Taking Sides and De-Colonizing Practices of Dissent

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In her book *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak concentrates on aesthetics, despite all the problems with this legacy. In her view, the space of aesthetic education "allows us to survive in the singular and the unverifiable." (Spivak 2012: 2) "Aesthetic education is Spivak's call to ab-use globalizing oppression through the epistemological."[1] (Gershon 2015: 5) Affiliated to that focus on aesthetics is Spivak's idea "that can be described as sabotaging Schiller." Therefore, it is urgently required

> "to find something relating to 'our own history' to counteract the fact that the Enlightenment came, to colonizer and colonized alike, through colonialism, to support a destructive 'free trade', and that top-down policy breaches of Enlightenment principles are more rule than exception." (Spivak 2012: 4)

It is the imagination that can be trained by aesthetic education. But that implies that we have to

> "learn to do violence to the epistemo-epistemological difference and remember that this is what education 'is', and thus keep up the work of displacing belief onto the terrain of the imagination, attempt to access the epistemic. The displacement of belief onto the terrain of the imagination can be a description of reading in its most robust sense." (Spivak 2012: 10)

Gregory Batson's phrase "double bind" is fundamental for Spivak's concept of aesthetic education. A *double bind* involves a binary in which two subject positions can simultaneously oppose, yet inform one another. Spivak describes the double bind as "learning to live with contradictory instructions." (Spivak 2012, 3)

In respect of the double bind Spivak follows neither classical ideological criticism, or the "hermeneutics of suspicion," (Sedgwick 2003: 124) nor does she claim

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1   Instead the formulation to use Enlightenment from below, Spivak suggests the expression "'ab-use' because the Latin prefix 'ab' says much more than 'below'. Indicating both 'motion away' and 'agency, point of origin', 'supporting', as well as 'the duties of slaves', it nicely captures the double bind of the postcolonial and the metropolitan migrant regarding the Enlightenment." (Spivak 2012: 3f)

an essential other knowledge outside the European framing, like some radical de-colonial attempts do. In contrast to Friedrich Schiller, who "tried to undo the double bind of mind and body by suggesting the *Spieltrieb*," (Spivak 2012: 19) Spivak tries to be aware of the double bind. This has the effect that art is not conceptualized as a balancing act that will save society, like it is in Schiller's thinking.

I would like to describe the double bind as a side taking that is not understood as a position opposite another. Confronting the double bind means recognizing contradictions and dealing with ambivalences. It is not a side taking that positions oneself on the assumed right side, but an attempt to understand a situation in all its ambivalences and contradictions and to deal with them. Due to this perspective, the question arises: How can we differentiate side-taking and distinguish it from a binary concept of inside/outside on the one hand and from an ambivalence, or an 'anything-goes' attitude, on the other hand? With the following analysis of art projects by Adrian Piper and Iris Kensmil, I want to elaborate a side-taking which deals with the double bind of aesthetics. They reveal aesthetic practices in their 'dispositif' constitution in contrast to an (autonomous) 'aesthetic regime' (Rancière 2011),[2] meaning to expose the entanglement between aesthetics, politics, and ethics.

During our Symposium in 2018, the starting point of the book at hand, Athena Athanasiou mentioned that to take sides means to involve, to situate oneself in space and time, it signifies to act from a specific and local background, refer to local knowledge, and to feel and to think what's at stake. In the following text, I focus on aesthetics in relation to epistemology and ethics. Therefore, I remove the idealization of art or the essential connection between art and resistance which one can find in Schiller's concept of aesthetic education. I follow Spivak's attempt to think of aesthetic education not as a resolve of the double bind, or a sensual practice which is able to collapse binaries like mind and body, but as a call for displacement. She writes: "my task is to undertake such a displacement." (Spivak 2012: 32) She ab-uses binary constructions, to reverse and displace them. My perception and reading of artworks by Piper and Kensmil, which follows brief reflections on the term criticism, focuses on practices that cause such ab-use.

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2   According to Rancière, the "aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art, and at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity. It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself. Schiller's aesthetic state, which is this regime's first manifesto (and remains, in a sense, unsurpassable), clearly indicates this fundamental identity of opposites. The aesthetic state is a pure instance of suspension, a moment when form is experienced for itself. Moreover, it is the moment of the formation and education of a specific type of humanity." (Ibid. 23f)

Displace Critique through (Micro-)Practice

In the 1990s, post-structuralism, with its new take on traditional concepts, was regarded as an independent, radical form of social critique, which led to a then highly suitable formulation of critical theory. Affirmation played a central role in Jacques Derrida's attempt to "imagine another historicity," (Derrida 2006: 94) and Jean-François Lyotard countered the aesthetics of negation and examined desire as the driving force of the political (Lyotard 1993), while Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari thought of transformation as an essential characteristic of existence that equals a constant process of becoming (Deleuze/Guattari 1983). In recent years, however, the post-structuralist form of critique has come under attack. The concept of critique, developed in sociology, distinguishes itself from post-structural cultural analysis of complex power constellations and knowledge systems, and declines the problematics of subject, truth, and great order, in favor of the investigation of "society as a whole." (van Dyk 2012: 186) Sociologist Silke van Dyk notes that "the preference for (self-willed) micro-politics, complex culprit relations, and interpretive struggles […] in (recent) social criticism is […] considered obsolete in the face of the great crisis." (Ibid.) According to one argument, post-structural critique lost its political clout when it became politically established, escaping into academically harmless abstraction and rhizomatic textures. It is only about the exchange value of an academic theory but not about its usefulness as a socially critical instrument as a consequence of which there is no genuine social commitment. In contrast, post-structuralists complain that academic philosophy continues to ignore post-structuralist thinking and that it has become accepted only in cultural studies (Lorey/Nigro/Raunig 2011: 18).

The (political-theoretical) opposition entails the risk to miss a significant aspect of post-structuralist theory and critique: i.e., the critical potential of aesthetics as a cognitive instrument both analytically and performatively. This is equally important for art and art theory. Post-structuralism has led to new perceptions of art, not only based on biographic or reception aesthetics, but rather on the material and formal nature of aesthetic practices. In favor of a new criticism, post-structuralist thinkers reflected the aesthetic structure of theory itself, and questioned the normative notions of knowledge and science. In the 1960s, Roland Barthes posited such a criticism, defying the reading instructions of traditional French literary studies. While the traditional function of criticism was judging,

> "the true 'criticism' of institutions and languages does not consist in 'judging' them, but in *perceiving*, in *separating*, in *dividing*. To be subversive, the critic does not have to judge, it is enough that he talks of language instead of using it. What new criticism is reproached with today is not so much that it is 'new', but that it is

fully 'criticism', that it re-allocates the roles of author and commentator and in so doing attacks the linguistic order." (Barthes 2007: 3)

Barthes understands criticism as a performative writing-thinking-act:

"We know that old criticism cannot write in any other way unless it begins to think in some other way. For to write is *already* to organize the world, it is *already* to think (to learn a language is to learn how one thinks in that language)." (Barthes 2007: 12)

Similar objections to traditional forms of criticism are also found in American and British conceptual art of the 1960s. Conceptual art, with its self-critical reflection and analysis of the conditionality of artistic practices, attacks the formalist principle of modernist reduction and the accompanying normative framework. One goal was to uncover prevailing authoritarian art paradigms, which are considered natural, through analytical procedures.

While the group *Art & Language* paradigmatically advocated an analytic-theoretical and linguistic-oriented perspective (Burn/Ramsden 1974), conceptual artists such as Robert Smithson and Adrian Piper combined a deconstruction of the normative rules of artistic practice with new aesthetic procedures. Piper, whose performances are discussed in the following paragraphs, focuses on functional issues. She is self-critical and criticizes the conditionality of artistic practices and hierarchies, while working on normative boundaries and releasing a poetic force of aesthetic practices, procedures, and modes of presentation. My analysis of her *Funk Lessons* embraces the concepts of affirmation, transformation, and critique, and creates a concrete analysis of Piper's project, from a post-structuralist perspective as a political micro-practice.[3] By means of aesthetic practices, the artist put up normative notions of social and artistic aesthetic reality for negotiation, and opens the possibility of new ways of thinking and acting. Adrian Piper and Iris Kensmil are artists of color. The choice is not accidental, to the contrary. Both artists develop a critical perspective that goes beyond an ordinary institutional critique. Their works confront me with my blind spots when examining art in its normative framework and draw my attention to my privileged white perspective and the effects of unconscious identifications. I hope to fulfill the responsibility that correlates with my choice.

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3   This formulation is a shift from micro-politics to the micro-practice of aesthetic procedures, which by practice aim at reflection in contrast to political action.

Funk as a Participative Collective Medium

Adrian Piper (*1948 in New York City) is a first-generation concept artist. Participatory practices play a major role in her work, which is based on artistic processes, as in the tradition of the Cage School, and the action events of Fluxus and Happening. Such participatory approaches, which integrate the audience through instructions to the production process, are fundamental to those artistic works which critically examine the divorce of art and reality (cf. Kravagna 1999). Piper remarks, that ignorance and xenophobia have shaped the audience's perception of her performances from the outset, especially in relation to the aesthetic language of a black working-class culture (Piper 1996: 201). She points to a fundamental connection between art and reality on the level of perception and understanding. Accordingly, it is not surprising that she does not take side inside or outside the aesthetic regime. On the contrary, she entangles the practices she is using in the social field with those in the artistic field. In doing so, she reflects her artistic work in the social field of community back into the art world, in order to disrupt and transform the inherent and unconscious patterns of perception in each case.

Figure 1: Adrian Piper, "Funk Lessons", 1983, Video, 00:15:17. Edited and directed by Sam Samore, produced by Tom Oden. Documentation of an audience-interactive performance of Funk Lessons at the University of California, Berkeley. Details: Stills # 250#.
Figure 2: Adrian Piper, "Funk Lessons", 1983, Video, 00:15:17. Edited and directed by Sam Samore, produced by Tom Oden. Documentation of an audience-interactive performance of Funk Lessons at the University of California, Berkeley. Details: Stills # 251

Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. © APRA Foundation Berlin

Between 1982 and 1984, Piper performed her piece *Funk Lessons*, which was a collaborative experiment in cross-culture transfusion, seeking to combine political content with pleasurable experiences. She started this project about the history of African-American funk and soul music shortly after finishing her PhD in philosophy at Harvard University in 1981. Under the title "GET DOWN AND PARTY.

TOGETHER" she then exercised the work with participants from the university, the surrounding neighborhood, and those in the art field. A 15-minute video, directed by Sam Samore and made from footage of Piper's *Funk Lessons* at the University of California, Berkeley, begins with images of a jukebox, focusing on the music apparatus and its mechanics, which is a bit reminiscent of Dziga Vertov's imagery. This is followed by a short sequence from the American TV Show *Soul Train*, a program which was produced by People of Color for a black audience. From a close-up of dancers from the show, the video switches to Piper's performance at U.C. Berkeley.[4] The subsequent recordings are accompanied by displayed didactic sentences such as "FUNK IS MODULAR", "FUNK IS IMPROVISATIONAL", or "SHOULDER SHRUG." The cinematic presentation of *Funk Lessons* is a montage of insights into the performance, as it combines sequences from the dancers in *Soul Train*, Piper's later explanations from an interview, video music clips by James Brown and Aretha Franklin, and a documentary recording of a racist attribution to Rock 'n' Roll music, uttered by a representative of the Alabama White Citizens Council, who predicts whites becoming black through Rock 'n' Roll.[5]

The white middle-class's widespread racist rejection of the Funk idiom as black working-class culture was the point of departure for Piper's didactic approach to her lesson with *Funk* as a collective and participatory medium of self-transgression and affection (Piper 1996: 196), and a means of acquiring insight into cultural and racist barriers. With 'Funk' and 'Lesson',[6] the artist assembles two concepts that are connoted opposites.

In 1985, according to Piper's later published comments on her performances, Funk, a typical expression of black culture in the 1970s, originates with black pop music and a dance style. Piper describes Funk as "a language of interpersonal communication and collective self-expression that has its origins in African tribal music and dance." (Piper 1996: 195) Funk is a shared pleasure and a dance, based on "a system of symbols, cultural meanings, attitudes, and patterns of movement that one must directly experience in order to understand fully." (Piper 1996: 195) She continues:

> "[...] whereas social dance in white culture is often viewed in terms of achievement, social grace or competence, or spectator-oriented entertainment, it is a collective and participatory means of self-transcendence and social union in black culture

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4   Cf. Funk Lessons (excerpt) http://www.adrianpiper.com/vs/video_fl.shtml, last access 3.25.2020.

5   In the documentary recording, the speaker states: "[...] the obscenity and vulgarity and the rock 'n' roll music [...]. It is obviously a means by which the white man and his children are driven to the level of the Negro [...]. It's obviously Negro music." (Funk Lessons 1983, 00:06:11)

6   'Dance lesson' is a standing concept, 'lesson' is not solely the (lecturing) lesson, but also meant to be an exercise.

along many dimensions, and so is often much more fully integrated into daily life."
(Ibid.)

In her performances, typically addressing more than 60 people, physical experiences of basic elements of musical dance intermix with cultural background information, such as in relation of funk to other, 'white' music. The performance not only conveys a shared experience, it also combines experience and reflection. The affirmation of funk does not invite mere identificatory intoxication, it also interrupts with affective power. Piper's method is comparable to Bertolt Brecht's model of *epic theater*, which, according to Walter Benjamin, is able to make readers or viewers participate and invites the actors to comment on their own roles. According to Benjamin, this reflection is caused by the principle of interruption, which he describes as a method of montage. The interruption has an organizing function that emancipates itself from a stimulus reaction: "It arrests the action in its course, and thereby compels the listener to adopt an attitude vis-à-vis the process, the actor vis-à-vis his role." (Benjamin 2005: 778)

Piper transforms the original learning situation of the Funk lesson into a "didactic basis for cooperation" through discussions in small groups[7] and "social union replaced the audience-performer separation." (Piper 1996: 196) The artist tries to make it clear that what she "purported to teach was revealed to be a kind of fundamental sensory 'knowledge' that everyone has and can use." (Ibid.) The performance does not "aspire to experience black culture sympathetically or through participation," (Piper 1996: 208) nor is it acting as a work of art or interactive art, nor is it intended to create a dull sense of community. The participants are rather addressed as always already partaking; in the sense that they are part of a historical and cultural dispositif, in which they subjectivize themselves, their identity, their thinking, their perception, their ideas, and their attitude. Piper does not reduce the processes of subjectification to cognitive processes. On the contrary, in her performance she reflects the interplay between self-practice and discursively conveyed norms and attempts to detach Funk from its normative constriction by breaking it down into individual exercises in order to make it effective for individuation processes in a new way. This is what it says in a handout distributed for the *Funk Lessons*:

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7   According to Piper, the triggered reactions succeeded in parallel, organizing the groups to articulate dismantled beliefs. "The result was often cathartic, therapeutic, and intellectually stimulating." (Piper 1996: 198)

"1. Relaxed back [...].

4. Isolation of body parts: feet, knees, hips [...].

7. Personalistic: variation and play on fixed dance conventions for individual self-expression. [...]

9. Participatory and nonexhibitionistic: dance as an involving communal event, *not* entertainment for a spectator audience. [...]

12. Repetitive: patterns repeated multiply, or until they become second nature.

13. Improvisational: simple units of physical movement lead into different movements, gradually or instantaneously transforming extended pattern." (Piper 1996: 213)

Funk Lessons as a Reinforcing Practice

Piper wants to "restructure people's social identities by making accessible to them a common medium of communication – funk music and dance." (Piper 1996: 198) In *Funk Lessons*, body and thinking practices are related, affects are interrupted, and new feelings and transformations become possible. According to this, affects become cognizable as structured and determined by historical, cultural or social interpretive patterns.[8] By dividing Funk into individual physical exercises, she also fragments the unified and self-assertive image of Funk that has elicited different responses from middle-class white and black college graduates. She dismantles the affirmative identification, as well as the aversive racist dimensions of this image, and transforms Funk into a cultural medium of communication that is not oriented towards stereotypical patterns, but rather questions essentialist attributions based on dichotomies. Piper relates experience to analysis and a pleasurable to a critical attitude. She creates a milieu (the communicative medium of Funk) in which subjectifications on a micro-practical level are carried out in the exercise of a shared "physical language that everyone was then empowered to use." (Piper 1996: 195) Consequently, Piper's *Funk Lessons* can generally be described as a critical analysis of representation and as an exercise in self-empowerment. Instead of a critical mode of operating against racism, Piper moved to a creatively subversive one. She takes side not from an outside, but from within, she opens a position which deals with the

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8   According to Butler, we are "already social beings, working within elaborate social interpretations both when we feel horror and when we fail to feel it at all. Our affect is never merely our own: affect is, from the start, communicated from elsewhere. It disposes us to perceive the world in a certain way, to let certain dimensions of the world in and to resist others. But if a response is always a response to a perceived state of the world, what is it that allows some aspect of the world to become perceivable and another not?" (Butler 2009: 50)

"double bind: The anxiety and fear response to what is perceived as alien and threatening carries with it the implicit belief that the Other is *superior*: in strength, cunning, endurance, and understanding – hence the myth of blacks as bigger, stronger, cooler, sexier, wiser, hipper, meaner, and so on. White Americans then get to feel inferior, not only to what they are not (European) because of what they are (African-influenced) but also to what they are (African-influenced) because of what they are not (Afro-American). Blacks become an object of fear, loathing, admiration, and awe." (Piper 1996: 208)

The heterogeneous and diversified social community, sought by Piper, was at odds with U.S. society in the 1980s, which was characterized by homogenization and as-similation, and in which, by adapting, black Americans succeeded in achieving a certain political, economic, social, and economic equality. Inclusion in the (white) community was linked to the exclusion of certain cultural life practices. Thus, as a medium of cultural communication, Piper had to abandon Funk, which she de-scribes as central to her life and her identity as a black woman. She responded to this unreasonable demand by sharing "this idiom with my audience so I could use it successfully in my work as a recognized and comprehended medium of com-munication, or shared language." (Piper 1996: 202) Piper's affirmation of Funk is indebted to a critical view of the norms taken at face value by white society and its high culture as well as her refusal to subordinate or adapt herself to its value sys-tem. Piper had to radically question the understanding of her role as an artist and her status as a relatively privileged member of (white) society in order to refer to Funk as "an unbelievably rich and enriching art form" and seize it "for the cultural benefit of my largely white, upper-middle-class audience." (Piper 1996: 203) Piper had to emancipate herself from the social hierarchy and not to be subsumed by it in order to realize that "black working-class culture [...] has invaluable gifts to offer that audience, and not just the other way around." (Ibid.)

Piper reflects on the conditions of inclusion or exclusion in reality and art. On one hand, she addresses the demands, requirements, and impositions linked to the offer to participate and be part of the white culture and community, and, on the other hand, the often unconscious acts required to adapt to the values of the culture in which one wishes to participate. In her performances she confirms and explores the various cultural dimensions of her identity. She uses the different communication rules and expressions that she has

"learned in the process of my acculturation into white culture: the analytical mode, the formal and structural analysis, the process of considered and constructive ra-tional dialogue, the pseudoacademic lecture/demonstration/group participation style, and so on." (Piper 1996, 204)

Instead of side taking in an oppositional style her aim is to switch back and forth between the different processes of the cultures with ease.

The superimposition of socio-cultural experience and analytical reflection in *Funk Lessons* reveals American culture as African-American, which suppresses its elements of blackness, constructing them as an alien and threatening Other in order to reinforce white identity. The *Funk Lessons* performances aimed at becoming different, by being disturbing and becoming existentially tangible for the participants. The aesthetic translation into the medium of video embodies and performs the implicit, fundamentally sensory knowledge that is Piper's point of departure, and inserts it in the realm of art – as a text in itself, as well as a highly composed, cinematic montage of image and text material from different sources. In doing so, the medial turns *against* the medial, meaning that it is reflected as a medium and cannot be reduced to the function of a mere transmission. In other words, the video communicates its performance, interrupts referential references and, refers to what escapes representation, and at the same time becomes open to multiple discourses. In this way, Piper's *Funk Lessons* could be described as a micro-political critique. These *micro-politics*, as envisioned by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, refer to a political experiment and political commitment, which responds to the capitalist-led neutralization of "revolutionary politics" and the "revolutionary subject". Since the 1970s, "capitalism develops an economic order that could do without the state." (Deleuze/Guattari 2005: 454) The disciplinary society is thus replaced by the control society, and the formations of power which become effective within it operate through flexible normalization requirements. As a result of these changes, the tactics and strategies of a revolutionary policy, which oppose repressive normalization become ineffective. The individuals adjust their behavior accordingly, for the norms are no longer imposed repressively, rather they emerge as changeable from the abundance of social differences and deviations and serve as guidelines, which are rejected as desired.

Piper seems to be particularly interested in these self-styling practices, when she associates her aesthetic procedures with physical self-practice. In order to tease out the importance of working with an individual body, I will further introduce the concept of *micro-practice*.[9] For even if there are many links and overlaps between micro-politics and micro-practices, the term *micro-practice* can also focus on those power procedures of governmentality that are aimed at the individual body. Self-practices are utilized in the family as well as in institutions – such as schools,

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9   I owe the considerations of micro-practice to my joint research work with Sebastian Dieterich and Wiktoria Furrer in the project "Micro-practice. Forms of Resistance and Commitment". The research project was carried out at the Zurich University of the Arts and was at the same time a sub-project of the research group "Media and Participation." (Phase I, 2015–2018), htt ps://mediaandparticipation.com/about/?lang=en, last access 2.12.2021.

hospitals, and companies, so that the individual refers to themselves in an irreducible way and subjectivizes him/herself. In contrast, micro-politics can be related in particular to the bio-politics, which is directed at the population, and thus at the generic body, as the object to be controlled and influenced and which becomes effective, for example, through discourse practices and the epistemological rules of production of fixed knowledge. This differentiation does not imply that micro-practices are independent of discourse practices. On the contrary, physical micro-practices are always accompanied by mental representations. Developmental psychology shows that micro-practices are cultivated through initial contact with the caregivers, and as they develop further "social physical micro-practices are introduced, which are socially normative, and in a sense, learned nuances." (Downing 2006: 335)[10] Thus, micro-practices are profoundly ambivalent. They allow the individual to conform to a system, via the body, and they can also work with resistance as a way to open up internalized and normalized body practices, allowing them to become permeable to new afflictions. Piper's micro-practices mobilize the ambivalence of physical knowledge. With her exercises, Piper interrupts internalized perceptual pathways, interferes with their affective effectiveness, and opens up the possibility of new afflictions. In other words, the aesthetic processes do not reduce the bodily affect as a stimulus-response, but activate diverse affinities, giving the possibility of subjectifications, beyond binary patterns. The exercises can literally set hardened habitualized body practices into motion, rendering the normative notions and attributions of Funk on a micro-practical level ineffective. On this physical basis, forces can mobilize which resist the power of norms, and keep the dualisms and the optimization of differentiations and individualizations in check.

The artistic-aesthetic practices in *Funk Lessons* correspond to basic assumptions of micro-political thinking in several ways, for instance: a political project cannot be severed from a way of life; that changed behavior of individuals can shape the world; and the awareness that "no situation is ever fully predetermined by ideological structures or codings." (Massumi 2009: 7) Micro-politics attribute a central function to an event. In contrast to this Piper relies on a micro-practice, which works on a physical and sensory level, as it modifies *The Distribution of the Sensible* (Rancière 2011) and produces sensitivity to (micro-)events, it may also have micro-political effects. Thus, Piper's performances unveil the effect of a happening, as they are influenced by this micro-political perspective: opening up new possibilities of action and new forms of subjectification. Following Maurizio Lazzarato, this "instantaneous subjective change is an act of both resistance and creation,

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10   Physical micro-practice is described in developmental psychology as a competence of its own kind, as embodied skills. It stands for "what is sometimes referred to as procedural or implicit knowledge, a 'knowledge-how' as distinct from a 'knowing-that'." (Downing 2006: 337)

resistance to power and creation of possibilities whose limits are not clearly established." (Lazzarato 2011: 3) The micro-practice which has been described here, leads to an unstable state and overrides existing laws, norms, and values – that makes micro-practices comparable to the event. It opens up subjectification processes whose "modalities of existence and action are still undetermined." (Ibid.) From this perspective, micro-practices can be described as an opening, as an event, "a possibility for self-transformation and, consequently, of changing the socio-political situation." (Ibid.)

Affirmation – Transformation – Critique

Piper's affirmation transforms what is supposedly affirmed, and this is precisely where her critical potential lies. The transformant traverses the dichotomous attributions of Funk and thereby takes its basis from the logic of affirmation and negation. Piper transforms the image of Funk without dissolving the specifics of a Funk practice. Piper's project is impressive, in that it makes the interlocking of art and reality recognizable on the level of perception, thinking, and critical faculty.

Here, the artist does not limit her artistic practice to the studio, nor to the individual work on the material, nor to the mere production of an object, and does not rely on the division of labor between practice and theory. On the contrary, she actively participates in the discourse about her work. It exposes racist value judgments and perceptions in art, marks blind spots, and makes restrictions and unconscious cultural and social ideas visible, tangible, and reflective. Such delimitations between artists, art theorists, and critics are among the principles of conceptual art.

Actively she takes part in the discourse of art, creates a time-diagnostic instrument and acts as a medium of thought and action, which, referring to Barthes' quoted formulation, organizes the world in a certain way. Piper uses her methods to address the strategies of emancipatory concepts of the avant-garde: the creation of a specific experimental situation, which Benjamin once referred to as Brecht's dramatic laboratory in contrast to a total dramatic artwork (Benjamin 2005: 779). Piper's micro-practices do not fit into the notion of a (spectacular and dramatic) event. Nevertheless, the moment of interruption is just as inherent to them, as is the disruption and irritation of internalized emotions. As a result, the micro-practices exercises can develop a resisting potential. The criticism/politics of Piper's project is not judgmental and not revolutionary in the sense of a radical change. The micro-practices transform the subjectivization apparatus, and thus theorize and discuss these practices in the aesthetic translations, in video and associated image, and text materials which are exhibited. Piper performs with them as it were the discursive becoming of her practice. Piper's praxeological analytical approach

conveys itself, as a radical aesthetic process that begins with a fundamentally sensory knowledge, which dissolve the physical disciplines that follow the reductionist notion of Funk as an immediate affective expression, and transforms Funk into an affective communication medium, interpersonal communication, and collective self-presentation. Piper's aesthetic process, thus realizes an immanent critique in line with Brian Massumi – as a critique that differentiates and pluralizes in the tradition of post-structuralist thinking and thus actively changes its conditions of origin: instead of judging, instead of side-taking against something, Piper's micro-practice involves a displacement and a becoming. The artist does not take an external standpoint, art does not become an idealized entity which can resolve all the problems, but pursues the attempt of a change within. Her micro-practices confront us with the double bind, at the same time, she reveals the construction of habitual ways of thinking, deconstructs them, and opens a site beyond them. The double bind does not dissolve through this, but it becomes more understandable.

A De-Colonized Aesthetic Site

Comparable to Piper's micro-practice work, Dutch artist Iris Kensmil (*1970 in Amsterdam) addresses demarcations, polarization, and in- and exclusions of the aesthetic regime. In her project for the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019 she tackled Western European art history, and with that corresponded to Spivak's term of 'ab-use'. She dismisses traditional demarcations of the art system regarding history, genre, and aesthetics. Instead of a linear narrative she creates relations, mixes genres, and defies categorical distinctions of such as abstraction and figuration. The Dutch pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale hosted the exhibition *The Measurement of Presence* by Iris Kensmil and Remy Jungerman (*1959 in Suriname) (fig. 3), curated by Benno Tempel.

The exhibition's concept was developed in exchange with the artists, and aims to address the Biennale's history, the specific space and questions about identity beyond nationality. In an announcement in *e-flux* about the Dutch pavilion, this non-national idea of identity is connected to a danger of assimilation and negation of differences:

> "Places and societies are becoming ever more interconnected in our globalised world. But, on the whole, globalisation also causes alignment, and imposes prevailing principles. As a result, we risk losing the specific. *The Measurement of Presence* will be a post-national presentation that reassesses and debunks these notions and mechanisms." (Dutch Pavilion 2018)

The artists, both People of Color, live in the Netherlands and have connections to the former Dutch colony of Suriname, reference 20th century Modernism through

Figure 3: Left and Back: Iris Kensmil, The New Utopia Begins Here # 2, 2019, ink and acrylic paint on wall, 580 × 390 cm. Right: Remy Jungerman, Visiting Deities: Kabra Tafra, 2018–19, wood, cotton textile, kaolin and dry river clay860 × 260 × 70 cm; Horizontal Obeah GEENGESITONU I, II, III, 2018, painted wood, cotton textile, kaolin, yarn, mirror and nails, 910 × 370 × 260 cm.
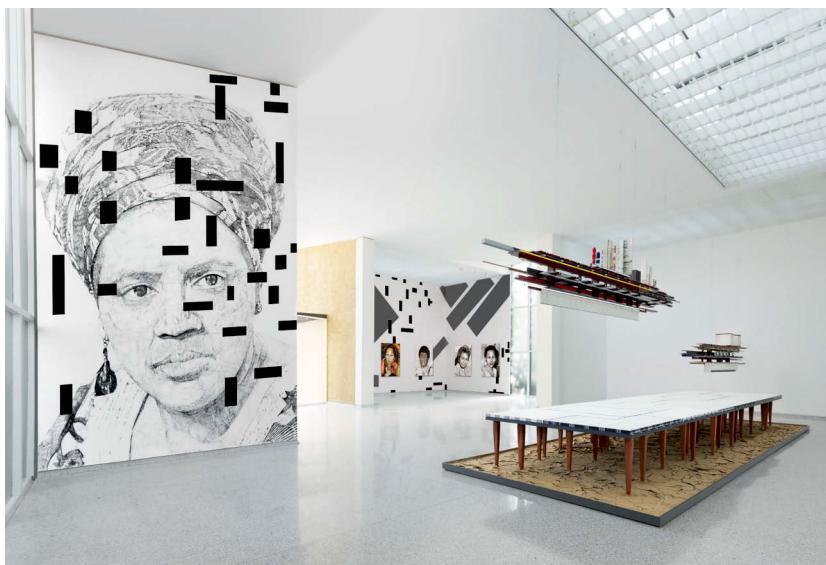
Photo: Simone Ferraro, © Mondriaan Fund.

their visual language of form and references. A spectator with a Western European trained and formalized viewpoint towards art can identify these references to modernism almost immediately: Piet Mondrian, De Stijl, the Russian avant-garde. This *im*mediate visibility is due to the aesthetic regime of Western European art history, that has marginalized and demarcated anything that deviates from that norm as problematic. This veils how the processes of in- and exclusion that construct identity need a constative 'outside', which always is also part of the identity that is to be produced.

Aesthetics, art history and theory have themselves gained their identity and legitimization through such *othering*. For instance, when they started to include 'native art' in the late 19th and early 20th century in order to legitimize 'their own', non-canonical art. This in turn also meant marginalization: the 'strange' artefact of the 'others' were framed as 'primitive' or as "ritual-magical or practical objects." (Kunst der 'Primitiven' 2018: 322)

My reception of Krensmil's work aims to show, how she emphasizes this constitutive double bind of aesthetics, by refusing to oppose the aesthetic regime with the deconolonial other as well as rejecting to be partial to that other. Instead, as Okwui Enwezor puts it for postcoloniality, Kensmil makes "empire's former 'other' visible and present at all times, either through the media or through mediatory, spectatorial, and carnivalesque relations of language, communication, images, contact, and resistance within the everyday." (Enwezor 2002: 45) Not in a post-modern manner for "relativizing historical transformations and contesting the lapses and prejudices of epistemological grand narratives, postcoloniality does the observe, seeking instead to sublate and replace all grand narratives through new ethical demands on modes of historical interpretation." (Ibid.)

Kensmil uses the reflexive potential of the (aesthetic) double bind, as did Spivak and Piper. Her work is hence not about conflict within the aesthetic regime in art, and not about a better art history. It is about raising cultural, political, and ethical questions within the aesthetic dispositive. I want to distinguish the aesthetic dispositive from Jacques Rancière's aesthetic regime in so far, as it not only relates to aesthetics in art. It is not about the identification, of "what we call art", which is the goal Rancière wants to achieve through the three regimes of ethics, poetics, and aesthetics (cf. Rancière 2011). In the aesthetic regime, which mostly relates to romanticism and modernism, "the identification of art no longer occurs via a division within ways of doing and making, but it is based on distinguishing a sensible mode of being specific to artistic products." (Ibid.: 22)

This 'way of being' has been described as genuinely iconic, especially with the *pictorial* or *iconic turn*. Polarizations of the visual and the verbal, image and text, visible and sayable have been promoted and potential indistinguishabilities or permeabilities have been omitted, for the sake of pure "iconic difference." (cf. Boehm 1995)

Even if the sayable and visible can be described as mutually exclusive, as what we see is not equivalent to what is said and vice versa, they are still related to one another. They are a specific corpus within the discursive practices of a historic era, which becomes evident under specific conditions. "For visibilities, in the light of historical formations, form scenes which are to the visible element what a statement is to the sayable or readable." (Deleuze 1988: 80) Statements cannot be separated from their formations and visibilities cannot be separated from their apparatuses, that is organizations and functions that let us see *anything*.

The aesthetic and the visible hence are not only sensory, but also evoke the sensuous and sayable. As such, the aesthetic is structured by knowledge and structures it as well as producing processes of subjectification. Different to the merely sensory, the sensuous is – according to Rancière – a sense connected to meaning (both *sens* in the French original), something that can be interpreted and evaluated (cf. Rancière 2008: 43). It is important to stress that "each historical formation sees

and reveals all it can within the conditions laid down for visibility, just as it says all it can within the conditions relating to statements." (Deleuze 1988: 59) Because of this conditionality, content, form, and expression, visible and sayable coalesce in creating knowledge – despite their different ways of being. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the aesthetics of art, i.e., the iconic difference is historic as well. The visible, as sensuous and sayable, is – despite the explained differences – conditioned by hegemonial powers of construction and definition, who make things become visible and sayable and connote them with meaning. Countering strategies, aiming to redistribute the sensuous and mobilize the knowledge-power-complex, can be employed precisely because of this connection.

Im-Proper Perspectives

Kensmil's three-part installation (fig. 4) *The New Utopia Begins Here # 1*, *The New Utopia Begins Here # 2* and *Beyond the Burden of Representation* evokes positions that can be sorted into classic categories of artistic/activist and different genres in a traditional manner. *Beyond the Burden of Representation* shows books from Black Culture Studies and PoC authors on a bookshelf next to a publication by artist Stanley Brouwn: from Darby English's *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (2007), to Kobena Mercer's *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (1994), Adrian Piper's *Escape to Berlin. A Travel Memoir* (2018), bell hooks' *Ain't I a Women* (1987), Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), Carole Boyce Davis' *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (2008), Joyce Moore Turner's *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (2005), Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984), Suzanne Césaires' *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent* (1941–1945) (2012), and Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1997).

Furthermore, there are paintings of installation shots of exhibitions and artworks representing artistic positions since the 1960s, which have been particularly focused on developing a radically anti-subjective yet bodily-material or processual language or which have taken a postcolonial-activist stance. These pieces are based on images a simple google image search will put out. They show, all in oil on canvas, Charlotte Posenenske's 1976 Offenbach exhibition, the *Impossible Objects* exhibition by Brouwn from 1976 at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, On Kawaras' work *One Million Years* as exhibited at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1999, David Hammons' *Untitled (Basketball drawing + stone)* which was part of the 2006 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and an installation from the *A Synthesis of Intuitions, 1965–2016* exhibition by Adrian Piper at the New York Museum of Modern Art (cf. Tempel 2019). The gathered artists each problematized their positions within the artistic regime and tried "protecting his/her authenticity against institutions and critics." (Tempel 2019: para 3)

Figure 4: Left: Iris Kensmil, Beyond the Burden of Representation, 2019, acrylic paint on wall, oil on canvas, books on shelves, 580 × 390 cm, back: Remy Jungerman.


Photo: Gerrit Schreurs, © Mondriaan Fund.

Posenenske turned against the idea of the original singular masterpiece with her serial works, and ended her artistic career in the late 1960s for her path in social sciences. Adrian Piper addressed racism and xenophobia in the art world in many of her works. The artist and professor of philosophy, who emigrated to Berlin in 2005 due to mobbing at work and racist and sexist discrimination, did not attend the retrospective of her work, which was hosted at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and is what Kensmil painted here. David Hammons was active in the civil rights movement and, as an Afro-American artist, has been ignored by the white art world. He uses his art works as means of communication. The work referenced by Kensmil, *Untitled (basketball drawing + stone)*, was made by repeatedly dibbling a dusty, graphite covered basketball on a white sheet of paper. On Kawara, like Brouwn, rejected the author-centered biographical reception of artworks.

There, undoubtedly, are even more aspects to be mentioned about the artistic strategies and practices employed by these artists, and the positions they are ascribed in Kensmil's work. They all brought institutional norms to the fore, which are shaped by cultural-political, economic concept, and, certainly not only, aesthetics. And they questioned the apparent unfoundedness of inequalities.

Across the room from *Beyond the Burden of Representation*, Kensmil shows large-scale portraits, also in oil, of black feminists, authors, and activists (fig. 5).

Figure 5: Iris Kensmil, The New Utopia Begins Here # 1, 2019, Acryl, Öl, 550 × 1596 cm.
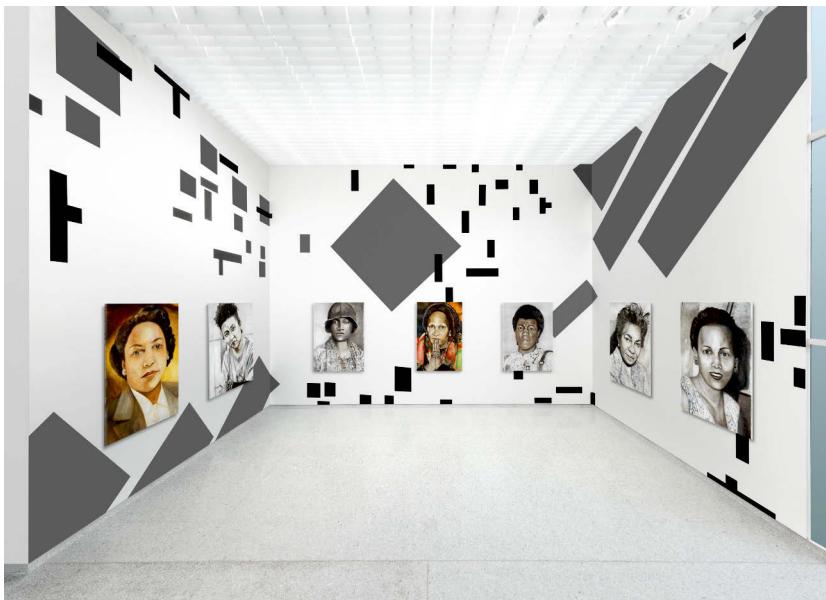
Photo: GerritSchreurs, © Mondriaan Fund.

Some of whom are also present on the bookshelf mentioned before, but all are at least represented there through their lives' work and impact. The portraits also reference utopias of black, female intellectuals. Kensmil researched, in cooperation with *The Black Archives*[11], black utopists from the Caribbean's, North-America, and Europe. The portraits show feminist and panafricanist Amy Ashwood Garvey (1897-1969), who founded the *Negro World Newspaper* with her former husband Marcus Garvey, and who was active in the feminist movement that formed around Sylvia Pankhurst; communist and activist Hermina Huiswoud (1905-1998), who fought for Suriname's independence; journalist and activist Claudia Jones (1915-1964); surrealist and anti-colonial author and activist Suzanne Césaire (1915-1966); Science

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11   "The Black Archives is a unique historical archive for inspiring conversations, activities, and literature from Black and other perspectives that are often overlooked elsewhere. The Black Archives documents the history of black emancipation movements and individuals in the Netherlands. The Black Archives is managed by the New Urban Collective." The Black Archives: http://www.theblackarchives.nl/about-us.html, last access 3.13.2020.

Fiction author Octavia E. Butler (1947-2006); literary scholar bell hooks (*1952); and DJ and singer Sister Nancy (*1962), whose song *Bam Bam* became a world-wide success in 1982.

On another wall – which stretches into Jungerman's installation (fig. 3) – Kensmil's third work *The New Utopia Begins Here # 2* is placed: a portrait of author and activist Audre Lorde (1934-1992), done in ink and covered with black bars and squares.

All portraits distinctly express that they are not trying to fulfill aesthetic markers of quality, neither regarding their motives nor their painting. They resemble simple portraiture photography and do not aim to individually characterize the depicted, instead they leave the burden of representation behind for their symbolic-referential function.

In an interview Kensmil mentioned that the acrylic wall paintings in the *Measurements of Presence* installation were inspired by Mondrian and Kasimir Malewitsch, and their abstract forms and ways to use light, space, and form in their works (Jocks 2019). The artist describes the avant-garde's utopia as a one-sided ideal and places another utopia – that of black, female intellectuals – next to it: playing with the relation between ground and figure Kensmil overlays her references of modernist avant-garde and anti-racist activism with each other. Sometimes the portraits of the activist, philosophers, authors, and musicians overlay the abstract forms of the wall painting and then Audre Lorde's portrait is covered with the rectangular shapes. This balancing of figure and ground is different to modes of hiding, emerging, uncovering, or unveiling often present in biased and hierarchical depictions. Figure and ground are clearly separate and yet equally worked upon, so their relation remains indifferent.

Kensmil perforates the Western European aesthetics of modernism, includes aesthetic-political activist and by that refers to historic and geopolitical interferences and penetrations of the aesthetic dispositive. The non-European traditions are not added as new additions of the aesthetics of the global south in a presumably new, globalized art world. Instead, they are marked as immanent counter movements and transnational interlacing of modernism and mobilize the narrative of the aesthetic regime.

The narratives that become possible are not oriented at the writings of modernism's history, instead (historic) readings of colonial hegemonies and anti-hegemonies unfold in the aesthetic dispositive.

History and knowledge, it can be said, in regard to Kensmil's work, depend on a becoming, a becoming visible and sayable. The art works described here critically address the systems of organization and representation of knowledge, and focus on what becomes visible and sayable through them, what is hidden and concealed through them. The Western European knowledge dispositive is explored and shaken up regarding its aesthetic configuration and mediation. The disruption of the aesthetic regime's representation patterns by including references shines a light

on the dispositive structure of aesthetics and therefore reveal its connection to political, economic, and historic factors. The specific conditions of a time regarding what can be said or seen can then be scrutinized. The interruption of the usual shows the power-knowledge-complex that determines – through an interplay of forces, strategies, and counter-strategies – which knowledge gains space, is accepted and who can articulate that knowledge.

The artist apparently does not only want to extend the canon of the visible/sayable. Instead, she problematizes the aesthetic dispositive, which determines what can be seen or said, but also can render things invisible or unsayable through in- or exclusion. Kensmil's critical reading of the Western European (art) history asks, which exclusions, repressions, and exotifications come alongside the aesthetic sensibilisation of modernisms and the division of the sensual.

Aesthetic sensibilisation is, as Ruth Sonderegger explained in her analysis of Immanuel Kant's aesthetics in the context of colonial capitalism, based on Kant's assumption,

> "that some people are impervious to sensibilities, as in the *sensus communis,* and hence insensible to aesthetic experiences and opinions. These skills are […] a distinction, which the bourgeoisie and its intellectuals claimed for themselves in the 18th century. This includes both a distinction towards the inside and the lower class, who still need to be made sensible, as well as towards the colonial other, which is only partially eligible for any pedagogic sensibilisation." (Sonderegger 2018: 122)

Colonialism, social hierarchies, marginalization, repressions, and demarcations are at the core of the distribution of the sensible in the aesthetic regime. Kensmil's art work create the space for an aesthetic that needs to be de-colonized, and that enables a reading of the invisible/unsayable in the Western European (art) history. Her work does not perpetuate an iconic difference, but becomes a "modality of expression" (Foucault 1993: 74) that functions as a re-distribution of the sensuous and necessarily 'ab-uses' aesthetics. This ab-use of aesthetics removes the certainty of taking the right side by shifting binary logic.

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