristic of the rural home-

stead. In chapter 8, "Brokering the Body," Meintjes charts *ngoma*'s moves from local to global once again, this time focusing on the role of cultural brokers who "wager on the warrior" (241). Zulu men continue to struggle with and against representations hardened in the popular imagination and exploited by the market. "As labor fails," she says, "commodified culture prevails" (242). *Ngoma* is simultaneously a site of struggle and a means of transacting in the world.

"Dust of the Zulu" crafts together the work of its dancers without denying the complexity of their shattered worlds. The technique of juxtaposing images, texts, and voices in time and space exposes a fractured canvas. Meintjes carries with her visions of the past and present ripe with ambiguity. It is a measure of her steadfastness that she maintains a reasoned critical balance in respect of her subject, and in the face of the untold deprivations and personal tragedies afflicting those about whom she writes with such gentleness and care. In the end, her commitment to the esiPongweni community wins out in a book that is replete with revelations that are by turns tremendously moving, frightening, disconcerting, and inspiring.

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**Plemons, Eric:** *The Look of a Woman. Facial Feminization Surgery and the Aims of Trans-Medicine*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. 192 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-6914-1. Price: £ 19.99

"The Look of a Woman" is based on an ethnographic study in the United States (US) about Facial Feminization Surgery (FFS) and its impact on trans-(women's) therapeutics, and on the performativity/materialism of the aesthetic body. The monograph has six chapters that chart the development of the surgical techniques, the material approaches to patients in the clinics, and the phenomenological experiences of people who have undergone FFS. The book argues that our understanding of "sex" has departed from the genital-centric model constructed in the early days of transsexual therapeutics. Other characteristics of the body have become central in recognising a (trans-) sexed body. The book considers the facial aesthetic (of trans-women) essential for being recognised and treated as women in society. As such, being recognised as women is possible through performative bodily morphologies beyond the genitals in everyday life. By extension, Plemons argues, FFS is a result of integrating a facial performative model of sex/gender into trans-medicine procedures, and, although it has not supplanted genital surgery for many (due to costs), for those who can afford it, it is another (important) way of articulating an alternative view of the sexed body.

The book makes contributions to the area of trans-aesthetics. Chapter one characterises the emergent practice of FFS in the life of surgeon Oosterhout in the US. It describes the ways that science was used by Oosterhout to augment and realise facial binary sex differences in more precise metric terms. The book leads the reader to reflect on the role that the face has in social relations for trans-women. The (surgically changed) face for trans-women is

elevated to new lofty heights by Oosterhout, and through the first part of the book, arguing that for many hundreds of his patients, FFS is “the most important intervention in medical transition [and] had nothing to do with genitals at all” (37). While similar claims have been made elsewhere about the importance of facial aesthetics to being recognised as women or men, the claims in this section of the book are not empirically supported – although they are later. Instead, an interview with Oosterhout himself offered anecdotal claims that he had received from the 1,700 patients he had operated upon. Moreover, while previous empirical claims have looked at visible bodily aesthetics more generally as a social transistor for gender recognition, according to Candace, a participant in the book, even when FFS is a success “too many other things about [her] body … signified maleness” (28) – this is somewhat contrary to the main argument about the face being the gender recognition transistor par excellence. Nonetheless, this chapter provides an informed account of how the multiple surgical procedures that constitute FFS have been gradually incorporated into trans-(women’s) therapeutics in a medico-economic system that facilitates financially-determined elective surgical procedures.

The next chapter follows some consultations by Oosterhout and another surgeon called Beck. The differences in their approaches to their patients’ consultation are analysed as two major performative approaches towards facial aesthetics. The former using a “scientific” approach based on natural masculine and feminine biomarkers from which the trans-woman can become normalised within the range of “natural” facial femininity. The latter using a discursive strategy that enlists the white standards of US beautification and “sex appeal,” through a “self-determination” model. It is exemplary that Plemons’ ethnography highlights the oft missing agency of the surgeons and their approaches to their patients in terms of the complex relationships in the consulting room.

In chapter three, Plemons develops an understanding about the clinic setting, the important relationships between the surgeons, office assistants, and patients and situates FFS interventions within a humanistic framework of “restitutive intimacy” (87). Here, the love of the surgeons and their assistants alongside the surgical work, by those patients interviewed, demonstrates the fundamental power of life-changing FFS they receive from the surgeons (when nothing goes wrong or when the surgery provides negligible changes). Plemons casts the surgeons with a “purity of motive” in relation to what the patient needs rather than how much the surgeon wants to make financially. Much anti-aesthetic surgery theories suggest that surgeons are either doing their work for money and/or power over (usually) female bodies. It is only relatively recently that we have had a more complex debate about the inherent agency of both surgeons, staff, and patients. Plemons adds to this debate, by highlighting the discursive work that the surgeons and their assistants do with the patients when the “specter of financial gain threatens the purity of beneficence that surgeons claim motivates them” (87), while also acknowledging that the financial rewards and payments are anything but neutral. This care

work functions prior to surgery and post-operatively to ensure a sense of collaborative working toward “the enactment of woman” (88) and that the sums payed for the procedures seem marginal compared to the benefits of becoming woman.

The next few chapters address theoretical debates about recognition and then performativity and materiality. Firstly, the book draws on the recognition debates within social philosophy in relation to authentic/inauthentic, visible/invisible, citizenship approved/refused and rich/poor trans-people and how these recognition effects developed in and through trans-political discourses. Setting up the dichotomy of looking trans and looking woman in trans discourse, Plemons illustrates that FFS insignificantly intersects with the medicolegal and economic apparatus surrounding trans-therapeutics (in the US), which continues to retain a genital-centric model of sex/gender, alongside more personalised “recognition relations” (108). Arguing that political theorists concerned with recognition are mono-focused on individualist notions of recognition, this section of the book offers an analysis which is not entirely clear. While Plemons’ analysis is generally sophisticated, it has minor shortcomings. I argue that this section is not entirely fair to the trans-debate about surgery, because it does not emphasise the multivalent recognition of trans-women within cisgender and trans-populations or medicolegal contexts regardless of facial feminization. This is not to say that FFS is not relevant to some, and indeed can, as noted, be a lifeline to safety, life chances, and self-worth, but I suggest that many trans-women are sexed as women in spite of not having FFS or a feminine face, of which there are multiple examples in the wider literature. In the debate about performativity and materialist approaches, Plemons wants to argue for a “middle way” between the opposing factions. Here Plemons nearly falls back into an essentialism, understanding that sex differences in this “time and place” are set for and by all. To argue that something is crucial for making “woman” possible is not as generalisable as he thinks. As such this section of the book does not look past either the face or the genitals or US-medicolegal frameworks and out towards trans-therapeutics, medicolegal contexts, and interpersonal relationships that acknowledge a self-determined approach to (trans-)women’s bodily aesthetics.

“The Look of a Woman” will hopefully supplement existing understandings of trans-embodiment and self-image. Plemons’ blending of qualitative and theoretical research is nuanced. I am less convinced of the text’s overall worth for those researching in the field of trans-therapeutics outside the US, with more self-determined approaches to trans-embodiment and more progressive medicolegal frameworks.

Zowie Davy

**Poser, Alexis von, und Bianca Baumann (Hrsg.):**  
Heikles Erbe. Koloniale Spuren bis in die Gegenwart.  
Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2016. 389 pp. ISBN 978-3-95498-250-9. Preis: € 48,00

“Heikles Erbe. Koloniale Spuren bis in die Gegenwart” ist die Publikation zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung,