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Queer Binding: Carson, Geyer, Zizek, Black Eyed Peas and Becker
Or
“Where is the love” -- Black Eyed Peas song

LOVE

Pop culture band Black Eyed Peas sees food for the soul as the anecdote for contemporary culture¹. Their songs feature political lyrics – such as the song “where is the love” -- and move to desire in their next album that features the song “my humps”. If love and politics are the anecdote for now, then art as described in Julie Carson’s text *Exile of the Imaginary: Politics / Aesthetics / Love* is reflective of the now, as she places love and desire in productive exile.

Carson’s text highlights the significance of the meta-narrative in Andrea Geyer’s piece *Now, then and love: Questions of Agency in Contemporary Practice* in the same 2007 publication. Geyer’s work – a round table discussion on the conceptual unconscious, love and exile in art practice – enacts love and the conceptual unconscious in its format, and questions politics and desire in its content. In the video *Zizek!*, Slavoj Zizek² also poses love as a sort of anecdote for the current times. By way of Carson, Geyer, Black Eyed Peas and Zizek, I

¹ In 1995 the band selected the name The Black Eyed Peas, a choice that is explained inside their album liner for *Monkey Business*. The band describes how they selected the name because they wanted to provide food for the soul with their music. They relate their version of musical food to the comfort food Black Eyed Peas.

² Slovenian sociologist, philosopher, and cultural critic

reflect on my work as anecdote or representation of now and negotiate my relationship to love in my art practice.

I've recently considered that almost everything I have done in my life has been for love (for a woman). This even includes buildings I designed during my short career as an architect – constructed monuments to an architecture student I fell in love with when I was 19. There is a coffee shop in Brooklyn with her name on it, or love's name on it. The exception is my art practice. With love/desire being such a central theme in my life it is peculiar maybe it has not entered my work as subject matter or even discussion. Perhaps it is because in the context I outline above, my art practice is the only thing I don't do for love, that I do for myself.

This statement positions love and self as opposing ideas.

The Black Eyed Peas would posit that this selfish world needs love, or at least it did in 2003 when they released their song "Where is the Love."

...What's wrong with the world, Mama, People livin'
like they ain't got no mamas...Where is the love...So
ask yourself is the lovin' really gone, So I could ask
myself really what is goin' wrong...

By employing the ambiguous and all-referencing "people," the Black Eyed Peas assert that in the position of Pop Culture icon they have some ability to discern the modern condition of all "people." As such, in this case all people are selfish, acting like they don't have mothers, in other words were not taught the golden rules of respect. Throughout the song the search for love is positioned as the

central theme with the repeating chorus of “where is the love.” Later in this song, love being gone is paired by rhyme with the idea of something being wrong. If you read the inverse into this line, Black Eyed Peas is proscribing love as an anecdote to our current-post 9/11 times.

Though not in a hip-hop rhyme, Geyer similarly questions “where is the love” in art and art practice in her round table discussion *Now, then and love: Questions of Agency in Contemporary Practice*. She asks “How do you understand “love” in relation to your work? What does love imply in terms of an artistic practice that understands itself as a political practice?... (Geyer 106)” In turn seven artist take turns answering this question. Emily Roysdon aptly notes the relationship between love and exile in her notes on queering the art discourse. The other seven artists also indulge in the subversive contemplation of how love plays a role in their work. Whether the artist negates its importance or embraces it, this discussion of love and art practice is the queer combination of discursive and amorous. By staging this exiled space Geyer allows room for love/desire and politics. In this space the artist can re-examine their place in terms of love/desire.

EXILE

In her article *Exile of the Imaginary: Politics / Aesthetics / Love* Julie Carson’s critics’ eye view comes to the rescue by providing productive paradigms for discussing love in terms of exile. Carson answers the question of “where is love” by posing that it is in exile, along with politics and aesthetics. Though this much

can be gathered by the title of the article itself³, Carson additionally asserts that the presence of love is not just a by-product of exiled space, but an actual cause or catalyst of exile: “love-as-stain is a self-perpetuating exile machine” (Carson 105). Reflexively, the intentional production of an exiled space is a haven for discursive talk of love.

In order to create this haven for discursive and productive discourse, Andrea Geyer employs a *mélange* of strategies in order to produce a decisively exiled space in her written dialogue between seven artists. The exiled space for discussion doesn't just occur by happenstance; Geyer creates it. She asserts her agency by designing the format of question and answer via response writing and dictates the topic of discussion through her three lengthy questions. Geyer positions all seven artists in a position of normal/ neurotic tension by asking them to name their practice in the exiled terms of love and politics.

The format of the dialogue instigates exile of each artist from themselves, from the other seven included in the discussion, from the reader, from commercial art practice and from mainstream culture. Two of the questions evoke a literal positioning as in or out of exile by each artist. The first question asks each artist to evoke the conceptual unconscious and describe a paradigmatic event in his or her art practice. In order to participate each artist must place themselves

³ The title of Carson's article is *Exile of the Imaginary: Politics / Aesthetics / Love*. The title equates politics, aesthetics and love with exile, the colon between the terms operating as the equal sign.

“outside” of himself or herself, in exile, in order to reflect in on this question. This is an optional self-exile. The second question inadvertently asks whether each artist is in or out of exile from the contemporary commercial art scene. Through their responses, each artist distinguishes themselves through (dis) agreement with others in the dialogue, establishing their place in or out of exile in this small group.

The format of multiple participants responding to each other along a particular theme – echoing the online message board – evokes exile in its reference to this online space for dialogue not permitted inside more mainstream mediums. The round table discussion is created through the illusion of a literal dialogue where all members are present. In actuality, the reader is given none of the usual visual cues that would aid in placing the artists within our own understandings and judgments. The resulting distance of the reader from the artists further establishes the dialogue as one safely in exile.

As the dialogue unfolds the reader is given less and less to ground the work inside our own comfortable understanding. The artists don't respond to the three questions within the same order, which causes the reader to confuse who is speaking when. Conceptual confusion is evoked, promoting the productive discord.

As disjointed as Geyer's grouping of artists may seem, their inclusion as one written voice binds them. Just as Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno are implicated in exile by the act of bonding them (Carson 108), the reader is forced to question why the seven featured artists are placed together. This strategy of intentionally putting something where it is out of place situates the reader as analyst of why these artists, why these topics, and why this format are selected in context with each other (Carson 114). By using the blog-like format, Geyer creates the seven artists in exile – together and from each other – which forces the conceptual unconscious to the forefront.

The invocation of the conceptual unconscious in Geyer's article, as well as the self-reflexive questioning, illustrates one of the most productive ends of the exiled state. Where Carson constructs exile as "a site of simultaneous repression and production (Carson 105)" Geyer demonstrates what exile accomplishes that inclusion doesn't: deviance, productive discord, and vantage point to make artist and viewer responsible as analyst. The sad tone of the exiled is not present as each artist positions themselves around the question of in or out of the evolving art market, in or out of love. This can be explained by referencing the Lacanian notion that the exiled son returns to the father through the eclipse of him (Carson 108). Redemption is found through exaltation of the new and better. In her article, Carson refers to the exiled triangulation of Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno, and in the case of Geyer article the seven artists when forced to be in context

with each other as a productive force in creation of a new critical aesthetic (Carson113).

ROLE OF ARTIST

In the context of Geyer's article-as-art, the role of the artist is as creator of new critical aesthetics in dialogue with those around them. It seems that a position of exile is the most productive place from which to respond. There are drawbacks, however, to this position. Consider the dual role of the pop culture icon Black Eyed Peas as both non-exiled representatives of pop culture and artists (musicians) – in both roles they are purveyors of love and politics. By self-defining themselves as cultural anecdote, Black Eyed Peas not only asserts that Pop Culture bands can know what is going on, but pose solutions to the current condition. Their status as mainstream (non-exiled)⁴ aids in their ability to affect more people, though it is worth questioning whether this same status results in their discourse of love and politics to be limited⁵. For example, does the discussion of “my lovely lady humps” really stir up as much dirt as Emily Roysdon's talk of queer love? Further, even if set to a catchy backbeat would Juli Carson's⁶ line “love-as-stain is a self perpetuating exile machine” (Carson 105)

⁴ Though for the purposes of this essay the Black Eyed Peas are considered mainstream based on their large fan base, widespread distribution, and radio time on “popular music stations,” the band's exiled/non-exiled status is clearly more complicated. Issues of race and class, just to begin, complicate their inclusion and authority in mainstream dialogue. These complications are acknowledged but will not be discussed within this essay.

⁵ Not that a hip-hop song sexualizing “lovely lady humps” isn't transgressive, but this is certainly not the edge of the sexual cliff.

⁶ For this example, I am positioning Juli Carson as critic/artist.

convey much more than a jumble of jargon if isolated into a mainstream discourse played out over the radio waves while driving in traffic? The state of exile does have some limitations, mainly the obvious, that its products and audience are also the exiled minority of individuals. However, I think for artists it is precisely this position that allows the most productive commentary, though the outcome more in the form of a question through reflection than the proscriptive melody of pop-messaging.

A quote from noted Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek brings the discussion of love, exile, current times and the role of the artist full circle:

...what we call Creation is a kind of a cosmic unbalance. Cosmic catastrophe. That things exist by mistake. And I am even ready to go to the end and to claim that the only way to counter act this is to assume the mistake and go to the end. And we have a name for this, its called love.

Žižek establishes the current condition by explaining that what exists happens by mistake. Through a set of relationships, he equates Creation – which in this discussion can be creation of art – with love. First, creation is related to cosmic unbalance and mistake, which the only way to counter act is to assume or claim the cosmic chaos and continue on, and that is called love. This suggests an interesting role for the artist, that of remedying the mistakes of the world through the relational other, the claiming of the chaos and moving past. This poses artist as creationist, similar to Lacan's exiled son returning to the father through the eclipse of him (Carson 108). Žižek's words also reference the artistry of Andrea

Geyer as she embraces the queer grouping of artists in her dialogue and moves forward, as a counter action to the boundary-full post 9/11 state⁷. Through the reading of Carson, Geyer, Zizek and even the Black Eyed Peas, the role of the artist is outlined as creating from exile a productive discourse on contemporary culture.

To return to my lover's discourse, and my own art practice, the role of the love-wielding artist in discourse with the same other that produces exile is a description that is very fitting for my own practice. My work engages the loose ends of the new post 1988 universal globalization. I address this universality by talking about human nature as if we are all the same, which addresses that we are not yet. I want to make work that increases connectedness and inadvertently supports globalization. To accomplish that, I highlight the loose ends where universality fails, or where globalization becomes so advanced that it is ahead of itself. I am in constant dialogue with the spectrum between the untranslatable and common human experience. Through the queer binding of creators in this text – from Juli Carson, Andrea Geyer, The Black Eyed Peas, Slavoj Zizek, and myself – I have come to re-consider the role of context and exile in my work. My position as both exiled and not, depending on context, allows me to re-negotiate and embrace the role of love and politics in my work. Despite my earlier note that I do everything for love except my art practice, maybe its all for love after all. I choose to engage the role of artist as one of bonded duality; both embracing

⁷ I reference the stricter border controls, of both our physical country, our ability to love, and most other things in the post 9/11 world.

and rejecting, answering and questioning our relationship to love, politics, aesthetics and contemporary culture.

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