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‚Because it's 2020' – Geschlecht in Politik und Gesellschaft

Geschlechterdiversität und Gleichberechtigung sind bereits seit Jahren viel diskutierte, von internationalem Interesse geprägte und durch verschiedenste politische und wissenschaftliche Diskurse beeinflusste Themenfelder, die immer wieder in teilweise brisanten öffentlichen Diskussionen aufgegriffen werden. Zusätzlich rückt die seit 2017 geführte #Metoo-Debatte Geschlecht als Strukturkategorie wieder in den öffentlichen Fokus, begleitet von Auseinandersetzungen um physische und psychische Bemächtigung und Hierarchien im privaten sowie im öffentlichen Raum. Der im Kontext von #Metoo geführte Diskurs lässt sich demnach als gegenwärtiges Zeugnis dafür lesen, dass die Kategorie Geschlecht auf das Engste mit Macht und Politik verwoben ist.

Kanada nimmt innerhalb dieser zuweilen hitzig geführten Auseinandersetzungen bereits seit einigen Jahren eine wegweisende Rolle ein, indem die kategoriale Interdependenz dort explizit auf realpolitischer Ebene verhandelt wird. 2015 löste der neu gewählte kanadische Premierminister Justin Trudeau internationale Resonanz aus, als er die Zusammensetzung seines Kabinetts vorstellte: 15 Frauen und 15 Männer bildeten gemeinsam das 29. kanadische Kabinett.[1] Diese Entscheidung rückte vor allem das Prinzip der Gender Equality in den Fokus der Öffentlichkeit. Auch die ethnische Zusammensetzung des 29. Kabinetts zeichnete sich erstmals explizit durch Diversität aus: Zwei der ernannten Minister sind Nachfahren der *First Nations* und vier gehören der Sikh-Minderheit an. Harjit Sajjan, Verteidigungsminister seit November 2015, gilt seit seiner Ernennung als politischer Vorreiter für eine Ethnien- und Gender-übergreifend kommunizierende Politik. Auf die Frage einer kanadischen Journalistin nach dem Grund für diese Kabinettszusammensetzung reagierte Trudeau mit der inzwischen vielfach zitierten Begründung „Because it's 2015."[2] Der Premierminister rückt damit die politische Abbildung einer von Diversität und Inklusion geprägten Gesellschaft in den Vordergrund und inszeniert Kanada als Ort eines beginnenden politischen und gesellschaftlichen Um- und Aufbruchs, der auch in Literatur und Medien repräsentiert wird.

Auch hinsichtlich der Rechte von LGBTQI+-Personen versteht sich Kanada als fortschrittlich. Unter Trudeaus Vater Pierre Elliott, dem 15. Premierminister Kanadas, wurde 1969 Homosexualität weitgehend entkriminalisiert.[3] Zwei Jahre zuvor ebnete Trudeau Senior mit seiner Aussage, dass „[d]er Staat […] in den Schlafzimmern der Nation nichts zu suchen"[4] habe, den Weg für eine anhaltende Liberalisierungswelle in Kanada. 2005 ermöglichte Kanada als erstes Land außerhalb Europas und als viertes Land weltweit die Ehe für gleichgeschlechtliche Paare.

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[1]   Die mediale Resonanz zu Trudeaus Kabinett war breitenwirksam angelegt. Ein Artikel aus einer britischen Tageszeitung sei hier im Folgenden genannt: Jessica Murphy: „Trudeau Gives Canada First Cabinet with Equal Number of Men and Women", in: *The Guardian*, 04.11.2015, auf: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/04/canada-cabinet-gender-diversity-justin-trudeau [zuletzt aufgerufen am 13.10.2020].

[2]   Vgl. Jennifer Ditchburn: „‚Because it's 2015': Trudeau Forms Canada's 1st Gender-balanced Cabinet", in: *The Canadian Press*, 04.11.2015, auf: https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-trudeau-liberal-government-cabinet-1.3304590 [zuletzt aufgerufen am 10.02.2020].

[3]   Vgl. The Government of Canada: „Rights of LGBTI Persons", auf: https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/rights-lgbti-persons.html [zuletzt aufgerufen am 13.10.2020].

[4]   Unbekannte/r Verfasser*in: „Gestorben: Pierre Trudeau", in: *Der Spiegel*, 09.10.2000, auf: https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-17542183.html [zuletzt aufgerufen am 10.02.2020].

Beginnend mit British Columbia in 1996, haben die kanadischen Provinzen nacheinander bis 2011 das Recht auf Adoption für gleichgeschlechtliche Paare eingeführt.[5] Seit 2017 wird auf neu herausgegebenen kanadischen *health cards* (entsprechend der deutschen Krankenversichertenkarte) kein Geschlecht mehr angegeben und es ist möglich auf dem Führerschein ein X als Geschlechtseintrag vorzunehmen.[6] Seit Juni 2019 ist es außerdem behördlich möglich, ein X als Alternative zu M und F im Reisepass einzutragen.[7] Diese formelle und realpolitische Anerkennung der Existenz von Nonbinaritäten fördert auch die sprachliche Abkehr von Zweigeschlechtlichkeit. Die Politik fungiert in diesem Zusammenhang als Aushandlungsort für die Neuausrichtung gesellschaftlicher Strukturen, die direkte Auswirkungen darauf haben, wie Geschlecht repräsentiert und gelebt werden kann.

Seit Februar 2018 ist durch Inkrafttreten eines Senatsbeschlusses auch die kanadische Nationalhymne sprachlich auf eine genderneutrale Formulierung angepasst worden. Die Phrase „in all thy sons" wurde zu „in all of us" verändert.[8] Diese gesellschaftspolitische Maßnahme ist ein Beispiel von sprachlichen Neuverhandlungen zugunsten von Sichtbarmachung gesellschaftlicher Diversität. Solche Anpassungen können auch als Effekt der stark gestiegenen literarischen und medialen Repräsentationen von Frauen, BIPoCs, Intersex- und Transpersonen sowie anderen marginalisierten Gruppen gelesen werden, die den gesellschaftlichen Diskurs der letzten Dekaden maßgeblich beeinflusst haben.

Sprachliche Dimensionen

Die sprachliche Repräsentation von Geschlechterdiversität ist in jedem Sprachraum nicht nur mit der grammatischen Abbildung von Geschlecht verbunden, sondern auch mit dem Akt des Sprechens. Die Phänomenologin und Philosophin Judith Butler dekonstruiert in ihrem Text *Gender Trouble* (1991) rückgebunden an die Sprechakttheorie Überlegungen zur Unterscheidung von sozialem und biologischem Geschlecht und entlarvt letztendlich beides als Produkt des gesellschaftlich-biologischen Diskurses. Die von Butler geprägten Begriffe der Maskerade und der Performanz dienen innerhalb der Gender Studies dazu, den Konstruktionscharakter von Geschlechtsidentitäten hervorzuheben. Butler zeigt auf, dass Geschlechterzuschreibungen an Handlungsweisen und gesellschaftliche ‚Normen' gebunden sind respektive von diesen definiert werden. Geschlechtsidentitäten entstehen demnach mittels Zuschreibungen und basierend auf diskursiv hergestellten biologischen Gegebenheiten; Geschlecht wird als durch seine normierten Handlungen definiert verstanden.[9] Butlers Arbeiten bilden die Basis für den Großteil der wissenschaftlichen Auseinandersetzungen mit Geschlecht, die zunehmend neue Dimensionen entfalten: interdisziplinäre Verschränkungen von *gender* u. a. mit den Kategorien *race*,

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[5] Vgl. Canadian Legal Information Institute (CanLII): *Adoption Act, SNWT (Nu) 1998, c 9*, auf: https://web.archive.org/web/20130712021358/http://www.canlii.org/en/nu/laws/stat/snwt-nu-1998-c-9/latest/snwt-nu-1998-c-9.html#history [zuletzt aufgerufen am 13.10.2020].

[6] Vgl. The Ontario Government: „Gender on Health Cards and Driver's Licences", auf: https://news.ontario.ca/mgs/en/2016/06/gender-on-health-cards-and-drivers-licences.html [zuletzt aufgerufen am 13.10.2020].

[7] Vgl. Nick Dixon: „Feds Allow Non-binary Citizens to Mark Gender with ‚X' on Passports", in: *CTV News Toronto*, 01.06.2019, auf: https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/mobile/feds-to-allow-non-binary-citizens-to-mark-gender-with-x-on-passports-1.4447570 [zuletzt aufgerufen am 13.10.2020].

[8] Vgl. Unbekannte/r Verfasser*in: „‚O Canada': Kanada erhält genderneutrale Nationalhymne", in: *Zeit Online*, 01.02.2018, auf: https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2018-02/o-canada-nationalhymne-kanada-genderneutral-senat-gesetzesentwurf [zuletzt aufgerufen am 13.10.2020].

[9] Vgl. Judith Butler: Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, New York u. a. 1990.

class und *(dis)ability* werden in aktuellen Diskursen insbesondere der Gender und Queer Studies auf ihre politischen und gesellschaftlichen Implikationen hin überprüft. Diese Dimensionen sind auch in Bezug auf die Anstrengungen der kanadischen Regierung relevant das Unrecht der Kolonialisierung durch weiße britische und französische Siedler gegenüber den *First Nations* aufzuarbeiten.

Literarische und mediale Repräsentationen

Die kanadische Literatur- und Medienlandschaft setzt sich konstruktiv mit der Kategorie Geschlecht und alternativen Geschlechtsentwürfen auseinander. Literatur gilt seit jeher als Seismograph gesellschaftlicher Umbrüche, sodass die Aushandlung von Genderdiskursen nicht nur auf textueller, sondern vor allem auch auf sprachlicher Ebene stattfindet. Eine Frage, die sich in diesem Zusammenhang immer wieder stellt, ist: Wie politisch darf Literatur eigentlich sein? Folgt man Norbert Elias' Auffassung, dass „schon aus der Sprache, erst recht aus dem Argument […] sich die freiwillige wie unfreiwillige Involviertheit nicht wegdenken"[10] lässt, dann kann Literatur nicht *nicht* politisch motiviert sein, denkt man Politik im Sinne von gesellschaftspolitischen Fragestellungen oder Reflexionen. Die vordergründig in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts formulierte Absage an die utopische Literatur sowie der vielfach postulierte Tod des Autors als sinnstiftendes Element und als politische Figur haben das Verständnis von Literatur als Vermittlerin politischer Botschaften scheinbar an ein Ende geführt, gleichzeitig aber auch Fragen nach einer engagierten Literatur neu aufgeworfen. Insbesondere seit der Jahrtausendwende nehmen sich Schriftsteller*innen und Filmemacher*innen wieder häufiger explizit der Aufgabe an, politische Debatten und gesellschaftliche Konflikte in ihren Werken zu bearbeiten. Für die Literaturwissenschaft hat sich in diesem Zusammenhang der Begriff des „Dichter-Politikers"[11] durchgesetzt. Die Literatur und demnach auch ihre medialen Transformationsformate wie Verfilmungen oder Serien verstehen sich als „Reflexion der historisch-strukturellen Zusammenhänge zwischen Kunst (als Institution, individuiertem Hervorbringungs- und intersubjektivem Kommunikationsprozeß), gesellschaftlicher Lebenswelt und Politik."[12]

In zahlreichen kanadischen Serien und TV-Formaten werden aktuelle Genderdiskurse in lebensweltlichen Bezügen aufgegriffen und einer Reflexion unterzogen. Die vielfältigen Entwicklungen der letzten Jahre und Jahrzehnte verdienen eine reflektierte Auseinandersetzung. Dabei sollen die historischen, politischen und popkulturellen Hintergründe der teilweise rigoros geführten Auseinandersetzungen und proklamierten Gender-Krisen stets mitgedacht werden. Wenn es um die Versprachlichung von Krisen geht, die in aller Regel Übergangssituationen sind, stellt sich die Frage nach adäquaten sprachlichen und medialen Formen dieser Auseinandersetzungen. Die Untersuchung von Formen und Funktionen dieser Aushandlungen wurde für die kanadische Literatur- und Medienlandschaft bislang allerdings vorwiegend in Form von Einzelanalysen geleistet, der vorliegende Band möchte einen Beitrag zur Bündelung von interdisziplinären Forschungsergebnissen leisten, die in ihrer Synergie den vielfältigen Einfluss der Gender Studies auf verschiedenste wissenschaftliche Disziplinen spiegelt.

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[10] Hendrikje Schauer und Marcel Lepper (Hg.): *Distanzierung und Engagement: Wie politisch sind die Geisteswissenschaften?*, Stuttgart 2018, S. 9.
[11] Sven Kramer (Hg.): *Das Politische im literarischen Diskurs: Studien zur deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur*, Opladen 1996, S. 7. Die genderpolitisch korrekte Schreibweise wäre ‚Dichter-Politiker*innen'.
[12] Ebd.

Mythen und Geschichte(n)

In der Aushandlung von Geschlechtsidentitäten in Literatur und Medien der Gegenwart zeigt sich allen postmodernen Tendenzen zum Trotz der Mythos als vielfach genutzte inhaltliche Komponente und Formgebung. Mythen gelten in diesem Zusammenhang als Ausdruck grundlegender sinnstiftender Prinzipien sowie Werte und Normen einer Gesellschaft:

> Ein Mythos bezieht sich immer auf vergangene Ereignisse: ‚Vor der Erschaffung der Welt' oder ‚in ganz frühen Zeiten' oder jedenfalls ‚vor sehr langer Zeit'. Aber der dem Mythos beigelegte innere Wert stammt daher, dass diese Ereignisse, die sich ja zu einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt abgespielt haben, gleichzeitig eine Dauerstruktur bilden. Diese bezieht sich gleichzeitig auf Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft.[13]

Mythen erreichen ihre strukturelle Relevanz über die Ebene der persönlich-historischen Erfahrung, den Volksmund, die frühkindliche Bildung. Sie werden seit Jahrhunderten vorwiegend mündlich tradiert, formen durch ihre Verschriftlichung, mediale Verarbeitung und politische Instrumentalisierung aber auch immer die zeitgenössische und zukünftige kulturelle Landschaft. Darüber hinaus findet sich ihr Einfluss in diversen Wissenschaften wieder, hier werden Mythen als überzeitliche Konzepte und Metaphern über Jahrhunderte hinweg aufrechterhalten, aber auch stetig neuen Interpretationen unterworfen:

> In psychology, for instance, the myths of Oedipus and Electra have famously inspired Freud's theories of the unconscious, while in common parlance, ‚Adonis' has been turned into a typical designation for a very handsome man. […] [D]espite their undeniable recurrence and perpetual hold on people's minds, myths are far from unalterable. Instead, paradoxically it seems to be their very mutability and fluidity which furnishes them with their seemingly infinite cultural validity and power. […] Not unlike that of a chameleon, the shape a myth takes in different times and places mirrors its surroundings, thus fulfilling a crucial function in the construction and perception of human's sociocultural identity.[14]

Spätestens an dieser Stelle wird ersichtlich, dass es sich beim Begriff ‚Mythos' nicht um ein einheitlich definiertes oder angewendetes Konzept handelt. In seiner alltagssprachlichen Verwendung wird der Begriff eher tendenziös eingesetzt und trägt die Konnotation von Unwahrheit oder Irrtum, beispielsweise verdeutlicht im Konzept des *urban myth*. Im Kontrast dazu steht die Relevanz historischer, religiöser und politischer Mythen für das kulturelle Gedächtnis von Staaten und Nationen. Dem Mythos liegen über seinen reinen ‚Informationsgehalt' hinaus offenbar weitere gemeinschafts- und identitätsstiftende Funktionen zugrunde, die seine überzeitliche Relevanz erklären: „[Der] Mythos ist eine fundierende Geschichte, eine Geschichte, die erzählt wird, um eine Gegenwart vom Ursprung her zu erhellen."[15]

Im Sinne der vorliegenden Aufsatzsammlung behalten wir uns vor, den Mythenbegriff hier nicht definitorisch einzuschränken, sondern ihn in seiner vollen interdisziplinären Bandbreite im Verbund mit Geschichte(n) in verschiedensten Erzählformen untersuchen zu lassen. Denn, wie Roland Barthes sagt, „[w]ir sind hiermit beim eigentlichen Prinzip des Mythos: er verwandelt Geschichte in Natur."[16] Das Problem der Naturalisierung vereint Mythos und Geschlecht,

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[13] Claude Lévi-Strauss: *Die Struktur der Mythen* [1955], in: Wilfried Barner, Anke Detken und Jörg Wesche (Hg.): *Texte zur modernen Mythentheorie*, Stuttgart 2003, S. 56-74, hier: S. 62.

[14] Martina Hörnicke: „Gendering Myths: Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* and Aritha van Herk's *The Tent Peg*", in: Susanne Bach, Melanie Schrage-Lang und Martina Hörnicke (Hg.): *Intertextual Transitions in Contemporary Canadian Literature: Atwood, MacDonald, van Herk*, Trier 2013, S. 73-195, hier: S. 75.

[15] Jan Assmann: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München 2005 (¹1992), S. 52.

[16] Roland Barthes: *Mythen des Alltags* [1957], in: Wilfried Barner, Anke Detken und Jörg Wesche (Hg.): *Texte zur modernen Mythentheorie*, Stuttgart 2003, S. 91-108, hier: S. 100.

denn Konzepte, Kategorien und Prinzipien, die Menschen als ‚natürlich' empfinden, bleiben meist unhinterfragt.

Wie lassen sich die aktuellen Gender-Debatten in Verbindung mit (Re-)Formulierungen mythischer Stoffe verstehen? Wie lässt sich der Konnex zwischen Gender und Mythos beschreiben? Und welche Funktion kommt der Engführung dieser beiden Aspekte zu? Die 16. Tagung des Nachwuchsforums der Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien nahm sich der Interrelation von mythologischen Verhandlungen und Genderkonstellationen an und beleuchtete sie anhand verschiedener literarischer sowie filmischer und auch kunstgeschichtlicher Beispiele. Die Interferenzbereiche zwischen historischen, (gesellschafts)politischen und sprachlichen Dimensionen sollten dabei stets mitbedacht und für die Analyse der Intersektionen von Gender und Mythos anhand von Beispielen aus der kanadischen Kultur und Medienlandschaft fruchtbar gemacht werden. Die Vorträge der Tagung „Intersections of Gender and Myth in Canadian Culture and Media" im Sommer 2019 an der Universität Kassel haben diese Aufsatzsammlung inspiriert, auf Grundlage des Zusammenwirkens von Geschlecht und Mythos auf folgende mögliche Ausgangsfragen einzugehen: Wie werden die Kategorien Gender und Mythos in fiktionalen und faktualen kanadischen Texten inszeniert? Wie lassen sich diese Kategorien mit Hinblick auf literatur-, film- und medienwissenschaftliche Kontexte lesen? Wie lässt sich die Engführung von Gender und Mythos denken? Ist die Kategorie Gender gar als Mythos in einer sogenannten post-feministischen Ära zu denken und/oder ist der Mythos genderspezifisch konnotiert? Welche Besonderheiten ergeben sich aus der Zusammenführung von Gender und Mythos in kanadischer Perspektive und wie grenzen sich diese von anderen wissenschaftlichen Interferenzbereichen ab? Diese Fragen haben es ermöglicht, sich rasch entwickelnden Diskurse zum Konnex von Gender und Mythos fokussiert in den Blick zu nehmen. Die zunehmend kontestierte Relevanz von literaturwissenschaftlichen und medialen Verhandlungen innerhalb einer ‚postfaktischen' Zeit wurde hierbei verstärkt in den Blick genommen, um die Künste als Reflexionsraum für gesellschaftspolitische Entwicklungen als erforschbar zu begreifen.

Beiträge dieses Bandes

Die Korrelation zwischen Gender und literarischen Garten-Szenerien wird von Vera Alexander in ihrem Beitrag „Garden and the Crisis of Connection in Emily Carr and Elizabeth Smart's Life Writings" näher beleuchtet. Ihre Analysen offerieren frappierende Verbindungen zwischen Gärten als Heterotopien, die Schwellenräume zwischen dem Bereich des Privaten und des Öffentlichen und per se Räume der Begegnung und zugleich der Verhandlung von Identitäten und Positionierungen von marginalisierten Gruppen darstellen. Darüber hinaus stehen Gärten für Wachstum und Entwicklung ein, so auch für produktive Prozesse der Kreativität. Diese Gedanken vereinend, wird die Verbindung zwischen Gärten und dem kreativen Schaffensprozess beider kanadischer Schriftstellerinnen, die sich durch ihre Genderzugehörigkeit als marginalisierte Schriftstellerinnen empfanden, zu einem kreativen Schreibprozess, der sich stetig an den Rändern des Sagbaren bewegt und im Motiv des Gartens freie Entfaltung genießen darf. Der Garten ist im Sinne Alexanders eben kein abgeschlossener Raum, sondern vielmehr ein Sinnbild eines lebendigen Diskurses.

Sarah Jäger und Maria Weber stellen in ihrem Beitrag „‚She went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple': Intersections of Gender and Space in Aritha van Herk's *The Tent Peg* and *The Book of Judges 4-5*" die Verwobenheit von Geschlecht und Mythos in Aritha van Herks

The Tent Peg in den Fokus. In ihrer feministischen Aufarbeitung der biblischen Geschichte um Jael und Deborah versetzt van Herk die Heldinnen vom antiken Israel in die Wildnis des kanadischen Nordens. Der Roman folgt dabei J. L., die einen Sommer auf einer Geologie-Expedition im kanadischen Yukon-Territorium verbringt. Während sie anfangs Schwierigkeiten hat, als einzige Frau im Camp ihren Platz in einer männlich dominierten Sphäre zu finden, verhilft sie ihren männlichen Kollegen zunehmend zu differenzierteren Vorstellungen geschlechtlicher Rollenbilder und durchläuft letztendlich auch selbst einen transformativen Prozess. Der Beitrag eruiert zunächst die Signifikanz von Intertextualität im Kontext feministischer Literatur sowie Schnittstellen von *gender* und *space*, um diese Erkenntnisse anschließend für eine Gegenüberstellung von van Herks feministischem Roman mit seiner biblischen Grundlage im Buch der Richter 4-5 zu nutzen.

In ihrem Artikel „Using Stories to Understand Myths in Canada: Reflections on Story-based Epistemology from an Anthropological Perspective" untersucht Michelle Thompson anhand ethnologischer Forschungsmaterialien, wie drei indigene Frauen aus dem Treaty 6 Territory, Saskatchewan, den Begriff *story* verwenden. Geleitet von Malinowskis (1926) Kategorien *folktales, historical accounts* und *myth* sowie Goodys (2010) drei Arten von Mythen, setzt sie sich mit unterschiedlichen Arten von mündlichen Erzählungen auseinander. Bei der Verwendung von *story* kommen sowohl historische und anthropologische Verständnisse mündlicher Erzählungen als auch alltagssprachliche Mythenverständnisse zum Ausdruck. Durch die Abgrenzung von Inhalt, Gebrauch, Funktion und beabsichtigtem Anspruch auf Faktualität oder Fiktionalität sowie Erzählstil zeigt sie ein nuancierteres Verständnis von *story*. Diese Facetten von *stories* sollen helfen, solche mündlichen Erzählungen in ihren kulturellen Kontexten besser zu verstehen und zu erkennen, wo einzelne Erzählungen zeitgenössischer Mythen auf kollektiver Ebene destabilisieren (können); dies ist ein wichtiger Schritt zur Entwicklung einer *story-based epistemology* in der anthropologischen Forschung.

Charlotte Kaisers Artikel „‚Bye bye le gender fucking' – Repräsentation und Anerkennung lesbischer Identitäten in der Montréaler Webserie *Féminin/Féminin*" analysiert die Sichtbarkeit lesbischer Identitäten in der Webserie *Féminin/Féminin* (Robichaud, 2014-2018). Ausgehend von der Annahme, dass der kongruente Zusammenhang zwischen Sichtbarkeit und Macht marginalisierter Identitäten dekonstruiert werden muss, wird hier nicht nach Sichtbarkeit im Allgemeinen, sondern nach ihrem Modus gefragt. Für die Konzeptualisierung anerkennender Sichtbarkeit lesbischer Identitäten schlägt die Autorin *queering le Féminin* vor, ein queeres auf Disidentifikation (Muñoz, 2008) aufbauendes Konzept, das eine dynamische Repräsentation und die kontinuierliche Aushandlung von Normen ermöglicht. Das Konzept verfolgt als politisches Ziel die Neuaushandlung lesbischer Identitäten als Ausdruck der Ablehnung stereotyper Weiblichkeit im heteronormativen System. Die Analyse von *Féminin/Féminin* konzentriert sich auf die Verhandlung der Themen Mutterschaft und Ehe, die teilweise neu ausgehandelt werden, letztlich aber, unter anderem durch die Reproduktion positiver Stereotype, hetero- bzw. homonormative Vorstellungen bestätigen.

In den letzten Jahren haben die Massenmedien einen signifikanten Anstieg in der Darstellung von und Auseinandersetzung mit trans*-Charakteren und -Themen erlebt. 2014 verkündete das US-amerikanische Magazin *TIME* den „Transgender Tipping Point", den historischen Höhepunkt der medialen trans*-Repräsentation. Anna Smitderks Beitrag „Dismantling the Gender Binary Myth – Transgender Representation in Xavier Dolan's *Laurence Anyways*" zeigt stereotype Darstellungen von trans*-Charakteren und -Themen und untersucht Dolans Film da-

raufhin. Der Film, der in den späten 1980ern und 1990ern spielt, folgt Laurence, einem Lehrer und Dichter, der sich als trans*-Frau outet. Der Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, inwieweit die Darstellung von Laurence die Geschlechterdichotomie herausfordern und aufbrechen kann. Zu diesem Zweck liegt der Fokus der Analyse auf der Darstellung der Hauptromanze des Films (zwischen Laurence und ihrer Langzeit-Partnerin Fred), um Aspekte von Geschlecht und Sexualität in Dolans Drama kritisch zu hinterfragen.

In seinem Beitrag „On Icarus' Wings – Kaleidoscopic Images of Gender, Sexuality and Mythology in Canadian Video Games" widmet sich René Schallegger Videospielen, die als dominante Form von Popkultur untrennbar mit Fragen nach sozialer Macht und diskursiver Autorität verwoben sind. Er untersucht vier kanadische Videospiele, die mythologisch gerahmt sind, auf ihren Umgang mit Geschlecht und Sexualität. Der kanadische Markt postuliert sich als international führend in der Entwicklung progressiver Spiele in Hinsicht auf beide Kategorien, trotzdem ist das Medium immer noch ein schwieriger Ort für solche Unterfangen – trotz seiner dominanten Existenz in den Leben von Menschen aller Geschlechter und sexueller Identitäten. Der Beitrag analysiert Ubisoft Montréals *Prince of Persia* (2008), Eidos Montréals *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (2011), Biowares *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014) und Ubisoft Québecs *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* (2018). Die Analysen zeigen, mit der Ausnahme von *Dragon Age*, wie mythologische Rahmung stereotype Erwartungen und Repräsentationen von Geschlechterrollen und sexuellem Verhalten intensivieren.

Dank

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Vera Alexander (Groningen)

Gardens and the Crisis of Connection
in Emily Carr and Elizabeth Smart's Life Writings

The Garden, Canadianness and Femininity

> Martyn and I had one perfect day during his stay in London – the day we went to Epping Forest. For a long, long day Martyn promised me that he would not *ask* that day […]. First we pretended that Epping Forest was our Canadian woods, but it was no good […]. Here were trees venerable, huge and grand but tamed. […] There was no turmoil of undergrowth swirling round the boles of the trees. The forest was almost like a garden – no brambles, no thorns, nothing to stumble over, no rotten stumps, no fallen branches, all mellow to look at, melodious to hear, every kind of bird, all singing, no awed hush, no vast echoes, just beautiful smiling woods, not solemn, solemn like our forests. This exquisite, enchanting gentleness was perfect for one day, but not for always – we were Canadians.[1]

This is a passage from Canadian painter and writer Emily Carr's (1871-1941) posthumous memoir *Growing Pains* (1944). In this memory from around 1900, Emily is spending a few years in England to study art, during which time she suffers from various eponymous pains, foremost among them homesickness and an inability to find her artistic voice. Visits from well-meaning but non-comprehending friends and relatives, or in this case, a hapless suitor, exacerbate her misery, as illustrated by the woeful date we just witnessed. What is remarkable about the way Carr narrates Martyn's pursuit is that it is a threesome: Emily and Martyn are joined by a very vibrant living treescape, Epping Forest, the description of which makes up the bulk of the chapter. A space which could have functioned as a potential romantic setting, a staged faux-Canadian bower of love for the two Canadians to bond over, leaves the human protagonist upstaged. As soon as there is a tree in the picture, however inadequate compared to British Columbian ones, Emily's human would-be lover is eclipsed and all her attention commanded by the "exquisite, enchanting gentleness" of the woods.

Cut to the year 1941 and to another story of unrequited passion, documented in an anguished outcry from the notebooks of the poet Elizabeth Smart (1913-1986):

> *George!* This is April 27th and today there was no Letter & the sun didn't come out & the Art of Egypt and Othello & the entire Faber library were powerless. Nor could Nature give me a slap of revival even though I found dogwoods bigger than my baby's head & my whole room smelled of Lilac & Appleblossom & the wind lifted my skirt.[2]

The italicised absentee is the poet George Barker, Elizabeth Smart's married lover and father to her illegitimate child, and literature, the magic which first connected the lovers, fails to fill the void or make up for George's neglect. Depressed and let down by humans as she is, Smart however records the valiant efforts a flirtatious "Nature" makes to bring her solace.

The crises of connection exemplified by the agonistic love relationships are embedded in larger ones, of gender, Canadianness, and artistic identity. The three are connected by way of a comprehensive experience of marginality. Being treated as inferior on account of being a female Canadian artist generates doubt and frustration but also surges of creative defiance. I approach these entanglements from an angle which in its turn has long been disregarded as a niche but has recently been recognised as a productive corner: human relations to plants and the garden

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[1]   Doris Shadbolt (Ed.): *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, Vancouver and Seattle 1993, p. 384.
[2]   Alice Van Wart (Ed.): *Necessary Secrets: The Journals of Elizabeth Smart, 1933-1941*, Toronto 1986, p. 41.

as the space in which this encounter unfolds. Human and more-than-human relations are only the latest in a long series of discourses which have not only deconstructed binary juxtapositions of centre and margin, but are actually decentring their material underpinnings. Examples of works that go in search of narratives which we miss by concentrating our attention on the human social sphere include Donna Haraway's account of meeting animals,[3] Peter Wohlleben's discovery of the supportive interaction of forest trees[4] and explorations in material ecocriticism and posthumanism that attempt to represent the agency, vibrancy and relational potential of non-human lives and matter.[5]

Emily Carr and Elizabeth Smart share a somewhat disrupted relationship with the social and gender conventions of their respective times and places. Both found themselves precluded from many of the opportunities, freedoms, and possibilities that were open to and shaped by men. In different ways, both women's flamboyant personalities and artistic voices brought them into conflict with the practical restrictions imposed on women, in terms of societal expectations, family support, and quite pragmatic economic factors. They can be said to pioneer a malaise which has only recently been labelled as a crisis of connection:

> People are increasingly disconnected from themselves and each other, with a state of alienation, isolation, and fragmentation characterizing much of the modern world. The quintessential "we," as in "We the people" or "We hold these truths to be self-evident," which once served as a reference to a collective consciousness and state of communion, if not community, has lost all meaning. In the place of the "we," we have been left with the "me," the solitary individual, whose needs, wants, and desires take precedence over the collective.[6]

A similar crisis, attributed to the arrival of modernism and dated somewhat arbitrarily "on or about December 1910" had already been detected by Virginia Woolf.[7] It has been taken up by Simone Drichel who attests a worsening of this condition in contemporary society.[8] Although the loss of affirmative social relations and the psychological fallout from a lack or insufficiency of human connection have mostly been attributed to later modernity, Carr and Smart suffer from an early variant. In the personal histories of both women, social marginalisation is accompanied by a particular bond with nature, and their life writings attest to long term relational patterns where plants and outdoor spaces acquire the dialogic potential left vacant by a non-comprehending human sphere.

Born in 1871 in colonial Victoria, Emily Carr eschewed a conventional life of marriage to pursue a career as a painter. To the despair of her relatives she chose to depict the British Columbian wilderness and deserted First Nations villages rather than the demure picturesque European landscapes her conservative neighbours might have been considered acceptable. In

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[3] Cf. Donna J. Haraway: *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis 2007.

[4] Cf. Peter Wohlleben: *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate*, London 2017.

[5] Cf. Jane Bennett: *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham 2010.

[6] Niobe Way et. al.: *The Crisis of Connection: Roots, Consequences, and Solutions*, New York 2018, p. 1. This concept is explored in various discourses; apart from literary studies, (Cf. Simone Drichel: "Preface: Relationality", in: *Angelaki*, V. 24 (2019), I. 3, p. 1-2. Cf. Simone Drichel: "'The Most Perfectly Autonomous Man': Relational Subjectivity and the Crisis of Connection", in: *Angelaki*, V. 24 (2019), I. 3, p. 3-18. Cf. Vera Alexander: "Back to the Roots. Corona and the Crisis of Connection", 22.05.2020, on: https://www.rug.nl/research/research-let/onderzoek-per-vakgebied/europese-talen-en-culturen/live-lectures-cultures-of-the-crisis-corona-and-beyond [last accessed on 30.11.2020]) fields such as psychology, pedagogy and sociology work with a similar concept. (Cf. Johann Hari: *Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression – and the Unexpected Solutions*, London 2018.)

[7] Cf. Virginia Woolf: "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown [1924]", in: Virginia Woolf: *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, London 1950, p. 91-93, here: p. 91.

[8] Cf. Drichel: "'The Most Perfectly Autonomous Man'".

middle age, she spent twelve years in the respectable occupation of a landlady who made a living from renting out her house, but even here, her artistic ambition remained alive, quite literally in her attic to which she retired to paint. Her painting entailed spending lengthy periods alone in the woods. Popular portraits depict her as an eccentric who walked the streets of Victoria surrounded by bobtails, and more exotic animals, such as a parrot and a monkey.[9] In addition to numerous paintings, Emily Carr published different kinds of autofiction (*Klee Wyck, The Book of Small, The House of All Sorts, The Heart of the Peacock*), all of which consist of short chapters written in an idiosyncratic oral style and featuring child and animal protagonists. Her numerous autobiographical sketches, journals and notebooks were posthumously collected as *Growing Pains* (1944), *Pause: A Sketch Book* (1953) and *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of an Artist* (1966). Besides, Carr's correspondence is largely available.[10] While Carr did not live to see her modernist art resonate with a Canadian audience, her writings, published late in life, brought her acclaim, as Doris Shadbolt confirms: "The books of Emily Carr found a ready audience. They spoke directly to the ordinary reader 'in the street', the response she always wanted for her paintings and never found".[11]

Elizabeth Smart defied the expectations of her well-situated family to make a good match and live a life of privilege in favour of "turning her life into a work of art" by becoming "the tragic heroine of her own story", as a biopic suggests.[12] Smart was a prodigy who published her first poem at the age of ten. After studying music at Kings College in London, she travelled widely accompanying the head of the Associated Country Women of the World. In 1937, when she was in her early twenties, the budding writer came across the poetry of George Barker and fell in love with the writing, and through it, its married author. She embarked on a lifelong relationship and had four illegitimate children with Barker, who never left his wife and had numerous other affairs.[13] Smart and Barker's tempestuous romance is depicted in *By Grand Central Station I sat down and wept* (1945), an acclaimed experiment in poetic prose which her mother had censored in Canada. Life as a single mother kept Smart from realising her literary

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[9] The memorable caricature of Carr as a crazy animal lady was cultivated in early biographical responses to her life (Cf. J. K. Nesbitt: "Emily Carr: The Woman Who Painted What the Forest Told Her", in: *Maclean's*, 01.01.1951, on: https://www.macleans.ca/archives/emily-carr-the-woman-who-painted-what-the-forest-told-her/ [last accessed on 30.11.2020]. Cf. Carol Pearson and Kathleen Coburn: *Emily Carr as I Knew Her*, Victoria 2016.) and survives in picture books, cartoons and other popular recreations, e. g. Nicholas Debon: *Four Pictures by Emily Carr*, Toronto 2003. Norman Ball and Philippa Campsie: "Learning to See: Emily Carr in France", in: *Parisian Fields*, 21.06.2015, on: https://parisianfields.com/2015/06/21/learning-to-see-emily-carr-in-france/ [last accessed on 30.11.2020]. Monica Kulling and Dean Griffiths: *When Emily Carr Met Woo*, Toronto 2015. Cat Klerks: *Emily Carr: The Incredible Life and Adventures of a West Coast Artist*, Victoria 2015. Biographers such as Maria Tippett (1979), Paula Blanchard (1987), Stephanie Kirkwood Walker (1996) and Susan Crean (2001) as well as Willard Holmes in the Vancouver Art Gallery's 1991 exhibition booklet have since presented evidence that Carr's self-image of "a little old woman on the edge of nowhere" (Stephanie Kirkwood Walker: *This Woman in Particular: Contexts for the Biographical Image of Emily Carr*, Waterloo 1996, p. 13.) is at least partly stylised and that Carr who after all made the acquaintance of the Group of Seven and maintained a lively and critical correspondence with Ira Dilworth and others was not as unconnected and isolated as she represented herself to be. (Cf. Vancouver Art Gallery (Ed.): *Emily Carr*, Vancouver 1991.)

[10] Cf. Doreen Walker (Ed.): *Dear Nan: Letters of Emily Carr, Nan Cheney and Humphrey Toms*, Vancouver 1990. Cf. Linda M. Morra: *Corresponding Influence: Selected Letters of Emily Carr & Ira Dilworth*, Toronto 2006.

[11] Doris Shadbolt: "Introduction", in: Doris Shadbolt (Ed.): *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, Vancouver and Seattle 1993, p. 3-14, here: p. 5.

[12] Cf. Maya Gallus: *Elizabeth Smart: On the Side of the Angels*, CAN 1991, 00:03:00.

[13] Cf. Christopher Barker: "Rhymes of Passion", in: *The Guardian*, 20.08.2006, on: http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/aug/20/poetry.features [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

ambitions as documented in numerous journals and notebooks from an early age. She published another book of poetic fiction titled *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals* (1978) as well as five volumes of poetry. Her journals, posthumously published in several volumes, *Elizabeth Smart's Autobiographies* (1987) and *On the Side of the Angels* (1995) attest to a lifelong longing for the world of words. Smart did in fact live by her pen, as she moved to England and supported her family by journalism, copywriting and advertising. Although she became one of the most successful copywriters and editors of her generation, commercial writing did not fulfil her poetic ambitions. During the 1950s and 1960s, she balanced a bohemian London life of work and being networking with literati with raising four children in the country. The garden at Tilty Mill near London partly served as a practical means of making a living, being the inspiration and base of garden pieces she wrote for *House and Garden* between 1948 and 1954.[14] In 1966 Smart retired to "The Dell", a cottage in Suffolk where she created a garden which was featured in an issue of the magazine *Harper's Queen*.[15]

In the writings of both Emily Carr and Elizabeth Smart, nature spaces play a central role, not just as motifs to be depicted in writing and painting, but in a more complex material manner which I approach as relational. Nature spaces affect the moods but also the thinking of their human observers. They pose riddles, engage the women in contemplations of growth and creativity and come to supply inspiration sorely lacking in their social surroundings. In some cases, there is even such a thing as responsive agency. In the biographies and writings of both women, experiences that extend the self into spheres other than the social feed into their creative work, Emily Carr's painting and writing and Elizabeth Smart's poetry and prose, and become an important aspect of both women's attempts to come to terms with their identity as female artists as well as shaping their understanding of creativity and personal growth and vision.

In this essay I examine one particularly ambiguous nature space, the garden, as a site where nature encounters are staged. Being a living and liminal corridor connecting private homes and the public sphere, the garden is a key location for exploring notions of marginality and creative endeavour. Connected to processes of growth, including the growing of food, gardens combine a utopian and a pragmatic aspect; they connect the world of the imagination and the practices defining everyday life. The garden serves to process both women's fraught relationships with their Canadian homeland. For both, recognition in Canada came quite late: decades of struggling with cultural paucity and a narrow colonial mindset were followed by posthumous acclaim. Emily Carr is now recognised for her bold and unique depiction of the British Columbian woods, including artefacts of Canadian First Nations culture. Elizabeth Smart turned her back on Canada, pursuing a life independent of her family in England. She did not return until 1982, for a stint as a writer in residence. Both Carr and Smart wrote about gardens, not in a prominent place, but persistently, in the diaries, letters and journals that chart their lifelong searches for their own voice and vision, the marginal media where they exercise the right to create. This presents us with a layered framework of interlacing marginalities: first, the journal presents itself as a fragmentary, unfinished, semi-private workshop medium, as a minor form of writing, inferior to refined published works;[16] secondly, Canada in its entirety is perceived as a colonial

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[14] Cf. Kim Echlin: *Elizabeth Smart: A Fugue Essay on Women and Creativity*, Toronto 2004, p. 145.

[15] Cf. Alice Van Wart (Ed.): *Elizabeth's Garden: Elizabeth Smart on the Art of Gardening*, Toronto 1989, p. 7.

[16] Its status of being life writing did not help since it was not until the 1970s that life writing by women arrived on the critical scene, having previously been disqualified for being "artless literature of fact". (Paul John Eakin: *Touching the World. Reference in Autobiography*, Princeton and Oxford 1992, p. 29.) The growing recognition of

outpost remote from the Eurocentre and backwards in terms of cultural production; thirdly, the garden is connotated as a hybrid domestic site, semi-private, and steeped in gender prejudice. I suggest that in their written reflections on the garden, both women work through their responses to their social marginalisation, linking marginality due to gender to a layered understanding of the need for obstacles in artistic creation.

In Canadian writings, the natural environment has often been described as a wild and over-whelming setting, in fact, as just such an obstacle.[17] The image of the garden as a symbol of the colonising act of clearing the land, of establishing control in the shape of urban culture, arises from and contrasts with the wilderness. The garden has thus been a prevalent image in Canadian literature and literary criticism, epitomising, at times, the Canadian nation, and at others, the literature produced in and about Canada. Margaret Atwood's image of Canada as a "bush gar-den",[18] popularised in critical discourse by Northrop Frye,[19] has come to epitomise the search for a canonical sense of Canadianness in culture and literature. This was given a new turn in Robert Kroetsch's controversial characterisation of Canadian literature as "unity in disunity",[20] illustrated by the "metanarrative" of the garden as it combines the singular (the garden as con-tainer) with the diversity of its multiple inhabitants – flowers, trees, water features, vegetables, animals: "the myth of the new world, the garden story. The dream of Eden. That dream, and the falling into fragments of the dream, haunts Canadian writers from nineteenth-century figures".[21] The garden's evocation of myth and images of heavenly beauty and restorative peace go to the very heart of creativity and aesthetics. At the same time, they are "rhetorical landscapes".[22] The narrative of the garden of Eden and its function of framing Canada as a paradisal new world has more recently been deconstructed by Shelley Boyd, who takes it up in the context of ex-ploring ways in which colonial gardens have become spaces of female empowerment.[23]

In fact, the garden has a more global history of serving as a beautiful frame that signals female entrapment. Western cultural history has practically connected women and gardens with the domestic sphere and assigned to the growing of food, safe raising of children and beauti-fication of the home. From medieval depictions of the Madonna ensconced in a miniature *hortus conclusus*[24] to book series addressed to women, such as *The Englishwoman's Garden,* gardens have stereotypically been represented as women's enclosures. In the context of North America, Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1984) analyses the garden as a "metaphorical land-

such writings and their transformative function for feminist criticism has been documented in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Ed.): *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, Madison 1998. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson: *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minneapolis 2010. Cf. Helen M. Buss: *Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English*, Montreal 1993.

[17] Cf. Northrop Frye: "A Conclusion to *A Literary History of Canada* [1965]", in: Northrop Frye: *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination with an Introduction by Linda Hutcheon*, Concord 1995 ([1]1971), p. 213-251. Cf. Faye Hammill: *Canadian Literature*, Edinburgh 2007. Cf. Vera Alexander: "Enclosed: Nature. Carol Shield's Textual Mazes", in: Daria Tunca and Janet Wilson (Ed.): *Postcolonial Gateways and Walls: Under Construction*, Leiden 2017, p. 219-239.

[18] Cf. Margaret Atwood: *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Toronto 1970.

[19] Cf. Frye: "A Conclusion to *A Literary History of Canada*".

[20] Robert Kroetsch: "Unity in Disunity: A Canadian Strategy", in: Robert Kroetsch: *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New*, Toronto et. al. 1989, p. 21-33, here: p. 31.

[21] Ibid., p. 32.

[22] Charles W. Moore, William J. Mitchell and William Turnbull: *The Poetics of Gardens*, Cambridge 1993, p. 49.

[23] Cf. Shelley Boyd: *Garden Plots: Canadian Women Writers and Their Literary Gardens*, Toronto 2013.

[24] Cf. Elizabeth A. Augspach: *The Garden as Woman's Space in Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Literature*, Lewiston 2005.

scape" embedded in narratives of discovery, conquest and possession where women are described as 'captive in the garden of someone else's imagination' (1984). Such gendered nature discourse based on essentialist analogies between women's bodies and fertile ground has been comprehensively deconstructed by Carolyn Merchant.[25] Ecofeminists have since continued to pull up weeds such as images of women as guardians of "nature"[26] and related implications.[27] Yet, they continue to grow wild even in writings about the garden: in "Woman's Place" (1981), Eleanor Perényi not only traces "women's incarceration in the flower garden" through several countries,[28] she also observes that, with the exception of Gertrude Jekyll, women's horticultural contributions throughout the ages have been largely obscured. Even from the vantage point of horticulture and garden writing, the garden thus appears an arena of crisis where decolonisation from gender imbalance is as yet incomplete. In the context of women's writing, the garden is thus never a quiet neutral space, it simmers with unfinished business, and part of it works towards using power imbalance to cultivate the margins as fruitful grounds for creative innovation.

Emily Carr's Gardenscapes

Famous for her innovative representation of the Canadian wilderness, Emily Carr is more commonly known as an animal lover than a woman with green thumbs. The *painter* Emily Carr did not depict gardens at all, the only exception being a derivative picture she produced as part of her training. By contrast, the *writer* accumulated garden scenes of the kind we witnessed at the onset of this essay. In those instances, where Carr does mention garden spaces, something extraordinary happens. The domesticated and enclosed city space of the garden seems to touch and connect the most significant concerns articulated in Carr's work: the lost idyll of the Victoria of her childhood, her resistance to the restrictive models for womanhood as represented by her sisters, the oppressive nature of social norms, her advocacy of a modernist creativity free from European standards, and throughout, her spiritual search for artistic expression are articulated through trees and flowers.

Before examining her chief garden writings, a disclaimer might be due, given the difference in the importance of painting and writing for Carr. Many of Carr's writings are processual utility tools associated with clearing the mind, as she states in *Hundreds and Thousands*: "trying to find equivalents for things in words helps me find equivalents in painting. That is the reason for this journal. Everything is all connected up. Different paths lead to the great 'it,' the thing we try to get at by hook and by crook".[29] Anne Collett and Dorothy Jones suggest that "for Carr, words were a device used to clarify specific feelings about place that enabled the effective translation of that feeling into paint on canvas".[30] The garden vignettes scattered throughout her journals are implicated in this; they are at least in part a functional periphery of Carr's oeuvre that was a support act, not trying to create art in its own right but to enable it. That being said,

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[25] Cf. Carolyn Merchant: *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco 1980.
[26] Luce Irigaray: *The Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca 1985, p. 77.
[27] Cf. L. J. Jordanova: *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Madison 1989.
[28] Cf. Eleanor Perényi: *Green Thoughts: A Writer in the Garden*, New York 2002 ([1]1981), p. 261.
[29] Shadbolt (Ed.): *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, p. 669.
[30] Anne Collett and Dorothy Jones: "Gendered Tree-scapes in the Art of Emily Carr and Judith Wright", in: *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, V. 42 (2009), I. 3, p. 75-94, here: p. 77.

Doris Shadbolt prefaces her Carr omnibus with the claim that many of Carr's writings, certainly the 'stories' published in her lifetime, were more carefully crafted than their surface simplicity suggests. In fact, the compendium she edits in part counteracts a tendency to dismiss them as naïve.[31]

Ranging from a child's Eldorado full of magical soulmates to a *cordon sanitaire* guaranteeing the respectability of her boarding house, Carr's gardens appear in a variety of functions. Thematically, they can be conceptualised in three main categories: 1) the 'kindergartens' of her childhood memoir, where her autobiographical alter Ego explores a magic realm that makes her imagination come alive and stretches the normative boundaries of reality as it presents itself in her social surroundings; 2) the landlady's garden at *The House of All Sorts* as a gateway to epiphany and artistic lifeline despite looming social obligations; and 3) an abstract spiritual garden of remembrance. While the first two categories are mainly represented in Carr's published 'stories', in her journals, Carr supplements the recurring *topos* of a symbolic garden in her heart, an inner sanctum where she plants (or stores) experiences and individuals who have touched her deeply. Here, the garden is part of her spiritual search for a new language, for ways of recognising essence and value and expressing the elusive heart of the objects she tries to depict.

In *The Book of Small* (1941), two consecutive narratives are set in Small's childhood and evoke a heterotopian image of gardens that open into adventures. "White Currants" is a breathless second-person narrative which takes the addressee on a trip to an enchanted "corner of the old garden"[32] to witness a miracle: "When it was going to happen the dance in your feet took you there without your doing anything about it. You danced through the flower garden and the vegetable garden till you came to the row of currant bushes, and then you danced down it".[33] Movement, dynamics and vibrancy are key here. The reader spirals forward in a dizzying motion, but the narrative simultaneously propels them to look into hidden depths by way of a fairy three-step process:

> First came the black currants with their strong wild smell. Then came the red currants hanging in bright tart clusters. On the very last bush in the row the currants were white. The white currants ripened first. The riper they got, the clearer they grew, till you could see the tiny veins in their skins and the seeds and the juice. Each currant hung there like an almost-told secret. Oh! you thought, if the currants were just a wee bit clearer, then perhaps you could see them *living*, inside.[34]

It is not only the shades of colours which create a connection to painting here. Carr's focaliser is equivalent to Blake's prophet who present, past and future sees, evoking a meditative process of learning to see like an artist, to allow the object of observation to reveal its story without interference, to perceive motion even in stillness: all movement seems to emerge from the currant bushes that zoom out to the onlooker and seduce them into perceiving them as lives in their own right. Below the surface, the currants contain animate landscapes. Once readers have braved this insight, they gain access to a scene of embodied magic:

> Bursting higgledy-piggledy up through the rubbish everywhere, grew a half-wild mauvy-pink flower. The leaves and the blossoms were not much to look at, because it poured every drop of its glory into its smell. When you went there the colour and the smell took you and wrapped you up in themselves. None of the flowers seemed quite joined to the earth – you only saw their tops, not where they went into the earth. The sun dazzled the butterflies' wings and called the smell out of the

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31 Cf. Shadbolt: "Introduction", p. 6.
32 Shadbolt (Ed.): *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, p. 122.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.

> flowers. Everything trembled. When you went in among the mauvy-pink flowers and the butterflies you began to tremble too; you seemed to become a part of it – and then what do you think happened? Somebody else was there too. He was on a white horse and he had brought another white horse for me. […] We flew round and round in and out among the mauvy pink blossoms, on the white horses. I never saw the boy; he was there and I knew his name, but who gave it to him or where he came from I did not know. He was different from other boys, you did not have to see him, that was why I liked him so […].[35]

Emily Carr looks at flowers, trees, landscapes, and in her keen observation, all of them are in motion. Not quietly swaying in the breeze, but in a wild rampant dance. Plants and green spaces are full of energy, there is movement, even determination, and there is a will to reveal or to withhold knowledge or insights. The destination in question is identified as "a little spare place" which nobody enters "except to dump garden rubbish" but which is alive with the scent of flowers, buzzing bees and butterflies and immerses readers in an evocative reminder of child's play. Through writing, the garden as a site of absorption in the moment remains accessible even to an adult 'you' able to disentangle the interlacing narratives of a child's game and an artist's mental discipline that transforms mundane fruit into gateways and compost heaps into sensory multiverses. In case readers are hard on the uptake, the ending of the story alerts them to the double narrative as a delighted Small finds out the name of the "half-wild mauvy-pink flower" central to the dream encounter: "Then I asked, 'What is the name of that mauvy-pink flower' 'Rocket.' 'Rocket?' 'Yes – the same as fireworks.' Rockets! Beautiful things that tear up into the air and burst!"[36] The story thus ends by celebrating the enlightenment that comes with the power of words and thus epitomises her search for connection, and her quest for what she elsewhere describes as a new way of seeing:

> More than ever was I convinced that the old way of seeing was inadequate to express this big country of ours, her depth, her height, her unbounded wideness, silences too strong to be broken–nor could ten million cameras, through their mechanical boxes, ever show real Canada. It had to be sensed, passed through live minds, sensed and loved.[37]

"White Currants" segues into a companion piece, "The Orange Lily", set in a nursery garden at the end of town which depicts an 'Emily in Wonderlandesque' encounter. Along with Small, readers come face to face with an anthropomorphised flower that, like the white currants, envelops them in a processual revelation of how human onlookers can commune with a plant:

> Lily rolled her petals grandly wide as sentinelled doors roll back for royalty. The entrance to her trumpet was guarded by a group of rust-powered stamens – her powerful perfume pushed past these. What was in the bottom of Lily's trumpet? What was it that the stamens were so carefully guarding? Small pushed the stamens aside and looked. The trumpet was empty – the emptiness of a church after parson and people have gone, when the music is asleep in the organ and the markers dangle from the Bible on the lectern […].[38]

In horticultural terms, the aptly named Small has an advantage: flowers are best enjoyed at eye-level, and the position she models in bending down to their level is one recommended by garden writers such as Karel Čapek, Jamaica Kincaid, Marion Cran and Gertrude Jekyll. Like Lewis Carroll's stories, however, this encounter has disturbing overtones. The anticlimactic enquiry amongst the lily's pollen-laden stamens with its connotations of sleep and the double meaning of "organ" would not only strike a Freudian reader as sexual in nature, especially in view of

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., p. 123.
[37] Ibid., p. 437.
[38] Ibid., p. 124.

Victorian traditions of couching matters of courtship and procreation in flower terms.[39] More-over, Small's return to the real world here brings a rude awakening to social niceties, as she is has pointed out to her that the pollen has 'rusted her nose'[40] and is urged to admire a wreath of dry flowers. The posy she receives as a gift does not help as it does not contain the lily she desired:[41] "In her heart, she hugged an Orange Lily. It had burned itself there not with flaming petals, not through the hot, rich smell. Soundless, formless, white – it burned there".[42] Here, the garden is embedded in society, with the highly symbolic lily signposting the looming life of adulthood and the threat to the imagination posed by adult perspectives and institutions.

The second garden depicted in Carr's writings is part of the societal space in which Carr felt exposed to the gaze and criticism of Victorian society. Gardens are not open nature, they are defined by enclosure and thus by human-made borders, as Jenny Uglow attests:

> The garden is merely a boundary between us and the wild, a tamed sphere that always wants to revert to wilderness. It is sexy and fecund, prone to chaos and pests, but controlled (we hope) into beauty and order. The word 'garden' itself comes from *ghordos*, an ancient Indo-European word for 'enclosure', and the same root is in 'yard' and 'orchard' […].[43]

Enclosure and its association with captivity are the operative images in Emily Carr's second type of gardenspace. Between 1914 and 1926 she made a living from renting out a house she had built in Simcoe Street, the now divided property that formerly situated her father's garden. Commemorated in (and as) *The House of All Sorts* (1942), the building in which she despondently tries her hand at living an ordinary life symbolises entrapment and what seemed like the death of her calling:

> Roof, walls, floor can pinch to hurting while they are homing you [...]. The tenant always had this advantage – he could pick up and go. I could not. Fate had nailed me down hard. [...] No, I was not nailed. I was *screwed* into the House of all Sorts, twist by twist. Every circumstance, financial, public, personal, artistic, had taken a hand in that cruel twirling of the driver. [...] Each twist had demanded – 'Forget you ever wanted to be an artist. Nobody wanted your art. Buckle down to being a landlady.'[44]

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[39]   The metaphoric potential of bloom as a way of describing nubile women has been analysed in great detail by Amy King. (Cf. Amy M. King: *Bloom: The Botanical Vernacular in the English Novel*, Oxford 2003.) As a Victorian, Emily Carr would have come across language of flower books and tussies-mussies such as discussed by Hélène Cixous: "The Language of Flowers", in: Laurence Coupe (Ed.): *The Green Studies Reader*, London and New York 1997, p. 148-153. Vanessa Diffenbaugh: *The Language of Flowers*, New York 2011. Kate Greenaway: *Language of Flowers*, London 1977. John Ingram: *Flora Symbolica, or the Language and Sentiment of Flowers*, London 1887. Beverly Seaton: *The Language of Flowers: A History*, Charlottesville 1995. Robert Tyas: *The Language of Flowers, or, Floral Emblems of Thoughts, Feelings and Sentiments*, London 1860. Biographers suggest an even more troubling reading as Emily Carr is surmised to have been the victim of child abuse which partly accounts for her reluctance to accept any suitor.

[40]   Shadbolt (Ed.): *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, p. 125.

[41]   Carr returns to lilies in a painting in 1873, and it is this painting, *Wild Lilies*, which she later donates to the hospital where her sister Lizzie was cared for while dying of cancer. (Cf. Ian Cameron: "Wild Lilies Gala 2015 'Emily Carr's Legacy'", 29.03.2015, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHPfhSI6Bjc [last accessed on 14.07.2020].) The connection between flowers and death resurfaces in her stories "Orchids" and "The Garden" in *Pause: A Sketchbook* which charts Emily Carr's sojourn in an English sanatorium as well as in her reminiscences of her family's lily field and her mother's death recounted in *Growing Pains*. (Cf. Shadbolt (Ed.): *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, p. 303.) The religious meaning of lilies which "The Orange Lily" only hints at makes up the bulk of "Nellie and the Lily Field" where Emily Carr connects it to the song "Consider the Lilies" and her homesickness for Canada. (Cf. Ibid., p. 315-316.)

[42]   Shadbolt (Ed.): *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, p. 125.

[43]   Jenny Uglow: *A Little History of British Gardening*, London 2004, p. 3.

[44]   Shadbolt (Ed.): *The Complete Writings of Emily Carr*, p. 202.

Satiric complaints about the outrageous mores and demands of her tenants make up the bulk of her book; the second half is filled with much more sympathetic portraits of the various Bobtails she bred and sold. This garden is storage- rather than storyspace, this is where she keeps wood, coals and her dog pen, but it is also where she herself is kept in plain sight of her neighbours, where decency must be obeyed and order upheld. And yet, even here the garden works its magic, for it does not have a ceiling:

> Carrying a bucket of ashes in each hand I went into the garden, feeling like an anchor dropped overboard. Everything was so coldly wet, I so heavy. Dawn was warming the eastern sky just a little. The Bobbies were champing for liberty. They had heard my step. The warmth of their loving did for the garden what the furnace was doing for the house.[45]

Stepping into the garden brings Carr's landlady into contact with the freedom of movement and living in the moment which art represents for her: being exposed to the sky, one of the recurring motifs in her paintings, the garden morphs from a site of chores to one of comfort. Encountering a glimpse of what makes her life meaningful, the narrator is literally reborn from the ashes and warms to life.

Whereas this passage merely mentions the garden as a corridor, albeit of awakening, a later story titled "The Garden" actually depicts it. Rather, it attempts to: what commences like a school essay, a dutiful, boring still, immediately turns into a quietly exhilarating movie:

> The garden was just ordinary – common flowers, everyday shrubs, apple trees. Like a turbulent river the Bobtails raced among gay flowers and comfortable shrubs on their way from sleeping pen to play-field, a surge of grey movement weaving beautiful patterns among poppy, rose, delphinium, whose flowers showed more brilliantly colourful for the grey intertwistings of shaggy-coated dogs among them.[46]

Surface level description gives way to a cinematic dog race which matches the movement quality of her paintings. The mixture of colours and shapes exposes a contrast, even conflict, between static and dynamic elements, the rooted garden ingredients and the garden's four-legged inhabitants with the power to blur the flowers, disturb the serenity and comprehensively destroy the credibility of the ordinariness evoked at the start. Carr takes up her description but once again, exuberant dogs get in her picture:

> In the centre of the lawn grew a great cherry-tree better at blossoming than at fruiting. To look into the heart of the cherry-tree when it was blossoming was a marvel almost greater than one could bear. Beneath the cherry-tree the Bobbies danced – bounding, rebounding on solid earth, or lying flat in magnificent relaxation.[47]

Carr's attempt to present readers with a well-behaved garden finally gives way to a direct contemplation of the nature of the limitations which her garden connects her to:

> East, west, north the garden was bounded by empty lots; its southern limit was the straight square shadow of my apartment house. The depth and narrowness of my lot made the height above it seem higher, a height in which you could pile dreams up, up until the clouds hid them.[48]

"My lot" is suggestive: as readers are instructed to raise their gaze and look beyond the ordinary to greater imaginative heights, the vignette aptly summarises Carr's lot: aspiring to art in surroundings marked by limitations. Whereas most of her artistic notebooks reiterate her struggle to focus on her art, being interrupted by visitors and social obligations, this story approaches her particular 'lot' from the opposite angle: she cannot hold on to her demonstration of ordi-

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[45] Ibid., p. 204-205.
[46] Ibid., p. 268.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

nariness when faced with the vital and creative dynamic of nature as represented by her dogs and the sky. Carr's garden is a space where she escapes, mentally if not physically, into the wider world of skies, freedom and openness, "breathing place",[49] heterotopian locations which connect her to art.

Carr's search for expression in painting depends on a particular way of seeing, of allowing the landscapes of the Canadian Northwest she attempts to penetrate and what she calls the essence or soul of trees, skies and mountains she tries to represent to reveal how they need to be represented. What impressed her in these was not necessarily beauty but a quality of the sublime (not a word she would have used, she preferred straight, simple 'strong talk'), an individual power or moment which expressed the significance of the object from a deeper level than the surface. Over all, gardens share in the unknowability of the wilderness, at the same time as enabling her to integrate the magic of art, of painting and of child-like wonder in social surroundings marked by flat unimaginative and derivative behaviours and preferences. The woods present her with an elusive challenging task which she struggles to rise to, one painting at a time, trying to purify her vision, to clarify what is essential and what is redundant. In practical terms, this requires skills of observation, but it also encompasses a spirituality of sorts as Carr tries to reach above and beyond herself. In her notebooks and journals, especially those written late in life, this search acquires overt Christian overtones, as when she records meeting the preacher Raja Singh:

> Now there is one more added to the remembrance garden deep in my heart – Uncle Raja. Down in my garden is neither creed, nor sex, nor nationality, nor age – no language even – there is just love. Only those who have touched my inner life, my soul, do I plant down there. No matter how intimate I have been with them, they cannot get into that place unless that mysterious something has happened between our souls.[50]

The image of an inner garden of remembrance is a recurring element in *Hundreds and Thousands*, in which Emily Carr traces her progress in the years 1927-1941. This conservatory of treasured memories is a personal spiritual space of feeling and relationality. Her notebooks chart how she comes to terms with bereavement, vents doubt and frustrations, revisits her past and records encounters and conversations with like-minded people. It is here that she returns to the memory of her imaginary friend with whom we see her sharing pony rides near the white currant bushes. Fulfilling a long-term desire to acquire a caravan to go on painting trips with, in her entry on July 23rd, 1933, Carr connects this to her earlier garden dream:

> I wonder who went with me in the dream caravan. I do not remember, but I was not alone. Maybe it was Drummie […]. We were only pals when I was a wee girl and I do not remember that he ever way anywhere except in our big garden. He was a dream pal and I used to ride all round the garden with him on a dream horse. There was one overgrown corner. Rocket ran riot there, all shades of it from mauve to purple, and white butterflies hovered amongst it in thousands and the perfume and the sunshine made things woosey. Drummie seemed to come most to that corner. I used to trot like a pony up and down the gravel walk; the rocket was as high as my head. […] Sometimes since, I have wondered if it was some small boy's spirit that really did come to play with me in the old garden. It was a wonderful enough old garden […].[51]

Though saturated with explanations, her memory still revolves around the mystic experience of connection which she locates in that particular garden spot. Gardens repeatedly appear as

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49 Ibid., p. 351.
50 Ibid., p. 722.
51 Ibid., p. 685.

heterotopian meeting grounds between that which is ordinary and that which lifts her beyond the ordinary.

These are just a few of her many passages which present the garden as a space of epiphany and insight that survives within the confines of societal rules: a space of female rebellion against social forms and norms which uses one of the most iconic feminine spaces, thereby turning the seemingly safe and enclosing garden into a heterotopian gateway to creative freedom where limitations are transformed into frames, decentred and shifted. It is clear that in Carr's vignettes, the garden fulfils a function that goes beyond the confines of the functions of either motif or setting. Her depiction of gardens directly addresses acts of creation and conditions of creative activity. In its abundance of colours, scents and movements the garden is a sensory conservatory, a shortcut that unlocks entangled memories of flow. It thereby serves as a material mnemonic which epitomises creative power.

Whereas Emily Carr's gardens act as gateways between the world of experiential reality and have meaning as a semi-mystic parallel world marked by intense artistic experiences, the practical dimensions of gardening are absent from her writing. Their connective functions are supplied by the writings of Elizabeth Smart.

Elizabeth Smart's Garden

"For Smart, life and art were inextricably connected," writes poet Alice Van Wart, the editor of the second volume of Smart's journals, adding that she regarded her journals as a "writing apprenticeship".[52] In a similar fashion, "creating a garden was like creating a poem, a work of art".[53] And creation exerted an inescapable call for Smart. In her poem "Bulbs, Corms and Tubers" (1977) she describes plants as "mad about creation" and able to "burst through concrete",[54] as determined and resilient, not unlike herself. "The madness struck me in the early spring of 1967. Not suddenly. It came on like a cold or an unsuitable love affair".[55] Smart's biography suggests she knew both of these afflictions inside out.

Throughout her life, she kept notebooks in which she made occasional references to gardens. For Elizabeth Smart, the garden fulfils different functions at different stages in her life. As her editor explains, Smart began writing as an eleven-year-old, while bedridden due to heart valve problems. Van Wart dates her budding interest in gardening in this period: "During her illness she read and wrote in bed and learned the names of plants and trees, pastimes that sustained her and would continue throughout her life. Her journals begin at this point, and thereafter she would never be without a journal; in it would go poems, stories, ideas for stories, lists and details of her life".[56] It would be far-fetched to impose a pattern on the garden references, but many of them signal a longing for freedom from social and other constraints. A journal entry written while Smart was attending lectures at UCLA, reads: "walking along the half wild flower bordered paths of the university, after Bertrand Russell, I smelt that sudden pine in the sun, and the grass growing green, and a far breath of the Hermit's Orchard: seduced and seduced and I

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[52] Alice Van Wart (Ed.): *On the Side of the Angels: The Second Volume of the Journals of Elizabeth Smart*, London 1994, p. 9.
[53] Van Wart (Ed.): *Elizabeth's Garden*, p. 8.
[54] Elizabeth Smart: *The Collected Poems*, London 1992, p. 53.
[55] Van Wart (Ed.): *Elizabeth's Garden*, p. 13.
[56] Van Wart (Ed.): *Necessary Secrets*, p. 2.

said bare feet or I die!"[57] Freedom from self-imposed limitations, standing in the way of passion – these go against Smart's aesthetic, as in a rant triggered by a discussion about the banned D. H. Lawrence novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: "How people can contaminate things! […] The book is good and essentially clean. Why on earth are sensual joys supposed to be so low? Flowers and pretty things! But flowers are unselfconscious and sensual and joyful".[58] In her notes and journals from the 1940s, as shown earlier, the garden is a concrete counter weight to the ups and downs of her relationship with Barker, its materiality, rootedness and reliability contrasting with the volatility of her love life. What remains constant is the garden as a space which commands attentions and observation. Its fruit and vegetables help her think about the role of nurturing in her life, to come to terms with making a living, but also how the practical demands of nurturing her four children and three grandchildren disrupt her poetic work.

Smart's love for gardens is inseparable from her love of nature, as this memory of her family's holiday residence shows:

> Oh! to be at Kingsmere these birdsong mornings and these breathing pregnant evenings full of meditation, music and silhouettes – and smell of earth and very tender flowers – and swamps of frogs! I don't think I want anything but nature.[59]

In a journal entry from 1936, after visiting the Butchart gardens in Victoria, she frames her learning curve in romantic terms: "I never used to like gardens. […] I loved woods and wild places and dead trees".[60] Many of her journal entries run an unfavourable comparison between nature and people: "Heine said, 'You do the same thing I do – identify yourself with nature. But it's bad to. It makes you hate people'".[61] In the giddy early days of her infatuation with George Barker, the two objects are in harmony: "But oh, these resilient sunny mornings! The lemon trees, the tall poinsettias and hibiscus and residential palms! He gives me back my love of the world, my medicinal, alchemical love that can convert everything into food for the soul and senses".[62] Later, she identifies with nature to come to terms with inner conflicts and qualms about their adultery.

Smart's writings encompass reflections on the garden as an experiential space from which she draws inspiration, but in contrast to Emily Carr, Smart wrote extensively on practical gardening. She created a notable garden of her own, "The Dell", created on the site of a clay pit in Suffolk. She kept garden journals and published several garden pieces collected as *Elizabeth's Garden* by Alice Van Wart, making up for a projected book on gardening Smart did not live to complete. According to biographer Rosemary Sullivan, in the late 1960s gardening thus became a "love affair"[63] which she conducted "with the same passionate, disciplined intensity that she had pursued love",[64] with the result that "[t]here were friends who accused Elizabeth of using gardening as a displacement of writing".[65] Sullivan refutes this with reference to a particular aesthetic of marginality which both her garden and her writings embrace:

> Her creation of a garden was an art and her love was genuine and ironic. Gardening was allegorical: the undervalued was the valuable. The ideas that weeds are described as weeds and flowers as flow-

57 Ibid., p. 241.
58 Ibid., p. 45.
59 Ibid., p. 64.
60 Ibid., p. 99.
61 Ibid., p. 245.
62 Ibid., p. 235.
63 Rosemary Sullivan: *By Heart: Elizabeth Smart, A Life*, London 1991, p. 311.
64 Ibid., p. 309.
65 Ibid., p. 312.

> ers was ludicrous. She would say, amused: 'these weeds are flowers because I define them as such,' and the garden became a spiritual discipline. It was absolutely necessary for Elizabeth to be involved in something real, and since her spirit and capacity to write and publish had been suppressed in the real world, undefeated, she exercised her imagination on a garden. It provided her the stamina to survive spiritually.[66]

In its marginality, or perhaps especially because of its marginality the garden comes to fulfil a special function, of articulating a particular relationship with creativity, an artistic identity which is as irrepressible as weeds. Smart's son Christopher Barker recounts memories of her sympathy with the defiance and tenacity of weeds: "whenever I walked in with a bruised knee or bandaged head, she would recommend the ways of the humble and sinuous dandelion that, she assured me, could crack concrete to get to the sunlight".[67] In the context of identifying with plants her relationship with so-called weeds is a particularly suggestive leitmotif in the first of Smart's three garden essays from 1969:

> [...] I was power shy.
> It seemed daring and wicked, for instance, to disturb the flourishing family exuberance of the stinging nettle, with its fat yellow materfamilias roots reigning below. Moreover, I had personal loyalties to them. Hadn't they kept me from scurvy once in vegetableless County Galway? And often supplied Vitamin C in remote places where funds were low? Hadn't I enjoyed modest culinary triumphs by serving them, sieved as dry as possible, as a plump middle to an omelette? Hadn't I only recently discovered that you can clear out that depressing brown bit in the bottom of vases with a few sprigs of stinging-nettle, left to stand, then swished about like a dish-mop?
> [...] But to be a gardener you must take that brutal leap into power, like any editor or managing director or prime minister.[68]

Shifting between the helicopter perspective of the gardener and insight into both the ambivalence of power relations and the multiple practical uses of plants that come with cooking on a small budget, Smart's relations to the 'weed' in question are complex and multi-layered: she relates to it quite generally as a woman, and more specifically as a mother, as a 'problem' individual whose life choices have made her a disturbance to others, and as a conscientious commercial writer who conveys useful information for a housewife readership. In a few deft strokes of the pen, she places the stinging nettle in discourses as diverse as botany, culinary and nutritional science, personal history, household economy and hygiene and even ethics: the nettle is food stuff or vegetable replacement (as part of a specific recipe), medical article, and cleaning agent. As a being deserving of loyalty, the nettle is female, depicted as the mother of a family and it disturbs order and questions an easy categorisation of what is and is not useful. But yes, Smart sees herself as "power shy"… In an essay titled "On Supplanting Rampant Nettledom With a Wondrous Watery Realm", she reflects on the gardener's creative hubris:

> One day in the first summer, I was sitting on the terrace in the sun contemplating a sea of nettles stretching away to the boundaries of the Dell, when I thought, 'Wouldn't it be lovely to have an oval pond just there, cutting out those nettles forever with fish and water lilies and weeping willows instead?' It is the possibility of realizing such godlike ideas that makes gardening so compulsive.[69]

Smart's garden descriptions combine poetry and analysis. Her garden is populated with individuals, 'plant Others' with their distinctive looks, behaviours and agendas. Smart's gardening essays and diary, like many of her writings, are self-conscious and full of admissions of defeat and feelings of inadequacy. She emphasises that gardening is incompatible with lady-like looks:

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Christopher Barker: *The Arms of the Infinite*, Hebden Bridge 2006, p. 2.
[68] Van Wart (Ed.): *Elizabeth's Garden*, p. 13.
[69] Ibid., p. 25.

"You have to abandon pride along with sightly fingernails when you take up gardening".[70] Far from deterring readers, her frankness has actually gained her praise. In a review of her garden writings Douglas Chambers observes: "It is gratifying to come upon a book about the making of a garden in England that is so full of disasters. Not for Elizabeth Smart the *soigné* pleasures of saying to the rhododendrons go and they goeth".[71] On a market increasingly dominated by glossy picture books filled with utopian garden beauty, Smart's writings reflect the unfinished workshop character of the garden, and they explicitly connect this to the process of creative writing.

Being a second outlet for her creativity, the garden is in an ambivalent relationship with writing – yet another love triangle for her to negotiate. On the one hand, her pages are pre-occupied with gardening; plants and nature affect her and extend her thoughts and feelings into spheres other than the social, and often the garden delivers much more satisfying returns than her human objects of affection. Or her writing, for that matter. Both her journals and publications such as her poetry are filled with references to her writing and ambitions to develop new forms of expression: "I cannot write a novel – the form needs padding, the form needs to be filled up with air – for no nugget of truth can last so long or be so boringly consistent. I want each word to be essence, irreplaceably and authentically the only one note".[72] She agonises endlessly over both the quality and quantity of what she produces, for instance when she compares herself to other writers and dismisses her "own always reacting words".[73] On the other hand, garden and writing are rivals: "This garden is so alive, so potential. I feel that if I turn my eyes away from it to be enclosed in this book I shall miss something."[74]

While Smart's dissatisfaction with her own productivity is a shared trait in both activities and in her meditations about them, gardening and writing differ in that the garden does things of its own accord. Many of those are actually to her liking, and Smart's notes, brief though they may be, are not without drama and grandeur when she records the garden's feats, as in a journal entry from 1968 which begins with a flourish: "*1 July*: The hour of the Poppy is at hand".[75] Smart's written portrait of the Dell, her garden home in Suffolk which she cultivated during the last seventeen years of her life, emerges from hasty notes and sketches rather than extensive description or commentary. Her technique is to show rather than tell, allowing the garden to appear as a self-contained stage of small-scale dramatic developments:

> *4 Nov* […] What's showing today:
> 1 perfect Sunflower (E. end of veg. Garden near clothes pole)
> Lots of Marigolds
> Lots of Nasturtiums
> Several mauve Sweet Peas by Tenare trellis
> Large grey rosette of leaves of Mullein Jasmine mid-flower – one flower out – many in colored bud
> […].[76]

The full list comprises twenty-four items, followed by another list of edible produce. The terse format, not completely unlike poems underlines the unfinished and changing nature of both

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[70] Ibid., p. 27.
[71] Douglas Chambers: "Elizabeth's Garden: Elizabeth Smart on the Art of Gardening and in a Canadian Garden", in: *The Journal of Garden History*, V. 10 (1990), I. 4, p. 252, here: p. 252.
[72] Van Wart (Ed.): *Necessary Secrets*, p. 236.
[73] Ibid., p. 173.
[74] Ibid., p. 98.
[75] Van Wart (Ed.): *Elizabeth's Garden*, p. 37.
[76] Ibid., p. 32.

garden and the writing process. Busy supervising her (grand)children, Smart has no time for polishing her notes. Her feelings about the garden run the gamut of delight to despair, for instance, when she finds her vegetables preyed on by pheasants, rats and other animals, or guiltily records overbuying bulbs, seeds and favourite plants. She makes notes of her plans, schemes and activities, but overall in her garden journals, Smart is gratified to take the role of spectator. Smart's English garden is an interactive artwork fit to compete with any textual piece or other form of entertainment. It is rich in plots, intrigues and surprises. Many of her journal entries begin with phrases such as 'what's showing' or 'What's out'. The garden puts on a show for her benefit, ranging from comedies to tragedies and murder mysteries, as the terse humour of Smart's minimalistic notes conveys:

> *20 Jan*
> Guns about near.
> End of Pheasants?
> *25 Jan*
> No. They're demolishing the bulbs around the Bear. Little yellow shoots lying in chaos.[77]

Pheasants are just one of many villains that threaten to demolish Smart's garden work. Rabbits, rodents, dogs, moles and other unwelcome visitors are repeat offenders against her vegetable patches and flower beds: "Something or someone has plucked off or eaten nearly all the new leaves off Dorothy Perkins Rose which was looking so happy; what can this possibly be? The Lupins that were attacked look very nude, but one has tiny basal leaves to fall back on,"[78] she complains on May 28th, 1968, and on January 11th, 1970: "2 rows of Cabbage totally gone and everything is *very* discouraging. Gardening is a hopeless task".[79] Demolitions of the kind give rise to plant-themed obituary columns:

> *21 Aug*
> Deaths:
> All Daphne mezereum (under old Apple)
> Euonymus in MC [Magic Circle]
> Rose (Azalea) Palestine [...].[80]

Then again, as a human gardener, owner and maker, Smart is aware that in the live theatre of her garden, her role is one of creative recipient and observer who notes garden events as if taking dictation. In a journal entry from 1936 she depicts the garden as an event space: "anything might happen in this garden," she says about the Butchart Gardens,

> [i]t is only waiting for a chance to squander more and more of its wealth on you. It draws forth thoughts and meditations and keeps them alive by its keen evening air. It has always in reserve something unexpected and colourful. And always it sends out flower scents like will o' the wisps, to ravish and enchant, and make your senses stumble after them in a vain attempt to understand their meaning.[81]

Because of the rich material on display, in the garden Smart feels she does not have to devise any plots. For a woman who sacrificed much of her time and money for benefit of others, being given something is a rare treat, and Smart's lists of discoveries indicate her appreciation and gratitude: "So much happens in a garden without one's mighty efforts!" Smart exclaims in her essay "This Little Acre: a Horticultural Extravaganza".[82] The garden is where nature takes steps

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[77]   Ibid., p. 31.
[78]   Ibid., p. 37.
[79]   Ibid., p. 46.
[80]   Ibid., p. 47.
[81]   Van Wart (Ed.): *Necessary Secrets*, p. 99.
[82]   Van Wart (Ed.): *Elizabeth's Garden*, p. 18.

to meet her and offers gifts of beauty, scents and edibles. When friends and family come bearing plants, these are likewise gratefully noted. The garden is a dramatic hub of give and take, which she barely interrupts to jot down briefs of what is going on. From her sketches, the garden emerges as a space constantly in motion and in development.

Conclusions

Gardens are good to think with, to paraphrase Claude Lévi-Strauss, or good for making meaningful connections between what the facts in front of one and their invisible potential. This is especially true if the individual who does the thinking is dedicated to creative endeavours, be they painterly or literary, or horticultural as the garden confronts human visitors not only with spectacles of abundance but also insights into growth and the power of flow. Like other nature spaces, the garden is constantly changing and reshaping itself, training its observers to pay attention to lives that inhabit spaces and temporalities other than the human. The garden is where not everything goes as planned, where matters of control, power and authority are contested by an elusive agency that is other to the human one. As Barbara T. Gates points out, the garden is an apt space in which to confront struggles over representation as it is implicated in an interplay of human creativity and non-human agency: "The garden is itself a representation of nature revised by culture, a situation in which an aestheticized nature is already literally in place".[83] In Michel Foucault's seminal paper on heterotopias, this representational quality makes the garden a paradigmatic interface between the real world and the world of the imagination:

> There are […] probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places […] which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. […] perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopias that take the form of contradictory sites is the garden. […] The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world. The garden has been a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity.[84]

It is no accident that all the sites Foucault lists besides the garden, caring homes, graveyards, boarding schools etc, are traditionally located in the periphery. In this essay I have made a case for examining the interlaced marginalities of the garden in the life writings of two writers whose creative endeavours are shaped by an awareness of being peripheral, both on account of their gender and their geographical origins, and who supplant their social relations with connections in and with the non-human sphere of the garden. Between themselves they present an array of ways in which a creative vision can benefit from a relationship with nature spaces. In this way they pioneer a revision of human-nature relations which is only now becoming more fully realised, for instance in ecocriticism and cultural materialism, generating a new way of looking at and even interacting with the environment.

The writings in which this vision is articulated can be described as a constructive margin in their own right: journals, notebooks, autobiographical sketches and other seemingly unpolished or even unfinished works inhabit an interactive contact zone between referentiality and fiction, connecting reflection, longing and the imagination. The genre of life writing, brought to

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[83] Barbara T. Gates: *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World*, Chicago and London 1998, p. 189.
[84] Foucault, Michel: "Of Other Spaces", on: http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html [last accessed on 30.11.2020], p. 24.

prominence by feminist critics of the 1970s and 1980s, has been instrumental in foregrounding relationality, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson suggest:

> While relationality became a cornerstone of feminist theorizing about women's difference that was enabling for the rise of critical work on women's autobiography, the distinction now seems essentialist, western-focused, and, in a time of gender fluidity, untenable.
> As many have since observed, there is a relational aspect to most life writing. A second option, therefore, is to view relationality as a particular mode of autobiographical storytelling that is sometimes engaged throughout an entire narrative.[85]

Both Emily Carr and Elizabeth Smart fashion artistic identities which extend relationality into the environment, using garden spaces as sites of encounter between human concerns and non-human others that have an impact on how and what they create. According to Robert Cooper, "Human agency works by reflecting itself through meaningful connections with its environment. Human work in its generic sense consists of constructing mimetic representations out of the raw matter of the environment so that the human agent can see itself".[86] In their garden writings, Carr and Smart suggest ways in which this "interspace between the individual and its environment"[87] can be extended beyond the social sphere, by giving attention to plants and nature spaces. It would be of benefit if their ways of perceiving relations between human beings and the environment were to become less marginal.

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[85] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson: "A Personal Introduction to Life Writing in the Long Run", in: Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Ed.): *Life Writing in the Long Run: A Smith & Watson Autobiography Studies Reader*, Ann Arbor 2017, n. p. Different meanings of relationality are pursued in various fields, life writing criticism, (Cf. Paul John Eakin: "Relational Selves, Relational Lives: The Story of the Story", in: Thomas Couser and Joseph Fichtelberg (Ed.): *True Relations: Essays on Autobiography and the Postmodern*, Westport 1988, p. 63-81. Cf. Katja Sarkowsky: "Transcultural Autobiography and the Staging of (Mis)Recognition", in: *Amerikastudien*, V. 57 (2012), I. 4, p. 627-642.) postcolonial discourse, (Cf. Édouard Glissant: *Poetics of Relation*, Ann Arbor 1997.), sociology (Cf. Pierpaolo Donati: *Relational Sociology: A New Paradigm for the Social Sciences*, London 2012. Cf. Kenneth J. Gergen: *Relational Being: Beyond Self and Community*, New York 2009.) environmental humanities, (Cf. Christian Moraru and Amy J. Elias: *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-first Century*, Evanston 2015. Cf. Ursula Heise: *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, New York 2008. Cf. Timothy Clark: *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept*, London 2015.) philosophy, (Cf. Neil Vallelly: "The Relationality of Disappearance", in: *Angelaki*, V. 24 (2019), I. 3, p. 38-52.) and many more. Carr and Smart's works connect several of these.

[86] Robert Cooper: "Relationality", in: *Organization Studies Berlin*, V. 26 (2005), I. 11, p. 1.689-1.710, here: p. 1.690.

[87] Ibid.

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Sarah Jäger & Maria Weber (Kassel)

"She went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple"[1]: Intersections of Gender and Space in Aritha van Herk's *The Tent Peg* and *The Book of Judges 4-5*

Introduction

In an attempt to shed new light on forgotten female myths, van Herk commonly addresses the role of women in mythology – be it in biblical traditions as with *The Tent Peg* or *Judith* or Greco-Roman mythological figures such as Arachne or Athena in *No Fixed Address*. While the extent of this paper does not allow for a detailed analysis of Aritha van Herk's extensive body of work, we will focus our attention on *The Tent Peg* as a feminist revision of the biblical account of Jael and Deborah in the Book of Judges 4-5. In public perception, similar to other strong female figures of the Old Testament, their tale of independence, strength and heroism is easily drowned out by the polyphonic soundscape of incomparably more stories featuring male protagonists:

> Well, one of the things that has always disturbed me is the way that the stories of women have been effaced. They haven't been lost or utterly destroyed, but they seem to have been erased, so that they're fuzzy. They are like pictograms that have been smeared over by smoke, you know? They are not very clear anymore. […] And so, what we need, is some contemporary retelling of those wonderful old stories! And that's what I did.[2]

In the following, we will put van Herk's feminist retelling of one of these "wonderful old stories" under scrutiny. To provide further context, we will first outline the inherent link between feminist literature and intertextuality, which is why we will briefly refer to selected writings by Adrienne Rich and Harold Bloom as well as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's monumental work *The Madwoman in the Attic* before applying our findings onto van Herk's *The Tent Peg*. Subsequently, we will attempt to highlight intersections of gender and space and in an attempt to explain how the initially marginalized female protagonists eventually gain footing within and rise above the constraints of their positions in society, confined by their gender as well as their compromising location outside the city. However, they do not allow these constraints to hold them back. In this context, we consider it worth an attempt to compare the topic of survival, (allegedly) omnipresent in Canadian literature, to the perceived dualism of civilization vs. wilderness in the context of the Old Testament. The wilderness in the biblical context, as well as in its Canadian counterpart, thus becomes a hostile place – especially for women, who are traditionally associated with the domestic sphere. In this specific place of danger and other, the female characters who have been continuously marginalized in literary tradition, move from the margins to the centres of their respective micro-societies.

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[1]   *The Bible: New King James Version*, Oxford 2018, Judges 4.21.
[2]   Hartmut Lutz: "Aritha van Herk im Gespräch mit Hartmut Lutz", in: *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien*, V. 16 (1989), p. 109-115, here: p. 114.

Feminism and Intertextuality

"Things change when women write and speak rather than being written about and spoken to."[3] In *The Anxiety of Influence* Harold Bloom describes a writer's struggle for originality and distinction from their predecessors as a "battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites, Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads".[4] Using Freud's psychoanalytical imagery, Bloom likens the (male) poet and his (male) antecedent to the oedipal antagonism between a son and his father, in which the son desires sole possession of his mother and consequently wishes to replace or even kill his father. This metaphor of patrilineal genealogy[5] within the literary tradition, virtually excludes female writers from the history of literature and instigates the development of the literary canon as a process primarily, or even exclusively, propelled by male writers.

While this patriarchal disposition of Bloom's model of influence[6] might be perceived as the result of or even perpetuation of a male hegemony within the western literary tradition, Gilbert and Gubar reframe Bloom's metaphor as a descriptive rather than a normative statement. By alluding to Juliet Mitchell's comment on the patriarchal nature of the Freudian terminology, that "psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of one"[7] Gilbert and Gubar remark that the same could be said of Bloom's model of literary history "which is not a recommendation for but an analysis of the patriarchal poetics (and attendant anxieties) which underlie our culture's chief literary movements".[8] Consequently, they answer the question in how far a female writer would fit into the literary tradition outlined by Bloom, as follows: "[A] woman writer does not 'fit in'. […] [I]ndeed, she seems to be anomalous, indefinable, alienated, a freakish outsider."[9] Furthermore, Gilbert and Gubar note that, due to their relative isolation within the literary tradition women could not possibly experience an "anxiety of influence", as described by Bloom, but rather an "anxiety of authorship"[10] as the very act of writing could mark her as 'other' and put her in danger of becoming a social outcast.

In a similar manner to the male author's struggle against his precursors that requires revisions of his antecedents' earlier works of literature, the female author had to first deconstruct and revise her own socialization and the – oftentimes stereotypical – depiction of women by male writers. Her struggle becomes "a battle for self-creation"[11] rather than originality or separation from precursors that do not exist in the first place. The revisionary process of female writers is thus, quite literally, linked to "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction", a process Rich likens to "an act of survival"[12] and emphatically proclaims for women in general and women writers in particular: "Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this

3   Allen Graham: *Intertextuality*, London 2000, p. 144.
4   Harold Bloom: *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford 1997, p. 11.
5   Frauke Berndt and Lily Tonger-Erk: *Intertextualität: Eine Einführung*, Berlin 2013, p. 80.
6   Ibid.
7   Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar: *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven 1979, p. 47.
8   Ibid., p. 48.
9   Ibid.
10   Ibid., p. 49.
11   Ibid.
12   Adrienne Rich: "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", in: *College English*, V. 34 (1972), I. 1, p. 18-30, here: p. 18.

drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of a male-dominated society."[13]

The intertextual approach of "revising, deconstructing and reconstructing"[14] thus seems to be closely connected to feminist literature as is reflected in Aritha van Herk's retelling of the myth surrounding the prophetess Deborah and the Kenite woman Jael (abbreviated to J. L. in *The Tent Peg*) in the biblical Book of Judges:

> [W]hat has intrigued me, has been trying to take those old stories and put them in a modern context, because we recognize for instance the importance of the *Odyssey* to our world…but that's a male story, right? Now, I mean it seems to me that the things we do are inspired by the women stories as well, that we've effaced that. […] And that's what I did with Judith, that's what I did with J. L., that's what I did with Arachne, the woman who dies because she can weave better than Athena.[15]

In an attempt to revise the predominantly male literary canon, van Herk aims to reframe ancient mythology and Christian scripture from the Old Testament and adapts the perspective of the oftentimes oppressed, marginalized or forgotten female characters whom she enables to tell their version of the story, thus giving a voice to the voiceless.

Gendered Spaces and the Canadian Wilderness

The rough Canadian wilderness has become an almost mythical place in Canada's national identity as well as literature. Outside the confining margins of civilized society, the wild, un-tamed nature has traditionally been considered a place of promise and opportunity, but also of chaos and danger – so much so that Margaret Atwood claimed the topic of 'survival'[16] to be one of the central and defining elements of Canadian literature. In this regard, Atwood picks up on Northrop Frye's assertion that "the most dangerous enemy of Canada has been not a foreign invader but its own geography."[17] It is this notion of a 'common enemy' – namely that of nature itself – that, according to Frye, contributed significantly to Canada's national identity and which Rebecca Raglon perceives as a central difference to its 'southern neighbour':

> Unlike the U.S., where writers express anxiety over the urbanized pressures that constantly intrude on wild places […], the underlying anxiety in Canada is a fear of being swallowed by the wildness surrounding isolated human settlements.[18]

It is not surprising that the motif of the Canadian wilderness also found its way into its literary tradition. As one of the most productive periods in Canada's literary history, the 1960s and 1970s, also referred to as the 'Canadian Renaissance', brought forth several influential female authors like Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro or Aritha van Herk. Coinciding with second wave feminism, novels like Atwood's *Surfacing* or van Herk's *The Tent Peg* reflect social questions of their time and reflect on gender-related power dynamics. Within these novels, the wilderness as a literal 'no man's land' outside of a restrictive patriarchal society, becomes a place of free-dom and independence. Entering the unknown and going into the wilderness becomes an act of

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[13]   Ibid.
[14]   Gilbert and Gubar: *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 75.
[15]   Qtd. in: Lutz: "Aritha van Herk im Gespräch mit Hartmut Lutz", p. 41.
[16]   Cf. Margaret Atwood: *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Toronto 1972.
[17]   Northrop Frye: "English Canadian Literature, 1929-1954", in: *World Literature Today*, V. 63 (1989), I. 2, p. 246-249.
[18]   Rebecca Raglon: "Women and the Great Canadian Wilderness: Reconsidering the Wild", in: *Women's Studies*, V. 25 (1996), I. 5, p. 513-531, here: p. 514.

liberation and a "quest for self-identity"[19] for the female protagonists, who turn their backs on socially constructed gender expectations and redefine their role as women.

The concept of gender is predominantly rooted in a heteronormative binary structure that extends far beyond its biological, i. e. reproductive, basis, as both signifiers do not coexist equally, but are rather ranked according to a socially constructed hierarchy, where A signifies the norm while not-A signifies the divergent – the other – as summarized by Doreen Massey: "For within this kind of conceptualization, only one kind of terms (A) is defined positively. The other term (not-A) is conceived only in relation to A, and as lacking in A."[20] This hierarchy not only determines the attributes allocated to individuals of a certain gender, but also classifies specific tasks, roles or social spheres as 'typically male' or 'typically female'. A transgression of these gender-based expectations may lead to stigmatization, isolation or even to the ostracization from a social group, depending on how strictly these rules are enforced within a culture. Accordingly, individuals grouped within a certain category – i. e. male or female – may encounter a significant amount of social pressure to behave in a certain way, take over specific roles or to stay within their allocated sphere.

Similar to Massey, Sherry B. Ortner identifies a hierarchical structure between "the specific cultural conceptions and symbolizations"[21] related to men and women and declares the secondary status ascribed to women as not only a western phenomenon, but as "one of the true universals, a pan-cultural fact".[22] She links this subordinate status to three main areas:

> 1) Elements of cultural ideology and informant's statements that explicitly devalue women, according them, their roles, their tasks, their products, and their social milieu less prestige than are accorded men and their male correlated;
> 2) Symbolic devices such as the attribution of defilement, which may be interpreted as implicitly making a statement of inferior valuation; and
> 3) Social-structural arrangements that exclude women from participation in or contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside.[23]

Ortner explains the hierarchy between male and female – and the "universality of the female subordination"[24] – by referring to universal dualisms governing human existence, of which the opposition of nature and culture seems to be most intricately connected to the perception of gender roles within society. As the title of her essay "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" already suggests, women tend to get associated with nature, due to their ability to give birth and nurture children,[25] whereas men are connected to culture:

> [T]he distinctiveness of culture rests precisely on the fact that it can under most circumstances transcend natural conditions and turn them to its purposes. Thus culture (i. e. every culture) at some level of awareness asserts itself to be not only distinct from but superior to nature, and that sense of dis-

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[19] Cf. Ganesh Sankar and R. Soundararajan: "Female Quest for Self-Identity and Women Subjections in Margaret Atwood's Surfacing", in: *Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 13 (2016), I. 4, p. 40-41.
[20] Doreen Massey: *Space, Place, Gender,* Malden 1994, p. 256.
[21] Sherry B. Ortner: "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", in: Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Ed.), *Women, Culture, and Society*, Stanford 1972, p. 67-87, here: p. 67.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., p. 69.
[24] Ibid.
[25] According to Ortner, especially younger children are – regardless of their gender – initially perceived as animalistic and incomplete members of society: "like animals, they are unable to walk upright, they excrete without control, the do not speak." She relates this notion to the significance of initiation rites in many cultures, in which – especially boys – are being moved "from a less than fully human state into full participation in society and culture." (Ibid., p. 78.)

tinctiveness and superiority rests precisely on the ability to transform – to 'socialize' and 'culturalize' – nature.[26]

This essential opposition is subsequently extended to other areas: woman are associated with the domestic sphere and the security of the home, where they can fulfil their 'natural' role as the nurturing mother whereas men are located in the public sphere as protectors and providers for the family. While women 'create life', men "are free to, or forced to, create artificially, that is, through cultural means, and in such a way as to sustain culture."[27]

Even though this binary opposition stages nature and culture as two completely opposing poles – and thus, seems to instigate the same for women and men – Ortner relativizes her allocation, by adding that women, even though placed more closely to nature than men, nevertheless have to be considered as social beings and part of their respective cultures. Accordingly, she frames women as being somewhere in between, as mediators between nature and culture. Verena Bühler Roth refers to this intermediate status of women in her evaluation of gender and nature (or rather: wilderness) in Canadian literature.[28] Drawing from Heather Murray's[29] model of wilderness and civilization as the two opposing poles of a spectrum rather than a binary dualism, she likens women to Murray's concept of "pseudo-wilderness".[30] Deconstructing the idea "of a simple correspondence of land and land values […] (city is 'bad', for example, and wilderness 'good', or vice versa)",[31] she highlights the special significance the space in between the extremes may hold for a more nuanced evaluation of gendered spaces.

After having discussed the implications of gendered space and the Canadian wilderness, we will now turn to van Herk's use of the hypotext for *The Tent Peg* and take a closer look at the implications of the source material of Judg. 4-5, likewise focusing on gender and space.

Van Herk's Biblical Template: Space and Gender and the Implications of Field and City in The Book of Judges 4-5

In *The Tent Peg*, van Herk retells the story of Deborah and Jael of the Book of Judges 4-5 from the Old Testament. The text that depicts the armed conflict between Israelites and Canaanites in pre-state Israel (approximately between 12 and 10.000 B.C.[32]) not only offers a historic perspective on the political events at the time, but also establishes insights into societal conditions of ancient Israel. It presents a similar division of spaces as previously discussed in the context of wilderness in Canadian literature – in reference to a domestic and public sphere – and inherent implications for both genders. The representation of the divided spheres in biblical texts seems congruent with a patriarchal structure of society: While the husbands were the heads of the families, the wives were the heads of the household, they held the command over it and had sovereignty from the men in their life to a certain degree.[33] However, an evaluative conclu-

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[26] Ibid., p. 73.
[27] Ibid., p. 77.
[28] Cf. Verena Bühler Roth: *Wilderness and the Natural Environment: Margaret Atwood's Recycling of a Canadian Theme*, Tübingen 1998, p. 34.
[29] Heather Murray: "Women in the Wilderness", in: Shirley Neumann and Smaro Kamboureli (Ed.): *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing*, Edmonton 1986, p. 74-83.
[30] Ibid., p. 35.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Sigrud Eder: *Wie Frauen und Männer Macht ausüben: Eine feministisch-narratologische Analyse von Ri 4*, Freiburg 2008, p. 62.
[33] Irmtraud Fischer: *Gender-faire Exegese: Gesammelte Beiträge zur Reflexion des Genderbias und seiner Auswirkungen in der Übersetzung und Auslegung von biblischen Texten*, Berlin 2004, p. 42.

sion that the private, the home, is of lesser importance than the public is erroneous.[34] As the family formed the nucleus of the tribal society of ancient Israel, its organization and dealings were in deed of relevance to the public. The events taking place in the close circle of the family were indicative for the events taking place on a societal level.[35] In hindsight, this perception alters the understanding of the female sphere. As there was no 'private' sphere in a tribal society where the family must be considered a political entity, the stories of the Old Testament revolving around women also gain a political dimension.[36]

In reference to Canadian wilderness and its contextual implications as a hazardous and potentially threatening space, the Old Testament displays a similar distinction. It differentiates between 'city' and 'field', the former being considered safe, the latter with its wide expanse and seclusion being considered dangerous, especially to women. They are explicitly advised not to enter it alone.[37] Not only is it coined a male dominated and uncivilized space (as most field work is done by men of a lower social standing),[38] where women are considered unwelcome, it also harbours the unambiguous danger of sexual violence. One of the passages evident for the distinction between city and field[39] can be found in the Book of Deuteronomy,[40] which specifies the expected behaviour of women who are raped and only recognizes rape when it occurs in the field outside the city: The underlying assumption is that due to the cramped housing situation within a city, women can easily call attention to themselves, thus people can intervene and prevent the attack. Albeit women are required to draw attention to themselves; the burden of proof, as today, lies with the victims. The same implications are not applied to the field. Women experiencing sexual violence outside the city walls are not required to call for help. The field is understood as such a dangerous place for them that they are relieved from providing the burden of proof.[41] As a result, this depiction creates a stark opposition between the city as a relatively safe space for women and the field as a dangerous zone. Yet, there are several passages that depict sexual assault and violence against women within city walls.[42] Read together, the dual bind of dangerous field and only semi-safe city creates a binary contrast between the household, which is considered safe, and the not-household (either the city or the field). This characterization emphasizes the safety and reliability of the household, perpetuating the restrictive notion that only the home was safe for women.[43]

In the context of space and gender, the Book of Judges 4-5 presents an interesting case. In traditional interpretation, there is the widespread notion that the Bible carries an androcentric world view and subsequently focusses only on male heroes. In reference to this, Judg. 4-5 portrays an exception to this alleged rule by showcasing two strong women. Furthermore, the spatial implications the story features offer a diverse ground for analysis. The story of the judge

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[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., p. 43.
[37] Nele Spiering-Schomborg: "Räume des Schreckens: Narratologische Überlegungen zum alttestamentlichen Erzählen von sexualisierter Gewalt", in: *Bibel und Kirche*, V. 73 (2018), I. 2, p. 71-79, here: p. 74.
[38] Fischer: *Gender-faire Exegese*, p. 129.
[39] Ilse Müllner: "Zeit, Raum, Figuren, Blick: Hermeneutische und methodische Grundlagen der Analyse biblischer Erzähltexte", in: *Protokolle zur Bibel*, V. 15 (2006), I. 1, p. 1-24, here: p. 9.
[40] Deut. 22.23-27.
[41] Müllner: "Zeit, Raum, Figuren, Blick", p. 10.
[42] Gen. 34, Judg. 19, Prov. 7. Cf. Ivonne Sophie Thöne: *Liebe zwischen Stadt und Feld: Raum und Geschlecht im Hohelied*, Berlin 2012, p. 66.
[43] Thöne: *Liebe zwischen Stadt und Feld*, p. 66-67, 75.

Deborah and the Kenite woman Jael are told in two chapters; Judg. 4 describing the events in a narration, whereas Judg. 5 depicts them in a poetic hymn sung by Deborah. The frame of the narration is a violent encounter between the Israelites and Canaanites, a hostile neighbouring tribe and great military force, in which the former seek to free themselves from the oppression they suffer at the hands of the latter. While there is much to uncover in the biblical text, especially in regard to the female protagonists, this essay will focus on the most relevant implications in respect to *The Tent Peg*.

Van Herk includes both female protagonists, Deborah and Jael, in her retelling of the story. However, she changes their order of appearance and subsequently the prominence of both characters. Whereas the biblical Deborah is introduced first to the reader – opening as well as closing the narration – she is less involved in van Herk's rendition. There, she never takes on an active role: with the exception of a visit of the 'she-bear' which J. L. recognizes as a spiritual messenger sent by Deborah, the reader only encounters the protagonist's best friend (and potential love interest) through J. L.'s recollection of past experiences with her. Nevertheless, both Deborahs portray similar character traits and functions in their respective narrations. As a prophetess and judge in ancient Israel, the biblical Deborah's role is to proclaim God's word as well as to provide counsel for her people. The root of her name links to 'word', emphasizing the power she holds over the words she speaks.[44] She is presented as a wise counsellor sitting on a hill, an elevated position[45] outside the city while the "children of Israel"[46] come to seek her judgment and guidance. Further on, she will lead the Israelites through their battle with the Canaanites, similar as to how van Herk's Deborah guides J. L. through her experiences at the camp site. However – while her character invites to a detailed interpretation – in our analysis of the source text, we will focus mainly on the presentation of Jael. Whilst her appearance in the biblical text marks the climax of the narrated events (the death of Sisera, the commander of the enemy's forces), it is relatively short lived. She is introduced briefly, fulfills her role and fades back into oblivion; what becomes of her is of no further interest to the narrator. Yet, she has the most relevance as inspiration for J. L. in *The Tent Peg*, who is the protagonist and focal point of van Herk's hypertext. Jael, who is introduced to the biblical hypotext relatively late,[47] enters the narration via her husband, the Kenite[48] Heber. Her name translates to 'mountain goat', but also has connotations of moving upwards in the context of ascending a mountain.[49] Thus, she is characterized as dexterous and agile, swift on her feet and in her mind.[50] In Judg. 4.11, Heber pitches his tent right at the border to the battlefield. The question why the Kenite chooses such a heavily layered liminal space is not answered. The potential danger the area harbours is threefold: the violence of the battlefield is taking place right in front of his proverbial

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[44] Eder: *Wie Frauen und Männer Macht ausüben*, p. 98.

[45] Here, Deborah is painted in the image of the first prophet, Moses. The narrator situates her on higher ground, referencing the space where Moses had his first encounter with God in the mountains of Horeb (Ex. 3.) as well as the reception of ten commandments (Ex. 20) on mount Sinai. The number of intertextual references Deborah is layered with present her with divine grace. (Cf. Eder: *Wie Frauen und Männer Macht ausüben*, p. 100.)

[46] Judg. 4.4-5. This reference also establishes Deborah as a mother figure.

[47] Judg. 4.16.

[48] Kenites, similar to Canaanites, are another ethnic group of the area. However, in contrast to the latter, they share their believe in Yahweh with the Israelites. Despite this connection in faith, the Kenites are in actuality allies to the Canaanites. (Cf. Eder: *Wie Frauen und Männer Macht ausüben*, p. 130.)

[49] Ibid., p. 155.

[50] Ibid. While Deborah is characterized through her speech, Jael is characterized by her movement. (Cf. Ibid., p.180.)

doorstep, the space itself is close to the river Kishon which demarcates tribal areas, therefore offers the possibility of hostile encounters and further more is a swampy marshland, which additionally marks the area itself as uninhabitable.[51] However, Heber decides on precisely this life-threatening no man's land to settle in. Even though he is introduced into the story, Heber does not take on an active part in the further depiction of the events. It seems that his sole purpose was to introduce Jael.

As seen, the spatial background of the events of Judg. 4 contains specific implications of danger and death. Van Herk took them into consideration and incorporated them by choosing the Canadian wilderness as the stage for her transformed narration. Moving on, the following part will take a closer look at the climax of the events in Judg. 4-5 as depicted in the hypotext, Jael's encounter with Sisera and his subsequent demise:

> However, Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear." And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a rug. Then he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him. […] Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.[52]

After the Canaanite commander Sisera has accepted the defeat of his troops by the Israelites, he abandons them and flees, with the Israeli commander Barak in pursuit, when he comes to the tent of Jael. Sisera, acknowledging Jael as an ally due to her being a Kenite and the allegiance between Canaanites and Kenites, comes to her in confidence of having found a safe place to rest. Jael goes out to meet him.[53] The terminology "goes out"[54] has been previously used in the text to characterize Yahweh's involvement in liberating the Israelites from the Canaanites; it is also a reference to Ex. 6 and 34, where Yahweh 'goes out' to free the Israelites form oppression. The evident implication is that the action 'goes out' results in liberation, but also points towards violence. With these semantic references in mind, the reader is able to anticipate that the encounter between Jael and Sisera will not be peaceful. The female protagonist regards the commander as a military threat and intends to treat him accordingly.[55] Nevertheless, she asks him into her tent.[56] Referring back to the aforementioned lack of the text explicitly mentioning sexual contact between Jael and Sisera, some scholars uncover its traces in these lines: Fewell and Gun argue that "in biblical literature, a man seldom enters a woman's tent for purposes other than sexual intercourse",[57] while Reis takes a step further, stating "in the Hebrew Bible, whenever a man and a woman, not married to one another, are alone in private there is sex. There are no occasions of innocent rendezvous".[58] Therefore, Jael and Sisera being alone in her tent is enough to allude to intercourse.

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[51]   Ibid., p. 113.
[52]   Judg. 4.17-21.
[53]   Judg. 4.18.
[54]   Judg. 4.14d.
[55]   Eder: *Wie Frauen und Männer Macht ausüben*, p. 151.
[56]   Judg. 4.18.
[57]   Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn: "Controlling Perspectives: Women, Men, and the Authority of Violence in Judges 4 & 5", in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, V. 58 (1990), I. 3, p. 389-411, here: p. 329.
[58]   Pamela Tamarkin Reis: "Uncovering Jael and Sisera: A New Reading", in: *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, V. 19 (2005), I. 1, p. 24-47, here: p. 26.

At first glance, Jael's actions seem perplexing to the reader. Her inviting Sisera into her tent implies the promise of safety, but ultimately killing him in his sleep seem paradoxical and deceitful.[59] Furthermore, van Herk's integration of sexual violence in her rendition of the events may seem even more mystifying to the reader, as there appears to be no occurrence of this type of violence in the hypotext: Although Sisera and Jael are alone in her tent, sexual misconduct is not mentioned (explicitly). The question therefore is, how the idea to include the almost-rape scene between J. L. and Jerome in her hypertext occurred to van Herk. The answer lies in a critical, against-the-grain reading of the biblical source and careful exegesis of the scene in Judg. 4 aided by the comparative analysis of its depiction in Judg. 5. The section below will go into further detail regarding this matter.

In reference to the division of space, the public and private spheres merge with Jael invitation to Sisera; potential danger has entered her sanctuary. Her actions outwardly may seem congruent with common patriarchal practices, yet as she has been the one to initiate first contact, her intentions to break with them also show through.[60] Inside the tent, Sisera lays down and Jael covers him with a "בַּשְּׂמִיכָה"[61] Generally translated with 'rug', the actual meaning of the word is unknown. Eder refers to it as "hapax legomenon"[62] stating that because of the context of the scene – the interior of a tent – the word has been interpreted as "rug, curtain, or blanket", but as there is no further occurrence of the word in the remainder of the Bible it is impossible to discern what it original meaning is.[63] The exegete introduces a different interpretation of the scene: as the setting is already sexually charged by a man and a woman being alone together in a tent, she suggests that Jael covers Sisera with herself and initiates intercourse.[64] "בַּשְּׂמִיכָה"would therefore refer to Jael's body.

Instead of directly going to sleep, Sisera is thirsty and asks for water. Jael, in turn, gives him milk.[65] On the one hand, this seems to be a very motherly gesture and emphasizes Jael's depiction as caretaker: she puts Sisera to bed; she gives him milk like a mother would feed her infant and consequently establishes a power dynamic between care-giver and care-receiver.[66] On the other hand, examining the scene more closely and with the previous implications in mind, there is more to uncover: in ancient Israeli culture milk is traditionally not consumed to quench thirst, it is considered a food product. While the act of eating has no direct link to sexual practices, 2 Sam. 11.11 is one instance in the Old Testament where 'eat' and 'drink' covertly signify 'to lie with a woman'. Furthermore, Song 5.1 mentions milk in the context of affirmative and responsible sexual behaviour.[67] These references indicate that whilst the obvious connection of milk can be made to life and fertility[68], a sexually charged image is also created.

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[59] Judg. 4.18-21.
[60] Judg. 4.18. Cf. Eder: *Wie Frauen und Männer Macht ausüben*, p. 223.
[61] Original Hebrew term taken from a Hebrew-English interlinear Bible. (Cf. Bible Hub: *Interlinear Bible*, on: https://biblehub.com/interlinear/judges/4.htm [last accessed on 24.04.2020].)
[62] 'Hapax legomenon' describes a term of singular reference in a text.
[63] Eder: *Wie Frauen und Männer Macht ausüben*, p. 152-153.
[64] Ibid., p. 179.
[65] Judg. 4.19.
[66] Eder: *Wie Frauen und Männer Macht ausüben*, p. 178. The depiction of Jael as mother, lover and killer, a tripartite portrayal of womanhood widespread in ancient cultures, is not uncommon. (Cf. Susan Niditch: "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael", in: Peggy Lynne Day (Ed.): *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, Augsburg 1989, p. 43-57, here: p. 44.)
[67] Eder: *Wie Frauen und Männer Macht ausüben*, p. 177.
[68] Ibid., p. 176.

Accordingly, this reading alters the interpretation of the events that follow. Sisera's readiness is brought on by a combination of post-coital exhaustion[69] and the presumption that the woman he was intimate with minutes before would not pose threat to his sleeping form.[70] After the commander has fallen asleep, Jael equips herself with a tent peg and hammer, tools of everyday use and readily available. The commonly translated 'went softly' can also refer to 'come in secret', which does not only hint towards that what follows might be illicit, but also carries and explicit sexual connotation.[71] In the Book of Ruth 3.7 this introduces (consensual) intercourse between Ruth and her love interest Boaz. Sexually charged implications seem to prevail and continue, even after Sisera's and Jael's (presumable) intercourse and continue until the commander's death. Jael exploits Sisera's vulnerable state and drives the peg with enough force into his head for it to enter into the ground beneath him.[72] Noteworthy is that Jael has aimed for the temple, the seat of the mind and in ancient cultures closely connected to concepts of masculinity. As men are associated with the mind – the ratio[73] – her choice of target implies that Jael is targeting the very centre of his masculinity and effectively emasculates him.[74] Taking into account the form of a tent peg, a phallic symbol, the scene reads as a depiction of rape.[75] The depiction of the scene in Judg. 5.27 presents the events in greater detail: slain, Sisera comes to lie between Jael's legs. In her essay, Susan Niditch adds the depiction of the events presented in Jug. 5.27 to her detailed analysis: "at her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; at her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell dead."[76] She proposes to translate 'feet' with 'legs' to emphasize Sisera's position beneath Jael, once again pointing towards their non-traditional power dynamic. While the phrase "between her legs" carries its own sexual imagery, the speaker of the poem enhances this allusion even further by adding "he knelt, he fell".[77] Not only does 'kneeling' allude to a position of "defeat and death",[78] it also refers to submission or even humiliation in a sexualized context. Sisera comes to lie at Jael's feet[79] as the conquest of a non-consensual and wrongful sexual encounter that signifies rape.[80]

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[69] Eder points out that the Hebrew term used to describe his sleep implies a state of paralyzation. (Cf. Ibid, p. 157-158.)

[70] This might offer a more relatable reading in contrast to the traditional one, in which Sisera does not consider Jael a threat based on her gender.

[71] Niditch: "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael", p. 45-46.

[72] Judg. 4.21.

[73] Niditch: "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael", p. 43-44

[74] Ibid. Fewell and Gunn have proposed an even more drastic interpretation of this scene: what has here been translated as 'temple', could also refer to '(open) mouth' or 'throat'. Therefore, Jael drives the tent peg through Sisera's mouth, which unmistakably uncovers the sexual violence beneath the surface of the events. (Cf. Fewell and Gunn: "Controlling Perspectives", p. 393.)

[75] Eder: *Wie Frauen und Männer Macht ausüben*, p. 178. This scene has been coined 'reverse rape' by some scholars (e. g. Fewell and Gunn: "Controlling Perspectives", p. 394). We do understand the underlying reference that in the majority of rape-cases men are the perpetrators and women the victims, however, the preface of 'reserve' seems to make a distinction between sexual violence perpetuated by men in contrast to women, which we do not agree with. Acts of sexual violence are appalling and devastating and everyone regardless their gender is capable of them.

[76] Judg. 5.27.

[77] Niditch's translation. (Cf. Niditch: "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael", p. 46.) The *NKJV* offers "he sank, he fell". (Judg. 5.27)

[78] Niditch: "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael", p. 48-49.

[79] Niditch's translation is here d'accord with *NKJV*. (Judg. 5.27)

[80] Niditch: "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael", p. 49. The exegete cites further inner-biblical references for this kind of interpretation: Gen. 19.32; Gen. 34.2; Gen. 35.22; 1 Sam. 2.22; 2 Sam. 13.11-14; Lev. 20.13.

As illustrated, death, sex and sexual violence are the prevalent themes in this biblical passage. The narrator illustrates Jael as an amalgamation of stereotypical tropes of womanhood representative of social norms of ancient near-eastern cultures. At the time, women were frequently represented in a dual-bind of life-giver and life-taker[81] due to the power they had over the lives of their children. Additionally, this presented them as 'other' to men who were needed for conception but had no influence on the progression of the pregnancy from there on out.[82] Accordingly, Jael unites roles of mother, lover and killer, creating a complex character as well as a heavily charged depiction of the events. For readers of the 21st century, the protagonist's actions generate an inexplicable tension: especially her role as the perpetrator of sexual violence seems to conflict with stereotypical conceptions of womanhood, which generally cast women as the victims of sexual assault. Portraying Jael as the violator creates an exceptionally shocking effect for the reader, who continues to try and find a reasonable explanation for her actions. This tension can be resolved once the reader takes the overarching theme into consideration. Moving away from the relationship between Jael and Sisera and taking a closer look at the general topoi of the narration, the female protagonist becomes a representative for the marginalized and oppressed. Regardless of her liminal position within society, this sidelined character becomes the self-assertive liberator to a people.[83] The controversial claim that women are inferior to men and their subordinates harks back to the story of creation, where Eve is introduced as Adam's 'helper' in Gen 2.85. Jael, and Deborah alike, do not act as the 'helper' Eve – and therefore women subsequently – were designed to be. and women subsequently are introduced as to creation in Gen. 2.85. On the contrary, Jael takes control over a situation and shows initiative which shifts the power dynamics in her favour. Ultimately, she becomes the incentive behind the liberation of the Israelites. Despite her ambiguous acts she is revered as a heroine and awarded the highest praise in Judg. 5.24: "[M]ost blessed among women is Jael".[84]

Gender and Space in *The Tent Peg*

Even though nature has traditionally been associated with femininity rather than masculinity, the Canadian wilderness seems to subvert the allocation of nature as a female sphere – at least to a certain extent. The rough, untamed wilderness, which Margaret Atwood refers to as "the malevolent North"[85], has always attracted male explorers striving to subdue the unclaimed land,[86] sometimes risking and sometimes losing their lives in the attempt. In opposition to the male explorers, Dorota Filipczak likens the Canadian North to a femme fatale, alluring adventurers with her beauty, who then "got lost or froze amidst the Canadian landscape."[87]

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[81] Ibid., p. 43-44.
[82] Ibid., p. 44-45.
[83] Ibid., p. 52.
[84] Ibid., p. 173, 175.
[85] Margaret Atwood: *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*, Oxford 1996.
[86] Traditional myths of settlers of North America promoted the depiction of the land as a woman. They would set out to claim some of that "virgin continent" for themselves. (Cf. Marlene Goldman: "Earth-quaking the Kingdom of the Male Virgin: A Deleuzian Analysis of Aritha van Herk's *No Fixed Address* and *Places far from Ellesmere*", in: *Canadian Literature*, V. 137 (1993), p. 21-38, here: p. 22.) Therefore, the relationship between men and nature has always been not only about the capture and mastery of the land, but also about the "impulse toward territorialisation". (Ibid., p. 23.)
[87] Dorota Filipczak: "J. L. and the Temple of the Gendered God: A Study of *The Tent Peg* by Aritha van Herk", in: *Folia Litteraria Anglica*, V. 5 (2002), p. 61-69, here: p. 61. This gendered imagery of the Canadian landscape is prominently addressed in the perspective of Mackenzie, the leader of the expedition, who continuously refers to

In van Herk's novel *The Tent Peg*, a young woman joins an all-male crew of geologists searching for uranium in the Yukon territory. Fittingly, almost all male characters' names can be linked to names of Canadian explorers: Mackenzie, the leader of the expedition, alludes to Alexander Mackenzie (1764-1820), co-director of the North West Company who discovered the course of the longest river system in Canada, which would later be named the Mackenzie River.[88] Mackenzie's assistant Thompson is named after the cartographer David Thompson (1770-1857), who travelled extensively throughout North-America and provided the first comprehensive map of North-America.[89] Cap, whose full name is Capital Kane, alludes to the explorer and artist Paul Kane (1810-1871), who travelled throughout the Canadian West sketching depictions of indigenous peoples.[90] The photographer Hearne is named after Samuel Hearne (1745-1792) who attempted to find the Northwest Passage by land[91] and Franklin is named after Sir John Franklin (1786-1847), who disappeared during an expedition to find the Northwest Passage.[92] Jerome's assistant Hudson is a reference to Henry Hudson (1565-1611) who explored the Hudson River, before losing his life due to a mutiny of his crew.[93] Milton is named after Viscount Milton, who searched for the Northwest Passage by land.[94] The only male member of the crew not 'honoored' with explorer's name is Jerome, who functions as an aggressive antagonist to J. L. whom he repeatedly threatens to rape or even kill. However, due to this misogynistic behaviour and aggressive demonstration of toxic masculinity, his name could suggest another connection: St. Jerome, a biblical scholar and translator of the Bible, is renowned for his deeply misogynistic views on women, whom he – very similar to Jerome – considered to be "the root of all evil."[95]

A similar connection can be drawn for the female protagonist of the story, J. L., who declares to Mackenzie to be named after the biblical figure of Jael, but since people tended to mispronounce her name, she abbreviated it to the initials J. L. As she later admits she did not shorten her name to facilitate pronunciation, but to conceal her gender, so that she can take part in the expedition despite being a woman in a male-dominated field:

> I thought that my initials would get me past the first scrutiny, but I didn't even count on their unassailable arrogance, that even if I left the sex box empty, no 'F' or 'M' […] it didn't matter. They must have noticed, but assumed it was masculine carelessness on my part.[96]

In this context, the "malevolent North" seems to pose a double threat for J. L. – not only as an area of dangerous wilderness, but also as a transgression of gendered spaces. This "violation of territorial taboo"[97] is symbolically highlighted before the expedition has even begun: still under

the Yukon territory by female pronouns. On his first night at the camp, the sensation of being back in the mountains and nature is mixed with sensual memories of being intimate with his wife. The convoluted description of his senses, where thoughts about his love for nature and sexual experiences with his wife alternate, creates a sexually charged atmosphere that raises the impression of him making love to nature. (Cf. Aritha van Herk: *The Tent Peg*, Calgary 2005 ([1]1981), p. 55–56.)

[88] Hartmut Lutz: "'Meat and Bones Don't Matter': Mythology in *The Tent Peg*", in: *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, V. 20 (1989), I. 2, p. 41-67, here: p. 55.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid., p. 56.

[94] Eva-Marie Kröller: *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, Cambridge 2004, p. 72.

[95] Margaret Knight: *Honest to Man: Christian Ethics Re-Examined*, Buffalo 1974, p. 120.

[96] van Herk: *The Tent Peg*, p. 18.

[97] Filipczak: "J. L. and the Temple of the Gendered God", p. 62.

the pretence of being a man, J. L. goes to the men's washing room, so as to not drop her mask in front of her new employer. Thus, she becomes "a trespasser on the segregated gender space",[98] a female intruder into a sphere exclusively assigned to men. The revelation of her true identity triggers sceptical responses from her colleagues – especially from Jerome who reacts furiously after being confronted with J. L.:

> What the fuck is going on here? […] A goddamn girl? […] [I]t's impossible to work in a camp with a girl. It's bad for morale. […] *Women just don't belong out there*. I wonder how she did it, what kind of deal she made with him. […] [G]irls like her will screw anybody to get what they want.[99]

Due to J. L.'s exposed position, being the only woman within an all-male expedition, she naturally attracts the attention of her male colleagues and becomes the centrepiece of their camp, with the rest of the crew revolving around her like planets around the sun. This constellation is reflected in the novel's narrative situation. Each chapter conveys a first-person narration from the different characters in the camp, thus shifting between a variety of – predominantly male – perspectives. Despite the quick jumps between the diary-like chapters, the focal point remains on J. L. While her colleagues differ in their perception of J. L. – ranging from romantic to downright sexual fantasies, from idealizations to hatred – she always seems to stand on a pedestal amidst her male colleagues. Under constant surveillance, she is "being weighted and watched and judged and found wanting every minute of the day. I thought I could be alone here. Instead I'm less alone than I've ever been."[100]

J. L.'s initial motivation to join the expedition – to seek quiet and solitude in the remote Canadian wilderness – is continuously undermined by her male colleagues' advances. While Jerome poses undoubtedly the worst threat to J. L., he is not the only member of the crew objectifying or even trying to sexually exploit her. Almost all of the other male members of the expedition either romantically fantasize about her or openly harass her:

> [Cap:] 'J. L.? […] I'm horny.' 'So?' 'You're responsible.' But all she says is, 'Cap, if you're so horny, go find yourself a grizzly bear.' And she won't talk to me after that, ignores me even when I tell her she's not fair, she's a cockteaser. Stands there and dries dishes with a look on her face like she's a million miles away.

Cap's insistence on J. L.'s alleged obligation towards him and his glaring inability to understand the inappropriateness of his behaviour reflect the central concern of van Herk's novel – the toxicity of unquestioned male hegemony:

> And yet, they've got it all, they've managed so sublimely to capture the better half of the world and put us to work for them. Nerve, they're born with it, they carry with them blind, unhesitating presumption.[101]

Those internalized normative concepts about masculinity and – especially – femininity can be observed in several parts of the novel. Obvious examples can be found in Milton's chapters, as his views of womanhood are inherently shaped by particularly conservative concepts of femininity, due to his religious socialization as a Mennonite:

> She's not the way a girl *should be*. […] She is hard and angry like instead of soft and still and holding inside a girl *should be*. […] [S]he is all elbows and corners and even her hair is not long and smooth the way a girl's hair *should be*, but short and spiky, like a chewed-up cat's. […] She *should be* called Fern or Amanda but instead she has a name like a man, J. L. […] [S]he wouldn't be a good woman

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[98] Ibid.
[99] van Herk: *The Tent Peg*, p. 23-24 [emphasis added].
[100] Ibid., p. 99.
[101] Ibid., p. 165.

to have. […] [S]he thinks she's as good as any man. When girls are like that, they're not good to marry.[102]

He compares J. L. to a variety of social clichés, thereby stressing her 'inadequateness' in regard to traditional ideals of womanhood (i. e. long hair, passive, demure, …). His normative statements are repeatedly underlined by the phrase "should be", which is contrasted by the reality of J. L.'s behaviour or outward appearance. His condescending attitude towards the feminine gender is further marked by the fact that he continuously refers to her as a "girl". The term "woman" only comes up once in the context of marriage and his phrase "she wouldn't be a good woman to *have*" underlines his patriarchal view on J. L. as potential property.[103] Through the act of marriage the wife becomes a part of her husband's possession[104], which is why Milton seems to be concerned not to acquire 'damaged goods'. The consequences of Milton's ideological indoctrination become even clearer when he remembers a childhood crush with whom he used to play tag as a young boy: "I want to strike her, girls aren't supposed to run, that's why they have skirts."[105] The very thought of being outdone or defeated by a girl – even in a child's play – instantly triggers a desire to hurt and subdue her even by means of physical force, and thus restore the 'natural order of things'.[106]

Among the broad array of male characters in *The Tent Peg*, Jerome undoubtedly serves as the worst embodiment of toxic masculinity: he is aggressive and controlling, harasses not only J. L. but also his subordinate male colleagues and competes with Mackenzie for the leadership of the expedition. To the annoyance of the other camp members, he carries a Magnum revolver at all times, bragging about his shooting skills and using it to threaten the others – especially J. L., whom he hates not only due to her gender, but also because of her defiance and refusal to submit to his alleged dominance. In this context, his gun becomes a sign of his masculinity – a symbolic phallus. This connection becomes even more apparent when Jerome uses the gun in his attempt to rape J. L. His attempt fails, when J. L. is able to wrest the weapon from him, performing an act of symbolic castration. She contemplates "blow[ing] [his] balls off",[107] which would turn the metaphorical castration into a real one:

> J. L. is standing over Jerome, holding his Magnum in her hand as fierce and steady as an old warrior. But after my first relief that she's all right, the sight chills me. In her long flannel shirt, her bare legs gleaming through the pale twilight of the tent, she seems vulnerable until I hear her voice. I know that voice, she's talked to us all summer, she's laughed and told stories and she's whispered to me. But not in this voice. She's holding that deadly pistol at a point directly between Jerome's legs where he lies writhing on the floor of the tent. 'Just try to get up', she says. 'Just try to get up, you bastard, and I'll shoot your balls off. That's the only language you understand.' He's trying to crouch himself away from the point of the gun's muzzle, but she follows him mercilessly. […] She is sprung there, holding that gun, and suddenly, without any doubt at all I know that she would do it […].[108]

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[102] Ibid., p. 75, 94, 171 [emphasis added].

[103] This notion of male ownership is reflected by J. L.'s perception of her role in the camp: "Here I'm everyone's property, I belong to everyone of these men". (Ibid., p. 99.)

[104] Ibid., p. 171. This topic is explored further – though, less extreme – in conversations J. L. has with Thompson as well as Mackenzie, who cannot get over the loss of his wife, who divorced him. While he wonders why she left him, considering that he would never have prevented her from pursuing her dreams, J. L. interjects: "That's it right there. The very idea that you could allow her or prevent her." (Ibid., p. 195.)

[105] Ibid., p. 154.

[106] Qtd. in: Martina Hörnicke: "Gendering Myths: Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* and Aritha van Herk's *The Tent Peg*", in: Susanne Bach, Melanie Schrage-Lang und Martina Hörnicke (Ed.): *Intertextual Transitions in Contemporary Canadian Literature: Atwood, MacDonald, van Herk*, Trier 2013, p. 73-195, here: p. 166.

[107] van Herk: *The Tent Peg*, p. 212.

[108] Ibid., p. 214.

This scene parallels the biblical depiction of Judg. 5.30: Jael towers over Sisera's slain body. Here, too, implications of sexual violence abound. Yet, van Herk manages to alleviate the tension of the text – portraying a woman murdering a defenceless man with a phallic symbol – by bringing the violence into J. L.'s tent via Jerome's aggressive intentions. Whereas Jael initiates the encounter with Sisera, inviting him into her tent, J. L. reacts to Jerome's violent intrusion. Before she can act on her decision, however, Mackenzie interrupts the struggle and removes Jerome from J. L.'s tent. In terms of spatial allocations in this scene, *The Tent Peg* also resumes biblical implications to a certain extent. As there is no 'private' sphere, because the home is also political, Jerome's attempt to subdue J. L. in her tent represents his need to re-establish a male dominated hegemonial social order. Additionally, these events take place in the wilderness, the field in biblical terms. With its inherent potential of danger for women in general, as well as taking into account the specific implications of death and destruction in Judg. 4.11, Jael's / J. L.'s tent is not a safe space for either gender.

Despite her exposed situation as a 'trespasser' in the male sphere, J. L. refuses to become a victim of her colleagues' verbal and physical attacks. Though she seems to attract the attention of almost all the men around her, she is also able to defend herself and literally fight back against physical attacks as well as the stereotypical concepts of womanhood (such as "bitch",[109] "witch",[110] muse,…), her fellow crew members try to impose on her. In that way, J. L. herself becomes an allegory of the Canadian wilderness surrounding the camp – a femme fatale "embody[ing] the attractions and threats offered by the north."[111] However, J. L. not only embodies the wilderness surrounding the tent, she also seems to have an almost supernatural connection to it. Accordingly, she is the only one who notices a massive landslide almost destroying the camp, while the male crew sleep through it:

> I move to balance myself so that my feet are *planted* firmly, take a deep breath. Silently I call, the *invocation blossoming* from my skin, my sorrow, the very spaces in my bones. […] [I]n the after silence I finally dare to open my eyes. My feet are still *planted* steady in the moss, and the moon is still brilliant and unclouded. […] I kneel then, press myself down and whisper, *rock myself* and whisper softly until the earth and I grow still, calm ourselves.[112]

Moreover, the scene insinuates that J. L. might be able to influence the natural forces surrounding her: she whispers to the earth, calming it down and seems to become a part of nature herself – her feet are "*planted*" in the moss, as if she were rooted in the Canadian wilderness herself.

Another dangerous part of the Canadian north is a grizzly-bear mother with her cubs that roam around close to the camp and become an embodiment of the beauty, but also of the threats lurking within the remote valley. In one of the key scenes of the novel, J. L. encounters the she-bear, however, instead of fear she senses a deeper, spiritual connection to the bear, whom she perceives as a messenger or an embodiment of her friend Deborah, coming to her for guidance and support:

> I knew her. She came to me in the she-bear. She came to me and she reared herself up. Big and beautiful and wild and strong and she said: 'Wait. Don't let them drive you away.' […] And then she's gone, with the two squealing cubs tumbling behind her. Leaving me with her smell, her invocation, the power of her long, curved claws.[113]

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109 Ibid., p. 98.
110 Ibid., p. 118.
111 Filipczak: "J. L. and the Temple of the Gendered God", p. 64.
112 van Herk: *The Tent Peg*, p. 114 [emphasis added].
113 Ibid., p. 104.

Alluding to the biblical Deborah of Judg. 4-5, J. L. encounters the she-bear on the side of the mountain – an elevated space. Furthermore, the seemingly omniscient she-bear seems to represent a greater power, much like the biblical Deborah, who acted as the voice of God. While J. L. experiences the encounter with the she-bear as a mythical moment of female solidarity, the other crew members' reactions range from astonishment to scepticism and fear. After witnessing J. L.'s "conversation"[114] with the grizzly mother, the helicopter pilot Ivan wonders: "What did the she-bear tell you, J. L.? What did she come all the way over the mountain to whisper in your ear?"[115] Again J. L.'s interaction with the wilderness is described through a "whisper", which puts it in sharp contrast to the noises of technology and civilization. J. L.'s almost magical interaction with the forces of nature are rationalized and thus trivialized by Jerome, who describes the events in vulgar, sexualized and aggressive terms, rejecting all sense of the supernatural or mystical:

> Now everyone's telling bear stories. According to Ivan and Cap, the cook practically kissed a grizzly sow. I don't believe it. They say that bear was only twenty feet away from her, but they've got to be crazy. There's no fucking way you could meet a grizzly with two cubs and not be mauled to death. […] Bears aren't interested in messing with humans. And if the old sow is, we'll see how she feels about my Magnum. I hope, I run into her out on the slopes, I'll finish her off quick.[116]

These magical encounters between J. L. and the wilderness around her not only illustrate her connection to the natural sphere, but also "provide […] paradigms for an understanding of the perceptual frames of the characters".[117] Accordingly, Jerome's perception of the events is mainly framed by sexualized imagery and violence. In opposition to J. L.'s bond of female solidarity with the she-bear, his first impulse is to refer to his gun, in order to emphasize his masculinity and superiority. This violent vision of him killing the grizzly mother is not limited to an act of self-defence, but he explicitly wishes to encounter her again, for the sole purpose of establishing his alleged dominance over the she-bear as an embodiment not only of nature, but also of the female sphere.

Similar to her biblical counterpart, J. L. takes action. However, not by brute force or violence, but by a more elaborate means: being the literal nurturer of the camp, J. L. uses her position at the centre of her micro-society in order to care for her male crew members not only by providing food, but also by providing emotional support and advice. Becoming a veritable source of wisdom for her colleagues, she helps them to overcome insecurities, find access to their emotions and confront suppressed fears:

> They're coming to me one by one, pouring their pestilence into my ears, trying to rid themselves of the poison. I can't blame them, the goddess knows they need to tell somebody, but, oh, the weight of those words. They suck at me like quicksand, but I have to listen. I know that if I repulse them, they may never speak again, they'll have lost their only opportunity to become men.[118]

For J. L. it is not the stereotypical attributes ascribed to masculinity that constitute a real man. She calls her male colleagues "children",[119] who lack the emotional maturity to reflect not only their personal decisions, but also their status within society and thus how they perceive themselves in relation to other members of that society. In accepting their shortcomings and insecurities, J. L. promotes an overall change of perspective for the men in the camp, proclaiming to

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[114] Ibid., p. 101.
[115] Ibid., p. 103.
[116] Ibid., p. 108.
[117] Lutz: "'Meat and Bones Don't Matter'", p. 59.
[118] van Herk: *The Tent Peg*, p. 212.
[119] Ibid.

her friend Deborah, that "[i]t's time we laid our hands on the workman's mallet and put the tent pegs to the sleeping temples, if ever we are going to get any rest."[120] The biblical image of Jael striking Sisera to ensure the liberation of the Israelites is turned into the liberation from patriarchal constraints. Accordingly, the eponymous tent peg becomes a recurring leitmotif in van Herk's novel. Whenever characters – particularly the male crew members – experience moments of personal growth or insight, this is typically accompanied by an allegorical reference to the hammer and tent peg, as can be seen when J. L. comforts Cap: "For a moment only the silken feel of her body *hammers in my temple* and then I lay my head on hers and cry…She holds me and comforts me like I'm a goddamn baby."[121] In this context J. L. seems to take over a motherly role for her "children" raising them in order to become 'new men', promoting a different kind of masculinity.

Gender Roles Revis(it)ed: Reaffirmation and Transgression of Gender Stereotypes

Despite her initially transgressive behaviour that allows her entrance into a traditionally male sphere, J. L. is also repeatedly depicted in stereotypically female gender roles. She is framed as a carer for the men in the camp, catering to their emotional and physical needs. She is frequently shown as a mother nurturing her children, only finding fulfilment after having met her obligations to the men. Additionally, J. L. herself reflects on her own internalization of socially constructed gender roles, which played a role in her socialization:

> [S]ometimes I wish I were [a man]. […] They do not have the questions and doubts that get laid on our backs, the bundle of faggots we carry and carry. I've tried to throw it off, fling it on the ground, but although I sometimes lose a stick or two, the weight is still there, old myths and old lovers, old duties, my mother's warning voice, my infallible conscience.[122]

Her list suggests a multifaceted web of perspectives that shaped her concept of gender appropriate behaviour and in extension also her self-perception as a woman in Western society, which comes with "questions and doubts" so deeply ingrained in her "infallible conscience" that even though she is aware of them, she cannot silence the voices in her head. And although the northern Canadian tundra seems to be "a place that is unspoiled by the demands of culture"[123] – a *tabula rasa* – which promises an escape out of socially constructed boundaries, this hope does not hold true. Not only the men in the camp, but also J. L. herself carry their preconceived notions into the wilderness.

While her male co-workers' perception of J. L. (or women in general) is addressed several times across the novel, Martina Hörnicke mentions that it is not only the men who engage in preconceived notions of the opposite sex, but also J. L. herself.[124] While J. L. criticizes her male colleagues' perception of her as a mere object to be desired or fantasized about, available at their disposal, her recollection of various romantic – or rather: sexual encounters – seem to suggest that her own perception of men is not at all different to that of "macho men towards women – as faceless escapade objects in sexual exploits":[125]

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[120] Ibid., p. 166.
[121] Ibid., p. 186 [emphasis added].
[122] Ibid., p. 32.
[123] Hörnicke: "Gendering Myths", p. 165.
[124] Cf. Ibid., p. 168.
[125] Jade Bar-Shalom and Danielle Schaub: "Female Territory, Narrative Space and Strategies of Deception in Aritha van Herk's *The Tent Peg*", in: Danielle Schaub (Ed.): *Mapping Canadian Cultural Space: Essays on Canadian Literature*, Jerusalem 2000, p. 142-162, here: p. 148.

> Beside me the weight in the bed is a tension, something I want to move away from. […] Present they are, yet absent from me, only another body in the other half of the bed, it hardly matters who. I never think of them, only of myself lying awake […]. There is comfort in another body in the bed.[126]

The men in J. L.'s life – or her bed – do not hold any significance for her, except for the fulfilment of her sexual desires or "the comfort of another body in the bed". The men are objectified and become "something" she uses. Their personality and character become completely irrelevant and they are reduced to an arbitrary and replaceable tool. Hörnicke juxtaposes J. L.'s exploitative behaviour with her own wish for love and acceptance:

> And if I once rouse myself to stare up into a face, actually look up at them, I am only horrified, repulsed by the blankness, the distance evident there. They are not feeling me, thinking of me, working over me. It is any or every woman that they hold in their arms, their expression is withdrawn and distant and inner-directed as if I were not even present. […] And in the end, exceptions prove the rule. There have been one or two who saw me, J. L. […] But even they were fleeting, quick to disappear. Nameless now, in the myriad of others.[127]

Like the men she criticizes for not actually seeing her, she is not paying attention to them either. Similarly, akin to her fears of being "any or every woman that they hold in their arms" her description of the men as "fleeting faces" disappearing among the "myriad of others" suggests that she is behaving in a similar, if not the same way: her wish to be accepted for herself gives expression to her own double standards.

Initially, this behaviour is also reflected in the way J. L. perceives her male colleagues. As depicted above, she mocks them for their "unassailable arrogance" and calls them "children", thus inferring attributes like immaturity or ignorance. She does not refer to a specific man in particular either, but rather makes generalizing statements about 'men' at large. Additionally, she compares her male co-workers to the insignificant faces of her lovers, admitting that she sees "the same faces I have ever seen, the same men I've always known. […] [T]hey are after all *only* men."[128] At times she seems veritably disgusted by the men's emotional needs she compares to "pestilence" being "pour[ed] in [her] ear". Consequently, Georgiana Colvile considers the processes of social and emotional maturation in *The Tent Peg* a "two-way learning experience"[129] during which not only the men in the camp, but also J. L. herself re-evaluate their preconceived notions and stereotypes concerning gender roles.

While the remote Canadian north cannot free the characters from the influences of their socialization, it might serve as a neutral region that allows for a more nuanced reassessment of gender roles and socially constructed stereotypes. As her co-workers come to accept J. L., so she learns to perceive her colleagues as complex human beings, who are entrapped in gender related norms and expectations in a similar way that she is. This process might best be illustrated with the development Cap undergoes in the course of the novel. While he initially appears as a sexist, misogynistic lecher, he eventually lets go of his chauvinistic façade and allows himself to cry and be comforted by a woman: "I'm suddenly calm, washed, clean, complete. That's all. […] I know if I want to, I can go to her and hold her and she'll let me, she'll rub my back with that circular motion and murmur softly, but I'll never make love to her. It's like that."[130] In this

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[126] van Herk: *The Tent Peg*, p. 58.

[127] Ibid., p. 153.

[128] Ibid., p. 51 [emphasis added].

[129] Georgiana Colvile: "Women Cross-Dressing in Aritha van Herk's *The Tent Peg*", in: *Canadian Studies* V. 54 (2003), p. 153-162, here: p. 157.

[130] van Herk: *The Tent Peg*, p. 186.

realization, he lets go of his need to prove his masculinity through a demonstration of his sexual prowess and instead embraces his need for protection and affection.

Eventually, J. L. as well as her male colleagues undergo a developmental process that enable them to embrace stereotypically 'masculine' as well as 'feminine' traits in themselves and thus, to increasingly deconstruct their imposed gender roles. The boundaries between what it means to be a man or what it means to be a woman become more and more blurry. This process is most prominent in the character of J. L., whose act of gender transgression initiates the plot in the first place. Her appearance is repeatedly described as rather "boyish" she deliberately abbreviates her name to initials that are identified as masculine, securing her the job in the expedition, despite being a woman in a male sphere. She is shown participating in stereotypically male contexts, drinking beer, gambling, shooting or flying a helicopter and, of course, partaking in a geologist expedition. However, she is also located in a caring role, not only fulfilling the role of the cook, but also listening to the thoughts and problems of her co-workers. And though she initially despises her role, she eventually "learns to embrace, rather than shun, her nurturing maternal potential".[131] She "rescues rather than damns"[132] her colleagues, by initiating processes of intellectual and emotional maturity, signified by a metaphorical tent peg hammered in their temple. She appears angry and fierce, but also vulnerable and emotional. Her "attributes are by no means fixed, but […] in permanent flux". Her androgynous liminality contributes to the continual deconstruction of gender stereotypes and their portrayal as socially imposed constructs. In the end, it is not a final transgression into one sphere or another, but rather the fluidity of oscillating between the binary opposition of gender related constructs, the "glass wall of limitations between the worlds of men and women"[133] that constitutes the novel's effective deconstructive potential.

Conclusion

The notion of intertextuality seems to be inherently linked to the female writing experience. While Harold Bloom coined the phrase of the "anxiety of influence" to describe a male writers fear of being "hopelessly belated"[134] in the face of an overwhelmingly male literary tradition, the same cannot be said about the female writing experience. As the "daughter of too few mothers"[135] the experience of a female writer is essentially bound to an "anxiety of authorship" – a desire for, rather than fear of poetic antecedents. In this context intertextuality itself becomes a strategy of "legitimization, rather than of emasculating belatedness"[136] and an opportunity to deconstruct and re-evaluate the depiction of women in literature produced by almost exclusively male authors. The Canadian writer Aritha van Herk has virtually perfected this integration of intertextual strategies in her vast array of works. By referring to mythological as well as biblical source material, van Herk creates a feminist revision of those texts in which she not only pulls into question the traditionally masculine depiction of mythology, but also gives a voice to the voiceless female figures that are oftentimes drowned out by the vast majority of stories featur-

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[131] Bar-Shalom and Schaub: "Female Territory, Narrative Space and Strategies of Deception", p. 156.
[132] van Herk: *The Tent Peg*, p. 207.
[133] Bar-Shalom and Schaub: "Female Territory, Narrative Space and Strategies of Deception", p. 147.
[134] Gilbert and Gubar: *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 50.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Graham: *Intertextuality*, p. 146.

ing male protagonists or have fallen victim to a stereotypical depiction as an 'angel of the house', evil seductress or madwoman.

In her novel *The Tent Peg*, van Herk retells the biblical story of Jael and Deborah locating it in the unforgiving wilderness of northern Canada. While van Herk resumes the main motifs of the template, she places a stronger focus on Jael / J. L. By paralleling, adopting and adapting core characteristics of the female protagonists as well as mirroring the key scene between Jael and Sisera in the tent, van Herk creates a strong intertextual connection to the source material. By placing her female protagonist J. L. in midst of an all-male crew of geologists prospecting for uranium in the Yukon territory, van Herk makes use of the contradictory implications of gender and space. Being the only woman on the expedition, her male colleagues repeatedly stress that "[w]omen just don't belong out there"[137] treating her as a suspicious outsider and trespasser in their male sphere. On the other hand, van Herk repeatedly alludes to the traditional connection of nature and femininity, making J. L. seem as the only member of the crew who really belongs in the Canadian north. In several scenes J. L. is depicted sharing an almost supernatural connection to nature, sensing a landslide that almost destroys the camp or communicating with a grizzly mother she perceives as a spiritual messenger from her friend Deborah.

While the conclusion that in the end it is not J. L, but her male colleagues who appear to be the true outsiders, invading nature for their own benefit, seems close at hand, this equation of J. L. as the sole heroine of the story, as opposed to her ignorant and exploitative male co-workers, does not do justice to van Herk's multifaceted biblical retelling and her effective use of the northern Canadian wilderness as a backdrop to her story. Even though Sherry B. Ortner's equation of femininity with nature and masculinity with culture has become one of the most well-known and influential works in cultural studies, her strictly binary opposition has repeatedly been criticized as an oversimplification. Though on a surface level van Herk's use of the rough untamed Canadian wilderness would seem to confirm this binary, we can find several passages that would suggest otherwise, drawing rather from Heather Murray's deconstructivist approach, which rejects "a simple correspondence of land and land values"[138] highlighting the opportunity for a more nuanced assessment of gendered spaces. While J. L. is repeatedly framed as a saviour figure, who drives the metaphorical tent peg into her male colleague's temples, she herself is not completely free of preconceived notions of gender. This is clearly shown in her thoughts on her own role as a woman in Western society, but also in the derogatory prejudices she holds in regard to her male co-workers and men in general. In this context, the uprooted micro-society of the camp not only becomes a source of financial or material gain to the camp members, but ultimately holds a transformative potential for both: J. L. and the male crew, who learn to overcome their prejudices and gender related stereotypes. In the end, *The Tent Peg* not only tells the story of a young woman transgressing from the female sphere into the male sphere, but rather works to deconstruct the binary opposition between femininity and masculinity on a broader scale, by showcasing several characters at odds with the societal norms and stereotypes ascribed to their gender.

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[137] van Herk: *The Tent Peg*, p. 24.
[138] Bühler Roth: *Wilderness and the Natural Environment*, p. 34.

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Using Stories to Understand Myths in Canada:
Reflections on Story-based Epistemology
from an Anthropological Perspective

In 2003, Indigenous author Thomas King held the CBC Massey Lectures in Canada entitled "The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative". At the end of the first lecture, he received a question from an audience member who first stated "we've built our culture on stories; we've built our history out of stories and so, the world that we live in now, is based on a series of stories;" King agreed and the audience member continued their question, "And some of those are incredibly painful, and I am wondering, how can we rewrite those stories, redistribute them, so that different stories can be told and different truths can be lived?"[1] And to begin this paper, I think it is worthwhile to quote King's answer from the recorded lecture extensively:

> I don't know that we can ever get rid of stories that we tell. I mean, I say […] that once told, stories are loose in the world. And so, you have to be careful with what stories you tell, what stories you listen to, and what stories you [then] tell. But I think you can privilege certain stories and you can tell those stories again and again and again. And that's what we do within any culture, any society. We have a series of stories we privilege. And depending on which stories we privilege, really depends on how that society is established and how that society is maintained. So, I suppose the answer to the question is, if you want to change society, change the stories you tell. Now that's [sic] probably sounds very simplistic and actually, many things are, and in my world, at least, the world of the storyteller, you know, I can change [things].[2]

Building off of King's lecture, the question draws attention to an epistemology that values stories and their role in building and maintaining culture. Furthermore, King's answer addresses the specific act of telling and re-telling stories, with the potential to change, in his words, society, over time. In this statement, he also recognises how society privileges certain stories over others at certain times.

Drawing on empirical data from field research completed in Canada between 2014 and 2018, I came to value such a story-based epistemology, particularly because of the stories told to me by my Indigenous informants.[3] In the writing that followed, I questioned how such stories related to culture and how the appreciation of diverse stories could potentially lead to deeper cross-cultural understanding.[4] However, I viewed these stories through the lens of my research topic at the time, German Indianthusiasm.[5] My data contained a plethora of explicit information

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[1]   Thomas King: "The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative", in: *CBC Massey Lectures*, 2003, on: https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-2003-cbc-massey-lectures-the-truth-about-stories-a-native-narrative-1.2946870 [last accessed on 24.03.2020], 46:33.

[2]   Ibid., 46:53.

[3]   I worked intensely with three women of various Indigenous backgrounds all from Treaty Six, Saskatchewan whom I will refer to by their first names, Sheila, Randi, and Janelle. For more detailed information about these collaborative research partners and personal introductions in their own words, please see Michelle Thompson: *Imagined Stories: Repercussions of (Re)Telling Fiction as Fact: An Anthropological Study of Transatlantic Reactions to German Indianthusiasm*, CreateSpace Independent, 2018

[4]   Thompson: *Imagined Stories: Repercussions of (Re)Telling Fiction as Fact*.

[5]   Indianthusiasm is a term coined by Hartmut Lutz which he describes as: "a yearning for all things Indian, a fascination with American Indians, a romanticizing about a supposed Indian essence […]. [And it] is racialized in that it refers to Indianness (*Indianertum)* as an essentializing bioracial and, concomitantly, cultural ethnic identity that ossifies into stereotype. It tends to historicize Indians as figures of the past, and it assumes that anybody 'truly Indian' will follow cultural practices and resemble in clothing and physiognomy First Nations people before or

about Indianthusiasm, however, I now see that my informants were implicitly telling me other stories, those of which I would like now to privilege. With the added dimension of increased temporal distance from my initial research material, it has become clear that they were not only telling me about Germany, but also about Canada. I felt compelled, despite this distance, to re-examine my data and through this paper to present an additional story.

To do so, I delve into the intricacies of how story can be studied from an anthropological perspective. Drawing on my informants' usage of the term *story* as a way to share through narrative form in a spoken manner, I focus on different categories of oral narratives already familiar and established within anthropological traditions: folktales, historical accounts, and myth; defining and delineating them as I go. Due to its complex and contradictory definitions and uses, the term and phenomenon of myth requires an extended discussion. From there, I begin to deconstruct how these select informants' stories overlap and intersect in content and context-specific ways with these established categories. I then use three examples from my research, where I juxtapose privileged stories, which I understand as contemporary myths, with individual stories from my informants. I see these individual stories as the 'different truths' suggested in the question above; lived realities that can speak against contemporary myths in Canadian society.[6]

What is in a story?

My data was collected in a combination of participant observation and interviews over eight stays in Canada, each lasting between three weeks and four months – in addition to previous cultural knowledge of being a Canadian citizen myself. Participant observation is an essential, yet largely unstructured, component to most anthropological fieldwork. It has been described as everything from profoundly entering the social and cultural field one is researching;[7] to living in "different worlds of thought at the same time" stressing the juxtaposition of being part of one's own culture but also a "sojourner in a strange land" and thus a "double marginal man" who is alienated from both of their worlds concurrently;[8] or through a phrase coined by Renato Rosaldo: "deep hanging out".[9] Fundamentally, it involves long-term participation in another culture or cultural group, while maintaining distance in order to make objective, yet subjectively

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during first contact". (Hartmut Lutz: "German Indianthusiasm: A Socially Constructed German National(ist) Myth", in: Colin G. Calloway, Gerd Gemünden and Susanne Zantop (Ed.): *Germans and Indians: Fantasies, Encounters, Projections*, Lincoln 2002, p. 167-184, here: p. 168-169.) In German society, Indianthusiasm can be found in novels, television, film, using Indian motives in advertising, holding Indian-themed camps for children, dressing up as Indians as a hobby, or Indian stereotypes integrated into the German language (Ein Indianer kennt keinen Schmerz – An Indian knows no pain), etc.

[6]   Although one could argue that my discussion moves in the direction of Cognitive Sciences, linking memory and narrative, that is not the intention of this article. I am more interested in everyday storytelling from a phenomenological perspective and particularly how we use certain terms to describe the phenomena of storytelling from an anthropological perspective. I am nevertheless inspired by King: "The Truth About Stories" and Marc Augé: *The War of Dreams: Studies in Ethno Fiction*, London 1999, which do touch on cognitive aspects. (Cf. Thompson: *Imagined Stories: Repercussions of (Re)Telling Fiction as Fact* for a more detailed account of my epistemological stance.)

[7]   Thomas Hylland Eriksen: *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*, London 2001 ([1]1995), p. 25-26.

[8]   E. E. Evans-Pritchard: *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*, Oxford 1976 ([1]1937), p. 243.

[9]   Qtd. in: James Clifford: "Anthropology and/as Travel", in: *Etnofoor*, V. 9 (1996), I. 2, p. 5-15.

informed, observations.[10] The conversations (sometimes informal interviews) I had with these informants were innumerable as I lived with them at times for weeks on end and participated with them in their daily lives. At the culmination of my last research trip, I recorded one to three interviews with each woman to be able to quote them directly in the final work. They had a chance to look over the transcripts and edit as necessary before the work was finished. The information I gained through our informal conversations informed my analysis and general framing of their words, but it was important to all of us that the direct quotations were approved in advance.

Similarly to King above, my informants favoured the term story over expressions like experience, narrative, tale, history, myth, or event and used it in our informal conversations, as well as the final interviews. At times, they introduced the story with the phrase, "Let me tell you a story…" or "I can connect that to a story from my own background…". Other times they reflected on the story just told: "But there's so much more to the story, that's just me paraphrasing it…" or "so, long story short….". Other instances were less explicit, but indicated or referenced a story (my word, not theirs): "So, this one time…" or "Because we all know what happened to Wesakechak…".[11] Some storytelling settings were more formalised and the person introduced themselves as a storyteller and had a sort-of set-list of what to tell, where most others occurred naturally in everyday conversations or interviews.

As story is an equivocal term, I attempted to identify the ways in which it was being used and to what exactly was being referred in the stories. I want to emphasise that the breakdown of my informants' uses of the term into categories is my interpretation and not that of my informants. They did not actively distinguish the boundaries of one type of story compared to another, yet when looking at the stories' varying functions or subject matter, I see that they could refer to different types of oral narrative form. As far as I could tell, these informants used the content, contextual setting, and storytelling style to inform how the story could or should be received. The expected reception was often dependent on the type of oral narrative form and protocols[12] specific to speakers' culture. Therefore, as a Settler-Canadian, not all 'appropriate' reactions were readily available to me, especially when they were linked to protocols of which I was, as an outsider, not aware. I quickly learned, most often after being directly instructed by my informants through our ongoing interactions, to distinguish these stories in relation to others in order to (re)act in a respectful and appropriate matter. Furthermore, I would like to emphasise that not all of their stories fit clearly into the following categories (to me at least) and I believe, at times my informants intentionally played with the ambiguity of the term, which I will discuss further below.

I can analyse my informants' *stories* in alignment with different categories of anthropological understandings of oral narratives; linking to decades of previous theoretical and ana-

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[10]   Cf. Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley: "Ethnograhy and Participant Observation", in: Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Ed.): *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks 1994, p. 248-261 for a more nuanced discussion of participant observation and its role in ethnography.

[11]   Wesakechak (pronounced wee-sah-keh-chock or wih-sah-kay-jock and written in many different forms) is a trickster figure who features prominently in many Cree (among others) oral narratives.

[12]   Protocols, here, can be understood as culturally appropriate (re)actions, codes of behaviours, speech-acts, and so forth. They are often part of rituals or ceremonies, but are also integrated into everyday life through ritualised, sometimes secularised, activities. I was orally taught most protocols in the situations that required them by my Indigenous (and sometimes non-Indigenous) interlocutors, however some protocols are becoming institutionalised and guides to these particular protocols are available in written form.

lytical research. This body of research, however, is extensive and on occasion contradictory. I have found the most fruitful categorisation for my reflections rooted in Bronislaw Malinowski's groupings of oral narratives,[13] while addressing other scholars or schools of thought, when appropriate. Malinowski distinguishes between folk tales, historical accounts (including hearsay and legends), and myth. Beginning with this delineation of oral narrative types allows for the deconstruction of the use of *story* and thus I will argue, for a better understanding of the roles *myths* play in Canadian culture, from an anthropological perspective.

Oral Narratives

Oral narrative is an umbrella term used in the social sciences and humanities to refer to spoken *stories*, much like those my informants shared with me. It is widely agreed upon that they are a constant and universal aspect of human life. Defining, collecting, describing, analysing, interpreting, and categorising oral narrative accounts, however, is anything but uniform; not within anthropology and definitely not between disciplines. My goal here is not to provide a comprehensive overview of this field of study as this would far extend the capacities of this paper, but rather highlight key differences in anthropological research, paying particular attention to audience, claims to fictionality or factuality, form, as well as cultural and storytelling contexts. I emphasise the disciplinary boundary as other fields such as psychology, literature studies, sociology, linguistics, or history can have differing interpretations and analyses of the terms. Particularly as the formal discipline of anthropology developed at the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, scholars often worked across these disciplinary boundaries and therefore some overlap in theorising oral narratives does exist; thus, I am not claiming that anthropological approaches or analyses are completely unique. Finally, it is also important to note that academic and scientific interest in oral traditions and narrative did not begin with the formalisation of anthropological study, but rather much earlier.

Folktales

I had the privilege of getting to know many of my interlocutors in the winter season: the time of year for (formal) storytelling across much of the Canadian prairies. As my informants, including the three who I will quote in this text, and I deepened our relationships and grew to trust one another, we often shared stories. Particularly in this early phase, I was privileged to hear many stories – often light-hearted, sometimes 'teaching' opportunities, primarily in narrative form. These 'teaching' moments, however, were not usually explicit, but rather open-ended stories that required a moment of reflection and then interpretation; letting me come to my own conclusions or moral stance. Many of these stories had similar narrative patterns, including similar plot structures, and at times, reoccurring characters, like Wesakechak. How the milky way was strewn across the sky, how crow got his black feathers, or why bear's tail is short, are examples of such tales.

Regardless of whether I was the only one in the room, or one of many audience members, these stories were interactive and looking for a response from me – often laughter, excitement, or shock. I had originally interpreted these childlike stories as a simple way to break the ice between us, but I understand now that they were so much more: they were introductions into a

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[13] Cf. Bronislaw Malinowski: *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, Westport 1971 ([1]1926).

cultural framework, axiology, and history that was needed to understand other oral stories and teachings.

Malinowski would categorise these types of oral narrative as folktales, sometimes also known as fairy tales.[14] They are told in certain seasons, and by a seasoned storyteller who, through their performance and the changing of their voice into distinct characters, seeks to provoke amusement. He writes: "if he is a good reciter, he will soon provoke laughter, rejoinders, and interruptions, and his tale will develop into a regular performance".[15] Although Malinowski's language is gendered here, the storytellers in the geographic area I worked did not need to be male and in fact, my female-identified interlocutors were excellent storytellers in this regard. Of his research in Melanesia, he specifies:

> Every story is 'owned' by a member of the community. Each story, though known by many, may be recited only by the 'owner'… But not all the 'owners' know how to thrill and raise a hearty laugh, which is one of the main ends of such stories. A good raconteur has to change his voice in the dialogue, chant the ditties with due temperament, gesticulate, and in general play to the gallery.[16]

In my experiences, this 'ownership' was less rigid; an observation that could rest on many factors. First, I agree with Stephen Hugh-Jones' remarks regarding his research in South America that Malinowski's categorisations are not completely universal;[17] perhaps ownership in this sense is not as an important category in these Indigenous territories compared to Melanesia. Secondly, in the context of my research, it was often said that storytelling was for everyone, yet I observed that certain storytellers' and Elders' stories were privileged in different ways.[18] It was difficult for me to recognise with limited exposure what exactly privileged these stories – the storyteller or the story told – and if ownership played a role, or not. Lastly, multiple informants told me the same story, yet none referred to the process of learning these stories which gave me the impression that they did not have scruples about repeating a story they had once heard. This could be, however, due to the fact that they would only repeat the story in the first place if they had proper ownership rights. These uncertainties were only revealed upon reflecting on my data and thus, I do not want to state conclusively my hypotheses regarding story ownership rights in my field of research, only to note that they were different than Malinowski's criteria for folktales.

Instead, I want to emphasise the similarities to Malinowski's other descriptions: that the storytellers I heard changed their voices, gesticulated profusely, and ensured that I, or the other audience members, were engaged with the story. The audience could be asked to participate in repeating the ditties; answering questions (e. g. should crow look into the bag? The audience yells no!); or through direct eye contact and extended pauses where the storyteller waits for the audience response. Moreover, the reactions that the storytellers were looking for could be dif-

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[14] Jack Goody also sees fables and parables as a subcategory of folktales; consisting of stories which use animals and humans as main characters, are often allegorical, and carry a moral message. (Cf. Jack Goody: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, New York 2010, p. 49.) For the purposes of this article, I do not see any advantages in using these sub-categories as I could not distinguish, on these characteristics alone, major differences between Malinowski's folktales and Goody's fables or parables in my research material.

[15] Malinowski: *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, p. 20-21.

[16] Ibid., p. 21.

[17] Qdt. in: Goody, *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, p. 9.

[18] This privileging was visible in the prestigious treatment of the storyteller (gifting tobacco, formal introductions, sometimes prayer); the setting (stage, microphone, physically higher position, for example standing while the others are sitting); how the storyteller or Elder identified themselves (their introductions including some kind of cultural authority including specifically calling themselves a storyteller); or the audiences' response (not talking while the storyteller or Elder is speaking unless prompted, less interruptions, not leaving in the middle of the story).

ferent depending on the age or background of the audience member.[19] For example, at times more mature content was subtly insinuated and the adults laughed, where the children stayed quiet, or the exaggerated movements or funny voices elicited laughter from younger audience members but less from adults. With crowds of Indigenous and non-Indigenous listeners, some storytellers used the storytelling format to comment on cultural realities that were not always accessible to the non-Indigenous members, which was evidenced by only the Indigenous audience members engaging. I interpreted this audience participation as being just as important as the story itself.

Interlocutors often told me explicitly when a story belonged to its winter season and thus could be told, or contrarily, when they could no longer tell me certain stories as the storytelling time had passed for another year. Nevertheless, stories that could fall under 'folktales' due to their content and storytelling practices were sometimes told out of season. One possible explanation for this phenomenon could be attributed to the availability of some stories produced and circulated in the written form, thus severing the original connection to the season.[20] Anthropologist Jack Goody claims that folktales are often found in "complex, literate cultures where only a minority can read and write and where the rest are unlettered".[21] In this assertion, a prominent debate in the research of oral narratives, particularly from an anthropological perspective, becomes apparent: are certain types of oral storytelling limited to the so-called primitive, and thus illiterate, peoples of the past, or are they available to 'modern' literate societies? This question will be addressed further below. Without minimizing this complex debate, I would like to suggest here that the writing down of narratives – particularly folktales and myths – can change storytelling practices, in addition to the story itself.[22]

An additional defining characteristic of folktales is their claim to fictionality. As I was often unsure of how others received the tales, the boundaries between folktale and myth became porous. I heard, for example, the story of how Turtle Island received its name, told with audience participation or engagement, and the exuberant storytelling practices defined above, yet I also heard it told in a serious tone, out of season, and in such a way that I should accept its factuality: this would correspond more closely to a myth, as described below. Furthermore, other stories similarly shared the characteristic storytelling style of folktales, but their subject matter more closely related to the next category, historical accounts, which also emphasises, as the name entails, true, factual accounts. When the stories, however, became too 'unbelievable' or seemed

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[19] Cf. Goody: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, p. 80 for a similar interpretation

[20] In a presentation by Elder Maria Linklater (attended 21.03.2017, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan), she identifies the colonial legacy and residential schools for the confusion of which stories can be told during which seasons. This assertion based on her personal experiences was corroborated through certain comments by my interlocutors, but I am hesitant to commit to this analysis without further empirical research and more space to contextualise this complex history.

[21] Goody: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, p. 43.

[22] I make this assertion based off of Goody: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral* as he cites various reasons why this could happen: in cultures with literate elites, they can use their literacy to control narratives due to their accessibility to, and ability to change, the written word (p. 41); the writing down of one, singular recitation is an arbitrary sample because the oral performance is constantly being adapted, for example adapted to the particular audience (p. 6); that in the case of fables or parables, the story is deliberately constructed through the writing process to aid in the search for hidden meanings (p. 49); through writing, the performance must be mediated by an author (or anthropologist, etc.) and in turn often historicises one moment in time from a certain subjective perspective (p. 4-6); and that some oral stories do not have a text which is learned and repeated verbatim but that changes and adapts to the needs and situations of the culture, time, and space (p. 52).

to have an explicit 'teaching moment', as described above, they too, became difficult to categorise.

Historical accounts | Legends | Hearsay

The most common 'category' of stories told by my informants referred to personal experiences or re-tellings of stories told by members of their families or communities. These categories were characterised by their claim to factuality, narrative form (in comparison to a chronicle), referentiality to our world or imaginable past, and aversion to the mystical, magical, religious, moral, amusement, or fictitious. For my research project at the time, they were the stories that I paid most attention to, as I was inquiring directly into these informants' reactions to a specific topic, and thus examples of their personal experiences, family members' understandings, and 'true' reactions or interactions with German Indianthusiasm were helpful sources of data. Stories in this category consisted of individual experiences visiting Germany; describing when the speaker's parents visited Europe; racist occurrences in Canada; or describing how one was raised and reflections on their childhoods.

When referring to such factual stories, Malinowski outlines three sub-categories: historical accounts refer to tales which have been witnessed or experienced by the narrator or "at least vouched for by someone within living memory"; legends have the plausibility of happening within the community, but in which the "continuity of testimony" has been temporally or geographically broken; and lastly, hearsay tales concern "distant countries and ancient happenings of a time which falls outside the range of present-day culture".[23] Malinowski also notes that these accounts are not designated to a season, nor are they recited in an amusing way for their audience.[24] While many of these stories were presented in a humorous or performative style, the seriousness of the content behind the comical front indicated that these stories were not for entertainment purposes. When, however, as mentioned, the factual story started to take on mythical or fictional attributes, it was difficult for me to definitively classify it as belonging to this category.

Myth

Myth, and in particular its connections to ritual, has been a core subject within anthropological research since the discipline's inception.[25] This interest, however, was not restricted to anthropology as mentioned previously, but thrived concurrently in the social sciences and humanities more generally. For that reason, von Hendy has asserted 1900 to 2000 as the "century of the myth";[26] yet, a quick search in academic databases shows innumerable works with the term *myth* have been published in the twenty-first century. Myth, therefore, is not only a topic of classical works, but also a term (and at times concept) currently employed across many disciplines.[27] Although frequently used, myth is not defined universally. In addition, the term's multiple understandings have been so securely solidified within various discourses – including 'everyday' uses – that *myth* is often neither defined nor differentiated from other types of oral or written

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[23]   Malinowski: *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, p. 26.
[24]   Ibid., p. 24-25.
[25]   Goody: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, p. 1.
[26]   Andrew von Hendy: *The Modern Construction of Myth*, Bloomington 2001, p. xiii.
[27]   Cf. Robert A. Segal: *Myth: A Very Short Introduction*, New York 2015 ([1]2004) for interdisciplinary perspectives.

stories, grand narratives, ways of thinking, or even ideological patterns. In looking at some varying interpretations, I hope to gain a more nuanced understanding of how my informants used the word *story*, which as we will see, overlaps with ways that myth can be utilized.

In anthropology, there is disagreement if myth can or should be interpreted literally or symbolically; if it applies exclusively to origins or origin stories; if it relates to the natural, physical world, or can reflect the social world; and if myths can be modern or are only for 'primitive societies'. There are discussions if or how myth relates to magic, ritual, ideology, and science, and if myths are explanatory, descriptive, philosophical, performative, or universal in their underlying structures.[28] I will address many of these debates in my discussion, but find it helpful to start with a few convictions as guidelines. Stephen C. Ausband writes that most scholars, regardless of their discipline, agree on two points: first, that a collection of myths in any society is "an expression of the standards and the values peculiar to that society" and, secondly, that "there exist recurrent patterns in mythology, which are shared by virtually every society".[29] Most scholars also identify that there is more than one type of myth, delineated in terms of either content, function, or structure,[30] but what exactly constitutes a myth in the first place is highly disputed. Lastly, there is overwhelming agreement in anthropology that myths, regardless of their definition, structure, or function, must be collected, analysed, and interpreted in the society and context from which they come – in other words, a stand-alone myth does not carry the meaning, nor is the collector/reader able to interpret this meaning, without understanding the matrix of cultural and societal meaning contained in and surrounding the myth.[31]

In anthropology, the researching of myth has evolved since Malinowski's time, and therefore I find it helpful to look briefly at Goody's three types of myth to understand its nuanced uses and connotations.[32] The first type most closely corresponds to Malinowski's use, and I argue, to most classical (anthropological) usages. Here, myth refers to a specific recitation of "a long account"; one which often describes "the beginning of things":[33] here he is referring to both creation stories and stories with latent explanatory functions, mostly for natural phenomena. These myths, however, do not have the primary function to explain, but rather are linked to rituals and thus have a sacred and venerable, highly important cultural component.[34] They are typically performed by a trained raconteur in a special cultural setting (e. g. ritual) but are not limited to a verbatim text; the myth changes with time.[35] From an anthropological perspective and drawing heavily on Malinowski's early foundations, these myths are collected in long-term field research and analysed primarily for their (cultural) functions. Written collections of 'old'

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[28] Cf. Gary P. Ferraro: *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective*, Belmont 2008 (¹1992), p. 344. Cf. Eriksen: *Small Places, Large Issues*, p. 128, 219, 259, 272-273, 292-293. Cf. Robert A. Segal (Ed.): *Structuralism in Myth: Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Dumézil, and Propp*, New York 1996. Cf. G. S. Kirk: *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*, Cambridge 1970 and many other anthropological overviews of myth.

[29] Stephen C. Ausband: *Myth and Meaning, Myth and Order*, Macon 1983, p. x.

[30] Kirk: *Myth*, p. 253-254, for example, distinguishes between myths based on the following categories: narrative; operative, and iterative; validatory; or speculative, and explanatory. Segal: *Structuralism in Myth*, on the other hand, sees myth as being part of a larger rubric and thus can be interpreted on different levels and from different perspectives.

[31] For example, Eriksen: *Small Places, Large Issues*. Goody: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*. Peter Heehs: "Myth, History, and Theory", in: *History and Theory*, V. 33 (1994), I. 1, p. 1-19. von Hendy: *The Modern Construction of Myth*. Malinowski: *Myth in Primitive Psychology* and many others.

[32] Cf. Goody: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, p. 2-7.

[33] Ibid., p.. 2.

[34] Cf. Malinowski: *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, p. 28.

[35] Cf. Goody: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*.

myths are believed to be disconnected from this "reality lived" or continuing use of the myth and therefore cannot be interpreted the same way as those collected 'on the ground'.[36] Goody, therefore, says the latter could be referred to as "contemporary myths":[37] myths that play an active role in the lives of those who tell and believe them. And when I write 'believe', I mean interpret them as factual, or at least, true. Again, in practice, I found it hard to distinguish these types of myth from folktales and teachings, which I will discuss below. As I participated in relatively few ceremonies during my field research, this could contribute to my lack of un-ambiguous examples of these types of myth.

Regarding the second type of myth, Goody writes: "Others see myth too as a 'mythology', which includes ideas about man and the supernatural emanating from a plurality of sources and is essentially put together by an individual, usually an outsider".[38] He emphasises the necessity of understanding myths in the context of other myths and that the interpretation of the my-thology, or this web of intersecting myths, is usually coded and interpreted by an outsider. He notes that the members of the culture would usually not interpret myth in this way as it could historicise oral narratives to one point in time and thus implies the "acceptance of an unchang-ing past".[39] This speaks against the notion of myth as dynamic and changing over time. How-ever, for structuralists, including Lévi-Strauss, myths understood as a unified analytical concept – mythologies – derived from various sources, become the focus of research.[40] Here, recitations of oral narratives (myths, as in the first type) have less prominence compared to the idea of a compete "transcendental view of the world".[41] This begins a transition away from the oral nar-rative into appreciating myth as a conceptual worldview.

Goody criticises the third type of myth which he has identified in others' research. He de-scribes it as both a specific story or the combination of all versions of that story.[42] He identifies this trend primarily among structuralists who draw parallels across myths and mythologies with the intention of identifying underlying universal structures, described as, for the most part, un-conscious to those telling and sharing the myths. In both the second and third types of myth, we can see a growing development of juxtaposing western science (and the concept of *logos*) and myth (*mythos*).[43] This also enhances the distinction between 'modern men', who can con-ceptualise the world logically through science, and the 'primitive man', who uses myth to re-flect their realities.[44] Examples from the second category of myth will be discussed more in detail in the 'Canadian' Myth section. This paper does not include examples from the third type as my research did not aim for structural assertions across different mythologies over large geographical areas.

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[36]   Malinowski: *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, p. 18.
[37]   Goody: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, p. 7.
[38]   Ibid., p. 3-4.
[39]   Ibid., p. 3.
[40]   Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss: *Myth and Meaning*, London: 1978. Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss: *Mythos und Bedeutung: Fünf Radiovorträge*, Frankfurt am Main 1980.
[41]   Goody: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, p. 4.
[42]   Ibid., p. 4-5.
[43]   Cf. Heehs: "Myth, History, and Theory" for a more thorough analysis.
[44]   This approach to myths can be seen in other scholars who laid the foundation for the future works: e. g. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl: *How Natives Think: Les Fonctions Mentales Dans Les Sociétés Inférieures*, Mansfield Centre 2015 ([1]1926 [English], [1]1910 [French]). Ernst Cassirer: *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, New Haven 1944.

These three types of myth, as outlined by Goody, demonstrate the complexity in how myth is conceptualised and researched: where the focus of analysis lies; which type of epistemology informs this analysis, for example functional or structural frameworks of knowing; and if one attempts to understand the myths from 'insider' or 'outsider' perspectives. Myths 'from the inside' are considered truthful; informed by and at the same time informing daily realities. Myth 'from the outside', however, particularly in its opposition to 'science' becomes synonymous with un-examined (cultural) assumptions. The emphasis on the 'unproven' or 'non-factual' begins to correspond to more closely to 'everyday' definitions of myth ranging from a "widely propagated lie";[45] to "misconceptions" or "fabrications";[46] or as the Cambridge English Dictionary defines "a commonly believed but false idea".[47] Historian Matthias Waechter attempts to define myth across these divides:

> Mythos bezieht sich auf gemeinsam erlebte und durch herausragende Individuen geprägte Geschichte, die auf eine besondere Weise präsentiert wird. Die Geschichte wird im Prozess ihrer Mythologisierung aus ihrem unmittelbaren zeitgebundenen Kontext herausgelöst und auf eine überzeitliche Ebene gehoben; ihre Protagonisten werden mit transzendentalen Attributen versehen. Charakteristisch für mythologisierte Geschichten ist, dass sie sich zumeist in zentrale, sinnlich erfahrbare Symbole und Rituale verdichten lassen, die den gesamten Komplex des durch den Mythos Auszudrückenden wachrufen.[48]

In defining myth in this way, I read Waechter's words as endeavouring to bridge the dichotomies 'primitive' and 'modern' societies, especially when we consider symbols and rituals in their broadest form. Furthermore, he acknowledges the processual notion of myth development and variation; recognising both the importance of time and place. Lastly, he emphasises that that which the myth expresses, evokes an entire cultural complex. Taking this more expansive view of myth in anthropological research, we can begin to interpret our contemporary myths through our ethnological field research and begin to understand the *stories* of my informants in a different way.

Myths in the Twenty-first Century: Modern, Emergent, Cultural?

As I have outlined, to speak about myths referring to research conducted in the twenty-first century presents a myriad of terminological, and at times phenomenological, problems. As the term *myth* has become saturated with different definitions, contemporary scholars have begun to attach adjectives before the noun in an attempt to specify to what they are referring. The *cultural myth, political myth, social myth, racial myth,* and *ideological myth* are frequently used

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[45] As described in von Hendy: *The Modern Construction of Myth*, p. 290.

[46] As used by K. Patrick Fazioli: "The Erasure of the Middle Ages from Anthropology's Intellectual Genealogy", in: *History and Anthropology*, V. 25 (2014), I. 3, p. 336-355, here: p. 337. Miriam Kahn: "Tahiti: The Ripples of a Myth on the Shores of the Imagination", *History and Anthropology*, V. 14 (2003), I. 4, p. 307-326, here: p. 309 respectively.

[47] Cambridge English Dictionary: "Myth", on: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/myth [last accessed on 02.04.2020]. Myth's association with fiction and fallacy in everyday use is complex and contested, especially between disciplines. A full discussion extends beyond this paper.

[48] "Myth refers to history experienced together and which has been shaped by outstanding individuals and is presented in a particular way. In the process of its mythologisation, the (hi)story is taken out of its immediate time-bound context and raised to a super-temporal level and its protagonists are provided with transcendental attributes. Mythologized stories are more often than not characterised in their ability to be condensed into central symbols and rituals which can be experienced with the senses. These symbols and rituals evoke the entire complex of what is expressed by the myth". (Matthias Waechter: "Mythos", in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, V. 1 (2016), p. 1-16, here: p. 5-6 [translation mine].)

in anthropological research and beyond.[49] The problem remains, however, that these terms are often used without discussing what exactly is being referenced and thus ignoring important considerations like those outlined above: is the myth received as fact/truth or fiction/a lie/misconception? Is it marked with an adjective to distance it from the oral narratives of so-called primitive societies? Is it used to evoke the transcendental figures Waechter referred to, but without the need to connect them to the notion of ritual or symbol? Is it to avoid the sacred and venerable for a secularisation of myth?

I do see however, some tendencies throughout these 'new' myths. Due to the thousands of books and papers which employ adjectives attached to *myth*, these reflections should not be taken as conclusive results but rather as impulses for how I interpret the myths and other oral narratives of my informants. To begin, supernatural beings, in particular those that maintain an explanatory function, are more common when myth is used without an adjective and they are linked to historical documents or in reference to societies that are relatively isolated. *Cultural myths* have been used in two ways: to refer to Goody's first type of myth[50] except in modern societies, or in referring to the common definition of myth, but located in specific cultural settings. This juxtaposition necessarily muddles the factuality/fictionality distinction. *Political myths* have been heavily theorised outside of anthropology referring to ideological narratives, which can be factual or fictional depending on the theorist, but which are generally believed by a large portion of society. *Social* and *racial myths* are commonly used in sociology and social anthropology, and often refer to similar phenomena as *cultural myths* but are theorised in a different manner, not always referring to narratives but rather normative convictions and credos. *Ideological myths* can be theorised as specific forms of *political myths*, but often emphasise the unconscious nature in addition to the low narrativity and literarity of the myth. Through all categories, I observe that the increased role of technology, political motivation, and processuality are implied – yet more often than not, implicitly.

To summarize, *myth* is being theorised or used as an analytical tool, but most often without definition or clarity. In the next section, I use examples from my field research to show how myth can be a useful concept in contemporary research, without ignoring these anthropological footings or modern conceptualisations.

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[49] Due to extensive literature in this field, I have selected a few articles that are representative of these particular terminological uses, including a few examples from other disciplines: *cultural myth*: Fazioli: "The Erasure of the Middle Ages from Anthropology's Intellectual Genealogy". Susan Knight: "Exploring a Cultural Myth: What Adult Non-Singers May Reveal About the Nature of Singing", in: *The Phenomenon of Singing*, V. 2 (2013), p. 144-154. Mark Lipovetsky: "New Russians as a Cultural Myth", in: *The Russian Review*, V. 62 (2003), I. 1, p. 54-71. Lee Wilkins: "Media Coverage of the Bhopal Disaster: A Cultural Myth in the Making", in: *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, V. 4 (1986), I. 1, p. 7-33. Alessandro Brogi: "Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce and the Evolution of Psychological Warfare in Italy", in: *Cold War History*, V. 12 (2012), I. 2, p. 269-294. Andrew Reynolds: "'Light Breathing': Osip Mandel'shtam's 'First' Poems, Pushkin, and the Poetics of Influence", in: *Pushkin Review*, V. 10 (2007), p. 103-128; *political myth*: Ernst Cassirer: *The Myth of State*, New Haven 1974. Herbert de Vriese: "Political Myth and Sacrifice", in: *History of European Ideas*, V. 43 (2017), I. 7, p. 808-824. Kahn: "Tahiti: The Ripples of a Myth on the Shores of the Imagination"; *social myth* and *racial myth*: Silvia Sovič: "European Family History: Moving Beyond Stereotypes of 'East' and 'West'", in: *Cultural and Social History*, V. 5 (2008), I. 2, p. 141-164. Brian Stock: "The Middle Ages as Subject and Object: Romantic Attitudes and Academic Medievalism", in: *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, V. 5 (1974), I. 3, p. 527-547; and *ideological myth*: Michael Tager: "Myth and Politics in the Works of Sorel and Barthes", in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, V. 47 (1986), I. 4, p. 625-639.
[50] Goody: *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, p. 2.

'Canadian' Myths

Canada is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic nation. Speaking of a singular Canadian culture is definitely problematic, but through the words of my interlocutors and my experiences while conducting participant observation field research, I can identify normative statements about 'Canada' as a whole. These statements draw on experiences primarily in cities (Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto) and from female-identified perspectives, which necessarily influence how Canada is seen and experienced.[51] Although my goal was to gather reactions to German Indianthusiasm, these informants – Sheila, Janelle, and Randi – used their experiences in Canada to reflect on the appreciation and appropriation of elements of their cultures overseas. I feel I would do them a disservice, if I did not address their commentaries on prevailing cultural narratives in Canada and how their experiences point to the mythologization of these normative credos; these "unexamined assumptions".[52]

Myth 1: Canada is a gender equal country without racism.

Since at least autumn 2015, when newly elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau introduced his "gender equal" cabinet,[53] Canada has been politically motivated to present itself as gender equal, or at least, deeply concerned about the rights of women and girls, particularly on an international stage.[54] Furthermore, the emphasis in mainstream media, official government communication, and school curricula focuses on multi-culturalism, racial and ethnic inclusiveness, and the 'Patchwork Quilt' which is formed by Canada's diversity of citizens. This is often used positively, particularly when compared to the United States' 'Melting Pot'. In Canadian public discourse, this picture is repeatedly presented in a very positive light: in advertisements one will see people all of different races, genders, and abilities; when media does report on the impact the current government is having on racial and gender inequality, it is presented in a positive light and downplays the problem at hand, which is, in comparison, said to be much less severe than in other countries; and in everyday conversations, many informants denied that Canada had a 'race' or 'gender' problem; often blaming feminists for overreacting. As a cis-gendered, white female with secondary-level education, it would be easy to miss underlying and intersectional inequalities.

I did, however, witness the ambivalence towards racial disparities in the wake of Colton Bushie's murder while conducting research in Treaty Six, Saskatchewan,[55] in addition to the release of the final reports for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission[56] and then The Final

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[51] This is, for example, in comparison to experiences from men, LGBT2Q, or gender non-conforming individuals; from the coasts including the northern coasts, rural areas, French speaking communities, and so on.

[52] Heehs: "Myth, History, and Theory", p. 1.

[53] Jennifer Ditchburn: "'Because it's 2015': Trudeau Forms Canada's 1st Gender-balanced Cabinet", in: *The Canadian Press*, 04.11.2015, on: https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-trudeau-liberal-government-cabinet-1.3304590 [last accessed on 04.04.2020].

[54] The Government of Canada: "Women and Girls", on: https://www.canada.ca/en/services/culture/canadian-identity-society/women-girls.html [last accessed on 04.04.2020]. The Government of Canada: "Canada Helping Women and Girls Around the World", on: https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/index.aspx?lang=eng [last accessed on 04.04.2020].

[55] Cf. Joe Friesen: "The Night Colten Boushie Died: What Family and Police Files Say About His Last Day, and What Came After", in: *The Globe and Mail*, 20.10.2016, on: https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/colten-boushie/article32451940/ [last accessed on 04.04.2020].

[56] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, Ottawa 2015.

Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.[57] Despite the information in these reports indicating a chronic problem, it could have been plausible to see these occurrences as individual accounts and not part of a longer and more complex history. Some media outlet did have critical pieces, often centered around Black History Month or National Indigenous Peoples Day, but I did not see the conversations being translated into everyday actions or changes in the national narrative throughout my field research.[58]

In speaking with Sheila, the topic of racism, specifically gendered racism, arose while discussing German desires for a specific type of Native. She insinuated that the romantization of the past – which partly informs modern German stereotypes of 'the Indian' – creates expectations about how Indigenous peoples today should be. Often modern Indigenous people in Canada can not or do not want to fulfil these specific German desires; especially when they are grounded in imaginative thought and privilege certain (physiological) characteristics.[59] This was particularly true for her as a Métis woman. Although the Métis are one of Canada's largest, most prominent, and fastest growing Indigenous groups with over half a million members belonging to the Métis Nation,[60] they are largely ignored, forgotten or misunderstood in German culture.

Using this discussion as a jumping off point, Sheila spoke directly to the intersectional racism and sexism she faces in her everyday, specifically commented on the continuing history of racism towards Indigenous women in Canada. To share this information, she primarily used (personal) historical accounts. She said it would be hard for others to understand Indigenous realities – the struggles and trauma associated with them – without experiencing her daily realities. She commented, that without such first-hand experiences, or at least hearing stories of experiences like hers, it would be hard to imagine why romanticising the past could have influence on present day stereotypes and the expectations that come with them. Through her *stories,* the personal historical accounts shared over months of communication, the myth that Canada is a racially and gender equal country was destabilised.

Myth 2: Colonisation ended at confederation (or before).

Before Trudeau's comment on gender equality, the previous Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, stated that Canada "ha[s] no history of colonialism"[61] and followed up by emphasising that Canada is "a country, obviously beginning with [its] two major cultures, but also a country formed by people from all over the world".[62] This statement unequivocally denies Canada's

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[57] Buller, Marion et. al. (Ed.): *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, Canada 2019.

[58] Tavia Grant: "Canada's Racial Divide: Confronting Racism in Our Own Backyard", in: *The Globe and Mail*, 26.09.2016, on: https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/cracks-in-the-narrative-confronting-the-harsh-truths-of-racism-in-canada/article32070545/ [last accessed on 04.04.2020] makes similar arguments in her critical piece as part of the *Globe and Mail*'s series *Colour Code.*

[59] Cf. Thompson: *Imagined Stories: Repercussions of (Re)Telling Fiction as Fact* relating to 'Indianer' and German's imaginative thought and Lutz: "German Indianthusiasm: A Socially Constructed German National(ist) Myth" for more information about German stereotypes more generally.

[60] Rhiannon Johnson: "Exploring Identity: Who Are the Métis and What Are Their Rights?", in: *CBC News*, 28.04.2019, on: https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/metis-identity-history-rights-explainer-1.5098585 [last accessed on 26.04.2020].

[61] Qtd. in: Aaron Wherry: "What He Was Talking About When He Talked About Colonialism", in: *Maclean's*, 01.10.2009, on: https://www.macleans.ca/uncategorized/what-he-was-talking-about-when-he-talked-about-colonialism/ [last accessed on 04.04.2020], paragraph 6.

[62] Qtd. in: Ibid., paragraph 7.

long colonial history and the many Indigenous Nations that were integral to the early development of the country, not to mention its continuing success (while latently supporting the former myth). Although explicit denial of the colonial history of Canada did garner some media attention and I found this opinion to be pretty rare through my participant observation, I did recognise a general downplaying of settler colonialism[63] and its ongoing effects, particularly from settler Canadians. Outside of Indigenous and solidarity or ally networks, I found Canada's controversial history to be infrequently explicitly discussed or reflected upon, giving the impression that it was not a problem – and indeed for the majority of the population, white settler Canadians, who benefit from the colonial agenda – it is not. From my further research in Europe, I have observed that Canada's colonial history and ongoing racial tensions is largely unknown.

In commenting on the racial dimension of white people dressing up as Indigenous people, Janelle emphasized that it is all fun and games when you are able to take off a costume at the end of the day, but she is not able to do that and her brownness has real consequences in Canada. These 'real consequences' she referred to are not only statistically proven lower education rates, poorer health (care), or early mortality, but also inter-generational effects of these disparities. She said:

> My ways of understanding the world isn't a hobby. It's something I wear and it's something that just because I am in this place, it's costly to me. Like, being discriminated against and having a lot of internalized colonisation issues from years before, and I'm working on healing those wounds. Me, as somebody who is impacted in that way, even as an inter-generational survivor… I can't say that I appreciate them [people dressing up as 'Indians']. (personal communication, October 2017)

This statement reminds me of a historical account she shared of her son's long hair and how she worries about the racism he could face because of it; as other men she knows already have. This in turn ties into a myth (Goody's Type 1) I heard from another informant regarding the importance of growing your hair long and the ceremonial cutting of it after the death of a close family member or a major life change. Not cutting one's hair is more than a ceremonial act; it is also an ongoing act of resistance to former colonial policies, like those common in Residential Schools, where Indigenous students had their long hair cut short as part of an assimilatory agenda.[64] Janelle's statement, along with these two reflections, demonstrate the complexity of recognising stories within the matrix of other cultural information to understand multifaceted historical processes like colonialization and their 'real consequences' in present-day Canada.

Janelle, along with the other two women, sees colonialism as a practice which is still ongoing and despite resistance, she feels that Indigenous Nations are continually being colonised through Canadian policy, law, and values, to the detriment of her, and other Nations', own laws and values. I interpreted her comments about colonization being a historical episode without continuing impacts as making it easier to relegate systemic problems, like the systematic disadvantages she faces, onto the individual. This not only perpetuates the myth that colonialism was a singular past event (which is over), but also the myth that Indigenous people are responsible for their own disadvantages.

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[63] I make the distinction between colonialism where the colonial power eventually leaves and settler colonialism where the colonial power stays and seeks to dominate or eliminate the Indigenous Nations through systematic structures, as described in Lorenzo Veracini: *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, New York 2010.

[64] Kyle Edwards: "For Indigenous Boy Whose Braid Got Cut, the Meaning of Long Hair Makes It Worth the Taunts", in: *Maclean's*, 05.06.2018, on: https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/for-indigenous-boy-whose-braid-got-cut-the-meaning-of-long-hair-makes-it-worth-the-taunts/ [last accessed on 04.04.2020].

Myth 3: Terra nullius

Perhaps the most common and widespread myth is that North America was empty, or at least mostly unused, at the time of 'discovery', thus making it, in legal terms *terra nullius*; belonging to no one. Although I did not hear anyone directly refer to this myth by its Latin name throughout my research, I did pick up on its sentiments. A farmer in Saskatchewan commented, "they [Indigenous peoples] never used this land anyway" referring to farming as the only 'real' way to use the land and an informant in Germany contemplated, "I guess it never occurred to me that Canada had Native people; I thought they were just in the USA, or maybe in the far North, but those aren't really Natives". Both accounts demonstrate the denial or misinformation relating to the original inhabitants of North America.

Randi was adamant that land is imperative to culture, but also emphasised the intricate connection between land and cultural expressions including language, ceremony, and food. She told me stories about certain ceremonies she takes part in and how the land provides for those ceremonies: the setting where they take place, but also in providing, for example, sweet grass or cedar to be burned, the wood for the fires, or food to be shared. In our interview, after she described many situations where this was the case, I asked her pointedly the clarifying question if, in her opinion, such ceremonies should take place outside of the land base where they originated. She said "no" then paused and continued, "no. And that's my strong opinion". She asserted that separating the ceremonies from the lands which they belong is not a good thing. She was not opposed to mutual cultural exchange or others learning her ceremonies, but she stressed that this must be done through the proper ceremonies with the proper protocols and that can only happen on the land.

The conviction that the land is free for taking because it is nobody's to begin with has, according to Randi, long-lasting consequences: in addition to disrupting traditional livelihoods when land is directly usurped, it becomes acceptable for individuals (and groups or corporations) to appropriate aspects of culture and to use them for profit or to perform them outside of their traditional meanings and settings. Having to assert that their cultures are alive was something Randi, Janelle, and Sheila all commented on. Having to defend yourself and your culture because people do not think you exist or your people no longer have a connection to the land (or never had one in the first place) is very detrimental and, as they described it, plainly untrue. The folktales they told me demonstrated long standing connections to place and the land, and their personal experiences anchored them in this continuing history. Their lived experiences and oral histories counter the myth of *terra nullius.*

Taken together, the folktales, historical accounts, and myths (Goody's Type 1) that my main informants told me aided in building an epistemological, axiological, and at times ontological, framework to more fully understand the stories they shared with me. Although my positionality as a Canadian citizen and researcher interested in their lived realities provided me with considerable historical and cultural prior knowledge which aided in understanding many of these accounts with little to no explanation, it was the combination of all types of oral narratives, their *stories*, combined with my wider field work that afforded me a more complex understanding of their reality. Thomas King's quote at the beginning of this paper tells us how, through a story-telling-epistemology, the valuing of stories builds and maintains culture. When widely believed

"unexamined assumptions"[65] are the prevailing stories told and shared, they will become the normative and privileged stories. Only when listening to the voices of those who do not see themselves reflected in these stories can these myths – at times contributing to a dominant mythology – be identified and contradicted. Myth in this case, closely reflects Goody's second type of myth: a dominant (secularised) worldview. In juxtaposing expressions of their lived realities, Sheila, Janelle, and Randi expose the misconceptions inherent in such privileged stories and consequently destabilise these Canadian myths.

Teachings

I mentioned that not all of my informants' stories fit clearly into the categories I presented, even when those categories are porous and overlapping. Typologies can be helpful in identifying trends and distinguishing between critical information, for example here, how the stories were told (audience or not); if they had a claim to factuality or fictionality, or played with that ambiguity; if they were based on experienced events or re-tellings; if they had a narrative form, or not; were explanatory or not; and so forth. Working with my main informants and particularly after spending considerable time in Treaty Six Territory in Saskatchewan and Alberta as a researcher, I noticed that the category of 'teachings' intersected all categories of oral narratives and at times, the experiential aspect; the non-oral and non-narrative, was more important that the 'oral narrative' itself. Without these teachings – information shared, lessons taught, time together shared in ceremony – I would have found it difficult to recognise the particularities of their stories.

Stories, a Summary

Through my research, I recognised the value of the words my informants were sharing with me, but also how, why, and in which context they were sharing those particular words. This, of course, is nothing new for anthropologists; the interest in oral narratives within the discipline is long and complex, but always contextual. I attempted to navigate this often contradictory history to focus in on how select female-identified Indigenous informants were using the word *story*; in particular, how this intersects or diverges from other anthropological understandings of terms describing oral forms of sharing, particularly the term *myth.*

Secondly, drawing on Thomas King, I investigated how individual-level, oral narratives interacted with myths on the collective level. I exposed which stories were being privileged, leading to the myths discussed above. Malinowski published these words in 1926:

> These stories (myths) live not by idle interest, not as fictitious or even as true narratives; but are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates, and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as how to perform them.[66]

If we understand 'the natives' and 'man' here to be dominant Canadian society, we can see how the myths outlined above contribute to many Canadian's ways of life, rituals, and moral compasses, understood in their widest forms. For others like my informants, however, these myths are neither believed nor shared – they do not play an axiological directive role in their lives. Sheila, Janelle, and Randi's stories revealed to me the 'different truths' they experience in

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65 Heehs: "Myth, History, and Theory", p. 11.
66 Malinowski: *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, p. 30.

Canada, and how these lived realities often speak against the privileged stories in society at large. In delineating between their stories as folktales, historical accounts, myth, or teachings, I could better react as an audience member, but also better understand their epistemological and axiological worldview, which often stood in contrast to prevailing stories – contemporary myths – in Canada.

As one last remark, the term *story* has the possibility of becoming as diluted and equivocal as *folktale, myth* or even *narrative*, but it is my hope that it instead presents an opportunity to more closely identify what exactly our informants are sharing and how that relates to the complex matrices of culture and storytelling. *Story* can be seen as a way to encompass the wealth of previous anthropological research on oral narratives. Whether we are looking at stories 'from the inside' or 'from the outside', we, as anthropologists, have the tools to identify, describe, and analyse the oral narratives we receive from our informants – their *stories.*

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CHARLOTTE KAISER (Saarbrücken)

„Bye bye le gender fucking" –
Repräsentation und Anerkennung lesbischer Identitäten
in der Montréaler Webserie *Féminin/Féminin*

Lesben sind im kulturellen Mainstream angekommen: *The L-Word*, *Orange is the New Black* und eine lesbische *Batwoman*[1] – die Liste der Filme und Serien, in denen lesbische Protagonistinnen im Zentrum stehen, wird fortlaufend länger. Es sind nicht mehr nur Nischenproduktionen für ein Minderheitenpublikum, sondern Hollywood-Filme und Netflix-Serien, die lesbische Identitäten allgegenwärtig sichtbar machen. Mediale Präsenz schafft Vorbilder, erleichtert die Identitätsfindung und das Coming-Out, sie gibt eine Orientierung. Aber sie bestimmt auch das gesellschaftliche Bild von Lesben, festigt Stereotype, verdrängt alternative Bilder – kurz gesagt, sie definiert eine Norm lesbischer Identitäten. Wer darf wen und wie repräsentieren? Dürfen Lesben als Frauen, die Frauen lieben, dargestellt werden oder müssen sie sich von *der* Norm abheben? Funktioniert Repräsentation am besten, wenn sich die Rezipient*innen selbst wiederfinden und dadurch anerkennend sichtbar gemacht werden? Und was genau bedeutet das eigentlich, anerkennende lesbische Sichtbarkeit?[2]

Wenn Chloé Robichaud, die Regisseurin der Webserie *Féminin/Féminin* in Interviews über ihr Werk spricht, steht zumeist ihre Motivation, ein positives Vorbild für junge Mädchen, die noch nicht geoutet sind, zu schaffen, im Mittelpunkt. Sie hat das Ziel, ermutigende und *schöne* lesbische Realitäten im Allgemeinen – besonders aber die ihres eigenen Umfelds – in einer hyperrealistischen Art und Weise darzustellen. Der Grund dafür liegt, wie Robichaud angibt, in ihrer eigenen Kindheit. Sie erinnert sich:

> Si je me revois quand j'avais 14 ans, je voulais voir des couples de filles pour qui c'était facile d'être gay, j'avais envie de me dire ,eh c'est cool d'être lesbienne, j'ai envie de l'être!', pas toujours ne voir que les côtés difficiles.[3]

Trotz dieser positiven Intention der Regisseurin erfährt die Webserie eine starke Kritik, wie unter anderem die Ausführungen von Sam Bourcier, einer der führenden Stimmen der *Queer Theory* Frankreichs, zeigen. Bourcier stellt bezüglich der Webserie folgende Diagnose:

> J'étais loin de penser que l'acronyme LSTW, tel un monogramme Vuitton pour lesbiennes chic, était le nom de code d'un nouveau virus et que j'en serais la patiente zéro. Regardez *Féminin/Féminin*, voire adoptez le style de vie de la lesbienne type de cette série ,plate', comme on dit en québécois, et vous mourrez d'ennui à coup sûr. […] Les gays et les lesbiennes qui se marient épousent aussi la différence sexuelle biologiquement définie. Bye Bye le *gender fucking* et la richesse des identités de genres caractéristiques des subcultures gays et lesbiennes.[4]

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[1]   Vgl. Ilene Chaiken: *The L Word*, USA 2004-2009. Jodie Foster: *Orange is the New Black*, USA 2013-2019. Caroline Dries: *Batwoman*, USA 2019.

[2]   Die Ausführungen zu anerkennender lesbischer Sichtbarkeit in diesem Artikel basieren auf dem Konzept, das Johanna Schaffer vorgelegt hat. (Vgl. Johanna Schaffer: *Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit: Über die visuellen Strukturen der Anerkennung*, Bielefeld 2008.)

[3]   Marie Turcan: „Féminin/Féminin: de la simplicité d'être lesbienne", in: *Lesinrocks*, 17.02.2014, auf: https://www.lesinrocks.com/2014/02/17/series/series/feminin-feminin-de-la-simplicite-detre-lesbienne-webserie/ [zuletzt aufgerufen am 20.04.2020].

[4]   Sam Bourcier: „Féminin/Féminin, la websérie qui dissout la lesbienne", in: *Slate*, 08.09.2014, auf: http://www.slate.fr/story/91143/femininfeminin-webserie-lesbienne-montreal   [zuletzt   aufgerufen   am: 20.04.2020].

Die Gegenüberstellung der ausgeführten Intentionen Robichauds, junge Menschen zu ermutigen, mit der harschen Kritik Bourciers verweisen auf einen Konflikt, der queeren Bewegungen und ihren (medialen) Repräsentationen nicht erst seit *Féminin/Féminin* inhärent ist. Es handelt sich dabei um das Paradox, das zwischen dem Wunsch gesehen zu werden und der Ablehnung der damit einhergehenden Einbindung in normative Systeme entsteht. Dieser Konflikt soll im Zentrum dieses Artikels stehen, der sich der Frage nach den Möglichkeiten einer anerkennenden Sichtbarkeit lesbischer Realitäten und Identitäten im Medium der Webserie widmet. Konkret: wie können Lesben in Webserien repräsentiert werden, ohne auf vereinfachende Stereotype zurückzugreifen, die ihre Identität als abweichend festschreiben und damit heteronormative Machtverhältnisse stabilisieren? Und wird eine solche anerkennende Sichtbarkeit in der Montréaler Webserie *Féminin/Féminin* realisiert? Um diesen Fragen auf den Grund zu gehen, sollen zunächst einige Ausführungen zum Konzept der anerkennenden Sichtbarkeit gemacht werden.[5] Als Expertin im Feld der visuellen Kommunikation hat Johanna Schaffer den Zusammenhang zwischen Sichtbarkeit und politischer Macht untersucht und deren Kongruenz dekonstruiert. Sie stellt damit ein Ideal politischen Aktivismus in Frage: das Gesehen werden. Stattdessen steht in ihrer Theoriebildung die Frage nach dem Modus der Darstellung im Mittelpunkt. Ausgehend von Schaffers Überlegungen schlage ich für die Analyse die Darstellungspraxis *queering le Féminin* vor. Diese kategorisiert Lesben nicht als lesbische *Frauen*, sondern beschreibt – zurückgehend auf Monique Wittig's Feststellung „les lesbiennes ne sont pas des femmes"[6] – ihre Möglichkeit, heteronormative Machtstrukturen zu zerstören. *Queering le Féminin* bildet die Basis für die Analyse von *Féminin/Féminin* die anhand der zwei soziokulturellen Institutionen Mutterschaft und Ehe durchgeführt wird. Im Fazit wird auf den Analyseergebnissen aufbauend noch einmal die Frage aufgegriffen, welche Auswirkungen der Darstellungsmodus auf kulturelle Deutungsmuster und in der Konsequenz auf Handlungsfähigkeit hat.

Die Theorie anerkennender Sichtbarkeit

Die kulturwissenschaftliche Analyse der bildlichen Repräsentation[7] verschiedener Identitäten ist insbesondere in der Tradition der *Cultural Studies*, die Fragen kultureller Phänomene mit der Analyse gesellschaftlicher Machtbeziehungen verbinden, ein wichtiges und bereits vielfältiges erforschtes Feld.[8] Darauf aufbauend hat die kritische Medienanalyse in interdisziplinärer Verbindung zu unter anderen den *Postcolonial Studies* und den *Queer Studies* die Analyse minorisierter Subjektpositionen in den Blick genommen.[9] Die Untersuchung medialer (Selbst-)Inszenierung, von Identitätspolitiken und Protestkultur nimmt hier einen entscheiden-

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[5]   Schaffer: *Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit*.
[6]   Monique Wittig: *La pensée straight*, Paris 2013 ([1]1980), S. 67.
[7]   Repräsentation wird in diesem Zusammenhang definiert als stellvertretende Anwesenheit einer Instanz durch entweder eine ästhetische Darstellung, eine epistemologische Vorstellung oder eine politische Stellvertretung. Alle drei Repräsentationsebenen können als Widerspiegelung der Wirklichkeit, als Ausdruck einer auktorialen Intention oder als semiotisch-konstruktiver Prozess gedacht werden. In allen drei Fällen weist Repräsentation eine wirklichkeitsproduzierende Dimension auf, die verdeutlicht, dass Sichtbarkeit keine natürliche Gegebenheit, sondern ein diskursives Produkt ist; visuelle Stereotype sind eine mögliche Verdeutlichung dieses Umstandes.
[8]   Vgl. u. a.: Richard Dyer: *The Matter of Images*, London 1993. Stuart Hall: *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London 1997.
[9]   Vgl. Tanja Thomas u. a. (Hg.): *Anerkennung und Sichtbarkeit: Perspektiven für eine kritische Medienkulturforschung*, Bielefeld 2018.

den Raum ein, da die Subjektwerdung und die Intelligibilität von Identitäten maßgeblich auch von ihrer visuellen Repräsentation abhängen.[10]

Diesen Kontroversen der ambivalenten Wirkung von Sicht- und Unsichtbarkeit widmet sich Johanna Schaffer in ihrer 2008 erschienenen Studie *Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit*.[11] Ausgehend von einer grundsätzlichen Problematisierung der in aktivistischen Kreisen weitverbreiteten Annahme, dass zunehmende Sichtbarkeit auch mit einem Zugewinn an politischem Einfluss einhergeht, unternimmt Schaffer an der Schnittstelle von politischem, ästhetischen und theoretischem Wissen eine Studie der visuellen Kultur. Sichtbarkeit per se als positiven Modus der politischen und gesellschaftlichen Repräsentation abzulehnen verdeutlicht, dass Phänomene visueller Kultur[12] nicht isoliert zu analysieren sind, sondern in komplexen kulturellen und sozialen Zusammenhängen stehen, die Deutungen beeinflussen und determinieren. Daher reicht es nicht, die Frage nach Sichtbarkeit rein quantitativ zu stellen. Vielmehr muss die Frage nach der Art von Sichtbarkeit im Fokus akademischer Analysen, aber auch aktivistischer Bemühungen gegen soziale Ungleichheit stehen. Für diese Untersuchung verschiedener Modi von Sichtbarkeit ergibt sich damit die Aufgabe, Sichtbarkeit nicht als allgemein definiert zu belassen, sondern auf eine analytische Ebene zu verschieben, wo sie „unselbstverständlich, ungewöhnlich und vor allem unbequem werden soll".[13] Um das zu erreichen, müssen die Prozesse und Prozeduren der Sichtbarmachung sowie die Gründe für die positive Konnotation des Sichtbarseins genauer betrachtet werden. Der Topos Sichtbarkeit soll aus dem politischen Aktivismus zurückübersetzt werden in wissenschaftliche Studien, um seine Bedeutung für politische Prozesse – den Zusammenhang von Visualität und Macht – zu beleuchten.

> Auf dem Gemeinplatz der Sichtbarkeit kreuzen sich […] feministische, antirassistische und queere oder lesBischwuletranspolitische Rhetoriken. Immer ist er in den Rhetoriken dieser links-aktivistischen oppositionellen und minorisierten Politiken positiv besetzt: ‚Sichtbar machen' bedeutet hier zuallererst die Forderung nach Anerkennung einer gesellschaftlichen und gesellschaftlich relevanten, d.h. mit Rechten und politischer/gesellschaftlicher Macht ausgestatteten Existenz.[14]

Die Annahme, dass visuelle Kultur in direktem Zusammenhang zu gesellschaftlichen Machtverhältnissen steht, zeigt auf, dass Bilder kontextuell beeinflusst werden und gleichzeitig bei reflektierter Nutzung das Potential zur politischen Intervention haben. Daher kann Schaffers Theorie ambivalenter Sichtbarkeit als interdisziplinäre Studie beschrieben werden, die sich in vielschichtige Traditionen der kritischen Medienanalyse einschreibt und entsprechend vielfältige Fragen der Visualisierung und Repräsentation verhandelt. Hier gilt Sichtbarkeit nicht länger als Ideal, sondern wird auch in ihren bedeutungsproduzierenden Praktiken hinterfragt und mit dem subversiven Potential bestimmter Unsichtbarkeiten – beispielsweise von Subkulturen – kontrastiert. Dabei scheinen zwei Problematiken zentral zu sein, die in der Literatur bereits vielfältig thematisiert wurden. Zum einen handelt es sich um das Benennen und daher auch Fixieren einer Identität durch Sichtbarkeit:

> Die Begierde zu sein, erkannt, gesehen, anerkannt zu werden, halte ich für fundamental, und manchmal nehmen wir in Kauf, auf Grund von Begriffen erkannt, wahrgenommen, platziert, aufgenommen und anerkannt zu werden, die uns einer enormen Ambivalenz aussetzen, aber wir tun es dennoch, weil wir nur so sein, das heißt anerkannt werden können. Manchmal sind die verfügbaren Anerken-

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[10] Vgl. Judith Butler: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York u. a. 1990. Vgl. Thomas u. a. (Hg.): *Anerkennung und Sichtbarkeit*.
[11] Schaffer: *Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit*, S. 11-23.
[12] Schaffers Analysebeispiele beziehen sich in erster Linie auf Film und Fotografie.
[13] Ebd., S. 12.
[14] Ebd.

> nungsbegriffe hochambivalent, und eine soziale Existenz wird nur um einen hohen Preis versprochen, und eine Art Opfer wird gefordert. Ich würde sogar sagen, ein bestimmter Entfremdungseffekt ist der Preis dafür, einen solchen Ort überhaupt einnehmen zu können. Nur so können wir im Raum des Lesbaren, Intelligiblen, Anerkennbaren handeln.[15]

Judith Butler stellt hier fest, dass Sichtbarkeit häufig damit einhergeht, für andere erkennbar gemacht zu werden – eine Benennung, die nur durch Festschreiben und Kontrolle einer Identität funktioniert. Diese Beschreibung führt zur zweiten Problematik, die der Hypervisibilität, einem der Modi von Sichtbarkeit nach Markus Schroer.[16] Er unterscheidet je nach Aktivität bzw. Passivität der repräsentierten Individuen und Sicht- bzw. Unsichtbarkeit vier Modi. Hypervisibiliät ist laut Schroer eine passive Sichtbarkeit, die häufig nicht vom Subjekt gewollt ist und die mit Überwachung einhergehen kann. Im Gegensatz dazu wird die politische Subversivität einer aktiven Unsichtbarkeit deutlich; durch diese können sich Identitäten der Kontrolle – beispielsweise als politisches Ziel – durch normierende Sichtbarkeit entziehen.[17] Julianne Pidduck spricht in ihrer Definition von Hypervisibilität von einem aktuellen Paradox lesbischwuler Repräsentation:

> This term signals a contemporary paradox or threshold on the political and epistemological status of lesbian and gay representation. In contrast with cultural and historical contexts where same-sex desires and lesbian and gay identities are or were invisible (or unspeakable), the prefix ‚hyper' points to a new order of excessive visibility.[18]

Die Hypervisibilität als erzwungene Sichtbarkeit ist von einer gewünschten und daher aktiven Sichtbarkeit, die auf Anerkennung und Inklusion abzielt, abzugrenzen.

Schaffer bezieht sich in ihrer Theoriebildung auf diese (Un-)Sichtbarkeitsmodi, die die Basis ihrer Überlegungen zu einer Theorie anerkennender Sichtbarkeit bilden. Die anerkennende Sichtbarkeit schreibt sich dabei weder in Hypervisibilität noch in vereinfachende und daher limitierende Darstellungen ein. Daraus ergeben sich in Schaffers Theorie drei Modi der Sichtbarkeit: die bereits erläuterte Hypervisibilität, die Anerkennung im Konditional und als Ideal die anerkennende Sichtbarkeit. Letztere wird vor allem über die Abgrenzung zu den anderen beiden Modi definiert und ist daher nicht anhand eines simplen Kriterienkatalogs zu reproduzieren. Dieser fluide Charakter erschwert einerseits die analytische und produktive Arbeit mit dem Konzept, bildet andererseits aber das queere Potential ihrer Konzeptualisierung ab. Im Ergebnis steht für die anerkennende Sichtbarkeit kein fixes Set an Merkmalen, sondern die Forderung nach der Repräsentation einer kontinuierlichen Verhandlung von Normen in ganzheitlicher Perspektive, die somit nicht auf eine Identitätsdimension beschränkt bleibt.[19] Zentral ist dabei auch, dass Stereotype weitestgehend vermieden werden, um sowohl die Festschreibung als auch die Anerkennung im Konditional zu verhindern. Diese Form der Sichtbarkeit bezeich-

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[15] Judith Butler, Emcke, Carolin und Saar, Martin: „Eine Welt, in der Antigone am Leben geblieben wäre", in: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, Jg. 4 (2001), S. 587-599, hier: S. 592-593.

[16] Vgl. Markus Schroer: „Visual Culture and the Fight for Visibility", in: *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, Jg. 44 (2014), S. 206-228.

[17] Peggy Phelan: *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London 1993. Vgl. Sigrid Schade und Silke Wenk (Hg.): *Studien zur visuellen Kultur: Einführung in ein transdisziplinäres Forschungsfeld*, Bielefeld 2011.

[18] Julianne Pidduck: „The Visible and the Sayable: The Moment and Conditions of Hypervisibility", in: Florian Grandena und Cristina Johnston (Hg.): *Cinematic Queerness: Gay and Lesbian Hypervisibility in Contemporary Francophone Feature Films*, Bern 2011, S. 9-40, hier: S. 9-10.

[19] Zusätzlich kritisiert Schaffer auch, dass minorisierte Identitäten zumeist anhand einer Achse der Diskriminierung und ihrer Folgen dargestellt werden. Durch diese eindimensionale Repräsentation werden Verschränkungen verschiedener Diskriminierungsfaktoren ausgeblendet und identitätszentrierte Sichtbarkeitspolitiken begünstigt, die wiederum Stereotype produzieren können.

net zumeist eine positive Darstellung, die oberflächlich als Anerkennung gewertet werden kann, dabei aber nur deren kulturelle Dimension berücksichtigt und Identitäten normierend festschreibt, wenn auch in einer bestätigenden Darstellungsweise. Ein klassisches Beispiel im Kontext der Analyse dieses Artikels wäre die Beobachtung, dass lesbische monogame Paare als gleichberechtigte Variante liebevoller moderner Paarbeziehungen dargestellt werden, während ihre rechtliche Gleichstellung auf politischer Ebene in Deutschland noch nicht erfolgt und auch gesellschaftlich weiterhin umstritten ist.[20] Damit wird zum einen ein genormtes Narrativ von lesbischen Paaren gepflegt und zum anderen ihre faktische Diskriminierung negiert; beides entspricht nicht dem Ideal der anerkennenden Sichtbarkeit, die Normen und Diskriminierung kontinuierlich verhandelt, sondern einer Anerkennung im Konditional, die mit positiven Bildern vermeintliche Akzeptanz repräsentiert. Positive Bilder kritisiert Schaffer daher als zu einfach gedacht für eine anerkennende Sichtbarkeit, denn in diesem Fall würde weder eine Analyse der Produktionsbedingungen vorgenommen, noch das Spannungsfeld zwischen dem Wunsch nach positiver Repräsentation als Abwehr von Negativdarstellung und der Gefahr der Kategorisierung in idealisierten Bildern mitgedacht werden. Diese Kategorisierung trägt außerdem dazu bei, bestehende Machtstrukturen zu stabilisieren, da das Stereotyp – sei es positiv oder negativ – eine Abgrenzung der dargestellten Identität von einem Ausgangspunkt, der zumeist als Normalität angesehen wird, ermöglicht. Anerkennende Sichtbarkeit ist daher nicht gleichzusetzen mit positiven (machtvollen) Bildern, sondern analysiert den soziokulturellen Kontext dieser normativen Repräsentation und erlaubt so eine Qualifizierung von Sichtbarkeit. Diese kann dazu dienen, „eine affirmative Weise des Repräsentierens zu bezeichnen, im Sinne einer Affirmation und affirmativen Produktion des partikularen Werts einer Person, einer Sache, eines Verhältnisses".[21] In Anlehnung an Judith Butler handelt es sich um ein Reformulieren „jene[r] Möglichkeiten […], die *bereits* existieren, wenn auch in kulturellen Bereichen, die als kulturell unintelligibel und unmöglich gelten".[22] Schaffer nimmt damit direkt auf das Verhältnis zwischen dominanten und subalternen Realitäten und Öffentlichkeiten Bezug und fragt danach, wie letztere anerkennend repräsentiert werden können, ohne in einen affirmativen Modus positiver Stereotype zu verfallen. Dabei klassifiziert sie Anerkennung als einen zunehmend prominenten Begriff in Debatten um Gerechtigkeit, Gleichheit und Differenz, der in ein aktuelles gesellschaftliches *cleavage* zwischen ökonomischer Macht und ideologischer bzw. kultureller Hegemonie eingeordnet wird. Diese Trennung und Gegenüberstellung von ökonomischer und kultureller Sphäre kritisiert Schaffer und verwendet

> ,Anerkennung' als Bezeichnung eines gesellschaftlichen Gutes, das als Produkt und Prozess gesellschaftlicher Strukturen und Dynamiken zwei verflochtene Dimensionen ausdrückt. Zum einen ist Anerkennung die Grundlage für die Lesbarkeit und Verstehbarkeit spezifischer Subjektpositionen – im Sinne von Erkennbarkeit. Hier garantiert sie die Wirklichkeit und die Wahrhaftigkeit dessen, was anerkannt wird. Zum anderen sind Verhältnisse der Anerkennung mit der Dimension der Belehnung

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[20]   Als Beispiele für diese Praxis können im deutschen Kontext unter anderem Filme des öffentlich-rechtlichen Fernsehens benannt werden, in denen die zentrale Rolle des heterosexuellen Paares durch ein lesbisches Paar ersetzt wird, ohne zugrundeliegende disziplinierende Beziehungsnormen (z. B. Monogamie, Zusammenleben, Ehe) zu hinterfragen oder zu modifizieren. Nur selten wird in diesen Filmen explizit auf soziale Benachteiligung und/oder rechtliche Diskriminierung hingewiesen, wobei davon auch zentrale Aspekte der Paarbeziehung wie eigene Kinder betroffen sind. Solche exemplarischen Ausnahmen sind beispielsweise: *Zwei Mütter* (Anne Zohra Berrached, D 2013) oder trotz stereotyper Figuren in Form eines alternativen Plots *Vier kriegen ein Kind* (Matthias Steurer, D 2015).
[21]   Schaffer: *Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit*, S. 19.
[22]   Judith Butler: *Das Unbehagen der Geschlechter*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, S. 218.

mit Wert verbunden – und gezielt verknüpfe ich hier einen zentralen Begriff psychoanalytischer Terminologie mit einem zentralen Begriff der Ökonomie.[23]

Mit dieser Definition dekonstruiert Schaffer einerseits die Einordnung des Konzepts Anerkennung in o. g. eingleisiges *cleavage* und lehnt andererseits auch eine einfache Bestimmung des Begriffs als Affirmation einer Situation, eines Gegenstandes oder einer Person ab. Vielmehr erlaubt Schaffers Definition der Anerkennung eine Analyse des normativen Feldes der Repräsentation und seiner Verflechtungen sowohl mit realpolitischen Machtbeziehungen als auch mit kulturellen Inszenierungen sozialer Tatbestände. Diese Analyse macht auch vor einer Selbstdarstellung nicht halt, denn mit Bezug auf Butler führt Schaffer aus, dass auch diese häufig auf der Nutzung hegemonialer Repräsentationssysteme durch minorisierte Gruppen basiert und sie damit die Repräsentationsordnung, die sie selbst marginalisiert, bestätigen. Es kommt so zur „paradoxen Situation der Affirmation der jeweiligen Minorisierung".[24] Darüber hinaus ist durch die (Selbst-)Zuordnung zu Mehr- oder Minderheit, insbesondere bei der Nutzung von Stereotypen, eine Verknappung diskursiver Möglichkeiten zu beobachten, die sich durch die repetitive Nutzung weniger oder gar einer einzigen Darstellungsmöglichkeit verstärkt. Im Kontext medialer Produktionen entwickeln diese Stereotypen außerdem einen Wiedererkennungswert, der die Ausbildung von verschiedenen Genres begünstigen kann: intertextuelle Verbindungen verstärken dabei die Wahrnehmung von Stereotypen als gesellschaftliches Wissen und tragen zu einer Manifestierung von Abgrenzung und Ausschlüssen bei.[25] Eine kritische Betrachtung der Vorgeschichte eines jeden Stereotyps ist daher entscheidend, auch wenn die Repetition per se nicht als schlichte, imitierende Verstärkung gesehen werden kann, sondern immer auch das Potential subversiven Widerstandes durch die Parodie auf ein Original besteht.[26] Das Stereotyp kann somit im Wesentlichen sowohl eine marginalisierende Funktion in zwei Modi, dem der Negativdarstellung und dem der Anerkennung im Konditional als auch eine subversive Funktion in der parodistischen, selbstreflexiven Umarbeitung erfahren. Letztere könnte ein Indikator für eine anerkennende Sichtbarkeit sein, da eine Parodie als Verhandlungsform die künstliche Konstruktion gesellschaftlicher Bilder und Normen aufzeigen kann.

Die Fokussierung auf lesbische Identitäten und ihre Möglichkeiten anerkennender Sichtbarkeit, die in dieser Analyse zum Tragen kommen sollen, heben das Spannungsfeld aus Assimilation und (un)freiwilliger Opposition noch einmal deutlich hervor. Hier spielen nicht nur Fragen der Anerkennung im visuellen und kulturellen Bereich eine Rolle, sondern auch aktuelle politische Verhandlungen und Diskurse um Gleichheit. Es eröffnet sich ein weiteres *cleavage* zwischen Homonormativität und ihrer Unsichtbarkeit und queerer Opposition als Sichtbarkeit, die teilweise mit radikalen, systemkritischen Tendenzen einhergeht. Anerkennung erscheint hier nicht mehr als klar definiertes Ziel und muss daher als grundlegende Wertvorstellung in Frage gestellt werden:

> Wenn man sich die Frage schwul-lesbischer Ehen als Beispiel für das Einfordern von Anerkennung anschaut, habe ich einige kritische Fragen. Selbst wenn man Anerkennung erreicht, wie wird man dann konstituiert und was im Leben der Gemeinschaft wird gleichzeitig von der neuen Norm dekonstituiert? Plötzlich sind stark konservative Vorstellungen von sexueller Praxis, monogamer Be-

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[23] Schaffer: *Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit*, S. 52.

[24] Ebd., S. 24.

[25] Schaffer nennt in ihrer Studie dafür das Beispiel des türkisierenden Stereotyps, das als Ausgangspunkt einer intertextuell verbindenden Genrestruktur seine Wirkung entfaltet.

[26] Vgl. Butler: *Gender Trouble*, S. 194.

ziehung und Familienstrukturen im Spiel und diskreditieren andere Lebensweisen, die für unsere gesamte soziale Bewegung bisher absolut entscheidend waren.[27]

In der Sichtbarmachung und der damit einhergehenden, teilweise erfolgreichen, Forderung nach Gleichberechtigung liegt außerdem auch das Potential für neue spezifische Unsichtbarkeiten, sofern nicht die vermeintlich notwendigen Merkmale einer politischen Gruppe äußerlich erfüllt werden.[28] Damit muss der politische Begriff Sichtbarkeit, der häufig als Erkennbarkeit übersetzt wird, mit seinen einschränkenden Effekten für bestimmte Identitäten und seiner Stabilisierung des bestehenden Repräsentationssystems problematisiert werden. Es stellt sich also die Frage, wie queere Identitäten, die ja per se nicht kategorisierbar sein wollen, anerkennend repräsentiert werden können.

> Wie aber minorisierte Öffentlichkeiten beschreiben in den Begriffen einer dominanten Darstellungsgrammatik hegemonialer Öffentlichkeiten, wenn diese Begriffe genau die Instrumente der Abwertung und Minorisierung der minorisierten Öffentlichkeiten sind?[29]

Die Aufgabe, queere Identitäten anerkennend darzustellen, scheint in der Erkundung von Möglichkeiten zur Reformulierung von visuellem Vokabular der Anerkennung zu liegen, um das konflikthafte Verhältnis zwischen Mehrheiten und Minderheiten nicht künstlich zu harmonisieren, sondern einen Raum der Verhandlung zu eröffnen. Dafür finden sich in der Literatur verschiedene Ansätze wie beispielsweise die Mimesis, die Sabine Fuchs für lesbische Femme-Identitäten geprägt hat, oder die „Disidentifikation" mit der José Esteban Muñoz eine distanzierende Haltung gegenüber Identitätspolitiken beschreibt, die eine Affirmation hegemonialer Repräsentation verhindert.[30] Bei beiden Konzepten entsteht ein Raum der Nicht-Anerkennung – eine Leerstelle, die eine Identitätskonstitution jenseits von stabilen Kategorien und Essentialismen sowie die Imagination neuen Vokabulars für diese ermöglicht. Vermeintlich geschlossene Repräsentationssysteme werden so dekonstruiert und fragmentiert und bieten Raum für produktive neue Bilder einer inklusiveren visuellen Kultur.

Queering le Féminin

Als queeres Konzept der Darstellung lesbischer Identitäten orientiert sich *queering le Féminin*, wie bereits in der Einleitung ausgeführt, an Ideen der kritischen Dekonstruktion von lesbischen Identitätsentwürfen. Ausgehend von Monique Wittig, die aufgezeigt hat, dass die heterosexuelle Frau eine im Kontext des „straight mind" künstlich erschaffene Figur ist, werden Lesben hier nicht als Frauen konzeptualisiert, sondern als queeres Subjekt, das sich außerhalb der Binarität von Mann und Frau positioniert.[31] Maßgeblich für die Definition lesbischer Identität ist

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[27] Butler, Emcke und Saar: „Eine Welt, in der Antigone am Leben geblieben wäre", S. 593.

[28] Diese Feststellung verweist unter anderem auf Theorien von Mehrfachdiskriminierung, die kritisieren, dass Aktivismus sich häufig auf eine Diskriminierungsdimension beschränkt und so beispielweise die Frauenbewegung zumeist von einer Norm der weißen, *abled-bodied*, heterosexuellen Frau ausgeht. Identitäten, die dieser Norm nicht entsprechen, sind häufig unsichtbar.

[29] Schaffer: *Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit*, S. 117.

[30] Vgl. Sabine Fuchs: *Femme! Radikal – queer – feminine*, Berlin 2014. Vgl. José Esteban Muñoz: *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Minneapolis 2008.

[31] Wittig definiert den „straight mind" wie folgt: „Les catégories dont il est question fonctionnent comme des concepts primitifs dans un conglomérat de toutes sortes de disciplines, théories, courants, idées que j'appellerai ‚la pensée *straight*' (en référence à la pensée sauvage de Lévi-Strauss). Il s'agit de ‚femme', ‚homme', ‚différence', et de toute la série de concepts qui se trouvent affectés par ce marquage, y compris des concepts tels que ‚histoire', ‚culture', et ‚réel'. Et bien qu'on ait admis ces dernières années qu'il n'y a pas de nature, que tout est culture, il reste au sein de cette culture un noyau de nature qui résiste à l'examen, une relation qui revêt un caractère d'inéluctabilité dans la culture comme dans la nature, c'est la relation hétérosexuelle ou relation obligatoire entre

daher ein Aufbrechen der „heterosexuellen Matrix",[32] d. h. eine Inkongruenz von *sex*, *gender* und *desire*, die darüber hinaus durch weitere Faktoren nicht normativer Identitäten ergänzt werden kann.

Dieser queeren Dekonstruktion lesbischer Identitäten entsprechend orientiert sich *queering le Féminin* als Idee an Muñoz' Konzept der Disidentifikation und nimmt explizit Abstand von einer neuen essentialistischen Definition von (homosexueller) Weiblichkeit. Vielmehr geht es um eine Umgangsform mit normativen Vorstellungen und der eigenen Identität, mit bestehenden Diskursen und ihren Repräsentationen. *Queering le Féminin* ist somit ein performativer Akt – was durch das Gerundium an dieser Stelle unterstrichen wird. Die Performativität verortet sich im Widerstand zu und in der Aushandlung von normativer Weiblichkeit zugleich und trägt das Potential in sich, diese soziokulturelle Konstruktion inhärent zu durchbrechen.

> Aber in der aktiven Reartikulation der Normen, die uns konstituieren, liegt auch die Ressource für Abweichung und Widerstand. Mich interessiert dieser Moment, in dem uns eine Norm auferlegt wird, ohne die wir uns selbst kaum begreifen können; und zugleich muss diese Norm in und durch das, was wir als ‚uns selbst' begreifen, erneuert werden. Und dieser Moment der Erneuerung ist ein Moment der Stilisierung, er birgt die Möglichkeit einer bestimmten Form des Umgestaltens [reworking]. Diese Möglichkeit des Umarbeitens der Norm löst den Zwangscharakter der Norm zwar nicht vollständig auf, aber man könnte sagen, es beutet ihn aus, um etwas anderes [sic] mit ihr zu tun.[33]

Als performativer Akt ist *queering le Féminin* keine radikale Opposition im Sinne der totalen Ablehnung normativer Weiblichkeit, sondern das Bewusstsein über die Einhegung in soziokulturell determinierte Strukturen und die Auseinandersetzung mit der eigenen Identität innerhalb, an den Rändern und außerhalb der Heteronormativität. Das Konzept greift die von Muñoz in der Disidentifikation beschriebene Schwierigkeit für Angehörige von Minderheiten auf, eine eigene Position Mehrheitsgesellschaft zu finden. Es beschreibt also die Fähigkeit, sich in hegemonialen Systemen zu verorten, ohne in ein Extrem – radikalen Widerstand oder Unterwerfung – zu verfallen. Dafür notwendig ist die Disidentifikation mit der Norm.

Queering le Féminin ist kein rein deskriptives Konzept, sondern beinhaltet eine klare politische Intention – gegen die Assimilation an eine dominante Ideologie – im Bewusstsein, dass ein Leben in der Gesellschaft nur möglich ist, wenn der Aushandlungsprozess von Normen nicht verweigert wird. Eine solche Verweigerung findet in dem Moment statt, wo die Abgrenzung so stark ist, dass nicht nur Normativität, sondern die Gesellschaft als Ganzes abgelehnt und eine Parallelgesellschaft konstituiert wird. Das ist nicht das Anliegen von q*ueering le Féminin*, vielmehr geht es um eine Dekonstruktion von Normen, um das Aufzeigen von Differenzen, um ein queeres Projekt, das sich damit auch von schwullesbischer Identitätspolitik distanziert.[34]

Die queere Dekonstruktion als Arbeit an und mit den Normen einer Gesellschaft kann dabei in verschiedenen Modi erfolgen und wird für *queering le Féminin* explizit als mediale Arbeit

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,l'homme' et ,la femme'. Ayant posé comme un principe évident, comme une donnée antérieure à toute science, l'inéluctabilité de cette relation, la pensée straight se livre à une interprétation totalisante à la fois de l'histoire, de la réalité sociale, de la culture et des sociétés, du langage et de tous les phénomènes subjectifs". (Wittig: *La pensée straight*, S. 62)

[32] Butler: *Gender Trouble*, S. 194.

[33] Butler, Emcke und Saar: „Eine Welt, in der Antigone am Leben geblieben wäre", S. 591.

[34] Sara Ahmeds Definition von *queer* folgend, distanziert sich *queering le Féminin* als Konzept von jeglicher Essentialisierung bestimmter Identitätsmerkmale, die in schwullesbischer Politik regelmäßig eine Rolle spielen. Vielmehr ist queer eine sexuelle und politische Orientierung, die Normen in Frage stellt, statt der Heteronormativität eine neue Normierung homosexueller Identitäten entgegenzusetzen. (Vgl. Sara Ahmed: „Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology", in: *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Jg. 12 (2006), S. 543-574.) Dieser Konflikt zwischen Assimilation und Subversion ist queeren Bewegungen seit mehreren Jahrzehnten inhärent. (Vgl. Annamarie Jagose: *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, New York 1996.)

an Praktiken der Repräsentation konzipiert. Das Konzept beschreibt hier nicht einfach lesbische Repräsentationen, sondern darüber hinaus ihre Verhandlungen von normativer Weiblichkeit, welche die Basis einer anerkennenden Sichtbarkeit bilden. Nicht jede (positive) Repräsentation lesbischer Identitäten entspricht diesen Anforderungen; eine homonormative Darstellung beispielsweise würde durch ihren assimilativen Charakter bei gleichzeitiger Benennung der Differenz nur die Bedingungen der Anerkennung im Konditional erfüllen. Dennoch bieten lesbische Repräsentationen – als per se von der Heteronormativität abweichend – eine mögliche Ausgangsbasis für die Inszenierung von *queering le Féminin*. Die Webserie erscheint zusätzlich als geeignetes Genre, das sich in den letzten Jahren wachsender Popularität erfreut und die Produktion unabhängiger Inhalte begünstigt, da der Zugang zu Produktionsmöglichkeiten sowohl für professionelle als auch Laien-Filmemacher*innen jenseits großer Studios oder Fernsehsender möglich ist. Die unabhängige Produktion der Webserien reduziert zwar das Budget, erlaubt aber auch das Behandeln von riskanten oder provokanten Themen und das Fokussieren eines konkreten Publikums, wobei besonders der erste Faktor eine Grundvoraussetzung für *queering le Féminin* ist. Webserien bieten somit gute Ausgangsbedingungen für alternative und anerkennende Sichtbarkeit, die nicht in einer Anerkennung im Konditional verhaftet bleibt.

> Malgré les difficultés, de nombreux créateurs se tournent vers les web-séries pour produire du contenu représentant des thèmes ou des individus qui ne sont pas habituellement représentés à la télévision et dans les films. Elles sont aussi une opportunité d'offrir une alternative à la visibilité des lesbiennes dans les représentations *mainstream*, c'est-à-dire, une alternative à la vision normative des lesbiennes comme blanches, féminines et de classe aisée.[35]

Auch die Besonderheiten bei der Verbreitung von Webserien über das Internet begünstigen *queering le Féminin*, da hier niedrigschwellig eine Kommunikation zwischen Produzent*innen und Rezipient*innen stattfinden kann, die möglicherweise auch den weiteren Inhalt beeinflusst und somit den Verhandlungscharakter des Mediums hervorhebt.

Analyse

Die Montréaler Webserie *Féminin/Féminin* zeichnet sich durch eine unabhängige Produktion der ersten Staffel aus, die von der lesbischen Community-Organisation *Lez Spread the Word (LSTW)* initiiert wurde.[36] Die zweite Staffel wurde im Programm von *icitou.tv*, dem frankophonen Internetangebot von *Radio Canada* produziert.[37] Im Vergleich beider Staffeln ist folglich eine größere Nähe der zweiten Staffel zur Fernsehserie wahrzunehmen. Während in der ersten Staffel das Leben der verschiedenen Protagonist*innen einer lesbischen Freundesclique in Montréal in den einzelnen Episoden jeweils anhand von Dyaden – zumeist Paaren – dargestellt wird, treten in der zweiten Staffel in jeder Episode mehrere Protagonistinnen auf und die Narration wird dadurch komplexer. Inhaltlich steht der Alltag der Freundesclique mit Themen wie Flirten, Beziehungsbildung und -problemen, Kinderwunsch, Ehe und Krankheit im Mittelpunkt. Zusätzlich werden insbesondere in der ersten Staffel die Episoden immer wieder durch Interviewsequenzen unterbrochen, in denen die Regisseurin den Protagonist*innen Fragen zu

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[35] Émilie Marolleau: *L'homosexualité féminine à l'écran: quelle visibilité pour les lesbiennes au cinéma américain et dans les séries télévisées américaines*, auf: http://www.applis.univ-tours.fr/theses/2015/emilie.marolleau_4470.pdf [zuletzt aufgerufen am 20.04.2020], S. 247.

[36] Vgl. Website der Community-Organisation *Lez Spread the Word*, auf: https://lezspreadtheword.com/ [zuletzt aufgerufen am 20.04.2020].

[37] Vgl. Website der Webserie *Féminin/Féminin*, auf: https://ici.tou.tv/feminin-feminin [zuletzt aufgerufen am 20.04.2020].

den verschiedenen Themen stellt. Während dieser Szenen bleibt für das Publikum verborgen, ob es sich um ein Interview mit den Protagonist*innen in ihren Rollen oder mit den Schauspieler*innen handelt und auch, ob diese ihre eigenen Erfahrungen und Meinungen teilen oder vorgeschriebene Antworten geben. Auf Nachfrage erläuterte die Regisseurin zu diesem Punkt, dass die Fragen von ihr konzipiert und vorher mit den Schauspielerinnen kommuniziert waren. Diese waren frei in ihren Antworten, konnten aber für den Fall, dass sie keine Ideen haben, auf Inspirationen von Robichaud zurückgreifen. Das Offenlegen der Vorgehensweise klärt nicht die Frage, ob es sich um schauspielerische Fiktion oder informierte Interviews handelt. In der Konsequenz bilden diese Szenen eine hybride Form und begründen damit den semi-fiktionalen Charakter der Serie. In der zweiten Staffel werden zunächst keine Interviews mehr geführt, was den Eindruck der Orientierung an klassischen Fernsehserien verstärkt; erst in der letzten Episode kommt es zu einem abschließenden Interview.

Die Entwicklung von einer selbstständig produzierten Webserie zum Teil des Programms von *Radio Canada* kann unter Umständen auch als Ausdruck einer Hypervisibilität gelesen werden, da so eine queere Repräsentation im *Mainstream* sichtbar gemacht wird.[38] Damit muss auch in Frage gestellt werden, ob die Möglichkeit der Darstellung marginalisierter Identitäten, die dem Genre Webserie inhärent ist, in *Féminin/Féminin* prinzipiell erhalten bleibt.

> La web-série est un exemple de réappropriation d'un genre dominant par la marge pour la marge –
> ‚for us, by us'. En interpellant personnellement cette communauté, elle les encourage à s'investir
> dans la production de séries ou de films évoquant des problématiques qui leur sont propres, dans le
> but de leur donner plus de visibilité.[39]

Ob diese Neuaneignung marginalisierter Positionen in *Féminin/Féminin* versucht oder gar erreicht wird, soll in der Analyse thematisiert werden. Dafür stelle ich die These auf, dass die Perspektive *queering le Féminin* der entscheidende Indikator zur Beantwortung der Frage, ob es sich um anerkennende Sichtbarkeit handelt, ist. *Queering le Féminin* verlangt auf zwei Ebenen eine komplexe Darstellung: zum einen müsste die Repräsentation über lesbische Identitäten hinaus Marginalisierung thematisieren und durchbrechen. Zum anderen müsste eine Essentialisierung der Protagonist*innen vermieden werden, indem die Verhandlung ihrer Identität und ihrer Normen zentral gemacht wird und sich diese nicht in heteronormative Muster einschreiben. Die Analyse wird daher exemplarisch an zwei normativ aufgeladenen Themen durchgeführt, die in der Webserie zentral verhandelt werden: Mutterschaft und Ehe. Zur Beurteilung der Sichtbarkeitskonzeption der Webserie vor dem Hintergrund von *queering le Féminin* stehen jene Praktiken im Fokus, welche als Reproduktion oder modifizierende Reartikulation von normativen Vorstellungen diskursiv wirksam werden.

Fortpflanzung und Mutterschaft werden in beiden Staffeln von *Féminin/Féminin* zentral vor allem an den Protagonistinnen Steph und Sam, welche die Verwirklichung ihres Kinderwunsches planen und am Ende der zweiten Staffel Eltern werden, thematisiert. Bereits in der ersten Episode der Webserie wird in einer Interviewsequenz[40] die Frage nach dem persönlichen Kinderwunsch gestellt. Alle befragten Protagonist*innen äußern, dass sie Mutter werden wollen, teilweise allerdings erst in einigen Jahren. Zusätzliche Schwierigkeiten bei der Realisierung des

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[38] Vgl. Florian Grandena und Cristina Johnston: *Cinematic Queerness: Gay and Lesbian Hypervisibility in Contemporary Francophone Feature Films*, Bern 2011.

[39] Émilie Marolleau: „Réappropriation et intertextualité dans la série *Girltrash*", in: *TV Series*, Jg. 2 (2015), S. 211-224, hier S. 223.

[40] Chloé Robichaud: *Féminin/Féminin*, CAN 2014-2018, Staffel 1, Episode 1, 10:40.

Kinderwunsches aufgrund der sexuellen Orientierung werden nicht angesprochen. Die Beantwortung der Frage lässt im Allgemeinen keine Rückschlüsse auf die sexuelle Orientierung der Charaktere zu, was in den Kontext dieser Interviewsequenz passt, da vorher mehrfach festgestellt wurde, dass keine Unterschiede zwischen heterosexuellen und homosexuellen Paaren bestünden. Darüber hinaus wird auch nicht erwähnt, dass Mutterschaft die Assoziation mit heterosexueller Weiblichkeit wecken und somit zu Diskriminierung führen könnte.

In der zweiten Staffel von *Féminin/Féminin* wird das Thema Mutterschaft noch stringenter behandelt als in der ersten, insbesondere, weil Steph und Sam nun konkret die Frage einer möglichen Familiengründung verhandeln und am Ende der Staffel ihr Kind geboren wird. Zentral ist dabei zunächst die Aushandlung zwischen Steph und Sam, wer das Kind austragen wird. Hier wird also – in der Wahlmöglichkeit der biologischen Elternschaft – die sexuelle Orientierung der Protagonistinnen mit einbezogen. Da Sam an Brustkrebs erkrankt ist, kann sie nicht, wie geplant, die biologische Mutter werden und wirft der überraschten Steph vor, dass sie nie vorschlägt, selbst das Kind auszutragen: „Le sais-tu ce qui me rend triste, moi? C'est que tu proposes jamais de le porter."[41] Ausgehend von dieser Szene wird gezeigt, wie sich Steph mit der Idee, selbst ein Kind auszutragen, auseinandersetzt. Interessant daran ist, dass sie in der Interviewsequenz der ersten Episode klar ausgedrückt hatte, dass sie gern Mutter wäre – Steph verbindet Mutterschaft also nicht selbstverständlich damit, selbst schwanger zu sein und ein Kind zur Welt zu bringen. Die Auseinandersetzung Stephs mit dem Gedanken an eine Schwangerschaft wird forciert durch ein Ultimatum, das Sam ihr mit der Wahl stellt, ein Kind zu bekommen oder Konsequenzen für sie beide – gemeint ist hier wohl eine Trennung – zu ziehen.[42] Stephs Überlegungsprozess lässt sich in zwei Phasen einteilen: zunächst beschäftigt sie sich mit den äußeren Veränderungen, die ihr Körper durchlaufen würde. Sie steckt sich ein Kissen unter das T-Shirt und betrachtet sich selbst kritisch im Spiegel. Die Szene ist mit vier Sekunden sehr kurz und die persönliche Auseinandersetzung wird somit nur angedeutet und nicht verbalisiert.[43] Eine Episode später scheint diese innere Auseinandersetzung bereits abgeschlossen und stattdessen steht die Frage, ob sie eine gute Mutter sein könnte, die vorher – als nicht biologische Mutter – nicht angesprochen wurde, im Zentrum. Steph holt sich hier Rat bei Céline, die sie als ihre „amie la plus mature" bezeichnet. Céline bestätigt Stephs Fähigkeit zur Mutterschaft und fügt hinzu, dass sie schwanger sehr schön aussehen werde.[44] Besonders die Feststellung der Schönheit von Schwangeren verweist auf ein klassisches Stereotyp heteronormativer Weiblichkeit und wird hier nicht verhandelt, sondern reproduziert. Die zunehmende Weiblichkeit Stephs wird in den nächsten beiden Episoden inszeniert. Ihre Ängste vor der Schwanger- und Mutterschaft werden von Sam belächelt und als hysterisch und unbegründet beurteilt.[45] Das erinnert stark an Darstellungen von Frauen, die aufgrund der Schwangerschaft vermeintlich

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[41] Ebd., S. 2, E. 3, 07:56-08:07.
[42] Sam: „Je t'aime de tout mon cœur. […] Mais je veux qu'on soit une famille. La vie est courte pis c'est mon rêve, tu le sais. Pis si toi, tu le partages pas, ben... j'aimerais ça que tu me le dises bientôt. Pis à partir de là, ben, on prendra des dispositions pour nous deux. Je veux pas te forcer à quelque chose que tu veux pas." Steph: „Non, mais tu veux pas me forcer, mais tu me donnes un ultimatum, là." Sam: „Non, mais tu veux des enfants, toi aussi, non?" Steph: „Ben oui, oui, mais attends, c'est parce que c'était pas ça le plan." Sam: „Je comprends. Prends le temps d'y penser. Bye! Bon voyage". (Ebd., S. 2, E. 5, 03:00-03:42.)
[43] Ebd., S. 2, E. 5, 12:40-12:44.
[44] Céline: „Ben, je pense que c'est merveilleux. Tu vas être si belle enceinte." Steph: „Ah, je sais pas, mais est-ce que... est-ce que tu penses que j'ai ce qu'il faut pour être une bonne mère?" Céline: „Oh! Mais c'est sûr. Voyons!" (Ebd., S. 2, E. 6, 0:44-01:05.)
[45] Ebd., S. 2, E. 7, 0:00-03:47.

hormonell gesteuert und weniger zurechnungsfähig sind. Hier wird also nicht nur klischeehafte Weiblichkeit vorausgesetzt, sondern insbesondere auch ein misogynes Stereotyp unproblematisiert reproduziert. Dieses widerspricht sowohl in der frauenfeindlichen Komponente, als auch durch seinen biologischen Essentialismus *queering le Féminin*. In der letzten Episode wird noch einmal die Affirmation der Schwangerschaft und ihre Verbindung zu Weiblichkeit bekräftigt, wenn Steph feststellt: „Je dirais que je suis déstabilisée dans ma féminité. Je me suis jamais sentie aussi femme […]."[46] Anhand dieser Äußerung entsteht der Eindruck, dass die Schwangerschaft Steph zwar in ihrer Identität verunsichert, aber in ihrer Weiblichkeit bestätigt und somit eine vorher eventuell queere Identität feminisiert. Stephs Verunsicherung, sich in der Rolle der leiblichen Mutter zu sehen ohne ihren Wunsch nach Mutterschaft allgemein in Frage zu stellen, kann als ein Ansatz von *queering le Féminin* gesehen werden, während insgesamt eine unkritische, heteronormative Sicht auf die Verbindung aus Weiblichkeit und Mutterschaft überwiegt. Die Verhandlung von Mutterschaft bleibt dabei hinter früheren Diskursen in Serien wie *The L-Word* zurück, da dort Fragen der Samenspende, des Sorgerechts und der Diskriminierung verhandelt werden, die in Konflikten mit Vertreter*innen der Mehrheitsgesellschaft entstehen.[47] In *Féminin/Féminin* wird durch Leerstellen in der Erzählung – wie wird Steph schwanger? – und durch die Situierung der gesamten Handlung in der lesbischen Clique eine vereinfachende Version lesbischer Mutterschaft dargestellt. Diese rekurriert auf heteronormative Weiblichkeitsbilder und verhindert die Aushandlung von damit verbundenen Normen, die durch die sexuelle Orientierung per se in Frage gestellt werden könnten. Die Darstellung von Mutterschaft erfüllt somit nicht die Perspektive von *queering le Féminin* und kann daher auch nicht als Indikator für eine anerkennende Sichtbarkeit lesbischer Identitäten gewertet werden.

Ein zweites Thema, das sich durch die gesamte Webserie zieht und in Verbindung zu gesellschaftlichen Normvorstellungen – wie monogamen Paarbeziehungen mit Kindern – steht, ist die Ehe. Zentral verhandelt wird das Thema am Charakter von Céline und ihrer deutlich jüngeren Partnerin Julie. Das Paar hat sich zu Beginn der Serie in einer Bar kennengelernt und wird bereits am Ende der ersten Staffel als stabile, harmonische Beziehung inszeniert.[48] Die Idee einer möglichen Hochzeit von Céline und Julie wird in der zweiten Staffel und hier – ähnlich wie das Thema Mutterschaft – stringenter als in der ersten Staffel behandelt. Die Ehe wird in ihrer Funktion als Instrument gegen die Diskriminierung, die Céline und Julie wegen ihres Altersunterschieds erfahren, als schützende Institution thematisiert. Eine der Freundinnen, Anne, macht Céline in Abwesenheit von Julie den Vorschlag, dass die beiden über eine Heirat nachdenken sollten, um unangenehmen Kommentaren zu entgehen. Diese Idee erntet allgemeine Begeisterung außer von Émily und Alex, die sich skeptisch gegenüber dem Vorhaben äußern.[49] Céline selbst scheint angetan und macht Julie, die kurz später wiederkommt, eine Liebeserklärung, die letztere als beinahe ausgesprochenen Heiratsantrag interpretiert und ihrerseits antizipiert, dass sie in diesem Fall einwilligen würde.[50] Es wird hier dargestellt, dass es über die Beziehung hinaus einen besonderen Grund braucht, um die Ehe einzugehen, in diesem Fall die Legitimation einer Beziehung mit Altersunterschied. Besonders im Kontext mit einer Äußerung Stephs aus der ersten Staffel, in der sie klar zwischen Ehe und gemeinsamen Kindern als Etap-

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[46] Ebd., S. 2, E. 8, 03:28.
[47] Chaiken: *The L Word*.
[48] Robichaud: *Féminin/Féminin*, S. 1, E. 8, 06:58-07:44.
[49] Ebd., S. 2, E. 1, 10:00.
[50] Ebd., S. 2, E. 1, 14:35.

pen einer Beziehung unterscheidet und diese nicht als einander bedingend wertet,[51] wird deutlich, dass eine heteronormative Vorstellung der Ehe – als sich selbst durch Liebe und gemeinsamen Kinderwunsch legitimierende Institution – nicht affirmativ umgesetzt wird. Dennoch scheint die Ehe als gesellschaftliche Institution respektiert zu werden, sodass davon ausgegangen wird, dass auch andere Menschen die Paarbeziehung zwischen Céline und Julie in dieser Form eher als solche annehmen würden.

Der Heiratsantrag einige Episoden später äußert sich nicht in einer stereotypen Form, da sowohl der Ring als auch Elemente wie ein Kniefall oder eine Liebeserklärung fehlen. Stattdessen stehen die konkrete Frage und der Ort im *Village Gai*, die *Rue St-Catherine* mit ihren traditionellen Regenbogengirlanden, im Mittelpunkt. In dieser Szene wird die konkrete Bedeutung der Entscheidung zu heiraten nicht genauer ausgehandelt, sondern eine unausgesprochen bekannte Definition der Ehe zu Grunde gelegt. Damit findet eine Normvorstellung von Ehe als Orientierungspunkt Anwendung, die implizit vorausgesetzt und so reproduziert wird. Erst in der letzten Episode wird in den Interviewsequenzen noch genauer definiert, wie sich Céline und Julie die Ehe vorstellen. Dabei fällt insbesondere auf, dass Céline die Monogamie als wichtigen Wert ohne genauere Erklärung ihrer Definition derselben setzt,[52] während Julie detaillierter ihre Vorstellung der gemeinsamen Entwicklung des Paares und der gegenseitigen Fürsorge erklärt, die Monogamie nicht voraussetzt, sondern als Ergebnis hat.[53] Durch beide Äußerungen wird dennoch eine Verbindung von Ehe und Monogamie hergestellt, die diese im heteronormativen Ideal der (sexuell) treuen Partnerschaft erscheinen lässt.

An der Darstellung des Themas Ehe in *Féminin/Féminin* wird eine Überschneidung von Hetero- und Homonormativität deutlich. Als institutionalisierte Paarbeziehung, die einen besonderen Schutz erfährt und sich durch Exklusivität auszeichnet, bildet sie heteronormative Ideale ab. Gleichzeitig findet sich aber eine Abweichung von denselben insbesondere in der Trennung von Kindern und Ehe, was als homonormatives Element – der unmöglichen Selbstverständlichkeit der Fortpflanzung – interpretiert werden kann. Eine explizite Reartikulation der Normvorstellung von Ehe, die auch eine Neudefinition des Verständnisses dieser Institution implizieren würde, ist allerdings nicht zu beobachten, weshalb hier nicht von einem Beispiel für *queering le Féminin* ausgegangen, sondern eher eine Verschiebung hin zur Homonormativität erkannt werden kann.

Fazit

Dieser Artikel hat sich der Frage einer anerkennenden Sichtbarkeit lesbischer Identitäten gewidmet und deren Umsetzung im Québecer Kontext anhand der Montréaler Webserie *Féminin/Féminin* untersucht. Dabei stand zunächst die Frage im Raum, wie anerkennende Sichtbarkeit zu definieren ist. Der Terminus kann im weitesten Sinne in den *Cultural Studies* verortet werden, die sich unter anderem mit visueller Kultur und ihrem Zusammenhang zu gesellschaftlichen Machtverhältnissen befassen. Die kritische Medienwissenschaft legt darüber hinaus einen besonderen Schwerpunkt auf marginalisierte Identitäten und schafft so die Basis für Jo-

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[51]   Ebd., S. 1, E. 3, 04:35-04:45.

[52]   „J'en pense beaucoup de bien. Oui, je trouve ça formidable. J'espère que Julie aussi trouve ça formidable, hein?" (Ebd., S. 2, E. 8, 07:24-07:32.)

[53]   „Je pense qu'on peut changer pis évoluer ensemble pis se surprendre. Pis pas avoir envie ni une ni l'autre d'aller voir ailleurs parce qu'on prend soin l'une de l'autre pis on se transforme, on évolue, fait que ouais, ouais, j'y crois, absolument". (Ebd., S. 2, E. 8, 07:32-07:46.)

hanna Schaffers Theorie anerkennender Sichtbarkeit. Schaffer dekonstruiert den häufig voraus-gesetzten kongruenten Zusammenhang zwischen zunehmender Sichtbarkeit und zunehmender gesellschaftlicher Macht minorisierter Identitäten. Vielmehr betont sie die Wichtigkeit der Art und Weise der Darstellung, die drei verschiedene Sichtbarkeitsmodi hervorbringen: die Hyper-visibilität, die Anerkennung im Konditional und die anerkennende Sichtbarkeit. Letztere ist für Schaffer der ideale Darstellungsmodus, der sich dadurch auszeichnet, Identitäten in der Dar-stellung weder durch positive noch durch negative Stereotype festzuschreiben, sondern in der ständigen Aushandlung tradierte Normen hinterfragt und so die Basis für Anerkennung auf der kulturellen *und* ökonomisch-rechtlichen Ebene bildet. Dazu notwendig ist die Erkundung neuer Darstellungsweisen, eines neuen visuellen Vokabulars, das an die Stelle altbekannter, stereoty-per Bilder tritt.

Die von mir vorgeschlagene und in diesem Artikel in der Analyse angewandte Perspektive *queering le Féminin* hat sich zum Ziel gesetzt, die anerkennende Sichtbarkeit lesbischer Iden-titäten in Webserien zu konzeptualisieren. Dafür gehe ich davon aus, dass Lesben queere Sub-jekte sind, die die heterosexuelle Matrix durchbrechen und damit eine Disidentifikation von normativer Weiblichkeit leisten können. Konkret bedeutet das die Neuaushandlung von Weib-lichkeit mit dem politischen Ziel, die Heteronormativität zu destabilisieren.

Die Analyse der Webserie *Féminin/Féminin* gründet auf der Konzeptualisierung von *quee-ring le Féminin* und untersucht ihre Umsetzung anhand der Verhandlung der Themen Mutter-schaft und Ehe. Beide Konstrukte können dabei als beeinflusst von soziokulturellen Deutungs-mustern bezeichnet werden, wodurch ihnen ein normativer Charakter innewohnt. Die Themen werden in der Webserie zentral dargestellt und durch das Erwähnen ausgewählter normativer Aspekte auch ansatzweise verhandelt. Insgesamt lässt sich aber eine Reproduktion normativer Vorstellungen feststellen: die Darstellung von Mutterschaft in der Webserie kann als hetero-normativ klassifiziert werden, da sie einerseits genutzt wird, um genormte (biologische) Weib-lichkeit zu inszenieren und andererseits nicht auf die spezifischen Bedürfnisse eines lesbischen Elternpaares eingegangen wird. Das Motiv der Ehe folgt in *Féminin/Féminin* einer homonor-mativen Vorstellung, weil zwar Fortpflanzung nicht mit Ehe gleichgesetzt wird, ansonsten aber normative Vorstellungen wie beispielsweise unausgesprochen vorausgesetzte Monogamie und eine traditionelle Hochzeitszeremonie reproduziert werden. Es kann also von einer Verschie-bung der heteronormativen Konzeption von Ehe zu einem homonormativen Konstrukt gespro-chen werden. Mit dieser normativen Repräsentation, die dennoch ausschließlich positive Bilder und Stereotype nutzt, ist *Féminin/Féminin* ein Beispiel für eine Anerkennung im Konditional. Diese trägt durch die positiven Bilder möglicherweise – wie von Chloé Robichaud intendiert – zum *Empowerment* lesbischer Identitäten bei, muss aber aus zwei Gründen problematisiert wer-den. Erstens ist das positive Bild von genormten lesbischen Identitäten, wie schon in der Ein-leitung im Zitat von Sam Bourcier erwähnt, prädestiniert dafür, Ausschlüsse mehrfach margi-nalisierter Personen zu befördern. In der gesamten Webserie treten Protagonist*innen aus der gehobenen Mittelschicht Québecs auf, die *abled-bodied*, zum Großteil weiß und sehr feminin sind. Dieses reduzierte Bild lesbischer Lebensrealitäten in Montréal macht die Abweichung anerkennbar und schließt Identitäten, die nicht ins dieses Bild passen, aus. Zweitens wird durch die Situierung der Handlung in einer lesbischen Clique und das Vermeiden von Konfliktsitua-tionen mit der Mehrheitsgesellschaft eine Trennung zwischen Norm und hier positiv dargestell-ter Abweichung reproduziert. Dieses ermöglicht die Trennung von Norm und Abweichung und darüber hinaus – durch die Affirmation der eigenen Abweichung – die Stabilisierung von He-

teronormativität. Diese zeigt sich auch in der wiederholt vorkommenden Annahme, dass sich homosexuelle Beziehungen nicht von heterosexuellen Beziehungen unterscheiden, ohne zu erwähnen, dass die rechtlichen Rahmenbedingungen Unterschiede hervorbringen und Homophobie alltägliche Diskriminierung provoziert.

Beide Aspekte führen zu einer Normalisierung bestimmter lesbischer Identitäten, die andere ausschließt und solidarisches Handeln gegen Homophobie und Diskriminierung aufgrund der Darstellung einer heilen Welt überflüssig erscheinen lässt. Wie Schaffer ausführt, ist hier ein Beispiel gegeben, in dem zunehmende Sichtbarkeit die politische Handlungsfähigkeit eher lähmt als befördert.

Die Frage, wie lesbische Identitäten anerkennend sichtbar gemacht werden können, kann damit noch nicht beantwortet werden. Deutlich wird aber, dass es unbequemere Bilder, weniger Klarheit und größere Vielfalt braucht, die unsere Sehgewohnheiten in Frage stellen und nicht das Ziel angepasster Normalität verfolgen. Die Webserie wäre dafür dennoch ein geeignetes Genre, da sie die Möglichkeit unabhängiger Produktion für genau solche – nicht zwingend massentaugliche – Inhalte hat. Bleibt zu hoffen, dass sich Filmemacher*innen immer wieder aufs Neue an unbequeme Bilder heranwagen und nicht in die Falle affirmativer Darstellungen der gewollten Normalität tappen, die letztendlich eher einschränkend als ermächtigend wirkt.

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ANNA SMITDERK (Kassel)

Dismantling the Gender Binary Myth –
Transgender Representation in Xavier Dolan's *Laurence Anyways*

Introduction

In 2014, *TIME* Magazine announced the transgender tipping point, declaring a significant shift in the depiction of transgender individuals in mainstream media, such as film and television.[1] Due to its release in 2012, the drama *Laurence Anyways*, directed by Xavier Dolan who is famous for his queer film repertoire, can be categorised as one of few Canadian examples of the films that led to the declaration of the tipping point. The film takes place in Canada in the late 1980s. The main character, Laurence Alia, is a successful writer and literature teacher who lives with his girlfriend, Frédérique Bellair (Fred) in Montréal. When Laurence turns 35, he comes out as transgender and tells Fred that he wants to live as a woman from now on.[2] Their relationship continues, although turbulent, with Fred supporting Laurence in her transition. Eventually they break up and live separate lives for about five years (1990-1995) while Laurence transitions further, faces discrimination, works on the relationship with her mother, finds a group of fellow queer friends and finishes a collection of poetry. Fred, who works in the film industry, moves away and marries another man with whom she has a son. After five years, they re-kindle their romance when Laurence sends Fred her finished book and they run away together, before breaking up for good when Fred tells Laurence that she had an abortion around the time Laurence came out, allegedly to save their relationship.[3]

The analysis of the film is guided by the question how the transgender character is depicted in *Laurence Anyways* and in how far the portrayal challenges a heteronormative and therefore binary understanding of gender.

To examine the posed questions, the concepts of gender and transgender have to be determined first. Ensuing the etymological establishments, this article will then give an overview on transgender media depiction in general, including common stereotypes and current developments, as well as highlighting the limited corpus of Canadian transgender media representation. Finally, this article surveys Xavier Dolan's 2012 drama *Laurence Anyways*, studying the way the film depicts Laurence's transgender identity by paying attention to aesthetic tools that are used to portray this identity, such as costume, lighting and music. Also, the analysis of the film will focus on the relationship of Laurence and her girlfriend Fred and in how far the depiction of their relationship influences the portrayal of Laurence's transgender identity.

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[1] Katie Steinmetz: "The Transgender Tipping Point", in: *TIME*, 29.05.2014, on: https://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/ [last accessed on 30.11.2020].
[2] Please note that from this point forward, this article uses female pronouns to address the character of Laurence in order to conform her gender identity.
[3] Cf. Xavier Dolan: *Laurence Anyways*, CAN 2012, 2:10:44-2:16:17.

Theoretical Approach

Gender and Transgender

In order to analyse *Laurence Anyways*, this chapter will first present a theoretical outline focusing on transgender studies and concepts and later touch upon transgender representation in the media, especially in Canadian television and film. The first part of the theoretical approach will define the concept of gender as a social construct and illustrate in how far transgender people disrupt the gender binary.

Transgender identities subvert the gender binary to a certain extent. They threaten the hegemonic understanding that there are two, and only two, genders, i. e. male and female. In order to examine transgender as a disruption to the dichotic system, the gender binary itself must be examined first. This chapter will therefore review the gender binary by examining the relationship of sex and gender before then elaborating on transgender identities as a disturbance of the hegemonic conception of gender.

Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman's essay "Doing Gender", first published in 1987, serves as a starting point for the analyses of the relations between sex and gender. West and Zimmerman differentiate between "sex, sex category, and gender".[4] The first concept, *sex*, is defined as "a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males".[5] *Sex category* is the application of the agreed upon essential sex criteria. This allows for identification of each other as either male of female in social interactions. Finally, West and Zimmerman define *gender* as a kind of display of one's sex category, i. e., acting in the way that is normatively considered to be appropriate for one's gender.[6] Therefore, gender is based on, but also reinforces "claims to membership in a sex category".[7] West and Zimmerman define gender as a doing, something that someone does rather than something someone automatically has. They call this process "doing gender"[8] and therefore stress the highly interactional character of it.

Similar to West and Zimmerman, Judith Butler shares the understanding of the socially constructed character of the biological concept of sex. In *Gender Trouble*, first published in 1990, Butler challenges the concept of sex as a definite, naturally given concept:

> If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.[9]

Butler deduces that if gender means 'socially constructed' and sex is as socially constructed as gender, sex equals gender, categorising it as a "gendered category" because the process in which the two sexes are created is a gendered process.[10]

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4   Candance West and Don H. Zimmermann: "Doing Gender", in: *Gender & Society: Official Publication of Sociologists for Women in Society*, V. 1 (1987), I. 2, p. 125-151, here: p. 125.
5   Ibid., p. 127.
6   Ibid.
7   Ibid.
8   Ibid., p. 126.
9   Judith Butler: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York et. al. 1990, p. 6.
10   Ibid., p. 10.

Gender not only happens in but shapes our everyday experience significantly. It is this all-encompassing character of gender that qualifies it, as Judith Lorber calls it, as a "social institution":[11]

> Gender is a human invention, like language, kinship, religion, and technology; like them, gender organizes human social life in culturally patterned ways. Gender organizes social relations in everyday life as well as in the major social structures, such as social class and the hierarchies of bureaucratic organizations (Acker 1998, 1990). The gendered microstructure of the gendered macrostructure reproduce and reinforce each other. The social reproduction of gender in individuals reproduces the gendered societal structure; as individuals act out gender norms and expectations in face-to-face interaction, they are constructing gendered systems of dominance and power.[12]

Similar to West and Zimmerman's concept of 'doing gender', Lorber states that gender as a social institution is unescapable and internalised by each individual. It represents a framework that is established "prior to any individual's birth, education, and social patterning"[13] and is therefore "internalized and willingly re-enacted",[14] i. e. reproduced constantly.

Two sexes dictate two genders. Butler attributes this dichotomy to "compulsory heterosexuality,[15] i. e. sex and gender attribution based on sexuality and ultimately reproduction, therefore creating to opposite sexes that secure heterosexuality. Thus, compulsory heterosexuality constructs the gender binary that is constituted of two genders, male and female, and two genders only, in which the one defines itself by being the opposite of the other and *vice versa*.[16]

In how far sexuality determines gender is manifested in Butler's concept of the "heterosexual matrix"[17] that describes "that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized".[18] According to Butler,

> '[i]ntelligible' genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produces by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the 'expression' of 'effect' of both manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice.[19]

Transgender people, i. e. individuals whose gender identity is antithetic to their sex assigned at birth, disrupt the heterosexual matrix due to their incoherence of sex, sexuality, and gender and therefore, "fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined".[20] Butler explains that due to this disruption, gender identities that do not fall within the gender binary of male or female become impossible:

> [t]he cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of identities cannot 'exist' – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender.[21]

Transgender is an umbrella term for a number of these alleged impossible gender identities. Etymologically, the term describes a movement from one category to the other, i. e. from male

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[11]   Judith Lorber: *Paradoxes of Gender*, New Haven 1994, p. 1.
[12]   Ibid., p. 10.
[13]   Ibid., p. 7.
[14]   Ibid.
[15]   Butler: *Gender Trouble*, p. 24.
[16]   Cf. Ibid., p. 31.
[17]   Ibid., p. 7.
[18]   Ibid., p. 208.
[19]   Ibid., p. 23.
[20]   Ibid.
[21]   Ibid., p. 24.

to female or vice *versa*. Before the 1980s, there used to be a distinction between transsexuals, i. e. individuals who feel 'misplaced' in their sexed body and, and transvestites, i. e. people who cross-dressed without any sexual motivation. In the 1960s, the physician Harry Benjamin described the difference as follows:

> But while 'dressing' would satisfy the true transvestite (who is content with his morphological sex), it is only incidental and note more than a partial or temporary help to the transsexual. True transsexuals feel that they belong to the other sex, they want to be and function as members of the opposite sex, not only to appear as such. For them, their sex organs, the primary (testes) as well as the secondary (penis and others) are disgusting deformities that must be changed by the surgeon's knife. This attitude appears to be the chief differential diagnostic point between the two syndromes (sets of symptoms) – that is, those of transvestism and transsexualism.[22]

However, since gender dysphoria had and still has nothing to do with sexuality, the term transsexualism was misleading. Therefore, Benjamin introduced the term transgenderism to describe individuals whose sexed body and gender identity do not cohere. During the 1970s, the term transgenderism became the norm when speaking about transsexualism and transvestism, foreshadowing the development into an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of gender identities outside of the binary.[23] Nowadays, transgender represents variety and inclusivity. Even though individuals identify themselves by very specific terms, e. g. gender fluid, gender nonbinary, drag queens, cross-dressers, etc., the community is united under the umbrella term transgender, representing the development from separation to unity.[24]

Transgender Television and Film

How is this diverse community represented in the media? The following chapter will present an overview on the development of transgender media representation that has moved beyond derogatory stereotypes to a more complex depiction nowadays.

In 2014, *TIME* magazine declared the transgender tipping point, celebrating the amount of transgender visibility in mainstream media ranging from news reports to television series such as *Orange is the New Black* or *Transparent*.[25] However, before this peak in trans media visibility, transgender characters were sparse and the few that were present on screen, were portrayed negatively: the depiction of transgender people ranged between victims or villains,[26] whereas they were often portrayed as name-less sex workers, feeding into the hyper-sexualization especially of male-to-female transpeople, as "cold-blood killer[s]" and in general as "victimized, evil, deceptive, or pathological".[27] The idea of transgender people as deceptive is manifested in what Talia Mae Bettcher calls "the evil deceiver".[28] This stereotype stems from media depictions in which violence against the transgender character is justified based on the

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[22] Harry Benjamin: *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, New York 1966, p. 11.

[23] Cf. Ibid., p. 14.

[24] In this paper, I will focus on male-to-female transgender identities as represented by the character of Laurence in *Laurence Anyways*.

[25] Cf. Steinmetz: "The Transgender Tipping Point".

[26] GLAAD: "Victims or Villains: Examining Ten Years of Transgender Images on Television", on: www.glaad.org/publications/victims-or-villains-examining-ten-years-transgender-images-television [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

[27] Hilary Malatino: "The Transgender Tipping Point: The Social Death of Sophia Burset", in April Kalogeropoulos Householder and Adrienne M. Trier-Bieniek (Ed.): *Feminist Perspectives on* Orange is the New Black*: Thirteen Critical Essays*, Jefferson 2016, p. 95-111, here: p. 97.

[28] Talia Mae Bettcher: "Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion", in: *Hypatia*, V. 22 (2007), I. 3, p. 43-65, here: p. 43.

understanding that due to their incoherence of sexed body and presented gender identity, transgender characters deceive cis-characters and threaten their heterosexuality. This reveal of the transgender character's sexed body usually takes place in a sex or rape scene.

This stereotypically negative portrayal of transgender individuals and storylines seemed to have changed by 2014 when the Transgender Tipping Point was announced. However, the tipping point implied that transgender media representation peaked in terms of quantity and quality, when in fact, transgender people were still facing significant discrimination in real life, e. g. a rapidly increasing number of trans people being murdered on a regular basis, as well as the absence of news coverage on these murders and other discriminatory problems the transgender community is facing.

In Canadian media, transgender individuals and storylines are still rarely visible. Overall, the number of Canadian films and television series including or focusing on the transgender issue is almost non-existent. The Queer Media Base Canada-Québec lists about 33 media projects depicting transgender identities.[29] However, the majority of entries represent low-budget, independent productions such as short films or university projects. In terms of mainstream media, the number of transgender films is a mere three. In terms of television, there are a few noteworthy portrayals, e. g. the series *The Switch*, a 2016 production written by transgender person Amy Fox that aired on the channel OutTV, a network that primarily caters to a LGBTQ+ audience. The comedy series follows Sü, a trans woman who is dismissed from her job after coming out as transgender and now re-structures her life due to her now openly lived gender identity. The series is mostly praised for the fact that all transgender characters are played by actual transgender people, rather than cis-gendered actors.[30]

Other Canadian television productions that feature transgender characters at certain points are *Orphan Black* (2013-2017) and *Degrassi* (2001-2015). Both shows are often praised for their positive portrayal of LGBTQ+ identities and topics. However, the character of Tony Sawicki on *Orphan Black* is only introduced to immediately disappear again, much to the disapproval and disappointment of fans,[31] and Adam Torres, the trans character on *Degrassi*, even though critically acclaimed (Peabody Award) and supported by GLAAD, dies after three years.[32] In both instances, the transgender characters are portrayed by cis-actors. This common discriminatory casting choice has been and continues to be heavily criticised by transgender actors who point out the double standard of them not being invited into castings for cis-roles, whereas cis-actors are often considered to play transgender roles. This also rings true for Xavier Dolan's *Laurence Anyways*, in which the transgender character of Laurence is played by cis-male actor Melvil Poupaud.

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[29] Cf. *The Queer Media Base Canada-Québec*, on: http://www.mediaqueer.ca [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

[30] Etan Vlessing: "Canada Flicks on 'The Switch,' TV's First Transgender Comedy", in: *The Hollywood Reporter*, 21.07.2014, on: https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/canada-flicks-switch-tvs-first-719987 [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

[31] Tariq Kyle: "'Orphan Black' and Trans Representation: Can They Fix Tony Sawicki?", in: *Hypable*, 03.05.2016, on: https://www.hypable.com/orphan-black-trans-representation [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

[32] Nick Adams: "Sad Turn for Adam On 'Degrassi' in Last Night's Episode (Spoiler)", in: *GLAAD*, 16.08.2013, on: https://www.glaad.org/blog/sad-turn-adam-degrassi-last-nights-episode-spoiler [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

Laurence Anyways

Transgender Representation via Outward Appearances in Laurence Anyways

In Dolan's drama, the portrayal of the main character's transgender identity is primarily portrayed by outward appearances, ranging from clothing to make-up. The opening scene is the first example for the importance of appearance and clothing in this film.[33] The scene functions as a foreshadowing device, in terms of the main character's development or rather the character's gender identity development throughout the film. In this scene, the camera follows a woman leaving an apartment and walking down the street. Through a point of view shot that puts the audience into the position of the woman, we see a variety of people looking at her with looks varying from judgmental to disapproving to disgusted.

The point of view shot is momentarily interrupted by a shot of the silhouette of the woman coming out of a wall of fog. What follows are more faces looking at her. Even when the camera shows her walking down the street, we never see her face. We either see her from the back or the side. Finally, the camera catches up with her from behind and she slowly starts to turn, however, before she finally reveals her face, there is a cut and we see the woman walking back into the fog hastily. Here, the fog and the woman's rapid retreat into it represents her 'secret', i. e. her hidden gender identity. Similar to being gay, depicting being transgender as a secret is a common stereotype in films and television. The narrative of the coming out as the major focal point of the transgender character or plot prohibits a complex portrayal of other aspects of the transgender experience. Also, the stereotypical plot produces a compulsion for the transgender character to come out and therefore forces it in order to advance the plot.[34]

In the opening scene, the woman is wearing a light blue two-piece costume with some pink colour-contrasting shoulder pads. Blue and pink are the two colours that are the embodiment of gendered colour-coding, whereas pink usually represents female and blue represents male. Combining these two colours in one article of clothing hints at the person's gender identity as also being a combination of the two genders.

The issue of colour-coding is explicitly addressed in the film in a different scene in which Laurence and Fred are sitting in their car where they make lists of things they like and dislike in life.[35] When they discuss colours as part of the lists, Laurence says that pink and light blue, or rather baby blue, form an unhealthy union. Further, she condemns parents who colour-code their children's rooms. When Fred suggests yellow as a seemingly gender-neutral alternative to pink and blue and asks if the time has come for yellow, Laurence negates Fred's question vehemently. If these colours are commonly understood as symbols for gender identities, then, according to Laurence's thesis, a mixture of pink and blue, hence a mixture of female and male, is seen as "unhealthy". A gender identity that combines these two binaries e. g. by identifying as a woman whilst having a male sexed body is therefore categorised as unhealthy. At the same time, yellow, standing for an alleged gender-neutral alternative or at least an alternative outside of the binary of blue and pink is simply impossible and does not have any space or raison d'être. Appropriately enough, in the car scene, Laurence is wearing a blue shirt and Fred is wearing a

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[33] Cf. Dolan: *Laurence Anyways*, 0:01:12-0:03:30.
[34] Steven Funk and Jaydi Funk: "Transgender Dispossession in *Transparent*: Coming Out as a Euphemism for Honesty", in: *Sexuality and Culture*, V. 20 (2016), I. 4, p. 879-905.
[35] Cf. Dolan: *Laurence Anyways*, 0:07:19-0:09:28.

pink jacket, conforming to the gender colour code. The music playing in the background of this scene is also noteworthy in terms of depicting transgender: the song on the car radio is "Bette Davis" by Kim Carnes, referencing the famous actress and Hollywood icon and therefore pertaining to a certain kind of cliché femininity. Songs that explicitly describe women are often used in films and television series in order to introduce and characterise female characters. Here, however, it can not only be read as a description of Fred, but again, as a foreshadowing of Laurence's transition from male to female. Almost every line of the song either opens with the pronoun "she" or the possessive pronoun "her" followed by a variety of features:

> She got Bette Davis eyes
> And she'll tease you
> She'll unease you
> All the better just to please you
> She's precocious and she knows just
> What it takes to make a pro blush
> She got Greta Garbo stand off sighs
> She's got Bette Davis eyes.[36]

These female pronouns might hint at Laurence's gender identity, declaring Fred not to be the only woman present in the car. Pronouns represent an important factor for transgender people in terms of being recognized as their correct gender identity, whereas misgendering a trans person by using the incorrect pronouns is a common act of discrimination.

Another instance in which outward appearances play a significant role is during a scene that takes place at Laurence's workplace, a school where she works as a literature teacher.[37] In this scene, an exam is being held. This scene takes place roughly a month after the car scene. In it, we see Laurence from behind, similar to the opening sequence, but here, the camera also functions as point-of-view, representing Laurence who is looking at the students. Laurence is looking at some of the female students who brush or play with their hair. In a close up of her face, her look is sceptical, almost angry, possibly even jealous. This jealousy is confirmed by the way Laurence proceeds to touch her own hair that is very short, styled in a kind of buzzcut, brushing it with her fingers as if to feel and inspect the shortness of it to then compare it to the students' long and voluminous hair. In comparison, Laurence is lacking a somewhat stereotypical, but to her rather vital aspect of femininity, i. e. long hair. Similar to this, there is another feature of representing femininity that Laurence is unable to include in her gender performance, i. e. long nails. When she touches her short hair, we see that Laurence has decorated her hands with paperclips that look like long golden fingernails or at least artificial substitutes for them like acrylic nails. Long fingernails, again, represent femininity, something Laurence longs for. At this point however, before coming out, artificial femininity, i. e. plastic paperclip nails instead of naturally grown long nails, is the only form of femininity Laurence is allowed to have as long as she is read as male by society.

The exam scene is followed by another scene that focuses on women and their hair: on her way home, Laurence passes a hair salon in which a group of old ladies is looking out of the window.[38] They look practically identical in their curlers, hair nets and salon capes. Above their heads, the pink neon sign of the salon reads "ELLE & LUI" which translates to she and her. Further, they are illuminated by pink light. All of these features define them as one female

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[36] Cf. Ibid., 0:07:23-0:07:52.
[37] Cf. Ibid., 0:10:52-0:11:26.
[38] Cf. Ibid., 0:11:50-0:13:02.

group: they look like women and they are declared as women by the sign above the salon. In contrast, Laurence is on the outside, passing by the window in a black hooded jacket which restricts her view as if she is not allowed to see the women or rather see her own femininity inside herself. Clearly, she is not part of the female group, which is not only implied by the outward differences between Laurence and the homogeneous group, but by the actual spatial separation, inside versus outside. Not only are the spaces therefore gendered, especially because a hair salon is usually a homosocially sorted and rather stereotypically female space, but they are further characterised as pleasant and unpleasant, positive and negative, since it is raining heavily outside. The women in the salon, in contrast to Laurence, are protected from the rain and comfortable in the salon, a place of wellness and relaxation. The women's femininity is easy, they have been identifying and performing as female for all of their lives, but Laurence is struggling with her femininity, it is hard and painful and a topic of constant inner contention.

The film implies that hair is one of the main triggers causing Laurence's coming out. Fred decides to give Laurence a wig for her first day as an open trans woman at her school.[39] Even though Fred struggles at first when Laurence comes out, buying her this wig symbolizes her support. Here, we see a trope that is common in the media depiction of transgender characters – the wife or girlfriend teaching her transgender partner femininity, i. e. the trans person learning femininity from a cis-woman, implying that gender is something that can be learned. However, in this scene where the couple is having dinner with friends, Laurence explains that she does not like the wig and only wears it in order to please Fred who bought it for her as a gift.[40]

The Heterosexual Relationship

Laurence's coming out or rather Fred's reaction to it depicts the two main aspects of transgender representation in this film: heterosexuality or the absence of it and representation via outward appearances. The coming out is not actually shown and the words not spoken because they are being drowned out by the noise of the car wash in which Laurence and Fred are sitting.[41] The scene after the coming out, in which Fred confronts Laurence, is more important and serves as the initial starting point of the couple dealing with the 'issue' of Laurence's transgender identity and therefore sets the tone for the way the couple will handle Laurence's transition throughout the film.[42]

In a fight after coming out, the first thing Fred asks Laurence is why she never told her that she was gay.[43] This question is multi-layered: first, it is based on the heterosexual matrix, i. e. the understanding that sex dictates sexuality and gender. Second, this accusation represents a common misconception about transgender people that being trans also means that someone is gay. Third, Fred questioning Laurence's sexuality rather than addressing her gender identity implies that the heterosexual relationship of the two characters is at the heart of the film and the focal point of the further plot development.

In this scene, Laurence points out several body parts, e. g. her biceps and her penis, and tells Fred that these parts do not belong to her. Fred then concludes that Laurence hates everything that she actually loves about her. Everything here means the body parts Laurence pointed out,

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39 Cf. Ibid., 0:40:53-0:42:24.
40 Cf. Ibid., 0:46:23-0:48:28.
41 Cf. Ibid., 0:17:51-0:21:05.
42 Cf. Ibid., 0:21:05-0:25:57.
43 Cf. Ibid.

suggesting that Fred loves Laurence because of her male sexed body. Ironically, their relationship so far in the film has been depicted as highly intellectual. Laurence and Fred are often shown having deep philosophical conversations and debates, suggesting that intellectuality is one of the main components of the relationship, but also one of the factors that attract them to one another. Hence, Laurence counters rightfully that her body is not the reason Fred loves her.

Not only is the body in focus, but this scene is also focusing on outward appearances, i. e. clothing. After wanting to know why Laurence never told Fred that she is gay, she asks if she ever 'dressed up as a woman', if so, how often and if Laurence ever dressed in Fred's clothes. Again, this idea is a common misconception and somewhat discriminating since it implies that the transgender person's gender identity is simply a costume. A trans woman is perceived as a man in a dress. Similar to the paperclip nails, Laurence does not have access to a certain kind of 'real femininity' and therefore Fred automatically assumes that if Laurence would like to dress like a woman, she would have to borrow or rather steal her girlfriend's clothes rather than buying her own dresses etc, again situating the transgender experience of Laurence in the context of the heterosexual relationship.

Laurence's and Fred's break-up is caused by an outburst Fred has in a restaurant where the couple is having lunch together.[44] The waitress comments on Laurence's look, keeps asking questions, misgenders her and finally asks if Laurence and Fred are a couple. This tips Fred over the edge. She starts yelling at the waitress. She tells her to shut her mouth and asks her under angry tears whether she has ever bought a wig for her boyfriend or worried that he might not come home because he's being attacked. Finally, Fred storms out of the restaurant, followed by Laurence. In terms of stigma, Fred is what Erving Goffman calls "the wise"[45] – a person that is connected to a stigmatized person and therefore experiences second-hand stigmatisation. This triggers Fred so much that she yells at the waitress and throws dishes, even though Laurence, who is the actual stigmatised and discriminated person in this instance, remains calm, yet seems to be uncomfortable. After this, Fred breaks up with Laurence.

Post-break-up, whenever we see Laurence and Fred together, Laurence looks similar to what she looked like before coming out. When they meet up for an actual break up talk, Fred even asks Laurence why she shows up 'like this', i. e. wearing no make-up, and why she does not show up 'as a woman'.[46] Laurence answers that she wants to appeal to Fred. Maintaining the heterosexual relationship is prioritised over expressing Laurence's transgender identity. Also, 'looking like a man' makes it harder for Fred to break up with Laurence for good which can be deduced from the desperate tone in her voice when she speaks to Laurence about the way she looks, i. e. 'like a man'. If Laurence 'looks like a man', it is not only harder to break up the relationship, but also to break the heterosexual matrix that lies at the basis of the relationship. Laurence tries to save the relationship by offering Fred a house and/or a baby, which can be read as a heteronormative rescue attempt, the only possible one for this heterosexual relationship.

The peak of this argument is depicted in a sex scene that takes place after a five-year-time leap.[47] Laurence and Fred meet again after Laurence sends Fred her newly published book of poetry. This quickly leads to a re-kindling of their relationship even though, at this point, Lau-

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44 Cf. Ibid., 1:09:55-1:15:04.
45 Erving Goffman: *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, New York 1963, p. 30.
46 Cf. Dolan: *Laurence Anyways*, 1:23:22-1:26:54.
47 Cf. Ibid., 1:55:08-2:00:57.

rence is in a relationship with a woman named Charlotte, who leaves Laurence once she finds out that Fred is back in her life. Thus, the heterosexual relationship poses a constant threat to Laurence's transgender identity and her queer relationship, eventually destroying it.[48] Laurence has grown out her hair and is wearing a bolder make-up look. When she visits Fred, however, she is, again, not wearing any make up at all and neither has her hair done. This presents a contrast to the scene before where she is having lunch with her mother and looks like a what can be stereotypically perceived as a 'proper lady'.[49] Fred and Laurence are having tea, but when Laurence takes off her coat, the situation escalates quickly into a passionate kissing scene in which Fred jumps into Laurence's arms, a stereotypical image in romantic films. Again, clothing plays an important role, i. e. it is the trigger for the physical reconnection of Laurence and Fred.

Fred starts touching Laurence's body, which resembles an inspection. Once she puts her hand to Laurence's chest, she immediately retracts it and then lets in wander down to Laurence's crotch. When Laurence then says, "not yet", Fred seems to be relieved and even more passionate when continuing to kiss Laurence. The not-yet is referring to Laurence's penis that is still there. Here, genitals as markers of the sexed body is highly important: as long as Laurence still has her penis, i. e. her male sexed genitalia, they are able to engage in a heteronormative sexual act, meaning penis penetrating vagina. Therefore, this scene shows that Fred and Laurence are still able to uphold the heterosexual matrix and consequently the heterosexual relationship.

What eventually breaks the relationship is the failure of heterosexuality, i. e. the abortion Fred had and finally tells Laurence about.[50] After they visit another couple in which one of the partners is transgender, Laurence and Fred fight and break up again. In this fight, Fred tells Laurence that she left her back in 1990 (after the restaurant scene) because she could no longer bear thinking about the child that she and Laurence conceived together, but that Fred aborted without Laurence knowing of the pregnancy. Here, the abortion represents the ultimate failing of heterosexuality. This ultimate failure is the reason Laurence and Fred are finally able to break up.

Conclusion

Xavier Dolan's drama *Laurence Anyways* is one of only a handful examples of Canadian transgender media representations. That is not to say that it is upon this single film to represent transgender identities in Canada single-handedly, or that this film has to aim for a perfect depiction of transgender characters and storylines. However, the 2013 film fails the transgender character and therefore representation. Laurence's transgender identity is primarily depicted via her outward appearances, such as clothes and make-up, reducing her gender identity to the act of cross-dressing. Not only does this minimize and simplify the portrayal of the transgender experience, but the film is able to use this depiction to suggest that Laurence is 'still a man' in connection to Fred and therefore uphold the heterosexual couple which remains the central focus of the film. This notion is conclusively manifested by the ending of the film, a flashback scene in which we see Laurence and Fred's initial meeting, a sort of meet cute in retrospect,

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[48] Laurence's and Charlotte's relationship qualifies as queer because they meet when Laurence openly lives as a trans woman.
[49] Cf. Dolan: *Laurence Anyways*, 1:45:26-1:49:14.
[50] Cf. Ibid., 2:10:44-2:16:17.

representing a starting point that implies that even though the couple might have broken up, their story will, regardless of gender identity, keep repeating itself.

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On Icarus' Wings –
Kaleidoscopic Images of Gender, Sexuality, and Mythology
in Canadian Videogames

Canada is a world-leader in videogames. It is the third biggest producer of videogames after the US and Japan with 596 active studios in 2017 and 21,700 full-time employees, adding $3.7bil to Canada's GDP.[1] It is also the eight biggest market in terms of revenue generated, right after Germany, the UK, and France that all have significantly larger populations.[2] The province of Québec is *the* hotspot considering the concentration of studios in Montréal and Québec, with Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta all sporting secondary clusters. Videogames are a major economic factor for Canada, and its industry also attracts talent from all over the world who, in an inclusive society that values diversity, go on to create some of the most progressive games regarding representations of gender, sex, and sexuality.

Unfortunately, the medium in general is still perceived to be a hostile environment for such endeavours, mostly due to a vocal minority of self-styled 'Gamers' who think they own it, staking their claims by aggressively policing the community. However, 61% of *all* Canadians self-identify as regular videogame players, 50% female and 50% male, and their average age is 39; 60% also own a dedicated console, and 71% of Canadian parents play videogames with their children at least once a week.[3] Videogames as a medium have therefore reached far beyond the original 'laddish' Gamer subculture and have arrived in the everyday lives of regular people, no matter their gender, sex, sexual identity or behaviour. At the same time, Adrienne Shaw's research[4,5] highlights how most mainstream (or AAA) videogames worldwide are produced for an imagined and constructed audience of white, cis-male, heterosexual players aged 18-25, and decision-makers in the industry ignore "the complexity and intersectionality of identities" in the player community,[6] as well as "the fluidity, performativity, and contextuality of identity categories".[7]

Videogames are currently the leading form of popular culture, and John Storey claims that not only is this "a category invented by intellectuals",[8] also "the idea of popular culture is always entangled with questions of social power, especially in terms of claims and counter-claims about, for example, class, gender, ethnicity, 'race,' generation, and sexuality".[9] I will therefore introduce four extensive and globally influential Canadian videogame franchises that all use

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[1] ESAC (Entertainment Software Association of Canada): *Essential Facts about the Canadian Video Game Industry 2018*, Toronto 2018.

[2] Newzoo: "Top 10 Countries/Markets by Game Revenues", on: https://newzoo.com/insights/rankings/top-10-countries-by-game-revenues/ [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

[3] ESAC: *Essential Facts about the Canadian Video Game Industry 2018*.

[4] Cf. Adrienne Shaw: "Putting the Gay in Games: Cultural Production and GLBT Content in Videogames", in: José P. Zagal (Ed.): *The Videogame Ethics Reader*, San Diego 2012, p. 225-248, here: p. 232.

[5] Cf. Adrienne Shaw: *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*, Minneapolis/MN and London/Engl. 2014, p. 224-227.

[6] Adrienne Shaw: *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*, Minneapolis and London 2014, p. 7.

[7] Ibid., p. 15.

[8] John Storey: *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization*, Malden et. al. 2008 ([1]2003), p. xi.

[9] Ibid., p. xii.

mythological frameworks for the settings and/or plots of their games, focusing on how they deal with these – for the industry unfortunately still contentious – issues.

Prince of Persia

Prince of Persia is a third-person 3D platformer action adventure, designed by Ubisoft Montréal and published by Ubisoft in 2008. It is the eighth game in a long-running franchise started with the classic *Prince of Persia* (1989) by Jordan Mechner, published by his company Broderbund. In 2003, Mechner sold the series to Ubisoft, and the resulting *Sands of Time* series went for a darker, more realistic look that successfully spanned years 2003 to 2010 when Mike Newell's film adaptation, starring Jake Gyllenhall, failed to deliver at the box office and thus ruined the franchise's pull.

Already in 2006, Ubisoft had hinted at intentions to reboot the franchise, so in 2008 *Prince of Persia* was released to critical acclaim and decent financial success. But its in-house momentum at Ubisoft had already been killed off by the immense success of *Assassin's Creed* (2007) which became Ubisoft's new cash-cow and has remained one of the most successful franchises until today. Breaking with the consistent trend towards photorealism in graphics, *Prince of Persia* uses a crisp and vivid colour palette and highly stylised cel shading techniques in its visual aesthetics. This approximates a 'painted' comics or animé look by reducing the shading of 3D objects from a full gradient to a minimal set of colours, creating large areas of flat colour.

Ubisoft Montréal: *Prince of Persia*, Montréal 2008.

Gameplay is centred around DDA, dynamic difficulty adjustment, which means that the game adapts to a player's performance and scales the level of challenge they face for an optimal individual experience. One of the inspirations was to create a design where human players would collaborate with an AI non-player character in order to navigate the game space, and this is where Elika comes in.[10]

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[10] Dave G: "Prince of Persia (2008) – Website Flash Intro and Trailer HD", 22.07.2012, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQCLFSa5k1I [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

Prince of Persia taps into Zoroastrian mythology. Zoroaster or Zarathustra lived sometime between the 11th century[11] and the 7th century BCE and reformed originally polytheistic Indo-Iranian beliefs into a coherent monotheistic, dualistic belief system.[12] His religion enters written history during 6th century BCE and becomes the state religion of Persian and Iranian empires until the 7th century CE, the advent of Islam in the region. Zoroastrianism is still practiced today, making it one of the oldest continuing religions. The creator and supreme being is Ahura Mazda, also known as Ormazd, Lord of Wisdom, sustaining source of life, light and truth in the universe. Opposing Ormazd and his antithesis is Angra Mainyu, or Ahriman, 'the destructive spirit', Lord of Chaos, darkness, and deceit. In this system of belief, humanity has free will, and every individual is therefore responsible for their choices. It is the purpose of right action to constantly renew the world and bring it closer to perfection.[13] Many Zoroastrian concepts later found their way into both Judaism and Christianity.

Ubisoft strongly focused their game on founding principles and major agents in Zoroastrian mythology, giving them a decidedly Orientalist touch (to use Edward Said's terminology[14]) in their representational regime. The 'Prince' of the game's title is not really a nobleman but a roguish wanderer, a thief, who in his chaotic, uncaring, and sometimes even violent approach to life embodies concepts associated with Ahriman more so than Ormazd. His colour palette consists of dark browns, greys, reds and blues, and he wears a metal claw on one hand and a large scimitar in the other. Elika is the daughter of the king of the Ahura, a tribe chosen by Ormazd to protect the Tree of Life where Ahriman is imprisoned. She mostly wears white, with silver and gold details. Instead of weapons, she uses magic to fight but calls herself a 'warrior princess' nevertheless. In her outlook and personality, she embodies central values of Zoroastrianism, like her striving for truth, healing/renewal, and order. At the beginning of the game, she explains to the Prince that the Tree of Life has been weakened, and so they need to collect light in order to keep Ahriman from breaking free.

Mechanically, the player controls the Prince directly, and through his actions indirectly Elika's AI (artificial intelligence). If the Prince falls while navigating the platforming sequences, she will catch him. During combat, Elika protects the Prince with her light magic and uses wards to attack Ahriman's creatures, whereas he is the heavy hitter in melee. Their movements are always gracefully woven together in an acrobatic dance. Both characters, while certainly attractive, are neither hypersexualised nor hyperfeminine, or -masculine. The Prince constantly makes clumsy romantic advances towards Elika, but this is overtly played for comic relief, and their witty banter throughout the game does not find the expected closure in a romantic relationship in the end.

However powerful Elika appears in how she is represented, she is also unquestionably portrayed as a 'damsel in distress', fulfilling established gender stereotypes. Whenever the Prince is saved by her, she caustically comments on this reversal of the traditional fairy tale roles, but by virtue of the design, Elika remains in the *supporting* role as a protector and healer. In the end, she even fulfils the classical sacrificial role of female characters when she gives her life

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[11]   Cf. John B. Teeple: *Timelines of World History*, London 2002, p. 32.
[12]   J. R. Porter: "The Middle East", in: Roy Willis (Ed.): *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide*, London et. al. 2006 ([1]1993), p. 56-57, here: p. 67.
[13]   Cf. Markus Hattstein: "Ancient Near Eastern Mythology", in: Juliane von Laffert (Ed.): *Essential Visual History of World Mythology*, Washington, D.C. 2008, p. 54-59, here: p. 54-57.
[14]   Cf. Edward W. Said: *Orientalism*, London et. al. 2003 ([1]1978).

during the final battle so that the Prince can prevail. While it makes for an interesting twist of long established videogame tropes on one level, on the other it is still the *Prince* who must decide in the end whether he (as the player avatar) undoes everything he has been fighting for by taking the collected light from the Tree of Life to resurrect Elika, or whether he saves the world from Ahriman but leaves her dead.

Throughout the game, Elika therefore has no agency of her own. The player learns at the end of the game that she had already died before the Prince met her, and her father made a pact with Ahriman to serve him in return for the power to resurrect his daughter. During the game, all of Elika's actions are always triggered by the Prince, since he is the player's sole avatar and there is no option to switch roles. Eventually, even her continued existence is dependent on the Prince's agency, while she remains silent and passive during the making of that choice, fulfilling the traditional Snow White trope. Only *after* her resurrection, faced with the massive destruction caused by the liberation of Ahriman so that she can live, she finally turns her back on the Prince and leaves him to find her people and to organise the fight against the raging lord of chaos. So, while Elika is given a strong and independent voice (a narrator's voice even) in the game from the very beginning of *Prince of Persia*, she only shows individual, independent agency with her very last action when she disapproves of the choice the player might have made by abandoning the Prince to organise and carry on the fight the player has decided to forfeit.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution

Deus Ex: Human Revolution (DXHR) is a first-person action role-playing game (RPG) and stealth shooter created by Eidos Montréal and published by the Japanese company Square Enix in 2011. It is the third game in a legendary videogame franchise started in 2000 by Ion Storm's *Deus Ex*, directed by Warren Spector, and it acts as a prequel to the original games. Already during the production process, interference by Tokyo in the Canadian design was a problem.[15] In 2013, the studio's founder, Stéphane D'Astous, left Eidos Montréal due to irreconcilable creative differences with Square Enix.

The Setting of DXHR is Detroit in 2027, and the main character and player avatar is Adam Jensen, a former SWAT member and currently chief of security for the corporation Sarif Industries. Like Detroit was a hub of the automobile revolution during the 1960s, it is now a centre of the emerging industry of cybernetic human augmentation, with Sarif Industries taking the scientific and commercial lead after having found a way to overcome the immunological rejection of transplants. During a terrorist attack on the Sarif HQ, Adam is critically injured and has more than half of his body replaced by technology without his consent. On his return to duty, he is then drawn into a network of interconnected conspiracies aimed at controlling this critical moment in human history.[16]

The artistic director of DXHR, Jonathan Jacques-Belletête, who left Eidos Montréal in March 2019, described the aesthetics of the game as a noirish Cyber-Renaissance, with a colour palette dominated by the black of obscurantism and the gold symbolic for the hope for a new

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[15] This was mentioned to my students and myself by the studio founder and then general manager Stéphane D'Astous when we visited the studio during a 2011 excursion to Montréal.

[16] IGN: "Deus Ex: Human Revolution – Cinematic Trailer", 10.12.2010, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kq5KWLqUewc [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

Golden Age of (Trans-)Humanism.[17] The h+ logo, used prominently in the game's advertising material and the game itself, is a refence to the World Transhumanist Association, founded in 1998 by Nick Bostrom and David Pearce. Echoing the cultural wars the player witnesses and participates in when playing DXHR, after a conflict between social-democratic pro-regulation and libertarian anti-regulation forces, who eventually won out, the association was rebranded as *humanity+* in 2008 and now openly propagates free-market access to and unregulated research into human augmentation.

One of the central recurring and most iconic mythological references in the game is to Icarus/Ikaros.[18]

IGN: "Deus Ex: Human Revolution – Cinematic Trailer", 10.12.2010, on:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kq5KWLqUewc [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

The song used in the cinematic trailer is the game's main theme, "Icarus", by composer Michael McCann. A prequel novel, written by James Swallow in 2011, bears the title *Deus Ex: Icarus Effect*, referring to a fictitious sociological effect that, in the alternate history of the game's setting, is defined in 2019 by Dr. Malcom Bonner of the University of Texas:[19] when individuals significantly exceed the capabilities of average members of their societies, Bonner claims, they are inevitably brought low or even eliminated by conservative social forces. Daidalos, Ikaros's father, was the great inventor and innovator of Greek classical antiquity, builder of the labyrinth that houses the Minotaur, and master of *techne* that encompassed and combined both art *and* craftsmanship. Until today, engineering, science and technology are stereotypically associated with male technicities, to use Helen Kennedy and Jon Dovey's term,[20] even though *techne* is in the portfolio of the goddess of wisdom, Athena. However, she also stands clearly outside many classic expectations of femininity, a fierce virgin who also serves as goddess of strategic warfare, balancing counterpart to the hypermasculine butcher Ares.

The Renaissance perspective and focus on masculinity is already visible in the game's trailer, with the all-male scholars studying Adam's body (science being implicitly gendered male), and

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[17]   Cf. René Schallegger: "Homo Ex Machina? Cyber-Renaissance and Transhumanism in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*", in: Tobias Winnerling and Florian Kerschbaumer (Ed.): *Early Modernity and Videogames*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2014, p. 52-63.

[18]   Simon Goldhill: "Transgressors: Breakers of the Natural Order", in: Roy Willis (Ed.): *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide*, London et. al. 2006 ([1]1993), p. 162-163, here: p. 162.

[19]   James Swallow: *Deus Ex: Icarus Effect*, New York 2011, p. 228.

[20]   Cf. Jon Dovey and Helen W. Kenney: *Game Cultures: Computer Games as New Media*, Maidenhead 2006.

the reference to St. Peter's cathedral (the Catholic Church being an all-male organisation). This latter connection also sets up a second line of reference to winged beings, mostly represented as male: Sarif Industries by name echoes the Seraphim, or 'burning ones', the highest order of angels in Christian mythology who guard the throne of God and can, with their direct access to him, therefore be seen as symbols of apotheosis.[21] Cybernetic human augmentation through technology here becomes the transformation of humanity into divinity.

The setting of DXHR presents a deeply masculine world, ruled economically by the finance sector, intellectually by discourses of science and technology, and politically by the military-industrial-complex. All major characters equipped with agency here are male: the protagonist Adam Jensen, the main antagonist William Taggert, most members of the cabal of Illuminati seeking to control public reaction to technological advances, Adam's IT-savvy sidekick Frank Pritchard, or his boss David Sarif. On a visual level, there is also a pervasive fascination with the male body, shaped according to the classical Greek image of idealised masculinity in Adam Jensen and others, evident in the numerous naked or half-naked male bodies on display through-out the game, even during combat scenes.

Women mostly play a subservient or purely functional role in DXHR, and the only example of a fighting woman, the sociopathic, non-speaking warmachine Yelena Fedorova, shows dis-turbingly hybridised physical features that are at the same time hyper-feminine *and* hyper-masculine. If women are not 'functional', like the pilot Farikah Malik who takes Adam to his operations, then following the genre conventions of *film noir*, they must be damsels in distress that turn out to be treacherous seductresses. Megan Reed, Adam's scientist girlfriend, performs as the helpless damsel during the terrorist attack on Sarif HQ, is subsequently abducted by the terrorists to serve as motivation for Adam, only to eventually turn out to having been in on everything from the start. She purposefully seduced Adam and slept with him just to have access to his extraordinary genetic material that served as the biological basis for the medication Sarif Industries developed to overcome the immunological rejection of cybernetic transplants.

In another stereotypical constellation, while engineers are male, their creations are given female features. Eliza Cassan, a celebrity newsreader, influencer, and pop culture icon in the setting, is later in the narrative revealed to be not a human being but a highly advanced AI. Her name immediately starts a chain of references to the seemingly intelligent computer programme ELIZA (1964-66), that could almost convincingly imitate human intelligence in conversations with a human interlocutors, to G. B. Shaw's Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion* (1912), a woman 'recreated' by a male linguist through the power of language, to its classical source in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where the sculptor Pygmalion falls in love with his creation, a statute then brought to life by Aphrodite that, as a woman, has to marry her creator.[22]

So, while *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* on the one hand pushes the medium in terms of a necessary critical reflection of the effects that technological advances have on our notions of humanity and ethical action, on the other hand its unreflected use of classical mythology, the genre conventions of popular culture, and deeply gendered notions of technicity, in combination with a strangely eroticised obsession with deconstructed and machine-like male bodies, leads

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[21] *The Bible: King James Version*, Isaiah 6.1-4, on: https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Isaiah-Chapter-6 [last accessed on 30.11.2020].
[22] Andrew W. White: "Greek and Roman Mythology", in: Juliane von Laffert (Ed.): *Essential Visual History of World Mythology*, Washington 2008, p. 106-223, here: p. 212.

to a tangle of mixed messages that serve more to recreate and even perpetuate gender stereo-types than to undo them.

Dragon Age: Inquisition

Dragon Age: Inquisition is a third-person action-RPG designed by BioWare Edmonton and published by Electronic Arts in 2014 as the third videogame installment in the transmedial *Dragon Age* fantasy franchise, started in 2009 with *Dragon Age: Origins*. Over two decades, BioWare have made a name for themselves as trailblazers for quality representation of non-normative characters and identities in the medium. Ever since *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn* (2000) all BioWare games, with the exception of *Anthem* (2019), include romance and relationship subplots for both genders and various sexual preferences. In 2003, BioWare created the first Jedi in *Star Wars* history to openly show same-sex attraction, Juhani, for *Knights of the Old Republic*. With *Jade Empire* (2005), they published their first in-house intellectual property (IP) that includes both female and male same-sex romances, imitating, adapting, and diversify-ing the then popular *wuxia* epics by Ang Lee and Zhang Yimou. When they were bought up by Electronic Arts, BioWare drew harsh criticism for *Mass Effect* (2007) because they blocked all male/male (m/m) romantic content in the game, while leaving female/female (f/f) options intact. *Dragon Age II* (2011) brought the first non-player characters (NPCs) that actively pursue rela-tionships with player avatars, giving them independent romantic and sexual agency. For *Mass Effect 3* (2012), BioWare wrote the first exclusively gay and lesbian videogame characters, Steve Cortez and Samantha Traynor, and they also reinstated Kaidan Alenko's originally planned bisexuality that had been blocked in the first game. The apex of inclusivity and diver-sity was then reached in 2014 with *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, and unfortunately since then both *Mass Effect: Andromeda* (2017), with its drastic reduction in and careful control of same-sex content, as well as *Anthem* (2019) show a decisive step back for the former champion in the industry in this regard.

Inquisition had BioWare's most successful game launch in terms of units sold,[23] was also critically highly acclaimed, and thus won several Game of the Year awards in 2014 and 2015. Its setting is a culturally eclectic pastiche of immersive high fantasy with strong horror ele-ments. The world of Thedas is repeatedly harrowed by archdemons, blighted versions of the Old Gods in the form of dragons, leading physically and mentally warped darkspawn from below ground to the surface and devastating the realms of humankind, elves, dwarves, and other species. Magic here has an inherent way of tainting its users, opening them up to demonic pos-session, so specially trained warriors, the Order of Templars, guard the Circles of Magi, bor-derline internment camps for magic-users. At the end of *Dragon Age II*, a bloody civil war between Templars and Mages erupts, and in *Inquisition*, the player avatar now has to find a way to resolve this conflict while at the same time trying to heal the Breach, a massive rift in reality that continually spawns demons.[24]

As early as *Dragon Age: Origins*, fully developed same-sex romances were already availa-ble, and this continued with *Dragon Age II*, even though NPCs were still avatar-sexual, i. e.

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[23] Phil Savage: "Dragon Age: Inquisition Had Most Successful Launch in Bioware History", in: *PC Gamer*, 28.01.2015, on: https://www.pcgamer.com/dragon-age-inquisition-had-most-successful-launch-in-bioware-history [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

[24] IGN: "Dragon Age Inquisition Lead Them or Fall Trailer – E3 2014", 09.06.2014, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srAjabZ7yAI [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

their sexual desires were defined passively by those expressed by the player through their avatar's interactions. *Inquisition* radically increases both the romantic and sexual agency, as well as the diversity of its cast of characters to a hitherto unknown level in mainstream videogames. NPCs now have their own sexual and romantic desires, patterns of sexual behaviour, and sexual identities, and they even actively turn down the advances of player avatars that do not conform to their wishes. A wide spectrum of possibilities is represented here, from cis, straight characters, to bisexual, pansexual, gay, lesbian, and trans characters. All relationships are complex and differentiated in how they are designed, how they develop through repeated interactions, and how they conclude. The Inquisitor is created by the player at the beginning of the game, and through their dialogue choices and configuration of the game world, the player then shapes the Inquisitor's personality and identity further, and NPCs react to them accordingly.

There are twelve NPC companions available in *Inquisition*, and eight of those can be romanced: two for male, two for female Inquisitors, two that do not have any gender preferences, and two that have both gender *and* species preferences. The unashamedly working-class and outspoken elf Sera and the refined and witty Tevinter mage Dorian both created increased media attention before the release of the game as the lesbian and gay romances respectively. The Iron Bull, the pansexual Qunari captain of the mercenary company the Bull's Chargers, is a hyper-masculine dragon/human hybrid who fulfils all of the genre conventions of heroic fantasy characters. Irrespective of the player avatar's gender or performed sexual preferences, he will offer them to enter into a caring and protective BDSM relationship, with Bull being the dominant and the player avatar the submissive part.[25,26] Especially with a male Inquisitor, the Iron Bull romance thus radically subverts genre expectations of heroic masculinity in traditional fantasy: the active agent becomes the passive recipient. Instead of shaping and controlling the world, which is what the Inquisitor is tasked to do in public, in private they hand over control and agency to Bull, who is very aware of his responsibility and the contractual and mutual nature of the arrangement. In a later sequence,[27] Bull not only shows his keen ability to read the other companions in terms of their romantic and sexual desires, he also admits to his deep feelings for the Inquisitor. With daring design decisions such as the inclusion not only of a diverse set of romance options and gender performances, but also a mostly successful representation of a complex BDSM relationship, *Inquisition* must therefore be seen as a milestone in the medium that remains unsurpassed to this day.

Assassin's Creed: Odyssey

The third-person stealth action-RPG *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey*, created by Ubisoft Québec and published by Ubisoft in 2018, is the 11th game in Ubisoft's power-horse franchise *Assassin's Creed*, started in 2007. In the AC universe, two factions, the Templars, championing strict order, and the Assassins, who promote chaos and free will, fight for control of the Pieces of Eden, technological remnants of a precursor civilisation, the Isu, who also created humanity in their (physically reduced) image. The player avatars are Assassins using a highly advanced

[25] René Schallegger: "Dragon Age™: Inquisition – 50 Shades of Bull", 23.01.2016, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Uo8BgH0Qh0.
[26] René Schallegger: "Dragon Age™: Inquisition – Negotiating the Relationship", 23.01.2016, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AB03xgY8cXI.
[27] René Schallegger: "Dragon Age™: Inquisition – Safe Words", 27.01.2016, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzNH1d-DnI4.

interface, the animus, to access the genetic memories of their ancestors to localise and retrieve these Pieces. *Odyssey's* setting is a fictionalised version of the Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens in 431 BCE. The avatar is the grand child of King Leonidas of Sparta: in the official canon version her name is Kassandra, but the player can also choose to play her brother, Alexios. Even before the game was released, Ubisoft already emphasised the importance of player choice in the new iteration, moving the series away from its action adventure origins towards action-RPG genre-wise.[28]

Kassandra and Alexios are Spartans, which is a decisive element in their character design and their cultural identities. As a fighting woman, Kassandra overcompensates for the violation of Spartan tradition with her hypermasculine behaviour. All NPCs can be romanced by both siblings equally, and she continually performs a femininity that is more masculine than her brother's performed masculinity in the same scenes. This relates to Thomas Laqueur's idea of how "the one-sex/one-flesh model dominated thinking about sexual difference from classical antiquity to the end of the seventeenth century".[29] The Greeks, he explains, perceived all bodies as male, classified in "a hierarchy of heat and perfection".[30] Female bodies were only 'less perfect' versions of the male body where "unexpressed organs […] are signs of the absence of heat and consequently of perfection".[31] Thus these 'imperfect' female bodies anatomically naturalised socially and culturally established power relationships, and Aristotle for example directly derived the notions of male activity and female passivity from them.[32] So in the game, Kassandra is designed in a manner to overcompensate the 'lacking' masculinity of her body through her hypermasculine behaviour, while Alexios does not have to.[33]

Unlike in BioWare games, romances in *Odyssey* are utterly inconsequential to the main plot, and after the player completes their romance arcs, NPCs go back to a neutral state. So, there is no lasting impact of the player's romantic or sexual choices on the game world at all. Furthermore, most of the m/m relationships available are deeply puerile and stereotypical in their representations of diverging masculinities, and all of them immediately cut to black to avoid any m/m intimacy, which is not the case in f/f scenes. A typical example of a disappointing m/m romance is Thaletas, a Spartan military leader sent to Delos to help the female rebel leader Kyra with an insurrection against Athens. In this specific case, in a strategic move frequently observable in popular media, m/m desire is directly reduced to and sublimated into violence, because it is acceptable for men to hurt but not to love each other.[34,35,36] Still, Alexios's masculinity is much more differentiated than the ham-fisted femininity designed for Kassandra. Even

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[28]   Ubisoft North America: "Assassin's Creed Odyssey: Power of Choice Trailer | Ubisoft [NA]", 10.09.2018, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H23mk3Zgtpk [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

[29]   Thomas Laqueur: *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge and London 1999 (¹1990), p. 25.

[30]   Ibid., p. 27.

[31]   Ibid., p. 28.

[32]   Ibid., p. 31.

[33]   This is, unfortunately, very much in line with the rigidly binary and deeply conservative gender politics pervasive in the videogame industry, both in terms of the majority of the people producing games, as well as the ideas about gender and power communicated in their creations.

[34]   René Schallegger: "Assassin's Creed® Odyssey – Thaletas 1", 17.06.2019, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MI-_4ciCLg.

[35]   René Schallegger: "Assassin's Creed® Odyssey – Thaletas 2", 17.06.2019, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NugBOm0KDQ.

[36]   René Schallegger: "Assassin's Creed® Odyssey – Thaletas 3", 17.06.2019, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKfBJvd1zeU.

if the player decides to develop him into a warrior, not a hunter or assassin, his lean and sinewy body image, his reliance on stealth, and his vulnerable and caring dialogue options show a multi-facetted performance of masculinity.

A major scandal was triggered by the *Legacy of the First Blade* downloadable content (DLC) (2018-2019) where the siblings' bloodline is forcibly continued by the plot, since, no matter the gender or sexual preference the player had their avatar perform, they *will* have a child. The inevitable heterosexual coupling, childbirth, and idyllic heteronormative family life imposed on players created a storm of outrage because it violated promises made earlier that players could *create* their avatar's sexual identity through their choices. In reaction, small changes were made by the studio: the trophy that unlocks after having the child was renamed from 'Growing Up', implying that same-sex relationships and those that do not produce children are immature, to 'Blood of Leonidas', and new dialogue options were added that let your avatar express that the child, which still inevitably happens, is really only about passing on Leonidas's genes, not about love or desire. Where that leaves the father or mother of the avatar's child emotionally, unfortunately remains unexplored.

There is only a single meaningful romance with a male NPC available in the main game of *Odyssey*, the healer Lykaon at Delphi. When we first meet him, he asks us to bring him mandrake as a painkiller in a seemingly innocent and stereotypical fetch quest. Later, however, it turns out that he needs it to kill his grandmother Praxithea who, as a false pythia, only communicated messages a group of conspirators wanted to be spread, not prophecies from Apollo. In order to re-establish his family's honour, Lykaon, as the last male heir, feels that it is his duty to personally kill Praxithea, addressing the thorny topical issue of so-called 'honour killings'. Over the course of the quest line, the player avatar can step by step establish and eventually consummate an emotional and sexual relationship with Lykaon, which serves to readjust his moral compass and to heal the healer of his emotional trauma.[37]

Altogether, there are also only five male NPC romance options in comparison to nine female ones. Thaletas only wants to fight and have a quick sexual encounter before he goes back to his relationship and life with Kyra. Alkibiades, a historical character, fulfils all of the negative stereotypes that are held against him in traditional historiography as a vain, hedonistic sex addict who even has sex with goats several times during the game. Kosta is a burly smith with a hyperfeminine personality who needs the player avatar to find some herbal helpers to fix his impotence and then stalks them unrelentingly. And Mikkos, finally, is a trainer of young athletes with a bland personality who from the very first meeting shows a strongly submissive behaviour towards the avatar and engages in drunken orgies with them where his taking the passive role further underlines his 'lack' of masculinity. Here we can see a perpetuation of and pandering to the constructed audience of the white, cis, straight young 'Gamer' Shaw is so critical of. Additional evidence was provided when after the introduction of the Story Creator Mode one of the first player-created stories uploaded and shared with the world was called "Kill the gay guy", its content designed to further represent Alkibiades as an obnoxious, sex-crazed 'faggot', resulting in the ultimate mission statement: "Slaughter Alkibiades".

This is in radical opposition to ancient Greek practices where sexuality was inherently about learning, as Foucault reminds us, about "the transmission of a precious knowledge from one

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[37] woolftooth: "Assassin's Creed Odyssey – All Alexios & Lykaon Romance Scene", 14.11.2018, on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aR_iPwu1PuY [last accessed on 30.11.2020].

body to another".[38] Sexual behaviour was also not categorised by strict and exclusive binaries: "The Greeks did not see love for one's own sex and love for the other sex as opposites, as two exclusive choices, two radically different types of behavior."[39] Traditionally, this was negotiated through pederasty, relationships between an adult male lover and his young male object of affection, but the complex sexual politics of Greek society necessitated a strict rule-set where "customs, courtship practices, and regulated games of love" aimed to contain any personal and interpersonal fallout.[40] The Platonic ideal of this love was non-physical, according to Foucault, or at least followed "a conception of *eros* and its pleasures that would have friendship itself as the goal", not the self-serving satisfaction of desire.[41] Sparta is also specifically named as an example where pederasty was a prevailing practice.[42]

Foucault also points out that many refences to other forms of male love "that did not conform to this schema" can be found in Greek antiquity, and that these were not "frowned upon" or "regarded as unseemly".[43] While relationships between boys, for instance, were "deemed completely natural and in keeping with their condition", there was also visible "abiding love between two men who were well past adolescence".[44] However, sexual *passivity* in adult men was intensely disliked and discouraged, thus m/m relationships could become "an object of criticism and irony" by targeting the (suspected) passive partner.[45] Even so, Foucault emphasises, "they did not belong to the domain of active and intense problematization".[46]

Louis Crompton posits that the Spartans "developed their own form of institutionalized man-boy love under Cretan influence",[47] and that lawgivers there indirectly encouraged a form of m/m sexual activity where, unlike in the Athenian context, it was the 'manliness' of a boy, not his beauty that made him desirable. Mentorship was most likely the intended focus of these relationships, even though the conspicuous absence of any laws regulating sexual behaviour in these pairings already made Xenophon doubt all claims of chastity: Athenians, for example, used the term to 'laconise' to mean 'sodomise'.[48] Male-male love was used as a stabilising social, political, and military force in ancient Greek society, Crompton explains: "to forge bonds between promising youths and conservative mentors" in aristocracies, "as insurance against tyranny" in democracies, and above all "the major source of its prestige remained […] its contribution to military morale", such as in the Sacred Band of Thebes.[49]

Colin Spencer identifies a whole network of Indo-European myths and legends referring to ritualised pederasty, and even seemingly hypermasculine characters such as Zeus or Heracles are known to have engaged in m/m couplings and relationships without tarnishing or endangering their gender or sexual images, while Apollo "was constantly stealing beautiful youths".[50] Women had no role to play here, "for they ha[d] been taught that this is how boys become

[38] Michel Foucault: *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, New York 1990 (¹1978), p. 61.
[39] Ibid., p. 187.
[40] Michel Foucault: *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, New York 1990 (¹1985), p. 232.
[41] Ibid., p. 234.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., p. 194.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., p. 195.
[47] Louis Crompton: *Homosexuality & Civilization*, Cambridge and London 2006 (¹2003), p. 7.
[48] Ibid., p. 8.
[49] Ibid., p. 69.
[50] Colin Spencer: *Homosexuality: A History*, London 1996 (¹1995), p. 26.

men".[51] Spencer specifically notes and remarks upon the absence of any stigma *inherent* to m/m relationships and how this mindset continued to exist and dominated in Europe for a long time afterwards:

> Up to and after the Renaissance, a 'sodomite' still did not mean anything less than male, and bisexuality in social terms was thoroughly acceptable. But gradually, as the world neared 1700, a radical change took place; the idea crept in that all men who enjoyed same-sex experiences were both effeminate and criminal, and a homophobic society was born.[52]

Therefore, the representation of m/m sexual desire and relationships in *Odyssey*, unlike in its historical source material, is mostly superficial, immature and sometimes outright offensive. This divergence seems to have been implemented on purpose in order to pander to the internalised homophobia witnessed in much of 'Gamer' culture today.

Conclusions: On Icarus' Wings

Even though it is not a Canadian game, the recent controversy about *God of War* (2018) is symptomatic, underlining the pernicious pervasiveness of the aforementioned problems in the videogame industry today. A tweet by David Jaffe, creative director of the original *God of War* (2005) and creator of the series' main protagonist and player avatar Kratos, claiming that his hero was conceived as "a raging bi-sexual" triggered a considerable internet backlash.[53] When public pressure became too strong, Jaffe eventually backed down and changed his story: his initial message was now just a hoax in reaction to aggressively negative opinions voiced about a montaged image posted online that he had replied to with his initial tweet and that showed Kratos in rainbow colours to support Pride month.[54]

With the exception of BioWare's highly eclectic and inclusive *Dragon Age* franchise, it seems that especially mythological frameworks *both* of a primary and secondary nature, i. e. 'real-world' mythology as well as fantasy texts, to use Tolkien's distinction[55], unfortunately show a tendency to intensify stereotypical expectations and subsequently representations of gender roles and sexual behaviour in videogames, while science-fiction games can get away with more daring representations.

The image of Icarus comes to mind again here as a powerful metaphor: Fly too low and drown, fly to high and burn. At the moment, the videogame industry is very hesitant to make bold statements, preferring to play it safe in their representational regimes of gender and sexuality for financial reasons. However, this risk-averse stance *must* be abandoned, if we want the medium to grow and attract more and more diverse players. A financially as well as culturally viable middle ground must be found to (a) not lose touch with the mainstream market on the one hand, not only for financial reasons but also for its incomparable reach, and (b) at the same time do more to *normalise* the existent and observable diversity of performances of gender and sexuality in human societies inhabited by players.[56]

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51 Ibid., p. 27.
52 Ibid., p. 10-11.
53 David Jaffe: "Oh, and one more thing", 04.06.2019, on: https://twitter.com/davidscottjaffe/status/1135753779070943232 [last accessed on 30.11.2020].
54 David Jaffe: "of Kratos supporting #PRIDE month", 04.06.2019, on: https://twitter.com/davidscottjaffe/status/1135801781642907648 [last accessed on 30.11.2020].
55 Cf. J. R. R. Tolkien: "On Fairy-Stories", in: J. R. R. Tolkien: *Tree and Leaf*, London 2001 ([1]1947), p. 3-81.
56 Cf. Judith Butler: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York and London 2008 ([1]1990).

Unfortunately, the stock market value of a company is currently the *only* measurement of its contribution to society, and the compensation schemes for the board of officers in most videogame companies rely to up to 85% to 95% on shares and options they hold.[57] What this means is that in the absence of any legal regulation forcing them to think and act otherwise, there is also no internal, structural incentive whatsoever for the decision-makers, *not* the designers who mostly would certainly be willing, to take a creative and ultimately financial risk. This in turn inevitably leads to the perpetuation of risk-averse strategies that mechanically and exclusively reproduce the constructed audience of the 1980s, blindly ignoring the radically shifting realities in the videogame player demographics of the 21st century.

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