

Introduction

If we take to the heart the fact that we make places, things, and selves, but not under conditions of our own choosing, then it is easier to take the risk of conceiving change as something both short of and longer than a single cataclysmic event. Indeed, the chronicles of revolutions all show how persistent small changes, and altogether unexpected consolidations, added up to enough weight, over time and space, to cause a break with the old order.

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Some say “drag” has no clear origin, that its etymology remains uncertain.² One folk narrative, however, traces the term associated with gender bending back to the stages in early modern, precapitalist Europe, where young male actors in female roles would schlepp the drags of their costumes across the floor.³ Dragging, then, is tied to conflicting narratives of volatile signification and physical gravitation. Correspondingly, *Dirty Dragging* is about moving or dancing bodies tailing stuff whose genealogy is uncertain—stuff that may entangle. My title extends the conventional understanding of drag as “exaggerated gender display”⁴ through a continued metaphor, that is, an allegory of unpredictable, nomadic schlepping. In contrast to the lush stage dragging of the Elizabethan era, this book explores the ambivalence of minor, transgressive modes of making a scene situated in contexts of political violence. It addresses the destructive implications of an ambivalent play with referential excess—emphasizing what becomes uncontrollably entangled and may reemerge elsewhere in altered, contradictory forms.⁵ *Dirty*, in this sense, refers less to

1 Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 2007: 242.

2 See Baroni, “Drag” 2012: 191.

3 On the etymology of hearsay, see Förstemann, *Volksetymologie*, 1852; on the etymology of drag McGlotten, *Dragging*, 2021: 7–8; Senelick, *Changing Room*, 2000: 279. On the recent boom in drag research, see Heller, *Queering Drag*, 2020; Khubchandani, *Decolonize Drag*, 2023; Schrödl and Striewski, *Drag*, 2025; Annuß and Weiner, *Facing Drag*, 2025.

4 Lorber, “Preface,” 2004: xv.

5 For a preliminary discussion, see Annuß, “Dirty,” 2022; “Alienating,” 2023. And, with a different emphasis, see Fischer-Lichte, *Interweaving Performance Cultures*, 2014.

what is represented than to transgressive, collectivizing modes of appearing or making a scene (in German: *Auftrittsformen*).⁶

Against the backdrop of current societal developments, I will reformulate the master trope of queer performativity—of “subversive repetition within signifying practices of gender”⁷—and transpose the study of drag as a transgressive performative practice into other contexts. In recent years, trans studies in particular has already critically revised our understanding of drag. By addressing shifting biopolitical conditions of subjectivation, it has redirected the emphasis from undoing fixed categories to liquefying them—with Jack Halberstam, toward a “politics of transitivity.”⁸ However, while drag in this context has been associated primarily with gender bending, my book will also consider various invective modes of making an appearance. It will examine the global history of interwoven and opposing mobilizations of performativity from transversal perspectives.⁹ Whether on the street, in carnival, in propaganda, on stage, in academia—*Dirty Dragging* explores mimetic “messiness”¹⁰ to better

6 On *Auftrittsformen* see Menke and Vogel, *Flucht*, 2018; Vogel and Wild, *Auftreten*, 2014; Vogel, *Aus dem Grund*, 2018; see also Matzke et al., *Auftritte*, 2015; see also the special issues I (co)edited: “Choral Figurations” (*Germanic Review* 98.2, 2023), “Kollektive Auftrittsformen” (*Forum Modernes Theater* 28.1, 2013); “Volksfiguren” (*Maske & Kothurn* 2, 2014).

7 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1990: 146, referring to Esther Newton’s *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1979); on a materialist critique back then, see Annuß, “Umbruch,” 1996/“The Butler-Boom,” 1998. Butler herself revised her perspective in her 1999 preface: xxiii; see also “Bodies That Still Matter,” 2021: 191. On the queer gesture of drag, see Heller, *Queering Drag*, 2020: 33; for an example of the “collapsing of a border-line,” see Weiner, *Out of Line*, 2019: 52. On the etymology of “queer,” see *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2014; on the corresponding paraphrase of transversal perspectives, see Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 1999: 31; Lorey, *Demokratie*, 2021; *Democracy*, 2022. On the US activist history of the term in the 1990s and its international impact, see Bala and Tellis, *Global Trajectories*, 2015; for a summary of global queer theoretical perspectives, see Laufenberg, *Queere Theorien*, 2022: 209–242; for critique, see Hoad, “Mythology,” 2015.

8 On the concept of trans as a “fleshly insistence of transitivity,” see Halberstam, *Trans**, 2018: 136. On the replacement of drag by pharmacological transing, see Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 2013, “The Drag King Plan of Action”: 364–380; see also Letter, 2018; *Apartment*, 2020; “Learning,” 2020. On the trans critique of the binary framing of drag concepts, see from different perspectives Heller, *Queering Drag*, 2020; Stokoe, *Reframing Drag*, 2020; on the critique of critique Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges,” 2006.

9 See Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, 2016; Osterhammel, *Verwandlung der Welt*, 2020.

10 Balke, *Mimesis zur Einführung*, 2018: 16.

understand how performative mimesis can provoke both resentful and resistant affects within regimes of divide and rule.

Through close readings of key, related sources, *Dirty Dragging* will thus also engage with contemporary catastrophes: the rise of authoritarian-broliarchic postdemocratic politics, where feigned resentment fuels attacks on “genderism” and globalized migration from below; the dismantling of regulatory infrastructures by the economic-libertarian right; and the emergence of new war regimes that signal global fascization under “predatory disaster capitalism.”¹¹ Today’s identitarianism is increasingly staged as carnivalesque political spectacle within media attention economies.¹² It is precisely this appropriation of transgressive performativity by the right that indicates the necessity to broaden our historical perspectives—exemplified in relation to what has been called “racialized drag.”¹³ Blackface, as “racial impersonation,”¹⁴ needs to be understood within the history of physiognomic racism and colonial hyper-exploitation, as well as through its varied receptions in early globalized visual mass culture. As grotesque-clownish defacement, the black mask becomes a sign of excess. In this sense, it is akin to today’s carnivalesque politics of resentment, while also pointing to the possibility of its reappropriation.

The stages—the areas of making a scene—to which *Dirty Dragging* turns are located at the southern tip of Africa, in the middle of Europe, and in the US South. The book explores how people use creolized performative cultural techniques to resist segregation policies in public spaces, how fascization seeks to banish queer and creolized drag, and how carnivalesque manifestations—whether by fraternal vigilantes, new patriarchal elites, or the subaltern—can be

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- 11 Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 2007. On the current reframing of fascism, see Toscano, *Late Fascism*, 2023. “Antigenderism” and the authoritarian turn of neoliberalism may also complicate previous critiques of homonationalism and pinkwashing; Farris, *In the Name*, 2017; Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 2007. See also Raz Weiner’s current research project *The Pink Wash-Out* (mdw) and his article “On Arab-Masquerades and Necropolitics,” 2025. On the current backlash and its carnivalization, see Annuß, “Affekt und Gefolgschaft,” 2023; “Populismus und Kritik,” 2024; “Notes on Facing Drag,” 2025.
 - 12 On carnivalesque practices of transgression that transcend the temporal limits of carnival, see Godet, “Behind the Masks,” 2020: 3. See also Nyong’o’s distinction between carnival and the commodified carnivalesque of minstrel shows; *Amalgamation* Waltz, 2009: 108.
 - 13 See Lott, “Blackface from Time to Time,” 2025; with reference to Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, 2009. Chude-Sokei describes Blackface as “racial cross-dressing” in *The Last Darky*, 2006: 38. The figure is “metonymic, not metaphoric ... a doppelganger, but one which haunted whiteness, not blackness” (33). On the early link between drag and blackface, see Johnson, “Gender Trumps Race?,” 2009.
 - 14 Gubar, *Racechanges*, 1997: 56.

mobilized.¹⁵ *Dirty Dragging* thus constellates opposing modes of performance, understood as a mimetic dragging along of social entanglements and cultural techniques. It will show how performative transgressions in public can serve as instruments of collective resistance and assertion but also as tools of Othering, devaluation, terror, or displays of power. Examining performances that range from a staged everyday photo of a drag queen during the forced removals of South African apartheid and its connection to Cape Town's subaltern carnival, to Eva Braun in a man's suit with a blackened face, alpine Perchten parades, the terror masks of the early Ku Klux Klan, and New Orleans's Mardi Gras, *Dirty Dragging* engages both existential drag scenes and the carnivalesque use of masks as transgressive mimesis.¹⁶ Analyzing contradictory forms of drag in a broader sense, I will show how modes of appearing can be hegemonically or complicitly appropriated, yet also remobilized again and again—perhaps even accumulated by those who practice the art of not being governed *like that*.¹⁷

What did the link between drag and blackface mean in the South African Cape carnival of the subaltern during colonialism and apartheid? How, in turn, was this link charged with antisemitism in Nazi Germany? How could the Southern carnival in the United States function both as an instrument of governing and a queer refuge? And how do carnivalesque articulations of colonialism and racism relate to a queer understanding of drag? In this study, I offer close readings of exemplary sources to examine different (post)colonial contexts in which regimes ultimately failed or collapsed but nonetheless continue to produce enduring forms of violence and resistance. The etymological narrative of theatrical “dragging” on early modern European stages and its references to mimetic performances predating the representational aesthetics that developed after Shakespearean theater already gestures toward the era of colonial expansion. The subject of *Dirty Dragging* is practices of exaggerational appearing that can be read as effects of this expansion. I will analyze related but distinct political contexts of divide and rule, each characterized by specific arbitrary exclusions—contexts that have often been too hastily considered “resolved” and that, in historical studies, tend to be examined separately. When placed in constellation, however, these contexts reveal the transoceanic

15 On *Cultural Techniques*, see Dünne et al., 2020.

16 On the ambivalence of drag, see Schacht and Underwood, *The Drag Queen Anthology*, 2004: 1–17 (“Introduction”). On the reflexive potential of carnival vis-à-vis gender, see Simões de Araújo, “Carnival, Carnival,” 2023: 201.

17 See Foucault, “What Is Critique,” 1996: 384. On complicity, see Lebovic, “Complicity and Dissent,” 2019.

interplay between creolization and decreolization:¹⁸ apartheid, Nazism, and Jim Crow segregation following the Civil War in the United States and the abolition of systematized enslavement.

Why this particular constellation? The South African apartheid regime (1948–1994), paradigmatic of modern social engineering, was shaped by policies of exclusion and segregation to some extent prefigured in Nazi Germany and the United States; and all three drew on historically overlapping colonial strategies aimed at banning creolization. The South African regime corresponded with simultaneous racist gentrification elsewhere and, as a biopolitical model, anticipated contemporary processes of securitization, hyperexploitation, and forced displacement.¹⁹ At the same time, its complex classification system unsettles the notion of an ever-fixed binary racism. A similar point may be made about German National Socialism (1933–1945), in which antisemitic propaganda and colonial exoticization were intertwined with attacks on early creolized popular culture and the global influence of its US manifestations. Thus, the intricate link between antisemitism, colonial racism, and decreolization becomes legible.²⁰ Segregation in the United States following the collapse of the plantation system in the 1860s continues to shape perceptions of other

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- 18 On creolization, see Glissant, *Introduction*, 1996; *Poetics of Relation*, 1997, originally 1990; in the South African context: Erasmus, “Creolization,” 2011; in the European context: Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Tate, *Creolizing Europe*, 2011; in the German-speaking context: Müller and Ueckmann, *Creolization Revisited*, 2013; Jour Fixe Initiative Berlin, *Kreolische Konstellationen*, 2023; as “forced transculturation” in the Anglo-French context: Hall in Enwezor 2003; Stam and Shohat, *Race in Translation*, 2012: 299; in the Francophone context: Vergès, “Creolization and Resistance,” 2015. The relationship between creolization, multidirectional adaptation processes, and modern governmentality is addressed by Crichlow and Northover, *Globalization*, 2009, who criticize the one-sided focus on the plantation system and the corresponding romanticization of the premodern.
- 19 Gilroy states with regard to South Africa: “The appeal of security and the related appearance of gated and secured residential spaces are two components of this larger change. The proliferation of service work and the reappearance of a caste of servile, insecure, and underpaid domestic laborers, carers, cleaners, deliverers, messengers, attendants, and guards are surely others. The segmentation and casualization of employment, health, and dwelling are the foundations on which these aspects of the privatization and destruction of the civic order have come to rest.” *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 2005, 45.
- 20 On the German colonial history and the sociocidal deployment of the Schutztruppe in the former German Southwest, today’s Namibia, against the local population, i.e., against Herero, Nama, and San, see Zimmerer and Zeller, *Völkermord*, 2003. On military dragging of the Herero, ambivalently mimicking the Schutztruppe, see Henrichsen and Selmic, *Schwarzkommando*, 1995.

historical and geographical contexts. Yet upon closer inspection, these contexts prove far more complex, as the constellation of the following chapters will show.

In exploring the historical entanglements of performative transgressions, I will draw on heterogeneous sources. These show how the metamorphosis of physical repertoires or masks—dragged along from elsewhere—work as *performative transpositions*.²¹ In doing so, they suggest a shift in perspective. This revision of drag aligns with the cultural studies turn from the deconstructive, negative reference to identity in early queer theory to today's focus on situated, “environmental” knowledge (*Umgebungswissen*), the socialization of means of production (*Vergesellschaftung*) and concomitant modes of subjectivation, as well as historically entangled performance practices.²² The tension between genealogically untraceable practices and the reference to hindered conditions of movement—which shapes my reading of dragging—translates into a perspective on both the specific situatedness of these practices and their global *lignes de fuite*, their lines of flight.²³ Hence, the following historical explorations are dedicated to examining the unpredictable potential of future political modes of relating—of *Beziehungsweisen*, to quote Bini Adamczak—in the face of persistent political violence.²⁴

21 Braidotti defines transposition as “cross-boundary or transversal transfer, in the sense of a leap from one code, field or axis into another ... Central to transpositions is the notion of material embodiment”; *Transpositions*, 2006: 5. On repertoire as embodied knowledge transfer through “performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge,” thus in contrast to the “supposedly enduring materials” of the archive, see Taylor, *Archive*, 2003, 19–20.

22 Sprenger speaks of *Umgebungswissen*, “environmental knowledge,” in *Epistemologien des Umgebens*, 2019; however, I refer here with Sánchez Cedillo (*This War*, 2023: 15) to Guattari's understanding of three intertwined ecologies—environment, social/society, and subjectivation: *Les trois écologies*, 1989/*The Three Ecologies*, 2014. For a feminist discussion of epistemological situatedness, see Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 1988. My perspective is also determined by German-language studies of the theatrical chorus as an accompanying environmental figure and its potential to give space; see Haß, *Kraftfeld Chor*, 2020: 10, 16; “Woher kommt der Chor,” 2012; “Without Beginning or End,” 2023; Kirsch, *Chor-Denken*, 2020; van Eikels, *Die Kunst des Kollektiven*, 2013. For a materialist rereading of environmentality, see Altvater, “Kapital und Anthropozän,” 2017; Darian-Smith, *Global Burning*, 2022; Hörl, “The Environmentalitarian Situation,” 2018; Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, 2020; Corona, 2022; Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 2015.

23 On deterritorializing lines of flight, in contrast to genealogical family trees, see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987: 9ff; Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 1997: 28.

24 On the term “Beziehungsweisen,” see Adamczak, *Beziehungsweise Revolution*, 2017.

To do justice to the complexity of this constellation, I will link South African creolization theory—referring to Caribbean discourse—with queer theory. Zimitri Erasmus, for example, interrogates the formation of racial categories in relation to colonial history through a praxeological approach.²⁵ Her work also resonates with debates on the concept of the nomadic.²⁶ By engaging with the interfaces of critical theorizations, I aim to bring together perspectives often treated as disparate. Simultaneously building on gender and drag research, this allows for an exploration of the lines of flight between debates on colonialism and antisemitism.

Underlying *Dirty Dragging* is the question of the contemporary relevance of the historical case studies brought in constellation. Functioning as “crisis experiments”²⁷ through the shifts in setting, I hope that my case studies will produce alienation effects in relation to present-day figures of thought. This may become clear with regard to the concept of apartheid. Today, the term denotes a category of international law, a synonym for institutionally racialized separation.²⁸ Accordingly, it is being applied—particularly in South Africa—to analyses of other political contexts and particularly connected to Israel-Palestine. In German-speaking discourse—where I am primarily situated—however, the term’s usage has become a flashpoint in current debates on the systematic violations of international law through territorial politics and crimes against humanity in Gaza after the Hamas massacre of October 7 in 2023. In this context, criticism of war crimes and forced displacement policies has been repeatedly reframed as antisemitism and instrumentalized by Islamophobic rhetoric from the right, whereas South Africa has characterized

25 See Erasmus, *Coloured by History*, 2001; “Contact Theory,” 2010; “Creolization,” 2011; “Nation,” 2015; *Race Otherwise*, 2017; “Race,” 2018; “Who Was Here First?,” 2020; “Caribbean Critical Thought,” 2025.

26 See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987; Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 2011.

27 See Garfinkel, *Ethnomethodology*, 1967.

28 “‘The crime of apartheid’ means inhumane acts ... committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime,” according to the Rome Statute, Article 7h, of the International Criminal Court of 2002, https://legal.un.org/icc/statute/99_corr/cstatute.htm, accessed September 11, 2024. This was preceded by a discussion in the field of international law: by law, apartheid is defined as any institutionalized form of a policy of racial segregation for the oppression of one race by another (“Als Apartheid wird jede institutionalisierte Form einer Politik der Rassentrennung zur Unterdrückung einer Rasse durch eine andere bezeichnet.” Triffterer, *Bestandsaufnahme zum Völkerrecht*, 1995: 191). On Southern US segregation as spatial apartheid, see Regis, “Second Lines,” 1999: 475. Posel, by contrast, criticizes the erosion of the term through such transpositions; see “The Apartheid Project,” 2011.

these war crimes as acts of genocide in its lawsuit before the International Court of Justice.²⁹ At the same time, decolonial discourse often disregards the sociocidal history of antisemitism, namely, the Nazi policy of industrial annihilation and its afterlife. This is not the subject of my book, but the current tensions between studies of colonial racism and antisemitism constitute part of its political-discursive background—a background marked by growing fault lines that seem to obstruct efforts to collectively and internationally counteract the destructive developments of the present. It is in this sense that the following shifts in terrain and historical perspective are motivated.

Dirty Dragging engages in detailed analyses of performative practices in public that negotiate various policies of exclusion and corresponding modes of subjectivation.³⁰ My references cannot be read merely as “autobiographical”;³¹ rather, they are due to a specific theoretical-political positionality. I seek to confront and bring together material from historical and geographical contexts of violence in order to reflect on the viability of analytical categorizations and approaches—considering both their differences and their correspondences. My questions are situated—shaped by the conditions in which I live and work. One could say they are symptomatic, reflecting not only specifically embedded shifts and contradictions within and beyond gender studies—that is, in pressing political debates.³² However, my concern is not simply an expression of where I come from. Instead, my reading aims to mediate between perspectives

29 See the Gaza Q&A published by the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (<https://www.ecchr.eu/fall/keine-deutschen-waffen-nach-israel/>); Frey, “Gegen Antisemitismus und seine Instrumentalisierung,” <https://www.jacobin.de/artikel/antisemitismus-instrumentalisierung-nahostkonflikt-isreal-palastina>; Ullrich et al., *Was ist Antisemitismus?*, 2024.

30 On the difference between identity and subjectivation, see Braidotti: “Whereas identity is a bounded, ego-indexed habit of fixing and capitalizing on one’s selfhood, subjectivity is a socially mediated process of relations and negotiations with multiple others and with multilayered social structures.” *Nomadic Theory*, 2011, 4. On self-government as subjectivation, see Foucault’s *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 2008; On *the Government of the Living*, 2014; see also the introduction by Bröckling et al., *Gouvernementalität*, 2000.

31 On the critique of retrospective autobiographical projections, see de Man, *Autobiography as Defacement*, 1979.

32 Addressing German discourse, Wiedemann has called for “understanding the pain of others;” see *Den Schmerz der anderen verstehen*, 2022. See also Bruns’s proposal “to associate different forms of racism as closely connected,” “Antisemitism,” 2022, 47; Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 2009.

developed elsewhere in response to the disturbing global processes of fascization. Working with historical material, then, serves as a means to think beyond local exceptionalisms so as to recall the potential for political alliances.³³

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Dirty Dragging begins with readings of archival images collected during various research trips to Cape Town, Gastein, and New Orleans, among other places. In this sense, the transposition of drag is both the subject of analysis and an integral part of the research design. The images used are visual finds that have captured particular movement repertoires and often play with the hypervisibilization of alleged deviance.³⁴ Retrospectively curated, their posthumous reading exposes our distance from the past. The rigidity and muteness of these images illustrate not only the medial difference between performance and photography,³⁵ but also the chasms between historical materials and contemporary readings, between distinct historical and geographical locations—and, crucially, the possibility of subsequent, differently situated practices of relating. The provenance of some of this primarily photographic material can no longer be traced. Some images depict people whose names and voices have not been archived. Through an analysis of repertoire and situatedness, these images provoke reflection on the contexts dragged along and on their transposition into the constellation I have fashioned—contexts whose foregrounding cannot be explained “autobiographically.” At the same time, the images bear witness to how their afterlife escapes the control of the regimes under which they were created.

In contrast to earlier poststructuralist research on the *allegories of reading*, this book is concerned with the visual afterlife of physical, ephemeral performative modes of appearing.³⁶ It highlights what Carolyn Dinshaw has described

33 On feminist-materialist critique—exemplified in Casale, “Subjekt,” 2014; Fraser, “Progressive Neoliberalism,” 2016; Klinger, “Troubled Times,” 2014—and the question of alliances, see Gago, *Feminist International*, 2020; Gago et al., *8M Constelación feminista*, 2018; Lorey, “Von den Kämpfen aus,” 2011; Roldán Mendiivil and Sarbo, *Diversität*, 2022; Soiland, “Verhältnisse,” 2012.

34 Where they are necessary for the course of argumentation, invective images are shown and discussed; this implies the danger to enforce Othering; see Axster, *Koloniales Spektakel*, 2014; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 1997: 3; Schaffer, *Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit*, 2008. Not showing these images, however, would also mean not analyzing their form and fabricatedness, thus attributing to them a potentiated power. On the historical baggage of collecting and archives, see Azoulay, *Potential History*, 2019.

35 On the “muteness of photography,” see Krauss, *Das Photographische*, 1998: 15.

36 On allegorical temporality and the allegories of reading, see de Man, *Allegories*, 1982.

as the desire to touch across time³⁷—a desire that requires a queer, entangled, allegorical understanding of temporality, one that counters linear, genealogical thinking, that is, one that implies what Elizabeth Freeman has called *temporal drag*.³⁸ The constellation of *Dirty Dragging* also translates this desire to touch across into the spatial realm. It stages the paradoxical presence of movement captured within the still image to gesture toward embodied repertoire and its environments elsewhere. Rather than evoking immediate proximity—such as to my own positionality—the book instead seeks to sketch transoceanic lines of flight in its assembly of images.

Dirty Dragging is not chronological; nor does it smooth out the heterogeneity of its material—subject it to one single narrative. Rather, through three chapters that increasingly interweave analytical perspectives, it explores specific performative appearances and their overlapping lines of flight. Each chapter is divided into two complementary parts, titled with actions, emphasizing my praxeological approach, while the structure of the book transposes the ambivalence of what I call dragging into my writing. Both its beginning and its fade-out accentuate unheroic modes of appearing that have sometimes been read as complicit, yet provide a sense of societal relations other than those prevailing. They gesture “towards a scene located elsewhere,” as Elizabeth Maddock Dillon writes of “people out of doors” within a transatlantic colonial world.³⁹ As we will see, it is precisely these gestures that may offer a way to counter the decreolizing trajectories that continue to shape right-wing discourse today.⁴⁰

37 On “a desire for bodies to touch across time,” Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 1999: 3; see also Dinshaw et al., “Theorizing Queer Temporalities,” 2007: 178. With regard to dance as “*schlepping the traces of the past*,” see Foellmer, “What Remains of the Witness?,” 2017.

38 See Freeman, *Time Binds*, 2010; with different emphases also Boudry and Lorenz, *Temporal Drag*, 2011; Dinshaw et al., “Theorizing Queer Temporalities,” 2007; Edelman, *No Future*, 2004; Ehrentraut, “Transtemporal Making Out,” 2025; Farrier, “Playing with Time,” 2015; Hacker, “Queere Zeitlichkeit,” 2018; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 2009, as well as the correspondences to Benjamin’s understanding of history (“Über den Begriff der Geschichte,” 1991, I.2) and Glissant’s notion of carnivalesque temporality; *Poetics of Relation*, 1997: 64; see also the chapter on carnivalizing time in Nyong’o, *Amalgamation Waltz*, 2009: 135–165. On “imperial time” as a countermodel, see McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 1995: 10. For a translation into questions of spatiality, see Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 2004; “Queer of Color Critique,” 2015.

39 Dillon, *New World Drama*, 2014: 50, 13. On the relational definition of “elsewhere,” see Plath, *Hier und anderswo*, 2017: 520.

40 Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory*, 2014: 195; accentuating physical appearance: 175.

Dirty Dragging begins where colonial histories overlap, examining their afterlife in the context of apartheid at the South African Cape (I. Apartheid). The first chapter elaborates on the theoretical potential of a photograph depicting a danced drag scene in the former harbor area of the Cape, intertwining reflections on queering and creolization. It reads dragging as a minor, dirty, mimetic mode of making an appearance—one that resists subjecting the moving body to the individualizing logic of representation.⁴¹ Instead, it draws attention to the—also theoretical—potential of dragging as a practice that remains cognizant of the political and historical context it drags along, thereby challenging the apartheid regime’s territorial claims of separation. As the chapter will show, this scene extends from drag in the narrower sense to related scenes elsewhere: it also alludes to a specific “indigenizing” use of blackface.⁴² This practice translates global mass culture of the time into carnival and thereby exposes an overlap of differing colonial histories. Accordingly, this chapter expands the concept of drag beyond its dimensions within a politics of gender. Drawing on South African contributions to the current creolization debate—contributions often overlooked in the Global North—it also resists the tendency to merely “apply” queer or decolonial theories especially from the United States to the formerly so-called periphery. Rather, the chapter on South Africa serves as the foundation for the subsequent readings, “creolizing” the perspective on dragging under Nazism and Jim Crow.

The second chapter explores an invective flipside of creolized performative practices discussed so far: the devaluing defacements associated with fascist identitarianism (II. Nazism). I examine images that fabricate and effeminate “the Other” through (dis)figuration—in drag, in blackface—and operate via antisemitically charged equivalential chains of alleged dirtiness. The chapter then highlights the distinction between the Nazis’ attack on globalized mass culture and their exoticizing, colonial-racist spectacles. It finally underscores the contradictory preconditions of the *männerbündian* fiction of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, or, national community, as seen in mass stagings and genealogical academic fabulations. My second chapter thus investigates National Socialist constructions of both the alien and the self against the backdrop of

41 On “minor mimesis” (mindere Mimesis), see Balke, “Ähnlichkeit und Entstellung,” 2015; *Mimesis*, 2018; with Linseisen, *Mimesis Expanded*, 2022. On the excessive dimension of the mimetic, see already Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty,” 2007: 333–336/“Über das mimetische Vermögen,” II.1, 1991: 210–213; see also “Doctrine of the Similar (1933),” 1979: 65–69/“Lehre vom Ähnlichen,” II.1, 1991: 204–210.

42 On the concept of indigenization as local appropriation, referring to Sylvia Wynter, see Erasmus, “Caribbean Critical Thought,” 2025; on critiquing ideologies of indigeneity, “Who Was Here First?,” 2020. See also Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*, 2009.

an already creolized mass culture.⁴³ Here, the pitfalls of essentialist claims that persist today, though in different contexts, become apparent—such as invocations of ancestral kinship or rootedness in the soil. At the same time, the chapter points to previously underexamined potentials for alliances and corresponding cultural techniques developed by those confronted with forced migration or marked as uprooted, as having no origin.

Finally, the third chapter interweaves an analysis of terrorist, governmental, and also subaltern modes of appearing that subvert prevailing segregation (III. Jim Crow). The chapter brings together the contrasting mobilizations of the performative that are explored in the first two chapters from opposing perspectives. Examining the relationship between irregular violence, hegemonic politics, and the carnivalesque, it addresses opposing masked Southern mobs in drag and the transoceanic entanglements their appearances entrain.⁴⁴ These include marauding vigilantes, high societies spectacularly occupying public space in elite carnivals, and loose crowds dancing through the back streets in the creolized Mardi Gras of New Orleans. As a port city, New Orleans not only connects the US South with the North but also links the United States to the Cape via the Caribbean. Working with diverse historical material, the chapter investigates both transoceanic relations and the contemporary relevance of the carnivalesque, engaging with the political present and its media assemblages.⁴⁵ I will increasingly interweave the material discussed in previous chapters, making drag legible in its ambivalence and potentiality and thereby introducing previously unexpected diachronic and synchronic lines of flight.

Decidedly without providing a summarizing closure, the book is dedicated to conflicting forms of dirty dragging within the history of terror and control, calling forth the potential joy of other ways of relating—including those that extend beyond one's local context. This temporary, hydra-like *performing (an) otherwise*, as Saidiya Hartman puts it elsewhere, continually restages the performative turn against hegemonic societal structures.⁴⁶ Demonstrating a

43 The chapter brings together my previously separate works on Nazism and postcolonial visual politics; see, for example, Annuß, *Stagings*, 2009; "Afterlives," 2011; "Für immer," 2011; *Volksschule*, 2019.

44 Mob—in German "Meute," borrowed from the French "meute"—describes a moving, disorderly gathering; on the figure as a form of shared excitement, see Canetti, *Masse und Macht*, 1980: 99, 101/*Crowds and Power*, 1973. On the rhizomatic nature of mobs and their contagious power, see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987.

45 On assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1987) as a paraphrase of "dispersed but mutually implicated and messy networks"—referring to queer theory—see also Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 2007: 211.

46 "Waywardness ... is the practice of the social otherwise, the insurgent ground that enables new possibilities and new vocabularies; it is the lived experience of enclon-

nonidentitarian, contagious knowledge of all kinds of “oddkinships,”⁴⁷ it drags along nongenealogical *Beziehungsweisen* and contributes to the possibility of future, previously unimaginable, multidirectional ways of relating to another—ways of relating that could make societal conditions not of our own choosing dance across time and space.

sure and segregation, assembling and huddling together.” Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 2020: 227–228. On the corresponding metaphor, see Erasmus, *Race Otherwise*, 2017. On the lumpenatlantic, many-headed hydra, the constellation of seafarers, see Linebaugh and Rediker, *Hydra*, 2000: 353.

47 On oddkinships—meaning irregular kinships—see Haraway, *Staying*, 2016.