KickQueen:
The Body, the Story, and *the Icon*

by

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Abstract

In the realm of the *KickQueens*, Malak Alawye breaks time's cyclicality when she hits an armed man in the crotch. She takes Lebanon out of its traumatic loop and into a linear dimension where progress is possible. *KickQueen* is a semi-fictional, semi-factual reflection on the icon of the October 2019 uprisings in Beirut. It is a magic potion against forgetting. It asks us to remember: "What does it mean to kick an armed man in the crotch? How does this gesture live in our embodied collective?"

Calling on a gesture's cite-ability, reenactment, and potentiality, the research behind this project addresses the limits of the icon both within and without the body, exposing its representational successes and failures while at the same time investigating how a hybrid narrative can translate into a multi-media installation using video performance, sculpture, and sound.

Keywords: embodiment; gesture; multi-media; icon; revolution; installation

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Defence Statement

On Traumatic Amnesia, Entering the Collective, and Gesture

Beirut, sometime around 1975, perhaps years before, the Lebanese Civil War starts. Beirut, December 20, 1984, I am born. 1990, the Lebanese Civil War is said to be over. I have lived a few years of war, of which I have barely any recollection. Most of my childhood memories have found their way into some internal black hole that I'm oblivious to. In fact, all I can remember before I turned seven or eight are four childhood memories:

One, my earliest memory: I'm four, sitting in kindergarten, and a teacher, Ms. Reema, is teaching us how to make a basket using a soap bar and pins.

Two: another school memory, I'm probably five, and my math teacher is scolding me for shouting out the right answers to addition problems before the other kids have had the chance to think about them.

Three: a recurring memory: I am five, probably six, my whole family is driving off in their car; I'm running after them in distress, refusing to let them leave without me, but refusing to go with them.

Four: I have no idea how old I was. My family and all the neighbors in our building are gathering in the underground shelter. There's a power cut. It's very dark but for our flickering irises, enough light to meet each other's gazes. The janitor's son teaches us, kids, how to make shapes out of aluminum foil to pass the time, or probably to distract us from the loud bombing.

At eight years, the fog of forgetting started to lift off. It does seem that I had moved into womanhood soon after. But that's another story. What on earth wiped off most of my childhood from my memory? Apparently – and I only found out in 2019 – I was struck by what is called traumatic amnesia. It is to artmaking that I owe the long path to this self-diagnosis. Thanks to my research, I was able to pinpoint the cause and the effects and know that forgetting was not my condition; it was a condition shared by many people in Lebanon.

Jalal Toufic is a writer and artist who speaks eloquently to this condition. He attributes the curse of forgetfulness to an imposed erasure.

> Against the prevalent post-traumatic amnesia encountered in post-war Lebanon, and which is exemplified by the unjust and scandalous general amnesty law that was passed by parliament on March 28, 1991 (Law No. 84/91) and that pardoned all political crimes before its enactment with the exclusion of "crimes of assassination or attempted assassination of religious figures, political leaders, and foreign or Arab diplomats," writers and filmmakers should have devised affirmative scenarios and strategies either to remember or not to remember: — Not to remember—without forgetting. (Jalal Toufic 2007, 9)

After 1991, the war was suspended in limbo for fear of reawakening past sensitivities between political parties. Wounds were covered with invisible bandages; kids were left with narrative fragments, jaws still open, eyes still wide. School history books unchanged buried fifteen years into a time capsule and sent it to the realm of oblivion. But did we really forget?

Before delving into trauma studies, I had been following an instinct to make autobiographical art. *Home, Suspended* (2012) (Fig. 2), my MA grad project pre-MFA, was an autobiographical video installation where personal objects turned into identity carriers. I created a liminal space inspired by Homi Bhabha's "third space," an interstice where "the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha 1994, 2). In *Home, Suspended*, I shared myself as a displaced Lebanese woman, reconstructing her identity by foraging her "landed-in" Dutch house for memories. Projecting on an object to find and define herself, knowing in retrospect. Similarly, today, I am aware of the distance that stands between me and Lebanon and the incompleteness of my narrative perspective when I reflect on its social and political struggles. I left my country thirteen years ago but continue to negotiate my belonging to it through my occasional visits, friends'' accounts, or the news that I witness via online media.

Figure 1.Home Suspended (2012) - Family Photo
(From my website https://www.ghinwayassine.com/family-photo)

Figure 2. Ironing Board (2018)
(From my website https://www.ghinwayassine.com/ironing-board)

Both *Home, Suspended*, and *Ironing Board* (2018) (Fig. 3), my first project during the MFA program, were concerned with the decontextualization of domestic objects to resurrect the imposing narrative memory that they conjure, along with its haunting effect. Exorcising the homely. Unknowing the known, the habitual usability, opens up to the uncanny or unhomely—a pleasure in not knowing, all the possibilities of being and becoming. As I learned to indulge in uncertainty, nostalgia left me, and with it, my focus on personal story and identity. “I” does not matter when home and identity are unnecessary. From Lebanon to Saudi Arabia, to Dubai, to the Netherlands, back to Lebanon, then Dubai, then to Canada, “We” became the new “I.” I joined the MFA program to leave the “Me” and enter the Collective. Projecting on people opens up endless possibilities; the new “I” is relational. My research took a turn from the personal to the collective, and I began investigating relational autobiography as a radical position of belonging. Letting go of memory as an event and diving into the emotion of the event. Emotions are the human elements that connect any two people together. What if we can co-write ourselves through our shared emotions? In “Collective Feelings,” Sara Ahmed defines “feelings-in-common” that can be traced over to reveal a collective body made up of embodied emotions. Ahmed describes emotions “as not simply ‘within’ or ‘without’” but as defining “the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects” (Ahmed 2004, 25). The body becomes part of a collective territory. Is my body a marked body? Does my body belong to me, or to my whole lineage? My work took on

a somatic turn when I realized that I was working with sense memory[1] or embodied memory, and stories that I could not perceive myself. I acknowledged that my work is intuitive and surrealistic in its *automatism*[2], stories finding their way out of the subconscious and into the work. And those stories or memories, like dormant lava, show up unexpectedly, mostly uninvited, and get awakened in the most peculiar ways: a smell, a dance move, a trip to another city. They're not solicited, but they sure know when to show up, like when I once put my hand on my heart during an improvised movement. As I wrote at the time,

> *When I put my hand on my heart, something did not feel right. It was not my heart. It was my mind. I was taken back in time. I remembered witnessing the procession yearly. Ten days of mourning, forced to wear black, my Shiite family taught me how to never forget the war of Karbala. Turning agnostic did not mean that my body forgot the sight of those men beating their bloodied heads with their hands till their white towels turned red. Hundreds of people marching the streets every year, beating their hearts to a single sound, the streets shaking. Commemoration and ritual. The gesture lives within me, even when I am not aware of it. Does my child see it when I can't? Is witnessing different from hearing a story?*

My project *Meditation on An Ideology of Pain* (Fig.4) was born from this simple gesture of touching my heart. It was then that I discovered gesture as a memory portal. Later, I drew inspiration from Rebecca Schneider and her work around gestures and their portal opening, time-altering abilities.

[1] Charlotte Delbo distinguishes sense memory from ordinary memory, sense memory being associated with the affective impact of trauma while ordinary memory is registered as chronological events. (Delbo, Lamont and Langer 2014)

[2] The surrealists defined "psychic automatism" as a concept and a technique in art-making which tries to express thought as it functions in the unconscious without any restriction from reason. This includes automatic bodily performance, dreams and induced dream states, and visual arts-techniques that could be executed automatically. (Bauduin 2015).

Figure 3. A Meditation on an Ideology of Pain (2019) – Studio presentation

> "A gesture, like a wave, is at once an act composed in and capable of reiteration, but also an action extended, opening the possibility of future alteration." (Schneider 2018, 286)

I joined the MFA program to talk about resilience, an ability to withstand a past, and as my art healed me, and I began to feel more embodied, I, and my work, got more anchored in the present. *KickQueen* is a present gesture, a visible tip of an invisible thread, that I touched, then held, then followed, until I could resurrect its past into an alternate future.

You Can't Get Interrupted If You're Heading Nowhere

> In the register of the imaginary, the pain of the other not only asks for a home in language but also seeks a home in the body.
>
> --Veena Das

On October 15, 2019, protesters filled the streets of Beirut. A movement started. I got to witness it from my Vancouver home through my small phone screen. From a distance, I could not understand the reality of the situation, and that is why I did not wish

to partake in it. But the feeling that something major was happening in Lebanon transcended distances and borders, and the news of numerous Lebanese immigrants organizing solidarity protests in their foreign cities spread.[3] I sporadically followed the news hoping to define a side on which to stand, am I with, am I against the revolution, do I believe, do I support? But then, on October 17, an icon was born. And that icon is what spoke to me the most among all the images and information that I was consuming on a daily basis. It was that of a woman hitting an armed man; her foot, side-kicking him in the crotch, as his rifle pointed towards the sky. Her name was Malak Alawye. The video went viral: first a video, then a picture, then an illustration in many iterations, then an icon. The kicking gesture was arresting.[4] It started a conversation with me. Through witnessing it, a sense of myself was awakened. I chose to obsess about it for some time, decipher it, reproduce it, restage it, repeat it, remember it, reclaim it. I say remember it because when gestures arrest a person, a body with memory, they do so by attaching themselves to a pre-existing version of themselves in that memory/body. They actually enter, breaking the boundaries between them and us. Like when we touch something, part of us gets awakened to that something outside us. The October uprisings had awakened my suspended connection to Lebanon and reminded me that I still cared and belonged. But the icon did another thing. It interrupted my thriving surviving diasporic life. It took me back to the time when I was still living in Lebanon and struggling as a woman because I felt oppressed, harassed, afraid, and unbecoming.

My journey with the side-kick gesture began. The first thing I did was inform my personal trainer about it and request that he include it in my training program. I then planned to rehearse it with a somatic experiencing practitioner, then to draw it, to measure it, to locate historical instances of it, pop references, feel it, touch it, think it, dream it. What IS giving an armed man a side-kick in the crotch? But then COVID happened. And I, like many other people, got interrupted. Suddenly, the kicking gesture started leaving my body. I tried to hold on to it, but new, more urgent gestures were

[3] Many media agencies covered the diasporic protests such as the National News and The Arab Weekly, among others. https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/leave-so-we-can-come-back-lebanese-diaspora-joins-the-protest-1.927633 and https://thearabweekly.com/lebanese-abroad-look-ways-get-involved-protest-movement

[4] Rebecca Schneider describes certain gestures as “arresting”, “beckoning”, “body-jumping”, “interval-opening”. Those are gestures from a past that call for our response and when encountered in the present, future to them, they show a special ability to reroute time. (Schneider 2018)

finding their way into me. Here I was, obsessing over an icon that was dissolving into the abyss of the world wide web while Corona became Google's most searched word overnight. Here I was, doing a project about Lebanon's October revolution[5] while protestors went into lockdown and the world stood still. The whole project risked losing its urgency if it wasn't for the gift of interruption and the adaptability of the human body. So, from being obsessed with the kick, I became obsessed with interruption itself. How does interruption register in the body? How does losing certainty and a prospect future land in different bodies - mine and others'? What is progress for post-war undermined populations? How do their non-privileged bodies react to the COVID reality, and what about the people from the top half of the globe? Survival and time's linearity got intertwined. Was that a sense of privilege that I was feeling? The ability to find safety in uncertainty, the resilience that I learned throughout my traumatic history, the normalcy of being interrupted and having to start over. And start over, and over. I saw people panicked around me while I played a balancing game, standing on one leg, eyes closed, thinking about the gift of not knowing and my learned ability to let go of control. Who's saving for their retirement years anyway? The world did come to a standstill, the Lebanese Revolution did get interrupted, but then it started again. The Lebanese chose to die from the disease over dying from poverty and depression (Gavlak, 2020). Corona interrupted the revolution; then the revolution interrupted Corona. Enter the loop.

This looping limbo situation was fruitful for my longing to build a universe around this icon, what sci-fi writer Philip K. Dick calls "a universe that doesn't fall apart two days later" (Dick 1978), a semi-fictional semi-factual account or a pseudo-reality. A universe akin to Jalal Toufic's *The Dancer's Two Bodies* (Toufic 2015) where an aesthetic theory folds onto itself to believe the lie that is its own creation, a theory pulled to its extremes, testing the limits of its own proposition, based on the real but refusing to anchor itself in the real. Many questions asked themselves. What are the limits of this video? What anchors it in the real? What are its reality-defying qualities? In Malak Alawye's video that I stumbled upon on Twitter, we see her action duplicated. At first, she kicks the man at regular speed, which takes approximately one second, then the image is repeated and slowed down to three seconds. This repetition and slowing down demand from the

[5] I will be using the term revolution throughout this document in reference to the aspirations of the people who took part of it and not to the actual results it achieved. For further insights on the "what is or is not revolution" polemic, see Azoulay, n.d.

viewer a different kind of attention than witnessing the action once and at real speed. The repeated image becomes a reenactment where both action and time itself are altered. When a gesture's action is moving forward in time, its repetition is simultaneously moving back to its referent and forward to create new possibilities. Is this repetition a redoing or undoing? What happens when the foot touches the crotch? What if the repetition is akin to a magic moment where a trauma leaves the body? Like the prince's kiss in *Snow White*, the kiss that undoes a curse, does this second kick undo history? Those are questions I asked myself during the day, while thick binders of theory mused in my imagination in my sleep: Rebecca Schneider's interval-opening interval-crossing gestures that call on our "openness to response-ability" (Schneider 2018, 293) and Jalal Toufic's dancers' double bodies: the physical one, and the "subtle version [from] a realm of altered movement, body, space and time" (Toufic 2015, viii). What if, surreally speaking, every time a woman, physically or figuratively, side-kicks a man in the crotch, a portal opens, a side-kick dimension where time moves from looping and cyclical to linear, a realm where all traumas get remembered, sifted through, and erased, once and for all?

Thus, came my text – or perhaps I should call it a story – *You Can't Get Interrupted If You're Heading Nowhere* (Appendix 1), the ground in which the project rooted and from which it grew. I let my subconscious flow and what came out was a collage: coiling mechanisms; a dancing ballerina in a wind-up music box; a Lebanese actress, the heroine of the only film I found with a female fighter; a looping dream of being shot; the *Realm of the KickQueens,* which contains women[6] who have dared to stand in the face of oppression to protect themselves and assert their sovereignty. Those were my text fragments, and here are some of them.

> *A person interrupts a pirouetting ballerina by closing the top cover of the box. Open the box, and the figurine picks up the pirouette from the last position it was in before the interruption.*
>
> *More than 20 years ago, I was shot while sleeping. Perhaps in my dream. The bullet's metal went straight into my heart. I opened my eyes; I was dead. When I woke up, I could not tell whether the awake me was in the realm of the living or the dead. The sound was loud and real. The impact was terrifying and visceral. The bullet went inside me, but instead of closing*

[6] I am using this seemingly exclusionary nomination because I'm speaking from my own experience and that of the friends whom I spoke to, all of whom are women. My hope is that any woman identified person could relate to this project.

my eyes, I opened them. I had a reversed death. I could have been living dead ever since. I have a beautiful life; I even made a daughter. I wonder whether she thinks I'm dead or alive. Did the shot interrupt my sleep? Or did my waking up interrupt the shot? In the half-asleep half-awake micro-second of shooting and waking up, a loop.

Layla, from The Return of the Hero, did not perform a side-kick, but she was seen instructing Karate students practicing it. Assuming that at a certain point in the past, Layla did give one of her opponents a side-kick in the crotch, Layla and M.A would have joined this portal, each in her own time, and the actress Madlene Taber, not the character of Layla, would be with M.A in the realm where women side-kicked a man in the crotch to stop them from shooting a rifle. The Realm of the KickQueens.

If Lebanon was in a musical box, what song would be playing?

Why is the crotch the foot's favorite target? When the foot touches the crotch, a portal opens– a portal to a dimension where time becomes linear again. At the point of impact, the attacker and attacked go into a union. They occupy a subtle body that transcends the fight scene. The subtle dual body enters a whirlpool that twirls it back to 1975. From there, it gets projected into a realm where time and space are altered and where all memory is brought to the surface, sifted through, and then erased.

Is time metallic?

In my writing, I have always given myself permission to mix fact and fiction and distort reality because history does not represent the reality of pain felt. I grew up in a place where history books have not been updated past the end of World War II, with 1943 as the last commemorated date, the year that Lebanon gained its independence from French colonization. History books were not updated for fear of talking about the Civil War and creating further frictions, and when there was an attempt at rewriting the history school curriculum in the early 2000s, the people involved failed at reaching a common memory of our past then forfeited the task (Nemer 2019). For individuals who experience trauma, the tragic event does not register in the realm of fact; it registers in the body in a limbo space between knowing and not knowing. To address trauma, one needs to think beyond the realm of factual historicity. As a trauma survivor myself, it became important to give myself permission to slither between the imaginary and the real in order to let others into my embodied history. Veena Das draws an intriguing triangle around language, pain, and the body. She attributes to the register of the imaginary the power to transmit an embodied pain: "In the register of the imaginary, the pain of the other not only asks for a home in language but also seeks a home in the body." (Das 1996, 88) The imaginary has taken the form of lies in some of my earlier

autobiographical writing. In *KickQueen*, it takes another form, that of hybrid narrativity. *KickQueen*, with its impossible propositions of altered realms, is my first attempt at mixing fact and fiction while at the same time making it easy for the reader to decipher what's one and what's the other. Both forms are ways to reclaim a history that was not registered and validated yet was deeply felt. Although my first intention behind this project was not to historicize as much as it was to investigate the somatic remnants of an iconic gesture, I have come to acknowledge that this somatic exploration is in itself an alternative historicization.

You Can't Get Interrupted If You're Heading Nowhere became the script or the subtext for this project, as well as a physical element in the space. Narrative elements from the text transmuted into exhibition material: time as metal was translated into metallic sheets or book pages protruding from a wall (*KickQueen–the Story*), the ballerina in a musical box became a side-kicking rotating sculpture with looping audio (*KickQueen–the Icon*), and the realm of the *KickQueens* became a visual metaphor in a short film (*KickQueen–the Body*).

Figure 4. KickQueen (2020) – Installation Shot at Audain Gallery in Vancouver. Photo by Hannah Campbell.

KickQueen: The Process

KickQueen–the Icon and *KickQueen–the Story*

In the gallery space stands a rotating figurine on a tall metallic cylinder. Her eyes meet ours on the same level. She stands firmly, grounded by her left leg, her right leg hovering in the air. The woman is stuck in an endless twirl, kicking an invisible crotch. As you come closer to her, you hear a voice. A female reading a text or fragments of a story. A few sentences repeating in loops:

> *Corona interrupts the revolution ---- the revolution interrupts Corona ---- Corona interrupts the revolution ---- the revolution interrupts Corona ---- ad infinitum.*
>
> *A crack ---- an interruption ---- a foot ---- a crotch ---- a crack ---- an interruption ---- an impact ---- a foot ---- a crotch ---- a crack ---- an interruption ---- an impact ---- a thrust ---- a foot ---- a crotch ---- a crack ---- an interruption ---- an impact ---- a thrust ---- a union ---- a foot ---- a crotch ---- a crack ---- an interruption ---- an impact ---- a thrust ---- a union ---- a transcendence ---- a foot ---- a crotch.*
>
> *I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- ad infinitum.*
>
> *I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- ad infinitum.*

Figure 5. KickQueen–the Icon (2020), total/front.
Photo by Hannah Campbell.

When I decided to 3D print the side-kicking figurine, I did not give the plastic material much attention. I admired its blankness as an abstraction, and its failure to render minor details suggested an erased identity – which for me correlated with my visual choice of the silhouette. Later on, I came to appreciate its contrasting newness and fakeness with the rawness and ancientness of metal, the second material that I chose to work with. This replicable sculpture mimics a virtual image, a representation, a viral video, a gesture from the present, which hints at a past that is marked with knives, bullets, and tanks. The rough metallic cylinder it stands on resembles Beirut in its chaos, industrialization, and faint reverberation of a resounding rumble.

Figure 6. KickQueen–the Icon (2020), close-up.
Photo by Hannah Campbell.

Figure 7. KickQueen–the Icon (2020), close-up, 2.
Photo by Hannah Campbell.

On the wall near the sculpture hang five metal prints of photos and text. They are pages floating on a white background, unframed, uncontained. This is where the audience can read fragments of *You Can't Get Interrupted If You're Heading Nowhere.* Like page spreads extracted from a book, the sheets are folded in the middle, with text on one side and an image of the kicking silhouette on the other. They protrude from the wall, inviting the viewer to explore them from all angles and approach them to read the small printed text. (Fig.9,10,11)

Both *KickQueen–the Icon* and *KickQueen–the Story* are positioned in a way that demands an embodied engagement of the viewer beyond a detached gaze, whether by tilting the head towards the sculpture to hear the soft speakers or walking around to look at the material's details. It is crucial for me to engage the audience in such an embodied reception of my work to provoke their own body memory and challenge the hegemony of the ocular. That is why, when displaying the film *KickQueen–the Body,* I chose to free the monitor from its typical wall attachment and placed it on an A-stand on the floor around which the audience could walk.

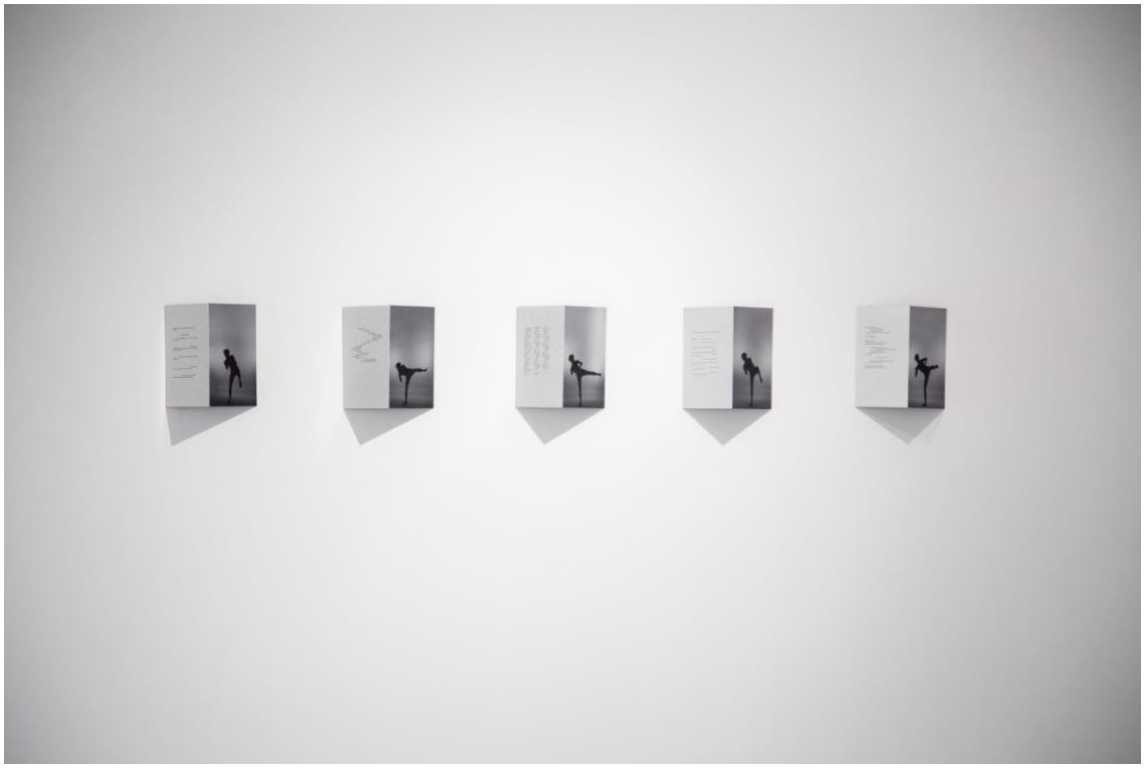

Figure 8. KickQueen–the Story (2020), full.
Photo by Hannah Campbell.

Figure 9. KickQueen–the Story (2020), full.
Photo by Hannah Campbell.

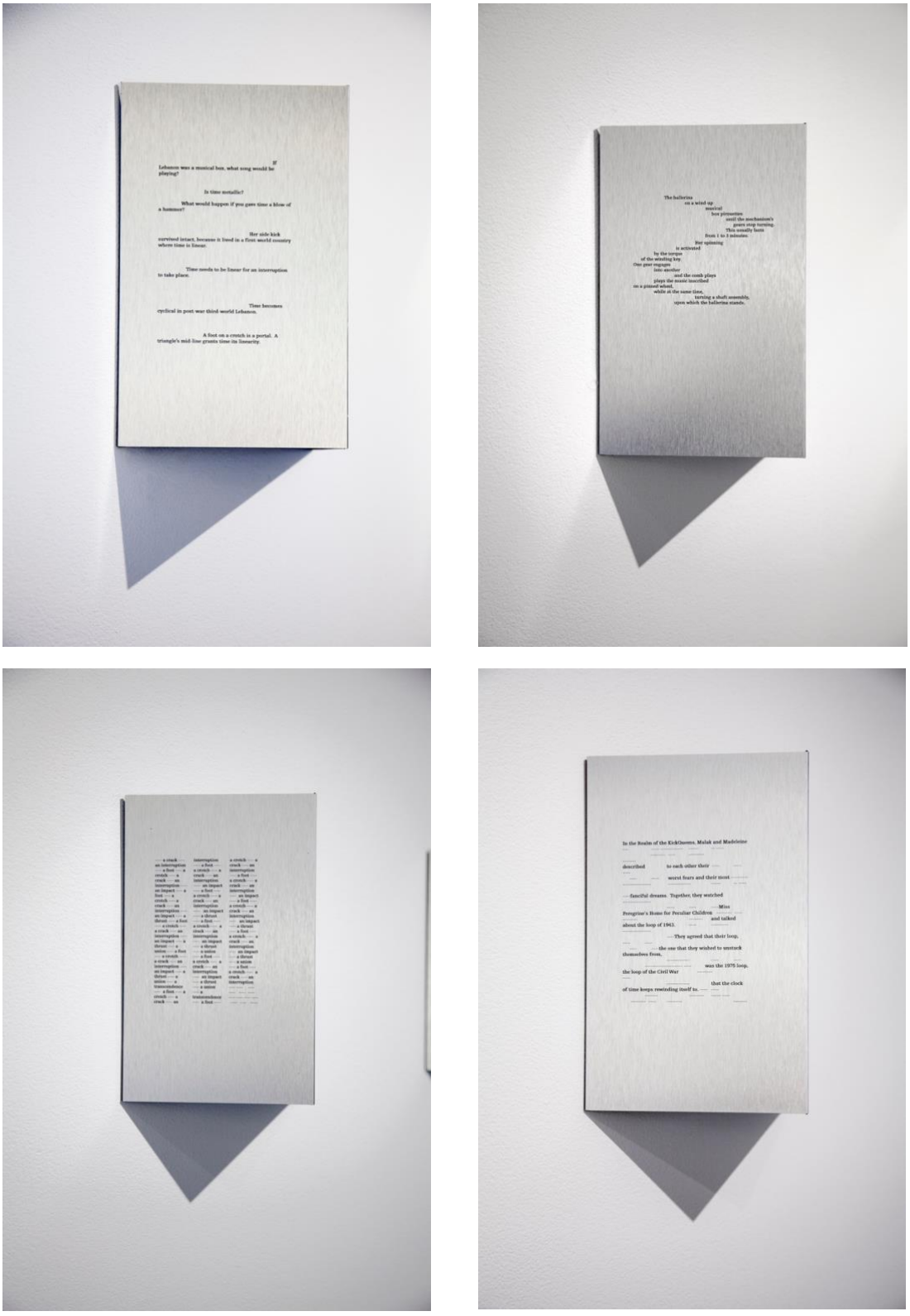

Figure 10. KickQueen–the Story (2020), close-ups.
Photos by Hannah Campbell.

KickQueen–the Body

How can my body become the icon? How can my body portray the icon without adding a reference, an identity, other than that of a female body? How can I be an emotionless motion/body when the gesture is the protagonist? What if I become an abstraction, a silhouette, a silhouette that reveals the minor gestures,[7] the angles, the joints, the movements, the coordinates, the physical dimensions, the proportions? The silhouette attempts to become a mirror for the audience, a largescale image that confronts them while evoking their bodily sensations. What if this mirror incites minor movements, twitches, or physiological fluctuations? Perhaps they'll notice something in their breath or muscles. The mirror-image kicking silhouette faces them to ask, "Does this gesture exist in your body? And if it does, where and how? And if it doesn't, what remains of it for you?"

Figure 11. KickQueen–the Body (2020), video stills.

In the research paper that led up to my project, I called *restless empathy* an empathy in motion. It is our responsiveness to other bodies through our gesturing sensitivity and capacity to move and be moved. Restless empathy, I wrote, allows one to feel into the other through feeling into oneself. Can we meet each other in movement and see what tunnels, bridges, neural pathways, mirror neurons, and embodied memories come through? Those questions percolated my film, *KickQueen–the Body*, along with questions about rhythm, time, and gifting.

[7] Erin Manning describes a "minor gesture" according to its capacity be transformed, the minor being "the gestural force that opens experience to its potential variation" (Manning 2016,1).

Starting the making process, I felt a strong pull to initiate with the sound. I imagined the rhythm to hold a strong presence in the film. Perhaps because as noisy as that original video clip was, you could not hear the kick itself. What was the sound of this kick? What did my friends hear when they felt vindicated and hopeful at the sight of it? On the street, a reporter asked a man who was shouting and cursing a politician, “Is this the way to send him a message?” His answer, “I do not wish to send him a message,” became another icon, a sonic icon, that got circulated on social media. “I do not wish to send him a message” found its way into *KickQueen’s* audio track, along with a friend’s comparison of the situation in Lebanon to a psychology test called Learned Helplessness[8], and more importantly, a distorted version of the Lebanese national anthem, a kick to patriotism, to the illusion of having a “Patrie” (literally “fatherland”), the word the French taught us to call our homeland. Our French colonizers taught us to believe in a fatherland whose fathers, today, should probably hold their hands over their crotches.

Repetition, successions, progressions, loops, and interruptions became the aesthetic principle as I worked simultaneously on my audio and video editing. I asked myself the question, “How can I make an image coil?” Researching videos that use various looping techniques, I was particularly inspired by an experimental looping video called *He Him My Husband Bill*, by Paul Pfeiffer.[9] In this video, a section of an interview with Hillary Clinton is repeated over and over, with each repetition superimposing onto the previous one. Clinton’s looping line is: “I guess everybody says to me how can you be so calm or how can you just you know look like you’re not upset and I guess I’ve just been through it so many times.” Repetition in Pfeiffer’s work opens up an interval where gesture becomes a reiteration. “Citable gestures,” as described by Swen Steinhäuser, “part with their present context of determination and begin to signal towards the possibility of future alterity” (Steinhäuser 2016, 17). Every time a duplicate of the image/sound of Clinton overlaps the previous one with a delay, moments of in-betweenness emerge, and with them, the possibility to witness elements that one might have missed in a single viewing: her minor hand gestures, facial micro-expressions, lipstick color, her undulating tonalities, her straightened hair. There’s a deliriousness in such repetitions where gradually the words, with their meanings, start to part and leave a

[8] The full quote from Samah can be read on page 16 of this paper

[9] The video can be found here: https://vimeo.com/9271923

hint of speech, their musicality, and their felt, not only the heard and the seen, is brought to the surface. Clinton's video becomes a mantra, a depersonalized foreground stripping itself down to reveal its hidden referentiality.

As I worked on editing *KickQueen–the Body*, I kept asking myself: "What if this project was not only a personal need or a catharsis? What if it's a gift? Whom am I gifting it to, and with what intention am I giving it?" I was inspired to talk to Lebanese women about what they thought of the kicking icon. As I placed my body in the body of Malak Alawye, I asked four of my Lebanese female friends to do the same. I asked them to say, "My name is Malak Alawye…" and let their unfiltered thoughts fill in the rest for them. I witnessed Chada's mind transporting her back to the start of the Civil War as soon as we began playing this automatic associations game. To my surprise, the first thing she said was, "My name is Malak Alawye. At 5 pm, on Tuesday, 1975". Talking to Chada, Samah, May, and Aya, I was asking all of us to find this gesture in our embodied memory, this gesture that entered our consciousness as an image. My friends told me about the times they had kicked men in the crotch, literally or figuratively. They told me about the illusionary freedom they felt during the revolution, the way they could almost touch *change*, the freshly acquired agency that they basked in for days on the street, participating in the protests, dreaming that tomorrow would be a better day for Lebanon. And eventually, how it all collapsed. They told me about how vindicated they felt as they watched Malak kick that man and how empowering and transformative it was for them. They also told me about how the icon was leaving the collective memory, how it could turn into an urban myth in a Barthesian sense,[10] and how the idealism of the icon was demystified for Aya after she met Malak in person and saw a non-idealistic side of her.

> It reminds me of my story and my past. I also once hit a man, also in Riyad El Solh, a long time ago, then I ran away. I was filming; it was a protest for the assassination of Hariri[11]. A man came and put his hand on my breast or my butt; I did a very quick side-kick. He fell on the floor, and I was

[10] French theorist Roland Barthes (1915-1980) defines as myths, the cultural power of signifiers, usually objects, and in this paper's context, an image that turned into a collective representation- and studies those within social semiotic systems. (https://criticallegalthinking.com/2020/06/12/roland-barthes-myth/)

[11] On 14 February 2005, former Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafic Hariri was killed along with 21 others in an explosion in Beirut, Lebanon. (https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/rafik-hariri-assassination-key-events-before-and-after-1.978996)

shocked. So, I ran away. It hit his abdomen. It was at the same location. Approximately the same. Yeah, it reminds me of this story. (Chada)

I thought about myself but not physically, whether I could hit someone. I saw myself in her strength because I've given conceptual kicks to masculinists. It's about how to talk back to a masculinist in his own language. Or his way. Of course, I've done it. And, of course, I see myself in her. But not physically. (May)

All that we thought of as meaningful seems to have been an illusion. It's this illusion that we got the power and the freedom, illusion that we were freeing ourselves from the ruling class at the time, and now I see that no, we're still subjected to their rules and their power and their authority even if we don't want it. I can't deny that we gained relative freedom. I lived this on the street, but it seems that we lived in a state of outburst, and now it's like, ok, what did we do with this freedom and anger? How did it proceed? Protests and meetings, actions, civil disobedience, etc., but in the end, I don't know if we reached anywhere; the oppressor is much bigger than our actions. Especially that it wasn't only the system against people, people were also against each other, and there were problems within the society. No one agreed. I discovered that later. That's why I'm saying it was an illusion. (Aya)

My name is Malak Alawye. And while I'm walking. I like to keep moving. I don't have time. I like to keep going without interruption on the street in my way. If I see a branch, I will take it away. If I see a rock, I will step over it if there's a crowd. I can move around. But if someone stands in my way. And won't let me pass. I feel I can kick them. Not to hurt them, but I just need to continue on my path. I really don't have time to waste. I prefer that no one interrupts me on the street. (Samah)

My name is Malak Alawye. At 5 pm, on Tuesday, 1975. My name is Malak Alawye. In the washroom at my parents' house. When the sun hadn't risen yet. Je m'appelle Malak Alawye. When I was in Paris. I had an accident. And I don't remember. My name is Malak Alawye. When I read my book. And I think about woman's suffering in Lebanon. My name is Malak Alawye. When I was 14, when Hariri died, and we went to the protests. My name was Malak Alawye. When I hit a man and ran away. (Chada)

This reminds me of a test in psychology called Learned Helplessness. You take a dog, and you stress this dog in a very uncontrollable manner. The dog will have learned helplessness. He will imagine that he has no power to influence anything in the environment. […] So yeah, I guess we were all in learned helplessness, and now it doesn't mean that we did change anything. But we know that there is a safe part of this chamber. (Samah)

My friends revealed to me why this gesture arrested me in the first place. It was because I was incapable of physically hitting a man, perhaps even physically hitting anyone. I witnessed a lot of men fighting in Lebanon, and that distressed me quite a lot. In Lebanon, women were hiding their kids while the men were fighting; that's the truth

that I grew up to. Aya, Samah, Chada, and May revealed to me that I was witnessing a breaking of a boundary. The boundary of another body, usually untouchable, unattainable, and invincible. And we all, except for Chada, who learned Karate at a very young age and was raised by a powerful single mother, spent our lives rehearsing this kick, in our minds, visualizing a kick to our fathers, brothers, partners, and politicians, for holding our voices hostage. It became clear to me that if this project was a gift, it was a gift to myself and to the women that I spoke to that have been conditioned to feel too helpless to see any possibility for change.

Malak Alawiye's kick did become an icon of the revolution, at least for a few weeks. The designer Rami Kanso turned it into a graphic artwork, *Take That* (2019) (Fig.4), adding the Arabic words "*Aleyhom*," which translates as "at them" (at the politicians), a phrase that was repeated over and over by the protestors. Within no time, his illustration turned into a profile picture of thousands of social media users and was used by digital newspapers worldwide as a header for their revolution highlights.[12]

[12] On October 18, most online international sources adopted the name "kick queen" when referring to Alawye. The precise date or source for this given title are not clear. The Daily Star, a Lebanese news agency, compared her to the Nubian Queen, a similar iconic image from Sudan's April 2019 protests, which could potentially be where the name "kick queen" found its origin. https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Oct-19/493857-lebanon-kick-queen-hits-government-where-it-hurts.ashx)

Figure 12. Take That (2019).
Graphic artwork provided by Lebanese designer Rami Kanso.

This powerful icon does not encompass all the aspirations of the protestors. It is impossible to pare down the events of October 15 to a single image, and to do so – to interpret Alawye's kick as a nationalistic symbol – risks dismissing the complexity of the narrative it carries. What's more, revolutionary icons have been known to reduce women to passive symbols of nationhood – idealized abstractions divested of political agency. Then, as the political situation worsened and this icon receded from the collective memory, we might say that the image began to speak to both the ideals and failures of the revolution, what Agata Lisiak attributed to two other revolutionary images of women, namely, the ballerina from the Occupy Wall Street poster and the "blue bra girl" from Tahrir Square (Lisiak, 2014.).

Idealistic or not, forgotten or not, this image belongs to what Ariella Azoulay calls the "universal language of citizenship and revolution" (Azoulay, n.d), an image that defies the language of power represented by the armed bodyguard. Like many iconic images, it represents the body of a woman as either a hero or a victim. Such images

usually run the risk of representing a woman as either defenseless and harassed or violent yet sexualized, in both cases, reinforcing traditional gender notions that run against the empowerment they gesture towards. But in its inherently agential gesture directed towards dismantling power structures, the image of the kick queen transcends these static female depictions. The difference between those icons[13] and the kick queen icon is related to how much focus is placed on the body of the pictured woman. Malak Alawye's body is not the focal point in that video; the kicking action is. As it orients itself away from her body, her gesture shifts our gaze towards the man's crotch, exposing his vulnerability. The video that went viral and, later on, its iconic rendering, frozen in time and taken out of their context, can be reminders to women in Lebanon that there is power for us to be claimed.

KickQueen is a gift to the Lebanese women that I spoke to. It's their embodied memories, a reclaiming of history through a co-written shared narrative. Their voices found their way into my film, some sonically present, and others as invisible subtext. This realization reminded me of erasure – how hard it is to heal when the loop of interruption keeps erasing your near past. The last trauma gets swept under the next. *KickQueen* insists on remembering. How do you heal from trauma as it happens? You count your numbers, your angles, your coordinates. I became obsessed with dates and numbers. I noted down every number that showed up in front of me. Forty-five years since the start of the civil war: 1975 to 2020. Forty-five years turned into 45 clips of blows on the crotch in *KickQueen–the Body*. Two hundred ninety-two days from October 17 to August 4, from the start of the Revolution to the Beirut explosion. Two hundred ninety-two bars, four beats per bar, two hundred ninety-two bars equal 1168 beats, 120 beats per minute, 1168 divided by 120, 9.7 min, that's 9 minutes and 42 seconds. There will be 9 minutes and 42 seconds of sound in the soundtrack, 9 minutes and 42 seconds of sound for 292 days of torture. I counted my numbers as if concocting a magic potion against forgetting, so I can remember this moment when my body got awakened to the gesture of the side-kick.

[13] Examples of these icons are "The Blue Bra Girl" from the Tahrir Square 2011 protests where the blue bra is the focal point of the iconic image, and Eugene Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People (1830) where a half-disrobed woman becomes the symbol of freedom

Epilogue: On Being Anti-disciplinary, Ritual, and Story

I make art to heal. I have healed my traumas through making art, and I have healed my anxiety by making art. That is partly why I call myself anti-disciplinary. It's not a reluctance to choose a medium. I simply am not medium-based. I am not inspired by stretching the limits of one medium. It's an insistence on prioritizing intention over form. I'm not an expert in anything, and I do not value expertise. As a feminist, bisexual, agnostic woman, I value being and making relationally: Art in-relation to other women, art in-relation to other non-believing Shiites, art in-relation to other oppressed people, art in-relation to nature (hopefully).

Rethinking all the work I have done before *KickQueen*, and the mediums that I have used, I can say that I have produced a series of rituals. It's true that my Muslim Shiite belief left me at the age of 17, at the peak of my religious practice, after reading a page from Krishnamurti's Freedom from the Known. But later on, I discovered that although the belief did leave, the ritual practice did not. Perhaps all the work that I've created can be described with Louise Bourgeois's words about her art, "a series of exorcisms" (Bourgeois 1998).

I started *KickQueen* as an exploration of an iconic political gesture. Little did I know I was creating an exorcism ritual, a portal-opening time-altering science fiction account. *KickQueen* is a video performance. It's an experimental film, conceptual in its execution, narrative in its soundtrack. It's a sculpture and a book. But above all, *KickQueen* is a story. Because all that I have wanted, ever since I was a child, throughout this program, and until today, was and has been, to tell a story.

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Appendix A.

You Can’t Get Interrupted If You’re Heading Nowhere

Lebanon, October 15, 2019, protests start on the streets of Beirut. A video of a woman giving an armed man a side-kick in the crotch goes viral and becomes the icon of the revolution. They name her KickQueen. October 2019 to March 2020, the protests are not only protests. It’s the first-ever secular revolution in Lebanon calling to impeach the regime. March 2020, the Coronavirus interrupts the revolution. May 2020, the Revolution interrupts the Corona restrictions. People are fed up. People would rather die from Corona than from hunger. They take to the streets again. May 2020, the second wave of Corona interrupts the Revolution.

Corona interrupts the revolution ---- the revolution interrupts Corona ---- Corona interrupts the revolution ---- the revolution interrupts Corona ---- Corona interrupts the revolution ---- the revolution interrupts Corona ---- Corona interrupts the revolution ---- the revolution interrupts Corona ---- Corona interrupts the revolution ---- the revolution interrupts Corona ---- Corona interrupts the revolution ---- the revolution interrupts Corona ---- Ad infinitum

Time becomes cyclical in post-war-third-world Lebanon. This is one of many loops that entrapped the Lebanese people. The first Arab-Israeli war interrupted them in 1948; the Lebanese Civil War interrupted them in 1975, the Israeli Invasion interrupted them in 1982, the prime minister Hariri’s assassination interrupted them in 2005, the July war interrupted them in 2006, the Fatah al-Islam Rebellion interrupted them in 2007, the May conflict interrupted them in 2008, the Syrian war interrupted them in 2011, to name a few. In the end, are these really acts of interruption, or were they never really heading anywhere? Is it that while the wheels of wars were turning, one wheel dovetailed into another, and they moved from one gear to the next, like the train of an old clock?

The video that went viral during the Lebanese Revolution last October is another kind of interruption, the interruption of a weapon. As that bodyguard was attempting to fire in the air, this woman, Malak Alaywe her name, gave him a blow that propelled his body backward, his rifle still hovering in the air.

The Return of the Hero is the only Lebanese action film with a female fighting scene performed by a woman. Layla, the protagonist, is not the main hero, her lover, and fighter Sami is. However, towards the end of the film, she is seen saving Sami after he got injured in a fight with his enemies. Both eventually die in a bombed car in the last scene of the film.

There's a glitch in the Lebanese system that makes it so every time there's an interruption, the system restarts back from the Civil War. At the end of the war, a halt on remembering was imposed to avoid further sensitivities between the previously opposed parties, and collective amnesia ensued. Today whenever time syncopates, the collective memory goes back to 1975, to try to recollect, to re-member. It is extremely difficult to undo this glitch because it has no shape or form; it is only in the collective unconsciousness.

Last October, a Lebanese woman living in Canada saw Malak's video on the Internet. So, she asked her personal trainer to teach her how to do a proper side-kick, a technically accurate one-legged-kick worthy of going viral someday. He started preparing her with some exercises using a tower with pulleys. He put a strap around her foot, attached it to a pulley with a Carabin hook, and taught her how to master her leg position as it cable-rowed away from the tower, kicking an illusion of a person behind her. She hadn't fully mastered her side-kick when all the gyms closed. But the memory of that specific point in space, where her hovering foot should have been in relation to the rest of her body, was now embodied in her.

If the specific point in space where the foot stays in the air is not embodied, a kicker cannot trace back their kick.

But then there's magic.

Every time the swinging foot touches the body of its opponent, a portal opens—a portal for a new temporal dimension.

Layla, from *The Return of the Hero*, did not perform a side-kick, but she was seen instructing karate students practicing it. Assuming at a certain point in the past, Layla did give one of her opponents a side-kick in the crotch, Layla and Malak Alawye would have joined this portal, each in her own time, and the actress Madlene Taber, not

the character of Layla, would be with Malak in the realm where women side kicked a man in the crotch to stop them from shooting a rifle. The Realm of the KickQueens.

The ballerina on a wind-up musical box pirouettes until the mechanism's gears stop turning. This usually lasts from 1 to 3 minutes. Her spinning is activated by the torque of the winding key. One gear engages into another, and the comb plays the music inscribed on a pinned wheel, while at the same time, turning a shaft assembly, upon which the ballerina stands.

If Lebanon was in a musical box, what song would be playing?

The side-kick was an interruption in the cycle of trauma that the Lebanese people have been undergoing for decades. As such, it became an icon. And although the icon got interrupted, it opened up a new time channel—a channel where perhaps time is linear.

Metal comes in flat sheets. A blacksmith hammers the metal to turn it into a concave shape such as a bowl or a cylinder. "Inside the casing of a music box is a clock spring. It's a coiled strip of steal that is 40 cm long unwound." Time starts linear, then coils into a spring, with the blow of a hammer.

Time becomes cyclical in post-war-third-world Lebanon. Time needs to be linear for an interruption to take place.

A person interrupts a pirouetting ballerina by closing the top cover of the box. Open the box, and the figurine picks up the pirouette from the last position it was in before the interruption.

In the closing scenes of *the Return of the Hero,* Layla wears a ruby red bodysuit with a striped cape around her shoulders. She runs down a rocky hill to sneak behind an armed gangster who was shooting his rifle at her lover Sami. Layla interrupts the man with an elbow strike on his neck, then snatches his rifle from his hands, and with the butt of the handle, knocks him on the head.

In the Realm of the KickQueens, Malak and Madeleine described to each other their worst fears and their most fanciful dreams. Together, they watched Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children and talked about the loop of 1943. They agreed

that their loop, the one that they wished to unstuck themselves from, was the 1975 loop, the loop of the Civil War that the clock of time keeps rewinding itself to. But then they wondered if it was really the 1975 Civil War or was it the 1948 first Arab-Israeli war? They let their imagination go wild for a moment and fantasized about Miss Peregrine joining them in the Realm of the KickQueens.

When things calmed down, and she went back to the gym, the trainer came to see her. He found her standing in this last position he left her in before the lockdown, her foot hovering in the exact point in space where it was months ago, just the way he instructed her.

Is time metallic? What would happen if you gave time a blow of a hammer?

Why is the crotch the foot's favorite target? When the foot touches the crotch, a portal opens. A portal to a dimension where time becomes linear again. At the point of impact, attacker and attacked go into a union. They occupy a subtle body that transcends the fight scene. The subtle dual body enters a whirlpool that twirls it back to 1975. From there, it gets projected into a realm where time and space are altered and where all memory is brought to the surface, sifted through, and then erased.

A crack ---- an interruption ---- a foot ---- a crotch ---- a crack ---- an interruption ---- an impact ---- a foot ---- a crotch ---- a crack ---- an interruption ---- an impact ---- a thrust ---- a foot ---- a crotch ---- a crack ---- an interruption ---- an impact ---- a thrust ---- a union ---- a foot ---- a crotch ---- a crack ---- an interruption ---- an impact ---- a thrust ---- a union ---- a transcendence ---- a foot ---- a crotch.

More than 20 years ago, I was shot while sleeping
Perhaps in my dream
The bullet's metal went straight into my heart
I opened my eyes
I was dead
When I woke up, I could not tell whether the awake me was in the realm of the living or the dead
The sound was loud and real
The impact was terrifying and visceral

The bullet went inside me, but instead of closing my eyes, I opened them
I had a reversed death
I could have been living dead ever since
I have a beautiful life; I even made a daughter
I wonder whether she thinks I'm dead or alive
Did the shot interrupt my sleep?
Or did my waking up interrupt the shot?
In the half-asleep half-awake micro-second of shooting and waking up, a loop

I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- I sleep ---- I get shot ---- I wake up ---- I'm dead ---- I wake up ---- I get shot ---- ad infinitum

Who shot me? Was it an Israeli soldier? Was it a Lebanese Forces Militiaman? Was it an ISIS terrorist? Who's coming with me to the Realm of the KickQueens?

Her side-kick survived intact because it lived in a first-world country where time is linear.

A foot on a crotch is a portal. Your triangle's mid-line grants time its linearity.

October 12, 2019. My husband's birthday. I leave him. I interrupt a 12-years marriage. We fell in love during the Israeli war of 2006; we went in loops of peace and conflict, love and repulsion.

I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- I love you ---- You make me sick ---- ad infinitum

The day I met Malak and Madeleine, they told me that they were proud of me, a word I have never heard from my own mother. They showered me with love and asked

me if I would like my daughter to join the side-kick dimension, the Realm of the KickQueens, someday in the future. I did not answer; they knew the answer. I never learned Karate, but she will. I never learned ballet, but she might. Before ascending, I was a twirling woman in a music box, not pirouetting, but kicking, kicking patriarchy in the crotch for all the right reasons.

Appendix B.

Empathetic Restlessness: Gestural Transmissions of Witnessing in the Works of Pia Lindman and Justine A. Chambers

Introduction

In 2018 Rebecca Schneider wrote a paper called “That the Past May Yet Have Another Future: Gesture in the Times of Hands Up”. In it, Schneider describes and relates two important human gestural moments, one of prehistoric negatives of hand stencils on rocks found in different parts of the world, and the other of “Hands up, don’t shoot!” gesture from the Black Lives Matters Movement (BLM). Schneider sees in those gestures “performances bodying forth the entangled histories and potentialities of relation, even without determined or definitive signification” and refers to those gestures as body-jumping, interval-opening and interval-crossing gestures that reroute time (Schneider 2018). As a performance artist concerned with notions of embodiment, I see in those gestural moments that jump to us and demand our response, a potential to activate our own gestural movement, whether by repeating them, mirroring them, representing them or transforming them using our own bodies.

In this essay, I look at two works of art based on gestural moments of encounter and transmission using as a background Schneider’s idea of “gestures as ongoing body-jumping performances” (Schneider 2018). The first work is of New-York-based performance artist Pia Lindman, entitled *New York Times*, the second is the work of Vancouver-based dancer and choreographer Justine A. Chambers entitled *ten thousand times and one hundred more*. In both of these works the artists re-enact other people’s gestures. Lindman re-enacts in a series of public performances, gestures of grief from mourning photographs published in the New York Times, while Chambers summons gestures of resistance from her own memory and image archive and uses them to create a movement score.

My aim is to trace the restless in those significant gestural encounters where movement afforded a kind of empathetic transmission often different or more than being a copy of an original. Those gestural transmissions reveal an empathy that is activated by a

gestural “jump” or “call and response” as Schneider describes it, and that is accessed through mimetic movement and which is itself capable of generating new movement.[14]

The context of my inquiry is Erin Manning’s question “what else can a body do”. What else can a body do to exist or relate differently in the world? A body can mirror a gesture or movement, a body can slow down, repeat or syncopate a movement, and a body can transform a movement.

It is because I am interested in possibilities of existing relationally in the world *or rather ways to reveal that we cannot exist otherwise* that I see gestural transmission as a pathway to entering the collective realm. Just as Sara Ahmed tells us that emotions can be traced across times and places, delineating a collective skin (Ahmed 2004), gestures too, as Carrie Noland tells us, can migrate, and perhaps delineate a collective gestural body. I will argue that by choosing to reenact those gestures, not only are the artists calling for a resurgence of meaningful past gestures, but they are also choosing movement over stillness as a way of relating in the world.

Before the outset, it is important here to differentiate restless empathy from LaCapra’s empathetic unsettlement. In the realm of trauma studies, restless empathy is more akin to LaCapra’s notion of empathetic unsettlement than to other notions that are overly invested in identification with someone else’s trauma or show a tendency to retraumatize the body. “’Empathetic unsettlement’ recognizes the affective impact of another’s traumatic history, yet respects its irreducible specificity, and thus avoids conflating empathy with identification” (Sanyal 2002). I would however like to point out that restless empathy is not a new proposition of historicizing trauma, but an exposition of ways gestural witnessing and mirroring have produced an empathy with the mirrored experience on the level of the body, a kind of embodied empathy that is at the origin, a kinaesthetic empathy which has been the subject of numerous fields of study including dance psychotherapy, performance studies and phenomenology.

[14] It is because of global discourses acknowledging the need for empathy and others warning against it, empathy being theorized over and over again across disciplines that like love, it is becoming a word that is acquiring different conflicting meanings. I still believe this word is evolving with our evolving understandings of the human body and our unfortunately regressively evolving world politics and I am interested in pushing the limits of this word.

The Gestural Jump: We Are Moving Bodies

In New York Times and ten thousand times and a hundred more, Lindman and Chambers source out past gestures witnessed as photographic images or image-memories. Their work stems from a gestural encounter, whereby a body witnesses an external gesture that "jumps at" it and asks it to be engaged and to respond (Schneider 2018). In that moment, the gesture can be read as "a citable gesture" according to Swen Steinhäuser who, in writing about the repeatability of gesture, links gesture's citability to its transformation potential: "Citable gestures virtually part with their present context of determination and begin to signal towards the possibility of future alterity" (Steinhäuser 2015). Similarly, and within the realm of the politics of movement, Erin Manning describes a "minor gesture" according to its capacity to be transform, the minor being "the gestural force that opens experience to its potential variation" (Manning 2016). Gestures' citability, their "interval-opening interval-crossing" abilities, are as activated by the gesture's own power to reach, extending the body from which it surges, as it is by the witnessing body's openness to be moved, or "openness to response-ability" (Schneider 2018). As Steinhäuser points us towards the etymology of "cite", he unwittingly nods towards Sara Ahmed's theory of Collective Feelings where she signals us to the etymology of emotions. There's an interesting relationship between citare, "to set in motion", stir or excite, and emovere "to move, to move out". "Emotions are what moves us" (Ahmed 2004), and the cite-ability of a gesture is in its ability to be set in motion. This intertwining of gesture's cite-ability, movement and emotions, speaks to the importance of our moving body in relationship to how we navigate places and communicate intentions between ourselves and others in the world. Gestures could then be what allows emotions to move through bodies and between bodies.

Empathy, em-pathos or in-feeling can no longer be seen independently from e-motion but is now referred to its connection to movement as well. A feeling is in motion or a motion of feeling between more than one individual.

This is all to say that the words we say constantly point towards embodied significations and implications. To be jumped at by a gesture that calls for a response is to be moved affectively and kinaesthetically, to be urged by the body as witness to respond. As Lindman and Chambers' bodies decide how to "orient" themselves in the situation of witnessing, they choose the action of re-en-act-ment, mirroring and

repetition, they choose movement as response. In other words, they choose to act, to display of their agency, through movement and as a moving body.[15]

The Stillness That Moves: Pia Lindman *New York Times*

Between September 2002 and September 2003, Lindman collected "600 photographs of Afghan, American, Iraqi, Sudanese, Palestinian, Israeli, Balinese bodies in pain" from The New York Times. She then videotaped herself re-enacting some of the photographs and traced over four hundred video stills in the form of minimalistic pencil sketches, focusing on the facial expressions and hand gestures. The final step of this work was a series of public performances that Lindman began by sharing the traced sketches with her audience, before re-enacting them in different public places as stripped off and abstracted gestures (Hynes 2003).

Lindman's performative approach of stilling a gesture reveals resistance to stillness itself. Her "process involves a series of movements and adjustments before the correct pose is established and then held for twenty seconds." (McGrady 2007) In the moment of repeating the gesture and holding it in stillness, her body is resisting the minor gestures, the constant adjustments, the controlling of the breath, in order to remain still. Those are micro-movements that are imposing themselves at every moment, demanding to be felt and seen. The body is fighting its own moving nature and witnessing this nature at the same time, knowing that "the body is never … entirely in repose" (Noland 2009). The restlessness of the body manifests as a negative image to a forced stillness.

In one of her performances, Lindman spends about ten minutes striking three poses in front of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington (Ravetto-Biagioli 2006). Within those three gestures and in-between them, are intervals filled with potentiality. In Agency and Embodiment, Carrie Noland describes a Bergson's "pregnant interval" as a gap between encountering sensory information from the external world and

[15] In Agency and Embodiment Carrie Noland talks about the moving body as a separate self constantly reading movement acts around it and translating them into kinesthetic feedback before responding with movement. "Kinesthetic feedback is a rejoinder emanating from our embodiment; it speaks in a language we cannot always translate and provides sensations we cannot always name. In short, the moving body is another self within the self that informs the next move we make." (Noland 2009)

formulating a sensory response in our nervous system that guides our next action or movement. “In most cases, the nervous system formulates a response over time; it requires an “interval,” which becomes, in Bergson’s language, “a center of indetermination.” During this interval the motor body seeks the appropriate way to respond; in Merleau-Ponty’s terms, the body “adjusts” itself to the “‘direction’ of a situation” (Noland 2009).

Lindman’s gestures are operating as intervals in this center of indetermination. Her mirroring action, which is a response to witnessing the photographs, or, in Merleau Ponty’s words, an adjustment to the situation of witnessing, can also be seen as an interval where new responses are taking shape. Lindman lets us witness her in these pregnant intervals where her body is adjusting, moving, and responding but also calling. Pregnancy, from Latin prae-gnasci or pre-birth, is used to convey something new to come, a pregnant interval is a gestation period. It is a life in movement as opposed to a dead stillness. Pregnancy is also an ability to carry, to be a container. Veena Das asks the question, is it possible to feel pain in another’s body? She then relates testimonies of rape victims in India who describe the feeling of being pregnant with the pain and carrying it inside them as a hidden secret (Das 1996). Isn’t Lindman pregnant with someone else’s pain? Isn’t in her enacting their gesture, an act of surrogacy? Perhaps surrogacy here is the right word because it entails non-possession and temporariness. It is not that victim and witness become one, but it is that a witness can welcome the pain of the victim, if not for a moment, transform it, and incubate it, with the condition that it remains momentary.

To feel pain in someone else’s body, we have to meet them with a potential surrogacy through movement, to move with their pain, where the gestation period is the interval. However, this pain does not become the grief of Lindman, but Lindman does embody a grief. Through the seemingly absent tensions in her muscles, through her own proprioception, she uses stillness to convey restlessness of a pain that resides within, that is acting in and on her body. Her work shows a gestural transmission as a way of carrying the pain of others, a forced interval and an empathy in movement, a restless empathy.

The work of Pia Lindman resists arrest in two ways: first, by revealing the minor gestures of the performing body in moments of stillness, and second, by extending the

movement of the body that the photographic medium arrests. Lindman unsettles the way that trauma is usually represented through photography, a disembodied, decontextualized gesture, “frozen in space and time” (Ravetto-Biagioli 2006). She precisely refuses to relate to suffering bodies of victims as arrested. By embodying their gestures, she is enforcing a restlessness upon those frozen bodies, reanimating and reviving them, giving them a new life. “In an intriguing transformation, what was disembodied, through the photographic medium, becomes re-embodied, through her live performance” (Hynes 2003). One could argue that her choice to decontextualize gestures and dislodge them from the subjective identities of the bodies they once inhabited, is another way of freezing them. But it is quite the opposite, for in re-contextualizing them in different places she is showing their multiple possibilities of interaction and interpretation, in other words, she is showing that “they cannot be stilled … or made to represent one unique expression or experience” (Ravetto-Biagioli 2006).

Lindman allows for what Schneider calls a *resurgence,* a “reiteration, pitched toward open-ended response-ability”. “Not representational image, but image as jump, as mimetic or extended gesture folded in the fabric of call and response and generative of intervals that are not just between (as between one past and one future), but intervals among, besides, and with hosts of alternatives that might yet become, might yet have been” (Schneider 2018).

The work of Lindman points the viewers towards their own bodies and how they relate to gestures and emotions. Through holding a gesture, sketching her re-enactments and effacing the identity of the original grievers, Lindman is inviting us to see her as a body and to see her body as sketch, as a transference. She is first a witness, then a filmed body, then a sketched body, then a performing body to which the audience is now a witness. As audience become witness, they take the time to understand those gestures and they too enter the interval or center of indetermination in their own body, kinaesthetically. They are forced to be embodied witnesses because the artist deprives them from the quick access to meaning that photography usually affords and takes them on a different affective journey where their relationship to their own bodies is in question.

The Trembling Contours: Justine A. Chambers' *ten thousand times and one hundred more*

Dancer and choreographer Justine A. Chambers is "concerned with a choreography of the everyday" and its "unintentional dances" (Chambers 2019). In *ten thousand times and one hundred more*, she draws from an archive of resistance gestures found in protest images as well as in her own bodily memory, and re-enacts those gestures with the aim of resisting legibility. For Chambers, "legibility is something that is attached to privilege. Only certain bodies have the freedom to be illegible" (Hurford Center 2019). Believing that her body is not one bestowed with such a privilege, she uses illegibility in her work as a mode of resistance.

You:
Source from your memory an image of resistance, whether iconic or widely shared, personal or perceived. Do not perform the gesture itself. Perform the transitions into or out of the gesture. Imagine the transitions without movement. Arrive in the gesture with your whole body at once. Let the breath determine the rhythm of the sequence of gestures. Never complete an inhale or an exhale. Keep the breath continuous. Slow or interrupt the breath — do not arrest or stop breathing. Do not predetermine the length of each breath. Allow this rhythm to be erratic /changeable. Attempt for each gesture to be framed within a standing body with the hands incrementally moving upwards, but never arriving symmetrically above your head. Count each gesture — audible or not.

Work on being illegible.

I:
Perform 100 gestures in 100 different locations in one day. Use my whole body as an imperfect recording device, record one gesture during the performance at each of the 100 locations. Hold this gesture in my body. Memorize the feeling. Use the recorded gestures to map a route between locations. Perform the 100 recorded gestures one time in one location. Perform the felt gesture map at the entrance of the location. Let my breath determine the rhythm of the sequence of gestures. Never complete an inhale or an exhale. Keep my breath continuous. Slow or interrupt the breath — do not arrest or stop breathing. Do not predetermine the length of each breath. Allow this rhythm to be erratic /changeable.

Count each gesture — audible or not.

Work on being illegible.

Figure B.1. Ten thousand times and one hundred more: The Score (Chambers 2019).

Chambers writes herself a challenging score (fig.1) that demands considerable proprioception and body awareness. Her aim is not to record perfectly or to provide documentation of the original images, it's quite the opposite. It is to be illegible, fighting the tendency to create a complete image or a finite meaning from each gesture. She pays attention to the movements in-between. From originally being moved affectively by

images of resistance, she chooses to embody them with a subjective cleaving, severing the ocular perception on the way. Instead of focusing on a stable end-gesture, she turns towards the process of arriving at this gesture from its preceding position. How to meet the gesture in the image halfway or quarter of the way or one tenth of the way? Her work exits in the moving in-between, and in and out, from one gesture to another. The image that comes to mind here is the slow shutter speed effect in photography used in capturing movement. The effect makes visible the in-between movements, with some being clearer and others more blurred, depending on their original speed. In such photos we witness a gestural moment as a clear contour, an anchor point juxtaposed to those other blurred contours that carry momentum. This exposing of the before and after recalls what Schneider describes as a "reverberation". "Rather than approaching an image simply as representation, trace, documentation, art, or evidence of the bygone (a conventional approach to photography as trace document), might we think of it as resonance, reverberation, or ongoing call?" (Schneider 2018) Additionally, in this empathetic relating, there is an extending of the performer's body towards the first gesturing body where a reverberation between those bodies appears. Empathy as symmetry or palindrome transforms into empathy as reverberations, opening up the edges of possibilities, Chambers exists in this interval as "trembling contours", waiting for the relational to reveal itself.

Chamber's score is a dialogue with the gestures in the images, a gestural antiphony, a call and response that Schneider deems ongoing because of its ability to extend to other bodies in the future. This score reveals an experiential approach that Chambers adopts, in order to access the political through the affordances and possibilities of her body as a yet-to-come, using her gestures as anchor points towards a future in the making. The original gesture is what propels her body into a negotiation with its own motor memory, a summoning of its bodily *I can'ts*.[16]

At every moment she is open to the unexpected, her movement becoming rehearsal rather than a repetition. "To avow of this virtual possibility of repetition –repeat-ability– in modes of radical performativity … is to take up an attitude (Haltung) of non-

[16] Merleau Ponty defines "I can's" as socially acquired bodily routines that are "historically contingent and culturally specific" (Noland 2009). I argue that both Lindman and Chambers are resisting the "habitual and socially generated" and are actually in a restless search of the I can't in their body, what has not been inscribed by culture and cannot be arrested through legibility.

mastery in any given context, or else: to “being-in-rehearsal”” (Steinhäuser 2015). The more-than the gesture itself exists in its potential to future alterity. Steinhäuser describes “being-in-rehearsal”, as an experimental attitude towards the past. “It’s a movement of repetition that maintains a simultaneous reference to the past and to the future, performance as rehearsal begins to describe an experimental attitude (Haltung) towards the inheritance of a past.”

In an interview, Chambers says “instead of performing my personal gestures of resistance and these archival photographs of resistance I’m looking to find the space between those two things” (Hurford Center 2019). In fact, through exploring the potential of her own body in movement, mimicking her own resistance gestures as well as others, Chambers is revealing relationships between bodies in resistance and showing a process of knowing the other through knowing oneself. “(T)he more aware, or observing, we are of our own embodied affordances, the more receptive in recognising, or seeing others we become. This seeing and understanding of others is also conceptualised as empathy” (Rova 2017).

I see in Chamber’s process, an experimental restless attitude of witnessing, as opposed to an empathetic arrest or appropriation, or affective settlement or engulfing. Her directions are clearly insisting on restlessness as well: “Never complete an inhale or an exhale. Keep the breath continuous. Slow or interrupt the breath — do not arrest or stop breathing. Do not predetermine the length of each breath. Allow this rhythm to be erratic /changeable” (Chambers 2019). In addition to that, she gives herself the task to “work on being illegible”, the result is such that at every moment her gesture needs to be assessed, negotiated and reiterated to make it devoid of meaning.

Towards a Relational Asymmetry

The restless empathy in the work of Lindman and Chambers resides in the interval, the Bergsonian physical interval of knowing the world as a moving body, our nervous system’s time to respond through movement. But also, the interval as reverberation, the interval of potentiality where the possibilities of iterations are negotiated. This is the interval that reroutes time according to Schneider. When in front of hand stencils on the rocks, Schneider raises her hand to return the wave, she responds to the call of that gesture, describing a oneness with that hand. Schneider

questions whether in our responding to an action from the past, we are opening up paths to alternative futures.

> “In Pech Merle, standing with the handprint, I experienced the jump of gesture in the intimate space of a hail as if body to body. Whatever the initial meaning—stop, hello, come close, goodbye—nevertheless what remained was the possibility for response. Timidly and somewhat embarrassedly (I lagged a bit behind other tourists to hide my action), I held my own hand up as well, and for a brief and minor moment the interval between us could be measured in inches as well as eons. I was both other to the negative hand (the hand was not my own), and to the degree that I met one gesturing hand with another, I was the rock hand’s other hand. I wondered if my gesture reached back to meet hers, or, perhaps better, if it might travel laterally or toward a different future than the one in which “we” stand imperiled.” (Schneider 2018)

Future alterity is the transformation across the lifespan of a gesture and the way at any moment, a new response allows for a different future to be born. Lindman and Chambers perform their gestures in different contexts. Not only do they destabilize the original context, but they also open the space for new possibilities to emerge. “As citable gestures, (Lindman and Chambers’ gestures) begin to stand in a fundamental relationship to the future, namely, towards the possibility of their repetition in other contexts to come. Such possible future displacements in time and space are bound to entail difference as much as repetition.” (Steinhäuser 2015) To generate this difference, the artists resist symmetry or accurate mimesis of an original, calling on the asymmetrical to come forth. Chambers evades the definite, complete or perfect gesture by using her “whole body as an imperfect recording device” and letting her “breath determine the rhythm of the sequence of gestures” (Chambers 2019). In this restless pursuit of the asymmetrical, the arms are not allowed to reach evenly over her head. “Attempt for each gesture to be framed within a standing body with the hands incrementally moving upwards, but never arriving symmetrically above your head” (Chambers 2019).

Chambers performs in a hundred different places. The work is documented through photographs of her stilled gestures in places such as a school classroom, a hallway, a shopping centre, on the street, in an amphitheatre, in a playground, at a bus stop and more. The juxtaposition of all these photographs shows a Justine that is constantly moving, never stopping; one could even start imagining her body transitioning

between those places, jumping outside the frames of the pictures, in the negative spaces of the wall on which they hang.

Figure B.2. Justine A. Chambers with Laurie Young, ten thousand times and one hundred more (Schmitt).
Torsten Schmitt Fotografie | Berlin, www.fotosch.de

Pia Lindman performs in different countries in the United States and Europe, in front of several public monuments, as well as in window displays in New York. Her gestures were described as both symmetrical and asymmetrical to each other. They seem similar, but when performed in varying situations, their repetition produces an excess (Ravetto-Biagioli 2006).

Not only do similar gestures convey different meanings when placed in new contexts, but in their abstraction and illegibility, any subject position is undermined, forcing us to see the more-than of the body position. Asymmetry in both Lindman and Chambers' work destabilizes identities and collapses them into a body that now stands for the collective in the way that it connects many bodies through gesture. In writing about Lindman's work, film and media scholar Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli describes the artist's ability to reveal a bodily relationality, through exposing the vulnerability of the

sentient body. “Rather than treat the body as discursive (that is, as performing social critique), Lindman’s work instantiates the public dimensions of the body, its materiality, vulnerability and relations to other bodies. The vulnerability of the body to violence, abstraction, aestheticization, and enframing puts the notion of the bounded individual into crisis” (Ravetto-Biagioli 2006).

Originally aimed at disrupting our perception of mediated images of grief, and resisting the corruption of gesture as an act of resistance, *New York Times* and *ten thousand times and one hundred more* thus stand as a call to seeing each other as bodies exposed in all their liveness and vulnerability. It is a call to be more embodied in our relating, and more humane.

Conclusion

By challenging our perception of existing gestures, both artists are answering these questions: How can empathy be embodied and not only witnessed through representations, thus reinforcing the ocular hegemony? How can our empathy acquire a more experimental attitude?

The answer to those questions is an empathetic restless attitude reaching towards a relationality in motion. Restless empathy allows one to feel into the other without being inside or entering the other’s body, it is in fact a back and forth of feeling into the other through feeling into oneself and vice versa. But it is also a feeling into the collective body delineated by its gesturing sensitivity and capacity to move and be moved. Rather than thinking of empathy as always directed towards another, might we see it as its etymology suggests, being in-feeling, being human in a body? Experiencing the world through embodiment. Embodiment affords openness towards responding to those calls we encounter at every second. This turns empathy towards relationality and response-ability, existing in relation. “Being with. Being among” (Schneider 2018).

But this is also an experimental attitude towards an agency in motion, an agency in the world as move-able moving human beings: aware that at every fraction of a second our body is in action, it is responding to the living and non-living around it and it is constantly responding to and with gesture. There is a certain freedom in being aware of the movement in our bodies, it is indeed a choice of being otherwise in this world, in

exploring “what else a body can do”. A freedom “attributed to the untapped movement potentials of the human animate form, potentials that are always emerging, in the course of being explored” (Noland 2009).

There is such abundant untapped movement potential in gestural transmission that demands for gestures to resurge. When gestures become fixed visual signifiers through their historical representation, a certain freedom is lost. The freedom to experience those gestures through the body, to mirror them, to syncopate them, to slow them down, to still them, to alter them and to reverse them, to repeat them and to extend them. Their being doomed to an arrest of their calling is equal to our deprivation of freedom and agency to move with them, to move in the direction of the past and the future as bodies, the freedom to relate, a closing of the interval. Our movement potential and our freedom are so linked to our empathy that a certain restlessness should be asserted, in order to live relationally, and responsibly in this world that we inhabit.

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Appendix C.

Video Documentation

Creator/Director: Ghinwa Yassine

Video Assistance: Elke Dick

Description:

A short trailer showcasing *KickQueen* (2020) in the Audain gallery.

File Name: *KickQueen-Exhibition-Trailer.mpeg*